

THE MISANTHROPE

A COMEDY

CHARACTERS

ALCESTE, in love with Célimène

PHILINTE, friend of Alceste

ORONTE, in love with Célimène

CELMENE

ELIANTE, Célimène's cousin

ARSINOE, friend of Célimène

ACASTE, a marquis

CLITANDRE, a marquis

BASQUE, Célimène's servant

AN OFFICER of the Marshals' Court

DUBOIS, Alceste's valet

The Scene is at Paris

ACT I[[edit](#)]

SCENE I

PHILINTE, ALCESTE

PHILINTE

What is it? What's the matter?

ALCESTE, seated

Leave me, pray.

PHILINTE

But tell me first, what new fantastic humour . . .

ALCESTE

Leave me alone, I say. Out of my sight!

PHILINTE

But can't you listen, at least, and not be angry?

ALCESTE

I will be angry, and I will not listen.

PHILINTE

I cannot understand your gusts of temper;

And though we're friends, I'll be the very first . . .

ALCESTE, starting to his feet

What, I, your friend? Go strike that off your books.

I have professed to be so hitherto;

But after seeing what you did just now,

I tell you flatly I am so no longer

And want no place in such corrupted hearts.

PHILINTE

Am I so very wicked, do you think?

ALCESTE

Go to, you ought to die for very shame!

Such conduct can have no excuse; it must

Arouse abhorrence in all men of honour.

I see you load a man with your caresses,

Profess for him the utmost tenderness,

And overcharge the zeal of your embracings

With protestations, promises, and oaths;

And when I come to ask you who he is

You hardly can remember even his name!

Your ardour cools the moment he is gone,

And you inform me you care nothing for him!

Good God! 'tis shameful, abject, infamous,

So basely to play traitor to your soul;

And if, by evil chance, I'd done as much,

I should go straight and hang myself for spite.

PHILINTE

It doesn't seem to me a hanging matter,

And I'll petition for your gracious leave

A little to commute your rigorous sentence,
And not go hang myself for that, an't please you.

ALCESTE

How unbecoming is your pleasantry!

PHILINTE

But seriously, what would you have me do?

ALCESTE

Be genuine; and like a man of honour
Let no word pass unless it's from the heart.

PHILINTE

But when a man salutes you joyfully,
You have to pay him back in his own coin,
Make what response you can to his politeness,
And render pledge for pledge, and oath for oath.

ALCESTE

No, no, I can't endure these abject manners
So much affected by your men of fashion;
There's nothing I detest like the contortions
Of all your noble protestation-mongers,
So generous with meaningless embraces,
So ready with their gifts of empty words,
Who vie with all men in civilities,
And treat alike the true man and the coxcomb.
What use is it to have a man embrace you,
Swear friendship, zeal, esteem, and faithful love,
And loudly praise you to your face, then run
And do as much for any scamp he meets?
No, no. No self-respecting man can ever
Accept esteem that 's prostituted so;
The highest honour has but little charm
If given to all the universe alike;
Real love must rest upon some preference;

You might as well love none, as everybody.
Since you go in for these prevailing vices,
By God, you 're not my kind of man, that's all;
I'll be no sharer in the fellowship
Of hearts that make for merit no distinction;
I must be singled out; to put it flatly,
The friend of all mankind's no friend for me.

PHILINTE

But, while we're of the world, we must observe
Some outward courtesies that custom calls for.

ALCESTE

No, no, I tell you; we must ruthlessly
Chastise this shameful trade in make-beliefs
Of friendship. Let's be men; on all occasions
Show in our words the truth that's in our hearts,
Letting the heart itself speak out, not hiding
Our feelings under masks of compliment.

PHILINTE

There's many a time and place when utter frankness
Would be ridiculous, or even worse;
And sometimes, no offence to your high honour,
'Tis well to hide the feelings in our hearts.
Would it be proper, decent, in good taste,
To tell a thousand people your opinion
About themselves? When you detest a man,
Must you declare it to him, to his face?

ALCESTE

Yes.

PHILINTE

What!—you'd tell that ancient dame, Emilia,
That she's too old to play the pretty girl,
And that her painting is a public scandal?

ALCESTE

Of course.

PHILINTE

And Dorilas, that he's a bore;
And that he's wearied every ear at court
With tales of his exploits and high extraction?

ALCESTE

By all means.

PHILINTE

You are joking.

ALCESTE

No. I'll spare
No one. My eyes are far too much offended.
The court and town alike present me nothing
But objects to provoke my spleen; I fall
Into black humours and profound disgust,
To see men treat each other as they do;
There's nowhere aught but dastard flattery,
Injustice, treachery, selfishness, deceit;
I can't endure it, I go mad —and mean
Squarely to break with all the human race.

PHILINTE

This philosophic wrath's a bit too savage.
I laugh at the black moods I find you in,
And think that we, who were brought up together,
Are like those brothers in the School for Husbands,
Whose ...

ALCESTE

Heavens, have done your dull comparisons.

PHILINTE

No, really now, have done your own vagaries.
The world will not reform for all your meddling;
And since plain speaking has such charms for you,
I'll tell you plainly that your strange distemper
Is thought as good's a play, where'er you go;
Such mighty wrath against the ways o' the world
Makes you a laughing-stock for many people.

ALCESTE

So much the better! Zounds, so much the better!
The very thing I want; I'm overjoyed;
'Tis a good sign. I hate mankind so much,
I should be sorry if they thought me wise.

PHILINTE

You have a great spite against human nature.

ALCESTE

Yes, I've conceived a frightful hatred for it.

PHILINTE

And are all mortals, quite without exception,
To be included in this detestation?
There are some, surely, even now-a-days . . .

ALCESTE

There's no exception, and I hate all men:
A part, because they're wicked and do evil;
The rest, because they fawn upon the wicked,
And fail to feel for them that healthy hatred
Which vice should always rouse in virtuous hearts.
You see the rank injustice of this fawning,
Shown toward the bare-faced scoundrel I'm at law with.
The traitor's face shows plainly through his mask,
And everywhere he's known for what he is;
His up-turned eyes, his honeyed canting voice,

Impose on none but strangers. All men know
That this confounded, low-bred, sneaking scamp
Has made his way by doing dirty jobs,
And that the splendid fortune these have brought him
Turns merit bitter and makes virtue blush.
Whatever shameful names you heap upon him,
There's no one to defend his wretched honour;
Call him a cheat, a rogue, a cursed rascal,
And every one agrees, none contradicts you.
But yet his grinning face is always welcomed;
He worms in everywhere, he's greeted, smiled on;
And if there is preferment to compete for,
Intrigue will win it for him, from the worthiest.
Damnation! It offends me mortally
To see how people compromise with vice;
Sometimes I'm seized upon by sudden longings
To flee from all mankind, and live in deserts.

PHILINTE

Don't take the manners of the time so hard!
Be a bit merciful to human nature;
Let us not judge it with the utmost rigour,
But look upon its faults with some indulgence.
Our social life demands a pliant virtue;
Too strict uprightness may be blameworthy;
Sound judgment always will avoid extremes,
And will be sober even in its virtue.
The stiff unbending morals of old times
Clash with our modern age and common usage;
They ask of mortal men too much perfection;
We must yield to the times, and not too hardly;
And 'tis the very utmost height of folly
To take upon you to reform the world.
I see a hundred things each day, as you do,
That might be better, were they different;
And yet, whatever I see happening,
I don't fly in a passion, as you do;

I quietly accept men as they are,
Make up my mind to tolerate their conduct,
And think my calmness is, for court or town,
As good philosophy as is your choler.

ALCESTE

But can this calmness, sir, that talks so well,
Be moved at nothing? If perchance a friend
Betrays you—tries by fraud to steal your fortune—
Or if vile slanders are devised against you,
Will you behold all this and not get angry?

PHILINTE

Yes, I can look on faults, at which your soul
Revolts, as vices linked with human nature;
To put it in a word, I'm no more shocked
To see a man unjust, deceitful, selfish,
Than to see vultures ravenous for prey,
Or monkeys mischievous, or wolves blood-thirsty.

ALCESTE

What! see myself betrayed, robbed, torn in pieces,
And not . . . Good heavens! I won't talk with you,
Your reasoning is such sheer sophistry!

PHILINTE

In truth, you had far better hold your tongue.
Storm somewhat less against your adversary,
And give some slight attention to your suit.

ALCESTE

I'll give it none at all—that point is settled.

PHILINTE

Who will solicit for you, then, d'ye think?

ALCESTE

Who? Reason, equity, and my just rights.

PHILINTE

You won't go call on any of the judges?

ALCESTE

No. Is my cause unjust, or even doubtful?

PHILINTE

No, I agree with you. But still, intrigue . . .

ALCESTE

No. I won't stir a step. My mind's made up.

My cause is wrong, or right.

PHILINTE

Don't trust to that.

ALCESTE

I shall not budge.

PHILINTE

Your adversary's strong,

And may, through his cabal, bear off ...

ALCESTE

No matter.

PHILINTE

You'll find you've made a great mistake.

ALCESTE

So be it.

I want to see how this thing will turn out.

PHILINTE

But ...

ALCESTE

It will be a joy to lose my suit.

PHILINTE

But surely . . .

ALCESTE

By this trial I shall see

If men can be sufficiently perverse,

Rascally, villainous, and impudent

To do me wrong before the universe.

PHILINTE

Lord, what a man!

ALCESTE

No matter what it costs me,

Just for the beauty of the thing, I'd rather

My suit were lost.

PHILINTE

People would laugh at you,

Alceste, if they could hear you talk so, truly.

ALCESTE

So much the worse for those who laughed.

PHILINTE

But tell me:

This strict integrity that you demand,

This truthfulness exact and scrupulous—

Say, do you find them here, in her you love?

For my part, I'm amazed that you, while being

(Or so 'twould seem) so utterly at odds

With all the human race, should, spite of all

That makes it hateful to you, find in it

A charm to stay your eyes. Still more surprising
Is that strange choice your heart has fixed upon.
Though Eliante, the true, has shown a kindness
For you, and though Arsinoé, the prude,
Looks on you with an eye of favour, still
Your heart rejects their love, while Célimène,
Whose taste for slander and coquettish temper
So truly ape the manners of the age,
Holds it, for pastime, captive in her chains.
How happens it that, when you hate our manners
So bitterly, you bear with them in her?
Are they no longer false when housed so fairly?
Do you not see, or do you pardon them?

ALCESTE

No, no. The love I feel for this young widow
Can't make me blind to any of her faults.
For all the passion she's inspired me with,
I am the first to see them and condemn them.
Yet none the less—I must confess my weakness—
Do what I will, she still finds ways to please me;
In vain I see her faults, in vain I blame them,
Still in my own despite she makes me love her;
Her charms prevail; no doubt my love, in time,
Will purge her of the vices of the age.

PHILINTE

If you accomplish that, you will do wonders.
You think she loves you, then?

ALCESTE

By heaven, I do!
I could not love her if I didn't think so.

PHILINTE

But if her fondness for you is confessed,
Why should you fret yourself about your rivals?

ALCESTE

Because a heart that truly loves, demands
To have its loved one wholly to itself.
I've come here now to tell her all I feel
Upon this point.

PHILINTE

If I could have my way
I should address my suit to Eliante,
Her cousin. She is steadfast and sincere,
Esteems you, and would be a fitter choice.

ALCESTE

Yes, yes, quite true. My reason tells me so
Each day. But reason does not govern love.

PHILINTE

I fear for your affections; and your hope
May well . . .

SCENE II

ORONTE, ALCESTE, PHILINTE

ORONTE, to Alceste

I learned below that Eliante
And Célimène have both gone out a-shopping.
But since they told me you were here, I came
Up stairs, to pay you, from my very heart,
My tribute of unlimited esteem,
And tell you of my ardent wish, long-cherished,
To be among the number of your friends.
Yes, I've a heart that loves to honour merit;
I long to see the bonds of friendship join us;
And I believe a zealous friend, and one
Of my condition, can't well be rejected.

(During this speech, Alceste stands musing, and seems not to notice that Oronte is speaking to him.)

'Tis you, by your good leave, that I'm addressing.

ALCESTE
I, sir?

ORONTE
Yes, you. I hope I don't offend you.

ALCESTE
By no means. But I'm very much surprised.
I did not look for such an honour, sir.

ORONTE
My great esteem for you should not surprise you,
For you can claim the like from everyone.

ALCESTE
Sir ...

ORONTE
Nothing in the state can measure up
To that supreme desert men see in you.

ALCESTE
Sir . . .

ORONTE
Yes, for me, I hold you far above
All that's most eminent in all the nation.

ALCESTE
Sir ...

ORONTE

Heaven strike me dead, if I am lying!
And for a present witness of my feelings,
Pray let me, sir, most heartily embrace you,
And ask you for a place among your friends.
Your hand, I beg of you. You promise me
Your friendship?

ALCESTE
Sir. . .

ORONTE
What, you refuse it?

ALCESTE
Sir,
'Tis too much honour that you wish to do me.
But friendship needs a touch of mystery,
And asks initiation. We profane
Its name, to drag it in on all occasions.
It springs from mutual knowledge, mutual choice;
Before we form this tie, we need to know
Each other better; we might have such natures
That we should both repent our hasty bargain.

ORONTE
'Pon honour, spoken like a man of sense!
And I esteem you for it all the more.
We'll let time knit these gentle ties between us;
But meanwhile, I am wholly at your service.
If you need any favour from the court,
'Tis known I cut some figure with the king;
I have his ear, and he has always used me,
'Pon honour, like a perfect gentleman.
In short, I'm yours completely, every way;
And since you've so much wit, I've come to show you,
Just to inaugurate our charming friendship,
A sonnet that I wrote not long ago,

And ask you whether I'd best publish it.

ALCESTE

Sir, I'm ill fitted to decide such matters;
Pray you, excuse me.

ORONTE

Why?

ALCESTE

I have the fault
Of being more sincere than suits the case.

ORONTE

The very thing I want. Why, you would wrong me
If, when I come for your unfeigned opinion,
You should deceive me, hiding anything.

ALCESTE

Since that is what you wish, sir, I am willing.

ORONTE

SONNET. It is a sonnet. *Hope* ... It is
A lady who had fanned my flame with hope.
Hope ... It is none of your grand pompous lines,
But light familiar verse, soft, languishing.

(At each interruption he looks toward Alceste.)

ALCESTE

We'll see, sir.

ORONTE

Hope ... I don't know if its style
Will seem sufficiently clean-cut and facile,
Or if the choice of words will satisfy you.

ALCESTE

Sir, we shall see.

ORONTE

Besides, I ought to tell you,
It took me but a quarter-hour to write it.

ALCESTE

Out with it, sir. The time can make no odds.

ORONTE, reading

*Hope, it is true, may bring relief
And rock to sleep awhile our pain;
But, Phyllis, what small gain and brief,
If nothing follow in its train!*

PHILINTE

I'm charmed already with this little taste.

ALCESTE, aside to Philinte

What! Can you have the face to call that fine?

ORONTE

*You showed me some benevolence,
But should have shown me less, or none,
Nor put yourself to such expense
To give me hope, and hope alone.*

PHILINTE

Ah! In what gallant terms these things are phrased!

ALCESTE, aside to Philinte

Good heavens! Vile flatterer! You're praising rubbish.

ORONTE

*If I must wait eternally,
Fondness by love, to death I'll fly,*

*And end my lost endeavour.
Then vain your care, my Phyllis fair;
Hope and despair are one, I swear,
When hope lasts on forever.*

PHILINTE

The ending's pretty, amorous, admirable,
It has a dying fall.

ALCESTE, aside

Plague take your fall,
You devil's poison-monger! Would you'd had
The dying fall yourself!

PHILINTE

I never heard
Lines better turned.

ALCESTE, aside

By heaven!

ORONTE

You flatter me
And think, perhaps . . .

PHILINTE

I am not flattering.

ALCESTE, aside

What are you doing then, you vile impostor?

ORONTE, to Alceste

But you, sir—you remember our agreement.
I pray you speak in all sincerity.

ALCESTE

This is a ticklish subject always, sir;

We're fond of being flattered for our wit.
But I was saying, just the other day,
To some one—I won't mention any names—
On hearing certain verses he had written,
That any gentleman should always keep
In stern control this writing itch we're seized with;
That he must hold in check the great impatience
We feel to give the world these idle pastimes;
For, through this eagerness to show our works,
'Tis likely we shall cut a foolish figure.

ORONTE

And do you mean to intimate by this,
That I am wrong to wish . . . ?

ALCESTE

I don't say that.
But I was telling him, a frigid piece
Of writing, bores to death; and this one weakness
Is quite enough to damn a man, no matter
What sterling qualities he have withal;
For men are judged most often by their foibles.

ORONTE

Then do you think my sonnet bad?

ALCESTE

I don't
Say that. But still, as reason for not writing,
I tried to make him see how, right among us,
This lust for ink has spoiled most worthy men.

ORONTE

Do I write badly then? D' ye mean I'm like 'em?

ALCESTE

I don't say that. But still (said I to him)

What is your urgent need of making verses?
And who the deuce should drive you into print?
Only poor creatures writing for a living
Can ever be excused for publishing
A wretched book. Come, come, resist temptation,
Conceal this sort of business from the public,
And don't, for anything, go and abandon
Your reputation as a gentleman
To get in place on't, from a greedy printer,
That of ridiculous and wretched scribe.
That's what I tried to make him understand.

ORONTE

All well and good, sir; and I take your meaning.
But mayn't I know what there is, in my sonnet . . .

ALCESTE

Candidly, sir, 'tis good . . . good closet-verse.
You have been guided by the worst of models,
And your expressions are not true to nature.
Now what is this: And rock to sleep our pain?
Or this: If nothing follow in its train?
What means: Nor put yourself to such expense,
To give me hope, and hope alone? What sense
Is there in this: Hope and despair are one
When hope lasts on—or words to that effect?
This style, full of conceits, that we're so vain of,
Is far from truth to life and genuineness;
'Tis merely play on words, sheer affectation,
And nature speaks far otherwise than so.
The wretched taste of this age makes me shudder;
Rude as they were, our fathers judged far better;
And I esteem all that's admired to-day
Far less than this old song, which I'll say over.

If the king had given me
His Paris town so fair,

But to have it I must leave
Loving of my dear, O!
I would say, "King Henry, pray
Take back your Paris fair,
I'd rather have my dearie, O!
I'd rather have my dear."

The rhyme is not exact, the style's old-fashioned;
But don't you see it's worth a thousand times
All your new gewgaws that good sense revolts at,
And there true passion speaks its native tongue?

If the king had given me
His Paris town so fair,
But to have it I must leave
Loving of my dear, O!
I would say, "King Henry, pray
Take back your Paris fair,
I'd rather have my dearie, O!
I'd rather have my dear."

That's what a really loving heart might say.
(To Philinte, who laughs)
Yes, Mr. Wag, in spite of all your wits,
I set that far above the flowery fustian
And tinsel stuff that everyone extols.

ORONTE

And I maintain my lines are excellent.

ALCESTE

You have your reasons, sir, for thinking so;
But you must grant me reasons of my own,
And not expect that mine shall bow to yours.

ORONTE

I'm satisfied to find that others prize them.

ALCESTE

They have the art of feigning. I have not.

ORONTE

D' ye think you are endowed with all the brains?

ALCESTE

Did I but praise your rhymes, you'd grant me more.

ORONTE

I'll get along quite well without your praise.

ALCESTE

You'll have to get along without it, please.

ORONTE

I'd like to have you write, in your own style,
Some verses on the subject, just to see.

ALCESTE

I might, by bad luck, write as wretched ones;
But I'd be mighty careful not to show 'em.

ORONTE

You talk most high and mighty; but your pride . . .

ALCESTE

Go seek your incense-swingers somewhere else.

ORONTE

Come, little sir, don't take such lofty airs.

ALCESTE

Faith, mighty sir, I'll take what airs I please.

PHILINTE, stepping between them

Eh! sirs, you go too far. Let be, I pray you.

ORONTE

I'm in the wrong, of course; I'll quit the field.
I am your servant, sir, with all my heart.

ALCESTE

And I, sir, am your most obedient servant.

SCENE III

PHILINTE, ALCESTE

PHILINTE

Well, now you see! For being too sincere,
You've got an ugly quarrel on your hands;
I saw Oronte, on purpose to be flattered . . .

ALCESTE

Don't speak to me.

PHILINTE

But ...

ALCESTE

I renounce mankind.

PHILINTE

'Tis too much.

ALCESTE

Let me be.

PHILINTE

If I ...

ALCESTE

No talking.

PHILINTE

But what . . . ?

ALCESTE

I'll hear no more.

PHILINTE

But ...

ALCESTE

Sir!

PHILINTE

You outrage . . .

ALCESTE

Zounds! 'tis too much. Don't follow me, I say.

PHILINTE

What nonsense! I shan't let you get away.

ACT II[[edit](#)]

SCENE I

ALCESTE, CELIMENE

ALCESTE

Madam, will you allow me to speak plainly?

I'm far from satisfied with your behaviour;

It fills my heart with so much bitterness

I feel 'twere better we break off our match;

'Twould be deception to speak otherwise;

Sooner or later we must surely break.

Were I to promise you the contrary

A thousand times, I could not keep my word.

CELIMENE

So—'twas to scold at me, apparently,

That you were kind enough to bring me home?

ALCESTE

I am not scolding. But your humour, madam,

Gives any and everyone too easy access

Into your heart. You have too many lovers

Besieging you—a thing I can't endure.

CELIMENE

And must you hold me guilty of my lovers?

How can I hinder men from liking me?

And, when they come to pay me pleasant calls,

Ought I to take a stick and drive them out?

ALCESTE

No stick is needed, madam, but a heart

Less tender and less open to their loves.

I know your charms attend you everywhere;

But those your eyes attract are bound to you

By your kind welcome of them, which completes

The conquest of your beauty o'er their hearts.

The too fond hope you're always holding out

Binds their attendance to you; somewhat less

Complacence on your part, would drive away

This jostling mob of suitors. Tell me, madam,

By what kind fate Clitandre can have pleased you

So much? On what foundation of sublime

Virtue and merit in him do you base

The honour of your high esteem? Perhaps

'Tis the long nail upon his little finger

That won your admiration? Or it may be,

The shining merit of his yellow wig

Quite overcame you, as it did the rest

Of high society? Or his broad ruffs

About the knees, have made you love him? Or
His mass of ribbons charmed you? Or, perhaps,
The vast proportions of his German breeches
Conquered your soul, the while he played your slave?
Or did his laugh, or his falsetto voice,
Find out the secret way of winning you?

CELIMENE

How foolishly you take offence at him!
You know exactly why I treat him kindly;
For he can bring me over all his friends
To help me win my law-suit, as he promised.

ALCESTE

Then lose your law-suit, madam, bravely lose it,
And don't retain a rival I detest.

CELIMENE

But you grow jealous of the universe.

ALCESTE

Because you welcome all the universe.

CELIMENE

This very fact should calm your foolish terrors,
That I treat all with equal graciousness;
You'd have more cause, by far, to be offended,
Were all my favours heaped on one.

ALCESTE

But, madam,
What have I more than all of them, I pray you?
—I, whom you blame for too much jealousy!

CELIMENE

The happiness of knowing you are loved.

ALCESTE

How can my burning heart be sure of it?

CELIMENE

I think that since I've taken pains to say so,
Such a confession ought to be sufficient.

ALCESTE

How shall I know you didn't say as much
At the same time, perhaps, to all the others?

CELIMENE

Truly, a gallant lover's compliment!
You make me out a pretty sort of person.
Well, then, to save you such anxiety,
I take back, here and now, all I have said;
Now nothing can deceive you but yourself;
I hope you're satisfied.

ALCESTE

'Sdeath, must I love you!
Oh, if I could but once get back my heart,
How I'd bless Heaven for such a rare good fortune!
I strive with all my strength, and don't conceal it,
To break the cruel bonds by which I'm bound;
Still all my greatest efforts come to nothing;
It must be for my sins I love you so.

CELIMENE

Truly, your passion is unparalleled.

ALCESTE

Yes, on that point I challenge all the world.
My love is inconceivable; be sure
No one has ever loved as I do, madam.

CELIMENE

That's true, your method is entirely novel,
You love a woman just to quarrel with her;
Only in peevish words you show your passion,
And love was never such a scold before.

ALCESTE

It rests with you to dissipate my anger.
Let us cut short all bickerings, I beg you,
Speak open-heartedly, and put a stop . . .

SCENE II

CELIMENE, ALCESTE, BASQUE

CELIMENE

What is it?

BASQUE

Here's Acaste.

CELIMENE

Well, show him up.

SCENE III

CELIMENE, ALCESTE

ALCESTE

What! Can I never have you to myself?
You 're always quick to let in everybody,
And can't make up your mind, in all the day,
One moment to deny yourself to people?

CELIMENE

Must I get up a quarrel with him, too?

ALCESTE

You show a deference that I can't endure.

CELIMENE

He is a man who never would forgive me,
If he should learn I didn't want to see him.

ALCESTE

What of it? ... and why put yourself to trouble ...?

CELIMENE

Good lack! From such as he, good-will's important;
These people somehow have their say at court.
They force themselves on every conversation;
And though they cannot help you, they may harm you;
No matter what support you may have elsewhere,
You must not quarrel with these loud-mouthed gentry.

ALCESTE

In any case, and for whatever reason,
You find some cause to let in everybody;
And your discreet and careful policy . . .

SCENE IV

ALCESTE, CELIMENE, BASQUE

BASQUE

Madam, here is Clitandre as well.

ALCESTE

Precisely.
(He makes as if to go.)

CELIMENE

Now what's this hurry?

ALCESTE

I am going.

CELIMENE

Stay.

ALCESTE

But what for?

CECIMENE

Stay.

ALCESTE

I can't.

CECIMENE

You shall.

ALCESTE

No use.

These conversations only weary me,
It is too much to ask that I endure 'em.

CECIMENE

You shall, you shall.

ALCESTE

No, 'tis impossible.

CECIMENE

Well then, begone. Off with you. You're quite free.

SCENE V

ELIANTE, PHILINTE, ACASTE, CLITANDRE,
ALCESTE, CECIMENE, BASQUE

ELIANTE, to Célimène

The marquises are coming up with us.
Have they not been announced?

CECIMENE

Yes. (To Basque) Chairs for all.

(Basque places the chairs, and goes out.)

What! (To Alceste) Not gone yet?

ALCESTE

No; but I shall insist

That you declare yourself, for them or me.

CECIMENE

Be still!

ALCESTE

You shall declare yourself, to-day.

CECIMENE

You've lost your senses.

ALCESTE

No, you shall make known
Your choice.

CECIMENE

So ho!

ALCESTE

You shall decide.

CECIMENE

You're joking.

ALCESTE

No. You shall choose. I have endured too long.

CLITANDRE

Egad! I'm just from court. At the levee
Cléonte did prove himself a perfect ass;
Has he no friend who could enlighten him

With charitable comments on his manners?

CELIMENE

'Tis true, he cuts a very sorry figure
Before society. He's always startling;
But when you see him after some brief absence,
You find him more fantastical than ever.

ACASTE

Talk of fantastic characters! Egad!
I've just encountered one of the most tedious:
Damon, the talker, kept me, by your leave,
Out of my chair, one hour, in the sun.

CELIMENE

He is a marvellous talker—one who finds
The art of saying naught with many words.
You can't make head or tail of his discourse,
And what you listen to is only noise.

ELIANTE, to Philinte

Not a bad opening. The conversation
Takes a fine start toward slandering our neighbours.

CLITANDRE

Madam, Timante's another perfect type.

CELIMENE

From head to foot, of mystery compact!
He throws you one wild glance, and hurries by;
And without business, is always busy.
All that he says abounds in affectation;
He wearies you to death with mannerisms;
He interrupts the talk at every moment
To whisper you some secret—which is nothing!
He makes a marvel of the merest trifle,
And even says "Good morning" in your ear.

ACASTE

And Gerald, madam!

CELIMENE

Oh, the boresome boaster!
He stoops to nothing less than lord and lady,
Is always moving in the highest circles,
And never mentions aught but duke or prince.
"The quality" has turned his head; his talk
Is all of horses, carriages, and dogs.
He thees and thous the men of highest rank,
And just plain sir is obsolete with him.

CLITANDRE

They say he's on the best terms with Bélise.

CELIMENE

The poor in spirit! What dull company!
The days she calls I suffer martyrdom;
I toil and sweat to keep the conversation
Alive, and constantly the barrenness
Of her expression lets it die again.
In vain attack upon her stupid silence
You summon to your aid all commonplaces;
Rain or fine weather, cold, or heat, are soon
Exhausted, yet her visit, bad enough
To start with, still drags on to frightful lengths;
You ask what 'tis o'clock, yawn twenty times,
And still she'll budge no more than any log.

ACASTE

What think you of Adraste?

CELIMENE

Oh! what a pride!
The man is so puffed up with love of self

He ne'er can rest contented with the court,
And makes a daily trade of cursing it,
Because no office, place, or favour's granted
But what he finds himself unjustly used.

CLITANDRE

But there's young Cleon; our best sort of people
Frequent his house of late; now what of him?

CELIMENE

He's made himself a merit of his cook;
And 'tis his table people go to call on.

ELIANTE

He takes great care to serve the daintiest dishes.

CELIMENE

Yes; if he only didn't serve himself;
His stupid person is a villainous dish
That spoils, to my taste, all his finest dinners.

PHILINTE

Damis, his uncle, is well thought of, madam;
What say you of him?

CELIMENE

He's a friend of mine.

PHILINTE

He seems a gentleman, and full of sense.

CELIMENE

Yes; but he's always trying to be witty,
Which drives me wild; in all his talk, he labours
To be delivered of some brilliant saying.
Since he has taken a notion to be clever,
Nothing can hit his taste, he's grown so nice.

He needs must censure everything that's written,
And thinks, to praise does not become a wit,
But to find fault will prove your skill and learning,
And to admire and laugh belongs to fools;
He thinks that by approving nothing new
He sets himself above all other men.
Even in conversations he finds fault;
The talk's too trivial for his condescension;
With folded arms, he looks in pity down
From heights of wit on everything that's said.

ACASTE

Damme! That's just his picture, to the life.

CLITANDRE, to Célimène

For drawing portraits, you're incomparable.

ALCESTE

On! On! Stand firm, thrust hard, my good court-friends;
You give each one his turn, spare none at all;
And yet no one of them could show himself.
But what you'd rush to meet him, give your hand,
And kiss his cheeks, and swear you were his servants.

CLITANDRE

But why blame us? If what is said offends you,
You must address your censures to the lady.

ALCESTE

No, no! To you. 'Tis your approving laughter
That wings these slanderous arrows of her wit.
And her satiric humour feeds upon
The guilty incense of your flatteries;
Her heart would find less charm in raillery
Were she to see it pass without applause.
And so 'tis always flatterers we find
To blame for vices spread among mankind.

PHILINTE

But why so earnest in behalf of people
In whom you 'd blame yourself the selfsame faults?

CELIMENE

Must not the gentleman needs contradict?
What! Would you have him think like other people,
And not exhibit, in and out of season,
The spirit of gainsaying he's endowed with?
Others' opinions are not fit for him,
And he must always hold the opposite,
Because he'd fear to seem like common mortals,
If he were caught agreeing with anyone.
The glory of contradiction charms him so
He often takes up arms against himself,
And falls to combating his own beliefs
If he but hears them from another's lips.

ALCESTE

You have the laughers, madam, on your side;
That's saying everything. On with your satire!

PHILINTE

But then, 'tis true you're always up in arms
'Gainst everything that anybody says;
And with ill-humour you admit yourself,
You can't let people either blame or praise.

ALCESTE

Zounds! That's because they 're always in the wrong,
Because ill-humour always is in season
Against them; for they are, in every case,
Praisers impertinent, or critics pert.

CELIMENE

But ...

ALCESTE

Madam, no! I say, though I should die for 't,
You have diversions that I can't put up with;
And people here are in the wrong to nourish
Your inclination to the faults they blame.

CLITANDRE

'Tis not for me to say; still, I'll declare
That hitherto I've found the lady faultless.

ACASTE

I find her full of graces and attractions;
But as for faults, I haven't seen them yet.

ALCESTE

I've seen them all, and, far from hiding it,
She knows I make a point to tax her with them.
The more we love, the less we ought to flatter;
True love is proven by condoning nothing;
For my part, I would banish those base lovers
I found agreeing with my own opinions,
And pandering with weak obsequiousness
To my vagaries upon all occasions.

CELIMENE

In short, were you to rule men's hearts, they must,
To show true love, renounce all compliments,
And set the high ideal of perfect passion
In railing handsomely at those they love.

ELIANTE

Love is but little subject to such laws,
And lovers always like to vaunt their choice.
Their passion can find naught in her to blame,
For in the loved one, all seems lovable.
They count her faults perfections, and invent

Sweet names to call them by. The pallid maiden
Is like a pure white jasmine flower for fairness;
The frightful dark one is a rich brunette;
The lean one has a figure lithe and free;
The fat one has a fine majestic carriage;
The dowdy, graced with little charm, is called
A careless beauty; and the giantess
Appears a goddess to adoring eyes.
The dwarf is deemed a brief epitome
Of heaven's miracles; the haughty maiden
Is worthy of a crown; the cheat is clever;
The silly dunce, so perfectly good-hearted;
The chatterbox, so pleasantly vivacious;
The silent girl, so modest and retiring.
Thus does a lover, whom true passion fires,
Love even the faults of her whom he admires.

ALCESTE

For my part, I maintain . . .

CELIMENE

Let's drop this subject,
And walk a little in the gallery.
What! Are you going, gentlemen?

CLITANDRE and ACASTE

No, madam.

ALCESTE

You have a mighty fear of their departure.
Go when you please, sirs; but I give you notice
I shall not stir till after you are gone.

ACASTE

Unless my presence prove importunate
There's nothing calls me elsewhere all day long.

CLITANDRE

If I can wait upon the king at bed time
I have no other business to engage me.

CELIMENE, to Alceste

You must be joking, surely.

ALCESTE

Not at all.

We 'll see if I'm the one you would be rid of.

SCENE VI

ALCESTE, CELIMENE, ELIANTE, ACASTE, PHILINTE,
CLITANDRE, BASQUE

BASQUE, to Alceste

Sir, there's a man who wants to speak to you
On business that, he says, can't be put off.

ALCESTE

Tell him I know of no such urgent business.

BASQUE

He 's got a jacket on with plaited coat-tails
And gold all over.

CELIMENE, to Alceste

Go see what it is,
Or rather, have him up.

SCENE VII

ALCESTE, CELIMENE, ELIANTE, ACASTE, PHILINTE,
CLITANDRE, AN OFFICER from the Marshals' Court

ALCESTE, stepping forward to meet the officer
What do you want?
Come in, sir.

THE OFFICER

Sir, I want a word with you.

ALCESTE

Speak out then, sir, and let me know what 'tis.

THE OFFICER

The honourable Marshals, whom I serve,
Bid you appear before them, sir, at once.

ALCESTE

Who? I, sir?

THE OFFICER

You.

ALCESTE

And what for, may I ask?

PHILINTE, to Alceste

'Tis your ridiculous quarrel with Oronte.

CELIMENE, to Philinte

What quarrel?

PHILINTE

They had words this morning here
About some trifling lines he didn't like.
The Marshals want to hush things up at once.

ALCESTE

I'll never stoop to any base compliance.

PHILINTE

You must obey their summons. Come, get ready . . .

ALCESTE

What sort of terms can they arrange between us?
Will they condemn me by a vote to think
The verses good that we disputed over?
I won't take back a single word about them,
I think them wretched.

PHILINTE

But a gentler tone . . .

ALCESTE

I shall not budge an inch; they're villainous.

PHILINTE

You ought to be the least bit tractable.
Come, come along with me.

ALCESTE

I'll go, but nothing
Can make me take it back.

PHILINTE

Come show yourself . . .

ALCESTE

Short of a special order from the king
Commanding me to think their plaguy verses
Are good, I shall maintain, by heaven, they're wretched,
And any man that made them merits hanging.
(To Clitandre and Acaste, who laugh)
By God's blood, gentlemen, I didn't know
I was so entertaining.

CELIMENE

Go, go quickly
Where you are summoned.

ALCESTE

Yes, I'll go; and straight
Be back again to settle our debate.

ACT III[edit]

SCENE I

CLITANDRE, ACASTE

CLITANDRE

Dear Marquis, you seem quite self-satisfied;
You're pleased with everything, annoyed at nothing.
Now tell me truly, are you sure—don't flatter
Yourself—you've such great reason to be joyous?

ACASTE

Egad now! When I look myself well over,
I can't find any cause for discontent;
I'm rich, I'm young, I'm of a family
That well may give itself the style of noble;
And by the rank which my extraction gives me,
I can lay claim to almost any office.
In courage, which we all must value most,
The world knows (not to boast) that I'm not lacking;
They've seen me carry an affair of honour
Quite dashingly and cavalierly through.
With wit, of course, I'm furnished; and good taste
To judge off-hand, and talk on any subject,
And, when new plays come out (which I adore),
On the stage-seats to act the knowing critic,
Decide the drama's fate, and lead the applause
Whenever a fine passage merits bravos.
I'm dexterous, handsome, have a good complexion,
Especially fine teeth, a slender figure;
And as for dressing well, I think, without
Conceit, 'twere foolish to dispute me that.
I find myself as much esteemed as can be,

Loved by the fair sex, favoured by the king.
And with all this, dear Marquis, I should think
That any man might be self-satisfied.

CLITANDRE

Yes. But, since elsewhere you find easy conquests,
Why waste your sighs upon this lady here?

ACASTE

I? Gad, not!! I'm not of make or temper
To bear a fair one's coldness. Let the common
And awkward fellows burn with constancy
For frigid beauties, languish at their feet,
Bear their rebuffs, seek help in sighs and tears,
And try, by long continuance of service,
To win what is denied their scanty merit.
But men like me, dear Marquis, are not made
To love on credit and pay all expenses.
However rare may be the ladies' merits
I think that I'm as good as they, thank Heaven;
That to be honoured with a heart like mine,
Should not, in any reason, cost them nothing;
And that the least a man like me can ask,
To make things fair, is meeting him half-way.

CLITANDRE

You think then, Marquis, you 're in favour here?

ACASTE

I have some reason, Marquis, so to think.

CLITANDRE

Trust me, divest yourself of that delusion;
Dear fellow, you deceive and blind yourself.

ACASTE

Quite true, I do deceive and blind myself.

CLITANDRE

What makes you think your happiness so perfect?

ACASTE

I do deceive myself.

CLITANDRE

Upon what grounds . . . ?

ACASTE

I blind myself.

CLITANDRE

Have you trustworthy proofs?

ACASTE

I fool myself, I say.

CLITANDRE

Can Célimène

Have secretly avowed some love for you?

ACASTE

No, I'm ill-used.

CLITANDRE

But answer me, I beg you.

ACASTE

I meet with nothing but rebuffs.

CLITANDRE

Have done

With jesting; say what hope she's given you.

ACASTE

I am the luckless one, and you the lucky.

She feels for me a horrible aversion,

And one of these days I must hang myself.

CLITANDRE

Come, Marquis, let's arrange our love-affairs,

Will you, by both agreeing on one thing—

If either of us show convincing proof

That he's preferred by Célimène, the other

Shall give a clear field to the future victor

And free him from assiduous rivalry?

ACASTE

Egad! I swear I like your proposition,

And I agree with all my heart. But hush . . .

SCENE II

CELIMENE, ACASTE, CLITANDRE

CELIMENE

Still here?

CLITANDRE

Love stays our steps.

CELIMENE

I heard just now

A carriage driving in. Who can it be?

SCENE III

CELIMENE, ACASTE, CLITANDRE, BASQUE

BASQUE

Arsinoé is coming up to see you,

Madam.

CELIMENE

What can the woman want with me?

BASQUE

She's talking now to Eliante, downstairs.

CELIMENE

What is she thinking of? What brings her here?

ACASTE

She everywhere is called a perfect prude;
Her zealous ardour . . .

CELIMENE

Yes, yes, all put on.

At heart she's of the world, and does her utmost
To hook some man, and yet she can't succeed.

So she can only look with eyes of envy
Upon another woman's train of suitors;
Her sorry charms, in their abandonment,
Are always railing at our age's blindness.
She'd like to hide, under sham prudery,
The frightful solitude that's seen about her;
To save the credit of her feeble charms,
She makes a crime of every power they lack.
The lady, all the same, would like a lover,
And even has a weakness for Alceste.
The court he pays to me insults her beauty;
She claims that I have stolen him from her;
And in her jealous spite, but ill concealed,
She secretly attacks me everywhere.
I've never in my life seen such an idiot;
Her conduct is the height of silly malice,
And ...

SCENE IV

ARSINOE, CELIMENE, CLITANDRE, ACASTE

CELIMENE

Oh! What lucky chance has brought you here?
In truth I was right anxious for you, madam.

ARSINOE

I've come to speak of something that I thought
I ought to ...

CELIMENE

Dear! How glad I am to see you!

(Clitandre and Acaste go out laughing.)

SCENE V

ARSINOE, CELIMENE

ARSINOE

Their going away was certainly most timely.

CELIMENE

Shall we sit down?

ARSINOE

It is not necessary.
Friendship ought most to show itself, dear madam,
In things that are of most importance to us;
And since there 's none of greater import, surely,
Than what concerns propriety and honour,
I've come to prove my heart-felt love for you,
By telling you of something that involves
Your honour. Yesterday I called upon
Some very virtuous friends of mine; and there
The talk was all of you; your conduct, madam,
That wins you so much notoriety,
Had the misfortune not to be commended.
This motley crowd whose visits you encourage,
Your love-affairs, the rumours they give rise to,

Had censors far more numerous and harsh
Than I could wish. Of course, you well may know
Which side I took; how I did all I could
To clear you; swore you really meant no harm
And said I'd vouch for it your heart was right.
But still, you know there are some things in life
One can't defend, however much one wants to;
And so I found myself compelled to grant
Your way of living was somewhat against you;
That to the world it had an ugly look;
That everywhere it makes all sorts of talk,
And that your conduct might, if you but chose,
Give far less reason for censorious judgment.
Not that I think you've really failed in virtue;
Heaven preserve me from that thought, at least!
But still, the mere appearances of evil
Are quickly credited; 'tis not enough
To live uprightly for ourselves alone.
I hope you have too sensible a spirit,
Madam, to take amiss this useful warning,
Or think it due to any other motive
Than my concern for all that touches you.

CELIMENE

Madam, I owe you many thanks. This warning
Has put me deeply in your debt; so far
From taking it amiss, I shall insist
Upon repaying it at once in kind
By giving you a warning which concerns
Your honour. Since you prove yourself my friend
By telling me the common talk about me,
I'll follow, in my turn, this good example,
By telling you what people say of you.
Where I was visiting the other day,
I met some people of especial merit,
Who, in discussing true ideals of virtue,
Turned their remarks upon your character,

Dear madam. But your prudery and fervour
Were not regarded as the best of models;
Your false assumption of a grave demeanour,
Your endless talk of virtue and of honour,
Your mincings and your mouthings at the shadow
Of coarseness that some doubtful word may have,
The high esteem in which you hold yourself
And pitying glances that you cast on others,
Your constant preaching, and your acrid judgments
On things quite innocent and honourable:
All this, to be quite frank with you, dear madam,
Was blamed with one accord. What is the good,
They said, of all this outward show of virtue
And modesty, when all the rest belies it?
She's punctual at her prayers, to a degree,
But beats her servants, and won't pay their wages.
At public worship she displays great fervour,
But paints herself, and tries to play the beauty.
She has the nude in pictures covered up,
But the reality, meanwhile, she likes.
I took your part against them, one and all,
Assuring them that this was calumny;
But their opinions all combined against me,
And their conclusion was, that you'd do well
To meddle less with other people's conduct,
And look a bit more closely to your own;
That we should scrutinise ourselves no little
Before assuming to condemn our neighbours,
And add the weight of exemplary living
To any censure that we pass on others;
And even so, if needful, we should leave it,
To those whom Heaven appoints to judge such matters.
I hope you likewise are too sensible,
Madam, to take amiss this useful warning,
Or think it due to any other motive
Than my concern for all that touches you.

ARSINOE

Whatever risk we run in our reproofs,
I did not, madam, look for this retort;
And I see plainly, by its bitterness,
That my frank warning cut you to the quick.

CELIMENE

No! Say it pleased me, rather. Were folk wise
Such mutual warnings would become the fashion.
Given in good faith, they'd soon dispel that blindness
Most of us suffer as regards ourselves.
'Twill be your fault if we should not continue
This faithful service with unbated zeal,
And take pains privately to tell each other
What you may hear of me, and I of you.

ARSINOE

Ah! madam, I can hear no ill of you;
It is in me that everything's to blame.

CELIMENE

Everything, madam, may be praised or blamed,
And each is right, in proper time and season.
There is an age for love-affairs, methinks,
And there's an age that's fit for prudery.
It may be policy to choose the second
When youth is gone and all its glamour faded,
For that may serve to hide a sorry downfall.
Perhaps some day I'll follow in your footsteps,
For age brings everything; but 'tis not time,
As all men know, to be a prude at twenty.

ARSINOE

You plume yourself upon a slight advantage,
And make a frightful noise about your age.
The trifling difference between yours and mine
Is no such mighty matter to be proud of,

And I can't see why you're so angry, madam,
And fall upon me in such bitter fashion.

CELIMENE

I, madam, likewise cannot see just why
You should let loose against me everywhere.
Must I be blamed for all your disappointments,
And can I help it if the men won't court you?
If they love me, and will persist in paying
To me addresses that you'd rather have,
Why, I can't help it, and it's not my fault;
The field is free for you, and I don't hinder
Your having charms to win them, if you can.

ARSINOE

Good lack! D' ye think that anyone's concerned
About the mob of lovers you 're so vain of,
Or that we cannot easily infer
What price is paid to get 'em now-a-days?
D' ye hope, the way things go, to make us think
Your simple merit draws this motley crowd?
That they're inflamed with honourable passion,
And that they court you only for your virtues?
No one is blinded by such vain pretences;
The world's no dupe. I know some women, too,
With charms to kindle tender sentiments,
Who don't have lovers always dangling round 'em;
Whereby we may infer that they're not won
Without some great advances on our part;
That men don't woo us just to look at us,
And all the court they pay is dearly bought.
Then don't be so purled up with boastful pride
For the cheap tinsel of a paltry triumph;
Don't let your beauty be so self-conceited,
And for so little treat folk haughtily.
For if my charms could envy yours their conquests,
Why, I might do as others do, methinks,

And prove, by being lavish of myself,
That one has lovers if one wants to have 'em.

CELIMENE

Then have 'em, madam; let us see it done.
Try if by this rare secret you can please;
And don't . . .

ARSINOE

Let's end this conversation, madam,
'Twill carry us too far; I should have taken
My leave already, as I ought to do,
If I weren't forced to wait here for my carriage.

CELIMENE

Stay just as long as suits you, madam. Nothing
Need hurry you. But not to weary you
With my attentions, here's a gentleman,
Most opportunely come, to take my place
And give you better company than I can.

SCENE VI

CELIMENE, ARSINOE, ALCESTE

CELIMENE

Alceste, I must go write a line or two;
I can't defer it without serious loss.
Please stay with madam; she will be so kind
As gladly to excuse my impoliteness.

SCENE VII

ALCESTE, ARSINOE

ARSINOE

You see she wishes me to talk with you
Just for a moment, till my carriage comes;
Her hospitality could offer nothing

More charming to me than such conversation.
People of lofty merit needs must win
Esteem and love from everyone; your worth
Has some especial charm to make my heart
Espouse your interests in every way.
I wish the court would cast an eye of favour
On you, and do more justice to your merits.
You've reason to complain; I'm out of patience
To see them day by day do nothing for you.

ALCESTE

Me, madam! Pray what claim have I upon them?
What service have I rendered to the state?
What brilliant deeds have I achieved to give me
Cause for complaint that they do nothing for me?

ARSINOE

Not all those whom the court delights to honour
Have always done such signal services.
The opportunity as well as power
Is needed; and the merit that you show
Ought . . .

ALCESTE

Heavens! I beg you, let my merit be;
How can the court be bothered about that?
'Twould have its hands too full, if it attempted
To bring to light the worth of everybody.

ARSINOE

But brilliant worth will bring itself to light.
Yours is esteemed by many, and most highly;
Why, I could mention two distinguished houses
Where men of weight extolled you yesterday.

ALCESTE

Eh! madam, now-a-days all men are praised;

The present age has no distinctions left,
And all is equally of dazzling merit;
There is no honour brought you by such praise,
Flung at your head, stuffed down your throat; I see
My valet's praised too, in the Court Gazette!

ARSINOE

For my part, I could wish, to prove your worth,
Some court employment might appeal to you.
If you'll but show the least desire for it,
We'll straightway set intrigues at work to serve you;
I've persons at my beck and call, to help you
And make the pathway smooth to all preferment.

ALCESTE

Madam, what would you have me do at court?
My character demands I keep away,
For heaven did not give me, at my birth,
A soul congenial to court atmosphere.
I know I don't possess the talents needful
To win success, and make my fortune there.
A frank sincerity is my chief merit,
I've not the skill to hoodwink men with words,
And anyone who lacks the gift of hiding
His thoughts should make brief stay in such a country.
Away from court, 'tis true, we've not that standing
Or honourable rank which it bestows;
But still, for compensation, we escape
Having to play the part of silly fools,
To bear a thousand pitiless rebuffs,
To laud the rhymes of Mr. So-and-So,
Burn incense at the shrine of Madam Blank,
And bear the shallow wit of hare-brained lordlings.

ARSINOE

Then let us drop this matter of the court,
Since you prefer it; but my heart is moved

To pity by your love-affair. To tell you
Just what I think about it, I could wish
Your passion were more fittingly bestowed.
You certainly deserve a kinder fate,
For she who charms you is unworthy of you.

ALCESTE

Madam, in saying this, do you remember,
I pray you, that this person is your friend?

ARSINOE

Yes. But it really goes against my conscience
Longer to bear the wrong that 's being done you.
The state I see you in afflicts my soul
Too much. I warn you that your love's betrayed.

ALCESTE

Madam, you're showing much concern for me;
Such news is always welcome to a lover!

ARSINOE

Yes, though my friend, she is, and I declare her,
Unworthy to enthrall a true man's heart;
And her affection for you is a sham.

ALCESTE

That's possible; we can't see people's hearts;
But still, in charity you might refrain,
Madam, from raising such a doubt in mine.

ARSINOE

If you prefer not to be undeceived,
I'll say no more to you; that's easy enough.

ALCESTE

In such a case, whatever we may learn,
Doubts are more torturing than any truth;

And I had rather I were told of nothing
Except what can be proved with certainty.

ARSINOE

That's right enough; and on this present matter
You shall receive complete enlightenment.
I'll let your own eyes prove it all to you.
Only escort me home, and there I'll show you
A faithful proof of her unfaithfulness;
And if your heart can love another fair,
Perhaps you'll find your consolation there.

ACT IV[edit]

SCENE I

ELIANTE, PHILINTE

PHILINTE

Never was seen a man so hard to manage,
Or compromise so difficult to make
In vain they tried to move him every way,
They couldn't drag him from his fixed opinion;
And never did so strange an altercation,
Methinks, employ the wisdom of the Marshals.
"No, gentlemen," he said, "I'll not retract;
I will agree to all you please, except
This one point. What is he offended at?
What does he want of me? Does it reflect
Upon his honour, if he can't write well?
What odds to him is my opinion, which
He took so much amiss; a man may be
A perfect gentleman, and write poor verse.
These matters do not raise the point of honour.
I hold him a true man in all respects,
Brave, worthy, noble, anything you will,
But still, a wretched writer. I will praise,
If you desire, his lavish style of living,

His skill in horsemanship, in arms, in dancing;
But for his verse, I beg to be excused;
And if a man has not the luck to write
Better than that, he ought to give up rhyming,
Unless condemned to it on pain of death."
In short, the only favour or concession
He could with effort bring himself to grant,
Was saying (as he thought, in gentler style):
"I'm sorry, sir, that I'm so hard to please,
And for your sake I wish with all my heart
I could have liked your recent sonnet better."
Whereon the Marshals forced them to embrace,
And hastily hushed up the whole affair.

ELIANTE

His ways are very strange; yet I must own
That I esteem him above other men;
And this sincerity he makes a point of
Has something noble and heroic in it.
'Tis a rare virtue now-a-days. I wish
That everyone took pattern after him.

PHILINTE

The more I see of him, the more amazed
I am to see this passion he's enslaved to.
With such a character as heaven gave him,
I don't know how he ever came to love
At all; and even less how it could be
Your cousin that his fancy fixed upon.

ELIANTE

This only goes to show love doesn't always
Depend on harmony of humours; all
Their theories of sympathetic souls
Are pretty, but the present case belies them.

PHILINTE

But do you think he's loved, from what we see?

ELIANTE

That is a point not easy to determine.

Does she love him or not ?—how can we judge,
When her own heart's not sure of what it feels?
She loves sometimes without quite knowing it,
And thinks she loves, too, sometimes, when she
doesn't.

PHILINTE

I think our friend is very like to have
More trouble than he looks for, with your cousin;
And, to be frank, if he but felt as I do,
He'd look in quite a different direction,
And by a fitter choice would take advantage,
Madam, of that kind favour you accord him.

ELIANTE

For my part, I don't try to hide my feelings,
And think, in such things, we should be straightforward.
I don't oppose his ardent love for her,
But rather do my best to forward it;
And if the matter could depend on me,
I should unite him with the one he loves.
But if (since anything is possible)
The fates should thwart him in his choice, and if
Another's love be crowned with more success,
I could be glad, then, to receive his homage;
His having been refused, in such a case,
Would cause me no aversion.

PHILINTE

For my part,
I likewise don't oppose your kindness, madam,
For him; and he can tell you, if he will,
What I have said to him upon that point.

But if their marriage once for all prevented
His suit to you, then I should do my utmost
To win that favour which your generous heart
Now grants to him; and count myself most happy
If what he misses might descend to me.

ELIANTE

Philinte, you're jesting.

PHILINTE

Madam, I am speaking
Now from my inmost heart. I wait the chance
To make this offer unreservedly,
And all my hopes are eager for that moment.

SCENE II

ALCESTE, ELIANTE, PHILINTE

ALCESTE

Ah! madam, help me to avenge a crime
That triumphs over all my strength of soul.

ELIANTE

What is the matter? What can move you so?

ALCESTE

The matter is ... 'tis death to think upon it!
Complete upheaval of the universe
Could not o'erwhelm me more than this disaster.
All's over with . . . My love ... I cannot speak.

ELIANTE

Try to control yourself somewhat.

ALCESTE

Just heaven!
How can so many graces be united

With hateful vices of the basest nature!

ELIANTE

But tell us, what can make you . . . ?

ALCESTE

All is ruined.

I am betrayed, destroyed, stricken to death,
For Célimène—ah! who could have believed it?—
For Célimène deceives me; she is faithless.

ELIANTE

Have you sufficient grounds for that belief?

PHILINTE

Perhaps you are too hastily suspicious;
Your jealous temper sometimes takes chimeras
For . . .

ALCESTE

'Sdeath! Mind your own business, will you, sir?
(To Eliante)
I'm all too certain of her treason, madam,
Having it written down in her own hand.
Yes, here 's a letter to Oronte, disclosing
Her shame and my misfortune; to Oronte,
Whose suit I thought she scorned, and whom I feared
The least of all my rivals.

PHILINTE

Letters, sometimes,
Are not so guilty as they may appear.

ALCESTE

Once more, sir, will you please let me alone,
And pay attention to your own concerns?

ELIANTE

You ought to calm yourself. The outrage . . .

ALCESTE

Madam,

This rests with you. To you I have recourse
For power to free my heart from galling anguish.
Avenge me on your false ungrateful cousin
Who basely has betrayed my constant love
By such a deed as must arouse your horror.

ELIANTE

Avenge you? I? But how?

ALCESTE

Accept my heart.
Accept it, in that faithless woman's place;
Only in that way can I be avenged;
I'll punish her by the sincere attachment,
Profound affection, worshipful attentions,
Eager devotion, and assiduous service,
My heart will henceforth offer at your shrine.

ELIANTE

I truly sympathise with what you suffer,
And don't despise the heart you offer me;
But still, perhaps the harm is not so great,
And you may yet give up this wish for vengeance.
For when a charming woman wrongs a man,
He forms a hundred plans, but acts on none;
In vain is even the strongest argument,
A guilty loved one soon seems innocent;
The wish to harm her quickly disappears,
And lover's wrath—we all know how it wears.

ALCESTE

No, madam, no. I'm mortally offended.

There's no relenting. I have done with her.
Nothing can change my settled resolution;
If I could love her still, I'd hate myself.
But here she comes. My anger is redoubled
At sight of her. I'll taunt her with her treason,
Confound her utterly, then bring to you
A heart quite freed from her delusive charms.

SCENE III

CELIMENE, ALCESTE

ALCESTE, aside
O heaven! Can I be master of my passion?

CELIMENE, aside
So ho! (To Alceste) Well, what's the matter with you now?
And what's the meaning of your deep-drawn sighs,
And those black looks you cast in my direction?

ALCESTE
That all the horrors which a heart can hold
Have nothing to compare with your dishonour;
That fate and devils and the wrath of heaven
Never produced a creature so perverse.

CELIMENE
A pretty compliment. I like it vastly.

ALCESTE
Have done with joking. 'Tis no time for laughter.
Far rather blush, for you have reason to;
I have full proof here of your perfidy.
'Twas this that my presentiments foretold;
Not without reason was my love alarmed,
And through those many doubts that you called hateful
My soul foresaw the truth my eyes have found.

In spite of all your care and clever feigning,
My star predicted what I had to fear.
But do not hope I'll suffer unavenged
The sting of such a wrong. 'Tis true, I know,
That will has no control of our affections,
That love must always come spontaneously,
That never any heart was won by force,
And every soul is free to name its master.
So I could find no reason for complaint
If you had treated me without deceit;
And though you had repulsed me from the first
I could have quarrelled only with my fate.
But to lead on my heart by false avowals,
Why, that is treason, that is perfidy
For which no punishment can be too great;
And I may give free rein to my resentment.
Yes, fear the worst, after such infamy;
I am beside myself, I am all rage.
Pierced by the deadly blow which you have struck,
My reason can no longer rule my senses;
I yield to impulses of righteous anger,
And will not answer for the things I do.

CELIMENE
But tell me, whence comes this excess of passion?
Have you quite lost your senses, pray?

ALCESTE
Yes, yes,
I lost them, when I sucked the murderous poison
Of my misfortune from the sight of you,
And thought to find some slight sincerity
In those deceitful charms that so bewitched me.

CELIMENE
Come now, what perfidy can you complain of?

ALCESTE

How false your heart, how skilled in arts of feigning!
But I have proofs to force its last defence.
Look here, and recognise your character;
This letter is sufficient to convict you,
And there can be no answer made to this.

CELIMENE

So that's the thing you're so worked up about.

ALCESTE

What! Don't you blush to see this piece of writing?

CELIMENE

And why, pray, should I blush at sight of it?

ALCESTE

What! Add audacity to artifice!
Will you disown it for not being signed?

CELIMENE

But why disown a letter that I wrote?

ALCESTE

And you can look on it without confusion
To see the crime toward me it brands you with!

CELIMENE

You are in truth a most fantastic fellow.

ALCESTE

What! You outbrave unanswerable proof?
The love shown in this letter for Oronte
Does not wrong me, or cover you with shame?

CELIMENE

Oronte! Who says the letter is to him?

ALCESTE

Why, those who put it in my hands just now.
But granting it was written to another,
Have I less reason to complain of you?
Are you less culpable toward me for that?

CELIMENE

But if this note was written to a woman,
In what can it offend you? Where's the guilt?

ALCESTE

Ah! 'tis a clever turn, a fine evasion.
I'll own I didn't look for such a shift,
And I am quite convinced by it, of course.
How dare you seek such palpable devices?
Or do you think me quite devoid of sense?
Come, show me by what trick, and with what face,
You can maintain so evident a lie;
How you will twist to suit them to a woman
All the expressions of this passionate letter?
Interpret now, to hide your faithlessness,
What I shall read . . .

CELIMENE

Not I; I do not care to.
You're foolish, to assume such domination,
And say the things you dare to, to my face.

ALCESTE

No, no; now don't get angry; try a little
To justify these words here.

CELIMENE

No, I will not.
What you may think of it is nothing to me.

ALCESTE

But I beseech you, show me how this letter
Can fit a woman, and I'll be content.

CELIMENE

No, it is to Oronte. I'll have you think so.
I welcome his attentions joyfully,
Admire his talk, esteem his character,
And will confess to everything you please.
Go on, do what you choose, let nothing stop you,
But don't vex me about it any more.

ALCESTE, aside

Good heavens! Can anything be found more cruel?
Was ever heart so treated? What! I come
All hot with righteous anger, to complain
Of her, and find myself the one that's blamed!
My griefs and doubts are goaded to the utmost,
She bids me think the worst, and glories in it;
And yet my heart is still so base and weak
It cannot break the chains that bind me to her,
Nor arm itself with noble scorn, against
The ungrateful object of a love too fond!
(To Célimène) How skilled you are to turn against me
now,
Traitor, the weapon of my utter weakness,
And use to your own ends the strange excess
Of fated love sprung from your fickle beauty.
Defend yourself, I beg you, from a crime
That crushes me; do not pretend you're guilty,
But show this letter innocent, if you can.
My love consents to help you; try to seem
Faithful, and I will try to think you so.

CELIMENE

Fie, fie, you're mad, with all your jealous frenzies,
And don't deserve the love that's given you.

I'd like to know what ever could compel me
To stoop on your account to base dissembling?
Or why, if my heart leaned another way,
I shouldn't say so with sincerity?
What! Does the kind assurance of my feelings
Not come to my defence against your doubts?
Compared with such a pledge, are they of weight?
Do you not outrage me by heeding them?
And since it costs a woman such great effort
To own her love, and since our sex's honour,
A foe to love, opposes such avowals,
May any lover doubt the oracle
When for his sake we overpass those bounds?
Is he not guilty if he does not trust
What's never said without a mighty struggle?
Fie on you, doubts like these deserve my anger.
You are not worth the least consideration.
I am a fool, and vexed at my own folly
In still retaining any kindness toward you;
I ought to fix my love on someone else,
And give you reason for a just complaint.

ALCESTE

How strange my weakness for you is! No doubt
You are deceiving me with tender words;
No matter; I must undergo my fate;
My soul is wholly given to love of you;
And I must see, even to the bitter end,
What your heart is, and whether 'twill betray me.

CELIMENE

No, you don't love me as one ought to love.

ALCESTE

Nothing can match the greatness of my love.
In its excess of zeal it goes so far
As even to wish you harm; yes, I could wish

That no one ever thought you lovable,
That you were forced to live in misery,
That heaven at your birth had given you nothing,
And that you had no wealth or rank or station,
If so my heart, by free and full devotion,
Might make amends to you for fate's injustice,
And I might have the joy and glory, then,
Of seeing you owe all to my affection.

CELIMENE

That's a strange way of caring for me! Heaven
Forbid your ever having cause . . . but here
Is your Du Bois, and strange enough he looks!

SCENE IV

CELIMENE, ALCESTE, DU BOIS

ALCESTE

What means this plight you're in, this frightened air?
What is it?

DU BOIS

Sir ...

ALCESTE

Well?

DU BOIS

Here's strange things have happened.

ALCESTE

Well, what?

DU BOIS

We are bad off, sir, very bad.

ALCESTE

How?

DU BOIS

Shall I speak right out?

ALCESTE

Yes, speak, and quickly.

DU BOIS

There's no one here who'll . . . ?

ALCESTE

Ah! what dallying!

Speak, will you?

DU BOIS

Sir, we've got to get away.

ALCESTE

What's that?

DU BOIS

We must decamp, and make no noise.

ALCESTE

But why?

DU BOIS

I tell you we must leave this place.

ALCESTE

What for?

DU BOIS

And never stop to say good-bye.

ALCESTE

But what's the cause, the cause, of what you tell me?

DU BOIS

The cause, the cause, sir, is, we must be packing.

ALCESTE

Ah! I shall break your head, beyond a doubt,
You booby, if you do not change your style.

DU BOIS

Sir, a man dressed in black, with blacker looks,
Came right into the kitchen, sir, and left us
A paper all so scribbled over, sir,
A man would have to be the very devil,
To read the thing. I make no sort of doubt
But it's about your law-suit; still, old Nick
Himself could not make head or tail of it.

ALCESTE

Well, well, what then? What has this scrawl to do,
You rascal, with our sudden forced departure?

DU BOIS

I'm here to tell you, sir, an hour later
A man who often pays you visits, came
To look for you, and in a hurry too;
And when he couldn't find you, asked me kindly—
Because he knows I am your faithful servant—
To tell you . . . wait a bit... what is his name . . . ?

ALCESTE

Rogue! Never mind his name; say what he told you!

DU BOIS

Well, he's a friend of yours, and that's enough.
He told me you must leave here, for your life,
And that you're liable to be arrested.

ALCESTE

But why? He told you nothing definite?

DU BOIS

No. But he asked for ink and paper then
And wrote a word by which you can, I think,
Get at the bottom of this mystery.

ALCESTE

Then give it to me.

CELIMENE

What can this portend?

ALCESTE

I don't know; but I mean to clear it up.
Will you not soon have done, you devil's limb?

DU BOIS, after having fumbled about for the note a long
time

Faith, sir, I've left it, sir, upon your table.

ALCESTE

I don't know what restrains me . . .

CELIMENE

Keep your temper,
And go unravel this perplexing business.

ALCESTE

It seems that Fate, in spite of all I do,
Has sworn to interrupt my talk with you;
But, madam, help me baffle Fate, I pray,
And let me see you yet again to-day.

ACT V[[edit](#)]

SCENE I

ALCESTE, PHILINTE

ALCESTE

My mind's made up, I say.

PHILINTE

But must this blow,
However hard it seem, compel you to ...

ALCESTE

No matter what you do or what you say,
Nothing can move me from my settled purpose;
The age we're living in is so depraved
That I must shun all intercourse with men.
What! Honour, justice, decency, the laws,
Are all combined against my adversary;
My rights are everywhere proclaimed; I rest
Assured upon the justice of my cause;
And yet I'm disappointed by the outcome;
With justice on my side, I lose my case!
A knave, whose story is a public scandal,
Comes off triumphant in his treachery,
And honest truth must yield to blackguardism!
He cuts my throat, and proves he's doing right!
That grinning face, in which his cant and cunning
Show clearly forth, has influence enough
To overthrow the right and ruin justice!
He gets decree of court to crown his crime!
Then, not contented with the wrong he's done me,
Finding a villainous book in circulation,
A book deserving of the utmost censure,
And which it is disgraceful even to read,
The scoundrel has the face to say I wrote it!
And thereupon Oronte begins to mutter,

And basely tries to spread the lie! ... Oronte
Who has the standing of a gentleman
At court, and whom I never wronged, unless
By being frank and honest, when he came
With ardent eagerness, against my will,
To ask my judgment on some rhymes he'd written!
Because I treat him like an honest man
And won't betray the truth or him, he helps
To overwhelm me with a trumped-up crime!
Now he's become my greatest enemy,
And never will be brought to pardon me,
All just because I didn't praise his sonnet!
And men, good heavens, are made of stuff like this!
These are the deeds their pride can bring them to!
This is the honesty, the love of virtue,
The justice, and the honour, found among 'em!
I've borne the plague of 'em too long; I'll leave
This savage ambushade and cut-throat hole;
And since among mankind you live like wolves,
You'll never see me more in all your days.

PHILINTE

Your plan, methinks, is just a little hasty;
The mischief's not so great as you make out.
Your adversary's impudent accusation
Has not caused your arrest—'tis not believed in;
We find his false report defeats itself,
And such an action well may do him harm.

ALCESTE

Do *him* harm! He that's known for scurvy tricks
Need fear no scandal. He's a licensed scoundrel,
And far from being harmed by this affair,
To-morrow he'll be found in higher credit.

PHILINTE

In any case 'tis certain few are fooled

By this report his malice spread against you,
And on that score you have no more to fear;
As for your law-suit, which you may complain of
With justice, you can easily appeal
And have this sentence . . .

ALCESTE

No, I'll hold by it.
However great the wrong this verdict does me,
I'll take good care it shan't be set aside;
It is so clear a case of justice wronged,
I'll hand it down to future generations
As signal proof and unsurpassed example
Of what men's villainy could be to-day.
The thing may cost me twenty thousand francs,
But for my twenty thousand francs I'll have
The right to rail against the wickedness
Of human nature, and forever hate it.

PHILINTE

But after all ...

ALCESTE

But after all, your trouble
Is wasted, sir; what can you find to say
About it? Will you have the impudence
To palliate these constant infamies?

PHILINTE

No, I agree to anything you please.
Intrigue and selfish motives govern all,
Deceit wins every battle now-a-days,
And men should be quite other than they are.
But is their lack of righteousness a reason
To shun the world? These faults of human nature
But give us opportunities in life
To put in practice our philosophy;

This is the best employment virtue finds;
If everything were clothed in probity,
If all men's hearts were open, just, and gentle,
Most of our virtues would be wholly useless,
Since we employ them now, in cheerfully
Enduring wrong, with right upon our side;
And just as any heart of genuine virtue . . .

ALCESTE

I know, sir, you're a mighty fluent talker,
Always abounding in fine arguments;
Still, you waste time, and all your dapper speeches.
Reason demands, for my own good, that I
Should quit the world; I can't control my tongue
Enough, nor answer for the things I'd say.
I'd have a hundred duels on my hands.
So let me wait in peace for Célimène;
She must accept the plan that brings me here;
I'll learn in that way if she really loves me,
And here and now she must convince me of it.

PHILINTE

Let's go see Eliante, until she comes.

ALCESTE

No, no, my heart's too full of care. You go
Up stairs to her, and leave me here alone
In this dark corner, with my black chagrin.

PHILINTE

Strange company that is, and too austere
To wait with! I'll bring Eliante down here.

SCENE II

CELIMENE, ORONTE, ALCESTE

ORONTE

Yes, 'tis for you to say, if ties so dear,
Madam, shall make me wholly yours forever.
I must have full assurance of your heart;
A lover does not like these waverings;
And if my ardent love has power to move you,
You should not hesitate to prove it to me;
And after all, the only proof I ask
Is, no more to admit Alceste's addresses,
To sacrifice him, madam, to my love,
And shut your door against him from this day.

CELIMENE
But why are you, whom I have heard so often
Lauding his merit, angry with him now?

ORONTE
There's no need, madam, of these explanations.
The point is, what are your own sentiments?
Choose, if you please, the one you wish to keep;
My own decision only waits on yours.

ALCESTE, coming out of the corner to which he had
withdrawn
Yes, madam, he is right, it's time to choose,
And his demand agrees with my desire.
The same impatience brings me here, the same
Intention; and my love demands of you
Some certain proof. Things can't drag on forever.
Now is the moment to declare your heart.

ORONTE
Sir, not for anything would I disturb
Your happy fortune by an ill-timed wooing.

ALCESTE
Sir, not for anything—jealous or not—
Would I consent to share her heart with you.

ORONTE
If she can possibly prefer your love . . .

ALCESTE
If she can feel for you the slightest leaning . . .

ORONTE
I swear she'll have no more of my addresses.

ALCESTE
I swear I'll ne'er set eyes on her again.

ORONTE
Now, madam, you may speak, without restraint.

ALCESTE
Now, madam, you may choose, and have no fear.

ORONTE
You only need to tell us which you love.

ALCESTE
You only need to say the word, and choose.

ORONTE
What! Can you seem to balk at such a choice!

ALCESTE
What! Can you waver and appear uncertain!

CELIMENE
Good heavens! How out of place is this insistence!
How little sense does either of you show!
'Tis not but what I know which one to choose;
Of course I could not hold my heart suspended
Upon the scales, in doubt between you two;

No choice is quicker made than that of love;
But still, the truth is, I'm too much embarrassed
To state my preference before you both;
I think that words which well may prove unpleasant,
Should not be said point blank, and publicly;
We can give hints enough of how we feel
Without your forcing us to open quarrel;
And gentler intimations are sufficient
To tell a suitor of his ill success.

ORONTE

No, I fear nothing from a frank avowal;
For my part, I consent to it.

ALCESTE

And I
Demand it. Open declaration, now,
Is what I dare insist on most of all,
And I will have no mincing matters, either.
You're always trying to retain them all;
But no more dallying or uncertainty!
Make now a clear and public declaration,
Or I shall take your silence for decision
And hold that it confirms my worst suspicions.

ORONTE

I thank you for your angry passion, sir,
And I repeat to her the selfsame words.

CELIMENE

How you do weary me with your caprice!
What reason is there in the thing you ask for
Have I not told you why I can't consent?
Here's Eliante, I'll let her be the judge.

SCENE III

ELIANTE, PHILINTE, CELIMENE, ORONTE

CELIMENE

Dear cousin, I am being persecuted
By these two men, whose scheme seems preconceived.
They both demand, and both insist upon it,
That I proclaim the choice I make between them,
And publicly forbid the other one
To pay me any court forever after.
Tell me if such a thing is ever done.

ELIANTE

You might do better not to ask my counsel;
Perhaps I am the wrong one to appeal to;
I'm on the side of those who speak their mind.

ORONTE

Madam, it is in vain you seek evasions.

ALCESTE

Your shifts and turns are ill supported here.

ORONTE

You needs must speak, and stop this balancing.

ALCESTE

You need do nothing but continue silent.

ORONTE

I only ask one word, to settle matters.

ALCESTE

And I shall understand, if you say nothing.

SCENE IV

ARSINOE, CELIMENE, ELIANTE, ALCESTE,
PHILINTE, ACASTE, CLITANDRE, ORONTE

ACASTE, to Célimène

Madam, we both have come, by your good leave,
To clear up here a certain trifling matter.

CLITANDRE, to Oronte and Alceste

Your presence is right welcome, gentlemen;
You likewise are concerned in this affair.

ARSINOE

Madam, you'll be surprised to see me here;
These gentlemen insisted on my coming;
Both called upon me, and complained to me
Of certain doings that I could not credit.
I feel too sure your heart at least is right,
To think you capable of such a crime;
I shut my eyes against their strongest proofs,
Forgot, for friendship's sake, our little quarrels,
And even consented to come here with them
To see you clear yourself of this vile slander.

ACASTE

Yes, madam, we should like to have the pleasure
Of seeing how you'll try to face it out.
You wrote this letter, did you, to Clitandre?

CLITANDRE

You penned this sweet epistle to Acaste?

ACASTE, to Oronte and Alceste

This writing, gentlemen, is not unknown
To you. I doubt not her civility
Has made you but too well acquainted with it.
Still, this is well worth reading:
"You are a strange fellow to blame me for my gaiety, and
reproach me with being never so merry as when I am
not with you. Nothing can be more unjust, and if you
don't come very soon and entreat my pardon for this

crime, I'll never forgive you as long as I live. Our great
gawk of a viscount ..."

He ought to be here.

"Our great gawk of a viscount, whom you complain of
first, could never by any possibility suit my taste. Ever
since I saw him for three mortal quarters of an hour
stand spitting into a well to make rings in the water, I
haven't been able to think much of him. As for the little
marquis ..."

Myself, sirs; with no vanity I say it.

"As for the little marquis, who held me so long by the
hand yesterday, I think there is nothing so diminutive as
his whole personality; he is one of those gentry who
have no worth but their titles, and whose merit is all
leather and prunello. As for the man with the green
ribbons ..."

(To Alceste) 'Tis your turn now, sir.

"As for the man with the green ribbons, he amuses me
sometimes with his blunt ways and his surly humours;
but hundreds of times I find him the most bothersome
bore in the world. And as to the sonneteer ..."

(To Oronte) This is your package, sir.

"And as to the sonneteer, who has set up for a wit, and
is determined to be an author whether the world will or
no, I can't bring myself to listen to him, and his prose
wearies me as much as his verse. So be assured that I
am not always so merry as you think; that I miss you
greatly, and more than I could wish, at all the
entertainments they drag me to; and that the presence
of people we like gives a marvellous relish to our
pleasures."

CLITANDRE

Now here am I, for my turn.

"Your Clitandre, that you talk to me of, who abounds so
in sweet compliments, is the very last of human beings
that I could have a liking for. He is absurd to imagine

that he is loved, and you are equally so to believe that you are not. Be reasonable, and exchange your ideas for his; and come to see me as often as you can, to help me bear the annoyance of being beset by him."

There is a noble type of character
Set forth. You know its name perhaps, dear madam.
Enough. We'll both of us be proud to show
This portrait of your heart, where'er we go.

ACASTE

I could find much to say; the theme is tempting;
But I don't hold you worthy of my anger.
I'll show you, little marquises can find
Hearts to console them, of a nobler kind.

SCENE V

ARSINOE, CELIMENE, ELIANTE, ALCESTE,
ORONTE, PHILINTE

ORONTE

What! Must I see myself thus torn to tatters,
After the things I've had you write to me!
And does your heart, in love's false finery
Arrayed, plight troth with all mankind by turns!
I was too much the dupe, I'm so no longer.
I owe you much for teaching me to know you,
I'm richer by the heart you thus restore.
And find revenge in knowing what you lose.
(To Alceste) I shall oppose your love no longer, sir,
And now you may conclude your match with her.

SCENE VI

CELIMENE, ELIANTE, ARSINOE, ALCESTE, PHILINTE

ARSINOE, to Célimène

This is the blackest deed I've ever known;
I can't be silent, I'm in such a ferment.

Did ever anybody see the like?

Not that I care a snap about those others;
But that this gentleman, (Pointing to Alceste) whom your
good luck
Attached to you, a man of worth and honour,
Who doted on you to idolatry,
Should be so . . .

ALCESTE

Madam, will you please allow me
To manage my affairs myself, and not
Take on yourself this quite superfluous burden?
However warmly you espouse my cause,
I'm in no way to pay your zeal in kind:
And you are not a person I could think of
Should I seek vengeance by another choice.

ARSINOE

Eh! Do you fancy, sir, I've that idea,
Or do you think I'd be so quick to have you?
I must say you are mighty vain if you
Can lay that flattering unction to your soul.
This lady's leavings are an article
'Twould be a great mistake to rate so highly.
Pray undeceive yourself; don't be so proud.
People like me are not for such as you.
You'd do well still to dangle at her skirts,
And marry her—you'd get your just deserts.

SCENE VII

CELIMENE, ELIANTE, ALCESTE, PHILINTE

ALCESTE, to Célimène

Well, I've kept silent, spite of what I've heard,
And let them all say out their say before me.
Have I controlled my feelings long enough,
And may I now . . . ?

CELIMENE

Yes, yes, say all you will;
You have the right, you justly may complain
And blame me as you please. I'm wrong, I own it;
In my confusion I shall not attempt
To put you off with any vain excuse.
The others' anger I despised. But you
I must admit I've wronged; and your resentment
Beyond all doubt is just; I know how guilty
I must appear to you; how everything
Proclaims that I was ready to betray you,
And that you truly have good cause to hate me.
Do so, I must submit.

ALCESTE

Ah! Can I, traitress?
Can I thus triumph over all my love?
And though with all my might I long to hate you,
How can I ever make my heart obey me?
(To Eliante and Philinte)
You see how far an abject love can go;
I call you both to witness to my weakness.
Yet, to confess the truth, this is not all,
You'll see me push it to the bitter end,
And prove that men are wrongfully called wise,
For all hearts have a touch of human nature.
(To Célimène) Yes, I am willing to forget your crimes;
I'll find it in my heart to pardon all,
And tell myself that they are weaknesses
To which the vices of the time misled you,
If only you'll consent to that design
Which I have formed, to flee from all mankind,
And be resolved at once to follow me
Into my desert, where I've vowed to live.
'Tis only so that in the world's opinion
You can repair the mischief of your letters,

And even after scandal so abhorrent
To noble natures, I may love you still.

CELIMENE

What, I renounce the world before I'm old,
And go be buried in your solitude!

ALCESTE

But if your fondness equals my affection,
What matters to you all the world beside?
Will not your wishes be content with me?

CELIMENE

But solitude has terrors for a soul
Of twenty; mine's not great and firm enough,
I fear, to let me take that high resolve.
But if my hand can satisfy your wishes,
I'll bring myself to suffer such a bond,
And marriage . . .

ALCESTE

No; my heart detests you now.
This one rebuff does more than all the rest.
And since you cannot find, in that dear tie,
Your all in me, as I my all in you
Go, I refuse you; this last sore offence
Sets me forever free from your base fetters.

(Célimène goes.)

SCENE VIII

ELIANTE, ALCESTE, PHILINTE

ALCESTE, to Eliante

Madam, a hundred virtues crown your beauty.
In you alone I've found sincerity,
And long I've felt for you a deep regard;

But let me still esteem you thus; and suffer
My heart, with all its varied agitations,
Not to demand the honour of your service.
I'm too unworthy, and begin to see
That heaven did not create me fit for marriage;
The leavings of a heart unworthy you,
Would be an offering meaner than your due;
And so ...

ELIANTE

So let it be, Alceste, I pray;
I'm at no loss to give my hand away;
And here's your friend—to seek no further—he,
If I should ask him, might accept of me.

PHILINTE

That honour, madam, is my whole desire;
To win it I would go through flood and fire.

ALCESTE

May you, to taste true happiness, preserve
These feelings each for each, and never swerve.
Betrayed on all sides, overwhelmed with wrong,
I'll leave this den of thieves vice reigns among,
And find some lonely corner, if I can,
Where one is free to be an honest man.

PHILINTE

Come, madam, let us use our utmost art
To change this savage purpose of his heart.