

The Mercurian



A Theatrical Translation Review
Volume 7, Number 1 (Spring 2018)

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The Mercurian is named for Mercury who, if he had known it, was/is the patron god of theatrical translators, those intrepid souls possessed of eloquence, feats of skill, messengers not between the gods but between cultures, traders in images, nimble and dexterous linguistic thieves. Like the metal mercury, theatrical translators are capable of absorbing other metals, forming amalgams. As in ancient chemistry, the mercurian is one of the five elementary “principles” of which all material substances are compounded, otherwise known as “spirit”. The theatrical translator is sprightly, lively, potentially volatile, sometimes inconstant, witty, an ideal guide or conductor on the road.

The Mercurian publishes translations of plays and performance pieces from any language into English. *The Mercurian* also welcomes theoretical pieces about theatrical translation, rants, manifestos, and position papers pertaining to translation for the theatre, as well as production histories of theatrical translations. Submissions should be sent to: Adam Versényi at anversen@email.unc.edu or by snail mail:

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Editor's Note

Welcome to the Spring 2018 issue of *The Mercurian: A Theatrical Translation Review!*

This issue focuses upon seventeenth century Spain and France, with closing nods to eighteenth century and contemporary French theatre. We begin with Ben Gunter and Kerry Wilks and Samuel (Chip) Worthington's differing translations of Francisco Bernardo de Quirós's Spanish Golden Age *entremés* *El muerto*. Long-time readers of *The Mercurian* will remember Oliver Mayer's contemporary, street-wise translation/adaptations of Miguel Cervantes' *entremeses* *Dirty Fraud*, *The Widowed Pimp*, and *The Divorce Court Judge* (Vol. 3, No. 2 Fall 2010). As their introduction describes, Gunter and Wilks/Worthington's respective translations of *El muerto*, *Better Wed Than Dead* and *Dead or Wed*, are the result of different approaches to theatrical translation. Gunter's *Better Wed Than Dead* was created for presentation by his theatre company Theatre with a Mission (TWAM) and, as such, its translation choices are primarily driven by performance considerations including the original performance context, the strengths and limitations of the acting company, and touring considerations, among others. The translation choices made in Wilks/Worthington's *Dead or Wed*, in contrast, are primarily driven by dramaturgical research that uncovered lost stage directions and undocumented textual variants of the published Spanish script that influenced their translation. While their points of departure are different, both Gunter and Wilks/Worthington are seeking theatrically viable translations of the same *entremés*. Publishing them side by side here for the first time provides readers with a fascinating look at two different kinds of theatrical translation and demonstrates that historical and textual analysis, as well as performance considerations, are all essential components in the process of theatrical translation.

The issue continues with Mechele Leon's *Molière at Versailles*, a translation/adaptation that combines Molière's one-act *Impromptu at Versailles* and his comedie-ballet *The Imaginary Invalid* into a single piece of theatre. Having dramaturged David Ball's adaptation of *Imaginary Invalid*, directed by Dominique Serrand, for PlayMakers Repertory Company in 2012, I was particularly intrigued by Leon's approach here. *The Mercurian* has always taken a big-tent approach towards distinctions between translation and adaptation, preferring to focus upon what works in practice. Leon's introduction describes how her transformation of *Impromptu at Versailles* into "The Rehearsal" and *The Imaginary Invalid* into "The Hypochondriac" creates two halves mutually dependent upon each other for a new whole. Her *Molière at Versailles* investigates historical, cultural, and dramaturgical aspects of Molière's original texts, making them legible to contemporary audiences in new ways.

Molière at Versailles is followed by Jonathan Marks' translation of Molière's *The Learned Ladies*. Like his own earlier translation of *The Imaginary Invalid*, Marks' translation of *The Learned Ladies* was made for his own production of the play at Texas Tech University. As he describes in his introduction, he set both himself and his designers "the task of creating a world that never was, blending elements of the here and now, the seventeenth century in France, and anything in between, or in the future or on another planet." This leads Marks to foreground, rather than disguise, the fictional, familiar, and

fabulous nature of Molière's world, creating an analogous experience for us to that of Molière's own seventeenth-century French audience.

The issue concludes with two book reviews, Daniel Smith's review of Tom Weber's translation of Pierre de Marivaux's *The Beau's Lesson*, and Amelia Parenteau's review of *Contemporary French Plays*, edited and translated by Chris Campbell. Smith, whose own translation of Marivaux's *Love in Disguise* appeared in *The Mercurian* (Vol.4, No. 2 Spring 2012), places Weber's translation of Marivaux's *Le Petit-maître corrigé* into the larger context of translations of Marivaux's theatre in general. Parenteau, whose own translation of contemporary French playwright Alain Foix's *The Last Scene* appeared in *The Mercurian* (Vol. 6, No. 1, Spring 2016), describes in her review how Campbell's collection of four plays gives us a glimpse of the breadth of theatre written and produced in France today.

Back issues of *The Mercurian* can be found at: <https://the-mercurian.com/>.

As the theatre is nothing without its audience, *The Mercurian* welcomes your comments, questions, complaints, and critiques. Deadline for submissions for consideration for Volume 7, No. 2 (Fall 2018) will be October 1, 2018.

--Adam Versényi

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EL MUERTO LIVES AGAIN: TWO TRANSLATIONS FROM THE SPANISH GOLDEN AGE

By Francisco Bernardo de Quirós

Translated by Ben Gunter, Kerry Wilks, and Samuel (Chip) Worthington

Plays from the Spanish Golden Age offer multiple attractions to translators. This period, covering the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, provides an unparalleled wealth of material to explore, since thousands of plays were written in Spanish during the *Siglo de Oro*, in a dazzling array of dramatic flavors, lengths, and subjects. The plays can feature major roles for women – roles written to be played by women, sometimes scripted by professional female playwrights. They comprise three-act *comedias* that can startlingly reinterpret classical myths, scathingly probe contemporary politics, adventurously explore speculative theology, and hilariously poke fun at gender expectations. They include one-act *autos sacramentales* that can stage psychomachias, re-set Bible stories into everyday life, and allegorize the world as a theater. And they feature one-act *entremeses* that can turn the world upside down like a funhouse mirror, satirizing values that people unthinkingly hold sacred, and providing star vehicles for talented performers.¹

A major attraction for translators is the proven performance potential of these plays onstage. Seasons of Spanish Golden Age plays in translation have succeeded recently for the UK's Royal Shakespeare Company and the Theatre Royal in Bath. In the US, the world's longest-running festival of plays from early modern Spain – the Siglo de Oro Drama Festival presented by the National Park Service at El Chamizal National Monument in El Paso, Texas – is now entering its 43rd year, years periodically enriched with world premieres of *comedias*, *autos*, and *entremeses* in English. Translating Golden Age plays for production has proved such a fruitful field for rediscovering “lost” theater treasures that the Association for Hispanic Classical Theatre (which maintains an impressive streaming-video library of performances at www.comedias.org) founded the journal *Comedia Performance* to explore the dynamic dialog that is in progress among textual scholarship, production practice, and translation.

The two translations presented here are a direct result of that dialog – new translations of a lively old one-act named *El muerto* (The Dead Man). This sparkling *entremés* has thoroughly proved its power onstage in Spanish, and is here making its English-language debut in print. As a prolog to the translations, let us briefly introduce you to *El muerto*'s genre, author, and history.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE *ENTREMÉS*

Historians of dramatic literature trace the origins of the Spanish *entremés* back to the late fifteenth century, with the genre exploding in popularity during the seventeenth century. *Entremeses* then enjoyed a substantial period of interest until a decline in the eighteenth century, when these one-act interludes

¹ For a searchable overview of the remarkable variety and scope of classical Spanish dramaturgy, see the extensive catalogs of plays from the Spanish Golden Age (indexed to English translations) that are curated on the websites www.outofthewings.org and www.comedias.org.

began their metamorphosis into a new style called *sainete*.² Though an *entremés* can have varying characteristics depending on the period in question, a good working definition of the *entremés* is a short, comical, one-act play that was performed in between the acts (*jornadas*) of a *comedia*.³ While *comedias* were written with the knowledge that short performance pieces would be inserted between the acts, *entremeses* typically were written as stand-alone works that were not directly tied to the action of the full-length play. The characters in the one-acts trace their origins to Rojas's *La Celestina*, as well as to picaresque literature, and to the stock characters of Italy's *commedia dell'arte*.⁴ As a result, the *entremés* is populated by characters who represent the common man or the underbelly of Spanish life. The themes of *entremeses*, though often similar to themes explored in three-act plays, were generally presented in subversive or satiric contrast to the *comedia*. For example, Lope de Vega, the defining playwright for the Spanish *comedia*, is often cited for his assertion that honor is an element in the plot that theatergoers find universally engaging. In the dramaturgy of the *comedia*, the theme of honor tends to tilt dangerously towards tragedy, until (most often) this tragic tilt is resolved at the end of the third act. In the world of the *entremés*, the theme of honor gets turned upside down, with young brides cuckolding inappropriately aged husbands and underdogs satirically subverting the prescribed social order. The characters (often stock characters or *tipos*) use racy, colloquial language, with satire, topsyturvy (*mundo al revés*), and trickery/practical jokes (*burlas*) being the underlying foundation of the plays.⁵

Because their themes and characters parody high-culture conventions, *entremeses* can be tricky to translate. The language of these one-acts poses particularly complex challenges for translation. By the seventeenth century, most *entremeses* utilized strophic verse (as did most *comedias*). Due to the topsyturvy tone of the genre, however, the language of the *entremés* is the reverse of elevated, even though it uses the same verse forms and rhyme schemes found in the *comedia*. Ironically, the prose style of

² While many historians trace the evolution of the *entremés* from roots in medieval theater, mentioning Juan del Encina (1468-1529) as a foundational figure, most agree that it was Lope de Rueda (1510?-1565), whose playwriting and performance style was immortalized by Cervantes's praise, who had the most formative impact on the *entremés*. Lope de Rueda's works, called *pasos*, garnered him the moniker of the "grandfather" of Spanish theater. See Bergman for Encina's influence on Spanish theater history and Huerta Calvo for a concise outline of the origin and development of the genre.

³ During the seventeenth century, the word *entremés* encompassed two definitions. The second definition derives from the world of the theater, while the first one, and possibly the origin of the term itself ("entremès") from the Catalan language and gastronomic world, signified a delicacy served between two courses. This is related to the placement of the *entremés* between two acts of the play. A day at the theater in seventeenth-century Spain consisted of a variety of events that were combined with the three-act *comedias* presented in the *corrales* (open-air theaters). The entire event was called a *fiesta* and lasted many hours, since short pieces of theater (*teatro breve*, including the *entremés*), as well as music and dance, were included before, during, and after the three-act play.

⁴ For more information as to the origins of the *entremés*, see Eugenio Asensio and the previously mentioned Hannah Bergman. Other critics also link the *entremés*'s development to the carnival rituals and farce that occurred across Europe during the medieval period (see Huerta Calvo).

⁵ See Asensio for a description of the typical categories of *entremeses*. Asensio also outlines the development of the genre and offers analysis of five of the primary authors of the *entremés* (Lope de Rueda, Cervantes, Hurtado de Mendoza, Quiñones de Benavente, and Quevedo).

Miguel de Cervantes, who is one of the best-known writers of *entremeses* in the English-speaking world, is more of an exception rather than the norm.⁶

THE AUTHOR AND HIS PLAYS

Francisco Bernardo de Quirós (1594-1668) was both a prose writer and a playwright (*poeta or dramaturgo*) in seventeenth-century Spain. While Luis Quiñones de Benavente (1581-1651) is the acknowledged master of the *entremés*, Quirós seems to have enjoyed a fair degree of popularity among the *autores* (company managers/producers) of the period, and most modern anthologies of *entremeses* include one of his works. Quirós was born in Madrid and inherited a court position from his father that more than likely allowed him to work in the theater world, traveling in search of performers and theater companies to bring to Madrid.⁷ Quirós also participated extensively in Madrid's cultural life and court events, including the literary competitions held for such occasions as holy days or church dedications. In 1656, Quirós published a collection entitled *Obras de Francisco Bernardo de Quirós y aventuras de don Fruela*, which contains ten *entremeses* (though *El muerto* does not appear in this volume), several poems, a full-length *comedia*, and a narrative work in the picaresque tradition (a novella describing Fruela's adventures). While this was the largest collection of his works that was published during his lifetime, Quirós's *entremeses*, including *El muerto*, were also included in other anthologies.

EL MUERTO - ITS HISTORY AND PERFORMANCE

El muerto was first published in Zaragoza in 1658, two years after Quirós's *Obras*, in a collection entitled *Teatro poético*.⁸ This lively play about a "dead man" was subsequently republished in 1670, in the volume *Primera parte del Parnaso nuevo*. In addition to drawing on the playtexts printed in these two publications, translations and performances of *El muerto* can be enriched by consulting the multiple versions of this *entremés* that are extant in manuscript form. The wide availability of these texts during the seventeenth century, at least some of which appear to be actor- or company-owned, are a very good indication of the popularity of this one-act during the Spanish Golden Age. While the manuscripts are all very similar with respect to the text, each of them is labeled with a distinct title and there are variants among them that are very useful for translators, with particularly significant variations located at the end of

⁶ It is interesting to note that while Cervantes's *entremeses* are often selected for staging today, both in English and in Spanish, they were originally published in 1615 with the title itself indicating that these plays had never been staged (*Ocho comedias y ocho entremeses nunca representadas*), and an introduction stating that they had been sold to a printer because no theater manager would produce them.

⁷ See García Valdés's introduction to Quirós in her collection of *entremeses* (281-89). García Valdés has worked extensively on Quirós, researching his biography, editing his works, and setting him in the context of other Golden Age authors. Quirós enjoyed the position of *alguacil* at court. During the reign of Felipe III, there were fifty of these positions, three of which were specifically designated for "las comedias" (281-82).

⁸ The complete title of the Zaragoza publication is *Teatro poético en veinte y un entremeses nuevos escogidos de los mejores ingenios de España*, which contained twenty-one different *entremeses*.

the play.⁹ This cache of manuscripts, combined with the pair of seventeenth-century printed texts, gives a wealth of resources from a dramaturgical perspective and key information with respect to *El muerto*'s performance shape during Spain's Golden Age.

What is it, then, that makes this play so appealing? Despite the seemingly unrealistic premise of the play – that his family and friends succeed in manipulating a male authority figure by convincing him that he has actually died and that only a man he despises can resurrect him – *El muerto* follows a dramatic arc that is very appealing to actors and audiences, offering a plethora of options for performing comic moments and a variety of interpretations for making sense of the characters. The play opens with a young woman named Eufrasia telling a male confidant named Tronera that she is dying to marry a dashing Astrólogo, but her brother Lorenzo, patriarch of the family, refuses to give permission for this marriage. Tronera, who appears to be a male servant of long standing or a relative, reassures Eufrasia that she has nothing to worry about since everything is ready for playing a trick (*burla*) on Lorenzo. From this moment on, the stage is set to convince Lorenzo that he has just expired, and that only Eufrasia's Astrólogo can bring him back to life. Even Eufrasia's friend, the seamstress-next-door Marta, joins in the conspiracy to convince Lorenzo that he has become *un muerto*. Marta actually sews Lorenzo into his burial shroud, immediately before the Astrólogo dashes onstage specifically to resuscitate Lorenzo. Bit by bit, Lorenzo's animus against the Astrólogo, and his contempt for the Astrólogo's *ciencia* (expertise), give way to his survival instinct. Threatened with the prospect of being left *un muerto* forever, Lorenzo finally sets his seal of approval on Eufrasia's union with the Astrólogo. The Astrólogo summons life back to Lorenzo's "lifeless corpse," and the play ends with singing and dancing, punctuated (in most versions of the script) by a series of *seguidillas* which offer a sardonic set of morals to the story.¹⁰

Despite evidence to indicate that *El muerto* enjoyed success onstage and on the page during the seventeenth century, Quirós's most celebrated play effectively disappeared in the eighteenth century, in company with most other plays from the *Siglo de Oro*. Audiences had to wait until the twenty-first century to rediscover this delightful one-act. In 2005, Celsa Carmen García Valdés published an anthology of Golden Age one-acts that has been widely circulated by Cátedra; she included *El muerto* in this high-profile collection. The play's modern production history appears to begin shortly thereafter, with Morfeo Teatro's 2007 production of *De burladores y burlados*, which included *El muerto* in a collage of four classical Spanish one-acts.¹¹ Morfeo's production brought *El muerto* to the United

⁹ All of the manuscripts consulted for this work can be found in Madrid's national library: MSS 14,089; 17,375; 16,574; 16,976; 14,514/25.

¹⁰ A *seguidilla* consists of four verses of alternating meter (heptasyllabic and pentasyllabic) with assonant rhyme. Apart from the poetry, the *seguidilla* also exists as a folk song with accompanying dance. The *seguidillas* in this text conform to the poetic genre and are also listed as a song/dance in the script, though there is no score to verify if this was in fact the musical form also used in the play.

¹¹ Other revivals of *El muerto* in Spanish soon followed, with Madrid's national theater company producing a group of *entremeses* during the 2010-2011 season. The production was billed as *Entremeses barrocos*, and adapted by Luis García-Araus for the Compañía Nacional de Teatro Clásico. This venture gave four young directors the opportunity to each direct one of the *entremeses*: Pilar Valenciano, Elisa Marinas (director of Quirós's play), Aitana Galán, and Héctor del Saz.

States, to appear (in Spanish) at the 38th Annual Siglo de Oro Drama Festival at the Chamizal National Memorial Park in El Paso, Texas (2013).¹² This performance immediately sparked the interest of translators in the United States, who shortly afterwards premiered the first English translation of the play during a working session of the American Society for Theater Research in Dallas (2013).

Designed as an exercise in finding ways to translate *El muerto*'s powerful performance appeals – its strongly-drawn characters, strikingly-managed dramatic situations, brilliantly-crafted economy of language, and provocatively-developed transgressions of cultural norms – the American Society for Theatre Research (ASTR) script soon inspired translations that are more finished, and more informed by performance feedback. The ASTR script had emerged scene by scene during a series of Skype sessions among a team of three collaborators, and had then been read aloud during a working-session meeting of scholars and practitioners from the USA and Canada. Exploratory in technique and contemporary in tone, the ASTR translation experimented with strategies such as translating character names to reveal their performance implications (rendering Tronera as “Thunderfart”), transmitting the subtext embedded in character situations (featuring in Eufrosia's opening monolog a complaint that Lorenzo is “carrying his basic male stupidity to ridiculous extremes!”), and decoding wordplay out of Spanish and Latin text and recoding it into contemporary US English (making the Astrólogo's doggerel-Latin greeting “Nausi friti” into “Frito-La-ser”).

ORIGIN AND PURPOSE OF THESE TWO TRANSLATIONS

The two translations printed here spring from origins that differ significantly from the ASTR script, and inspire instructively different results. In 2014, Theater with a Mission (TWAM) re-translated *El muerto* for presentation as post-nuptial entertainment during a Historic Indian/Spanish Wedding at the most important Spanish mission in colonial La Florida. As you will see, performance context fundamentally shapes TWAM's translation, defining Lorenzo's occupation as a military *Capitán*, his character type as a *miles gloriosus*, and his approach to *doble entendimiento* as family-friendly. TWAM double-casts productions to provide multiple perspectives on roles and maximum opportunities for touring. Performance considerations visibly influence TWAM's translation of *El muerto*, generating alternate versions of key passages to help performers suit the script's sexual innuendo to the age range of the cast and the cultural tolerance of the performance venue. Part of TWAM's mission is to build bridges across language barriers, so you will find TWAM's version of *El muerto* strategically preserving the original Spanish text as the preferred performance option for some high-profile turning points in the play. Because TWAM finds that music and dance are indispensable tools for connecting classical Spanish plays with contemporary American audiences, you will find that rhythm and rhyme play prominent roles in TWAM's translation, and this performance script builds to a finale in which

As indicated in the “cuaderno pedagógico” that accompanies the production, Marinas places Quirós's piece in a jazz club, where Eufrosia sings “Stormy Weather” and the Astrólogo responds with the blues song “Stormy Monday.”

Tronera is converted to a customer drinking in the bar and the piano player joins in to form part of the group who will convince Lorenzo he has died. This section of the production ends when Lorenzo is brought back to life by the Astrólogo in a festive ambience punctuated with a rock-and-roll beat (38).

¹² For a review of this production, see Gunter.

character couplets sum up the plot while dance steps set the mood and punctuate the dialog. From start to finish, performance resources and performance considerations shape TWAM's translation.

In 2015, Kerry Wilks and Chip Worthington of Wichita State University (WSU) premiered a translation of *El muerto* that is profoundly shaped by dramaturgical resources. The WSU script originated when the Association for Hispanic Classical Theatre issued a call for translators to supply dueling versions of Quirós's play to showcase in a practicum on translating and performing plays from the Spanish Golden Age. As Wilks and Worthington researched *El muerto*'s Spanish text, they found overlooked stage directions and undocumented textual variants that refocused their reading of the play. As you will see, WSU's dramaturgical research inspires a translation in which Eufrasia takes charge of her own destiny, Lorenzo's "death" scene is precisely located by a 17th-century *acotación* (stage direction), Marta's shroud-sewing becomes explicitly scatological, and the Astrólogo proclaims his presence with a greeting that is part Latin and part techno-speak ("Lorem ipsum"). Other indications of this translation's attention to dramaturgical resources become evident in WSU's performance-friendly presentation of the *dramatis personae*, providing an introduction to the world of the play that offers producers and performers insight into the performance cues that are encoded in character names.

DIVERGENCES AND CONVERGENCES BETWEEN THE TRANSLATIONS

Both translations of *El muerto* here published for the first time are the result of inquisitive, strategic, and ongoing collaboration – collaboration designed to build on each translation group's collective strengths in order to create a stageworthy script. For TWAM, with access to an established acting company and an active touring schedule for field-testing translation choices, it is productive for the translation process to mine the rich performance possibilities that are inherent within the playtext. Using a variety of performance contexts, casts, and even alternative dialog to accommodate the script's performance challenges (e.g., rhythmically rhymed couplets and sexual humor), TWAM's translation continues to evolve as performance opportunities shape the translation for presentation to general-public audiences in civic-festival settings (witness the scripted introduction that prefaces TWAM's translation). For WSU, with access to unpublished stage directions and textual variants that open up new performance possibilities for the play, the translation process productively focuses on teasing out nuances in unique dramaturgical resources interrogated by translators with strong backgrounds in philology. WSU's translation continues to grow as research uncovers and clarifies variants in *El muerto*'s manuscripts, and as translators analyze these new readings, assess their performance potential, and utilize variants as the basis for translation.

The divergent choices open to translators using these two different *modus operandi* are detailed in Gunter and Wilks's publication entitled "*El muerto* Revived in the USA."¹³ Equally instructive are the surprising points of convergence between two scripts produced by translators who were using

¹³ Gunter, Ben and Kerry Wilks. "*El muerto* Revived in the USA." *Cervantes, Shakespeare y la Edad de Oro de la Escena*. Eds. Jorge Braga Riera, Javier J. González Martínez, Miguel Sanz Jiménez. Madrid: Fundación Universitaria Española, 2018. 579-595.

different methods – convergences that occurred, we believe, because both groups were paying close attention to the performance possibilities of the play. The best example of a convergence between divergent approaches to translation can be seen in Lorenzo’s death scene. During table work, TWAM’s translators intuited that there was a point in the play where Lorenzo would act an overblown “death scene” on stage, and rehearsals located this moment at a specific line in the scene where Eufrosia and Tronera succeed in convincing Lorenzo that he has just died. When the scripts were compared, TWAM was delighted to find that WSU’s translation also included a death scene, in which Lorenzo shows that his sister’s arguments have overpowered him by dramatically falling to the floor “like a dead man.” WSU discovered a stage direction precisely locating this action in one of the manuscripts that had not been available to the TWAM group. Though the two translations approached this moment of high comic impact from divergent directions, the two acting scripts will show you that the death scene occurs at a moment when both scripts converge – whether by stage direction unearthed through archival research, or by rehearsal exploration informed by audience response.

In addition to instructive divergences and convergences, these two translations of *El muerto* demonstrate the hybrid vigor that is available to translators who are eager to enrich their work by every resource at their disposal, including consultations and collaborations with other translators. Neither WSU nor TWAM focused solely on either rehearsals or research as a stand-alone resource. Instead, they aggressively combined dramaturgical and performance resources, WSU mixing feedback from public readings with its analysis of textual variants, and TWAM mixing lexicological research into seventeenth-century definitions for key terms and character names with its audience field-tests. Instructively, the two groups have communicated with each other repeatedly, as each group’s translation process has evolved. We fully expect that these scripts will develop further as TWAM continues to tour performances of *El muerto* in English across the southern part of the US and as Wilks continues her research into the play to share with her friend, colleague, and “dueling” partner, Gunter. In the game of translation, there are no winners and losers in the duel – but a competition that allows for both teams to be winners.

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Ben Gunter holds a PhD in dramaturgy from Florida State University, and serves as Artistic Director for Theater with a Mission. His translations have been featured in workshops by the Association for Theatre in Higher Education, the American Society for Theatre Research, and the Association for Hispanic Classical Theatre; taught in classes at Florida State, Wichita State, and Arizona State; and staged by community theaters in north Florida and south Georgia.

Kerry Wilks holds a PhD from the University of Chicago and is Associate Professor of Spanish and Associate Dean of the Graduate School at Wichita State University. She has dramaturged university productions of classical Spanish *comedias*; presented textual research and criticism at conferences in the US and Spain; and translated one-acts ranging from Juan del Encina to Francisco de Quevedo. She serves on the board of the Association for Hispanic Classical Theatre, and has managed working sessions for the American Society for Theatre Research.

Samuel (Chip) Worthington graduated with his MA in Spanish from Wichita State University in 2016. During his time at WSU, he worked as a research assistant to Wilks. He is currently working as a professional interpreter (legal and medical).

El muerto: or Better Wed than Dead

Theater with a Mission (TWAM) translation of an *entremés* by
Francisco Bernardo de Quirós (1594-1668) published in Zaragoza, 1658

INTRO

*(spoken by the 5 members of the acting company,
who enter singing a rousing military march;
see special note on music at the end of the script;
here, the numbers suggest one way of assigning lines in the intro;
we frequently adapt this introduction to fit specific performance locales)*

- 1 Damas y caballeros –
- 2 Ladies and gentlemen,
- 1 we are
- ALL:** Theater with a Mission,
- 1 and we're here to take you back
into Florida's Spanish past.
- 3 Three hundred years ago,
the land we're standing on was part of the
Spanish Empire.
- 4 All over Spanish La Florida,
people loved plays.
- 5 Priests used plays to teach,
- 4 royal officials used plays to raise money for charity,
- 3 and everyday people used plays to celebrate special occasions.
- 2 The play you're about to see on this special occasion
is a light-hearted spoof about long-lasting family values called...
- ALL:** *El muerto,*
- 2 *or Better Wed than Dead.*
- 1 In *El muerto*, you'll meet:

Eufrasia,
the little sister of big shot
Capitán Lorenzo.

Eufrasia wants to marry the dashing
Astrólogo-Sailor,
who uses the sun and stars
to guide ships in and out of port.

2 You'll also meet Eufrasia's friends:

there's **Tronera**, a kindly Sargento,
and needle-witted neighbor **Marta.**
Together, they've plotted a trick
to play on big brother Lorenzo.

1 You see, Capitán Lorenzo can't stand
the dashing Astrólogo-Sailor –

2 Lorenzo says they'll marry

ALL: “over his dead body!”

1 Watch what happens when Eufrasia and her friends
get everybody in the neighborhood involved
in making Lorenzo think he's ...
dead, difunto, in a word,

ALL: un muerto!

2 In Spanish,
“muerto” means “dead, departed, difunto.”

But in this performance
we're asking everybody in the audience to look alive.

Every time you hear anyone onstage say “muerto,”
we want you to shout back with all your might
“muerto!”

Let's rehearse.

3 *This is the most famous play written by Francisco Bernardo de Quirós.*

It's called El muerto.

4 *In this play, you'll meet a Capitán who thinks he's "caído muerto."*

5 *You're about to see a little sister make her big brother believe he's
"deceased, dead meat, in a word ... un muerto."*

2 Well done, audience! Clearly, you're quick, not dead.

1 Actores, time for you to be quick, too:
Places! ¡A prevenille sin empacho!

2 Damas y caballeros

1 Ladies and gentlemen,

2 Theater with a Mission brings you
a sparkling Spanish farce from 1658,
resurrected for you today as ...
El MUERTO! [audience repeats]

1 *or..., Better Wed than Dead.*

ENTREMÉS

Setting: Interior of Spanish soldier's house at Mission San Luis in colonial La Florida, c. 1700. One wood-and-leather (arm)chair, serving as Lorenzo's private domain, the 17th-century equivalent of Archie Bunker's easy chair. One trestle table, plain wood. On the back wall, period paintings of weddings (e.g., Wedding of Mary and Joseph, late 17th-century, Cuzco School, oil on canvas, 32 5/8 x 48 1/4 in., Brooklyn Museum, Carll H. de Silver Fund, 41.1251).

Starting Points: Onstage, Eufrasia and Tronera are waiting for Lorenzo to make it all the way home from the Fort (Fuerte San Luis), easy chair at the ready. Offstage, Lorenzo patronizes the "cas' del tabernero mi vecino" next door, raucously toasting his drinking buddies with occasional snatches of song.

Eufrasia wears comically overblown wedding garb, with a portrait of her Astrólogo-Sailor as a necklace. Tronera calmly waits for the Capitán to complete his carousing and come home, but Eufrasia slowly loses her patience. Tronera redirects her attention to the Astrólogo-Sailor's portrait, which makes Eufrasia swoon with delight.

To the discordant music of Lorenzo's carouse (set to the theme of the military march that links the entrance procession to scene 3 and the dance in scene 5), Eufrasia and Tronera pattern through a cycle of prepping Lorenzo's chair for his homecoming, losing patience with his long stay at the bar next door, and mooning over the portrait of the Astrólogo-Sailor.

NOTE: indented, bracketed lines in English translate lines that are designed for delivery in Spanish. In scenes two, three, and four, indented, bracketed lines in the original Spanish may be substituted for the English. Scene four offers the actor playing Lorenzo the choice of English or Spanish at pivotal points.

SCENE ONE

Eufrasia

Is the stage all set, sargento Tronera?

Tronera

(saluting)

Ma'am, yes, ma'am. Plot's perfect. Verá de la manera
Que se logra la burla en nuestro intento.

[You'll see how our cleverness will pay off.]

(from the tavern, another snatch of song)

Eufrasia

This brother of mine, señor... ¡es mi tormento!
Though I've patiently pushed him, he says, "No! You can't marry!
Over my dead body you'll even court with any Tom, Dick, or Harry!"
Marching to the drumbeat of his own jealous fears,
only hearing what he wants to hear,
seeing things that aren't even there:
hateful's how he's acting, stubborn as a mule,
cocky, bullheaded, like some back-country fool.
Rústico, zafio, y sin discurso alguno,
y ha dado ahora en necio y importuno.

[Redneck, boorish, shut-mouthed, and mean,
His latest trick's so stupid it could make you scream.]

Now Big Brother Capitán insists he's my jailer:
He'll "bar me from marrying that Astrólogo-Sailor!"
He's standing between me and the man who adores me,
while I'm dying for my starry-eyed husband-to-be!

(Eufrasia faints – a well-practiced routine – and Tronera calmly catches her)

Tronera

Patience, Princess. We've plotted it out.
This trick will fix everything you're worried about.

(offstage, Lorenzo finally bids the tavern a beery "Hasta luego")

Eufrasia

Your friends in the wings – rehearsed in their parts?

Tronera

They'll meet him in the street, on your cue to start.

Eufrasia

Así conviene. Well done, sargento!

(coming home, Lorenzo indignantly demands, "¿Qué dices?!")

Tronera

(saluting)

Ma'm, shh, ma'am! Here comes Lorenzo.

Eufrasia

Places! Quick! ¡A prevenille sin empacho!

[We'll take him by surprise.

He'll never know what hit him.]

SCENE TWO

(Enter Lorenzo, shouting at someone offstage.)

Lorenzo

¡Valga el diablo los hijos de un borracho!

[Oh yeh? Who needs you, goddam sons of a lousy souse!]

(Lorenzo circles his easy chair, performing a homecoming ritual of kissing his sister and saluting his sargento – a ritual which is about to go comically awry.)

Eufrasia

¡Hermano!

Lorenzo

¡Hermana!

Tronera

¡Capitán!

Lorenzo

¡Tronera!

Lorenzo

(back to doorway, shouting offstage)

You think that's funny?! Drunken scum!

(another circle around the easy chair)

Eufrasia

¡Hermano!

Lorenzo

¡Hermana!

Tronera

¡Capitán!

Lorenzo

¡Tronera!

Lorenzo

(back to doorway, shouting offstage)

Devil snatch you from the door to Kingdom Come!

(reversing the circle around the easy chair)

Tronera

¡Hermano!

Lorenzo

¡Tronera!

Eufrasia

¡Capitán!

Lorenzo

¡Hermana!

(double-take, as Lorenzo realizes something has gone wrong with the rhythm of kissing his sister and saluting his Sargento)

Tronera

Sir, what's wrong?

Eufrasia

Why so upset, sir? Won't you say?

Lorenzo

Estadme atentos, (*military salute*)

pues soy yo muy amigo de esos cuentos.

[Listen close: I'll tell you why.

Ask anyone at the Mission – I'm an even-keeled guy.]

Tronera

Decid.

Lorenzo

Here I am, walking home from the Fort,
When I meet this private, who salutes and reports,
staring me in the face, muy atento,
then tells me I'm looking ... "macilento
como un difunto." (*gasps of horror from Eufrasia & Tronera*)

For pity's sake, Princess, Eufrasia mía,
what's a phrase like that supposed to mean here?
"¿Macilento ... como un difunto?"

Eufrasia

"Macilento como un difunto" describes to a T
someone who's dead, or about to be.
Means you're pale-faced as a ghost, your cheeks with no color,
Like someone pining for her forbidden lover.

Lorenzo

Oh! (*big laugh of relief*) Joke's on him, then!
(*shouting offstage*) Hey, Private So and So,
You're the one who's "macilento!"
¿Entiende? The moment we met,
my face was pale 'cause my throat was wet!

(*to Eufrasia*) Get it? I could feel my color come & go 'cause I'd just had a stiff one en cas' del
tabernero mi vecino!

[Get it? porque yo en aquel momento
de un trago que bebí con poco tiento

en cas' del tabernero mi vecino,
una color y otra se me vino.]

(toasts, belches, and changes tone)

Two steps closer to home – behold!
a pickle-brained ship's purser's grabbed hold of my shoulder,
eyeballed me, heaved a wine-scented sigh,
“Get right with God, Capitán – your end draweth nigh!
Just in case it's escaped your notice,
You got the look of a man setting sail for ... rigor mortis.”

Is that so? Says who? ¿Acaso, señor cuero,
piensa que yo no sé lo que me muero?
[Yes, Mr. Brains-in-a-Bottle, I'll die someday,
but my last breath's still a long haul away.]

Never felt better, ¡Dios sea loado!
(big Viva!, with a slap on the chest that knocks the breath out of himself)
Only thing wrong with me is all this palaver
From a bunch of drunks talking bunk all day!

(Tronera starts moaning and making the sign of the Cross)

What? Tronera? Why're you looking at me that way?

Tronera

(to Lorenzo) ¡Dios te haya dado el cielo! *(to Eufrosia)* He's expiring fast!
[St. Peter, throw open those pearly gates!]

Eufrosia

Poor orphaned me! He's gasping his last!

Lorenzo

¿Qué dices?

Tronera

Death comes to take you ... ¡de repente!

Lorenzo

Has all La Florida gone mad ... ¿tanta gente?

Eufrosia

Lorenzo! Dead – and left me all alone!

Lorenzo

Mas ¡por Dios, Princess! (*demonstrating liveliness with marching and singing*)

Eufrasia

¡Ay, hermano de mi vida! Hear me moan...

Tronera

¡Qué lástima! Lord –

Eufrasia

– have mercy! You could knock
me over with a feather.

(*starts to faint – Lorenzo catches her*)

Lorenzo

Stop, little sister! Don't give in to the shock!
Let's examine the facts. Just what do we know?

I met a private. A raw recruit. To him, I looked “macilento
como un difunto.” But the big stiff drink
I'd just swigged explains that completely ... don't you think?

(*Eufrasia shakes her head “no”*)

Then a sloshed ship's purser started testifyin'
that without my knowing it, I was a-dyin'.
Sure, that made me feel a little queasy,
but once I got home, explaining that seemed easy...

(*Tronera shakes his head “no”*)

... Now you and Tronera are swearing it's cierto.
I'm wondering ... could it be? what if ... ¿¡he caído muerto!?

(*audience shouts, “muerto!”*)

No, no – I'm Lorenzo! Not muerto!

(*audience shouts “muerto!” again*)

Say it's not so! Anything, anything but ... Muerto!

(*audience shouts “muerto!” for a third time, sending Lorenzo into a big death scene, grabbing his throat, clutching his chest, and finally sprawling in his chair, a stiffened “corpse”*)

Eufrasia

Bet your life you're dead! Why else would you see me,
shattered by sorrow, wailing like a banshee?

(Eufrasia & Tronera burst into a loud, long wail, startling the "corpse")

Luto me he de poner desde mañana
hasta los pies.

[Tomorrow I'll have to be shrouded in expensive orphan-sister black
from crown to soles.]

I must dress all in black to honor this loss:
A rush order, from Marta, no matter the cost!

Lorenzo

Not so quick, hermana,
We could find a cure ...

Tronera

I'd take a bullet to save you, Sir,
But too late now – I can see you're a goner!

Lorenzo

(to the audience) When your nearest and dearest tell you it's so
You know that your time has come ... to go.

(Tronera & Eufrasia start composing the "body" for burial.)

Tronera

Woe for Lorenzo! ¡hombre honrado!

Eufrasia

Belovèd Brother! ¡Qué bien quisto!

Tronera

His timing was perfect!

Eufrasia

Always open to direction!

Lorenzo

¡Juro a Cristo!

They're starting my eulogy – singing my praises!
That settles it – soon I'll be pushing up daisies.

Eufrasia

Such a good-looking corpse! So young to fall!

Lorenzo

And here I sit, like a fly on the wall.

Eufrasia

Tronera, go call my Astrólogo here!

Tronera

Three sheets to the wind, he'll come support you, no fear.

(to Lorenzo, who's trying to intercept his exit)

O Capitán, my Capitán! Our fearful trip is done!
My grief's so great, I'm overcome!

Lorenzo

Before making your exit, walk this way:
There's something vital I want to say.

(Lorenzo zombie-walks away from Eufrasia; Tronera shrugs and follows suit)

(aside to Tronera) Swear to me, Sargento, you're absolutely cierto
that I'm deceased, dead meat – in a word, un muerto.

Tronera

(as audience shouts "muerto," Tronera draws his weapon to defend his honor from the slur on his trustworthiness implied by Lorenzo's "Swear to me")

Some soldiers' behavior shows their word's a disgrace, Sir.
But three men in a row lying to your face, Sir?!
And even, Sir, were that not clearly implausible,
you think that your sister ... deceiving her brother ... is possible?!
(Tronera pretends to take Eufrasia hostage; Lorenzo talks the situation down)

Lorenzo

No offense, Tronera! Let's all settle down.
I know I'm deceased ... departed ... difunto ...
I just had to bury all doubt. Oh, woe! No, no, no, no, no, no, no!
¡He caído muerto!

(audience shouts "muerto")

Tronera

Time to procure services for digging your grave.

Lorenzo

Get 'em cheap! I'm poor! It's my last chance to save!

(Tronera exits. Lorenzo sobs, seeking sympathy from attractive ladies in the audience. Eufrasia clears the chair, making space for the trestle table to get moved into center stage during the shrouding sequence.)

SCENE THREE

Eufrasia

(to the audience) Now my girl-friend next door
comes to tighten the knot.
While he's still off balance,
she'll start playing her part.

(Eufrasia calls a "ready" signal to Marta. Enter Marta, with an expensive black outfit for Eufrasia, and an enormous darning needle and a shroud for Lorenzo.)

Marta

Princess! God lighten your cross!

Eufrasia

Soul-sister! Ay-ay-ay, what a loss!

Lorenzo

Who's that?

Eufrasia

Our neighbor Marta.

Lorenzo

Why?!

Eufrasia

She's just brought a
sheet to fit for your shroud.

Lorenzo

(to the audience)

A shroud? She'll sew me up like a mummy!
Help! This isn't funny!

(Lorenzo bargains with God, while Marta and Eufrasia set the table)

Marta

(chanting as she flings open the shroud)

God in heaven rest the soul
of loudmouth Lorenzo.

Lorenzo

Amen! *(aside)* Devil take all parts of
nosy neighbor Marta. A—

Marta

Hush! Now you behave,
silent as the grave.

Lorenzo

Verily I've passed on,
but there's a liveliness left in my tongue!

(Lorenzo sticks his tongue out at Marta)

Eufrasia

(to Marta, as she sits Lorenzo on the table)

I'll get the next step in his journey started,
while you sew up my dearly departed.

(Exits with her fancy new outfit, overcome with woe.)

(Marta unsheathes her darning needle.)

Lorenzo

¡Zape! Never saw a needle
quite that long or sharp. Ah ...
What could be its purpose
at a deathbed, Marta?

Marta

(using the needle to mark his body with the sign of the Cross)

Give your mouth a rest
and think about it. Guess!

(points needle toward his seat)

Lorenzo

Oh! So ... Sew?!
No!!!
Won't need that needle's offices.
I'll just squeeze shut all my orifices!

Marta

Good – so now we'll concentrate
On sewing up your winding-sheet.

Lorenzo

¡Norabuena! Perfect –
and give me your best whipstitch!

(He starts to sing a lively anti-marriage marching song, moving in time to the music.)

Marta

(rigor mortis lazzzi: Marta forces down Lorenzo's leg, other one pops up, she shows the needle, and the body goes limp – or Lorenzo goes stiff as a stone statue and moves only his mouth to speak)

Hold still!

Lorenzo

Still as a stiff! Say Marta,
swear on your granny's gravestone:
[Decidme, Marta, por vuestra vida,]
Why'd I die? What reason?

Marta

(enjoying this ridiculous cause of death)

Classic case of apple-plexy:
Here one minute, gone the next!
Too much food and drink,
croaked quick as a wink.

Lorenzo

(feeling all the tragedy of the situation)

Killed by drinks and eats?!
Wish I remembered that feast!

(for mature actors/ audiences)

Wonder when my soul'll
start walking those streets of gold... ?

(for juvenile actors/ family audiences)

Wonder when my soul'll pass
over into Paradise – like a puff of gas...

Marta

Couldn't offer a single suggestion
when you pop *that* question:
Don't know a thing about streetwalking!

Couldn't offer a single suggestion
when you pop *that* question:
I'm not the person to ask about passing gas.

Lorenzo

Oh no? To hear the soldiers talking –

Oh no? I know what I've heard
and I know what I know –

(Marta jabs the needle home in Lorenzo's hindquarters – can repeat, with a jab punctuating each remaining speech in the scene)

¡Hala! La aguja me habéis hincado
por la carne, ¿estáis borracha?
[Your needle just punctured my skin!
What are you – three sheets to the wind?]

Marta

You can still feel that?

Lorenzo

(whimpering) ¡Como un vivo!

Marta

Abracadabra! You're shrouded, Lorenzo.

(Marta calls the “all clear.” Enter Eufrasia, luxuriously draped in black.)

Eufrasia

¡Albricias, hermano, albricias!

[You’d pay a pretty penny for my thoughts, brother dear.]

Lorenzo

What’s the good news, little sister?

Eufrasia

¡El Astrólogo viene a resucitaros!

[My Astrólogo-Sailor is coming to resurrect you!]

Lorenzo

Oh, how nice!

The Astrólogo is coming to bring me back to life!

(news sinks in)

¿¡El Astrólogo?!

¡Guarda! ¡Tronera!

(enter Tronera) ¡Juro a Dios!

¡Solo por no verle en casa,

I’d rather remain a corpse!

[On guard! Swear to heaven,

best thing about death is not dealing with that bum!]

SCENE FOUR

(Enter the Astrólogo-Sailor, navigating his way toward Eufrasia by calling “Nausi” as she answers “friti.” Lorenzo orders Tronera to fire – “¡Dispara! – but Tronera manages to make his weapon refuse to cooperate.)

Astrólogo-Sailor

Nausi friti, nausi friti.

Lorenzo

(aborting the lovers’ meeting)

¡Nabos fritos!

[Nasty fried dough!]

¿Qué queréis aquí, fantasma?

[What could you want here, useless?]

Astrólogo-Sailor

(saluting) Courageous Capitán, ¿cómo estáis?

Lorenzo

(trying to return the salute, but straight-jacketed by the shroud)

Lamebrain Astrólogo, can't you see?
Stiff! You're talking to a defunctee.

Astrólogo-Sailor

Pues, hala, this is your lucky day!
The Stars have aligned and
Yo ... Quiero ... ¡Resucitaros!

Lorenzo

All right, impress me. Show off your skill.
[Verdad que yo me holgara.]
(aside) Truth to tell, being dead is relaxing,
but socially, it's terribly taxing.

Astrólogo-Sailor

Let Miss Eufrasia come escort me
to a private exhibition
of the most jealously-guarded space in the house –
porque importa mucho.
[that's essential for the cure.]

Lorenzo

¿Importa? What for?

Astrólogo Sailor

(for mature actors/ audiences)
To erect the image
of a new-rising star!

(for juvenile actors/family audiences)
To project the image
of a new-rising star!

Lorenzo

¡Pues no quiero, ni me pasa
por la puerta de la calle!
[No, no, no, no, no, no, no!]

(for mature actors/ audiences)
You can make your erections

(for juvenile actors/family audiences)
You can make your projections

right here where we all are,
o ¡váyase al infierno a alzarla!
[Permission denied!
Stand there in the doorway!
Any projections/erections necessary can take place in this room,
with me present – otherwise, to hell with your resurrections!]

Astrólogo-Sailor

Fine – we'll do it right here ... let's operate!
Mi ciencia en cualquiera parte obra.
[My expertise can operate anywhere.]

Lorenzo

Well get to work, then,
if work's what you call it,
pues porque obra me enfada.
[‘cause I'm getting antsy.]

Eufrasia

Señor Astrólogo, apriesa.
[Hurry up, Mr. Astrologer!]

Astrólogo-Sailor

(dramatically intoning the introduction to his incantation, as Eufrasia, Marta, and Tronera move like planets orbiting at his command)

¡Ea!

¡de conjuro ...

vaya!

[Listen! The magic ... begins!]

Here I summon you, planets!
Plutón, Saturno, come embrace me,
as I embrace this ...
fabulous star –

(whirling Eufrasia onto his knee)

Lorenzo

¡Quedo! ¡Quedo! Hands off my sister!

Eufrasia

Hush, hermano – no interjections!
Everything we're doing is for your resurrection.

Lorenzo

Oh!
Well if it's all part of the magic, I'll play along.

Astrólogo-Sailor

Come, planets! Kiss, caress, possess me,
Y así, como aquesta mano
pongo en mi boca –
[just the way I kiss, caress, and take possession of this celestial hand ...]

Lorenzo

Hold your horror-scopes!

Eufrasia

Que es del conjuro, menguado.
[Silly Brother – it's all part of the incantation!]

Lorenzo

Oh!
Pues si es del conjuro, vaya.

Astrólogo-Sailor

Set my course, planets,
as my arms complete their orbit
around this heavenly ... Eufrasia!

Lorenzo

¡Déjelo con Barrabás!
Is he incantating me or my sister's a–

(Marta and Tronera interrupt)

Eufrasia

Sit still, brother. This is the deepest-reaching part of the spell!

Lorenzo

Oh!

Well I'm giving his magic a hail & farewell!

As God is my witness, I guarantee
If I were alive, ... not a defunctee,
deceased, dead meat, in a word, un muerto ...

(audience shouts "muerto!")

I'd give this Astrólogo the old heave-ho!

You cheap, chugalugging Astrólogo brat:
I'd like to incantate you with a stickball bat!

Yo le voto, a non de Dios,
que si yo ahora me hallara
vivo, como me hallo muerto

que yo le echara de casa.

Astrólogo-Sailor

Suit yourself – enjoy life as a corpse!

(intoning his most ferocious spell)

Pues yo os dejo ...

¡para un muerto!

¡Muerto!

¡MUERTO!

(as audience shouts, Lorenzo melts, like the Wicked Witch of the West splashed with a bucket of water)

Lorenzo

Esa es la mayor palabra
que me ha podido decir.

[That's the first sensible word you've said!]

Astrólogo-Sailor

¡Nausi friti!

(grand exit, calling "friti" back to Eufrosia's forlorn "nausi!")

Lorenzo

¡Aguárdese, no se vaya!

[Wait! Don't leave!]

Resurrect me! I'll give you anything!

(Lorenzo offers various items cadged from the audience. The Astrólogo declines, refusing to change course. Finally, cued by Eufrosia holding out her ring finger, Lorenzo thinks of ...)

Maybe even ... my sister's hand in marriage ...?

(bit by bit, Astrólogo reenters Lorenzo's orbit)

Hear me say ...

que ahora le dé ...

a mi hermana la mano de ...

(finally forced to the sticking point by Tronera's nudges and Marta's needle)

... de casamiento!

Astrólogo-Sailor

Capitán, you've said the magic word!

(Lorenzo repeats "hermana" and "mano" before realizing the magic word is "casamiento")

Life! Return to this corpse!

Make him ready, head to toe –

to dance at her wedding ... *(big kiss from Eufrasia)*

... as my brother-in-law! *(big kiss from Astrólogo)*

SCENE FIVE

(As Astrólogo revives Lorenzo with an elaborate series of "Nausi friti", Eufrasia divests her mourning to reappear in wedding dress with a giant ring, and Marta de-shrouds Lorenzo like a chrysalis giving birth.)

Lorenzo

I'm ALIVE!

Hatched like a brand-new butterfly!

¡De gira y de fiesta vaya!

[Incredible! Let's party!]

ALL

¡De gira y de fiesta vaya!

(They sing the first verse of Lorenzo's lively marching song – which now endorses marriage – and dance a circle dance, tossing the shroud in the air in time to the music. At the end of that verse, they call:)

¡O Astrólogo!

Tronera

Funerals and weddings – what's the big difference?

Astrólogo-Sailor

(scaring, and then comforting Lorenzo)

One stirs your fears, the other frees your feelings.

ALL

¡Vivan las bodas!

(They sing the second verse of the marching song, continuing to praise the married state, and dance a circle dance that moves them side-to-side with turns. At the end of that verse, they call:)

¡O Lorenzo!

Marta

(brandishing her needle)

What's the greatest success a man can win?

Lorenzo

(making a getaway out of needling range)

To exit this world to get away from women.

ALL

¡Vivan las bodas!

(They sing the last verse of the marching song, now praising marriage, and dance the seguidilla in a line, holding hands. At the end of that verse, they call:)

¡O Eufrosia!

Astrólogo-Sailor

What marks a woman's crowning achievement?

Eufrosia

Making men believe in ... their own bereavement.

Lorenzo

Amen! ¡Vivan las bodas!

ALL

¡Viva la fiesta! ¡Nausi friti!

(Bows & exeunt.)

a NOTE on the MUSIC:

A simple, satisfactory option for the marching song that's called for periodically throughout this performance can be found in "La Guerra (Ensalada)" by Mateo Flecha (1481-1553). Like Lorenzo, Flecha's march sounds hard-core, old-school, simple, and insistent; and because its tune tends to stick on one note, it can be learned quickly and then tweaked interestingly for different situations.

This link will take you to a wonderfully pompous performance:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9LcUI7lKXdo>. Here is the Spanish text and the English translation used in Theater with a Mission's performances:

To-dos los bue-nos sol-da-dos
que a-sen-ta-ren a es-ta gue-rra,
no quie-ran na-da en la tie-rra
si quie-ren ir des-can-sa-dos.

Men, if you want to make hist'ry
& win fame in the fierce fight that's coming:

(anti-marriage version)

Don't fall in love with some woman,
That's how to fight lightheartedly.

(pro-marriage version)

Go fall in love with some woman,
That's how to live lightheartedly.

NOTES on the TRANSLATION:

This script transmits discoveries made by actors and audiences in performances staged between January 2015 and August 2017. We expect the translation, like Lorenzo, to keep developing as it revives.

Scenes one and four are based on a 2013 translation by Christiana Molldrem Harkulich and Ben Gunter, revised by Ben Gunter and Idy Codington in 2014.

Scenes two and three are based on a 2013 translation by Ben Gunter, revised by Ben Gunter and Idy Codington in 2014.

Scene five is based on a 2013 translation by Alyssa Rumble and Ben Gunter, revised by Ben Gunter in 2014.

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Dead or Wed

a translation of

El muerto, Eufrasia, y Tronera / Entremés del muerto (entremés)

by Francisco Bernardo de Quirós (1594-1668)

(published in Zaragoza, 1658)

Translators: Kerry Wilks and Samuel Worthington¹⁴

EUFRASIA: Lorenzo's sister who wants to marry an astrologer, but her brother refuses. Greek origin meaning cheerful, joyous, etc. In the Spanish dictionary of the period, it refers to a loving, honest, beautiful woman, which is ironic given her role in the play. It also refers to a plant that was used to cure the "evil eye."

TRONERA: Appears to be a servant in Eufrasia's family who helps her trick Lorenzo into believing he's dead. The word has various meanings in Spanish including a toy that makes a loud noise or a disorganized person who makes things up as they go along.

LORENZO: Eufrasia's brother, who encounters two men (placed there by Eufrasia and Tronera) on the street after leaving the local tavern. The men try to convince him that he's dead.

MARTA: Neighbor of Eufrasia and Lorenzo who comes to help with burial arrangements. In addition to the biblical reference, the character name also refers to a small mammal similar to the weasel.

ASTROLOGER: Suitor for Eufrasia who promises to bring Lorenzo back to life if he will give his sister's hand in marriage to him. Although astrology was considered a science at the time, astrologers were often made fun of by Spanish playwrights.

Setting: This one-act play takes place in the home of Lorenzo and Eufrasia. There are also allusions to the neighbor's tavern and to the street in between the two locales. Though written in the 17th century, the piece is easily transposed to any time/location.

Enter Eufrasia and Tronera.

EUFRASIA

Is everything ready, Tronera?

TRONERA

You will soon see

how our trick is bound to succeed.

¹⁴ Special thanks to Alyssa Rumble, former master's student for her assistance with the initial project and to Dr. Harley Erdman for his guidance and advice as we embarked upon the translation.

EUFRASIA

Señor, my brother annoys me no end,
and though I try very hard to be patient,
he won't let me marry, no matter what.
He's a rash and overzealous man,
and on top of his ignorance, he's irrational,
common, vulgar, and malicious.
And now he's being foolish and insistent,
saying that my beloved astrologer, who loves me so much,
will not be my husband,
but I'm dying for my astrologer.

TRONERA

Patience, Señora Eufrasia,
as I hope, that with all I've done,
this plan will put an end to your worries.

EUFRASIA

But do our friends know the plan?

TRONERA

They're waiting for him on the street
and know exactly what to do.

EUFRASIA

That works.

TRONERA

Hey!, watch out, Lorenzo's here.

EUFRASIA

Come on then...the show's about to start.

Enter Lorenzo, shouting offstage.

LORENZO

[slightly inebriated] To hell with those drunkards!

TRONERA

Lorenzo!

EUFRASIA

Brother!

LORENZO

What a bunch of nonsense!

TRONERA

What's the matter?

LORENZO

To hell with those fools!

TRONERA

Won't you tell us what's going on?

LORENZO

Then listen up...you all know I love a good story.

Lorenzo pauses, looking expectantly at Tronera and Eufrosia.

TRONERA

Out with it.

LORENZO

As I was walking down the street,
I came across a well-dressed man,
who, staring me right in the face,
told me I looked rather peaked,
like a cadaver. (*Hesitantly.*) Eufrosia, dear,
do you know what peaked means?

EUFRASIA

As far as I can tell,
peakèd means you're somewhat pale,
ashen, sunken like a man close to death.

LORENZO

Well he's the peakèd one, whoever he is,
right?, because I had just downed a shot
at my neighbor's house --the innkeeper--
and I was flushed with color.
So I kept going, and then, right in my face,
with a heavy sigh, some other fool
told me to hurry up and get right with God
because my time was just about up;
and even though I might not realize it,
I was going downhill fast towards death.
Humph, does Mister Topsy think
I wouldn't notice if I were dying?
I've never been healthier
a day in my life, praise be to God.
Have you ever heard such drunken nonsense?
What are you looking at, Tronera?

TRONERA

God's got you in his glory! He's met his death!

EUFRASIA

Oh woe is me! He's drawn his last breath.

LORENZO

What are you saying?

TRONERA

That you just died.

LORENZO

How can so many people be so wrong?

EUFRASIA

You're dead, Lorenzo. Oh what sorrow!

LORENZO

But...by God!

EUFRASIA

Oh my life! My brother!

TRONERA

Dear God! What a blow!

EUFRASIA

With just a feather
they could knock me over.

LORENZO

I don't think so.

I'll get to the bottom of this.

The truth is, when that man told me
I looked peaked, I'd just run into him
on the dark street;
and then some other guy showed up;
said I was dying, and didn't even know it.
I just thought he was wrong,
assumed he was leading me on.
But, what if it's true what they said?
And...well...now that I've heard it,

I might just be dead.

EUFRASIA

How can you say *might* if it's true? Let my
sorrow, my suffering, my grief and my cries
tell you the truth. By this time tomorrow,
I'll be dressed in full mourning.

LORENZO

Oh sister, don't weep,
it might not be true.

TRONERA

Some trick that would be!
Not true?! You're dead from head to toe.

LORENZO

Well, if you want somebody to believe something,
you just have to get three or four people to say it.
Lorenzo falls on the floor like a dead man.

TRONERA

He was such an honorable man!

EUFRASIA

How well loved!
Lorenzo rises slightly and opens one eye to see what other compliments they will say.
Eufrasia and Tronera continue with difficulty.

TRONERA

How punctual!

EUFRASIA

How attentive!

LORENZO

Good God!

I really believe it.

I guess it's time to meet my maker.

EUFRASIA

Too soon departed and so handsome.

LORENZO

I went peacefully.

EUFRASIA

Tronera, tell my astrologer to come quick.

TRONERA

Never you fear, he'll be just a moment.

So sorry, dear friend, I'm a bit upset,

because, well, you're dead.

LORENZO

That said...

come here, Tronera, are you sure,

are you certain I'm dead?

TRONERA

I'll say this, some men do tell tales,

but would three honorable men deceive you?

And if that's not enough,

do you think your own sister would lie to you?

LORENZO

Don't be mad, Tronera, or get so upset,

I'm well aware that I've died,

it was just a doubt, that's why I asked.

TRONERA

I'm going to find someone to do the burial.

LORENZO

I'm poor, better find someone cheap.

Tronera exits.

EUFRASIA

[Aside.] My neighbor knows all about this
and she's coming now to thicken the plot.

Enter Marta, with sewing materials and a sheet.

MARTA

Eufrasia, God grant you comfort.

EUFRASIA

Oh!, my dearest friend!

LORENZO

Who's there?

EUFRASIA

Marta, our neighbor.

LORENZO

What does she want?

EUFRASIA

She's brought the sheet
to make your shroud.

LORENZO

Wow!,
this is really happening.

MARTA

May your soul

find peace in heaven. Amen.

LORENZO

May yours go straight to hell.

MARTA

Look, Lorenzo, you're dead now,
don't talk, not a word.

LORENZO

It's true that I'm dead,
but I still have my voice.

EUFRASIA

I'm going to take care of a few things
while you get all shrouded.

Eufrasia exits.

LORENZO

What's the needle and thread for?
Aren't you going to tell me?

MARTA

Really?!
You don't know what they're for?

LORENZO

Well you can just forget that,
I've already closed my "eye". [*While covering anus.*]

MARTA

Well, I'll just sew up
your shroud for now.
Marta puts a sheet on him for the shroud.

LORENZO

Nicely done,
and fine, tight stitching.

MARTA

Hold still.

LORENZO

I'll be as still as a
dead man. Marta, tell me,
God's truth, do you know
what killed me?

MARTA

It had to be something,
a terrible seizure;
a drop-dead illness;
too much eating and drinking.

LORENZO

I didn't feel a damned thing.
Tell me, if you know,
is my soul on the road to
salvation, if you know?

MARTA

I don't know a thing about roads.

LORENZO

I'll bet you've seen a lot of miles
in your day. What the hell?!
You just stuck the needle right
through my flesh, are you drunk?

MARTA

So you feel that?

LORENZO

Like I'm alive.

MARTA

Then my work here is done.

Exit Marta and enter Eufrasia.

EUFRASIA

Congratulations brother, good news.

LORENZO

What are you saying, sister?

EUFRASIA

The astrologer is coming
to bring you back to life.

LORENZO

Hold on!

I swear to God I'd rather be dead
than see him in my house.

*Enter the Astrologer, looking a bit ridiculous in clerical garb
(short cut, to the knees and tied at waist)*

ASTROL.

Lorem Ipsum, Lorem Ipsum.

LORENZO

Lorenzo eat some?!... What are you doing here?

ASTROL.

And how are you?

LORENZO

Wonderfully cold,
can't you see? I'm dead.

ASTROL.

Well, look here,
I want to resurrect you.

LORENZO

That would be nice,
being dead's not that great
although it is refreshing.

ASTROL.

Señora Eufrasia should come
and show me every nook
and cranny of this house –
it's very important.

LORENZO

Why?

ASTROL.

To consult the heavenly orbs.

LORENZO

Well I don't want that, she isn't
even going out the front door.
Look in this room to see if
you can consult them here, or if not,
go straight to hell to do it.

ASTROL.

My craft works anywhere.

LORENZO

Well your craft is annoying.

EUFRASIA

Mr. Astrologer, hurry.

ASTROL.

Aha! Let the spell begin...

Pluto, Saturn, just as

I embrace this beautiful lady...

LORENZO

Who-a, who-a!

EUFRASIA

Don't say a word, brother,

it's all part of the spell.

LORENZO

Well if it's part of the spell, go ahead.

ASTROL.

And now, just as I place my lips

upon this hand...

LORENZO

Enough already!

EUFRASIA

It's part of the spell, fool.

LORENZO

Well if it's part of the spell, go ahead.

ASTROL.

And now, as I return

to embrace Eufrasia again...

LORENZO

Hands off, Judas,
are you trying to conjure me or my sister?
By God, I swear,
if I were as alive right now as I am dead,
I would cast this drunken
astrologer out of my house
by the spell of this stick.

ASTROL.

Well I'm leaving you for dead.

LORENZO

That's the best thing
you could have said to me. [*Astrologer begins to exit.*]
Hold on, don't go.
Bring me back to life...
I'll give you my sister's
hand in marriage.

ASTROL.

With those magic words my friend,
you'll soon be up and dancing
at the wedding.
Lorenzo gets up.

LORENZO

I can't believe I'm alive.
Let the party and feast begin!
Musicians enter and the dance begins. The verses below could be sung.

EUFRASIA

What's the difference in the end
between being married and being dead?

LORENZO

One of them leads straight to regret,
the other puts suffering to an end.

EUFRASIA

Tell me then, I'm eager to know:
what's the triumph men celebrate most?

LORENZO

Leaving this world for a better place
where they never have to see a woman's face.

EUFRASIA

Tell me then, I'm eager to know:
what's the triumph women celebrate most?

LORENZO

Making men actually believe
anything a woman might conceive.

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Molière at Versailles

Translated and adapted from the plays of Molière

By Mechele Leon

Molière at Versailles is an original piece created by pairing Molière's 1663 one-act *L'Impromptu de Versailles* and his 1673 comédie-ballet, *Le Malade imaginaire*. In adapting *Impromptu*, a play about Molière's company in rehearsal, I invented a reimagined premise in which Molière's company is preparing to offer a command performance of *The Imaginary Invalid* at the Versailles Palace for Louis XIV. Together, the plays comprise a two-part comedy. However, instead of understanding this as a double bill on a single program, one should take *Molière at Versailles* as a unified event, offering a play within a play in a way that inflects both *Impromptu at Versailles* and *The Imaginary Invalid*. Through this framework, the two parts together function as mutually revealing. Each reflects on the other and, together, creates a new story about a group of actors and a playwright—one that provides audiences with a new view of Molière, his company, and their artistry.¹⁵

The effort of creating this piece involved translating both plays, a process I undertook with great debt to the eighteenth-century English translations by Henry Baker and James Miller.¹⁶ Their versions can be faulty and, at times, obscure, but reading them puts a jaunty rhythm and archaic line and vocabulary into the ear that I find true and inspiring. Simply calling *Molière at Versailles* a “translation,” however, fails to signal the extent to which this project is an adaptation. In transforming *Impromptu at Versailles* into “The Rehearsal,” I eliminated some scenes and rearranged others. I appropriated characters and dialogue from other plays by Molière that were in the same historical orbit (especially *La Critique de L'École des femmes*). I also added dialogue of my own invention, attempting, when possible, to draw on phrases as I found them in his works. For *Imaginary Invalid*, I inserted asides and created new English lyrics for a revised finale. Consequently, I claim this project as a “translation and adaption,” knowing full well that such a description reinscribes an outmoded idea of translation as somehow not already being an adaptation. “Debates about when a translation stops being a translation and becomes an adaptation have rumbled on for decades,” writes Susan Bassnett. “The basis of the distinction seems to be the degree to which a text that has been rendered into another language diverges from the source: if it seems so close as to be recognisable, then it can be classified as a translation, but if it starts to move away from that source, then it has to be deemed an adaptation. The problem is, though, how close do you have to be, and how far away do you have to move before the labels change?”¹⁷ In this case, aware that I have moved quite far, “adaptation” seems correct.

¹⁵ For its initial production, I billed this piece as *The Rehearsal & The Hypochondriac*. This revision presents the preferred *Molière at Versailles*, which contains two parts: (1) “The Rehearsal” and (2) “The Hypochondriac.” For the purposes of clarity throughout this introduction, when I speak of Molière's two plays, I will refer to them as *Impromptu at Versailles* and *The Imaginary Invalid*. When I speak of my two-part adaptation, I will refer to *Molière at Versailles* and/or its constituent parts, i.e., “The Rehearsal” and “The Hypochondriac.”

¹⁶ Henry Baker and James Miller, “The Impromptu of Versailles.” *The Works of Molière, French and English* 3 (1755).

¹⁷ Susan Bassnett, *Reflections on Translation* (Bristol: Channel View Publications, 2010), 40.

Impromptu at Versailles (1663), a one-act prose play in eleven scenes, is among Molière's lesser-known short comedies. The story concerns Molière and his actors at work. The company has gathered at Versailles to do a command performance of a new play. They have a few hours before the king is expected to arrive, and Molière intends to use the time to conduct a rehearsal of his hastily written, not entirely rehearsed nor memorized new comedy. Instead of focusing on the business at hand, however, the company indulges in disagreement and speculative improvisations. The actors argue with Molière about his response (or lack of it) to his critics, insist they are not ready to perform the play, and coax him to treat them all to his lampoon of actors at the rival Parisian company at the Hôtel de Bourgogne. A further impediment to the task at hand arrives in the form of a nosy marquis. He interrupts their efforts, flirts with the actresses, and goads Molière with sly insults. Finally, Molière and his actors begin the rehearsal of the play, the gist of which is that a group of familiar characters—precious ladies, marquises, a poet, a prude or two, a coquette, and a chevalier—are awaiting an audience with the king. They have barely made headway when a messenger arrives to tell Molière that the king awaits their performance. Clearly not ready, the company panics. After stalling the king several more times, a messenger arrives, letting them know that his majesty understands the position they are in, relieves them of the obligation to perform, and will await the play at its first availability. The company is spared, grateful to the king, and the play ends.

From literary, theatrical, and historical perspectives, there is hardly a play in Molière's corpus that presents such a tantalizing combination of significance and illegibility. It is a central document in a series of events that took place in 1663, following the premier of *The School for Wives* in December 1662. That play ignited widespread debate and inspired denunciations by enemies (rival playwrights and men of letters, clergy, *salonnières*, and particularly the members of Paris's other theatre, the Hôtel de Bourgogne) who found it, among other faults, to be poorly written and lewdly suggestive. The quarrel manifested in different ways, but largely in the form of a volley of plays between Molière, his defenders, and his rivals. As early as February 1663, news emerged that Molière's response to his critics would be in the form of a *dialogue* or *petite comédie*, as he disclosed in his preface to *The School for Wives* in March 1663. The play he was referring to is *La Critique de L'École des femmes*, and it premiered that June by Molière's company at the Palais-Royal. Playwright and essayist Jean Donneau de Visé responded to this volley by publishing the defamatory *Zélinde, ou La Véritable critique de L'École des femmes*. The play was probably never performed, but it was widely circulated. The actors at the Hôtel de Bourgogne mounted their own attack on Molière in August, in the form of a play called *Le Portrait du peintre, ou La Contre-critique de L'École des femmes*, by Edme Boursault. Going beyond merely attacking Molière, the actors of the Bourgogne followed this with a performance of the scandalous *La Chanson de la coquille*, which consists of verses against Madeleine Béjart. Molière's response to these scurrilous works—for a response was requested by the king—premiered that October at Versailles. This was *L'Impromptu de Versailles*, and it was Molière's last word on the matter.

As his comeback to his critics, the play is immensely clever. Rather than address their attacks, he creates an argument about the futility of responding to them and the insignificance of their criticisms, especially in light of the appreciation of his audiences. He parodies the bombastic acting of the troupe at the Hôtel de Bourgogne and their slavish adherence to prevailing dramatic codes. He highlights his

service to the king (and the king's appreciation in return). In sum, although not quite a *pièce à thèse* (and the term would be anachronistic, anyway), *Impromptu at Versailles* is nevertheless an argument as much as it is a play. It offers compelling pronouncements about the uses of comedy, the value of Molière's work, his thoughts about audiences, and his disinterest in the opinions of critics. As a theatrical and biographical archive, the play also evidences the relationship between Molière and the members of his company. Through self-parody, it exposes something of the approach of Molière's company to their work, their skill in physical and vocal characterization, and Molière's role as playwright/manager and performer. Any consideration of *Impromptu at Versailles* must, of course, contend with the trap of biographical criticism—one cannot unconditionally accept what it seems to reveal about Molière, nor can it be unconditionally dismissed. A frustratingly unstable archive, *Impromptu at Versailles* nevertheless offers performance clues, insights about the work, and the abilities of his actors. Given that so little trustworthy information about the feelings and thoughts of Molière and his company has survived, this intriguing little play is invaluable testimony. Had Shakespeare similarly penned a piece about writing, acting, and rehearsing with the King's Men, it certainly would not have been dismissed because of its questionable historicity.

Significant as *Impromptu at Versailles* may be to theatre historians, the play is largely illegible for contemporary U.S. audiences. The context in which it was created and the extent to which it references events and people of its day is central to its comprehension. That may explain why it is rarely performed. Molière's one-act plays are not often produced in the United States, but even in France, where productions occur more frequently, one is more likely to see *L'Impromptu de Versailles* on special occasions such as Molière anniversary commemorations. It is fair to say that for most audiences today in the United States, the historical referentiality of the play is entirely obscure. How can we understand the context of Molière's argument about his enemies? Who are these members of his company—Béjart, La Grange, Brécourt, and so on? Who are the rival actors that are being imitated by Molière in his off-the-cuff lampoon? Of course, such knowledge, on the part of audiences, is not a prerequisite for any production. If it were, we would never produce Shakespeare's history plays or any of Aristophanes's plays for that matter. Not surprisingly, plays with difficult legibility are often subjected to deep revision and recontextualization. While adaption is not *required* in these cases, it is often *inspired* by the challenges posed by lost context, obscured referentiality, and expired historical knowledge. As a theatre director, historian, and translator, I was intrigued by *Impromptu at Versailles*, despite its illegibility, for the possibilities it offered to illuminate Molière for U.S. audiences.

My adaption of *Impromptu at Versailles*, maintains the broad strokes of Molière's play while introducing significant differences. "The Rehearsal" is set not in October 1663 but in February 1673. Molière and his company have gathered at Versailles for a premier command performance of a new play called "The Hypochondriac." The play is not thoroughly prepared, and Molière hopes to use the few hours they have before the king's arrival to conduct a rehearsal. They have barely begun rehearsing a scene when they are interrupted by a nosy marquis. Molière and the marquis argue about the value of Molière's *The School for Wives* and about comedy and audiences in general. Upon the marquis's departure, Molière and his company, stung by the insults of the marquis, launch into an improvisation in which they invent a play that takes place at Versailles. A host of familiar characters—precious ladies,

marquises, a poet, a prude or two, a coquette, and a chevalier—are awaiting an audience with the king. They amuse themselves by ridiculing each other and Molière. The game continues until the announced entry of the king brings them back to the task at hand. The company frantically finishes preparing the stage and gathers to perform “The Hypochondriac.”

Reimagining the plot of *Impromptu at Versailles* as the occasion for a performance of *Le Malade imaginaire* involved important alterations to both plays, but particularly to *Impromptu*. Aligning the number of roles in “The Rehearsal” with the roles in “The Hypochondriac” required careful thought. This was a practical matter, of course, but it was also historical and dramaturgical. The characters of *Impromptu at Versailles* are named, historical actors of Molière’s company. The characters of *The Imaginary Invalid* were played by company actors, but not all the same ones that took part in the earlier play. Molière’s company had changed in the ten years between the two plays: some members had retired, defected to other companies, or died, and new actors had joined. To collapse these figures for the purpose of the combined plays meant ignoring historical facts about Molière’s company as well as changing character genders and adding characters. Dramaturgically, creating the fiction that the company was about to perform in “The Hypochondriac” also meant introducing deeply revised or newly invented dialogue. For example, there is a moment in which the character Molière coaches his actors on the roles they are to perform in his play. My adaptation rewrites the scene to accommodate the premise that he is describing for each member of his company their roles in “The Hypochondriac.” Although I invented this dialogue, I did it by drawing on descriptors of character types as found in Molière’s plays—either in *Impromptu* or other pieces.

A highlight of *Impromptu at Versailles* appears early in the play (Sc.1) in which the character Molière offers a brief improvised sketch of an idea for a play involving satiric portrayals of contemporary actors, playing all the parts himself. For sake of legibility, I eliminated this part of the scene. In its place, I provided a brief rehearsal of the very play they are about to perform. Madeleine and Armande expertly transform into Toinette and Angélique for a quick run of Act I, Scene 2. However, they are soon interrupted by a busybody marquis. Sparked by the appearance of this fop, Molière inspires his troupe to improvise on a new idea he has for a play based on the affected, criticizing catty chatter of the crowd in the king’s anti-chamber. This, of course, is the play being improvised in *Impromptu at Versailles*. Into both the scene between Molière and the marquis and throughout the improvisation, I grafted dialogue borrowed from *La Critique de L’École des femmes* (*The School for Wives Criticized*). My purpose in doing so was to use the valuable material in the *Critique* to more pointedly bring out opinions of his comedies and portrayals of his critics and defenders. This makes sense: *Impromptu at Versailles* is not a discretely contained object. It can be thought of as the third act in a longer dialogic self-defense that Molière began in his preface to the publication of *L’École des femmes*, followed by the *Critique de L’École des femmes*. The historical circumstances that tie all the texts of the *quarrel* together make for permeable boundaries between these works and an intertextuality. My borrowing from the *Critique* for “The Rehearsal” made use of this.

There is another small but important alteration inspired by the invented premise connecting *Impromptu* to *Imaginary Invalid*. Central to *Impromptu* is the conflict created by Molière’s obligation to present a play to the king and the company’s reluctance to do so, in part for fear of being under-rehearsed. This is

expressed by the female characters and their repeated declarations that they do not know their lines. It was important to maintain this obstacle, but how, then, do they execute the performance of “The Hypochondriac” if they are so weak on their lines? My solution was to insert several instances throughout “The Hypochondriac,” in which an actor “goes up” on lines and must resort to calling on a character I created—the “Pastry-eating Prompter”—for their cues. Repeating this at intervals reminded the audience of the framing circumstances underlying the performance.

My purpose with this discussion is not to offer an analysis of similarities and differences between Molière’s play and my own, in the interests of conducting a kind of “fidelity criticism” between source text and derivative adaptation—instead, my free adaptation of *Impromptu at Versailles* should be taken, like Linda Hutcheon argues of all adaptations, as an original work in itself.¹⁸ As such, it offers performance possibilities on its own merits that differ from Molière’s play. How does *Molière at Versailles* establish for audiences a new legibility about Molière and his company? With the performance of “The Hypochondriac” now interwoven within the premise of *Molière at Versailles*, how do these two plays work in tandem? Together, what kind of audience experience might they inspire?

In theory, almost any of Molière’s plays could have been paired with “The Rehearsal.” I chose *The Imaginary Invalid* because it contains disruptions of its fictional status that make the play especially suitable for the sort of offstage reveal that *Molière at Versailles* aims to achieve. This metatheatrical element is most apparent in the scene between Argan and his brother Béralde when they discuss Molière’s plays. However, it could be argued that all productions of *The Imaginary Invalid* might signify both real and fictional registers for audience members with knowledge of the circumstances of Molière’s health at the time of its writing and awareness that Molière, playing Argan, died shortly after its fourth performance. *The Imaginary Invalid* is thus persistently inflected by this biographical overlay, infused with levels of irony and poignancy, and endowed by historical events in a way that, for example, *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* is not.¹⁹ I deliberately avoided inscribing this history into the text of *Molière at Versailles*; it is a matter of interpretation for theatre-makers to decide how to use this information. Suffice to say, a stage director with a good eye for metatheatricity will find no shortage of moments to allow actors to draw together the biographical world of “The Rehearsal” and fictional world of “The Hypochondriac.”

The Imaginary Invalid has a complex structure. The play itself is three acts, to which are added a ballet prologue and three disjointed music and dance interludes following each act. The third interlude is described in the play as a “cérémonie burlesque d’un homme qu’on fait médecin, en récit, chante, et danse [burlesque ceremony about a man-turned-doctor, in word, song, and dance].” Like his other

¹⁸ Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (London & New York: Routledge, 2012).

¹⁹ See Mechele Leon, “Corpsing Molière: History as Fiasco.” *Theatre Historiography: Critical Questions*, ed. Henry Bial and Scott Magelssen (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010).

comédie-ballets, the piece today is often performed without these ornaments,²⁰ but it does pose the question of what to do with the third interlude. Instead of merely closing the play, the “burlesque ceremony” concludes the plot, and so is not easily dispensed with. At the same time, the third interlude is notoriously wicked to translate. The text is made up of recitation and song in a mashup of French, Italian, and dog Latin. If one attempts an English translation—and quite understandably not all translators do—how does one convey the playful use of language? And if translated, what to do with the music as it was provided by Marc-Antoine Charpentier? The finale I wrote for *Molière at Versailles* is quite novel. Starting from my loose translation of Molière’s linguistically parodic text (a literal translation is impossible), I then used this paraphrased material to invent a new version of the ceremony, which I set to original music. As readers can see, it is flagrantly anachronistic—a choice I justified in the recognition that Molière’s comédie-ballets often freely juxtapose the topical and fictional; for example, when a prologue extolling Louis XIV’s latest military exploits begins a play about a bourgeois Parisian family.

This matter of the anachronistic leads me finally to the question of the liberties taken throughout this piece with historical facts. *Molière at Versailles* collapses, condenses, or otherwise ignores factual elements about Molière and his company and introduces, well, some fake news. However, by reimagining *Impromptu at Versailles* and *The Imaginary Invalid* within the single and singular frame of *Molière at Versailles*, I hope to provide audiences with a different but equally valid history—namely, the impressionistic experience of seeing Molière’s company as his audiences might have seen them; i.e., as actors first and characters second. Here, I will remind readers again that the two parts of *Molière at Versailles* are meant to be *mutually revealing*, each reflecting on the other and together making transparent the relationship between Molière’s actors and their artistry in a way that, in contemporary performance of his plays, cannot but be lost. For his seventeenth-century audiences, Molière’s plays meant perceiving actor and role simultaneously. Molière’s company of actors, although not entirely consistent over his fourteen years in Paris, was familiar to his audiences (both city and court), who could observe them in different roles. In other words, Molière’s company performed in a semiotic frame in which the audience had familiarity with the actors in both their onstage and offstage personas, where the *jeu* of the company was transparent, exposed, enhanced, and read through a lens of comparison and juxtaposition by knowing audiences. The “peek behind the curtain” offered by “The Rehearsal” is my attempt—hopefully not vain—at dispelling some of the alienating distance that often results from the period styles in which we typically perform Molière. I hope it gives audiences a sense of this theatrical collective, and it does this while providing a production of one of the funniest plays in the canon of Western drama.

Combining *Impromptu* and *Imaginary Invalid* under the fictional premise of a single event required—no mincing words—some dramaturgical violence. However, I believe that whatever historical authority is compromised, it is compensated by the opportunity the piece gives its actors as well as its audiences.

²⁰ This typically means the curtain rises on Argan. There exists an alternative prologue from the period, from which I created a freely adapted version to aid the transition between “The Rehearsal” and “The Hypochondriac.” See *Molière. Œuvres complètes*. Sous la direction de Georges Forestier (Paris: Gallimard, 2010).

It offers the pleasure of witnessing the transformation his actors underwent, from their workaday obligations—with their fears, follies, and arguments—into expert comic performers. The pleasure of the double bill *Molière at Versailles* lays not in its efficacy as performed theatre history but as a vibrant comedy about extraordinary seventeenth-century actors, their playwright, and their work together.

Molière (Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, 1622–1673) was a French comic actor and playwright whose plays are judged in posterity to have modernized old French comedy and Italian commedia dell'arte into a unique and elevated form for the French neoclassical stage. Contemporaneous criticism was not so kind, and his work was attacked throughout his writing career by rival authors, critics, and clergy. Ranging from short farce and full-length comedies to comédie-ballets, his major plays include *The School for Wives*, *Tartuffe*, *The Misanthrope*, *The Miser*, *The Would-Be Gentleman*, and *The Imaginary Invalid*. Over his thirty years in the theatre, half was spent solely as an actor and leader of a successful troupe touring the French provinces. His career as a playwright began in earnest in 1658, when his company established a theatre in Paris under the patronage of Louis XIV. He died in 1673 due to pulmonary tuberculosis that afflicted him throughout his adulthood.

Mechele Leon is a theatre director, scholar, performer, and educator. She specializes in the history of French theatre with a focus on culture and national identity. Her book, *Molière, The French Revolution and the Theatrical Afterlife* (University of Iowa, 2009) is the winner of the 2009 Barnard Hewitt Award for Outstanding Research in Theatre History. She edited the anthology “A Cultural History of Theatre in the Enlightenment” (Bloomsbury, 2017), volume four of the series *A Cultural History of Theatre*. She is a director of classical and contemporary plays and musicals. She wrote and currently performs a solo autobiographical play about cancer, *Bladder Interrupted*, a Fringe Festival award winner.

Molière at Versailles

Translated and adapted from the plays of Molière

By Mechele Leon

Original Music by Michael Wysong and Ryan McCall

Originally produced February 2016 at the University Theatre, University of Kansas. Directed by Mechele Leon. Sandy Leppin, Scenic Design. Dennis Christilles, Lighting Design. Shannon Smith-Regnier, Costume Design. Leslie Bennett, Choreography.

SETTING

February 1673. A hall at the Palace of Versailles under the Reign of Louis XIV.

The actors of Molière’s company have gathered for the premiere performance of his play “The Hypochondriac.” The play will be presented for King Louis XIV and his guests in a hall within the palace that has been prepared with a temporary stage for such performances.

It is a few hours before they are to begin. The stage, which is to represent a parlor in the middle-class Parisian home of Argan, a hypochondriac, is far from ready. Costume trunks and prop boxes are strewn about on the stage and on the floor around it, costume pieces are everywhere, set pieces are not in their final positions and furniture is tossed about. In other words, it’s a typical stage on opening day a few hours before curtain—that is to say, a mess.

SCENES

Act I The Rehearsal

Act II The Hypochondriac

Prologue

Scene 1: Argan’s Chamber, Late morning

Scene 2: The next day

Act III The Hypochondriac

Scene 1: Later that day

Scene 2: “The Ceremony”

Intermission takes places between Act II and Act III.

CHARACTERS (7m/6f)

Molière (Jean-Baptiste Poquelin): Comic actor, playwright and manager of The King’s Players. Plays Argan, in "The Hypochondriac."

La Grange (Charles Varlet): Leading actor for romantic roles in Molière's plays and devoted member of Molière's troupe. Managed many of the business affairs for the company. Plays "Cléante," Angelique's suitor, in "The Hypochondriac."

Du Croisy (Philibert Gassot): Leading comic actor for Molière's company, which he joined in 1659. Married to Marie Claveau. Plays Dr. Purgon, Argan's Doctor.

Brécourt (Guillaume Marcoureau): A versatile actor and accomplished playwright. Plays Dr. Thomas Diafoirus, son of Dr. Diafoirus and suitor to Angelique.

Louis Béjart: Brother to Madeleine Béjart and long-time member of Molière's troupe. Typically played a variety of secondary roles. Plays Argan's sensible brother "Béralde."

Madeleine Béjart: A celebrated actress of the period and reputed to be a great beauty. Leading member of the Béjart theatre family. Plays "Toinette," servant to Argan.

Mademoiselle de Brie (Catherine Leclerc): Key member of Molière's company, wife of the actor Edme Villequin, known as de Brie. She performs the role of Béline, Argan's second wife and stepmother to Angelique and Louise.

Mademoiselle Molière (Armande Béjart): Probably the daughter of Madeleine Béjart. Grew up with the troupe and eventually married Molière. An excellent actress, she played leading roles for the company. In "The Hypochondriac" she plays Angelique, Argan's daughter.

Mademoiselle Du Parc (Marquise-Therese La Goria): A dancer of Spanish origins, she joined Molière's company in its years before returning to Paris. Disguised in male garb, plays Bonnefoy, the notary.

Mademoiselle Hervé (Genevieve Béjart): A founding member of Molière's company. Played smaller roles throughout her lifetime. In "The Hypochondriac," she plays Louise, Argan's youngest daughter.

Mademoiselle Du Croisy (Marie Claveau): Married to Du Croisy, she was known to be not much of an actress. She serves as the company's "pastry-eating prompter."

Marquis: Also plays Dr. Diafoirus in "The Hypochondriac."

A King's Page: Also plays Mr. Fleurant, an apothecary.

PRODUCTION NOTE

This piece is a play within a play and thus requires stage design and acting skills that depict a fluid movement between onstage and offstage worlds. Scenic and lighting design must of course support this, but acting technique is key. Actors should make clear the difference between the everyday behavior of Molière's company members and the heightened acting styles they assume when playing their roles.

“The Rehearsal” leads directly into “The Hypochondriac,” reserving the intermission to follow Act II of “The Hypochondriac.” In practical terms, “The Rehearsal” is not long enough to require an intermission following it. More importantly, the audience should witness the transformation from chaos to order, from disorganized rehearsal room to disciplined stage performance, from unruly actors to comic virtuosos. Effecting a set change in full view of the audience, this transformation from the rehearsal to the performance itself should be done with whatever theatrical magic is necessary.

In the interest of preserving the “Frenchness” of the piece, the names of characters have not been anglicized. English pronunciation of the French names is a good option for Molière. Where names exist in both English and French, I have omitted diacritics.

ACT I

THE REHEARSAL

Lights up on MOLIÈRE, alone and seated in an armchair. The effect is eerie. He begins to conjure his company members by calling to them, tentatively at first, then more boldly. He calls offstage, toward the darkened audience, toward the balcony, perhaps to the fly space.

MOLIÈRE: Come now, Ladies and Gentlemen! You’re wasting time. Will you not come? (*Calling out.*) Brécourt!

BRÉCOURT (*offstage, from somewhere*): What?

MOLIÈRE: La Grange!

LA GRANGE (*off*): What is it?

MOLIÈRE: Du Croisy!

DU CROISY (*off*): What do you want?

MOLIÈRE: Therese!

THERESE (*off*): Well?

MOLIÈRE: Madeleine!

MADELEINE (*off*): What do you want?

MOLIÈRE: Catherine!

CATHERINE (*off*): Who’s there?

MOLIÈRE: Béjart!

BÉJART (*off*): What’s the matter?

MOLIÈRE: Marie!

MARIE (*off*): What now?

MOLIÈRE: Armande!

ARMANDE (*off*): You called?

MOLIÈRE: Genevieve!

GENEVIEVE (*off*): I'm coming.

MOLIÈRE: Come now, everyone. You'll drive me out of my mind!

(Singly and in pairs the actors arrive from all parts of the theatre—from wings, orchestra, balcony. As they enter, they gather around him. They are in various stages of dress as if caught in the transformation to stage costume. Many carry their costume pieces or will retrieve pieces from the trunks on stage. All have pages from the script of a new play: The Hypochondriac.)

BRÉCOURT: What do you want from us, Molière? We don't know our parts. You'll drive us out of our minds if you make us perform.

MOLIÈRE: Actors! What unruly beasts to command!

MADELEINE: Well, we're here. What do you want us to do?

THERESE: What's your plan?

CATHERINE: What's to be done?

MOLIÈRE: Now, everyone, stay close by. Since the king won't be arriving for at least two hours, let's use this time to rehearse our play.

LA GRANGE: How can we rehearse what we haven't yet learned?

THERESE: I haven't memorized a word my character says.

CATHERINE: I'll need my lines prompted from beginning to end.

MADELEINE: I'm preparing to go on with my script.

ARMANDE: So am I.

GENEVIEVE: As for me, I don't have a lot to say.

MARIE: Neither do I. Even so, I'm planning to forget my lines.

DU CROISY: Frankly, I would be out of this business if I could. Ho! I'll pay a penalty! How much?

BRÉCOURT: Me too. I'll take a whipping!

MOLIÈRE: Well, well. So, you're all unhappy at having such terrible roles to play, are you? What would you do if you were in my place?

MADELEINE: Who, you? You have nothing to complain about because, having written the play, you don't have to worry about remembering your lines.

MOLIÈRE: So, I have nothing to fear except a lapse in memory? Do you think it's nothing to have to worry about a success or failure that reflects on me alone? Do you think it's nothing to present a comedy before such an audience? It's difficult business, to make people laugh. What author doesn't tremble when he faces that task? I'm the one who should be saying I want out of this business, and more than anything in the world!

MADELEINE: If it makes you tremble, then you should have taken better care and not promised to present a play in eight days.

MOLIÈRE: How could I have avoided it? It was his majesty's request!

MADELEINE: How? With a respectful apology based on the impossibility of doing the task in such a short time. Anyone else in your position would have managed his reputation better and avoided committing himself as you have done. Where will you be, Jean-Baptiste, if this performance goes badly? Can you imagine what your enemies will say?

CATHERINE: Indeed, Molière, one must excuse themselves with respect when it comes to the king or ask for more time.

MOLIÈRE: Oh, for heaven's sake, ladies. Don't you know that monarchs like nothing better than prompt obedience and are not happy to hear about obstacles? It's not for us to question what they want from us. We exist only for their pleasure. When they command something, it's up to us to quickly make good on their desires. Better to deliver something poorly, then to fail to deliver it at all. But we're wasting time. Let's begin rehearsing.

THERESE: How do you expect us to do that, if we don't know our parts?

MOLIÈRE: You will know them, I'm sure. If you don't know the lines perfectly, fill them in, since it's in prose and you know the plot.

GENEVIEVE: Excuse me for saying so, but prose is more difficult than verse.

ARMANDE: Do you know what I think? I think you would have done better to write a comedy that you could play all by yourself.

MOLIÈRE: Quiet, my wife, you're being foolish.

ARMANDE: Thank you, my husband. Here's how it is: marriage changes people. You wouldn't have said that to me before we were married.

MOLIÈRE: Be quiet, Armande. I'm begging you.

ARMANDE: It's a scandal that a little ceremony can erase all our good qualities and that a suitor and a husband can look at the same woman with such different eyes.

MOLIÈRE: What nonsense!

ARMANDE: Truly, if I wrote a comedy, I would do it on the subject of marriage. I would vindicate wives for the many things of which they are wrongly accused, and I would make husbands see the contrast between their surly manners and the tenderness of suitors.

MOLIÈRE: Leave it there, Armande. Let's put our minds on our work, everyone, and stop amusing ourselves with nonsense. All right, then. Act One. The scene is at the home of Argan, a hypochondriac. (*MOLIÈRE threads his way through his troupe of actors, instructing each on their role.*) Du Croisy, take care how you play the role of Doctor Purgon —

MADELEINE (*scoffing*): More doctors!

MOLIÈRE: Yes, more doctors. Why not? They're amusing characters in the theatre.

ARMANDE: It's true. He wouldn't know how to do without them.

MOLIÈRE: As for you, my wife —

ARMANDE: As for me, my husband, I don't know why you gave me the role of Angelique, Argan's lovesick daughter. I'll be terrible in the part.

MOLIÈRE: For heaven's sake, Armande, that's what you said about playing Elmire in *Tartuffe*, but you were wonderful in that role and everyone agreed you performed it to perfection. Believe me, this will be the same and you will be better than you think.

ARMANDE: How could that be? There's no one in the world who is less lovesick than I am.

MOLIÈRE: That's true, my wife. And that should make it all the more clear to you that you are an excellent actress, to carry out a role so contrary to your nature. (*To all the company members.*) Immerse yourselves in your characters and imagine that you are what you represent. Béjart, you play the hypochondriac's brother, Béralde, an honest man of good sense — what we call a *raisonneur*. That is to say, you must be poised, with a natural tone of voice and no exaggerated gestures. Brécourt, you play Angelique's fiancé, Dr. Thomas Diafoirus. You must fill that character with a pedantic air, an exactitude of pronunciation without missing a syllable. As for you, La Grange, you are Angelique's lover, Cléante. You know what to do there. Catherine, remember when you portray Béline, the hypochondriac's wife, that you are one of those women who pretend to be loving and virtuous while quietly carrying on intrigues. Put yourself into that character. Genevieve, you are Louise, Angelique's little sister. And of course, Madeleine, you are Argan's servant, Toinette, who sticks her nose in everywhere. There we are, everyone! You know your characters, now imprint them in your minds! (*MOLIÈRE claps twice. It's the signal to begin.*) Let's rehearse and see how it goes.

(ARMANDE and MADELEINE, carrying their scripts, expertly transform into their characters ANGELIQUE and TOINETTE and take on the elevated performance style they will use in The Hypochondriac. The rest of the company pays little attention to the rehearsal as they quietly move around, putting on costumes pieces, searching for props, memorizing lines, etc. In other words, they occupy themselves like actors do preparing for a performance.)

ANGELIQUE: Toinette.

TOINETTE: Well.

ANGELIQUE: Look at me, Toinette.

TOINETTE: I'm looking.

ANGELIQUE: Toinette.

TOINETTE: Well, what would you have with Toinette?

ANGELIQUE: Do not you know what I would speak of?

TOINETTE: I suspect of your young lover, for it's around him that our conversations have turned these past six days, and you're not happy unless you're talking about him every moment.

ANGELIQUE: Since you know that, why are you not the first to bring him up, and spare me the pains of forcing you to this discourse?

TOINETTE: You don't give me time to do it. You're so eager, it's difficult to get ahead of you.

ANGELIQUE: I admit that I am never weary of talking of him, and that my heart takes advantage of every moment to speak to you of him. But tell me, Toinette, do you—

MOLIÈRE (*interrupting her as he sees the MARQUIS, who has entered the hall, making his way toward their stage*): Oh no! Here comes a bore, right on cue. That's all we need.

(The rehearsal is paused. Everyone in the company stops what they are doing and bows to the MARQUIS.)

MARQUIS: Good morrow, Monsieur Molière!

MOLIÈRE: To you as well, Marquis. (*Aside*) Dammit!

MARQUIS: How goes it?

MOLIÈRE: Very well.

MARQUIS: I come from a place where people have been talking about one of your plays.

MOLIÈRE: Which play, Sir?

MARQUIS: *The School for Wives.*

MOLIÈRE: Well, Sir. How did you find it?

MARQUIS: I found it detestable! Egad! Detestable! One need only listen to the continual laughter from the cheap seats. There is nothing better than that to tell us that a play is worthless.

MOLIÈRE: I suppose, Marquis, that you are one of those men of quality who don't believe that the common people have any taste, and who wouldn't laugh along with them, even if it were the best comedy in the world. You should know, Marquis, that good taste isn't determined by where you sit in the theatre or how much you pay for your ticket. In any case, I'm happy to trust in the approval of those people in the "cheap seats." For although they can't judge a play by the ancient rules of drama,

they judge it by the way it should be judged: which is to enjoy it, without prejudice, smiling indulgence, or mock sensitivity.

MARQUIS: Hmm! What an argument! I would have expected it from you.

(Throughout the next beat, the MARQUIS moves around the stage, eyeing the set pieces, costumes, prop boxes, etc. MOLIERE replies to him politely but tries to continue instructing his company.)

MARQUIS: You play a new piece today?

MOLIERE *(to the MARQUIS):* Yes, Sir. *(Turning to his actors.)* Now, gentlemen, don't—

MARQUIS: The king commanded it?

MOLIERE: Yes. Ladies, remember —

MARQUIS: What do you call it?

MOLIERE: *The Hypochondriac.* Now, everyone, you must —

MARQUIS: How will you be dressed?

MOLIERE: As you see us. Remember, I beg you, don't —

MARQUIS: When do you begin?

MOLIERE: When the king arrives. *(Aside.)* To the Devil with these questions!

MARQUIS: When will come?

MOLIERE: Damned if I know!

MARQUIS: Do you know, Sir —

MOLIERE *(to the MARQUIS):* Look, Sir. I don't know anything about anything. *(To his actors, confidentially.)* This is maddening. Doesn't he see we have business to attend to?

MARQUIS *(turning his attention to the actresses, seductively):* Well, ladies, how do you do?

MOLIERE *(aside):* I'm ruined now.

MARQUIS: You are as pretty as angels. Do you play, both of you, today?

ARMANDE: Yes, Sir.

MARQUIS: Without you two, the comedy would not be worth much.

MOLIERE *(to Catherine):* Can't you get rid of him?

CATHERINE: Sir, we have to rehearse.

MARQUIS: Oh! Of course, I will not hinder you. Pray, proceed!

MARIE: But —

MARQUIS: No, no. It would pain me to incommode anyone, you are at liberty to do whatever you have to do.

THERESE: Yes, but —

MARQUIS: I am a man of no ceremony, I say! You may rehearse as you please.

MOLIÈRE: Sir, what the ladies are trying to tell you is that they would prefer that no one be present during rehearsal.

MARQUIS: But why? There is no danger to me!

MOLIÈRE: It's a custom they observe, and you will have more pleasure when the play surprises you.

MARQUIS: I take my leave then . . . and shall inform the king that you are ready!

(Exit MARQUIS.)

MOLIÈRE *(calling after him):* Not at all, Marquis! Don't be in such a hurry, if you please!

(MARQUIS is gone.)

MOLIÈRE: Well, good riddance, Marquis. What a bore!

(MOLIÈRE gets lost in thought while the company watches to see if he will resume the rehearsal.)

MOLIÈRE: Can't you just imagine the scene right now in the king's anti-chamber—that foyer where these dandies pass their days waiting for a word with his majesty? Surely something amusing happens there every day . . . I should compose a comedy about that! I could fill that setting with all kinds of amusing characters, men and women. Yes! The play would open with two marquises. *(He points to LA GRANGE and DU CROISY, who jump up and grab props from the trunks nearby, feathered hats, canes, etc.)* The marquis is the new clown in comedy, you know. In the old days, there was always a buffoon servant to make the audience laugh, now there is a ridiculous marquis for diversion. *(To LA GRANGE and DU CROISY, who have transformed themselves into the characters.)* Yes, yes, come into the king's foyer with that attitude one calls “bel air.” Perhaps one is adjusting his wig. The other is mumbling a little song between his teeth: la, la, la, la, la, la. *(To the rest of the company, who arrange themselves as an audience for the improvisation. They can't resist the amusement.)* Move out of the way everyone, these marquises take up the room of two people.

LA GRANGE *(taking stage. To DU CROISY):* “Good morrow, Marquis”

MOLIÈRE: No, no, that is not how a marquis sounds. You must elevate the tone. These gentlemen affect a style of speaking that distinguishes them from commoners. *(Speaking in a highly affected tone.)* “Good Morrow, Marquis” — like that. Give it a try.

LA GRANGE: “Good morrow, Marquis.”

DU CROISY: “Ah! Marquis. Your humble servant.”

LA GRANGE: “What are you doing here?”

DU CROISY: “As you see. I am waiting for these persons to clear the door, that I might present myself to his majesty.”

LA GRANGE: “Egad! What a crowd! I do not care to push myself through. I had rather wait till the end.”

DU CROISY: “There are twenty or more here who have no chance of getting in, but they press forward, and hinder all approaches to the door.”

LA GRANGE: “Let us call out our names to the door-keeper, so that he may summon us.”

DU CROISY: “As you like. But if you do so, you may find yourself ridiculed in Molière’s next play!”

LA GRANGE: “Me? I think, Sir, that you were the model for that ridiculous Marquis de Mascarille in *The Affected Ladies*.”

DU CROISY: “Me? Well, it was surely you as Clitander, that foolish marquis in *The Misanthrope*.”

LA GRANGE: “Ha, ha, ha, ha! How entertaining you were!”

DU CROISY: “Ha, ha, ha, ha! How comical were you!”

LA GRANGE: “What! Do you mean to say that it was not you who was portrayed as the Marquis in *The School for Wives Criticized*?”

DU CROISY: “Just so, it was I. ‘Detestable! Egad! Detestable!’ Oh, it was I. Most certainly it was!”

LA GRANGE: “Yes, it was you. You need not jest. (*Pointing to MOLLIÈRE.*) Here comes an honest gentleman who shall decide this quarrel. What ho! Chevalier!”

MOLIÈRE (*takes a prop, joins the improvisation, assuming the attitude of a chevalier, a man of sober authority and good sense*): “What is it?”

LA GRANGE: “We cannot agree who is the model for the marquis we see portrayed in Molière’s plays. I say that it is he, and he says that it is I.”

MOLIÈRE: “Well, I say that it is neither the one nor the other. You are fools, both of you. This is just what I heard Molière complaining about the other day. He said that nothing annoyed him so much as to be accused of portraying anyone specifically in the plays he writes. His desire is to show human behavior, not strike out at individuals. He creates characters according to his fancy and for the delight of his audience. His enemies maliciously start quarrels with rumors that he is portraying so-and-so, when in fact these ridiculous traits are shared by a hundred people. Since the business of comedy is to paint the follies of men, then it follows that there is no character Molière could create that you will not find in the world.”

DU CROISY: “So be it. But tell me, Chevalier, do you not think that Molière has exhausted his topics, and that he will find no more subjects for comedy?”

MOLIÈRE (*still playing a CHEVALIER. Although there are moments when the mask drops*): “No more subjects for comedy? My dear Marquis, do you imagine that he has depicted in his plays all the possible follies of men? Are there not at least a dozen characters which he has not yet touched upon? For instance, there are those who profess the greatest friendship possible, and who, when they turn their backs, think it clever to tear each other to pieces. Could he not write about those unmitigated sycophants, those vapid flatterers, whose words nauseate anyone who hears them? What about those fair-weather friends, who praise you in prosperity, and run you down in adversity? And those who fawn on all the world, who hand out polite phrases left and right, saying ‘Sir, your most obedient’ and ‘Sir, I am entirely at your service’ and Count me, Sir, as the warmest of your friends’ and ‘Sir, I am enchanted to embrace you.’ Oh, Marquis, Molière will always have more subjects than he needs. All he has written is but a trifle compared to the treasures within his reach.”

LA GRANGE (*bringing CATHERINE and ARMANDE into the game*): “But here come two pretentious ladies, Climene and Elise.”

MOLIÈRE (*to the women, as they pick up fans and other props and take their roles*): Don’t forget to sway your hips, ladies. (*To ARMANDE*) You must assume a haughty tone. (*Teasing*). It’s unnatural for you know, but it must be so.

CATHERINE: “I have come for a little matter of business with his majesty.”

ARMANDE: “That is my situation as well. Heavens, Madame, I do think your complexion dazzling, and your lips of a marvelous color.”

CATHERINE: “Ah! What is that you say, Madame? Do not look at me, I am frightfully ugly today.”

ARMANDE: “Do, Madame, just raise your hood.”

CATHERINE: “Oh no! I am frightful, I tell you. I shock even myself.”

ARMANDE: “You are so lovely.”

CATHERINE: “No, no.”

ARMANDE: “Show your face.”

CATHERINE: “Oh, pray no.”

ARMANDE: “Pray, do.”

CATHERINE: “How troublesome you are!”

ARMANDE: “You positively will show yourself. We cannot do without seeing you.”

CATHERINE: “Good gracious, what an odd creature you are! What you wish you wish so desperately.” (*Raises her veil.*)

ARMANDE: “Ah, Madame, you need not dread the broad daylight. How wicked people are to say such a thing! I shall certainly be able to contradict them now.”

CATHERINE: “Heavens, I do not know what you mean by that! (*Pointing to THERESE and MARIE.*) But here come two learned women.”

(The actors have taken hold of the premise of the improvisation and run with it. They gang up on Molière, imitating the social types of the day and repeating the hackneyed criticisms against him. It's all in fun and they know it.)

THERESE: “Permit us, ladies, to give you the most agreeable news conceivable. (*Pointing to BÉJART and drawing him into the improvisation.*) Here is Mr. Lysidas, who knows of a play just written against that monster, Molière, and which the company of rival actors across town are going to perform.”

BÉJART (*as LYSIDAS*): “It is true. But many people have contributed to this piece, since we all look on Molière as our greatest enemy. We all unite against him to do him an ill turn. Each of us has added a pen stroke to the portrait of this—what do they call him? Oh, yes. The ‘Painter of the Follies of Men’ — ha! ha!”

MARIE: “For my part, I confess that I am glad to hear it.”

BÉJART: “So am I. Finally, the mocker himself shall be mocked.”

THERESE: “That will teach him to make fun of everybody. That Molière believes women have no wit. He condemns all our lofty modes of expression and expects that we should speak in a humdrum way.”

MARIE: “He faults all our intimate friendships however harmless they may be.”

THERESE: “He ridicules even virtuous women. The wicked buffoon calls us ‘respectable she-devils.’”

MARIE: “Molière is an impertinent wretch. He deserves all he gets.”

THERESE: “Why does he write these wicked plays that all of Paris goes to see, and in which he portrays real people so well that everybody recognizes himself? Why does he not make plays like those of Mr. Lysidas here? He has no one against him. It is true that his plays do not draw large audiences, but on the other hand, all who see them are desperately anxious to think them well written.”

BÉJART: “It is true that I have the advantage of making no enemies, and my plays are appreciated by the learned.”

THERESE: “You are justified in being satisfied with yourself. That is worth more than all the applause of the public. What does it matter whether people come to see your plays, so long as they are praised by your professional friends?”

LA GRANGE: “But when will this play about Molière be acted?”

BRÉCOURT (*joining the improvisation*): “I do not know, but I intend to appear in the front seat, and cry, “This is a good play!””

LA GRANGE: “Egad! And I too.”

ARMANDE: “For my part, I shall show myself there. I shall answer with a round of applause that will drown out all adverse opinion. It is really the least we can do.”

THERESE: “Well said!”

CATHERINE: “That is what we must all do.”

MARIE: “Assuredly.”

THERESE: “Undoubtedly.”

GENEVIEVE (*joining the improvisation*): “Give no quarter to this clown Molière!”

DU CROISY: “Upon my word, Chevalier, your Molière must hide his head!”

MOLIÈRE: “Who? He? I promise you, Marquis, that he intends to laugh with the rest of them at the portrait they paint of him.”

LA GRANGE: “Well, then, he will laugh out of the wrong side of his face.”

MOLIÈRE: “Perhaps he will find more reason for laughter than you think. Since anything amusing in it is taken from Molière, it will not offend him. As to the parts that blacken his reputation, I doubt they will be applauded by anyone.”

DU CROISY: “The actors told me they expected a rejoinder from Molière, and that—”

MOLIÈRE: “A rejoinder? He is a great fool if he takes the trouble to reply to their insults. Everyone knows well enough their motives. The best response he can have is to write a comedy that will succeed beyond all the others. I’m sure that a new play will annoy those actors much more than any rejoinder written against them.”

LA GRANGE: “But, Chevalier—”

MADELEINE (*angrily*): I must interrupt this nonsense. Listen, Jean-Baptiste, since your enemies have written about you, they've opened the door for you to write about them. After the way you've been treated in their satires, you are justified in taking revenge.

MOLIÈRE: I disagree. You would have me get fired up against them, and follow their example by rushing into invectives and insults.

MADELEINE: Why not? They did the same to you when you wrote *The Affected Ladies*. They scorned you for your poetry in *The School for Wives*, in which they heard nothing but rude insinuations and none of its beauty. You were called a heretic for *Don Juan*, not to mention those religious hypocrites who gathered against your *Tartuffe*. Your enemies call you a plagiarist, a bad poet, and a clown who

can only imitate better models like our friend Scaramouche. In my opinion, you should not to spare any of them.

MOLIÈRE: The greatest harm I've done them is that I've been fortunate enough to please my audiences a little more than they would have liked. Their whole conduct since we came to Paris has too clearly shown what bothers them. But let them do what they will. All their efforts can't disturb me. They criticize my plays? So much the better. The success of my comedies is vengeance enough for me.

MADELEINE: There's not much pleasure in seeing one's work pulled to pieces.

MOLIÈRE: What does it matter to me? Haven't I gotten from my comedies all I could wish for? Haven't I reason to be content with my lot, and aren't their censures a little too late? It doesn't bother me. When they attack a play that has been successful, they merely attack the judgment of those who have praised it and not skill of him who wrote it.

MADELEINE: But, in a word—

MOLIÈRE: In a word, Madeleine, you'll drive me mad. Let's say no more about this. We amuse ourselves in talking when we ought to be rehearsing our comedy. Where were we? I can't remember.

CATHERINE: You were at the place where Angelique . . .

(Suddenly, music signals the imminent arrival of the king. General panic erupts among the company.)

MOLIÈRE: Good lord, what do I hear? The king is coming! It's plain to see we have no more time to rehearse. That's what comes of playing. Well, you must all do the best you can.

MADELEINE: I'm in such a fright, I won't be able to play my part unless I rehearse it!

MOLIÈRE: What?! You cannot play your part?

MADELEINE: No!

THERESE: Nor I mine!

CATHERINE: No more can I!

ARMANDE: Nor I!

GENEVIEVE: Nor I!

MARIE: Nor I!

MOLIÈRE: What on earth do you mean? Are you serious?

(Enter the king's PAGE.)

PAGE: Ladies and gentlemen, I come to inform you that his majesty King Louis XIV is arriving and waits for you to begin.

MOLIÈRE: Ah, Sir. You see us in terrible straits. These ladies are frightened. We beg the favor of another moment.

(Disapprovingly, the PAGE exits.)

MOLIÈRE *(to his company):* Try and pull yourselves together, everyone. Take courage, I beg you.

(MOLIÈRE claps his hands twice to signal his company to get back to work. The stage becomes a frenzy of motion. The company rushes to put the set of The Hypochondriac in order, placing stage furniture, hastily packing up and clearing costume and prop trunks, etc. The actors help each other make the finishing touches on their costumes and make-up. Marie, who will be the prompter for the show, rushes around gathering everyone's script pages and takes them to her prompter's booth, trying to put them in order.)

(Once everything is ready, the actors arrange themselves in formation and await the entrance of the king. They whisper here and there, make last minute adjustments to their costumes, wipe sweat off their palms, clear their throats, etc. Maximum moment of anticipation.)

(Finally, a blast of trumpets brings the entrance of the king. The actors offer him a low and reverent bow, which they hold until the king is seated. As they complete the bow and the music ends, the Prompter steps forward to present the Prologue while the other actors leave the stage and Molière takes his place as Argan at his desk.)

Production Note: The king can be represented by an effect of light (he was the “Sun King” after all), or music, or some other bit of theatrical magic. It's the actors' reaction to the effect that will make the king's presence a reality for the audience. Of course, if production allows, one could have the physical presence of a Louis XIV to attend the production.

ACT II.

THE HYPOCHONDRIAC

PROLOGUE *(spoken by the Prompter).*

Hear ye Hear ye! Doctors:

It's you I address:

You fakers and quacks, you fail to impress.

Fancy words and concoctions

Move bowels, that's sure,

Yet you pretend these enemas cure.

Alas! Alas! In love, I'm abused.

And doctors, doctors, here's the news:

No pill is going to cure my ill—

Yet you pretend your medicines will!

You pretend to know what makes a heart ache

And you seek to fix it with potions of snake.

Only a fool seeks comfort from a quack—

So, here's your man: THE HYPOCHONDRIAC!

(Lights and other shifts to signal the start of the performance.)

Scene 1. Argan's Chamber. Late Morning

ARGAN *(alone, sitting at his table with a stack of bills, adding up his doctor bills and counting out coins):* Three and two make five, and five makes ten, and ten makes twenty. *(Reading the next bill:)* Next item, from the twenty-fourth of February: “A little preparation to moisten and refresh His Worship's Bowels—” Ah! What pleases me about Mr. Fleurant, my Apothecary, is that his bills are always so polite. “—His Worship's Bowels. Thirty francs.” Thirty francs!? Being polite isn't enough, Mr. Fleurant, you must be reasonable too, and not fleece your patients! I will pay ten francs. *(Adding one coin to the pot.)* There! *(Reading next bill:)* “Item, a good cleaning enema composed of double catholicum, rhubarb, rosatum, et cetera, according to prescription, to scour, scrub, and cleanse His Honor's abdomen. Thirty francs.” Excuse me, Sir, let's make that ten francs. “Item, the same day, at night, an hepatic, soporific, and somniferous Julep, composed to make his Honor sleep. Thirty-five francs.” I won't complain about that, since I slept well. “Item, on the twenty fifth, a good purgative composed of cinnamon and senna, according to the prescription of Dr. Purgon, to expel and evacuate His Honor's choler. Forty francs.” You jest, Mr. Fleurant! I'll pay thirty, if you please. “Item, the twenty sixth, an enema to expel His Honor's wind. Thirty francs.” Twenty, Mr. Fleurant. “Item, His Honor's enema repeated at night as before. Thirty francs.” Ten! Mr. Fleurant, Ten! “Item, the twenty seventh, a good medicine composed to dissipate and drive out His Honor's bad temper, three francs.” That's reasonable. “Item, the twenty eighth, a dose of clarified milk, to sweeten, temper and refresh His Honor's blood. Twenty francs.” Oh! Mr. Fleurant, be careful. If you keep charging these prices, no one will want to be ill. *(Adding aloud:)* Three and two make five, and five makes ten, and ten makes twenty. Sixty-three francs. So, in this month I have taken *(counting in his ledger)* one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight purges, and one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve enemas. Last month it was twelve purges, and twenty enemas. No wonder I'm not feeling well this month! I'll tell Dr. Purgon about this, and he will set it right. I'm done, take away all these things. *(Noticing he is alone.)* There's nobody here. I'm always left alone. *(He rings his bell.)* They don't hear, my bell's not loud enough. *(Rings.)* No one. *(Rings again.)* They are deaf. *(Calling out.)* Toinette! Toinette! *(Making as much noise with his bell as possible.)* Just as if I did not ring at all. *(Ringing the bell again.)* Ring, ring, ring! To the devil with the wench. Is it

possible she should leave a poor sick creature in this manner! (*Gives up on the bell and yells.*) Ring Ring! Ring Ring! Ding Dong! Ding Dong! They'll let me die here. Clang, Clang, Clang!

TOINETTE (*entering*): Here I am.

ARGAN: Carrion! What took you so long?

TOINETTE (*pretending to have hurt her head*): The devil with your impatience, Sir. You hurried me so much that I've knocked my head.

ARGAN: Ah! Baggage—

TOINETTE (*interrupting him, pretending to be in pain.*): Oh!

ARGAN: It is a—

TOINETTE: Oh!

ARGAN: It is an hour—

TOINETTE: Oh! Oh!

ARGAN: Since you have left me—

TOINETTE (*still pretending pain*): Oh!

ARGAN: Hold your tongue, you harlot, that I may scold you.

TOINETTE: Very well, truly. I like that, after what I've done to myself.

ARGAN: You have made me yell my throat sore, Gypsy.

TOINETTE: And you have made me hit my head, Sir. One's as good as the other, so we're even.

ARGAN: How is that, hussy?!

TOINETTE: If you scold me, I'll cry.

ARGAN: How dare you ignore me, you Jade—

TOINETTE (*crying*): Oh! Oh! Oh!

ARGAN: Impudence! Would you—

TOINETTE (*crying*): Oh! Oh! Oh!

ARGAN: What, cannot I have the pleasure of scolding?

TOINETTE: Go ahead. Scold with all your heart.

ARGAN: You hinder me from it, hussy, by interrupting me at every turn.

TOINETTE: If you have the pleasure of scolding, I must for my part, have the pleasure of crying: To each his own. *(Crying.)* Oh! Oh! Oh!

ARGAN: Come now, enough of this. Take away my chamber pot.

(TOINETTE moves to do so but realizes the chamber pot is not on stage. MADELEINE gestures apologetically to the audience and then whispers angrily toward the prompter booth.)

MADELEINE: Psst! Marie!

(MARIE pops her head out of the prompter booth, with a pastry box and pastry in hand. MADELEINE gestures angrily to the stage. MARIE understands, pops backstage for a second and runs back on stage with a chamber pot. MADELEINE takes it, shoos Marie off stage and reassumes the play.)

ARGAN: Well, has my enema worked to day?

TOINETTE: Your enema!

ARGAN: Yes. Have I voided much bilious matter?

TOINETTE: It's not my business. Let your apothecary, Mr. Fleurant, put his nose in it, since he makes the profit by it.

ARGAN: Take care to get me some broth ready, for the other I am to take by and by.

TOINETTE: This Mr. Fleurant and Dr. Purgon are having a fine time with your carcass. They have a fine milk-cow in you. I would ask them what disease you have, that you must take so much medicine.

ARGAN: Hold your tongue, ignorance. It is not for you to question the doctor's orders. Give me my cane. I will return again presently. Have my daughter Angelique ready for me, I have something to say to her.

(ARGAN exits, to his privy.)

ANGELIQUE *(entering, speaking confidentially):* Toinette.

TOINETTE: Well.

ANGELIQUE: Look at me, Toinette.

TOINETTE: I'm looking.

ANGELIQUE: Toinette.

TOINETTE: Well, what would you have with Toinette?

ANGELIQUE: Do not you know what I would speak of?

TOINETTE: I suspect of your young lover, for it's around him that our conversations have turned these past six days, and you're not happy unless you're talking about him every moment.

ANGELIQUE: Since you know that, why are not you the first to bring him up, and spare me the pains of forcing you to this discourse?

TOINETTE: You don't give me time to do it. You're so eager it's difficult to get ahead of you.

ANGELIQUE: I admit that I am never weary of talking of him, and that my heart takes advantage of every moment to speak to you of him. But tell me, Toinette, do you condemn the feelings I have for him?

TOINETTE: Far from it.

ANGELIQUE: Am I wrong to abandon myself to these sweet sentiments?

TOINETTE: I didn't say that.

ANGELIQUE: And would you have me ignore the tender protestations of love that he declares for me?

TOINETTE: Heaven forbid!

ANGELIQUE: Tell me, do you not think, as well as I, that there is something of providence, some act of destiny, in the unexpected adventure of our acquaintance?

TOINETTE: Yes.

ANGELIQUE: Do you not think that the action of his rushing to my defense, without knowing me, was perfectly gallant?

TOINETTE: Oh, aye.

ANGELIQUE: That it could not have been more honorable?

TOINETTE: Agreed.

ANGELIQUE: And that he did it with all the grace in the world?

TOINETTE: Oh, yes.

ANGELIQUE: Do you not think, Toinette, that he is well made in his person?

TOINETTE: Certainly.

ANGELIQUE: That he has the best air in the world?

TOINETTE: Undoubtedly.

ANGELIQUE: That his discourse, as well as actions, has something noble in it?

TOINETTE: Truly.

ANGELIQUE: That never anything was heard more affectionate than all he says to me?

TOINETTE: That's sure.

ANGELIQUE: And that there is nothing more horrible than the restraints I am kept under, which hinder all communication of those sweet transports of mutual ardor with which heaven inspires us both?

TOINETTE: You're right about that.

ANGELIQUE: But, my dear Toinette, do you think he loves me as much as he says?

TOINETTE: Those kinds of things are sometimes not to be trusted. His show of love is very much like the reality, but I have seen good actors in that part.

ANGELIQUE: Ah! Toinette! What are you saying? Alas, in his manner of speaking, is it really possible that he is not telling me the truth?

TOINETTE: Be it as it may, all will be clear on that point soon. The letter he wrote to you yesterday, declaring his intention to ask your father for your hand in marriage, is the sure way to discover if he's speaking the truth or not. That'll be the proof.

ANGELIQUE: Ah! Toinette, if this man deceives me, I will never believe another man as long as I live.

TOINETTE: Shhh! Here's your father returned.

(Reenter ARGAN.)

ARGAN: So, daughter, I am going to tell you a piece of news, which you little expect perhaps. You are asked in marriage. (*ANGELIQUE reacts.*) How is this? You rejoice? It is pleasant, eh? That word "marriage." There is nothing so merry to young girls. Ah, Nature! Nature! From what I can see, my child, I do not have to ask you if you are willing to be married.

ANGELIQUE: It is my duty, Sir, to do whatever will please you to enjoin me.

ARGAN: I am glad to have such a dutiful daughter. The thing is fixed then, and I have promised you.

ANGELIQUE: It is for me, Sir, to blindly follow all your resolutions.

ARGAN: My wife, your stepmother, desired that I should make a nun of you, and your little sister Louise as well. She is always insisting on it.

TOINETTE (*aside*): That sly beast has her reasons for it.

ARGAN: She will not like this match, but I am decided and my word is given.

ANGELIQUE: Oh! Father, how much am I obliged to you for all your goodness!

TOINETTE: In truth, I take this well of you. This is a wise action.

ARGAN: I have not yet seen the young man, but they tell me I will be satisfied with him, and you too.

ANGELIQUE: Most certainly.

ARGAN: How! Have you seen him?

ANGELIQUE: Since your consent allows me to open my heart to you, I will not hesitate to tell you that chance brought us acquainted about six days ago, and that the request which has been made to you is the effect of an inclination which we conceived for each other at first sight.

ARGAN: I was not told of that, but I am very glad of it. It is so much the better that things go in this manner. They say that he is a jolly, well-made young fellow.

ANGELIQUE: Yes, Father.

ARGAN: Well shaped.

ANGELIQUE: Without doubt.

ARGAN: Agreeable in his person.

ANGELIQUE: Most certainly.

ARGAN: Of a good countenance.

ANGELIQUE: Extremely good.

ARGAN: Discreet, and well born.

ANGELIQUE: Perfectly.

ARGAN: Very genteel.

ANGELIQUE: The most genteel man in the world.

ARGAN: And speaks Latin and Greek.

ANGELIQUE (*impressed*): I didn't know that!

ARGAN: And will be granted the title of "Doctor" in three days' time.

ANGELIQUE: Doctor, Father?

ARGAN: Yes. Has he not told you?

ANGELIQUE: No indeed. Who told you so?

ARGAN: Dr. Purgon.

ANGELIQUE: Does Dr. Purgon know him?

ARGAN: A fine question! Of course, he knows him — he is his nephew.

ANGELIQUE: Cléante is Dr. Purgon's nephew?

ARGAN: What “Cléante”? We are speaking of the person you are asked for in marriage.

ANGELIQUE: Well, yes.

ARGAN: Very well, and he is the nephew of Dr. Purgon, the son of the physician Dr. Diafoirus, and this son's name is Thomas Diafoirus, not Cléante. I have concluded the match, and tomorrow this intended son is to be brought to me by his father. What is the matter? You look quite astonished.

ANGELIQUE: It is because I find, Father, that you have been speaking of one person, and I understood another.

TOINETTE: What, Sir, would you entertain so absurd a design? And with so much wealth as you have, would you marry your daughter to a doctor?

ARGAN: Yes. What business is it of yours, Wench? Such impudence!

TOINETTE: Calm now, softly, Sir, you fly immediately to insults. Can't we reason together without falling into a passion? Come, let's talk calmly. What is your reason, pray, for such a marriage?

ARGAN: My reason is, that seeing myself infirm and sick as I am, I would procure me a medical son-in-law to have access to such remedies which are necessary to me, and to have as many consultations and prescriptions as I want.

TOINETTE: Very well, that's giving a reason, and there's a pleasure in answering one another calmly, is there not? But, Sir, lay your hand on your heart. Now, tell me, are you really sick?

ARGAN: How, Jade, am I really sick?! Am I really sick, impertinent wench?!

TOINETTE: Well, yes, Sir, you *are* sick, let us have no quarrel about that. You are very sick, I agree—and more sick than you know. But your daughter must marry a husband for herself, and she, not being sick, doesn't need a doctor.

ARGAN: It's for my sake that I give her a physician, and a girl of good nature should be overjoyed to marry for the benefit of her father's health.

TOINETTE: Look here, Sir. Will you let me as a friend give you a piece of advice?

ARGAN: What's that advice?

TOINETTE: Forget this match.

ARGAN: And the reason, I pray?

TOINETTE: The reason is this: your daughter won't consent to it.

ARGAN: She won't consent to it?

TOINETTE: No.

ARGAN: My daughter?

TOINETTE: Your daughter. She'll tell you that she will have nothing to do with Dr. Diafoirus, nor with his son Thomas Diafoirus, nor all the Diafoiri in the world.

ARGAN: But I'll have something to do with them. Besides, the match is more advantageous than you think. His father Dr. Diafoirus has only one son to inherit all he has, and moreover, his uncle Dr. Purgon has neither wife nor children and gives him all his estate in favor of this marriage. Dr. Purgon is a man worth a good eight thousand a year.

TOINETTE: He must have killed a world of people to become that rich.

ARGAN: Eight thousand a year is nothing to sneeze at.

TOINETTE: All this, Sir, is fair and fine: But I still return to the same point. I advise you to choose another husband for your daughter, for she's not made to be Madame Diafoirus.

ARGAN: But I'll have it be so.

TOINETTE: Oh, fie, don't say that.

ARGAN: And why not say it?

TOINETTE: They'll say you don't know what you're talking about.

ARGAN: They may say what they please, but I tell you, I'll have her make good on the promise I have given.

TOINETTE: No, I am sure that she'll not do it.

ARGAN: I'll force her to it then.

TOINETTE: She'll not do it, I tell you.

ARGAN: She'll do it, or I'll put her into a convent.

TOINETTE: You?

ARGAN: Me.

TOINETTE: You will not put her into a convent.

ARGAN: I will not put her into a convent?

TOINETTE: No.

ARGAN: No?

TOINETTE: No.

ARGAN: I will not put my daughter into a convent, if I please?

TOINETTE: No, I tell you.

ARGAN: Who will stop me?

TOINETTE: Yourself.

ARGAN: Myself?

TOINETTE: Yes, you'll not have the heart.

ARGAN: I will.

TOINETTE: You jest.

ARGAN: I don't jest!

TOINETTE: Fatherly tenderness will hinder you.

ARGAN: It won't hinder me!

TOINETTE: A little tear or two, her arms thrown about your neck, a "dear little Papa" pronounced tenderly, will be enough to move you.

ARGAN: All that will do nothing!

TOINETTE: Yes, yes.

ARGAN: I tell you that I won't give an inch!

TOINETTE: You're not serious.

ARGAN: Don't say I'm not serious!

TOINETTE: By heaven, I know you, you're good-natured.

ARGAN: I am not good-natured! I am not good-natured! I am ill-natured!

TOINETTE: Take it easy, Sir, remember that you are sick.

ARGAN: I command her absolutely to prepare to take the husband I have chosen.

TOINETTE: And I absolutely forbid her to do it.

ARGAN: Ah! Insolence. I'll knock you down. *(Raises an arm to strike her.)*

TOINETTE *(running from him):* It's my duty to oppose anything that would disgrace you.

ARGAN *(running after her):* Come hither, that I may teach you how to speak.

TOINETTE *(running from him):* I involve myself as I should, to hinder you from doing such a foolish thing.

ARGAN: Jade!

TOINETTE: I'll never consent to this match.

ARGAN: Baggage!

TOINETTE: I'll not have her marry your Thomas Diafoirus!

ARGAN: Carrion!

TOINETTE: And she'll obey me sooner than you.

ARGAN: Angelique, won't you lay hold of that slut for me?

ANGELIQUE: Oh, Father, don't make yourself sick.

ARGAN: If you do not stop her for me, I'll refuse you my blessing. (*ANGELIQUE runs out, crying.*)

TOINETTE (*following her out*): And I'll disinherit her, if she does obey you.

ARGAN (*falling into his chair, exhausted*): Oh! Oh! I can bear it no longer. This is enough to kill me.

(*Enter BÉLINE.*)

ARGAN: Ah! My dear wife, come hither.

BÉLINE: What's the matter, my poor husband?

ARGAN: I am beside myself.

BÉLINE: Alas! my poor little one!

ARGAN: Your wicked Toinette is grown more insolent than ever.

BÉLINE: Don't put yourself into a passion.

ARGAN: She has made me mad, my love.

BÉLINE: There, there, my child.

ARGAN: She has been thwarting me this hour in things that I'm resolved to do.

BÉLINE: Calm yourself, my dear.

ARGAN: She has had the impudence to tell me that I'm not sick.

BÉLINE: What an impertinent gypsy.

ARGAN: You know, my dear, how sick I am.

BÉLINE: Yes, my darling, she's in the wrong.

ARGAN: My love, that hussy will kill me yet.

BÉLINE: Tsk, Tsk, Tsk.

ARGAN: She's the cause of all the choler I breed.

BÉLINE: Don't fret yourself so much.

ARGAN: I have begged you, I know not how many times, to turn her away from here.

BÉLINE: Alas, there are no servants, men or women . . . Alas, there are no servants, men or women . . .

(CATHERINE has gone up on the line. She inches her way over to the prompter's booth to catch MARIE's attention.)

CATHERINE *(loudly, for MARIE'S benefit):* Alas, there are no servants, men or women—

(MARIE pops out of her prompter's booth. She has a script page in hand but has been eating pastry and fumbles to find the right page).

MARIE *(mumbling through a mouthful of pastry too big to swallow):* “Alas, there are no mmmm, no, mmmm...women....who do not have their ffffffffs...”

(MARIE gives up. Shrugs a half-hearted apology to the audience and disappears again into prompter's booth.)

BÉLINE *(she's heard enough):* Alas, there are no servants, men or women, who do not have their faults. We are sometimes forced to bear their bad qualities for the sake of their good ones. The girl is capable, careful, diligent, and above all honest. *(Calling:)* Toinette!

TOINETTE *(entering):* Madame?

BÉLINE: What's the reason that you put my dear husband in this passion?

TOINETTE: I, Madame? Alas! I don't know what you mean, I think of nothing but to please my master in everything.

ARGAN: Oh, the traitor!

TOINETTE: He told us that he intended to give his daughter in marriage to the son of Dr. Diafoirus. I answered him that I thought the match was very advantageous for her but believed he would do better to put her into a convent.

BÉLINE: There's no great harm in that, and I think she's in the right.

ARGAN: Ah! my love, do you believe her? She's a rascal! She said a hundred insolent things to me.

BÉLINE: Very well, I believe you, my dear. Come, recover yourself. Hear me, Toinette, if you vex my husband ever again, I'll turn you out of doors. So, give me his fur and the pillows that I may set him easy in his chair. There you are. Pull your night cap well over your ears, there's nothing gives people so much cold, as letting air in between their ears.

ARGAN: Ah! my life, How I'm obliged to you for all the care you take of me.

BÉLINE *(adjusting pillows which she puts round him):* Raise yourself up that I may put this under you. Let us put this one here to keep you up, and this on the other side. Let's place this one behind your back, and this other to support your head.

TOINETTE (*clapping a pillow on his face*): And this to keep you from the damp.

ARGAN (*getting up in a rage and throwing the pillows after TOINETTE as she runs off*): Ah! Jade! You're trying to smother me.

BÉLINE: Why do you fly into such a passion? She meant to do well.

ARGAN: You don't know, my love, the malice of that wench. She has put me beside myself, and there'll be need of more than eight doses of physic and twelve enemas to set me right again.

BÉLINE: My dear, calm yourself a little.

ARGAN: My life, you are all my comfort. So that I may endeavor to return the love you have for me, my heart, I'll revise my will as I promised.

BÉLINE: Ah! My soul, don't talk of that, pray, I can't bear the thought of it. The very words "Last Will and Testament" make me leap for grief.

ARGAN: I want you to speak of it to your notary.

BÉLINE: The notary is waiting in the parlor.

ARGAN: Let him come hither then, my love.

(BÉLINE exits and reenters with BONNEFOY.)

ARGAN: Come hither, good man, come hither. Take a chair. My wife has told me that you are very honest and altogether one of her friends. I have asked her to speak to you about notarizing my last will and testament.

BONNEFOY: She has revealed your intentions to me, Sir, and what you plan to give her, and I have to tell you upon that subject that you cannot leave your wife anything in your will.

ARGAN: But why so?

BONNEFOY: Custom is against it. If we were a country of statute law, it could be done, but as we are a country governed by common law, it is not allowed. All that a man and woman joined by wedlock can give each to the other is by mutual gift in their lifetimes, moreover there must be no children of the deceased.

ARGAN: What an affront! A husband can't leave anything to a wife, by whom he's tenderly beloved, and who takes such good care of him? I should desire to consult my lawyer to see what can be done.

(TOINETTE enters quietly, pretending to clean up, eavesdropping.)

BONNEFOY: It is not to lawyers that you must apply, for they are usually picky about these things and imagine it a great crime to do anything contrary to law. Ha, ha! Such sticklers they are! There are other persons to consult who are much fitter to accommodate you, who have a way of passing gently over the law and making legal that which is not allowed. Without them, where would we be? There must be a flexibility in such things. Business depends on it.

ARGAN: Indeed. My wife told me, that you are very skillful and very honest. What can I do, I ask you, to give her my estate, and to deprive my children of it?

BONNEFOY: What can you do? You must secretly choose an intimate friend of your wife to whom you may bequeath all that you can in due form by your will, and this friend will afterwards give up all back to her. You may likewise in this lifetime put into her hands all money and bonds which you may have.

BÉLINE: Alas you must not torment yourself with all these things. If I should lose you, my dearest, I'll stay no longer in the world.

ARGAN: My soul!

BÉLINE: Life will be no longer anything to me.

ARGAN: My love!

BÉLINE: And I'll follow you, so you will know the tenderness I have for you.

ARGAN: My life, you break my heart, be comforted I beg you.

BONNEFOY: These tears are unnecessary. Things are not yet come to that.

BÉLINE (*to BONNEFOY*): Ah! Sir. You don't know what it is to have a husband that one tenderly loves.

ARGAN: I'll make this will and testament, my love, after the manner this notary says, and I'll put into your hands twenty thousand in gold, which I have in the ceiling of my alcove, and two bonds which are due to me.

BÉLINE: No, no, I'll have none of it. Ah!—how much do you say that there is in your alcove?

ARGAN: Twenty thousand, my love.

BÉLINE: Don't speak to me of riches, I beg you. Ah!—how much are the two bonds for?

ARGAN: One for four thousand, and the other for six, my love.

BÉLINE: All the wealth in the world, my soul, is nothing to me in comparison to you.

BONNEFOY (*to ARGAN*): Would you have us proceed to make the will?

ARGAN: Yes, Sir, but we will be better in my little chamber. My love, lead me, pray.

BÉLINE: Come, my poor dear child.

(Exit ARGAN, BÉLINE, BONNEFOY. Enter ANGELIQUE, running to TOINETTE.)

TOINETTE: They are with some notary, and I heard them talk of a will. Your stepmother is planning some contrivance against your interest.

ANGELIQUE: Let my father dispose of his money as he pleases, provided he does not dispose of my heart. You hear, Toinette, the violent designs he has against it. Don't abandon me in this dire situation, I beg you.

TOINETTE: I abandon you? I'd sooner die. Your stepmother makes me her confidante. I never had any Inclination for her. I'll make use of everything to serve you, but to serve you more effectively I'll conceal the sympathy I have for you and pretend to agree with your father and stepmother.

ANGELIQUE: Try, dear Toinette I beg you, to give Cléante notice of the marriage they are planning.

TOINETTE: It's too late for that today, but first thing tomorrow, I will—

BÉLINE (*calling from within*): Toinette!

TOINETTE: She's calling. Good night. Rely upon me.

Scene 2: Same. The next day.

(*At rise, TOINETTE is busying herself dusting. Enter CLÉANTE, disguised as a music teacher.*)

TOINETTE (*surprised and not recognizing CLÉANTE*): What do you want, Sir?

CLÉANTE: What do I want?

TOINETTE: Ah, It's you, Sir! What a surprise! (*Alarmed.*) Why are you come?

CLÉANTE: To know my destiny, Toinette. I must speak to the amiable Angelique, consult the sentiments of her heart, and demand of her what are her resolutions in respect to the fatal marriage which you have revealed to me.

TOINETTE: Yes, but Angelique cannot be seen. You have been told how she is kept under strict guard. She is not allowed to stir abroad, or to speak to anybody.

CLÉANTE: Just so. I come not as Cléante, and as her lover, but as a friend of her music teacher, who has come in his absence.

TOINETTE: Here's her father. Stay back, and I'll let him know you are here.

(*Enter ARGAN.*)

ARGAN (*pacing, not seeing them*): Dr. Purgon told me I should walk around my chamber every morning twelve times to and fro. But I forgot to ask him, whether it should be length-wise or broad-ways.

TOINETTE: Sir, there is one—

ARGAN: Lower your voice, Hussy, you just split my ears. You never consider that sick people should not be spoken to loudly.

TOINETTE: I would tell you, Sir—

ARGAN: Lower, I say.

TOINETTE (*whispering*): Sir—

ARGAN: Hey?

TOINETTE (*mouthng the words*): I tell you that—

ARGAN: What is it you tell me?

TOINETTE (*aloud*): I tell you here is a man wants to speak with you.

ARGAN: Let him come.

(*TOINETTE signals to CLÉANTE to come near.*)

CLÉANTE: Sir, I am exceeding glad to find you up and about, and to see that you are feeling better.

TOINETTE: How better? Not true. My master is always ill.

CLÉANTE: I had heard the gentleman was better, and I perceive he looks well.

TOINETTE: What do you mean by “looks well”? He looks very ill, and they are impertinent people who told you he was well. He was never so ill in his life.

ARGAN: She's right about that.

TOINETTE: He walks, sleeps, eats, and drinks just like other people, but that doesn't mean he's not sick.

ARGAN: That's true.

CLÉANTE: Sir, I am heartily sorry for it. I come from your daughter's music teacher. He was obliged to leave the city for a few days, and as I am one of his friends, he sent me in his place, for fear that if she discontinues her lessons, she might forget what she has already learned.

ARGAN: Very well. (*To TOINETTE.*) Call for Angelique.

TOINETTE: I believe, Sir, it would be better to show the gentleman to her chamber.

ARGAN: No.

TOINETTE: He can't teach her the lesson as he should do, if they are not by themselves.

ARGAN: No matter.

TOINETTE: Sir, it will only bother you, and you should have nothing disturb you in the condition you are.

ARGAN: No, no, I love music, and I will be glad to—

(*Enter ANGELIQUE.*)

ARGAN: Ah! here she comes. (*To TOINETTE.*) Go see if my wife is dressed.

(*Exit TOINETTE.*)

ARGAN: Come, daughter. Your music teacher has left town, and here's a person he has sent to teach you in his place.

ANGELIQUE (*recognizing CLÉANTE*): Oh, Heavens!

ARGAN: What's the matter? Why this surprise?

ANGELIQUE: It is—

ARGAN: What? What disturbs you in this manner?

ANGELIQUE: It is a surprising accident, Sir, that I meet with here.

ARGAN: How?

ANGELIQUE: I dreamt last night that I was in the greatest distress in the world, and that a person exactly like this gentleman freed me from the trouble I was in. My surprise is very great to see unexpectedly, upon coming in here, the very thing I had in mind all night.

CLÉANTE: It is no small happiness to have a place in your thoughts, whether sleeping or waking. My good fortune would be very great, were you in any trouble from which I would be worthy to deliver you, and there is nothing I would not do to—

(*TOINETTE returns.*)

TOINETTE (*to ARGAN*): Sir, Dr. Diafoirus and his son Thomas Diafoirus have come to visit. Let's forget my insolence yesterday. I see now what a good son-in-law you will have! He spoke only two words to me, but I'm enthralled. Your daughter will be so charmed.

ARGAN (*to CLÉANTE, who starts to leave*): Don't go, Sir, I plan to marry off my daughter, and the person coming is her intended husband, whom she has not yet seen.

CLÉANTE: It will be a great honor, Sir, to be witness to so agreeable an interview.

ARGAN: He is the son of an eminent physician, and the marriage will be performed in four days.

CLÉANTE: Very well.

ARGAN: I invite you and her music master to the wedding.

CLÉANTE: You do me a great deal of honor.

ARGAN: Come, place yourselves in order, here they come.

(*Enter DR. DIAFOIRUS and THOMAS.*)

ARGAN and DR. DIAFOIRUS (*speaking over each other*):

DR. DIAFOIRUS

We are here, Sir, my son Thomas, and I, to declare to you, Sir, the pleasure we receive, from the favor you do us, so kindly to admit us, to the honor, Sir, of your alliance, and to assure you that in affairs depending on our faculty, as also in all others, we shall ever be ready, Sir, to testify our zeal for you.

ARGAN

With a great deal of joy, you do me honor, Sir, and I could have wished, to have been able to have gone to you, to assure you, but you know, Sir, what it is to be a poor sick creature, who can do no more, than to tell you here, that he will seek all opportunities, To make you sensible, Sir, that he is entirely at your Service

DR. DIAFOIRUS: Come, Thomas, step forward and pay your compliments.

THOMAS: Should I begin with the father?

DR. DIAFOIRUS: Yes.

THOMAS: Sir, I come to salute, recognize, cherish, and revere in you a second father to whom, I'll be bold to say, I am more indebted than to my first. The first begat me, but you have adopted me. He received me by necessity, but you accepted me by choice. What I have from him, is of the body, what I have from you of the will, and by how much the mental faculties are superior to the corporeal, by that much am I more indebted to you, and by so much do I hold, as more precious, this future filiation, for which I on this day come to pay you beforehand, the most humble and most respectful homage.

TOINETTE: Hooray for college, they turn out such clever people.

THOMAS: Was that well done, Father?

DR. DIAFOIRUS: Excellent.

ARGAN: Angelique, come pay your respects to the gentleman.

THOMAS: Shall I greet her, Father?

DR. DIAFOIRUS: Yes, yes.

THOMAS: Madame, it is with justice that heaven has granted you to be my mother-in-law, since one—

ARGAN: That's not my wife, that's my daughter you are speaking to.

THOMAS: Where is she then?

ARGAN: She's coming.

THOMAS: Shall I wait, Father, until she comes?

DR. DIAFOIRUS: Pay your compliments to the young lady, Thomas.

THOMAS: Madame, just in the same manner as the Statue of Memnon gave a harmonious sound when it was illuminated by the rays of the sun: So, in like manner, do I feel myself animated with a sweet transport at the appearance of the sun of your beauty. As we remark that the flower named the Heliotrope, always turns towards that star of day, so shall my heart, henceforth forever turn towards the resplendent stars of your adorable eyes. Permit me then, Madame, now to pay, at the altar of your charms, the offering of that heart which seeks no other Glory than that of being, until death, Madame, your most humble, most obedient, and most faithful husband.

TOINETTE: See what it is to study, one learns to say fine things.

CLÉANTE: The gentleman speaks wonders, and if he is as good a physician as he is an orator, it would be a great pleasure to be one of his patients.

ARGAN: Here, my chair quickly, and chairs for everybody. (*To DR. DIAFOIRUS.*) You see, Sir, that all the world admires your son, and I think you must very happy with such a fine young man.

DR. DIAFOIRUS: Sir, it is not because I am his father, but I can say I have reason to be satisfied with him. He never had a very lively Imagination, nor that sparkling wit which one observes in some others. They had all the difficulty in the world to teach him to read, and he was nine years old before he knew his letters. Never mind, thought I, trees slow of growth are those which bear the best fruit. Anyway, when I sent him to college he was hard put to it, but he bore up against all difficulties, and his tutors always praised his perseverance and effort. In short, by mere dint of hammering away at it, he graduated, and I can say that, from the time he took his Bachelor of Physics Degree, there is no candidate that has made more noise. He is firm in a dispute and pursues an argument to the furthest recesses of logic. But what pleases me above all things in him, is that he is blindly attached to the opinions of the Greeks, and pays no heed to reason and experiment, and the so-called “discoveries” of our age concerning the circulation of the blood, and other such nonsense.

THOMAS (*presenting a rolled-up document to ANGELIQUE*): I have supported a thesis against the proponents of circulation, which, with the Gentleman's permission— (*bowing to ARGAN*) — I make bold to present to you, and I ... and I... and I... (*BRÉCOURT has forgotten his line. MARIE, ready this time, pops quickly out of the prompter booth with script in hand, but when she sees his ridiculous costume, she starts laughing uncontrollably. BRÉCOURT loses his temper and shoos her away. MARIE, still laughing, disappears into her prompter's box*). — I make bold to present to you, and I ... (*remembering*) . . . invite you to come and see, for your diversion, the dissection of a woman, upon which I am to present lectures.

TOINETTE: There are some gentlemen who give their mistresses a play, but to give a dissection, there is something new.

DR. DIAFOIRUS: As to the rest, for what concerns the requisite qualities for marriage and propagation, I do assure you he is all one could wish for and is of a temperament proper to beget and procreate well-conditioned children.

ARGAN: Is it not your intention, Sir, to pursue his interest at Court, and procure for him a physician's place there?

DR. DIAFOIRUS: To speak frankly to you, I always found it much better for us to continue amongst the common folk. We are accountable to nobody for our actions. When the nobility is ill, they absolutely expect their physicians to cure them.

TOINETTE: How dare they expect that you should cure them!

ARGAN (*to CLÉANTE*): Sir, pray let my daughter sing before the company.

CLÉANTE: I anticipated these orders, Sir, and propose to sing along with mademoiselle a scene from a little opera lately composed. (*To ANGELIQUE, giving her a sheet of paper.*) There's your part.

ANGELIQUE: I?

CLÉANTE (*confidentially to ANGELIQUE*): Pray don't refuse. (*Aloud.*) I have no voice for singing. It is properly an *ex tempore* opera, and what you are about to hear is no more than a kind of irregular verse, such as passion and necessity might cause two persons to speak in haste.

ARGAN: Very well. Let's hear.

CLÉANTE: The subject of the scene is this. A shepherd was attending a public entertainment, which had just begun, when his attention was interrupted by a noise. He turned to look and saw a brute with foul language abusing a shepherdess. Immediately he reprimanded the beast for his insolence. Then he turns to the shepherdess and finds a young creature, who, from two of the finest eyes he has ever seen, was shedding tears, which he thought the most beautiful in the world. The lovely shepherdess took care to thank him for the service he had done, and in a manner so charming, so tender, so passionate, that the shepherd could not resist it. Every word, every look is a flaming shaft, which pierces him to the heart. The conclusion of the entertainment separated him from his adorable shepherdess. He immediately suffered all the miseries of absence. He does everything possible to regain her, but the great constraint under which his shepherdess is kept by her dominating father deprives him of all opportunity. The violence of his passion makes him resolve to demand the adorable beauty in marriage and he obtained her permission for this by a letter secretly delivered. But then he heard that the father of this fair one has promised her in marriage to another man. Imagine what a cruel stroke this is to the heart of the melancholy Shepherd. See him overwhelmed with sorrow. He cannot support the horrible Idea of seeing the woman he loves in the arms of another. His desperate passion drives him to insinuate himself into the house of the shepherdess to learn her true feelings. He there meets with the very thing he fears, he sees the unworthy rival. He sees this ridiculous fool near the lovely shepherdess and the sight fills him with indignation, which he has the utmost difficulty to control. He casts a mournful look on her that he adores, and both his respect for her, and the presence of her father, prevents his saying anything to her but with his eyes. At last, he breaks through all restraint, and the transport of his passion makes him express himself in this manner:

CLÉANTE:

*Fair Phyllis, it is too much to bear,
Break cruel silence, and your thoughts declare.
Tell me at once my destiny,
Shall I live, or must I die?*

ANGELIQUE:

*With sad, dejected looks, Oh Tierces, see
Poor Phyllis dreads the ill-fated wedding day,
Sighing, she lifts her eyes to heaven and thee.*

ARGAN: Well, well! I didn't know my daughter was such a mistress of song, to sing at sight without hesitating!

CLÉANTE:

*Alas! My Phyllis fair,
Can the enamored Tierces be so blessed,
Your Favor in the least to share,
And find a Place within that lovely Breast?*

ANGELIQUE:

*In this extreme, if I confess my Love,
Not Modesty itself can disapprove,
Yes, Tierces, 'tis thee I love.*

CLÉANTE:

*Oh! Words enchanting to the ear!
Repeat it, Phyllis, and all doubt remove.*

ANGELIQUE:

Yes, Tierces, 'tis thee I love.

CLÉANTE:

Once more, my Phyllis.

ANGELIQUE:

'Tis Thee I love.

CLÉANTE:

A thousand times repeat, nor ever weary prove.

ANGELIQUE:

I love, I love, I love, I love, I love . . . Yes, Tierces 'tis thee I love.

CLÉANTE:

But, Phyllis, here's a thought

Does my transporting joy abate,

A rival—

ANGELIQUE:

I, more than Death, that Monster hate.

And if his presence tortures you,

It does no less to Phyllis too.

CLÉANTE:

If with the match a father's power,

Would force you to comply?

ANGELIQUE:

I'd rather, rather die than give consent,

Much rather, rather die.

ARGAN: And what says the father to all this?

CLÉANTE: He says nothing. *(Continuing the song.) Ah! my Love—*

ARGAN *(interrupting):* No, no, enough of it. This play is very bad. The shepherd Tierces is an impertinent puppy, and the shepherdess Phyllis, an impudent daughter, to speak in this manner before a father *(To CLÉANTE.)* We could very well have spared your opera.

CLÉANTE: I thought to amuse you.

ARGAN: Impertinence never amuses. Good-day, Sir. Ah! here's my Wife.

(Enter BÉLINE as exits CLÉANTE.)

ARGAN: My love, here is Thomas, the intended fiancé.

THOMAS: Madame, it is with justice that Heaven has granted you the name of mother-in law, since one sees in your face—

BÉLINE: Sir, I am very glad I came here, that I might have the honor of meeting you.

THOMAS: Since one sees in your face— Since one sees in your face— Madame, you interrupted me and that has disturbed my memory.

DR. DIAFOIRUS: Reserve it, Thomas, for another time.

ARGAN: I wish you had been here just now, Dearest—

TOINETTE: Oh, Madame, you missed a great deal by not being here at the “Second Father,” at the “Statue of Memnon” and the “Flower named the Heliotrope.”

ARGAN: Come, daughter, join hands with the gentleman, and make your promise.

ANGELIQUE: Oh, Father!

ARGAN: “Oh, Father” what?

ANGELIQUE: I beg you, don't hurry things too fast. Give us time at least to get to know one another, and to find the growth of that inclination for each other, which is so necessary to form a perfect union.

THOMAS: As for me, Madame, mine is grown already, I have no need to wait.

ANGELIQUE: If you are so forward, Sir, it is not so with me, and I confess to you that your merit has not as yet made impression enough upon my mind.

ARGAN: Hoh! well, well, there will be time enough for that, when you are married.

ANGELIQUE: Ah! Father, pray give me time. Marriage is a chain that should never be imposed by force upon a heart, and if the gentleman is a man of honor, he should never accept a person by constraint.

THOMAS: Madame, I am a man of honor, and yet accept you from the hands of your father.

ANGELIQUE: To offer violence is but a very ill way to make you beloved by anyone.

THOMAS: We read in the Ancients, Madame, that their custom was to carry off the young women they were going to marry by force from their father's house.

ANGELIQUE: The ancients, Sir, are the ancients, and we are moderns. Such actions are not necessary in our age, and when a marriage pleases us, we know very well how to go about it, without anybody dragging us off. Have patience, if you love me, Sir, you ought to want what I want.

TOINETTE: It's useless to reason. The gentleman has come fresh from college, and he'll always have the last word.

BÉLINE: She has perhaps some other inclination in her head.

ANGELIQUE: If I had, Stepmother, it should be such as reason and honor might allow me.

BÉLINE (*to ARGAN*): If I were as you, dear, I would not force her to marry. I know very well what I would do.

ANGELIQUE: I know, Madame, what you mean, and the kindness you have for me. But perhaps your good plans will lead to nothing.

BÉLINE: That's because children like you, refuse to be obedient and submissive to the will of their fathers.

ANGELIQUE: The duty of a daughter has its limits, Madame.

BÉLINE: That's as much as to say you have no aversion to matrimony, but you've a mind to choose a husband of your own liking.

ANGELIQUE: If my father won't give me a husband to my liking, I will beg him, at least, not to force me to marry one I can't love.

ARGAN (*to THOMAS and DR. DIAFOIRUS*): Gentlemen, I beg your pardon for all this.

ANGELIQUE: Everybody marries for their own reasons. As for me, who would not marry except for love, and who intends to be attached for life, I admit I am being cautious in the affair. There are some persons who take husbands only to set themselves free from their parents, and to put themselves in a position to do whatever they please. There are other persons, Madame, who make of marriage a commerce of pure self-interest, who run without scruple from husband to husband, only to enrich themselves with each widowhood. Those persons in good truth do not stand much upon ceremony and have little regard who they marry.

BÉLINE: I find you are quite the philosopher today, Angelique, and I would like know what you mean by it.

ANGELIQUE: You would be glad, Madame, if you forced me to some impertinent answer, but I tell you that you will not have that advantage.

BÉLINE: Your insolence has no equal.

ANGELIQUE: No, Madame, your arguments are in vain.

BÉLINE: Your arrogance is amazing, you would scorn the world with your impudence.

ANGELIQUE: All this will do no good, Madame: I will be discreet in spite of you, and to take from you all hope of succeeding in provoking me, I will quit your sight.

ARGAN (*to ANGELIQUE*): Listen to me: you have four days to make your choice. Marry this gentleman or go to a convent.

(Exit ANGELIQUE.)

ARGAN (*to BÉLINE*): Don't worry. I will bring her to heel.

BÉLINE: I am sorry to leave you, my love, but I have an affair in the city, which cannot be missed. I will return presently.

ARGAN: Go, dear. Call upon your notary and bid him to hasten you know what.

BÉLINE: Adieu, my heart.

ARGAN: Adieu, my buttercup.

(*Exit BÉLINE.*)

ARGAN: How that woman loves me— it is not to be believed.

DR. DIAFOIRUS: We shall take our leave of you, Sir.

ARGAN: Stay, Sir. Tell me a little how I am.

DR. DIAFOIRUS (*feeling his pulse*): Here, Thomas, take the Gentleman's other arm, to see whether you can form a good judgment of his pulse.

THOMAS: The gentleman's pulse, is the pulse of a man who is not well.

DR. DIAFOIRUS: Good.

THOMAS: That it is hard-*ish*, if not to say hard.

DR. DIAFOIRUS: Very well.

THOMAS: Recoiling.

DR. DIAFOIRUS: *Bene*.

THOMAS: And even a little erratic.

DR. DIAFOIRUS: *Optimè*.

THOMAS: And shows a temperature in the *parenchyma splenicum*, that is to say, the spleen.

DR. DIAFOIRUS: Very good.

ARGAN: Dr. Purgon says it's my liver that's bad.

DR. DIAFOIRUS: Why yes, he who says *parenchyma*, means both one and the other, because of the strict sympathy they have together, by means of the *vas breve* of the *Pylorus*, and sometimes the *Meatus Cholidici*. He orders you, doubtless, to eat roasted meat.

ARGAN: No, nothing but boiled meat.

DR. DIAFOIRUS: Ah, yes, roasted, boiled, it's all the same thing. He orders you very prudently, and you couldn't be in better hands.

ARGAN: Sir, your very humble servant.

(Exit THOMAS and DLAFORUS. Enter BÉLINE.)

BÉLINE: I come, my darling, before leaving, to warn you of something. As I passed by Angelique's chamber just door just now, I saw a young fellow with her, who immediately made his escape as soon as he saw me.

ARGAN: A young fellow with my daughter?

BÉLINE: Yes. Your little daughter Louise was with them too, who can tell you what she heard.

ARGAN: Send her here, love, send her here. *(BÉLINE exits.)* Oh! the audacity! I am no longer astonished by her obstinacy.

(Enter LOUISE.)

LOUISE: What do you want, Papa?— *(GENEVIEVE realizes she forgot her prop doll. She inches her way over to the prompter booth.)* Pssst! Marie! *(She gestures to indicate she needs a doll in her arms.)*

(MARIE makes a disapproving face and disappears for a moment to the prompter's booth and returns with a doll. Throwing it angrily onstage at GENEVIEVE.)

LOUISE: What do you want, Papa? Mama told me that you want to speak with me?

ARGAN: Yes, come. Come nearer. Turn you. Look up. Look at me. So?

LOUISE: What, Papa?

ARGAN: What?

LOUISE: What?

ARGAN: Have you nothing to tell me?

LOUISE: To divert you, I'll tell you, if you like, the Story of the Donkey Skin, or the Fable of the Crow and the Fox, which I learned the other day.

ARGAN: That's not what I want.

LOUISE: What then?

ARGAN: Oh, you clever girl, you know very well what I mean.

LOUISE: Pardon me, Papa. I don't.

ARGAN: Is that how you obey me?

LOUISE: How?

ARGAN: Did not I order you to come to me immediately and tell me all that you see?

LOUISE: Yes, Papa.

ARGAN: And have you seen nothing today?

LOUISE: No, Papa.

ARGAN: No, Papa?

LOUISE: No, Papa.

ARGAN: Indeed?

LOUISE: Indeed.

ARGAN (*taking his cane*): Very well, I'll make you see something.

LOUISE (*running away from him*): Oh! Papa!

ARGAN (*chasing her*): Hah! You little liar. You didn't tell me you saw a man in your sister's chamber.

LOUISE (*still running*): Oh! Papa.

ARGAN (*threatening her with his cane*): Here's something will teach you to lie.

LOUISE (*stops and falls on her knees to him*): Oh, Papa, forgive me. My sister told me not to tell it you, but I'll tell you all.

ARGAN: You must first have the rod for lying to me. After that we will consider of the rest.

(LOUISE reluctantly extends the palms of her hands to him. ARGAN raises his cane.)

LOUISE (*snapping back her hands just as he lowers the cane*): Oh, forgive me, Papa.

ARGAN: No, no.

(LOUISE again extends the palms of her hands. ARGAN raises his cane.)

LOUISE (*snapping back her hands just as he lowers the cane*): My dear, Papa, don't whip me.

ARGAN: You will be whipped.

(LOUISE again extends the palms of her hands. ARGAN raises his cane.)

LOUISE (*snapping back her hands. Whimpering*): For heaven's sake, Papa, don't.

ARGAN: Come, come.

(LOUISE again puts out palms of her hands. ARGAN raises his cane.)

LOUISE (*snapping back her hands just as he lowers the cane*): Oh! Papa, you have hurt me. Wait, I'm dead.
(She falls over.)

ARGAN: Lackaday, what's the meaning of this? Louise? Louise? Oh! Bless me! Louise! Ah! my child. Oh! wretched me! My poor child's dead. What have I done? Oh! my dear child, my poor little Louise.

LOUISE (*getting up*): There, there, Papa, don't cry. I'm not dead yet.

ARGAN: Do you see this little trickster? Well, come, come. I pardon you this time, provided you tell me all.

LOUISE: Papa, don't tell my sister that I told you.

ARGAN: No, no.

LOUISE: Why, Papa, there came a man into my sister's chamber when I was there!

ARGAN: Well?

LOUISE: I asked him what he wanted, and he told me he was her music teacher.

ARGAN (*to himself*): Ah ha! There's the business. (*To LOUISE.*) And then?

LOUISE: Then my sister came.

ARGAN: And then?

LOUISE: And then said to him "Be gone, be gone, be gone, for goodness sake! Be gone. You'll drive me to despair."

ARGAN: And then?

LOUISE: And then he wouldn't go.

ARGAN: What did he say to her?

LOUISE: He said I don't know how many things.

ARGAN: But what?

LOUISE: He told her this, and that. How he loved her dearly, and that she was the prettiest creature in the world.

ARGAN: And then?

LOUISE: And then he fell down on his knees to her.

ARGAN: And then?

LOUISE: And then he kissed her hand.

ARGAN: And then?

LOUISE: And then stepmother came to the door, and he ran away.

ARGAN: Was there nothing else?

LOUISE: No, Papa.

ARGAN: Very well, we will see. Go on your way, and be sure you observe everything, go.

(Exit LOUISE.)

ARGAN: Well! What perplexity of affairs! I am so busy I forget my illness! I can hold out no longer.
Falls down exhausted into his chair.

INTERMISSION

Act III

THE HYPOCHONDRIAC

Scene 1. Same. Later the same day

(Enter TOINETTE and BÉRALDE.)

TOINETTE: Pray, Sir, don't abandon the interests of your niece.

BÉRALDE: I'll try every way to obtain for her what she wishes.

TOINETTE: We must absolutely prevent this wild idea of marriage, which he has got into his head. I've thought to myself that it would be a good plan if we could come up with a doctor of our own, one who would turn him against his Dr. Purgon and expose his conduct. But as we have nobody at hand to do it, I have resolved to employ an idea of my own.

BÉRALDE: What's that?

TOINETTE: Oh, it's just an idea. It may be more successful than prudent. Let me work on it. Just act your part. Here's our man.

(Exit TOINETTE as ARGAN enters.)

BÉRALDE: Well, Brother, what's the matter, how do you do?

ARGAN: Ah, very ill.

BÉRALDE: How, very ill?

ARGAN: Yes. I'm so very feeble.

BÉRALDE: That's a sad thing indeed.

ARGAN: I haven't even the strength to speak.

BÉRALDE: I came here, Brother, to propose a match for my niece Angelique.

ARGAN: Brother, don't speak to me about that spoiled brat. She's idle, impertinent, and impudent. I'll put her in a convent before she's two days older.

BÉRALDE: Ho, there! I'm glad your strength returns to you, and that my visit does you good. Now, will you allow me, brother, to ask that you not put yourself into a fury at our conversation?

ARGAN: Already done.

BÉRALDE: That you'll answer without snapping at the things I may say to you.

ARGAN: Yes.

BÉRALDE: And that we may reason together upon the business we have to talk of, with a mind free from all emotion.

ARGAN: For heaven's sake! Yes. What a great deal of preamble!

BÉRALDE: How is it, Brother, that having the wealth which you have, and having no children but one daughter—not counting the little one—How is it, I ask, that you talk of sending her to a convent?

ARGAN: How is it, Brother, that I am master of my family and can do what I think fit.

BÉRALDE: Your wife does not miss a chance to advise you to get rid of your daughters, and I don't doubt that she would be overjoyed to see them both locked away.

ARGAN: Ah! Here comes the old complaint! My poor wife is at fault. It is she who does all the mischief and everyone believes it so!

BÉRALDE: No, Brother. Let's let that alone. She's a woman who has the best intentions in the world for your family, a woman who is free of all self-interest, who has an amazing tenderness for you, and shows an affection and kindness for your children that is unbelievable, that's for certain. We'll not talk of that but return to your daughter. With what intention, Brother, would you give her in marriage to the son of a doctor?

ARGAN: With the intention to give myself the son-in-law I want.

BÉRALDE: That's showing no concern for your daughter. There's a more suitable match for her.

ARGAN: Yes, but Thomas Diafoirus is more suitable for me.

BÉRALDE: But the husband she takes, is he for you, or for her?

ARGAN: He should be both for her, and for me. I'll bring into my family those people that I have need of.

BÉRALDE: By the same reasoning, if your little Louise was old enough, you'd marry her to an apothecary?

ARGAN: Why not?

BÉRALDE: Is it possible that you can be infatuated with your apothecaries and doctors, and insist that you're sick in spite of man and nature?

ARGAN: What do you mean, Brother?

BÉRALDE: I mean, that I don't see any man who's less sick than you. I wish I had your constitution. The best evidence that you are well, and have a body in fine health is that, despite all your efforts, you've not yet spoiled your good constitution and dropped dead from all the medicines you take.

ARGAN: But these medicines preserve me, Brother. Dr. Purgon says that without his care, I would die within three days.

BÉRALDE: If you don't watch it, he'll take so much care of you that he'll send you into the next world.

ARGAN: You have no faith then in medicine, Brother?

BÉRALDE: No, and I don't find it a necessary faith for my salvation.

ARGAN: What? You don't trust something that is established throughout the world, and which has been practiced for centuries?

BÉRALDE: Far from trusting it, I look on it as one of the greatest follies of man. To consider it philosophically, I don't know of a more pleasant piece of theatre, of anything more ridiculous, than the idea that one man should undertake to cure the illness of another.

ARGAN: Why won't you believe that one man may cure another?

BÉRALDE: For this reason, Brother: because the workings of this machine are a mystery that men can scarcely understand. Nature has thrown before our eyes too thick a veil to know anything about it.

ARGAN: The physicians know nothing then, in your opinion?

BÉRALDE: They have an education, they know how to talk good Latin, how to name all the diseases in Greek, to define, and to distinguish them. But as for curing them? They don't know anything at all.

ARGAN: But nevertheless, you must agree, Brother, that in this matter doctors know more than other people.

BÉRALDE: They know what I have said. All their art consists in pompous nonsense, in specious babbling, which gives you words instead of reasons, and promises instead of effects.

ARGAN: But, Brother, in sickness all the world relies on physicians.

BÉRALDE: That's a mark of human weakness, not evidence of the truth of their art.

ARGAN: But physicians themselves must believe in the truth of their art, since they make use of it themselves.

BÉRALDE: That's because there are some among them who believe in the errors by which they profit. Your Dr. Purgon, for example, is not pretending. He's a physician, through and through. He believes in his practices and would think it a crime to question them. He sees nothing unknown in medicine, nothing questionable. With an impetuosity of action, an obstinacy of assurance, and a brutality void of common sense and reason, he bleeds and purges men haphazardly, stopping at nothing. He means no harm in all his treatments for you. It is with the best intentions in the world that he will send you to your grave.

ARGAN: What must we do then, when we are sick?

BÉRALDE: Nothing, Brother.

ARGAN: Nothing?

BÉRALDE: Nothing. We must let nature run her course. Nature herself, when we'll let her alone, will gently deliver herself from the disorder she's fallen into. It's our worry, our impatience, that spoils all. Almost all men die of their doctors, not of their diseases.

ARGAN: But you must allow, Brother, that we may assist nature by certain things.

BÉRALDE: Come now, Brother. These are mere fantasies we love to feed ourselves. When a physician talks to you of assisting, succoring and supporting nature, of removing from her what's hurtful and defective, of re-establishing her, and restoring her to a full exercise of her functions, when he talks to you of rectifying the blood, refreshing the bowels, and the brain, correcting the spleen, restoring the lungs, fortifying the heart, re-establishing and preserving the natural state, and of having secrets to lengthen out life for a long term of years, he is reciting to you precisely the fairytale of medicine. But when you come to the truth and experience of it, you find nothing of all it. It is like those fine dreams which leave you nothing upon waking but the regret of having believed them.

ARGAN: Well, well! You think you are a great doctor yourself. I heartily wish that one of those gentlemen were here now to answer your arguments, and quiet your prating.

BÉRALDE: I don't make it my business to attack the faculty of medicine. Everyone at their perils and fortune may believe whatever they please. What I say is only for ourselves. I wish I could save you from your errors and divert you, could take you to see one of Molière's comedies on this subject.

ARGAN: Bah! Your Molière with his comedies is a fine impertinent fellow, to pretend to bring on the stage such worthy persons as doctors.

BÉRALDE: It isn't the foolishness of doctors that he exposes, but the ridiculousness of medicine.

ARGAN: It's mighty proper for him to believe he can question medicine. He's a fine simpleton, an impertinent creature, to make a jest of consultations and prescriptions, to attack the faculty of physicians, and to bring on his stage such venerable persons as those gentlemen.

BÉRALDE: What would you have him bring to the stage, if not the follies of men?

ARGAN: To the Devil with him! If I were a doctor I would be revenged on him for his impertinence, and when he was sick, I would let him die without relief. He would cry and beg in vain, but I would not prescribe him the least bleeding or enema, and would say to him, “Die! Die! Molière!” that will teach you to make fun of doctors.

BÉRALDE: This Molière has you riled up.

ARGAN: Yes, he's a foolish fellow, and if the physicians are wise, they'll do what I say.

BÉRALDE: He's wiser than your physicians, because he doesn't ask them for any assistance.

ARGAN: So much the worse for him, if he has no recourse to remedies.

BÉRALDE: He has his reasons for not seeking medicine. He thinks that it's for vigorous and robust people, for those who have strength left to bear the medicine with the disease, but for him, he has but just strength enough to bear his illness.

ARGAN: Very foolish reasons, those! Enough, Brother, let us talk no more of that man, for it raises my choler, and you'll bring distemper on me.

BÉRALDE: With all my heart, Brother. To change the subject, I must tell you, you should not to take the violent resolution of putting your daughter into a convent. In the choice of a son-in-law, you should not blindly follow a passion that transports you. You should in this matter accommodate yourself to the inclination of your child, since marriage is for the rest of her life, and the happiness of the married state depends on it.

(Enter the apothecary MR. FLEURANT with a huge enema syringe.)

ARGAN: Oh! Now, Brother, excuse me.

BÉRALDE: How? What would you do?

ARGAN: *(Getting into “enema ready” position.)* I'll take this little enema here. It won't be but a minute.

BÉRALDE: You jest, surely. Can't you be one moment without a purge? Send it back until some other time and take a little rest.

ARGAN *(reluctantly):* Come back this evening, Mr. Fleurant, or tomorrow morning.

FLEURANT *(to BÉRALDE):* For what reason do you oppose this prescription by his doctor, and hinder the gentleman from taking my enema? How dare you be so bold!

BÉRALDE: Be gone, Sir. I see well enough that you are not accustomed to speaking to people's faces.

FLEURANT: You should not make a joke of medicine in this manner and make me waste my time. I have come with a good prescription. I now go tell Dr. Purgon how I've been hindered from executing his orders, and from performing my function. You'll see, you'll see—

(Exit FLEURANT.)

ARGAN: Brother, you'll be the cause here of some misfortune.

BÉRALDE: The great misfortune of not taking a clyster which Dr. Purgon prescribed? Once more, Brother, is it possible that there should be no way of curing you of the disease of the doctor, and all your life will you be enslaved by their remedies?

ARGAN: You talk like a man who's in good health, but if you were in my place, you'd soon change your tune. It's easy to speak against medicine when one is in full health.

BÉRALDE: But what illness have you?

ARGAN: You'll make me mad. I wish that you had my illness. Then see if you would rattle on like this. Ah! here's Dr. Purgon .

(Enter DR. PURGON and FLEURANT, still carrying the syringe, followed by TOINETTE.)

PURGON: I have just now heard some very disturbing news: that you make a jest of my prescriptions here and refuse to take the remedy which I ordered.

ARGAN: Sir, it was not—

PURGON: A clyster which I had taken the pleasure to compose myself—

ARGAN: It was not I—

PURGON: —invented, and made up according to all the rules of art—

ARGAN: My Brother—

DR. PURGON: —and you send it back with contempt!

ARGAN *(pointing to BÉRALDE):* It was he—

DR. PURGON: It is an enormous outrage —.

ARGAN: —he is the cause.

DR. PURGON: —a crime of high treason against the faculty of medicine, which can't be punished enough!

ARGAN: High treason?!

DR. PURGON: I declare to you that I break off all commerce with you.

ARGAN: My Brother—

DR. PURGON: That I'll have no more alliance with you and end all union with you. Here is the Deed of Gift which I made to my nephew in favor of the marriage to your daughter. *(He rips up the agreement.)*

ARGAN: —has done all the mischief.

DR. PURGON: To condemn my enema?!

ARGAN (*getting into "enema ready" position again*): Let it be brought now—

DR. PURGON: I could have delivered you from your illness before very long.

ARGAN: — I'll take it directly.

DR. PURGON: I was going to cleanse your body, and to have discharged it entirely of all its ill humors.

ARGAN: Ah, Brother!

DR. PURGON: But since you were not willing to be cured by my hands—

ARGAN: It isn't my fault.

DR. PURGON: —and since you have forsaken the obedience which a man owes to his physician, and declared yourself rebellious to the remedies I've prescribed you—

ARGAN: Ah, not at all.

DR. PURGON: —I must tell you that I now abandon you to your evil constitution, to your intemperate bowels, the corruption of your blood, the acrimony of your bile, and the feculence of your humors.

ARGAN: Oh! Heavens!

DR. PURGON: And it is my will that, within four days' time, you enter into an incurable state.

ARGAN: Ah! Mercy!

DR. PURGON: That you fall into a *Bradypepsia* .

ARGAN: Dr. Purgon!

DR. PURGON: From a *Bradypepsia* into a *Dyspepsia*.

ARGAN: Dr. Purgon!

DR. PURGON: From a *Dyspepsia* into an *Apepsia*.

ARGAN: Dr. Purgon!

DR. PURGON: From an *Apepsia* into a *Lienteria*.

ARGAN: Dr. Purgon!

DR. PURGON: From a *Lienteria* into a *Dissenteria*.

ARGAN: Dr. Purgon!

DR. PURGON: From a *Dissenteria* into a dropsy.

ARGAN: Dr. Purgon!

DR. PURGON: And from a dropsy into a death where your folly will end you!

(Exit DR. PURGON and FLEURANT. TOINETTE follows.)

ARGAN: Ah Heavens, I'm dead! I can hold out no longer. I feel already that the doctor's curse is taking its revenge.

BÉRALDE: What a simple man you are!

ARGAN: He said I should become incurable within four days' time.

BÉRALDE: And what does it matter what he said? Is it an oracle that has spoken to you? To hear you one would think that Dr. Purgon held in his hands the number of your days, and by supreme authority could prolong them or cut them short as he pleases. Consider that the principles of your life are in yourself, and that the anger of Dr. Purgon is as incapable of killing you as his remedies are of keeping you alive. Here's an opportunity, if you have a mind to do it, to get rid of doctors.

(Renter TOINETTE quietly, signaling confidentially to BÉRALDE.)

BÉRALDE: Or, if you can't live without them, find a different doctor, Brother, from whom you run less risk of harm.

ARGAN: Ah! Brother, he knew all my constitution, and the way to govern me.

TOINETTE *(to ARGAN):* Sir, there's a doctor that desires to see you.

ARGAN: What doctor?

TOINETTE: A doctor of medicine.

ARGAN: I ask you who he is.

TOINETTE: I don't know him, Sir.

ARGAN: Let him come in.

(Exit TOINETTE.)

BÉRALDE: You get what you wish for. One doctor leaves you, and another arrives at your door.

ARGAN: I very much fear that you'll be the cause of some misfortune.

BÉRALDE: Again! You always harp on that.

ARGAN: See how I have at heart all these diseases unknown, these—

(Enter TOINETTE, disguised as a doctor. She speaks in a broadly fake Italian accent.)

TOINETTE-as-DOCTOR: Permit me, most distinguished Sir, to occasion this visit, and offer you my humble services for all the bleedings and purgation you have need for.

ARGAN: Sir, I am very much obliged to you.

TOINETTE-as-DOCTOR: I beg you to excuse me, Sir. I forgot to give my servant a message, I will return promptly.

(Exit TOINETTE-AS-DOCTOR.)

ARGAN: Ha! Would not you say that the doctor looks very much like Toinette?

BÉRALDE: It's true that the resemblance is striking. But this is not the first time we've seen this sort of thing. History is full of these tricks of nature.

ARGAN: Well, for my part, I'm astonished at it, and will—

(Enter TOINETTE as herself.)

TOINETTE: What do you want, Sir?

ARGAN: What?

TOINETTE: Did you not call me?

ARGAN: I? No.

TOINETTE: My ears must have fooled me then. *(She turns to go.)*

ARGAN: Stay here a little while and see how much this doctor looks like you.

TOINETTE: Truly, Sir, I have other business below. Besides, I have seen enough of him already.

(Exit TOINETTE.)

ARGAN: Amazing! If I hadn't just seen them both together, I would have believed they were the same person.

BÉRALDE: I've read surprising things about these kinds of resemblances, and we've heard of cases like this in our own time, where all the world was deceived.

ARGAN: For my part, I could've been deceived by this, and would have sworn it was the same person.

(Reenter TOINETTE, disguised as a doctor.)

TOINETTE-as-DOCTOR: Sir, I beg your pardon with all my heart.

ARGAN *(aside to BÉRALDE):* This is wondrous!

TOINETTE-as-DOCTOR: Pray, Sir. You must excuse the liberty I have taken to visit you. I had to see such an illustrious patient as yourself. Your reputation is known the world over.

ARGAN: Sir, I am at your service.

TOINETTE-as-DOCTOR: I see, Sir, that you look intently at me. What age do you think I am?

ARGAN: I think that you may be twenty-six, or twenty-seven at most.

TOINETTE-as-DOCTOR: Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! I am fourscore and ten.

ARGAN: Fourscore and ten!

TOINETTE-as-DOCTOR: Yes. You see an effect of the secrets of my art, to preserve me so fresh and vigorous.

ARGAN: My word! You are fine youthful fellow for someone of 90.

TOINETTE-as-DOCTOR: I am a traveling physician who goes from town to town, province to province, kingdom to kingdom, to find patients worthy of me, patients who are capable of receiving the great secrets I have discovered in medicine. I disdain to amuse myself with common diseases, with rheumatisms, fluxions, and melancholia. I would have diseases of great importance! Good continual fevers with a disordered brain, plagues, dropsies, pleurisies with inflammations of the lungs—this is what pleases me! This is what excites me! I hope, Sir, that I might demonstrate to you the excellency of my remedies.

ARGAN: I'm obliged to you, Sir, for the kind wishes you have for me.

TOINETTE-as-DOCTOR (*taking his wrist*): Let me feel your pulse. (*Slapping his wrist.*) Come then, beat as you should. (*Slapping his wrist a few more times, more vigorously.*) I will make you go as you should. (*Shaking his whole arm.*) Ho, this pulse is very rude. I perceive you do not know me yet. (*She gives up on the pulse business.*) Who is your physician?

ARGAN: Dr. Purgon.

TOINETTE-as-DOCTOR: That man is not among the great physicians. What does he say you are ill of?

ARGAN: He says that it is my liver, but other doctors say that it is my spleen.

TOINETTE-as-DOCTOR: They are all blockheads, it is your lungs that you are ill of.

ARGAN: My lungs?

TOINETTE-as-DOCTOR: Yes. What are your symptoms?

ARGAN: I feel from time to time pains in my head.

TOINETTE-as-DOCTOR: The lungs, yes.

ARGAN: I seem sometimes to have a mist before my eyes.

TOINETTE-as-DOCTOR: The lungs.

ARGAN: Sometimes a pain at the heart.

TOINETTE-as-DOCTOR: The lungs.

ARGAN: Sometimes a weariness in my limbs.

TOINETTE-as-DOCTOR: The lungs.

ARGAN: And sometimes I am taken with pains in my belly, as if it was the colic.

TOINETTE-as-DOCTOR: The lungs. Do you have an appetite for what you eat?

ARGAN: Yes, Sir.

TOINETTE-as-DOCTOR: The lungs. You love to drink the wine?

ARGAN: Yes, Sir.

TOINETTE-as-DOCTOR: The lungs. You take a little nap after meals and are glad to sleep.

ARGAN: Yes, Sir.

TOINETTE-as-DOCTOR: The lungs, the lungs I tell you! What does your physician order you for your food?

ARGAN: He orders me soup.

TOINETTE-as-DOCTOR: Ignorant!

ARGAN: Poultry.

TOINETTE-as-DOCTOR: Ignorant!

ARGAN: Veal.

TOINETTE-as-DOCTOR: Ignorant!

ARGAN: Broth.

TOINETTE-as-DOCTOR: Ignorant!

ARGAN: Fresh eggs.

TOINETTE-as-DOCTOR: Ignorant!

ARGAN: And a few prunes at night to relax the belly.

TOINETTE-as-DOCTOR: Ignorant!

ARGAN: And above all to drink my wine well diluted.

TOINETTE-as-DOCTOR: *Ignorantus, ignoranta, ignorantum.* You must drink your wine unmixed. to thicken your blood which is too thin. You must eat good fat beef, good fat pork, good Dutch cheese, to thicken your blood. Your doctor is an ass. I will send you one of my own choosing.

ARGAN: You will very much oblige me.

TOINETTE-as-DOCTOR: What the devil do you do with this arm?

ARGAN: How?

TOINETTE-as-DOCTOR: Here is an arm I would have removed immediately, if I were you.

ARGAN: Why?

TOINETTE-as-DOCTOR: Don't you see that it attracts all the nourishment to itself, and hinders the other side from growing?

ARGAN: Yes, but I have need of my arm.

TOINETTE-as-DOCTOR: You've a right eye there too that I would have plucked out, if I were in you.

ARGAN: Pluck out an eye?

TOINETTE-as-DOCTOR: It disturbs the other and robs it of all its nourishment! Believe me, have it plucked out as soon as possible, you'll see the clearer with the left eye.

ARGAN: There need be no hurry in this affair.

TOINETTE-as-DOCTOR: Farewell. I am sorry to quit you so soon, but I must attend a consultation about a man who died yesterday.

ARGAN: About a man who died yesterday?

TOINETTE-as-DOCTOR: Yes, to consider how we will cure him!

(Exit TOINETTE-as-DOCTOR.)

BÉRALDE: Most truly, this doctor seems to be a very skillful man.

ARGAN: Yes, but he goes a little fast.

BÉRALDE: All your great physicians do so.

ARGAN: To cut off my arm, and pluck out my eye, that the other may be better? A pretty operation, truly, to make me at once both blind and lame.

(Enter TOINETTE.)

TOINETTE *(pretending to speak to somebody in the corridor):* Come, come, I'm your humble servant for that. I'm not in a merry humor, Sir.

ARGAN: What's the matter?

TOINETTE: Your physician wants to feel my pulse.

BÉRALDE: Come, Brother. Since Dr. Purgon has annulled your agreement with Thomas Diafoirus, won't you allow me to speak of another marriage which is proposed for my niece?

ARGAN: No, Brother. She will go to a convent, since she has opposed my wishes. I see plainly there's some sneaky business in this, and I've discovered a certain secret liaison.

BÉRALDE: Well, Brother, allowing that there was some little liaison, would that be so criminal when it is honest and leads to matrimony?

ARGAN: Be that as it may, Brother, she will be a nun, of that I'm resolved.

BÉRALDE: That will very much please a certain person.

ARGAN: I understand what you are getting at. You're always harping on that string. My wife sticks in your throat.

BÉRALDE: Well, yes, Brother, since I must speak frankly, it is your wife I refer to.

TOINETTE: Ah, Sir, don't talk of Madame, she's a woman of whom there's nothing to be said, a woman without artifice, who loves my master.

ARGAN: Ask her how fond she is of me.

TOINETTE: It's true.

ARGAN: What uneasiness my illness gives her.

TOINETTE: Most assuredly.

ARGAN: And the care, and the pains she takes for me.

TOINETTE: This is certain. *(To BÉRALDE.)* Would you like me to convince you, and show you right now how much Madame loves my master? *(To ARGAN.)* Sir, let me show him, and correct his mistake.

ARGAN: How?

TOINETTE: My mistress is just returned. Lay yourself down here, stretched out, and pretend you're dead. He'll see the sorrow she'll be in, when I tell her the news.

ARGAN: I'll do it.

TOINETTE: Yes, but don't let her continue too long in despair, for she may perhaps die from it.

ARGAN: Let me do it.

(ARGAN lays down. TOINETTE covers him up with a blanket.)

TOINETTE *(to BÉRALDE):* Hide yourself.

ARGAN *(poking his head out from the blanket):* Is there not some danger in counterfeiting death?

TOINETTE: No, no. What danger can there be? Stay down. Here's my mistress. Don't move.

(Enter BÉLINE.)

TOINETTE (*pretending not to see BÉLINE*): Oh! Heavens! Oh! Wretched me! What a strange accident!

BÉLINE: What ails you, Toinette?

TOINETTE: Ah, Madame!

BÉLINE: What's the matter?

TOINETTE: Your husband's dead.

BÉLINE: My husband's dead?

TOINETTE: Alas! Yes. The poor soul is defunct.

BÉLINE: Are you sure?

TOINETTE: Certainly. Nobody knows yet. I was here all alone with him. He just now departed in my arms. Here, see him laid at his full length in this chair.

BÉLINE: Heaven be praised! I am delivered from that great burden. What a fool you are, Toinette, to be so afflicted at his death!

TOINETTE: I thought, Madame, that we should cry.

BÉLINE: It's not worth it. What loss is there? What good did he ever do upon earth? A wretch troublesome to all the world, a filthy, nauseous fellow, never without an enema, or a dose of physic in his guts, always sniveling, coughing, or spitting, a stupid, tedious, ill-natured creature, forever fatiguing people, and scolding, night and day, his maids and footmen.

TOINETTE: That's a fine eulogy!

BÉLINE: You must help me, Toinette, to execute my design, and you may be sure that in serving me you will be rewarded. By good luck, nobody yet knows of the affair. Let's carry him up to his bed and keep his death a secret until I have accomplished my business. There are some papers, and there is some money, that I have a mind to seize. I have spent the prime years of my life with him and I will take my reward. Come, Toinette, first of all take his keys.

ARGAN (*starting up hastily*): Hold it right there!

BÉLINE: Ah!

ARGAN: Ah, Wife! Is this how you love me?

TOINETTE: Ah! The defunct is not dead!

ARGAN (*to BÉLINE as she runs off*): So that's your love for me, and that's the tribute you pay me? I'll take it as a warning. It will make me wiser in the future.

BÉRALDE (*coming out from his hiding place*): Well, Brother, you see how it is.

TOINETTE: In truth, I never would have believed it. But I hear your daughter coming. Place yourself as you were, and let's see in what manner she will receive news your death.

(BÉRALDE conceals himself again. Enter ANGELIQUE.)

TOINETTE *(pretending not to see ANGELIQUE):* Oh Heaven! Ah! Sad accident! Unhappy day!

ANGELIQUE: What ails you, Toinette, why do you cry?

TOINETTE: Alas! I've melancholy news to tell you. Your father is dead.

ANGELIQUE: My father dead, Toinette?

TOINETTE: Yes, you see him there, he died just this moment of a fainting fit that took him.

ANGELIQUE: Oh Heavens! What misfortune! What a cruel stroke! Alas! Must I lose my father, the only thing I have left in the world! And must I also, to increase my despair, lose him at a time when he was angry with me! What will become of me? What consolation can I find after so great a loss?

(Enter CLÉANTE.)

CLÉANTE: What 's the matter, fair Angelique? What misfortune do you weep for?

ANGELIQUE: I weep for the most dear and precious in life. I weep for the death of my father.

CLÉANTE: Heavens! What an accident! I was coming to present myself to him, in the hope that my respect and pleas would soften his heart and he would grant you to me.

ANGELIQUE: Ah! Cléante, let us forget all thoughts of marriage. After the death of my father, I can have nothing more to do with the world. I renounce it forever. Yes, my dear Father, if I have opposed your wishes, I will make amends by following your desire and go to convent. *(Kneeling.)* Permit me, Father, now to give you my promise of it, and to embrace you.

ARGAN *(rising and embracing ANGELIQUE):* Oh! my child!

ANGELIQUE: Aaaah!

ARGAN: Come, don't be frightened. I'm not dead yet. Come, you are truly my flesh and blood, my daughter, and I am pleased that I have seen your good nature.

ANGELIQUE: Ah! What an agreeable surprise! Since, by extreme good fortune, heaven restores you, Father, permit me to implore you. If you are not favorable to the inclination of my heart, if you refuse Cléante for my husband, I beg you at least, not to force me to marry another man. That's all I ask.

CLÉANTE *(throwing himself at ARGAN'S Feet):* Ah! Sir, allow yourself to be moved by her entreaties and by mine. Accept the mutual ardors of so agreeable a passion.

BÉRALDE: Brother, can you resist this?

TOINETTE: Can you ignore, Sir, so much love?

ARGAN: Let him become a doctor, and I'll consent to the marriage. (*To CLÉANTE.*) Yes! Become a physician, and I give you my daughter.

CLÉANTE: Most willingly. If it only takes that, Sir, to become your son-in-law, I'll be a physician and an apothecary too, if you'd like. That's not too much. I would do much more to obtain the fair Angelique.

BÉRALDE: But, my Brother, an idea has just come to me. Why not become a doctor yourself? It will be much more convenient to have all that you want within yourself.

TOINETTE: That's true. That's the best way to cure yourself. There's no disease so bold as to infect a physician.

ARGAN: My Brother, you are flattering me. I'm too old to study medicine.

BÉRALDE: Who said anything about study? Why, you know enough already. There are a great many men among them who have no better skills than yourself.

ARGAN: But one should know all the diseases, and the remedies proper to apply to them.

BÉRALDE: You'll learn all that by simply putting on the cap and robe of a physician. Afterwards, you'll be as skillful as you wish to be.

ARGAN: What! Do people understand how to discourse upon illness, simply by wearing the habit?

BÉRALDE: Yes. You have nothing to do but to talk. With a cap and gown, wit becomes wisdom, and nonsense becomes sense. Do you want to do it immediately?

ARGAN: Immediately?

BÉRALDE: Yes, and right here in your own house?

ARGAN: In my own house?

BÉRALDE: Yes. I know a body of physicians who will come instantly and perform the ceremony here. It will cost you nothing.

ARGAN: But what will I say, what will I answer?

BÉRALDE: They'll instruct you in a few words, and they'll give you in writing, what you are to say. Go prepare yourself. I'll go send for them.

ARGAN: With all my heart.

(Exit ARGAN.)

CLÉANTE: What 's your intention, and what do you mean by this "body of physicians"?

TOINETTE: What's your plan?

BÉRALDE: Let's have a little fun this evening and make a diversion of it together, that my brother may act the principal character in this comedy.

ANGELIQUE: But, Uncle, I think you mock my father a little too much.

BÉRALDE: Niece, this is not so much playing on him, as giving in to his fancies. We may each of us take a part in it ourselves. It's Carnival time, let the Mardi Gras begin! Let's go quickly to get everything ready.

Exit BÉRALDE, CLÉANTE, TOINETTE, ANGELIQUE. MARIE appears from her prompter box, makes a sign that the audience should not give away the joke, and runs after them.

Scene 2: The Ceremony

After a pause, reenter ARGAN, who sits in his chair and waits with great anticipation for the ceremony to begin. Music. Enter BÉRALDE, CLÉANTE, TOINETTE, ANGELIQUE, MARIE, and LOUISE, all disguised as doctors in robe and hats and with medical props —some historical and some anachronistic. They will conduct the “ceremony” to make ARGAN a doctor, and they do this as a parody of an academic examination, as best they can figure what that is.

Two fake doctors trail them, in similar disguising robes. We will discover that these are BÉLINE and BONNEFOY. These eight comprise the “Chorus of Doctors.”

The following text is chanted and sung. Sung portions are in italics.

DEAN of the FACULTY OF MEDECINE (BÉRALDE):

Molto learnéd professorés
Très distinguishéd doctorés
Oh, faithful executioners—
Eh ...I mean practitioners,
Of our esteemed profession,
that honorable invention,
Medicine, medicina, medicinum!
Nosotros gathered here today,
To welcome our new protegé.

CHORUS OF DOCTORS:

Ic Ic hoc hoc
Nosotros gathered here today,

Ic Ic hoc hoc

We welcome our new protégé.

FIRST DOCTOR (CLÉANTE):

Who today could live without us?

Our remedies are so sensible,

Lyrice, Humera, Viagra, unite us!

Sans prescriptus, no dispensable.

CHORUS of DOCTORS:

Sans prescriptus no dispensable

Sans prescriptus no dispensable

SECOND DOCTOR (TOINETTE):

This gentleman here, hopeful doctor-(ish)

To join our company, that's his wish.

We must now examine him,

Test his knowledge and acumen,

To see if his Abilify is worthy-(ish)!

CHORUS of DOCTORS:

To see if his Abilify is worthy-(ish!)

To see if his Abilify is worthy-(ish!)

DEAN:

Let's begin the proceedings, but first,

Our motto Kansiensis with me Chantix:

Ad Astra per Aspirin-a.

(Production Note: Some lyrics in this finale were designed with audience of the original production at the University of Kansas in mind. Subsequent productions have permission to substitute local references.)

CHORUS of DOCTORS:

Ad Astra Per Aspirin-a.

DEAN:

Et notre motto universitatis

(intoning) Zocor...Plavix...Xanax...Tamiflu

CHORUS of DOCTORS *(chanting):*

Zocor, Plavix, Xanax, Tamiflu!

Zocor, Plavix, Xanax, Tamiflu!

Zocor, Plavix, Xanax, Tamiflu!

(Louder and faster until it sounds like the KU chant.)

(Singing and Dancing, everyone except Argan, who is watching the proceedings around him with awe)

Ad Astra Per Aspirin-a.

Lyrica, Humera, Viagra

Ad Astra Per Aspirin-a.

Chantix, Plavix, Celebrex, Nasonex!

(During this dance, the four real medical men of the play DLAFOIRUS, THOMAS, PURGON and FLEURANT enter and regard the proceedings with alarm.)

DEAN:

Let's begin the doctoral examination!

SECOND DOCTOR:

Molto learned professorés

Très distinguished doctorés

Here's the question for our student:

When one has dropsy, what cure is prudent?

ARGAN *(reading from a slip of paper):*

Try some Ex-Lax to the max

Then a little senna.

Let him bleed, but not too much

That's sure to make him betta!

CHORUS OF DOCTORS:

Betta, Betta what a student!

Give that man an “A” — “A”!

Doctor, Doctor, what a doctor!

You’ll be one today!

SECOND DOCTOR:

Molto learned professorés

Très distinguished doctorés

I ask a question problematic:

Tell me, how to treat the asthmatic?

ARGAN (*now with confidence*):

Try some Ex-Lax to the max

Then a little senna.

Let him bleed, but not too much

That’s sure to make him betta!

CHORUS of DOCTORS:

Betta, Betta what a student!

Give that man an “A” — “A”!

Doctor, Doctor, what a doctor!

You’ll be one today!

DR. DIAFOIRUS (*stepping in on the ceremony. Challenging*): I have a question for this . . . (*spitting out the word*) . . . doctor. This sick man here (*grabs THOMAS*), who has fallen into my hands, has high fever that is increasing—

(DLAFOIRUS whacks THOMAS on the head.)

THOMAS: —great pain in the head—

(DLAFOIRUS pokes THOMAS on his side with his cane.)

THOMAS: —great discomfort in the side—

(DLAFOIRUS choking THOMAS.)

THOMAS: (*coughing, barely audible.*) —with great difficulty to breathe.

DR. DIAFOIRUS: Tell me, what you would do?

(The four medical men crowd in on ARGAN. Challenging him.)

ARGAN (*tentatively*):

Try some Ex-Lax to the max

Then a little senna.

Let him bleed, but not too much

That's sure to make him betta!

(Chorus begins to sing and dance "Betta, Betta . . ."! PURGON stops them cold.)

DR. PURGON: What would you do with a rheumatic?

ARGAN: I'd make him asymptomatic.

DR. DIAFOIRUS: What if he had diphtheria?

ARGAN: I'd send him to Siberia.

THOMAS: Supposing you found tuberculosis.

ARGAN: I'd kick it right in the ass-mosis!

DR. PURGON: And if he had a relapse?

ARGAN (*triumphantly*): Rinse and repeat!!!!

(Music. DIAFOIRUS and the other doctors give in and now everyone except Argan, who is still in his chair, sings and dances:)

ALL (*except Argan*):

Ad Astra Per Aspirin-a.

Lyrical, Humeral, Viagra

Ad Astra Per Aspirin-a.

Chantix, Plavix, Celebrex, Nasonex!

DEAN (*with mortarboard for ARGAN. Takes Argan from the chair and positions him for the capping*): Do you swear to uphold our statutes, as the faculty has prescribed, with good sense and judgment?

ARGAN: I swear

FIRST DOCTOR: To follow, in all consultations, received ideas, whether they are good or bad?

ARGAN: I swear.

SECOND DOCTOR: To never take any remedy that does not come from us, even if the sick man falls low and dies of his illness?

ARGAN: I swear.

DR. DIAFOIRUS (*puts the mortarboard on Argan's head, ceremoniously*): And now, The Oath of Hypocrisy (*sings*):

I solemnly uphold this statement:

First do nothing without payment.

ALL:

We solemnly uphold this statement:

First do nothing without payment.

DEAN:

Then as Dean of the Faculty of Doctors,

In the county and the land of . . . Douglas

I welcome you most regally—

DR. DIAFOIRUS (*interrupting, giving the Dean a diploma*): —But you have to do it legally.

DEAN: Yes. There's one thing they have that you haven't got: a diploma. By virtue of the authority vested in me by the Universitatis Medicinus Kansiensus, I hereby confer upon you the honorary degree of Q.Ed. (*Gives ARGAN the diploma.*)

ARGAN: Q.Ed?

DEAN: Doctor of Quack-ology!

ARGAN: Oh joy, rapture! Today I am a DOCTOR!

(Music strikes up. ARGAN tosses his cane and does a crazy solo dance. Then all join in. During this dance, all is resolved. ANGELIQUE and CLÉANTE embrace with ARGAN's blessing. THE DOCTORS get paid by BÉRALDE and are delighted. A reveal that two of the "doctors" are really BÉLINE and BONNEFOY: BONNEFOY pulls off "his" hat and reveals "herself." BÉLINE and BONNEFOY embrace, ARGAN makes a gesture of forgiveness, and the two women run off, hand in hand. Dance continues. Everyone dances off except ARGAN and MARIE the prompter, who has been nibbling on her cream puffs. Realizing they have all left the stage, MARIE throws box of pastry in the air and runs off to catch up.)

(MOLIÈRE is now on stage alone. He sits in his chair, as in the opening of the play. Music fades, lights start to dim, the voices of the actors off stage lessens and silence descends on MOLIÈRE as his company of players have disappeared again into the theatrical afterlife. His revels have now ended.)

BLACKOUT

THE LEARNED LADIES

by Molière

Translated by Jonathan Marks

This translation, like my earlier translation of *The Imaginary Invalid*, was made for my own production at Texas Tech. In both of them I set for my designers the task of creating a world that never was, blending elements of the here and now, the seventeenth century in France, and anything in between, or in the future or on another planet.

Of course, creating worlds that never were is one of the things that theatre does; it can also create a detailed replication of a certain time or place, which is the innovation of Romanticism and the strongest suit of realism; but evidence shows that Molière – as producer/director – showed little inclination in this direction. A relatively bare stage and characters in somewhat revelatory costumes worked for most of the plays; and in the *comédie-ballets* and elsewhere the staging could depict fantasy lands, removed from clock time.

Every translation, of course, creates some dislocation, so we've become accustomed to accepting them without question. A "straight" translation of *The Learned Ladies* might set us in an Anglophone Paris, and we'd make allowances, not even noticing the facticity of the world. The language might not be 17th-century English, but as long as it's consistent and plausibly classical-sounding, we're fine.

I've chosen to feature, rather than mask, this facticity and dislocation. It doesn't take the audience – or hopefully the reader – long to realize they're in a fictional world unlike anything that's ever been, and what they find is characters and situations somewhat like the ones they know, and somewhat different: flamboyant, exaggerated, and odd in a funny way... which I find to be pretty analogous to what our author was doing.

The original is in French *alexandrin* verse, for which we have no effective equivalent, so iambic pentameter is usually dragooned into duty. Then again, our world is not so steeped in rhyming verse as was Molière's; there and then you could hear it hawked on the streets, and even the gossip columnists versified. Regular rhyme schemes tend to lull us into galloping along with them. I have opted for a sort of free verse, with elevated diction and vocabulary when appropriate.

Jean-Baptiste Poquelin (1622-1673), the son of a prosperous Parisian upholsterer, dropped out of law school for a career as an entertainer under the stage name **Molière**. He spent the first half of his career as head of a provincial troupe, managing, directing, and performing as the leading actor in tragedies and comedies, and (most successfully) in improvised farces, in which he was the chief clown. Toward the end of their provincial wanderings he began to write comedies as an inexpensive way of supplementing their repertoire. In 1658 he gained favor with King Louis XIV through a court performance of a Corneille tragedy (which bombed) followed by a farce (which was a wild success). During the second half of his career, installed in Paris with royal patronage, he progressively added more of his own plays to his troupe's repertoire, almost all with leading roles for himself. Though

most of his contemporaries regarded him primarily as a clown, his comedies came to be regarded as masterworks of dramatic literature. During the third performance of *The Imaginary Invalid* he coughed up blood onstage and was carried home to die.

Jonathan Marks, a Professor in the Acting/Directing area at Texas Tech University, wrote his Yale DFA dissertation under Jacques Guicharnaud on Molière's theatrical career. He has worked with the Yale Repertory Theatre, American Repertory Theatre, American Conservatory Theatre, Magic Theatre, Berkeley Rep and others in various capacities, sometimes as actor, director, dramaturg, and educator simultaneously. A treasured moment: acting in farces by Molière at the Festival d'Avignon, a town where Molière and his troupe had performed them.

Note: All photos of the 2012 production of Molière's The Learned Ladies at Texas Tech University, translated and directed by Jonathan Marks; scenic design by Vicki Ayers; lighting design by Andrea Bilkey; costume design by Melissa Merz; Photos by Andrea Bilkey.

The Learned Ladies

CHARACTERS:

CHRYSALE: a solid middle-class citizen

PHILAMINTE: Chrysale's wife

ARMANDE:

} daughters of Chrysale and Philaminte

HENRIETTE:

ARISTE: Chrysale's brother

BÉLISE: Chrysale's sister

CLITANDRE: Henriette's boyfriend

TRIPPELDOLT: a wit

VADIUS: a scholar

MARTINE: the kitchen maid

LÉPINE: a lackey

JULIEN: Vadius's valet

JUSTICE OF THE PEACE

The setting is in Paris.

ACT ONE

Scene 1

ARMANDE: What?! "Single woman," sister, is a noble title,
And you want to abandon it, to fling it gaily away
And get married?
Can such a vulgar plan have seized your brain?

HENRIETTE: Yes, sister.

ARMANDE: Ugh! That little "yes" is intolerable! Impossible to hear
Without a fit of heartburn.

HENRIETTE: What is it sister, about marriage in itself that makes you...

ARMANDE: Oh, my God, fie!

HENRIETTE: What?

ARMANDE: Yes, fie, I tell you!

Can't you even begin to see how distasteful
Such a word is to the mind? How it wounds
The brain with images unbidden?
To what filthy sights it drags one's thoughts?
Do you not shudder at it, sister? And can you set your heart
Upon the consequences of that word?

HENRIETTE: The consequences of that word, to my mind,
Would be a husband, some children, a household;
And I see nothing there, when I set my mind upon it
That wounds my brain or makes me shudder.

ARMANDE: And bonds like that (good God!) would give you pleasure?

HENRIETTE: And what better could I do, at my age,
Than forge a bond with a spouse,
A man who would love me and be loved,
And from the tenderness that follows,
Create the sweetness of a blameless life?
If the chemistry is right, can't you see its appeal?

ARMANDE: My God, your mind is on a lowly plane!
How small a role you choose to play,
To cloister yourself in household things,
Glimpsing no pleasures more appealing
Than some idol of a husband and some brats!
Leave to the lower sorts, the vulgar masses,
The base amusements of such affairs.
Elevate your yearnings toward the higher goals,
Cultivate a taste for nobler pleasures,
And, disdainings senses and gross matter,
Devote yourself like us entirely to the mind.
Look to our mother as a model,
Honored everywhere for erudition.
Try, as I do, to be her worthy daughter;
Aspire to the enlightenment that's our heritage,
And learn to savor the sweet delights
That the love of study pours into our hearts.
Don't subject yourself as slave to the laws of a man;
Become the bride, dear sister, of philosophy
Which sets us up above all humankind

And gives to reason sovereign empire,
Subjecting to its rule our animal side
Whose gross appetites drag us down to the pit with the beasts.
These are the noble fires, the sweet attachments
Which ought to fill up every moment of our lives;
And the cares that worry sentimental women
Strike me as horrible wastes.

HENRIETTE: Heaven, whose order of course is all-powerful,
Creates us at birth for different functions;
And every mind is not composed of the stuff
That's right for fashioning philosophers.
If yours was born fit for the heights
Scaled by the theories of scholars,
Mine was made, sister, to stick to the earth,
Prone to be caught up in those little cares.
Let's not trouble the just rules of heaven;
We should follow the promptings of our instincts.
Go, through the flight of your great, fine genius,
Dwell in the highest regions of philosophy
While my mind keeps me here below
To taste the earthly pleasures of marriage.
So, in our quite contrary courses
We will both emulate our mother;
You, on the side of the soul and noble wishes,
I, on the side of the senses and gross pleasures;
You, on the enlightened projects of the mind,
I, sister, on the projects of mere matter.

ARMANDE: When you try to emulate a person,
You should imitate the beautiful side,
And it's hardly modeling yourself on her,
Sister, if you look like her when you cough and spit.

HENRIETTE: But you wouldn't be your vaunted self, my sister,
If my mother'd had only that beautiful side,
And think where you'd be if her noble genius
Hadn't taken a break from philosophy.
Please be so kind as to allow me some of the baseness
To which you owe your high intellect,
And do not stifle, by enlisting me to follow you,
Some little scholar who wants to be born.

ARMANDE: I see that your stubborn mind cannot be cured
Of the lunatic notion of taking a husband;
But pray tell me who you dream of landing.
Surely you don't set your sights on Clitandre?

HENRIETTE: And why not? Does he lack merit?
Would the choice be way too low?

ARMANDE: No, but it's a plan that would be dishonorable,
Trying to snag another's conquest;
And it's no secret to the world that Clitandre
Has openly sighed for me.

HENRIETTE: Yes, but for you all sighs are useless things,
And you'd never stoop to human baseness.
Your spirit has renounced mere marriage
And all your love is for philosophy.
So, since your heart is not set on Clitandre,
What can it matter if another might want him?

ARMANDE: The sovereign rule of reason over the senses
Permits us to enjoy the sweet smell of incense;
I can deny a gallant my hand
But like him to be a worshiper.

HENRIETTE: I haven't kept him from continuing
To adore all your perfections.
All I've done is accept, upon your spirit's rejection,
The offer that came to me: the homage of his heart.

ARMANDE: But please, do you feel totally secure
With the pledges of a jilted lover?
Do you honestly think his passion for you is real,
And the flame burning for me is really dead?

HENRIETTE: He tells me so, dear sister, and I believe him.

ARMANDE: Sister, don't be so naïve. Believe me,
When he says he's through with me and loves you,
He's not really thinking; he's fooling himself.

HENRIETTE: I don't know; but really, if you wish,
It would be easy for us to clear this up.
I see him coming, so on this question
He can fully enlighten us.

Scene 2

HENRIETTE: To resolve the doubt that my sister has sown,
Is it her or me, Clitandre? Show us your heart,
Open it wide, and kindly instruct us
Which of us has the right to claim your vows.

ARMANDE: Oh, no! I wouldn't think of requiring
An explication of your feelings. I know how to deal
With people, and how embarrassing it is
To be forced to reveal your true thoughts face to face.

CLITANDRE (to Armande): No, madame, my heart, which hides little,
Needs no command to speak freely.
There's nothing here that embarrasses me,
And I'll declare out loud, straight from the soul,
That the gentle bonds by which I am tied,
(*Indicating Henriette*) My heart and my wishes, are all on this side.
This declaration shouldn't bother you;
It's just how you wanted things.
Your charms had taken me, and my tender sighs
Amplify proved the ardor of my desire;
My heart dedicated its everlasting flame to you
But your eyes didn't find their conquest worthy.
I suffered under their yoke a hundred different slights;
They lorded over my soul as haughty tyrants;
So, weary of all these torments, I sought
Conquerors more humane, and softer chains.
(*Indicating Henriette*) I found them, madame, in these eyes,
And their features will always be precious to me;
With a sympathetic gaze they dried my tears
And did not disdain what your charms had rebuffed.
Such rare goodness touched me so deeply
That nothing could ever tear off my bonds;
And I dare beseech you now, Madame,
Not to make any effort to quench my flame.
Don't even try to reclaim a heart
Determined to die in this sweet emotion.

ARMANDE: Hey! What makes you think, monsieur, that anybody would want to,
Or that anybody cares all that much about you?
I think it's really funny that you think so,
And really rude to say it to my face.

HENRIETTE: Hey, easy, sister! What happened to the moral faculty
That does so well at ruling the animal side
And reins in the brute force of rage?

ARMANDE: You talk to me about it, but what do you do?
Encourage the attentions of someone who seems to love you
Without the permission of those who gave you life?
You should know that duty submits you to their laws,
That you may love only the one they choose,
That they have supreme command over your heart,
And that it's criminal for you to lose it as you wish.

HENRIETTE: I thank you for the goodness you have shown me
In teaching me what I need to do.
My heart wants to heed your lessons in improving its conduct;
And to show you, sister, what I've learned,
Clitandre, take pains to bolster your love by obtaining
The blessings of those who gave me life;
Secure legitimate power over my heart
And give me the means to love you legally.

CLITANDRE: With all my might I'll labor at this task;
Your sweet consent was all I was awaiting.

ARMANDE: You've triumphed, sister, and your face says
That you imagine that it bothers me.

HENRIETTE: Oh, not at all, sister. I know for you
The rule of reason remains all-powerful,
And through the lessons you've had in wisdom
You are above that kind of weakness.
So far you are from feeling the slightest chagrin,
I think, that you'll graciously help me out
By lending your voice to his request
And press for the happy moment of our marriage.
I'm asking you to do so. And the way to do it...

ARMANDE: Your little mind is having its joke.
You look so proud of a heart that is flung at you.

HENRIETTE: Flung or not, it's a heart that hardly displeases you;
And if the eyes I see could pick it up off the floor
They'd go down to half-mast pretty quickly.

ARMANDE: I won't stoop to answer that.

This is foolish blather that nobody should have to hear.

HENRIETTE: You've done so well, you've shown us a model
Of astounding moderation.

Scene 3

HENRIETTE: Your straightforward answer surprised her a lot.

CLITANDRE: She really deserves that kind of candor
And all the flights of her crazy pride
Have earned her at least my frankness.
But since you've authorized me, I'll go to your father,
Madame....

HENRIETTE: You'd do better to win over Mother.
My father's inclined to say yes to anything,
But he doesn't stand up for what he decides.
Heaven gave him a good heart, but it's the kind
That submits to the will of his wife.
It's she who rules, and with an iron fist.
She decrees as law whatever she decides.
I'd like to see you show her and my aunt
A spirit, let us say, a bit more indulgent:
A wit that flatters their self-delusions
And so might win you their warm regards.

CLITANDRE: I always speak straight from the heart, so much so
That I could never flatter anyone's character, even your sister's;
And I don't much like lady scholars.
It's fine if they're enlightened, in every way,
But I don't like this shocking passion
To learn just to look learned.
I like a woman who sometimes, in response to a question,
Knows how to forget some things she knows.
I like her to hide her erudition,
To have the knowledge without showing it off,
Without footnotes, without big words
Or straining to be witty in the simplest exchanges.
I have great respect for your mother,
But I simply can't support her fantasy
And make myself an echo of the things she says,

The hosannas she sings to her brilliant hero.
Her Monsieur Trippeldolt annoys me, he kills me;
I'm enraged to see her admire a man like that,
Ranking him among the great and beautiful minds:
A blockhead whose writing is booed everywhere,
A pedant whose copious output has proved
Most useful in the marketplace wrapping fish.

HENRIETTE: His writings, his lectures, all strike me as boring,
So I pretty much share what you see and you feel;
But since he has so much sway with my mother,
You should force yourself to indulge them a bit.
A suitor pays court at the home of his love;
He tries to gain favor with everyone there
And, to ensure that no-one opposes his suit,
He needs to please everyone, even the dog.

CLITANDRE: Yes, you're right. But Monsieur Trippeldolt
Revolts me, to the depths of my soul;
I cannot consent to seek his assent
Through the shameful charade of praising his works.
I read him before I met him,
And sight unseen I knew him.
I saw in the foolish mess that he's published
What his pedantic pose broadcasts to the world:
The steadfast haughtiness of his pretention,
The con-man's belief in his own imposture
That makes him a monster of self-esteem.
He constantly basks in his fictional fame,
In the honors he imagines his writings have earned.
I see him strutting around like a general
With a sash and a chestful of medals.

HENRIETTE: You must have very good eyes to see all that.

CLITANDRE: Reading the verses he dumps on us,
I could even see the features of his face
And the bearing the poet would have.
I had formed such an accurate picture
That, crossing paths with a man at a bookstore one day,
I bet it was Trippeldolt in person,
And then I learned that I'd won my bet.

HENRIETTE: What a story!

CLITANDRE: Not a story; it's true.
But I see your aunt approaching. By your leave,
I'll tell her our secret right now,
To win her support with your mother.

Scene 4

CLITANDRE: If you please, Madame, may a lover
Use this chance encounter
To reveal to you the passion of his heart...

BELISE: Ah! Softly now! Ope not too widely your heart.
Though I knew you were in the ranks of my lovers,
Your eyes should be your only spokesmen;
Explain to me in no other language
The desires that, of course, to me are an outrage.
Love me, sigh, burn for my charms,
But permit me not to know of it.
I can shut my eyes to your secret fire
So long as you keep to your mute interpreters;
But if ever your mouth gets involved in it
I must banish you forever from my sight.

CLITANDRE: Of the fire in my heart you need feel no alarm.
Henriette, dear madame, has won me with her charm,
And I've come to you to solicit your good will
In seconding the love I have for her.

BELISE: Ah! The subterfuge, I admit, is quite clever,
A deft and subtle switcheroo.
In all the romances I've read in my life,
I've never seen a twist quite as cunning.

CLITANDRE: Madame, there's no trick to this.
It's a true avowal of what I feel in my soul.
Heaven, through the bonds of a constant fire
Has tied my soul to the beauty of Henriette.
Henriette is the only queen of my heart,
And wedding Henriette is what I want.
You can help us greatly, and all I ask
Is that you kindly lend your support to our wishes.

BELISE: I see how deftly the request is phrased
And I know what to hear when you say that name.
The trope is adroit and, to reply in its style,
I will say that “Henriette” will not hear of marriage,
So you must yearn for her without hope of reward.

CLITANDRE: Wha? What’s the use of these complications?
And why insist on what is not true?

BELISE: My God, drop the pretense! Stop avoiding
What your glances have always confessed.
Be happy that I’ve gone along with the twist
That your love wisely prompted you to devise,
Be content that I’m willing to endure your homage
So long as your transports, illumined by honor,
Lay upon my altar only purified desire.

CLITANDRE: But...

BELISE: Adieu. That’s enough for now.
I’ve told you more than I meant to.

CLITANDRE: But your mistake...

BELISE: Enough. Now I’m blushing.
My modesty’s been taxed beyond belief.

CLITANDRE: I’d rather be hanged than make love to you.
And wisdom...

BELISE: No, no, I wish to hear no more.

(She exits.)

CLITANDRE: To hell with that loon and her fantasies!
I’ve never had to deal with such crazy presumptions.
I’ll look for someone else to help me out.
Maybe I can find somebody sane.

ACT TWO

Scene 1

ARISTE: Yes, I’ll bring you the answer as soon as I can.
Yes, I’ll push, I’ll lean on him, whatever it takes.

Whew! A man in love can bend your ear
And has no patience about getting what he wants.
I've never...

Scene 2

ARISTE: Ah, hello, brother.

CHRYSALE: Brother, hello.

ARISTE: Do you know what brings me here?

CHRYSALE: No, but I'll find out if you want to tell me.

ARISTE: You've known Clitandre for quite some time?

CHRYSALE: Of course, he comes to visit us often.

ARISTE: And what is your opinion of him?

CHRYSALE: A man of honor, wit, heart, and wisdom,
And I think very few could match his merit.

ARISTE: A certain wish of his has brought me here,
And I'm thrilled you think so highly of him.

CHRYSALE: I knew his late father when I was in Rome.

ARISTE: Oh, good.

CHRYSALE: He was really a fine gentleman.

ARISTE: So they say.

CHRYSALE: We were both 28 back then,
And boy, we were men about town.

ARISTE: I believe it.

CHRYSALE: We really went for those Roman girls.
Our escapades were the talk of the town;
The Roman men were jealous.

ARISTE: Perfect. But let's get down to what brought me here.

Scene 3

(BÉLISE enters quietly, listening.)

ARISTE: Clitandre has made me messenger to you
To say his heart is taken by Henriette's charms.

CHRYSALE: What? My daughter's?

ARISTE: Yes, they've bewitched Clitandre,
And I've never seen anyone so in love.

BÉLISE (to Ariste): No, no, I heard you. You don't know the story,
And it's not at all what you think.

ARISTE: What, sister?

BÉLISE: Clitandre has made a fool of you.
His heart is fixed on another object.

ARISTE: You're joking. It's not Henriette he loves?

BÉLISE: No, I'm sure of it.

ARISTE: He told me so himself.

BÉLISE: Yes he did.

ARISTE: I'm here, sister, because he asked me himself
To pose the question to her father today.

BÉLISE: All right.

ARISTE: And he insisted I push for a wedding
As soon as possible, his love was so urgent.

BÉLISE: Better still. You couldn't be duped more gallantly.
"Henriette," entre nous, is a code name,
An ingenious veil, a pretext, brother,
To disguise another love, a secret that I know,
And I want to disabuse you both of the mistake.

ARISTE: But since you know so many things, sister,
Tell us please who's the true object of his love.

BÉLISE: You want to know?

ARISTE: Yes. Who?

BÉLISE: Me.

ARISTE: You?

BÉLISE: That's right.

ARISTE: Oh, sister!

BÉLISE: What do you mean, "Oh"?

And what is surprising about what I said?
One has a certain air, I believe, that clearly says
One needn't give one's heart to win mastery of another's;
And Dorante, Damis, Cléonte, and Lycidas
Are proof that one has some appeal.

ARISTE: These men are in love with you?

BÉLISE: Yes, with all their might.

ARISTE: And they told you so?

BÉLISE: Not one has taken that liberty:

They're wise enough to revere me so
That to this day they've never said a word of their love.
But, to offer me their hearts and pledge their devotion
Mute messengers have carried the word.

ARISTE: I hardly ever see Damis here.

BÉLISE: It's to convey the depth of his respect.

ARISTE: Snide comments at your expense is all that I get from Dorante.

BÉLISE: He's carried away by waves of jealous rage.

ARISTE: Cléonte and Lycidas have taken brides.

BÉLISE: Driven to despair by my resolve.

ARISTE: Listen, dear sister, you're dreaming.

CHRYSALE: You've got to rid yourself of these hallucinations.

BÉLISE: Hallucinations? These, hallucinations?

Me, hallucinations? That's really good, hallucinations!
I glory in hallucinations, brothers.
I had no idea that that is what they were.

Scene 4

CHRYSALE: That's that, our sister's mad.

ARISTE: More and more every day.

But once again, let's get back to the topic.
Clitandre is asking you for Henriette's hand;
What's the verdict on his lover's suit?

CHRYSALE: Do you have to ask? With all my heart I consent,
And consider this match a singular honor.

ARISTE: You know he's not especially wealthy,
And that...

CHRYSALE: Nothing to worry about.
He's rich in virtue, and that's worth fortunes;
And don't forget his father and I were just like that.

(Indicating "as close as possible.")

ARISTE: Let's speak about your wife, and how to win her favor
In this...

CHRYSALE: No need, I accept him as my son-in-law.

ARISTE: Yes, but...to leverage your consent, brother
It wouldn't be bad to have her on our side.
Let's go...

CHRYSALE: Are you kidding? It's not necessary.
I answer for my wife. It's not her business.

ARISTE: But...

CHRYSALE: Leave her to me, I tell you, and don't fret.
I'll make sure she agrees.

ARISTE: All right. I'll sound out Henriette about it,
And come back to find out...

CHRYSALE: It's a done deal.
I'll speak to my wife right now.

Scene 5

MARTINE: Dagnabit! I am really up the creek. Workin' around here, I feel like a long-tailed cat in a room full of rocking-chairs. Lord! Kitchen work ain't what it's cracked up to be.

CHRYSALE: What is it? What's wrong, Martine?

MARTINE: What's wrong?

CHRYSALE: Yes.

MARTINE: What it is is that I been fired, dude.

CHRYSALE: Fired?

MARTINE: That's right. Madame's done throwed me out.

CHRYSALE: I hadn't heard. How did it happen?

MARTINE: I been threatened.

If I don't git, I'll git my ass kicked.

CHRYSALE: No, you're staying; I'm pleased with you.

My wife can be a bit hot-headed;

But I don't want...

Scene 6

PHILAMINTE (*noticing Martine*): What! Still here, vixen?

Quickly, leave, baggage; let's go, depart these premises.

I never want to lay eyes on you again.

CHRYSALE: Easy now!

PHILAMINTE: No, it's finished.

CHRYSALE: Huh?

PHILAMINTE: I want her to leave.

CHRYSALE: But what has she done to make you want her gone?

PHILAMINTE: What? You back her up?

CHRYSALE: Not at all.

PHILAMINTE: You take her part against me?

CHRYSALE: Oh, God, no,

All I'm doing is asking what's her crime.

PHILAMINTE: Do you think I'd fire her without just cause?

CHRYSALE: I'm not saying that, but with our help we ought to...

PHILAMINTE: No, she leaves our household now.

CHRYSALE: Well, all right. Did I say she shouldn't?

PHILAMINTE: I want no opposition to my expressed desires.

CHRYSALE: Right.

PHILAMINTE: And you should, like a reasonable spouse,
Take my side against her and show some rage.

CHRYSALE: All right, I'm doing it. (*Turning to Martine*)
Yes, my wife was right to fire you, hussy.
Your crime was unforgivable.

MARTINE: Well what did I do?

CHRYSALE (*Quietly*): I swear, I don't know.

PHILAMINTE: She's the sort who thinks it's nothing.

CHRYSALE: What's she done, to bring down all this wrath?
Broken a mirror, or maybe a priceless vase?

PHILAMINTE: Would I fire her, or do you really think
I'd be so furious for such a little thing?

CHRYSALE: What was it? So the offense is really grave?

PHILAMINTE: Of course. Do I look unreasonable?

CHRYSALE: Did she inadvertently walk off
With a pitcher or a silver platter?

PHILAMINTE: That would be nothing.

CHRYSALE (*to Martine*): Uh-oh. Hell, sweetie.
(*to Philaminte*) Have you discovered that she's dishonest?

PHILAMINTE: It's worse than that.

CHRYSALE: Worse than that?

PHILAMINTE: Worse.

CHRYSALE: Damn, hussy! Ah! Has she committed...

PHILAMINTE: She has, with supreme insolence,
After thirty lessons, insulted my ear
With the impropriety of a vulgar, corrupt word
Condemned in express terms by Webster's, Derrida, and Docteur Philippe.

CHRYSALE: Is that all...

PHILAMINTE: What! Still, despite my lectures,
Assailing the foundation of all learning,

Grammar, which rules us all, even queens and kings
And subjugates us to her iron rules.

CHRYSALE: I thought she'd committed the blackest sin.

PHILAMINTE: What! You don't find this crime unpardonable?

CHRYSALE: Oh yes I do.

PHILAMINTE: I'd like to see you try to make excuses for her.

CHRYSALE: I wouldn't dare.

PHILAMINTE: One could almost pity her;
Every construction she wrecks,
Even the rules of grammar she's been taught a hundred times.

MARTINE: All you're preaching here is well and good, I think,
But danged if I can understand your jargon.

PHILAMINTE: The impudence! To call a language jargon
That is founded on reason and good usage.

MARTINE: Whenever people understand you, you're talkin' good;
And all your high-falutin' gum-flapping ain't worth diddly.

PHILAMINTE: Well, there we have it, her sense of style:
"Ain't worth diddly."

BÉLISE: O, unruly brain!
Must it be that with all the pains unceasingly taken
You can't be taught to speak congruently?
"Ain't" "is not" a word accepted in our world;
"Diddly" should never pass between our lips.

MARTINE: God almighty! All y'all got your noses in your books,
But I talk straight like all my people do.

PHILAMINTE: Ah! Can it be borne?

BÉLISE: Such frightful solecism!

PHILAMINTE: Enough to murder a sensible ear!

BÉLISE: Your mind, I fear, is thoroughly materialist.
"All" is plural; "Y'all" is frightful; "All y'all" not to be countenanced.
Will you insult grammar all your life?

MARTINE: Who's talkin' about insultin' gramma or gramps?

PHILAMINTE: Heaven protect us!

BÉLISE: You've confounded the meaning of "grammar."
I've told you before where the word comes from.

MARTINE: Horsepucky! Don't make no nevermind if it comes
From Muleshoe, Rawls, or Idalou.

BÉLISE: Your soul is pure country.
Grammar, from the verb to the nominative,
And from the adjective to the subjunctive,
Teaches us the laws.

MARTINE: I have to tell you, Madame,
That I don't know any of those folks.

PHILAMINTE: I'm being tortured on the rack!

BÉLISE: These are the names of words, and one must seek
The ways in which they can be brought into agreement.

MARTINE: What's it matter if they agree or kick each other's butts?

PHILAMINTE (to her sister-in-law): Good God, give up of this lesson.
(to her husband) Are you going to rid me of her or not?

CHRYSALE (aside): Yes I will. I must give in to her caprices.
Go, don't irritate her; you have to leave, Martine.

PHILAMINTE: What? You're afraid of offending the hussy?
You speak to her in such a friendly way.

CHRYSALE (aloud): Me? Not at all. Let's go, out!
(aside) Go, my poor child.

Scene 7

CHRYSALE: You got what you want, she's gone;
But I don't approve at all of how she went.
She's a girl who does her job, and well,
And you have fired her for a tiny fault.

PHILAMINTE: You'd rather she were still at work here,
Constantly torturing my ears,
Breaking every law of usage and of sense
With a barbarous mess of rhetorical vices,

With butchered words, clumsily stitched together,
With proverbs plucked up from the gutter?

BÉLISE: It's true that it's a trial to hear her speak.
She mangles the dictionary every day;
And the least of the faults of her simple brain
Are either pleonasm or cacophony.

CHRYSALE: What does it matter if she lacks a silver tongue
As long as she's not lacking in the kitchen?
As for me, I'd prefer that, while peeling the veggies,
She misaligns a few subjects and verbs,
And repeats fifty times a low and vulgar word,
Than that she burns my meat or over-salts my stew.
I live on good soup, not on fine language.
My favorite recipes aren't found in Webster's;
And Shakespeare and Dante, masters of flowery words,
Might have been dunces in the kitchen.

PHILAMINTE: This sordid declaration just appalls me.
Such indignity, for what passes for a man.
To be so degraded by material cares
Instead of aspiring to the spiritual!
Is the body, this shabby cloak, so important,
So dear, that we can think of nothing but it?

CHRYSALE: Yes, my body's myself, and I like to look after it.
The cloak may be shabby, but I'm attached.

BÉLISE: Body and mind make a unified whole, dear brother,
But, if all the great thinkers today have it right,
The mind must always take precedence,
And our greatest imperative, our primary care,
Must be to nourish it at the font of knowledge.

CHRYSALE: Good God, if you only feed the mind,
You'll be living on empty calories,
And if you take no care, feel no botheration
In...

PHILAMINTE: Ugh! Botheration, to my ears, is gross;
The word stinks highly of antiquity.

BÉLISE: It's true, the word is really out of fashion.

CHRYSALE: Will you let me speak? I've had about enough,
The gloves are coming off, my spleen's about to burst.
They treat you like you're crazy, and I have half a mind to say...

PHILAMINTE: What did you just say?

CHRYSALE: It's you I'm speaking to, sister.
The tiniest error of grammar drives you crazy;
But some of your own conduct gets on my nerves.
Your eternal books, for one example;
Except for that big Plutarch, which is good for creasing my pants,
You ought to burn that useless bookcase
And leave science to the town's PhD's.;
Go up to the attic and toss out that long spyglass
That scares the neighbors, and while you're at it toss
The hundred spooky science doodads you've collected.
Don't bother with what they're up to on the moon
And pay some attention to what's going on at home
Where everything's gone topsy-turvy.
It's not really right, and for many reasons,
That a woman should study and know so many things.
Teaching her children good manners,
Making the house run, keeping an eye on the help
And managing the household accounts
Should be her study and entire philosophy.
On this point our forefathers showed a lot of good sense
When they said that a woman has learned enough
When her brain power reaches the point
She can tell a shirt from a pair of trousers.
Their wives couldn't read, but they lived well;
Their learned conversations were all household,
And their books a thimble, needle, and thread,
Which they used to make the trousseaus of their daughters.
Women these days don't honor these old customs;
They want to write and even become authors;
There's no science that is too profound for them,
And here more than anyplace in the world,
They penetrate the very deepest secrets.
At my house they know everything but what they ought to know:
What's going on on the moon and on the pole star,
On Venus, Saturn, and Mars that I don't care about;
But for all this vain and arcane erudition

They have no clue what's going on with my stew, which I need.
The help are busy studying so they can please you,
And so they're doing everything but what I need.
The only work being done around here is reasoning,
And reasoning has totally banished reason.
One servant burns my roast while reading history,
Another one's dreaming poetry when I want a drink;
In short, I see them following your example;
I have all these servants, but I'm not served.
I had one little servant girl left for me
Who wasn't yet infected with these airs,
And now with all this hubbub she's been fired
For committing some kind of sin against the dictionary.
I tell you, sister, that this whole business hurts me,
'Cause remember, it's you to whom I speak.
I don't like all the eggheads you invite here,
Especially your Monsieur Trippeldolt.
He's been tooting your horn with his poetry,
But all he spouts is utterly nonsensical;
When he's done you try to figure out what he's said;
And as for me, I think he's just a crackpot.

PHILAMINTE: My God, what baseness, both of mind and language!

BÉLISE: Have atoms ever arranged themselves
To create a mind more bourgeois?
And could it be that I have the same genes?
I'm deathly mortified that we are the same species
And in confusion I abandon this locale.

Scene 8

PHILAMINTE: Do you have any more clever things to say?

CHRYSALE: Me? No. That's enough fighting. It's done.
Let's talk about something else. Your elder daughter
Seems to have some distaste for marriage.
Bottom line, she's a philosopher. Enough said.
She's well brought up; you've done very well.
But her younger sister doesn't share her tastes,
And I think it would be good to give Henriette
The choice of a husband...

PHILAMINTE: That's just what I've been thinking,
And I want to let you in on my intention.
This Monsieur Trippeldolt who's such a criminal
And lacks the honor of your high esteem
Is the one I take as the husband she should have,
And I can judge better than you just what he's worth.
Any opposition will be wasted words, the case is closed.
Don't breathe a word of this choice of a husband,
I'll be the first to speak to your daughter.
I have good reasons for this course of conduct,
And I'll know if you get to her first.

Scene 9

ARISTE: Well? There goes the wife, brother, and I can tell
That you have had a little talk together.

CHRYSALE: Yes.

ARISTE: And how did it turn out? Well for Henriette?
Did she consent? The match is made?

CHRYSALE: Not completely yet.

ARISTE: Did she refuse?

CHRYSALE: No.

ARISTE: Is she thinking it over?

CHRYSALE: Not at all.

ARISTE: What then?

CHRYSALE: It's that she's offered me another man for son-in-law.

ARISTE: Another man for son-in-law?

CHRYSALE: Another.

ARISTE: Whose name is?

CHRYSALE: Monsieur Trippeldolt.

ARISTE: What? The Monsieur Trippeldolt who...

CHRYSALE: Yes, who's always talking poetry and Latin.

ARISTE: And you accepted?

CHRYSALE: Me? My God, no way.

ARISTE: What did you tell her?

CHRYSALE: Nothing. And I'm glad I didn't speak.
I'm not committed.

ARISTE: Good thinking. You've made a big statement.
Did you at least suggest Clitandre to her?

CHRYSALE: No, 'cause when she spoke of another son-in-law
I thought it best not to come right out with it.

ARISTE: Oh right, your prudence is exemplary.
Aren't you ashamed of your spinelessness?
And can a man display such weakness
To grant his wife such absolute power
He doesn't dare oppose what she's decided?

CHRYSALE: Good God, brother, it's easy for you to talk.
You don't know how much arguing depresses me.
I treasure peace, and rest, and sweetness,
And my wife's bad side is terrifying.
She makes such a fuss about philosophy
But it doesn't help her temper any.
And her high moral sense, which disdains earthly vices,
Has no power at all to counteract her venom.
Just utter a peep against what pops into her mind
And you'll get a week of fearful tempests.
When she takes that tone I tremble;
I don't know where to hide from the horrible dragon;
And yet, through all her hellish rages
I have to call her "darling" and "my dove."

ARISTE: What a joke! Just between us, your wife is,
Because of your cowardice, your ruler;
The only source of her power is your weakness;
You give her the prerogatives of a queen;
She doesn't give herself airs, you give them to her
By letting her lead you around by the nose.
Since everybody knows it, can't you just this once
Resolve to act as if you were a man?
To make your wife comply with your wishes
And find the courage to say "This is what I want"?
You're leading your daughter to sacrifice

For the crazy notions of your family,
And you'll deck out some fool with all your wealth
For braying six words of Latin: a pedant who,
At every turn, is hailed by your wife
As a wit, a great philosopher, a peerless
Creator of gallant poetry;
But everybody knows he's really none of that.
Come on. Again: It's a joke!
Your cowardice is truly laughable.

CHRYSALE: Yes, you're right; I see I'm wrong.
All right; now, brother, the time is right
To show some courage.

ARISTE: That's the spirit.

CHRYSALE: It's a shameful position
To be subordinate to a wife.

ARISTE: Well said.

CHRYSALE: She's taken advantage of my sweet disposition.

ARISTE: It's true.

CHRYSALE: Preyed upon my easy nature.

ARISTE: Without a doubt.

CHRYSALE: And today I'll let her know
That my daughter is my daughter, and that I am the master,
So she can marry the man I approve.

ARISTE: Now you're talking.

CHRYSALE: You know where Clitandre lives.
Bring him to me, brother, right away.

ARISTE: You bet I will.

CHRYSALE: I've taken it long enough. Now I'll show the world
What kind of man I am.

ACT THREE

Scene 1

PHILAMINTE: Ah! Let us sit here to listen at our leisure
To verses worth savoring word by word.

ARMANDE: I'm dying to hear them.

BÉLISE: I'm perishing myself.

PHILAMINTE (to Trippeldolt): To my mind, whatever comes from you is magical.

ARMANDE: For me, incomparable delight.

BÉLISE: It's a savory meal poured right in my ear.

PHILAMINTE: Don't frustrate such urgent desires.

ARMANDE: Hurry!

BÉLISE: Do it soon, and hasten our pleasures.

PHILAMINTE: Cool our impatience with your sonnet.

TRIPPELDOLT (to Philaminte): Alas, madame, it's just a newborn babe.
Its destiny assuredly is to touch you,
As it was in your court I just now birthed it.

PHILAMINTE: Its paternity suffices to endear it to me.

TRIPPELDOLT: Your approbation would serve to mother it.

BÉLISE: Such a wit he has!

Scene 2

PHILAMINTE (To Henriette, who is making for the exit): Hey! Why are you fleeing?

HENRIETTE: It's for fear of troubling such a pleasant get-together.

PHILAMINTE: Come along, with open ears,
And partake of the pleasure of hearing great marvels.

HENRIETTE: I don't know much about the beauties of his writing,
And besides, these matters of the mind are not my thing.

PHILAMINTE: That doesn't matter. And furthermore, I have something to tell you
Afterwards, a secret you need to be in on.

TRIPPELDOLT: Intellectual matters will not bite you,
And all you have to do is be your charming self.

HENRIETTE: I'm not interested in any of that, and I have no intention...

BÉLISE: Ah! Let's have a care for the newborn babe, if you please.

PHILAMINTE (to Lépine): Come on, boy, quickly: the vehicles of conversation.
(The lackey falls with the chair.)
The impertinence of the fellow! How could he have let it fall
If he had studied the law of gravity?

BÉLISE: Don't you see, dumb ox, that the cause of the fall
Was that you deviated from that fixed point
We call the center of gravity?

LÉPINE: I didn't notice it, madame, 'cause I was on the ground.

PHILAMINTE (To Lépine, who is exiting): The oaf!

TRIPPELDOLT: Lucky for him he wasn't made of glass.

ARMANDE: Ah! Wit for every occasion!

BÉLISE: It just keeps coming.

PHILAMINTE: Now serve us your sumptuous meal.

TRIPPELDOLT: For that great hunger my eyes have perceived
A dish of eight lines shouldn't tax me too much,
And I think that here I might do well
To add to the epigram or, if you will, the madrigal
The ragout of a sonnet that, in the view of a princess,
Was received as a delicate morsel.
It's thoroughly seasoned with Grecian salt,
And you'll find it, I trust, in very good taste.

ARMANDE: Ah! I have no doubt.

PHILAMINTE: Quickly, let us hear.

BÉLISE (interrupting each time he starts to read):
I already feel my heart surging with joy.
My love for poetry is all-consuming.
Especially when the lines take a romantic turn.

PHILAMINTE: If we speak all the time he won't be able to.

TRIPPELDOLT: SON...

BÉLISE: Silence, Henriette...

ARMANDE: Ah! Let him read.

TRIPPELDOLT:

SONNET TO PRINCESS URANIA
ON HER FEVER

Your vigilance is sleeping
To take in a new boarder,
A foe of the worst order.
No wonder you are weeping.

BÉLISE: Ah! Such a stunning start!

ARMANDE: Such romantic touches!

PHILAMINTE: Only he has the talent for such graceful verses!

ARMANDE: He had me at “vigilance is sleeping.”

BÉLISE: “To welcome a new boarder” is what got me.

PHILAMINTE: I like “boarder” and “order”;
Joining those two nouns works wonders.

BÉLISE: Let us lend our ears to the rest.

TRIPPELDOLT:

Your vigilance is sleeping
To take in a new boarder,
A foe of the worst order.
No wonder you are weeping.

ARMANDE: “Vigilance sleeping!”

BÉLISE: “Take in a new boarder!”

PHILAMINTE: “Boarder” and “order”!

TRIPPELDOLT:

Your condition, qua condition,
Goes downhill with every day.
While in your palace it doth play,
This fiendish foe that bodes perdition.

BÉLISE: Ah! Please be gentle, let me breathe.

ARMANDE: Give us, I beg you, some time for admiring.

PHILAMINTE: In these verses one feels, to the depths of one's soul,
The flow of something, I know not what, that makes one faint.

ARMANDE:

“Your condition, qua condition,
Goes downhill with every day.”

How well put “goes downhill” is,
And how witty the metaphor!

PHILAMINTE: “Your condition, qua condition”
Ah! Such admirable taste in this “qua condition”!
It is, to my thinking, simply priceless.

ARMANDE: I am utterly ravished by “qua condition”.

BÉLISE: I agree, “qua condition.” Is so felicitous.

ARMANDE: I wish I had done it.

BÉLISE: An entire play could be written about it.

PHILAMINTE: But do you really understand, as I do, its subtlety?

ARMANDE and BÉLISE: Oh! Oh!

PHILAMINTE: “Your condition, qua condition.”
It is not simply a condition that is her boarder,
It is the very essence of a condition.

“Your condition, qua condition.
Qua condition qua condition!”

This “qua condition” says much more than it may seem.
I don't know if everyone is like me,
But I hear in this phrase a million words of wisdom.

BÉLISE: It's true that its sum is worth more than its parts.

PHILAMINTE (to Trippeldolt): But, when you wrote this charming “qua condition,”
Were you fully aware of its sheer energy?
Did you dream of all that it says to us,
And did you intend to endow it with so much wit?

TRIPPELDOLT: Ha ha!

ARMANDE: I can't get "this foul intruder" out of my head.
This foul intruder of a fever, unjust, dishonest,
Who treats so ill its hostess.

PHILAMINTE: In sum, the quatrains are both admirable.
Now I beg you, let's hear the tercet.

ARMANDE: Oh, please, just once more, "qua condition."

TRIPPELDOLT: Your condition, qua condition.

PHILAMINTE, ARMANDE, and BÉLISE: "Qua condition"!

TRIPPELDOLT: Goes downhill with every day.

PHILAMINTE, ARMANDE, and BÉLISE: "Goes downhill with every day"!

TRIPPELDOLT: While in your palace it doth play...

PHILAMINTE, ARMANDE, and BÉLISE: A fever that plays!

TRIPPELDOLT: This fiendish foe that bodes perdition.

PHILAMINTE: "Bodes perdition!"

ARMANDE and BÉLISE: Ah!

TRIPPELDOLT:

Send it hence, this foul intruder,
Minion of the great deluder...

PHILAMINTE, ARMANDE, and BÉLISE: Ah!

TRIPPELDOLT:

Ere it sucks the life from you.
Take it to the royal bath,
Jump in, and then invite it too,
Then drown from it what breath it hath.

PHILAMINTE: Unsurpassable.

BÉLISE: I'm going to faint.

ARMANDE: I'll die of pleasure.

PHILAMINTE: Goosebumps all over, a thousand of them.

ARMANDE: "Take it to the royal bath..."

BÉLISE: "Jump in, and then invite it too..."

PHILAMINTE: “Then drown from it what breath it hath.”
With your own hands, right there, drown it in the baths.

ARMANDE: At every step in the poem you find a charming touch.

BÉLISE: You stroll in it and you’re ravished.

PHILAMINTE: You can’t avoid treading on beautiful things.

ARMANDE: All beautiful pathways strewn with roses.

TRIPPELDOLT: So the sonnet strikes you as...

PHILAMINTE: Admirable, new,
And nobody’s ever surpassed it for beauty.

BÉLISE (to *Henriette*): What! No emotion for such a reading!
Niece, you really are an odd duck.

HENRIETTE: Different strokes for different folks, Aunt Bélise,
And wit is in the eye of the beholder.

TRIPPELDOLT: Perhaps my poetry disturbed madame.

HENRIETTE: Not at all: I wasn’t listening.

PHILAMINTE: Oh, let’s hear the epigram.

TRIPPELDOLT:

UPON A VERMILLION-COLORED CARRIAGE
GIVEN TO A LADY WHO’S A FRIEND

PHILAMINTE: His titles are always so original.

ARMANDE: Their novelty presages scores of witty strokes.

TRIPPELDOLT: Love charged me so much to purchase its chain.....

PHILAMINTE, ARMANDE, and BÉLISE: Ah!

TRIPPELDOLT:

That my bank account felt a fantastic drain
And when you behold that sumptuous carriage,
Brocade and gold trim in a fabulous marriage
That astonishes the whole countryside,
And makes my Diana triumph like a glowing bride,...

PHILAMINTE: Ah! “my Diana!” Now that’s erudition for you.

BÉLISE: The allusion is darling; it’s priceless.

TRIPPELDOLT:

And when you behold that sumptuous carriage,
Brocade and gold trim in a fabulous marriage
That astonishes the whole countryside,
And makes my Diana triumph like a glowing bride,
Don’t say that it’s vermillion,
Say rather that it took me for a million.

ARMANDE: Oh! Oh! Oh! I didn’t expect that at all.

PHILAMINTE: Only he can write like that.

BÉLISE:

“Don’t say that it’s vermillion,
Say rather that it took me for a million.”

There’s a declension for you: a million, vermillion, for a million.

PHILAMINTE: I don’t know whether, from the moment I met you,
I understood the depths of your wit,
But now I admire globally your verses and your prose.

TRIPPELDOLT (to *Philaminte*): If you would care to show us something of yours,
We could admire it in return.

PHILAMINTE: I haven’t done any poetry, but I might hope
That soon I could show you, as a friend,
Eight chapters of the strategic plan for our academy.
Plato didn’t get so far along
When he wrote up his Republic;
But I want to push the idea to full effect,
Which in my prose on paper I’ve encompassed;
For truly I feel a strange resentment
At the wrong done to us when it comes to wit;
And I want to have revenge, for all of us,
For this lowly class to which men consign us,
To limit our talents to trivialities
And shut us off from deep enlightenment.

ARMANDE: It constitutes a great offense against our sex
To denigrate the force of our intelligence
To judge us by a skirt or by a scarf,
Or by the beauties of the latest fashion.

BÉLISE: This shameful prejudice must be eliminated,
And our intelligence no longer questioned.

TRIPPELDOLT: My respect for womankind is legendary,
And if I wax ecstatic for the brilliance of their eyes,
No less do I adore the brilliance of their minds.

PHILAMINTE: Our sex is grateful to you on this score;
But we want to show to certain intellectuals,
Conceited brains who treat us with disdain,
That women too can master all the disciplines,
And meet in learned conferences just like them
Or even better, interdisciplinarily
Mixing heightened language skills with higher science,
Unmasking nature with experiments in every parlor,
Joining every school of thought, espousing none.

TRIPPELDOLT: I'm particular, myself, to Peripateticism.

PHILAMINTE: I like Platonism for its abstractions.

ARMANDE: Epicurus is my style; he's so dogmatic.

BÉLISE: I'm all right with his little atoms,
But the void strikes me as hard to swallow,
So I far prefer subtle matter.

TRIPPELDOLT: Ah, Descartes! He's the man for lovers like me.

ARMANDE: I love his vortices.

PHILAMINTE: For me, his falling bodies.

ARMANDE: I can't wait for the opening of our conference,
And the stir we'll make with our first few discoveries.

TRIPPELDOLT: So much is expected of your brilliant wits;
Nature has few mysteries you will not clear up.

PHILAMINTE: I don't wish to brag, but I've already made one.
Yes, I saw clearly the men in the moon.

BÉLISE: I haven't yet seen any men, I don't think,
But I saw church steeples just as clearly as I see you.

ARMANDE: We shall probe not only the physical universe,
But grammar, history, poetry, morals, and politics.

PHILAMINTE: Some aspects of moral philosophy thrill us,
As in days of yore all the great minds were enamored of it,
But of all of them the stoics take the prize,
And I find nobody as charming as their sage.

ARMANDE: As for language, pretty soon we'll reveal our new rules,
And they're sure to make quite a splash.
Each of us has made a list of all the words we hate,
For good reasons or not, be they nouns or verbs;
And we've pooled our lists and made an oath
To abandon them forever.
And when we open our learned conference
We'll pronounce their death sentences,
And we'll purge them for good from all poetry and prose.

PHILAMINTE: But the finest project of our academy,
A noble undertaking that simply thrills me,
A glorious project that will bring us fame
Among all the great minds of posterity,
Is the suppression of all those filthy syllables
That lurk within much finer words, causing scandal:
Those eternal toys of fools of every era,
Those tired, stale jokes of our nastier comics,
Those founts of endless tasteless puns
Meant to offend the modesty of women.

ARMANDE: Damaging.

BÉLISE: Horrible

PHILAMINTE: ...for example.

TRIPPELDOLT: Those are certainly worthy projects!

BÉLISE: We'll show you our statutes when they're completed.

TRIPPELDOLT: They're sure to be both fine and wise.

ARMANDE: We shall be through our laws judges of all works,
Through our laws, prose or verse, all shall be submitted:
None shall have wit but we and our friends.

We'll search high and low for things to dislike,
And find nothing well written but whatever we write.

Scene 3

LÉPINE (*to Trippeldolt*): Monsieur, there's a man who's come to speak with you.
He's dressed in black and speaks very softly.

TRIPPELDOLT: It's a colleague of mine who has often urged me
To give him the honor of meeting you.

PHILAMINTE: A friend of yours is a friend of mine.
(*To Armande and Bélise*) Let's honor him at least with our wit.
(*To Henriette, who is leaving*) Whoa there! I told you quite clearly
That I need you.

HENRIETTE: But why?

PHILAMINTE: Don't worry, you'll find out soon enough.

TRIPPELDOLT: Here's the man who's dying to meet you.
In bringing him to you, I fear no blame,
Madame, for introducing to your home a common man.
He can hold his own against the finest wits.

PHILAMINTE: Since he's brought by you, he must be golden.

TRIPPELDOLT: He's deeply versed in the classics, madam,
And knows Greek as well as any man in France.

PHILAMINTE: Greek! My God, Greek! Sister, he knows Greek!

BÉLISE: Ah! Did you hear, niece, Greek!

ARMANDE: Greek! What a pleasure!

PHILAMINTE: What! Monsieur knows Greek! Ah! Allow me please,
Monsieur: for the love of Greek you should be kissed.

(*He kisses each one of them, but Henriette refuses.*)

HENRIETTE: You must excuse me, sir, I don't know Greek.

PHILAMINTE: I have the deepest respect for books in Greek.

VADIUS: I'm sure I don't deserve the warmth that greets me.
I fear, Madame, I've come to give you homage
But have interrupted some learned discourse.

PHILAMINTE: With Greek, Monsieur, you could never interrupt.

TRIPPELDOLT: His prose and his verse are equally fine.
If you like, perhaps he could show us something.

VADIUS: Authors often have the fault
Of tyrannizing conversations;
Bouncing from the palace to the market to salons and dinners
With their interminable boring readings.
As for me, I see nothing more doltish
Than a writer who peddles his wares everywhere,
Seizing the ears of all comers,
Making them the martyrs of his creative fires.
You'll never catch me indulging in such folly,
As I agree with a certain Greek
Who dogmatically forbids his fellow sages
From the unworthy pursuit of reading from their works.
Here's a little poem for young lovers
About which I'd like to hear your thoughts.

TRIPPELDOLT: The beauty of your poetry surpasses all others.

VADIUS: The Graces of Venus rule over yours.

TRIPPELDOLT: Words dance at your command.

VADIUS: Throughout your work there's both ethos and pathos.

TRIPPELDOLT: The style of your eclogues surpasses,
For sweet charm, both Theocritus and Virgil.

VADIUS: Your odes have a sweet, romantic, and noble air
That leaves poor Horace in the dust.

TRIPPELDOLT: Is there anything so lovely as your chansonnettes?

VADIUS: Have your sonnets ever been equaled?

TRIPPELDOLT: Anything as charming as your rondeaux?

VADIUS: Nothing so witty as your madrigals!

TRIPPELDOLT: Your special talent is for ballads.

VADIUS: Nobody can rhyme like you can.

TRIPPELDOLT: If only France would see your true worth...

VADIUS: If our age truly valued intelligence...

TRIPPELDOLT: ...you'd be paraded through the streets in a golden chariot.

VADIUS: ...every town would have a statue of you.
Ahem! This is a ballad, and I'd like you, in all candor,
To tell me...

TRIPPELDOLT: Have you seen a certain little sonnet
On the fever of Princess Urania?

VADIUS: Yes, I heard it read at a party yesterday.

TRIPPELDOLT: Do you know who wrote it?

VADIUS: No, but I know for sure
That his sonnet is totally worthless.

TRIPPELDOLT: Many people find it worthy through and through.

VADIUS: That may be, but still it's miserable,
And if you had read it you'd agree with me.

TRIPPELDOLT: Now there you're wrong, I'm quite sure, and I know
That very few writers are capable of such a sonnet.

VADIUS: God forbid I should ever write like that.

TRIPPELDOLT: I insist the poem's unsurpassable,
And my main reason is that I'm the author.

VADIUS: You?

TRIPPELDOLT: Me.

VADIUS: I don't know how this happened.

TRIPPELDOLT: I'm so sorry I was unable to please you.

VADIUS: I must have been distracted when I should have listened
Or maybe it was the fellow who read it who ruined the sonnet.
But let's drop this topic, and turn to my ballad.

TRIPPELDOLT: The ballad, I would say, is so yesteryear;
No longer the fashion, it reeks of olden days.

VADIUS: And yet, the ballad still pleases many people.

TRIPPELDOLT: That may be, but I still don't like it.

VADIUS: That doesn't detract from its true value.

TRIPPELDOLT: It is wildly popular with pedants.

VADIUS: Then how come you don't like it?

TRIPPELDOLT: Ascribing your traits to others is doltish.

VADIUS: Keep your name to yourself, you fool.

TRIPPELDOLT: Get out, you dunce, you waste of paper, ink, and time!

VADIUS: Get out, you street-corner barker!

TRIPPELDOLT: Get out, you cut-and-paste rhymer, you shameless plagiarist!

PHILAMINTE: Hey! Gentlemen, what do you think you're doing?

TRIPPELDOLT: Go on, you need to pay up for all the shameless thefts
You've made from the Greeks and Latins.

VADIUS: Go on, turn yourself in to the Academy of Letters
For the hash you made of the works of Horace.

TRIPPELDOLT: Remember how quickly your book dropped out of sight.

VADIUS: And you, your book was instantly remaindered.

TRIPPELDOLT: My name is made, you can't tarnish it.

VADIUS: Just wait 'til Kerns gets hold of you.

TRIPPELDOLT: You go to Kerns.

VADIUS: I'm rather pleased
That people see he treats me honorably.
He just gives me a few light whacks in passing;
While you, he never lets up on, always looking
For ways to shoot you down.

TRIPPELDOLT: And that's what does me honor.
You're just lumped in with the crowd;
He only needs one flick to make you crumple
And never feels the need to smack you more;
While me he rails at as a noble foe,
He needs to double down to beat me back,
Which shows he knows he's never quite defeated me.

VADIUS: My pen will show you how mighty I am.

TRIPPELDOLT: And mine will show you who's your daddy.

VADIUS: I challenge you in prose, in verse, in Greek and Latin.

TRIPPELDOLT: All right! You and me, one on one, at Barnes & Noble.

Scene 4

TRIPPELDOLT: Don't blame me, please, for getting so worked up.
It's your judgment, madame, that I'm defending:
Your love of the sonnet he had the gall to attack.

PHILAMINTE: I'll do my best to calm your breast.
Let's change the subject. Henriette, come here.
For some time I've been concerned
At your lack of intellectual curiosity;
But now I've found a way to stimulate it.

HENRIETTE: Don't bother yourself, not necessary.
Discourses of the learned sort are not my thing.
My taste in life is for the natural,
And you all take such pains to speak with wit.
I've absolutely no ambition for that life.
I'm quite happy, Mother, staying stupid;
And I far prefer talking like people talk
To torturing myself to speak bons mots.

PHILAMINTE: Yes, but that wounds me, and I'm not the sort
To allow my child to suffer such disgrace.
Facial beauty is a frail ornament,
A fleeting flower, a momentary sparkle
Belonging only to the epidermis;
Beauty of the mind is firm and permanent.
So I have long searched for an angle to give you
The beauty that the years cannot decay,
To penetrate you with the love of learning
So higher knowledge worms its way into you;
My wishes finally led me to the thought
Of tying you to a man whose mind is full;
And that man is here – monsieur, whom I've determined
To see as your spouse, your fate, my choice.

HENRIETTE: Me, Mother?

PHILAMINTE: Yes, you. Act like a fool, why don't you?

BELISE (to *Trippeldolt*): I understand you. Your eyes ask my consent
To engage elsewhere a heart that belongs to me.
Go on, I give you leave. I grant you this wedding.
It's splendid for your career.

TRIPPELDOLT (*to Henriette*): I don't know what to say, I'm so enraptured,
Madame, and this union I'm awarded makes me...

HENRIETTE: Hold on, Monsieur! It hasn't happened yet.
Don't be in such a hurry.

PHILAMINTE: Watch how you speak to him!
Don't you know that if...? Enough, you understand me.

(To Trissotin)

She'll behave. Come on, leave her alone.

Scene 5

ARMANDE: How brilliant Mother was to pull this off for you;
Her choice of a husband couldn't be more fabulous, and...

HENRIETTE: If it's such a hot pick, why not take it for yourself?

ARMANDE: It's to you, not me, that his hand was given.

HENRIETTE: I quit my claim to him for my big sister.

ARMANDE: If marriage had such appeal for me as you,
I'd accept your offer with delight.

HENRIETTE: If I, like you, had pedants on the brain,
I'd find him quite a catch.

ARMANDE: Still, though our tastes may differ, Sister,
We must obey our parents.
A mother has all power over us,
And all of your resistance is in vain.

Scene 6

CHRYSALE (*to Henriette, presenting Clitandre*):
Well, Daughter, I think you'll say my plan was brilliant.
Don't be so formal; take his hand in yours,
And take him into your very soul as the man
I want for you to be his wife.

ARMANDE: For this one, Sister, your leanings are strong enough.

HENRIETTE: We must obey our parents, Sister;
A father has all power over us.

ARMANDE: A mother has her share in our duty.

CHRYSALE: What's going on?

ARMANDE: I'm saying that it's clear to me
That here my mother and you are not together,
And it's another spouse...

CHRYSALE: Shut up, chatterbox.
Go philosophize your fill with her,
And don't you mess in my affairs.
Tell her what I think and warn her well
Not to come here to chew me out.
Go on, quick!

ARISTE: All right! It's a miracle!

CLITANDRE: I'm in heaven! What a happy ending! Sweet!

CHRYSALE: Go on, take her hand and leave us.
Take her to her room. Ah! The sweet caresses!
Boy, my heart is moved by all this love;
It brings back all the old juices,
And I see before me all my young loves.

ACT FOUR

Scene 1

ARMANDE: Yes, there was nothing keeping her mind in balance.
She made a show of her obedience.
She barely waited to get his order before her heart,
Right in front of me, leapt to him;
She seemed less to follow the will of a father
Than showing her defiance of the will of a mother.

PHILAMINTE: I'll show her whose laws respond to the wishes
Handed down by the court of reason,
And who should govern, her mother or her father,
The spirit or the body, form or matter.

ARMANDE: You were owed at least a visit.
That little nobody is quite presumptuous
To want to be your son-in-law despite you.

PHILAMINTE: He hasn't yet achieved his goal.
I once admired him, when he was courting you,
But by his actions he soon lost my favor.
He knew that, God be thanked, I enjoyed writing,
But never once did he ask to hear my work.

Scene 2

(Clitandre enters quietly, avoiding being seen.)

ARMANDE: I wouldn't stand for it, if I were you,
That Henriette would ever be his bride.
Of course it would be wrong to think that I
Am speaking here as a girl with a personal interest,
Or that the dirty trick he played on me
Created a secret spite deep inside my soul.
The heart is fortified against such blows
Through the solid succor of philosophy,
Which raises us above it all;
But treating you like that, that goes the limit.
It does you honor to deny his wishes,
As he's the kind of man you should detest
To my own knowledge, just between us two,
He never showed the least respect for you.

PHILAMINTE: The little dolt!

ARMANDE: Whatever fame your merit earned
His tongue was frozen: not a word of praise.

PHILAMINTE: The brute!

ARMANDE: And twenty times I read him new poems,
Fresh from your pen, which he never liked one bit.

PHILAMINTE: The snot-nosed brat!

ARMANDE: Sometimes we'd fight about your writing,
And you wouldn't believe the foolish things he said...

CLITANDRE: Whoa! Easy now, I beg you. A bit of charity,
Madame, or at least a bit of honesty.
What harm have I done to you? And what is my offense
To fire against me all your eloquence?
To try to destroy me, and take such pains
To make me hateful to people I need?
Come on, speak, why this awful rage?
I'd like Madame to be the judge.

ARMANDE: If I'm enraged, as has been charged,
I'd have no lack of motives.
You'd have deserved it, as first love
Creates such sacred rights on souls
To warrant loss of fortune, and even life
For making love to someone else.
There's no horror equal to changing vows;
The faithless heart is a moral monster.

CLITANDRE: Madame, do you call it infidelity
To do what you yourself so cruelly demanded?
All I did was obey the rules you set down
And if I offended you, you're the only cause.
From the first, your charms had all my heart.
Two years it burned with constant heat;
I spared no pains, duties, tributes, services,
All by way of loving sacrifice.
All my ardor, all my care, got me nowhere with you;
I found you opposed to my sweetest entreaties.
What you refused I offered to another.
You see: Madame, is it my fault or yours?
Did my heart run away, or is it you who pushed it?
Did I leave you, or did you send me away?

ARMANDE: Monsieur, do you call it opposing your wishes
To strip them of the parts that are vulgar
And to try to distill them to the purity
In which perfect love consists of beauty alone?
You couldn't keep your thoughts of me
Free and clear of the commerce of the senses.
And you had no taste for the sweetest appeal
Of the union of hearts without bodies.
You could only pine with a love that was gross;
With all the appurtenances of the union of matter;

And, to feed the fires ignited in you,
We'd need a marriage, and all that ensues.
Ah! What strange love! And how far the beautiful spirits
Are from burning with these earthly fires!
The senses have no part in all their loves,
And their loving fire wants to marry only their hearts;
It skips all the rest as a shameful thing.
It's a flame pure and simple, like celestial fire;
The sighs it creates are all chaste,
And there's no inclination to dirty desires.
Nothing impure is mixed in its conduct;
You love out of love, and nothing else.
The ecstasy is in and of the mind,
And you never even notice that you have a body.

CLITANDRE: I've noticed that, madame, unfortunately,
I have, you'll pardon the expression, a body as well as a soul,
I feel it hanging on so, I can't just let it go;
I can't get the hang of that sort of detachment;
Heaven has denied me your philosophy,
So my body and soul are always walking hand in hand.
There's nothing more lovely, as you have said,
Than those purified vows that hitch up two minds,
Those weddings of hearts and those sweet tender thoughts
So thoroughly stripped of all truck with the senses;
But that sort of love is too subtle for me;
I am a bit gross, as you have accused me;
I love with my whole self, and when it is returned
I want, I do confess, the entire person.
It's nothing to be ashamed of;
And, no offense to your noble sentiments,
I see in the world people fit in my pattern,
And that marriage is still in fashion.
And passes for a relationship that's decent and pleasant.
I wanted to be your husband,
But the liberty of harboring such a thought
Shouldn't have given you leave to act offended.

ARMANDE: Well, monsieur, well, since without listening to me
Your bestial feelings must be satisfied;
Since, to bind you to faithful love
You must have ties of flesh, carnal chains,

If my mother agrees, I've made up my mind
To consent to give you the thing in question.

CLITANDRE: It's too late, madame, another has taken the position;
It would be very bad form to repay her this way,
To abuse the safe harbor and wound the goodness
Where I fled to escape from your cruelty.

PHILAMINTE: Really, monsieur, did you count on my vote
When you pledged yourself to this other marriage?
And amidst your imaginings, do you know, if you please,
That I have another groom in mind for Henriette?

CLITANDRE: Oh! Madame, have a look at your choice, I beg you;
Expose me to less ignominy,
And don't condemn me to the shameful fate
Of becoming the rival of Trippeldolt.
The love of great minds, which in your book leaves me out,
Couldn't set me up against a less worthy adversary.
There are some (well, I'd say many) whom the wretched taste of today
Has given credit for being superior minds;
But Monsieur Trippeldolt hasn't managed to fool anyone;
They all see through the scribbling he bestows on us.
Outside these walls he's valued at his true worth.
What never fails to floor me is seeing you
Going in ecstasies over balderdash
That you'd deny was yours if you'd written it yourself.

PHILAMINTE: If you judge him so differently from us,
It's because we see him with different eyes than you.

Scene 3

TRIPPELDOLT: I've come to report some earthshaking news.
While we were sleeping, madame, we had a close call:
A nearby planet has traveled all that distance
And fallen right into our vortex;
And if it had encountered our earth on its way
It would have shattered to pieces like a glass.

PHILAMINTE: Hold that thought for another time,
Monsieur wouldn't make head or tails of it;

He swears his allegiance to ignorance
And hates above all the mind and knowledge.

CLITANDRE: The truth of that needs a bit of adjustment.

Let me explain, madame: I only hate
Knowledge and learning that screw people up.
These things are grand and beautiful in themselves,
But I'd rather be in the ranks of the ignorant
Than become a learned person like certain ones I know.

TRIPPELDOLT: For me, I don't believe, no matter what you say,
That knowledge could damage anything at all.

CLITANDRE: And I insist that in fact as well as theory,
Knowledge can produce humongous dolts.

TRIPPELDOLT: That's quite a paradox.

CLITANDRE: Though I'm not very clever,
Proving my point, I think, would be pretty easy.
Even if I couldn't find a rationale, I'm sure
I could find some prominent examples.

TRIPPELDOLT: Naming some wouldn't prove anything.

CLITANDRE: I wouldn't have to go far to make my case.

TRIPPELDOLT: I don't see any prominent examples.

CLITANDRE: I see them so well my eyes ache.

TRIPPELDOLT: I've always believed it was ignorance
That made great fools, not knowledge.

CLITANDRE: Your beliefs are all wrong, I guarantee you,
As a learned fool is more foolish than an ignorant fool.

TRIPPELDOLT: Common sense contradicts your maxims,
As "fool" and "ignorant" are synonymous terms.

CLITANDRE: If you'd care to look at common usage,
The connection is greater between "pedant" and "fool."

TRIPPELDOLT: Foolishness in the one manifests its purest state.

CLITANDRE: And study in the other enhances its nature.

TRIPPELDOLT: Knowledge has inherently an evident distinction.

CLITANDRE: Knowledge in a dolt is all the more galling.

TRIPPELDOLT: Ignorance must have great attraction for you,
Since you're so eager to fight for it.

CLITANDRE: If ignorance attracts me so strongly,
It's because certain scholars are up in my face.

TRIPPELDOLT: Those certain scholars could, if you knew them,
Be the equals of certain great men.

CLITANDRE: Yes, in the opinion of those certain scholars,
But not in the minds of certain folks.

PHILAMINTE: It seems to me, monsieur, that...

CLITANDRE: Oh, madame, if you please,
Monsieur is strong enough not to need reinforcements.
I've got enough with one rude assailant,
And if I'm defensive, it's only since I'm attacked.

ARMANDE: But the offensive sharpness of each reply
That you...

CLITANDRE: Another second? Then I quit the field.

PHILAMINTE: In scholarly discourse, combat is permissible
As long as there's no personal attack.

CLITANDRE: Huh? My God, in all this there's nothing he takes offense at;
He's a master at absorbing abuse
He's heard a lot worse about all his other attributes,
But his ego's untouched; he just laughs it all off.

TRIPPELDOLT: I'm untouched by this combat, but I'm not surprised
To hear monsieur support this proposition.
He's a man of the court, that's all I need to say.
The court, as we know, sets no store by the mind.
It's in its interest to foster ignorance,
So it's as a good courtier that he is defending it.

CLITANDRE: You've really got it in for our poor little royal court,
Whose misfortune is great that on a daily basis
All you intellectuals just grouse about it,
Blaming it for all of your problems,
Indicting it for its rotten taste.
It's not alone to blame for all of your flops.
Let me tell you, Monsieur Trippeldolt,
With all the respect to which your name is due,

That you would do well, your colleagues and you,
To speak of the court in more moderate tones;
If you look at it rightly, it's not quite so dumb
As all of you are pleased to imagine;
It has common sense in full view of all;
At the court, good taste can be cultivated,
And the collective brain-power there (and I'm not a flatterer)
Is worth all the obscure knowledge of pedantry.

TRIPPELDOLT: As to its great taste, monsieur, we see its effects.

CLITANDRE: And where do you see, monsieur, that its judgment is wrong?

TRIPPELDOLT: What I see, monsieur, for example in the sciences
There's Boseau and Snookibus, national treasures,
But all of their merit, which is plain to see,
Attracts neither attention nor subsidy from the court.

CLITANDRE: I see your chagrin, and how modesty forbids you
From including yourself in the list;
And, not to speak of yourself,
What do they do for the country, your clever heroes?
How does their writing serve the State
By accusing the court of horrible injustice
And complain everywhere that their distinguished names
Have failed to attract either favor or funding?
Their brains are really vital to France!
It seems to these pinheads that since they've been published
In handsome coffee-table editions
Now they're important national figures
Who forge the destiny of crowned heads with their pens;
Who ought, for providing the slimmest of volumes
To have pensions come flowing into their accounts;
Who have the eyes of the universe fixed on them;
Whose glorious names ring out everywhere.
In science they're doubtless great prodigies
For memorizing what had been written before,
For carrying around, for thirty years, eyeballs and eardrums;
For devoting nine or ten thousand all-nighters
Wallowing in Greek and Latin;
And for cramming their brains with a murky jumble
Of all the old gobbledygook that molders in books;
People habitually drunk on their knowledge,

Rich above measure in senseless babble,
Devoid of common sense, endlessly awkward,
But so full of effrontery and ridicule
That they bring ill repute to knowledge and the mind.

PHILAMINTE: Your anger's overwhelming, you're so carried away,
But it's clear that what's riling you
Is the thought that you're the rival to such a...

Scene 4

JULIEN: The scholar who recently paid you a visit,
And to whom I have the honor of serving as valet,
Exhorts you, madame, to peruse this note.

PHILAMINTE: No matter how important what I'm being asked to read,
Let me tell you, my friend, that you're acting like a fool,
Butting in when I am engaging in discourse;
And you really should address yourself to the help,
And be introduced by a valet with some manners.

JULIEN: I'll note that down, madame, in my memoirs.

PHILAMINTE: "Madame, Trippeldolt has been bragging that he's going to marry your daughter. I warn you that his entire philosophical project is to tap your bank account, and that you'd better not conclude this marriage before reading the poem I'm writing about him. While I'm adding the finishing touches, by which I will depict him in his true colors, I am sending you Horace, Virgil, Terence, and Catullus, with marginal notes and underlinings where I show you all the passages he's pirated."

That's it! This splendid wedding I've promised myself
Attacked by so many enemies.
And this massing of forces today leads me
To confound all this envy with a lightning strike
So it feels that all the effort it's taken
To prevent, will actually hasten the event.
Report all that right away to your master
And tell him that I so want him to know
How much store I set by his noble warnings
And how much I deem them worthy of heeding.
This very night I shall marry my daughter to Monsieur Trippeldolt.
(*To Clitandre*) You, monsieur, as a friend of the family
Can sign their contract as a witness;

And I warmly invite you to attend.
Armande, have someone go fetch the justice of the peace,
And don't forget to notify Henriette about it too.

ARMANDE: To notify my sister there's really no need.
I'm sure that monsieur will take good care of that.
In a flash he'll be running to bring her the news
And influence her heart to rebel against you.

PHILAMINTE: We'll see which one has more power over her,
And whether I can drag her back to her duty.

(Exit.)

ARMANDE: I'm so sorry, monsieur, that with all of your plans
Things aren't turning out as you had hoped.

CLITANDRE: I'm going now, madame, to bend all of my might
To ensure that you won't need to feel that regret.

ARMANDE: I fear that your efforts will prove to be fruitless.

CLITANDRE: It could be that your fear will be baseless.

ARMANDE: I truly hope so.

CLITANDRE: I do believe it,
And know I can count on your help.

ARMANDE: Yes, I'll do my all to be of service.

CLITANDRE: And be sure that I'll never forget it.

Scene 5

CLITANDRE: Without your support, monsieur, I'm a goner:
Madame your wife has rejected my suit.
She's dead set on having Trippeldolt as her son-in-law.

CHRYSALE: Oh no! Some madness has surely seized her.
Why the hell want this Monsieur Trippeldolt?

ARISTE: It's because he's distinguished himself rhyming in Latin
That he's taken the lead on his rival.

CLITANDRE: She wants the wedding this very evening.

CHRYSALE: This evening?

CLITANDRE: This evening.

CHRYSALE: Then this evening my will
Is to thwart her and marry you two.

CLITANDRE: To draw up the contract she's sent for the J.P.

CHRYSALE: And I'll have him draw up the one that I want.

CLITANDRE: And madame (Henriette) will be informed by her sister
Of the marriage to which she must pledge her heart.

CHRYSALE: And I will command, with overwhelming force,
That she give her hand to this other union.
Hah! I'll show them, when it comes to laying down the law
If there's any other master in this house than moi.
(*To Henriette*) We'll be back. Wait for us.
Forward, follow me, brother, and you too, son-in-law.

HENRIETTE (*To Ariste*): You've got to keep him in this mood, I beg you.

ARISTE: I'll do anything for you two.

CLITANDRE: Whatever promises of help we get,
My fervent hope, madame, is for your heart.

HENRIETTE: My heart? You can be sure of it.

CLITANDRE: Nothing makes me happier than having its support.

HENRIETTE: You see what knots they're trying to bind it with.

CLITANDRE: As long as it beats for me, I've nothing to fear.

HENRIETTE: I'll try everything to fulfill our sweetest desire,
And if all my efforts don't give me to you,
I will shut myself in a convent,
Which will keep me from going to anyone else.

CLITANDRE: May God on high protect me now
From receiving this proof of your love.

ACT FIVE

Scene 1

HENRIETTE: It's about the marriage that my mother is planning
That I wanted to speak with you, monsieur, one on one.
I think, for all the hubbub that's beset our home,
That I can still make you listen to reason.
I know you think that with my wedding vows
I'll bring you a whopping dowry;
But money, which so many folks make a fuss over,
For a true philosopher has little appeal;
So disdain for earthly goods and frivolous fortunes
Should be seen in your deeds, not just heard from your lips.

TRIPPELDOLT: But none of that speaks to what charms me in you;
Your dazzling features, eyes piercing yet sweet,
Your grace and your aura, those are the goods, the treasures
That attracted my yearnings, my wishes, my heart.
Those are the only jewels that I love.

HENRIETTE: I am much indebted for your generous devotion,
This kindly love is somewhat confusing,
And I regret, monsieur, that I can't return it.
I admire you as much as anyone can,
But there is an impediment to loving you.
A heart, as you know, cannot divide in two,
And Clitandre is already the master of mine.
I know that he's so much less worthy than you,
That I'm really no good at choosing a spouse,
That with all of your talents you really would please me;
I see that I'm wrong, but I simply can't help it,
And all that my reasoning can do for me
Is anger me at myself for such blindness.

TRIPPELDOLT: The gift of your hand, which I've been urged to seek,
Will win me the heart now owned by Clitandre;
Through a thousand sweet attentions I believe I can hope
To find the key to open up your heart.

HENRIETTE: No. My soul is attached to its original vows,
And cannot be swayed, monsieur, by all your attentions.
Freely I dare to explain myself here,
And nothing I'll say should shock you.

This passionate feeling that swells in the heart
Has nothing to do with merit.
Caprice is a part of it, and when someone pleases us
It's often we have no idea why it's so.
If I loved, monsieur, by choice and through wisdom
You'd have all my heart and my care;
But you see, love is governed otherwise.
Leave me, I beg you, to my blindness,
And do not participate in this violence
Being planned for you: to force me to obey.
As a good man, you won't rely
On the power my parents have over me.
How awful it would be to destroy one you love:
To win a heart via any means but appealing to itself.
Do not push my mother to attempt
To exercise her right to overpower my wishes.
Retract your love for me, and bring to another
The bounties of a heart as worthy as yours.

TRIPPELDOLT: And how can this heart make you happy?
Impose on it some laws that it's able to obey.
Is it able to cease to love you?
Only, madame, if you cease to be so lovable,
And to beam from your eyes such celestial appeals...

HENRIETTE: Hey! Monsieur, that's enough of your bull.
You've got all of your Phyllises, your Irises, your Phoebes
You find so irresistible in your poetry
For whom you swear so much loving fidelity...

TRIPPELDOLT: That's my brain speaking there, it is not my heart.
I'm in love with them only as a poet;
In reality I love the adorable Henriette.

HENRIETTE: Oh, please, monsieur...

TRIPPELDOLT: If that should offend you,
Be prepared for unceasing offense.
My passion, 'til now shining on unseeing eyes,
Fixes its desires upon you forever.
Nothing can stop my amorous desires,
And even if your beauties condemn my efforts,
I cannot refuse the support of a mother
Attempting to crown my urgent flame,

And, provided I obtain a goal so enchanting
Provided I have you, it doesn't matter how.

HENRIETTE: But you should know that you risk a bit more than you think
When you're willing to violate a heart;
That you might have a problem, to speak very frankly,
If you marry a girl against her wishes,
As she might resort, in defying her restraints,
To those measures every husband must dread.

TRIPPELDOLT: A threat such as that doesn't faze me;
A philosopher must be ready for anything.
Spared by his reasoning from all vulgar weaknesses,
He rises above all that sort of thing,
And keeps himself from allowing any hint of bother
From any circumstance that's out of his control.

HENRIETTE: In truth, monsieur, you amaze me.
I didn't know that philosophy,
For all its evident wonders, could teach a man
To bear so constantly disasters.
This firmness of mind, so special in you,
Entitles you to get abundant cause to display it,
To have a worthy woman who would take
Continual loving care to let you show it to the world.
But as, to tell the truth, I'd never think myself
The right one to give it all the fame it merits,
I leave it to someone else, and swear to you
That I renounce the prize of seeing you as my spouse.

TRIPPELDOLT: We'll soon see how this business will end;
The justice of the peace will finish it.

Scene 2

CHRYSALE: Ah, daughter, I'm so glad to see you.
Come along, it's time to fulfill your obligations
And subjugate your wishes to the will of your father.
My wish is to teach your mother how to live;
And, to defy her more starkly, voilà, in her face,
Martine, whom I have re-hired to ply her craft herein.

HENRIETTE: Praiseworthy resolutions, father!

Now keep yourself in this frame of mind; don't change.

Keep your willpower firm

Resist all appeals to your good nature.

Don't give in, and do what you must

To keep mother from winning over you.

CHRYSALE: What! Do you take me for a limp noodle?

HENRIETTE: Heaven forbid!

CHRYSALE: Beg pardon. Am I some kind of fool?

HENRIETTE: I'm not saying that.

CHRYSALE: Do you think me incapable

Of the firm positions of a reasonable man?

HENRIETTE: No, father.

CHRYSALE: Is it that I don't have, at this stage of my life,

The brains to be master in my own house?

HENRIETTE: Oh but you do.

CHRYSALE: And that I'm so weak-spirited

That I let my wife lead me around by the nose?

HENRIETTE: Oh, no, father.

CHRYSALE: Yeah? What is it then?

I find it odd that you speak to me this way.

HENRIETTE: If I've disturbed you, I really didn't mean to.

CHRYSALE: This is my castle. My will herein must be obeyed in every respect.

HENRIETTE: Very well, father.

CHRYSALE: No-one but me can give an order here.

HENRIETTE: You're absolutely right.

CHRYSALE: It's I who hold the title "head of the family."

HENRIETTE: I'm with you there.

CHRYSALE: I'm the one who marries off my daughter.

HENRIETTE: Oh yes.

CHRYSALE: It's God who gave me total power over you.

HENRIETTE: Who would deny it?

CHRYSALE: And, to take a spouse,
I'll have you know that it's your sire
You must obey, and not your dam.

HENRIETTE: Oh me, you're touching there on my fondest hopes.
Make us obey your orders, that's all I want.

CHRYSALE: We'll see about my wife, that rebel in our midst...

CLITANDRE: Here she is, coming with the justice of the peace.

CHRYSALE: Everyone back me up.

MARTINE: Leave it to me, and I'll be sure
To egg you on, if that's what it takes.

Scene 3

PHILAMINTE (to the JP): Couldn't you change your primitive style
And draw us up a contract worded more elegantly?

JUSTICE OF THE PEACE: Our style is okee-dokee, and I would be playing the fool,
Madame, to try to change a single word of it.

BÉLISE: Ah! Barbarism in the very heart of France!
Couldn't you at least, as a favor, monsieur genius,
In place of Euros, pounds, or francs,
Express the dowry for us in drachmas and obols,
With references to several Olympian gods?

JUSTICE OF THE PEACE: You want me to...? Madame, if I were to grant your wishes,
I'd be the butt of the jokes of all my colleagues.

PHILAMINTE: It's useless to complain about his barbarism.
All right monsieur; here's your table, sit and write.
(*Noticing Martine*) Ah! Ah! The impudence to dare to show her face!
Why, pray tell, is she back, flouncing about my house?

CHRYSALE: I'll tell you why when we have time, by and by,
But now we've got more pressing matters to conclude.

JUSTICE OF THE PEACE: Shall we proceed to the contract? Then where is the bride?

PHILAMINTE: I'm marrying off my younger daughter.

JUSTICE OF THE PEACE: All right.

CHRYSALE: Yes, there she is, monsieur. Her name is Henriette.

JUSTICE OF THE PEACE: Very well. And her intended?

PHILAMINTE: The husband I'm giving her is monsieur. (*indicating Trippeldolt*)

CHRYSALE: And the one that I, the party of the first part,
Wish her to marry is monsieur... (*indicating Clitandre*)

JUSTICE OF THE PEACE: Two grooms? That's beyond the customary number.

PHILAMINTE: Why have you stopped?
Write it down, write it down, monsieur, Trippeldolt for my son-in-law.

CHRYSALE: For my son-in-law, write it down, write it down, monsieur: Clitandre.

JUSTICE OF THE PEACE: Let's try to get together, people. Use mature judgment,
And try to agree who will be your son-in-law.

PHILAMINTE: Do as I say, do as I say, monsieur, put down my choice.

CHRYSALE: Listen to me, listen to me, monsieur, read my lips.

JUSTICE OF THE PEACE: Tell me which of you two I should obey.

PHILAMINTE (to Chrysale): So! You're determined to oppose my wishes.

CHRYSALE: I can't allow a man to seek my daughter's hand
Only for the wealth he sees in my household.

PHILAMINTE: Really? Somebody here cares about your wealth?
And that would be a concern worthy of a scholar?

CHRYSALE: Bottom line: for her husband I have chosen Clitandre.

PHILAMINTE: And for her husband here's who I have chosen.
My choice is final, it's a done deal.

CHRYSALE: Yeah, you're carrying on here like some sort of queen.

MARTINE: It ain't for the woman to give orders, and I'm down with
The man, no nevermind what, bein' on top,

CHRYSALE: Well said.

MARTINE: Fire me a hundred times, if you like,
Still the hen don't sing before the cock.

CHRYSALE: No doubt about it.

MARTINE: And everybody gits a big ole guffaw outta the house
Where the wife wears the pants.

CHRYSALE: It's true.

MARTINE: If I had a husband, I tell you,
I'd want him to show he had big ones.
I don't want him acting like no rodeo clown;
And if I got it in mind to pull his chain,
If I chewed him out, I'd say he oughta
Slap me around til I lowered by voice.

CHRYSALE: Now you're talking.

MARTINE: You got your head on your shoulders, sir,
To git for your daughter a good-lookin' stud.

CHRYSALE: Right.

MARTINE: Why the hell would you turn down Clitandre?
And why the hell, if you don't mind my askin',
Stick her with a pantywaist who's all the time spoutin' Shakespeare?
She needs a husband, not a perffessor;
And since she don't want to learn any Grease or Latin,
She flat-out don't need Monsieur Trippeldolt.

PHILAMINTE: It's a trial, but we must bear all her nonsense.

MARTINE: Book-men are only good for preaching from a pulpit;
For my husband, as I've said a thousand times,
I would never choose no brainiac.
Brains ain't what you need around the house,
And books don't mix with marriage;
If I ever marry, I only want a man
Who don't know an A from a B (beg pardon, madame),
And would only be a professor in how to please a wife.

PHILAMINTE: Is it over? Have I heard enough, patiently enough,
From your worthy spokesperson?

CHRYSALE: She spoke the truth.

PHILAMINTE: And now, to cut short this argument,
My wishes must be carried out absolutely.
Henriette and monsieur will be married immediately;
I have spoken, I order it, don't answer back;
If you've given your word to Clitandre,
Fulfill it by giving him the hand of her elder sister.

CHRYSALE: Well, there's a way out of this predicament.
What do you think? You agree?

HENRIETTE: Aaaaah! Father!

CLITANDRE: Oh, monsieur!

BÉLISE: I could propose a solution
That might very well please him more;
But we'd have to establish a type of love
As pure as the morning star.
We'd have to resolve the mind/body dualism
To welcome the mind and banish the other.

Scene 4

ARISTE: I'm so sorry to disturb this joyous ceremony
With the sorrow I must bring into this place.
These two letters make me the bearer of double sad tidings
And I feel profoundly the pain that I bring you.
The one for you (Philaminte) comes from your lawyer
The other, for you (Chrysale) comes from Lyon.

PHILAMINTE: What news is so sad
That it's worth bothering us now?

ARISTE: When you read this letter you will know.

PHILAMINTE: "Madame, I have prevailed upon your brother-in-law to bring you this letter,
which will tell you what I did not dare tell you myself. The great neglect you have shown for
your business affairs was the reason why the clerk of the special master in your case did not
alert you, and the judgment, which you should have won, has gone totally against you."

CHRYSALE: You've lost your lawsuit!

PHILAMINTE: Don't make such a fuss!
I'm not at all disheartened by this loss.
Come on, try to display a soul that's not so common
And brave the material shocks of fortune.

"The lack of care that you have shown has cost you four hundred thousand Euros, which must be
paid, plus expenses, and that's your sentence by order of the court."

Sentence! This usage of a noble word is shocking;
It's only appropriate for criminals.

ARISTE: You're right, it's wrong,
And you've got reason to protest.
It should have said that you're kindly entreated
By order of the court to pay immediately
Four hundred thousand Euros plus expenses.

PHILAMINTE: Let's look at the other.

CHRYSALE: "Monsieur, the friendship that binds me to your brother makes me take an interest in everything that concerns you. I know that you have placed all your assets in the hands of Monsieur Bugdov and Monsieur Baggs, and I must inform you that on the very same day they both filed for bankruptcy."

Oh my God! Just like that, my entire fortune lost!

PHILAMINTE: Oh, don't make such a vulgar fuss! Really, all of that means nothing.
A true philosopher would never mourn the loss of things,
For whatever he loses, he still retains his self.
Let's finish our business, and quit your wailing.
(Indicating Trippeldolt) His richness is enough both for him and for us.

TRIPPELDOLT: No, madame, stop pushing this business.
I can see that everyone opposes this marriage,
And I would never desire to force anyone.

PHILAMINTE: This thought came to you rather suddenly!
It follows on the heels of our misfortune.

TRIPPELDOLT: I've finally had enough of this resistance
I'd rather take a pass on all this bother,
And just don't want a heart not freely given.

PHILAMINTE: I see; I see you now, and it isn't flattering:
What 'til now I had refused to believe.

TRIPPELDOLT: You can see in me whatever you like
And I don't much care how you take it;
But I'm not the sort of man to take the insults
Of the offensive rebuffs that now I wash my hands of;
I insist on being treated with more deference,
And to those who won't comply: Kiss off! *(Exit.)*

PHILAMINTE: He truly revealed his mercenary soul!
What he just did so little befits a philosopher!

CLITANDRE: I don't claim to be one of those, but in the end,
Madame, I ally myself with your future;

And I stand forth to offer you, along with my self,
Whatever wealth my future may bring me.

PHILAMINTE: Your generous offer is very endearing;
Your reward is receiving your amorous wish.
Yes, monsieur, I give you Henriette, whom you've eagerly...

HENRIETTE: No, mother, I've changed my mind.
Permit me to resist your will.

CLITANDRE: What! You're opposed to my happiness?
And it's now, when everyone agrees...

HENRIETTE: I know how little wealth you have, Clitandre,
And I've always wanted you for my husband,
When by satisfying my sweetest wishes
I could see that the wedding would set you up;
But now that we've suffered such reversals,
I cherish you so much that, in this awful situation,
I refuse to let you bear our adversity.

CLITANDRE: Any fate with you is totally agreeable;
Any fate without you entirely unbearable.

HENRIETTE: Love, in its delirium, always talks like that.
Let's avoid the cares that regret may bring.
Nothing would erode the warmth of the tie that binds us
So much as the worrisome lack of basic human needs,
And often couples begin to accuse each other
For all the dark distress that supplants their love.

ARISTE: Is that the only motive – what we just heard –
That makes you resist this marriage with Clitandre?

HENRIETTE: If not for that, you'd see me running to his arms.
I only spurn his hand because I cherish him so.

ARISTE: Then let's get ready for a wedding feast.
What I brought you was bogus news;
It was a stratagem, a surprising trap
That I wanted to try to serve your loves,
To disillusion my sister-in-law, and let her know
What her philosopher was capable of when put to the test.

CHRYSALE: Praise God!

PHILAMINTE: It warms my heart
To think of the grief of that cowardly deserter
That's the punishment for his lowly avarice,
To see the rich joy of the wedding celebration.

CHRYSALE: I knew all along that you'd marry her.

ARMANDE: So to satisfy their wishes you sacrifice me!

PHILAMINTE: You're not being sacrificed at all;
And you have the solace of philosophy
So serenely you can watch the fulfillment of their love.

BÉLISE: He'll have quite a struggle ripping me from his heart.
So often men marry out of sudden despair
And at the end of their life wonder "Where is she? Oh, where?"

CHRYSALE: All right, monsieur, follow my orders explicitly
And draw up the contract precisely as I have decreed.

FIN

In Review: *The Beau's Lesson* by Pierre de Marivaux. Translated by Tom Weber. Middletown, DE: Createspace Independent Publishing Platform, 2017. pp. vii + 100.

Reviewed by Daniel Smith

The Beau's Lesson is Tom Weber's excellent new translation of Marivaux's *Le Petit-maître corrigé* (1734). Weber was inspired to translate the play after seeing a well-received production at the Comédie-Française in the 2016-2017 season. The book includes a helpful preface that discusses translator's choices, historical context, and the potential resonance of the play for the twenty-first century.

Weber's preface offers some information on Marivaux's reception in France, and on Marivaux's style. His strategies as a translator parallel those of others who have translated Marivaux into English. Marivaux's work has previously been translated into English by scholars and by theatre practitioners. Three full-length plays in particular have received multiple English translations: *The Triumph of Love*; *The Game of Love and Chance*; and *La Double Inconstance* (variously translated as *Double Inconstancy*, *Double Infidelity*, and *Changes of Heart*). *Seven Comedies by Marivaux* (1968), translated by Oscar Mandel and Adrienne S. Mandel, focuses mainly on full-length plays, including *The Game of Love and Chance* and *Double Infidelity*.²¹ Claude Schumacher's collection *Marivaux: Plays* (1988) combines five full-length plays with five one-act plays.²² The translations collected by Schumacher are by British translators, and are not often produced in the United States. Playwright Timberlake Wertenbaker has published three translations of Marivaux plays: *False Admissions*, *Successful Strategies*, and *La Dispute* (1989).²³ James Magruder has translated *The Triumph of Love* and later adapted his translation as the book of a Broadway musical (1997).²⁴ Stephen Wadsworth's translations of the three best-known Marivaux plays are the most frequently produced by U.S. theatre companies; Wadsworth is also a theatre director and has directed his own translations.²⁵ Another director/translator who has worked on Marivaux is Samuel Buggeln; his translation of *The School for Mothers* appears in *The Mercurian* (in the same volume as my own translation of *Love in Disguise*).²⁶

Le Petit-maître corrigé is among the minority of Marivaux's plays in that it premiered at the Comédie Française, rather than the Comédie Italienne. Traces of Marivaux's previous work in the commedia dell'arte aesthetic can be observed mostly in the characters of servants. The play presents the story of

²¹ Marivaux, *Seven Comedies by Marivaux*. Ed. Oscar Mandel, trans. Oscar Mandel and Adrienne S. Mandel (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968).

²² Marivaux, *Plays*. Ed. Claude Schumacher. (London: Methuen Drama, 1988).

²³ Marivaux, *Three Plays: False Admissions, Successful Strategies, and La Dispute*. Trans. Timberlake Wertenbaker (Bath: Absolute Press, 1989).

²⁴ James Magruder, trans. *Three French Comedies*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996). Magruder also wrote a fascinating article on translating Marivaux. See James Magruder, "Love Has Entered My Vocabulary: A Cautionary Tale" in *Dramaturgy in American Theatre: A Sourcebook*, ed. Susan Jonas, Geoff Proehl, and Michael Lupu (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1997). Magruder's attitude toward the opportunities of translating undiscovered classics is similar to Weber's.

²⁵ Stephen Wadsworth, trans. *Marivaux: Three Plays* (Lyme, NH: Smith and Kraus, 1999).

²⁶ See *The Mercurian* volume 4, number 1 (Spring 2012).

the sensible Hortense and the foppish Rosimond, who meet as parties of an arranged marriage. Rosimond makes no effort to court Hortensia, remaining aloof as though the marriage is a mere formality. Hortense refuses to marry him until his manners improve. Their servants Marton and Frontin function as confidants, and they try to help Rosimond's mother (the Marquise) and Hortense's father (the Count, named Chrisalde in the original) to guide the central couple toward wedded bliss. Meanwhile, the coquette Dorimène and the rake Dorante arrive to complicate matters. Rosimond discovers that he prefers Hortense to Dorimène, but sends Dorante to court her in his place. Dorante and Dorimène take advantage of the situation, attempting their own flirtations with the central couple. Eventually Rosimond overcomes these obstacles, announces that he has changed his ways, and issues a more sincere proposal of marriage to Hortense. She accepts.

Weber notes that this is “a straight translation” and identifies “the intent of a line and its playability” as his main criteria in making decisions (iv). Translators of Marivaux face particular challenges with regard to language, as Marivaux's characters are often invested in describing nuances of emotion. This style has come to be known as *marivaudage*, which was initially a negative descriptor but has been reclaimed as positive by Marivaux scholars. Like other translators of Marivaux, Weber appreciates the playful qualities of the source material, especially the fast tonal and tactical shifts employed by the characters.

Right off the bat, the title includes a complicated vocabulary challenge. The French *petit-maitre* is an aristocratic character type that combines a love of fashion with a disdain for domesticity, embracing libertine sexual mores in a way that makes him something of a fop and something of a rake. The closest English translation is probably “fop.” I like Weber's strategy of using the more neutral “Beau” in the title, though he does use “fop” and “foppish” at other points in the script. *The Beau's Lesson* offers a subtle nod to Restoration Comedy (Farquhar's *The Beaux' Stratagem*) and “Lesson” captures the idea of “corrigé” nicely. A different translator might have titled an English-language version *The School for Fops*, inviting comparison to Molière and Sheridan.

The linguistic register offers a nice balance of historical and contemporary. Diction suggests historical distance, but vocabulary is not archaic. Characters maintain a formality of discourse that is occasionally broken up for humorous purposes. After a long list of Rosimond's positive qualities, Marton concludes “And taking him all together, his only flaw is that he's ridiculous” (3). Weber translates “amourette” as “crush,” using accessible modern language. In contrast, he translates “maraud” as “rascal,” which feels somewhat more distant. Weber has a good ear for this temporal back-and-forth; as a reader I noticed these choices, but did not find them distracting. A particularly felicitous choice is the repeated metaphor of “a kind of a wisp of love” (9) that is later developed as “a wisp will blow away” (11). Another playful choice is to translate “amour” and “folie” as “lovingness” and “foolishness” (34), creating a stronger connection between these words in English by matching their syllable lengths and endings.

Character voice is a definite strength of this translation. Each character has a clear and distinctive way of speaking, suggesting solid choices for actors. The clever servant roles tend to employ more accessible language, and sometimes comment on the historical period. For example, Frontin calls a

love letter a “billy-doo,” mispronouncing the French billet-doux (17). Frontin’s speech tends toward either short, choppy phrases or overlong, breathless sentences, and Weber captures these rhythms well. Marton speaks intimately with some characters and formally with others, and she gets some great asides. Dorimène is a delightful coquette with some melodrama villain undertones: “I love upsetting people’s plans, it’s my hobby; especially when I upset them to my advantage” (39).

With its period setting and cast of eight, *The Beau’s Lesson* would be an especially good addition to college and university theatre seasons. Six of the eight characters could be played as college-aged, and the play offers more and stronger roles for women than some other period pieces. The complexity of tactics would also provide a productive challenge for young actors, particularly in scenes involving Dorante and Dorimène.

With its fortuitous turns of phrase, elegance of style, and clarity of character voices, Tom Weber’s translation is a welcome addition to the canon of Marivaux plays in English.

Daniel Smith is Assistant Professor of Theatre Studies at Michigan State University. His research interests include seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French theatre, history of sexuality, and translation studies. His translation of Marivaux’s *Love in Disguise* and co-translation of Carlo Gozzi’s *The Serpent Lady* have previously appeared in *The Mercurian*. He also collaborated with Constance Congdon on her adaptation of *The Imaginary Invalid* by Molière (Broadway Play Publishing, 2016). Dan is currently working on a book manuscript, tentatively titled *Dramaturgies of Translation: History, Culture, and Style*.

In Review: *Contemporary French Plays*, Edited and translated by Chris Campbell. Oberon Books, 2017. Pp. 200. ISBN 978-1-78682-072-3

Reviewed by Amelia Parenteau

Campbell's collection presents four plays that constitute a sliver of the breadth of contemporary French theater. As Clare Finburgh writes in her judicious introduction, "[T]oday's [French] theatrical landscape tends to be characterized by shows that either feature virtually no text, or text that is collectively written by members of the creative team." And yet, individual playwrights are still sought and produced by some of the leading theaters in the country, despite being too often overshadowed by the big name auteur directors who earn international renown.

The collection starts with Rémi de Vos' 2006 *Till Death (Till Death Us Do Part)*, a rambling farce that resembles a much peppier version of a Martin McDonagh play. *Till Death* is followed by Magali Mougel's 2011 *Erwin Motors (Erwin Motor, dévotion)*, a poetic play, rife with sexual undertones, reminiscent of *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*. Next, we have Lancelot Hamelin's 2007 *Alta Villa (ALTA VILLA contrepoint)*, a "personal is political" play about the Algerian War, finally followed by Adeline Picault's 2008 *Bobin and Mikado (Bobbin et Mikado)*, a *Jules and Jim* love triangle, shot through with tragedy. With this sequence, Campbell creates a light-hearted frame to surround the more emotionally and structurally complicated middle works in the volume.

Traditionally, as Finburgh explains, "French playwriting tends to foreground form, [using] dissolute poetic fragments, [privileging] research into formal possibility." These plays, perhaps with the exception of *Alta Villa*, foreground story, falling into a more Anglo tradition of playwriting and storytelling, delving into emotions rather than intellect. This collection, thereby, makes an excellent primer for exporting French plays to the international market, offering uniquely French voices in a format that is widely accessible to non-French-speaking audiences.

Finburgh avoids offering specific thematic analysis in her introduction, but if I were to hazard a few generalizations, I was struck by the focus on romantic love in this selection of contemporary French theatre, as opposed to the more socially embroiled, often family-centric plays coming out of the United States. Since identity politics are not the bread and butter of French political conversation as they are in the United States, it makes sense that the central dramatic narratives rather focus on romantic love, inasmuch as theater is a mirror to society. However, this choice does little to disabuse the romantic American notion of French culture as full of affairs and scandalous love.

Moreover, I was surprised by how patriarchal the relationships depicted between men and women are in these four plays, demonstrating extremely conventional gender roles and power imbalances for the twenty-first century. Each "romance" is a tale of possession, with male characters attempting to assert their power over the women in their lives to prove their worth, from Simon in *Till Death*, marrying his childhood sweetheart to avoid telling his mother the truth, to Mr. Talzberg and Mr. Volanges manipulating Cécile in *Erwin Motors*, to Faïza trapped in her marriage to the abusive Frank in *Alta Villa*, to Jim and Mikado trying to declare ownership of Bobin in *Bobin and Mikado*. It is no secret that

French feminism and gender roles differ from those of the United States, but such an overt theme through the diverse collection of storytelling and authors surprised me.

The first play in the collection, *Till Death*, is a classic farce, full of French rambling and unbearably awkward white lies that build into monstrous untruths. Finburgh writes in her introduction, “Most ‘popular’ theatre can be frowned upon by the theatre establishment in France, for its commercialism and intention to entertain rather than to educate.” De Vos’ play transcends its genre by bringing a level of nuanced hysteria to the humor, rather than slapstick. The dialogue builds in blocks to each punchline, and the audience can barely breathe a sigh of relief when one disaster has been averted before another crops up. The conversation between the three characters is punctuated by soliloquies from Simon, sometimes directly to the audience, sometimes reporting on his situation to a colleague over the phone. This unparalleled access to his inner monologue makes him our daft protagonist, whose mother sees straight through his lies and still loves him anyway, and who ends up marrying the neighbor girl as a nod to classic comic structure. De Vos has a particularly wry voice, well suited to the living room farce.

Erwin Motors comes next in the volume, which layers a reprise of Choderlos de Laclos’ 18th century novel *Les Liaisons dangereuses* over the “current crisis of confidence in the European Union’s model of free movement of labour,” as Finburgh writes in her introduction. Campbell chooses to keep the play set in France rather than the UK, both to honor the original setting (“Erwin Motors” is not a French company name to begin with), but also to emphasize this connection to de Laclos’ text. Cécile Volanges is proud to work at the Erwin Motors factory, repeating over and over when arguing with her husband, “MY DEVOTION TO MY WORK HAS SET ME FREE.” Meanwhile, she is being sexually harassed and abused by her supervisor at the factory, Mr. Salzberg, which diminishes her productivity. The factory is run by the heartless Mrs. Merteuil, who makes such declarations as, “If he rapes one of the girls, they can feel flattered that someone’s taking an interest. I simply do not care.”

Cécile’s husband runs his own garage, and is both outraged that his wife feels a need to work outside the home and jealous of the attention she receives at the factory, while Cécile repeats her adherence to the “French dream,” a “steady job when times are hard.” If capitalism has replaced aristocracy as the new ruling power, the caprices of human desire have not changed a whit, and Mougel adeptly demonstrates that whether humans are devoting themselves to the machine of capitalism or socialism or feudalism, they are still responding to the same inherent desires. Of much repeated all-caps dialogue throughout this play (a nod to Brecht), one of the most puzzling phrases is, “I’M NOT SWINGING ON THE END OF THE UMBILICAL CORD TALKING TO MYSELF.” As best as I can understand it, Mougel seems to suggest that we all are, in fact, just that isolated and self-serving, no matter to which higher cause or organization we devote ourselves.

Third, *Alta Villa* continues the thread of social commentary, this time focusing on racial rather than economic imbalance between characters. Finburgh writes in her introduction, “This is no ordinary plot-based drama. Indeed, its references are often more cinematic than theatrical,” and also notes the “juxtaposition of the personal and the political.” In a slow and murky way, often narrated from the point of view of a son with an intellectual disability, we discover an underlying plot of vengeance,

years after the Algerian War. The characters who are not from the insular small town feel their outsider status, no matter how many years they invest in the place—one need look no further than the Parisian banlieues to see the verity of this scenario in contemporary France.

Alta Villa's format is inventive, offering a fun challenge for any director, with fragmentary text and many voices speaking at once, forcing the audience to divide their attention in an unusual way for theatrical drama. The stage directions describe this play as a “theatre of hesitations [...] a TV left on when everyone's left the room.” Indeed, Frank (the aforementioned brutish husband) declares, “Film's the only way you can learn about life,” which is obviously a provocative statement when pronounced on stage. Spoken commentary could sometimes equally be written as stage directions (a somewhat trendy convention in contemporary French theatre), such as Faïza describing, “Yesterday evening at the window table, three Turks, coffee and glass of water, silence and cigarettes, ashtray filling up. One of them spits in the ashtray. Slowly, phlegm and saliva, a long strand stuck to his teeth, won't come away / the man laughs and the others look over at him / Faïza looks over at them. Oh no, not this again, Faïza had thought there were no more secrets from her... Frank clinks his beer against one of the Turk's coffees. Frank's friends are back.” In *Alta Villa*, Hamelin blends film and theater, family and politics together in a biting drama.

Finally, *Bobin and Mikado* takes a lighter turn, returning to the romantic element of *Till Death*. Finburgh describes it as a “Bohemian love triangle [in which] psyche's hidden obscurities and ambiguities are examined.” Picault also has her characters narrate their stage directions, opening with the character Jim setting the scene: “A bar. The three of them are in a bar from the beginning since it all starts here. Bobin reading and eating peanuts. Mikado drinking tea. Me, Jim, me, eyes riveted on Bobin.” The story follows the three characters in and out of love, trying to make sense of affairs and pregnancies and loyalty and jealousy. The only other voice in the mix is that of Lilas, Mikado's sister, who represents the image of classic familial bliss, replete with two parents, two children, simple holidays, simple pleasures. She claims the phrase, “The two of us,” to refer to herself and her husband, refusing to let her brother use it to refer to himself and Bobin (with whom he is having a passionate affair). This is the parlance of coupledness, forming your own language, defining your own space in the world, and she resists Mikado's unconventional romance. Both Jim and Mikado are possessive towards the elusive Bobin, and the New Wave doesn't feel far away. Despite Jim's suicide, the play feels light and distant, like an early Sarah Ruhl drama, filled with characters who slip through your fingers when you try to hold them too tightly.

On the whole, Campbell's *Contemporary French Plays* spans the gamut of French drama, from the cinematic to the living room drama, the political to the romantic. For those familiarizing themselves with the French theatrical landscape, or those already entrenched in its offerings, this volume has something to offer. As a native American English speaker, I can't dissect the nuances of Campbell's British English translation, but he seems to faithfully capture the colloquial nature of the original French dialogue. Although the selection lacks a specific organizational mission, Campbell does well to capture each author's individual voice, and faithfully render this offering of contemporary French theater.

Amelia Parenteau is a playwright, journalist, and translator. A graduate of Sarah Lawrence College, she has worked with TCG, Ping Chong & Company, The Lark, The Civilians, Life Jacket Theatre Company, Voyage Theater Company, the French Institute Alliance Française, and the Park Avenue Armory in New York, and the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center in Waterford, Connecticut. Recent productions include: *America Is Hard to See* (HERE, 2018), *(Projection)* (Dixon Place, 2017), and *Liminal* (New York International Fringe Festival, 2015). She is a member of the Fence, and has previously been published in *The Mercurian* as well as *American Theatre Magazine*, *Asymptote Literary Magazine*, *Contemporary Theater Review*, *Culturebot*, *Extended Play*, and *HowlRound*.