

LA NÉCESSITÉ DU DIVORCE.

COMÉDIE EN TROIS ACTES EN PROSE.

The Necessity of Divorce. A prose comedy in three acts.¹

CHARACTERS

M. d'Aziuval.²

Mme d'Aziuval.

Rosambert, old bachelor, d'Aziuval's friend.

Germeuil, Rosambert's nephew, Constance's suitor.

Constance, M. d'Aziuval's sister.

Herminie.

Abbot, Father Basilie.

Philippe, M. d'Aziuval's elderly servant.

The action takes place in M. d'Aziuval's Parisian drawing-room.

ACT ONE

FIRST SCENE ³

¹ The manuscript of this play was unearthed in the BNF in Paris in the early 1990s and is inscribed as having been viewed by the police censor on 26 October 1790, it does not bear the name of any author; de Gouges mentions having written a play on divorce in her pamphlet *Sera t-il roi* at the end of June 1791 though she refers to it as a five act play whereas the manuscript version consists of only three. The BNF catalogue attributes this play to Augustin Prévost (1753 - 1830) although the printed version of his play of 1801 *L'Utilité du divorce* bears no resemblance whatsoever to this manuscript which has on its first page *La Nécessité du Divorce, Comédie en 3 actes*. Expert scholars (Gabrielle Verdier, Gisela Thiele-Knobloch and Olivier Blanc) affirm that this play was written by de Gouges in 1790 and as such it has been published twice in recent times (ed. Castan: Cocagne, n.d. and ed. Thiele-Knobloch: côté-femme, 1993). The work was probably written in the late summer/early autumn of 1790 in response to a National Assembly debate on divorce held on 5 August 1790 for it is set on the eve of such a debate. Although the text gives the bulk of the argument for divorce to a male bachelor it is the two women protagonists cheated by their husband/lover who resolve the marital situation through their strength, honesty and sensitivity. Neither woman is viewed as a victim although both are seen to suffer when their love is exploited by a dishonest man. De Gouges places the errant husband in a closet where he is obliged to listen, and learn from, the reasoned and friendly solidarity that these two intelligent women bring to bear on their crisis. The women represent a model that de Gouges strove to encourage throughout her life believing that both the former coquettish wit of the salon flirt and the new housebound mother of the Revolution represented feminine ideals that limited female potential. She felt that those women who had been, under the Ancien Régime, despicable but respected, were now respectable but despised. The play's last sentence neatly encapsulates De Gouges's thoughts on relationships and marriage: she held strong views in favour of divorce; marriage could too often entomb a woman in a vulnerable powerless state with a husband who may well have been chosen for her against her will. She expressed these opinions in her brochures, particularly in *La Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne*. A secular law in favour of divorce was finally decreed on 20 September 1792 by the National Assembly and modified in 1793 and 1794; from 1 January 1793 to 17 June 1795 nearly 6000 divorces were pronounced, 71 per cent instigated by women (Godineau: Alinea, 1988). The law on divorce was revoked in 1816 during the Restoration and not brought back until 1844; divorce by mutual consent was not fully re-established in France until 1975. This play has never been staged.

² The names are spelt as in the original manuscript that I viewed in the BNF; the printed text in the modern edition côté-femme (1993) uses d'Azinaval and Basilic.

³ The second person plural is used throughout the play with these exceptions: Rosambert and d'Aziuval

GERMEUIL, PHILIPPE.

GERMEUIL, *entering* - Philippe?

PHILIPPE, *entering* - Ah! Monsieur Germeuil, it's you.

GERMEUIL - Is it daytime at Madame d'Aziuval's?

PHILIPPE - Daytime! Ah, Sir, my poor mistress has not closed her eyes all night. She is worried sick.

GERMEUIL - Has something happened to d'Aziuval?

PHILIPPE - He didn't come home last night.

GERMEUIL - He didn't come home!

PHILIPPE - No, no, and my mistress cried all night long. She never went to bed and Mademoiselle Constance kept her company.

GERMEUIL - Yet another trespass!...May I speak to Constance?

PHILIPPE - I will let her know that you are here.

SECOND SCENE

GERMEUIL, *alone* - D'Aziuval did not come home! Has he met with an accident? No, rather his distaste for an amiable and virtuous woman has reached its peak. Having taken back the heart he gave her he ends up violating decency, and no longer maintains even the niceties that he had substituted for the love she once inspired in him. No doubt some new conquest...but I see Constance! She looks so dispirited. What an unhappy omen for my own love!

THIRD SCENE

CONSTANCE AND GERMEUIL.

GERMEUIL - My dear Constance, here you are! I learn with great sorrow that your brother...

CONSTANCE - Oh! Sir, my brother fills his wife, and me, with misery. Madame d'Aziuval deserved to be happy and my brother makes her life unbearable. Who could ever believe the promises, the pledges of men? He loved her so tenderly! He repeatedly told her that his love for her would never cease; barely two years have passed since their union and he is no longer the same man. Cold indifference and distaste have taken the place of the most affectionate love. He doesn't even feel obliged to keep up the pretence...it cannot console a tender heart but at least it offers a glimmer of hope and does not spread any signs of separation to the world outside. Oh! Germeuil, what sad thoughts have been thrust on me by this reprehensible behaviour!

GERMEUIL - Ah! Have pity, good Constance, do not take me for one of those shallow men who have never felt the burning effects of a true and pure love, one that is above all founded on fellow feeling, respect and esteem! Never, never will I for one moment cease to adore you...

alone address Philippe using 'tu' not 'vous'; M et Mme d'Aziuval use 'tu' when addressing each other; Rosambert and d'Aziuval use 'vous' between each other except in the last scene of the play when Rosambert uses 'tu' to address his friend. For reasons of personal taste I have chosen to translate 'Monsieur' as 'Sir' when used conversationally but have kept to 'Madame' and 'Mademoiselle' despite it being inconsistent; no surname is given for Herminie, for Madame d'Aziuval to address her as 'Miss' or 'Miss Herminie' felt wrong, as did 'Miss --'.

CONSTANCE - Oh, Sir! At the moment you think these sentiments will never change but who will answer for their duration? That is how my brother used to express himself, that is how he deceived his unhappy spouse. And if you were to deceive me, you, Germeuil! Ah! I know it would be the end of me!

GERMEUIL - Take comfort, take comfort, my dear Constance, I venture to promise that I will never betray the fidelity that I have sworn to you. Not all men are like d'Aziuval. There are models of constancy, of conjugal fidelity, that I would be honoured to imitate, and for your suitor, your brother's example would forever be a powerful lesson preserving him from wrong. I trust that this is just a momentary wrong, I know d'Aziuval and no doubt we will find him disgusted by his capricious pleasures, bringing his heart, his regrets and his repentance to the feet of his spouse.

CONSTANCE - Ah! Germeuil, if only I could forgive him! He is my brother but...

GERMEUIL - Forgive me for I barely know Madame d'Aziuval. She is charming and virtuous! But that is not always enough to attach a spouse or bring back an unfaithful man. Continued attentions, taking care to hide anxiety and pain, to always show a smiling face to the man whom reproaches and ill-humour can distance even further, these are more certain methods and Madame d'Aziuval might...

CONSTANCE - What are you saying, Sir? Ah! To safeguard the most unhappy and most respectable woman. What you demand is virtue's noblest effort. Well, such is my sister's character, such is her conduct, but her spouse prefers the noisy pleasures of the wide world to the sweet tranquility of home. The touching sensibility of his adorable spouse is nothing compared to the piquant wiles and affected manners of those unprincipled women who bring to the bosom of families trouble and desolation, penury and horror. Eh! Quite a difference, however! Oh! I see it! A mother who devotes every moment to the happiness of her husband, to manage his income, to bring up his children so that they become useful citizens, is an august being who deserves the praise and the admiration not just of her spouse but also of all her fellow citizens.

GERMEUIL - My affectionate friend, you depict what is in your heart! You will be this respectable spouse, this virtuous mother, the honour of your sex, and you would wish me to give up all hope of possessing you, and the joy of sharing every moment with you!...

CONSTANCE - Ah! Germeuil, your uncle will never agree to it, you know his prejudice against marriage, against the indissolubility of those knots that he sees as chains whose weight it is impossible to drag around.

GERMEUIL - Eh! What do I care for his prejudice? Is it up to the withered heart of a sad bachelor to judge the charms and delights of a union contracted under the auspices of love and virtue?

CONSTANCE - But, Germeuil, you are dependent on him!

GERMEUIL - Oh! That is what drives me to despair. I haven't given up the hope that I can soften him, fight him and convince him. Unlike so many others it is not hate or disdain for a sex so worthy of being loved, nor odious speculations of a sordid self-interest, that have forced him to stay single. Only the indissolubility of a union that could be ill-suited made him shudder. According to his way of thinking divorce allows the knots of marriage to be tied with flowers, without it they become the irons that the trembling slave gnaws at for they are the torment of his life. But, having reached that age when a man feels more than ever the need for an obliging and benevolent companion by his side, my uncle would wish in vain to hide the awful void in his heart...But I think I hear...Ye gods! It's him!

FOURTH SCENE

THE SAME, ROSAMBERT.

ROSAMBERT - Mademoiselle, I have the honour of presenting my respects. Nephew, you are romancing, Sir, rather early in the morning.⁴ What an untimely hour to visit the ladies. It is different for me. I am of no consequence, but a young sprightly chap like you...

GERMEUIL - But, uncle...

ROSAMBERT - But, nephew, you are wasting your time. I have already told you. You are totally dependent on me. You have nothing, I am rich. I am your guardian, I am in *loco parentis* and, in my lifetime, I will never tolerate that you should marry. After my death, all well and good, I will no longer be there to keep you out of mischief. Then it will be so much the worse for you!

CONSTANCE - But Sir...

ROSAMBERT - That is how it is! See, Mademoiselle, you are young, pretty, witty, sweet, sensible, my nephew is a good looking boy who will love you like a fool. You are not to be outdone by him on that score, I know. Both of you are of good faith but, let me tell you, if by some unhappy accident you were to marry you would end by cordially hating each other. In love, a woman is an angel; in the home she is a devil. The lover obeys and the husband commands. Monsieur turns to the right, Madame points to the left, from that spousal disunion comes the hapless education of children, the ruin of families and the corruption of society!

GERMEUIL - But, my dear uncle, if all the world thought like you...

ROSAMBERT - The world would soon end, wouldn't it? Ah well! Jolly good! Or so I would have said fifteen months ago; for what it's worth.⁵ But everything has devilishly changed since then. Thanks to the wisdom of our legislators things have taken a new turn. Man is back in his place. Prejudice still exists. It is so hard to weed it out. Opinion cannot be dictated to! As for abuses, they will always exist, it is inevitable, but it is like comparing fifty to one. Anyway, never mind! I, an old man, a little sad...I will admit, because I find myself almost alone, isolated in the world, that this has put a spring in my step. I am no flatterer but the name of one of our patriotic deputies makes me tremble. They have done so much for us! I hope they will achieve their aim. See, for example, if today our legislators pronounce for divorce I will marry tomorrow, assuming that I can find a woman who would have me for, I can at least give myself some credit, I am nothing short of an Adonis...

FIFTH SCENE

THE SAME, A SERVANT.

THE SERVANT, *announcing* - The Right Reverend Father Basile!

ROSAMBERT - Ah! By gad! I am curious to be acquainted with this fellow. I have never met him. Let him in, if Mademoiselle will allow.

CONSTANCE - Willingly, Sir, but allow me to withdraw. I fear that this gentleman may not be as respectable as his calling demands and I truly fear that his bad advice...Permit me to withdraw!

ROSAMBERT - With all my heart, lovely young lady! (*To Germeuil who is dithering.*) Yes, yes, you can lend a hand to this beautiful child! It's neither here nor there!

4 The original French text 'vous avez la puce à l'oreille de bien bon matin' - you have a flea in your ear very early in the morning - meant being amorous up to the 17th century (implying intimately checking people for fleas) then, from the early 18th century, meant feeling anxious (implying actually having a flea in one's ear and the resultant discomfort): I believe that the context allows for the amorous meaning, one that writers were familiar with through the earlier works of la Fontaine and others.

5 Fifteen months is a very precise time; if the play is set, as suggested by Thiele-Knoblach (*côté-femme* 1993) on the 5 August 1790 - when divorce was first debated by the National Assembly - fifteen months earlier just predates the reconvening of the Estates General in May/June 1789 in Versailles and implies a period before 'new' ideas such as divorce were contemplated by the state.

SIXTH SCENE

ROSAMBERT, FATHER BASILIE.

ROSAMBERT - Forgive me, Father, if a stranger welcomes you but I am a friend of the family. D'Aziuvai is absent, the ladies are busy, and...

FATHER BASILIE, *unctuously* - Sir, I am delighted to have the opportunity to afford myself the joy of getting to know a man of merit such as yourself and...

ROSAMBERT - Of merit, Father! Of merit! Eh! Who told you that I was a man of merit? You do not know me! Stop, a ceasefire, no more compliments, I beg you! Let us sit and have a chat!

FATHER BASILIE, *aside* - Who is this eccentric?

They both sit down.

ROSAMBERT - You come to this house often Father, so I am told.

FATHER BASILIE - Yes, Sir, I am duty bound to, through Christian charity. I attempt, through my wise advice, to restore calm to the soul of a virtuous woman, but...I am not afraid to tell you that the bad behaviour of her spouse (please forgive the expression), that the behaviour, rather, of a very disturbed spouse could lead to some imprudence...

ROSAMBERT - Wait, Father, I am prepared to accept that your intentions are pure but people in your field seem to me to be hardly fit to restore calm to a couple; dutifully vowed to celibacy, how can they enter into the minutiae of details of which they do not understand the consequences or the problems, and, by the way (forgive this expression in turn) are they not men and therefore susceptible...

FATHER BASILIE - Goodness gracious! What are you daring to suggest, Sir? What, men who have renounced the passions and frivolity of the century...

ROSAMBERT - Oh! Father, can one renounce nature? What meaning do you give to that word 'passions'? They are feelings, spiritual needs, and it is as impossible for man to live without passions as it is to exist without the circulation of blood.

FATHER BASILIE - So you are saying that you would incline towards allowing us to...

ROSAMBERT - Marry! Without a doubt, it is the wish of nature. The duty of all men is to give citizens to society. Oh! Who could give their children a better education than the one whose position obliges him to be totally virtuous? Let us adopt this law, and pronounce on the one for divorce: those are the only means by which conduct can regain the purity without which there can be no solid prosperity, that the ever increasing and formidable numbers of bachelors can be reduced, that families can be at peace again and society, in its entirety, can be happy.

FATHER BASILIE - You want divorce to be adopted, Sir, but consider that religion has proscribed it, that our customs repudiate it and that marriage has always been indissoluble among us.

ROSAMBERT - Father, when, after many centuries have passed and the customs of a nation are utterly altered, it is reasonable, it is necessary even, to change a system whose inflexibility is only proportional to the good it produces. The wisdom of a bygone legislator is not obscured by the abnegation of his laws, or by corrective measures that one brings to them, because he worked for his times, and his successors, ad infinitum, will have to work for theirs. The past can serve as an example but it can never become law. By the way, Father, you are wrong when you suppose that divorce did not exist alongside Christianity; in the first ten centuries it was practiced in Christian states and from Constantine to the emperor Leon, the divorce laws were in full vigour. It would therefore not be an innovation, Father, but a simple reestablishing of a useful, necessary law indispensable to the happiness of all mankind.

FATHER BASILIE - Sir, Sir, you do not mention that mass of laws created during the ten century interval which tended to restrain the abuses of divorce, proving unquestionably...

ROSAMBERT - None aimed to destroy it, Father, and the efforts made by wise legislators to preserve the integrity of divorce, on the contrary, triumphantly prove its legality. A vice of this sort cannot be corrected, it must be stifled.⁶ Reforming laws always deal with authorized conditions. Oh! Would it not be folly to attempt to create limits to the art of poisoning by prescribing standards!

FATHER BASILIE - That's all very well, Sir, but the indissolubility of marriage...

ROSAMBERT - Threatens the splendour of a State and silently undermines it. Let us imagine for a moment that the whole of Europe were divided into two confederations, one in the south, one in the north: one accepts a depopulating system, the other, having no formal bachelors, offers the population all its vitality. If the northern confederation becomes embattled it will attack and defend itself with new vigour. Its armies will be numerous, healthy and robust whilst the southern confederation will only have a feeble number of troops weakened by the sicknesses that result from bad habits. In a word, in the north all is productive, in the south all is consumed: one is weakened to the same extent that the other is strengthened.

FATHER BASILIE - Oh! Dear Sir, can you not behold what a mass of problems, what a welter of disorder such an erroneous system would produce if by ill-luck it should come to be adopted! How many separations! How many marriages dissolved! What would be the fate of children following a divorce? Or the fate of the guilty party, or of the one found to be innocent? While mutual agreement allows divorce to function what will be the fortunes of those that separate? What decisions will be made regarding those who have only their industriousness to support them?

ROSAMBERT - To that I would reply, Father, that there would be far fewer separations than envisaged from first impressions. The respective ability to separate would encourage all parties to seek reconciliation. For it would only be in cases determined by law that divorce would take place and that law would protect the interests of children and spouses that have separated. How is it managed in Poland? How was it managed in all the periods and in all the places where divorce took place? There are perhaps inconveniences, but is anything free from them? Everywhere personal interests are ceding to the general good. A universal utility is the characteristic of all systems that take their lead from nature.

FATHER BASILIE - But, Sir, through divorce...

ROSAMBERT - Through divorce, Father, you would place an innumerable mass of bachelors in the position of taking up marriage. They are reticent merely because they fear the eternity of marriage. More marriages would make it harder for libertines to illicitly search out girls, their numbers having decreased. Divorce gives you the means to propagate marriage by increasing its spread, by reducing the number of troublesome bachelors and, because the status of married individuals will depend on their behaviour, they will perforce become more circumspect. Finally, through the exercise of divorce, you gain the upper hand over vice and you avenge an oppressed virtue without using violent means. Couples who are at present living as though they were actually divorced are forced into sterility; when their position is altered by the changes that will take place they will become fecund again. You return a man to a wife who is made for him and a woman to a husband she finds suitable. There, Father, there are the advantages of divorce. There are a thousand more that I could cite if the time and the constraints of a conversation would allow me to expose them to your view.

SEVENTH SCENE

6 The indissolubility of marriage.

THE SAME, PHILIPPE.

PHILIPPE, *running in* - Ah! Sir, here he is! It's him! I recognised him from afar, his looks, his clothes...I was dying of impatience. I was glued to the window with a glass...

ROSAMBERT - Oh! My poor Philippe, are you mad?

PHILIPPE - Mad? No, but drunk with joy. My poor master! Here he is, it's him, I was so anxious!...Thank God, all is well! I will run to Madame to put a spring in her step and announce his return...Tell him off, Monsieur Rosambert! He worries us!...Such a good wife! A sister who loves him so! His old servant...who would give his life for him! Yes it's him! I've seen him! I fly...excuse me! What happiness! I'm overwhelmed with joy! (*He exits.*)

FATHER BASILIE - For my part, Sir, by your leave I will withdraw.

ROSAMBERT - Eh! But Father, did you not come with the intention of seeing Monsieur and Madame d'Aziuval?

FATHER BASILIE - Yes, Sir, but all my moments are accounted for and I must devote them to alleviate the suffering of the poor, to the consolation of the afflicted, to the edification of the next generation.

ROSAMBERT - As you will, Father, as you will!

EIGHTH SCENE

ROSAMBERT, PHILIPPE.

PHILIPPE - My poor mistress is finally resting. She hasn't slept a wink all night. Oh! Sir, do try and encourage Monsieur d'Aziuval to stop causing us such sorrow.

ROSAMBERT - Be assured, my friend, I will clear his head.

PHILIPPE - Oh! Go gently, Sir, you are his friend. You could upset him.

ROSAMBERT - Yes, I will speak kindly to him. Never fear.

PHILIPPE - Here he is.

NINTH SCENE

THE SAME, D'AZIUVAL.

D'AZIUVAL - Ah! It's you, my friend! I am delighted to see you.

PHILIPPE - Sir...Sir...My dear master!

D'AZIUVAL - Good morning, Philippe.

PHILIPPE - Are you not sick?

D'AZIUVAL - No, my friend, I am fine. Leave us.

PHILIPPE - Yes Sir...It's just that...I feared...but no...your health!...I am...Yes, oh! I...(he kisses the hem of his coat and exits.)

TENTH SCENE

ROSAMBERT, D'AZIUVAL.

ROSAMBERT - At least, my poor d'Aziuval, you are luckier than you are wise.

D'AZIUVAL - How so?

ROSAMBERT - You see how beloved you are.

D'AZIUVAL - Yes, Philippe is very attached to me.

ROSAMBERT - The joyful transports of a simple servant on seeing you again might allow you to judge of the anxiety you have visited on your sister and wife.

D'AZIUVAL - I had no intention of staying the night but I found myself carried away. Supper was delayed late into the night. We danced and...

ROSAMBERT - You are keeping something back, my friend. No doubt you were detained by the presence of some enticing nymph...

D'AZIUVAL - Well, I will admit that Herminie was of the supper. But be careful, my friend, be careful not to confuse her with those unprincipled women, without scruples, who run from one seduction to another and seem to pride themselves on the huge number of their conquests. The gentle and modest Herminie is affectionate and I am convinced that she is so only to me. A vile self-interest has never been her guide, she refused a glittering fortune, she did even better, she refused an advantageous marriage probably,...should I say? In the hope that I would eventually offer her my hand, for I hid from her that I was already married...

ROSAMBERT - And that is how you create, at one and the same time, the misfortune of two women who love you. If Herminie is such as you depict her...but then the brushstrokes of love...

D'AZIUVAL - Oh!...

ROSAMBERT - Enough! I believe you, but why deceive her? On the other hand you have a young wife who is beautiful, virtuous, full of sensibility and who loves you...too much perhaps for her own good. Do you want to make her die of sorrow?

D'AZIUVAL - I love my wife, I respect her. But my heart is dead to that lively feeling that is called love and, in the mean time, what I feel for Herminie does not revive the affection that I owe my spouse. I accept that she must have been anxious. Let me go and reassure her. You will dine with us...

ROSAMBERT - She is resting at the moment.

D'AZIUVAL - So then who were you with, here?

ROSAMBERT - With Father Basilie and I will admit that I found his company far from pleasing. I think it even threatens the tranquility of your household. There are, without doubt, in this class of people, respectable beings that I honour from the depth of my heart but I know something of physiognomy and his bodes ill.⁷ With the triple brow of hypocrites, and using the specious pretext of religion, I have seen too many insinuate themselves into families, seeking only to spread division and trouble. To succeed in his intent such a man does not take the form of an amiable blunderer; he realizes that he would fail using such a mask. He knows that great vices only get on well with each other and that in order to defeat virtue he must use its own language; he doesn't seek to please, he merely wants to seduce. Raised in those houses that corrupt the air society breathes, whose contagion flows out incessantly, whose order is based on division, where virtue consists solely of pulling faces and morality of empty words, he possesses the art of cheating, of lying, of imagining faults that are non-existent, of grabbing them, when they do exist, and showing them in the most odious light, and of breaking the most sacred ties, too pleased when they spread only trouble and division in families, so long as they afford him no dishonour.⁸

D'AZIUVAL - I agree with you, Rosambert. I have never liked that man. I only put up with him out of respect for my wife...for my wife! Ah! My friend! That word torments me! How I agree with you about the necessity of divorce! But I long for it in vain, it will not happen and

7 The Swiss Johan Kaspar Lavater (1741 - 1801) published a very influential and popular essay on physiognomy in the early 1770s that was widely read throughout Europe. I have taken 'Le triple front' to refer to physiognomy as it was interpreted in the 18th century i.e. that man's nature was divided into three namely animal, emotional and intellectual and that these characteristics could be judged by looking at an individual's facial features. But it could equally be translated as meaning a threefold impudence. Either way it is clear that Rosambert believes Father Basilie to be excessively hypocritical.

8 It is unclear from the structure of the sentence whether it is the 'faults' or the 'sacred ties' that spread trouble and division.

I will repent for the rest of my life that I did not maintain my freedom. You are happy, tranquil...

ROSAMBERT - Tranquil! Happy!...My friend, I will speak to you from the heart. I would guard against expressing myself as frankly with anyone else. At my age, when the intoxication of passion has passed, one takes stock of oneself. Comparing the use one has made of one's life with that to which one was destined is frightening and spreads, over the part of life that starts at maturity, a melancholy whose bitterness nothing can alleviate. Oh! My friend! How cruel it is to be alone, isolated in the world! For example, two days ago I heard that one of our friends was ill. I flew there. He is a father, burdened by age and infirmity. I saw by the bed of this respectable old man a spouse weak from keeping vigil. In her zeal I saw her find reserves of strength that she never exhibited before. She grew in proportion to the needs of her husband. [Around the bed] attentive children ready to offer, at the least sign, all the help that could be expected of them. Fear and longing was etched on all faces. It was an honour to rival each other in offering the most menial help to the sick man. How love and friendship ennoble everything! Ah! My friend! This vision struck me forcibly. 'Who am I?', I asked myself. 'Where is this wife, where are the children who should live on and perpetuate my name, who should take care of my old age and close my eyelids?' I see around me nothing but a terrible void. The father dies peacefully in the midst of his children; his soul departs and a joyful smile still lingers on his lips. The bachelor dies shuddering, heart-broken. He is a wounded lion who roars. He cannot extract the dart that pierced him, he blames the hand that sent it...but I think I hear someone. Your spouse is no doubt awake. Let us enter her apartment and, given that you cannot break your chains, at least use all means available to you to lessen their burden.

End of the first Act.

ACT TWO

FIRST SCENE

MADAME D'AZIUVAL, ROSAMBERT.

MADAME D'AZIUVAL - So, Sir, you can see clearly how unhappy I am. Witness of our temporary reconciliation you have just seen my spouse's latest offence against me. Once he would have blushed at my suspecting, even for an instant, his behaviour: now he drops his mask. Everything irritates him, everything displeases him. I have become, in his view, nothing but an object of hatred and disdain.

ROSAMBERT - I agree with you, Madame, that d'Aziual has his faults. Some are very great indeed. But you, yourself! Are you beyond reproach? He fears, you say, that you may suspect his behaviour yet you make him aware that you know about his peccadillos. This allusive reproach, despite being delivered under cover of a smile and coloured by playfulness is, none the less, a bitter reproach. Confusion made him harsh and you pronounced the name of Herminie! Did you say he would not treat her in the same way? Oh! Madame, should your lips be the ones to make comparisons between the two of you? Is it you that should reawaken in your spouse's heart a memory that disgraces him in your eyes and even in his own? An imprudent reproach is often a spark that kindles a fire and when a peccadillo that one is trying to hide is discovered, one loses all sense of proportion, and rather than remedy the situation one ends up by making it worse.

MADAME D'AZIUVAL - Perhaps I was wrong to name Herminie but you will admit, Sir, that I have been cruelly punished for it and you will realize how cruel it is for a wife who

tenderly loves her husband to hear him admit, from his own lips, the love that another woman inspires in him, and to hear...that he prefers the other woman and will never stop loving her.

ROSAMBERT - I admit that the disclosure is cruel but anger often tears expressions from us that the heart later denies. And what caused all of this? Your imprudence, perhaps, or rather the tenets of that odious relationship that you were permitted to undertake. I knew of your spouse's weakness. I hid it from you, not because he is my friend, but because I esteem both of you, because I respect your peace of mind and the repose of your household, and without a doubt, he who would have been pleased to foment division between you is a dishonest man and an enemy of your repose.

MADAME D'AZIUVAL - You are wrong, Sir. I know only too well the man who opened my eyes, who tore off the blindfold that covered them, to question the zeal that encouraged him to act and speak. I will admit that, on the contrary, I fear that your system has (despite yourself I will grant you that) has, I say, contributed to the distancing of my spouse. According to you, marriage is an appalling chain whose weight it is impossible to drag around. D'Aziual trusts you and on the strength of your beliefs, this man who loved me, who might have made me happy, who would have been happy himself, this man, I say, has persuaded himself that no joy can exist in a union that is deemed to be eternal. In the object of his gentlest inclination he saw only constraint and it is to you, Sir, that I owe the sad fruits of his error.

ROSAMBERT - I am much obliged. I am the one who has created all the wrong, am I! That is reasoned to perfection. Madame, when d'Aziual consulted me on his marriage I did not hide from him the train of my thoughts: I think one is entitled to have one's own method. He did not believe me; too bad. Today this union is making both of you unhappy; I am angry about that! I anticipated as much, so now I can only help with my counsel but please believe that this counsel is only intended to reconcile you, to restore your repose: however, I must warn you, this is not an easy matter. The specific happiness of families depends on the understanding that reigns between the different members that compose them but this perfect accord, that alone can secure felicity at the heart of society, cannot always result from laws that seek to impose it. Happiness cannot be achieved through force; it is the product of natural freedom. Laws direct this feeling, they cannot give it. The reciprocal love between spouses, their affection for their children, the respect and friendship of the children for their father and mother, the general esteem they share for one another that strengthens and perpetuates these affectionate feelings, these are the unique origins of the union and peace that can be observed with interest in such a small number of families.

MADAME D'AZIUVAL - And do you believe, Sir, that it is impossible to preserve this peace, this union, as things stand?

ROSAMBERT - Madame, it is, at the very least, extremely difficult. Force, by harassing the human heart, irritates it and corrupts it. Virtue enchained is a form of heroism that not everyone can attain. The perpetuity of marriage may have produced more horrors than the overreaching ambition of conquerors and the implacable cruelty of tyrants who swamped the earth in barbarian times. At least it was possible to flee their presence. No laws, raised to the level of dogma, forced people to await their blows. In an indissoluble marriage one must live with one's enemy, at times one's assassin, one must kiss the hand that will do harm and be caught between the cruel choice of living abjectly or dying unhappy.

MADAME D'AZIUVAL - Oh! Do you have any idea, Sir, how distressing these ideas are to a tender soul? What might have served as a safeguard before the wedding can now only bring about despair. Must all hopes be abandoned of recalling an unfaithful man and binding him to his family, of making him feel the vacuity and frivolity of his guilty pleasures, of convincing him that it is unpardonable in all cases to violate one's word, that it is sacrilegious to infringe a promise made in front of an altar?

ROSAMBERT - I told you Madame. At such a time virtue must rise to the level of heroism.

Therefore be civil, affectionate, abandon those irregularities, those caprices, those resolute tones, those manners that a lover accepts because he does not respect you but that a spouse has the right to correct in order to make you respectable. Abandon, above all else, those reproaches! They merely embitter a fickle man and make him ever more distant. If your husband's task is to gather riches, yours is to economise them. Let your spouse find you ever mindful, civil, full of care and attention; that is the right way to return him to your side. Eh! These qualities that allow a woman to be venerated by all of society trump the feeble accoutrements of a dissipated life, they outdo the ambiguous condition of a childless wife, estranged from her husband, the bane of nature, who wastes the time she should spend attending to her household on frivolous occupations, who only schools her charms to multiply her crimes and who ends up being an object of disdain even to those she believed idolised her!

MADAME D'AZIUVAL - You are right, Sir, and I will follow your wise advice. Further, my faith in you is such that I will not refrain from communicating to you a plan that I have devised. Do not attempt to dissuade me! Your efforts would be in vain. I believe you are too sincere to reveal my secret.

ROSAMBERT - You would be insulting me, Madame, if you thought me capable of...

MADAME D'AZIUVAL - No, Sir, I assure you. I have discovered where Herminie lives. I definitely want to meet her, to question her, and find out how she binds her man. I plan to go to her house this evening. Please try and engage Monsieur d'Aziual...

ROSAMBERT, *aside* - I have an idea, I must seize it! (*Aloud.*) I do not mean to disapprove of your plan, Madame, but I believe it would be more respectable to invite her to come here...

MADAME D'AZIUVAL - What are you thinking, Sir! Here, in my husband's house?

ROSAMBERT - I know that she has no idea where d'Aziual lives. Address her a few words. Use an alias and warn your footman?...

MADAME D'AZIUVAL - I understand, and I approve of your idea. I will go to my room, for a moment, and write. But please, be discreet!

ROSAMBERT - You can count on me, Madame.

SECOND SCENE

ROSAMBERT, *alone*.

Excellent! Everything is falling perfectly into place for my plan. If my ruse is successful I will not doubt effect a positive change in d'Aziual's behaviour. I will bring peace back to this unhappy family and I will have the pleasure of proving the solidity, the truth, of my proposition. In order to execute my plan I needed to find a way of keeping d'Aziual at home all evening and his wife offers me a way, quite naturally...Good, but is it not an abuse of her confidence? Is it for me to use this secret? Did I not make her a promise?...Perhaps, but I shall not speak of it. By persuading Philippe to cleverly allow d'Aziual to discover this letter, I would not be...Frivolous subterfuge! Would it not be thanks to my advice! Ah! It is pointless to try and confuse oneself with regard to violating one's duty for therein is a severe judge who warns us of our faults. The good that should come of this action is all that renders it excusable and were it not for this joyous hope, I should never undertake it.

THIRD SCENE

ROSAMBERT, PHILIPPE.

ROSAMBERT - Why, there's Philippe. Philippe?
PHILIPPE - Sir?
ROSAMBERT - You seem very sad, old chap?
PHILIPPE - Oh! Who wouldn't be, Sir, seeing such a good master and such a good mistress who love each so much, suffering and unhappy...
ROSAMBERT - Rest assured, my friend. I hope all that will change.
PHILIPPE - Ah! I would be so obliged to you, Sir!
ROSAMBERT - Listen to me.
PHILIPPE - Yes, Sir.
ROSAMBERT - Madame d'Aziuval will give you a letter.
PHILIPPE - Yes, Sir.
ROSAMBERT - You will be ordered to take it at once, or have it taken, to its address.
PHILIPPE - Yes, Sir.
ROSAMBERT - You will appear before d'Aziuval as though by chance.
PHILIPPE - Yes, Sir.
ROSAMBERT - You will appear to be hiding the letter.
PHILIPPE - Yes, Sir.
ROSAMBERT - But in such a way that he sees it and takes it from you. Do you follow?
PHILIPPE - No, Sir.
ROSAMBERT - I mean that you must arrange for him to snatch the letter from you.
PHILIPPE - No, Sir.
ROSAMBERT - Why is that?
PHILIPPE - Because it would mean betraying a secret that is not mine to betray.
ROSAMBERT, *aside* - This valet would teach me a lesson if I had not already learnt it myself.
PHILIPPE - Oh! Do you know who this letter is for, Sir?
ROSAMBERT - For Herminie.
PHILIPPE - For Mad....that is not possible, Sir.
ROSAMBERT - How so? It is not possible!
PHILIPPE - No, Sir. I cannot take charge of that particular letter.
ROSAMBERT - And why?
PHILIPPE - Because...Mademoiselle Herminie...is a young lady...that my master...
ROSAMBERT - Is in love with! We know. Madame d'Aziuval is aware of it.
PHILIPPE - Oh Sir! At least it wasn't me that told her. I've known for a long time, but I would die rather than...
ROSAMBERT - I am sure of it! Rest assured and do as I say. What I will do with it will only bring peace and happiness to my friend and his spouse. You know me, you understand...
PHILIPPE - Oh! Yes, Sir, I...the good man.
ROSAMBERT - But it is the only way to achieve it!
PHILIPPE - The only way! Then we must use it, Sir, and I am at your service.
ROSAMBERT - Quiet. I see my nephew with Constance.

FOURTH SCENE

THE SAME, CONSTANCE, GERMEUIL.

CONSTANCE - Sir, I thought you were with Madame d'Aziuval.
ROSAMBERT - I was until a moment ago, my beautiful young lady! She wished to be

alone and went to her closet.⁹ And you, where did you leave her husband?

CONSTANCE - In the garden where Germeuil and I managed to calm him somewhat. He is a bit more composed.

ROSAMBERT - Thank goodness, but that composure will not last.

GERMEUIL - You are cheerful, Uncle!

ROSAMBERT - I am truthful! I am experienced and I am rarely wrong. All this, young lady, should discourage your leanings towards marriage and the young gentleman, my nephew, would do well to renounce his claims, don't you think?

CONSTANCE - Sir...

ROSAMBERT - Ah! Without a doubt you would both be unhappy. Look at d'Aziuval and his wife. They used to adore each other: now, they hate each other. That is the way it works and you will do the same.

GERMEUIL - But, Uncle...

ROSAMBERT - But, Nephew. I know about it better than you. I have lived. But I think I hear Madame d'Aziuval! She wants to be alone. Let us not trouble her! Go take another tour of the garden! I will join you soon. I have a few words to say to Philippe.

FIFTH SCENE

MADAME D'AZIUVAL, PHILIPPE.

MADAME D'AZIUVAL - Philippe?

PHILIPPE - Madame!

MADAME D'AZIUVAL - Tell Dubois to take these two letters to the addresses indicated, straightaway! Impress upon him silence and exactitude.

PHILIPPE - Yes, Madame.

MADAME D'AZIUVAL - Tell the footman that if a young woman asks for Mademoiselle de Saint-Ange he must bring her up to me, without further enquiry.

PHILIPPE - Understood, Madame. (*Madame d'Aziuval retires.*) What can she have in mind!...But Monsieur de Rosambert only spoke to me of one letter and now there are two.

SIXTH SCENE

ROSAMBERT, PHILIPPE.

ROSAMBERT - Well, Philippe?

PHILIPPE - Well, Sir, instead of one letter I have two.

ROSAMBERT - Two? Who on earth is the second one for?

PHILIPPE - Wait, Sir....to the... Right Reverend...Father Basilie.

ROSAMBERT - Father Basilie! What on earth does she want with that hypocrite.

PHILIPPE - I don't know.

ROSAMBERT - To ask his advice, no doubt. She doesn't realise that he can only give her bad counsel.

PHILIPPE - I can well believe it, but Sir, in all conscience, can I allow Madame's letters to be snatched?...

ROSAMBERT - Eh! Yes! Do as I told you! It is for her own good. I will answer for it all.

⁹ The French term 'cabinet' - a small private room - can be translated as cabinet, closet or study; the latter, which is commonly understood to be such a room nowadays, was not used as such in the 18th century so I have not used it in this translation.

PHILIPPE - Then that is fine, Sir. I hear my master, keep your distance.

SEVENTH SCENE

MONSIEUR D'AZIUVAL, PHILIPPE.

PHILIPPE - It's fine for Monsieur de Rosambert to say as much! For my part his method...

MONSIEUR D'AZIUVAL - Philippe?

PHILIPPE - Sir?

MONSIEUR D'AZIUVAL - Where is Rosambert?

PHILIPPE - Monsieur de Rosambert, Sir! He is...I don't know.

MONSIEUR D'AZIUVAL - You seem very agitated! What are trying so hard to hide?

PHILIPPE - They're...It is nothing, Sir.

MONSIEUR D'AZIUVAL - They are letters.

PHILIPPE - Yes...no, Sir.

MONSIEUR D'AZIUVAL - You are taxing me. Those are letters and I expect to see them.

PHILIPPE - Sir...

MONSIEUR D'AZIUVAL - Give them to me at once or risk my wrath.

PHILIPPE - Sir...

MONSIEUR D'AZIUVAL, *menacingly* - Well?

PHILIPPE - Here they are, Sir.

MONSIEUR D'AZIUVAL - They are in my wife's hand...'To Mademoiselle Herminie'...Who can have given her the address? What is she sending her? Threats! If only I knew!...'To the Right Reverend Father Basile'...Some invitation or other to come here to listen to her tale of woe...Let me read them...(He starts to unseal the letter, then stops.) No, I must respect her secrets...but...Herminie's letter...curiosity wins! Let me read it! 'Mademoiselle, a young woman, who is unable to visit you at home, wishes to make your acquaintance and begs you, now, in the name of friendship to come and see her. She has things of the utmost importance to communicate to you. She awaits your visit at seven this evening. De Sainte-Ange.' Her maiden name! What is this mystery!...Ah! I've guessed it. That name is unknown to Herminie and my wife no doubt feared that if she signed in her husband's name...The letter will not be sent...it will not be sent. Ah! Can I prevent her from writing another? Will I always be in a position to take them?...No. Let me reseal it. (He goes to his desk and reseals the letter.) I have an idea. Why don't I pretend to leave (it will no doubt be assumed that I would not stay at home). From this closet I could hear marvellously...Philippe?

PHILIPPE - Sir.

MONSIEUR D'AZIUVAL - You may take your message. But if I find out that you have allowed yourself to tell Madame d'Aziual that I opened her letter, I will sack you, do you understand?

PHILIPPE - Yes, Sir.

MONSIEUR D'AZIUVAL - Leave.

EIGHTH SCENE

MONSIEUR D'AZIUVAL, *alone* - What is Madame d'Aziual's plan and who can have given her such specific instructions regarding Herminie...Who?...Rosambert perhaps...Rosambert! My friend! Oh! The ties of friendship are often as easily broken as the bonds of love, and the ways of the bachelor...

NINTH SCENE

ROSAMBERT, MONSIEUR D'AZIUVAL.

ROSAMBERT - Great news, my friend, great news. I have just heard that since this morning the Assembly has been debating the great subject of divorce and there is no doubt that it will be decreed; the debate will be taken up again in this evening's session and they will not quit until it is resolved. I admit I can no longer resist, I am going to attend.

MONSIEUR D'AZIUVAL - What? My friend, you think so?...

ROSAMBERT - Nothing is more certain.

MONSIEUR D'AZIUVAL - Ah! If I could be so happy!...

ROSAMBERT - Come my friend, let's go...

MONSIEUR D'AZIUVAL - It pains me to not be able to accompany you.

ROSAMBERT, *aside* - Good, that is exactly what I expect of you.

MONSIEUR D'AZIUVAL - But urgent matters...

ROSAMBERT, *aside* - The letter has had the right effect.

MONSIEUR D'AZIUVAL, *aside* - He does not suspect the nature of this affair!

ROSAMBERT - By gad! I am piqued that you cannot come in person to hear your decree.

MONSIEUR D'AZIUVAL - I disappoints me! (*Aside.*) Let me pretend to leave! (*Aloud.*) I am going to attend to my affairs. (*He takes his sword.*)

ROSAMBERT, *aside* - It is a ruse! He is going to stay, and so much the better! Or the cat would be out of the bag! (*Aloud.*) In that case I will bring you the news myself! Goodbye, d'Aziuvall!

MONSIEUR D'AZIUVAL - Until this evening, my friend!

ROSAMBERT, *aside* - I've got him!

MONSIEUR D'AZIUVAL, *aside, exiting* - He has no idea. Marvellous.

End of the second Act.

THIRD ACT

FIRST SCENE

MONSIEUR D'AZIUVAL, *aside* - Good, everyone thinks I am away from home. Soon it will be time for the meeting, let me enter this closet! Unseen, I will be able to observe and hear all that passes. My wife will surely be here soon. I must not allow myself to be taken by surprise. I think I hear some noise. It is my wife, herself, with my sister. Let me enter.

SECOND SCENE

MADAME D'AZIUVAL, CONSTANCE.

CONSTANCE - Oh! Why be so determined to be alone like this? Does my concern tire you so? Do you no longer care for me?

MADAME D'AZIUVAL - My dear Constance, my feelings of friendship for you have not

changed, as I would like to prove to you. You love Germeuil and I believe his is worthy of being loved. I strongly wish to conquer his uncle's obstinacy! I would be so delighted to see you happy!

CONSTANCE, *kissing her hand* - My dear sister.

MADAME D'AZIUVAL - And yet I could not see you tie the knot without trembling! Men are so deceitful! So fickle! Perhaps it would become an unlucky gift...

CONSTANCE - No, do not believe it. I am sure of Germeuil's heart. It will never change.

MADAME D'AZIUVAL - It will never change! I also thought as much. I was so cruelly undeceived.

CONSTANCE - My brother is a decent man. His heart is good and fond. He was virtuous. One momentary error led him astray. He will return to you more loving than ever.

MADAME D'AZIUVAL - You think so?

CONSTANCE - I will answer for it.

MADAME D'AZIUVAL - May your hope not be in vain! But, my dear Constance, do go to your apartment for a while. I need to be alone.

CONSTANCE - What? You want....

MADAME D'AZIUVAL - I beg you.

CONSTANCE - I obey!

She kisses her hand and exits.

THIRD SCENE

MADAME D'AZIUVAL, *alone*.

That child truly deserves to be happy! But, it is a quarter past seven and that woman has not come. Has she decided not to...I begged Father Basilie to be here at eight o'clock. I would not wish them to be here together.

FOURTH SCENE

MADAME D'AZIUVAL, PHILIPPE, HERMINIE.

PHILIPPE, *announcing* - Mademoiselle Herminie!

MADAME D'AZIUVAL - Bid her enter. (*Everyone bows.*) [*To Philippe.*] Bring forward a chair. Mademoiselle, pray be seated.

HERMINIE - Madame...

MADAME D'AZIUVAL, *to Philippe* - Leave us.

FIFTH SCENE

MADAME D'AZIUVAL, HERMINIE.

MADAME D'AZIUVAL - You must be astonished, Mademoiselle, at my taking the liberty to beg you to come and visit me.

HERMINIE - Madame, the invitation was so flattering that I did not waiver in coming straight away!

MADAME D'AZIUVAL - I will explain the reasons, Mademoiselle, but before I start, allow me to ask you one question. Are you acquainted with Monsieur d'Aziual?

HERMINIE - Yes, Madame. I do not know why you ask but I will admit, with all the

frankness at my command, that I know him...and...that he is dear to me.

MADAME D'AZIUVAL - He is dear to you! Doubtless you are as cherished as you cherish him yourself?...You are worthy of being loved.

HERMINIE - I believe so, Madame. But you are troubled. Why such a pressing interest?

MADAME D'AZIUVAL - Why such an interest?...You see in me...

HERMINIE - Oh! I beg you, Madame, finish!

MADAME D'AZIUVAL - His unhappy spouse.

HERMINIE, *falling back in her chair* - His spouse! He is married!

MADAME D'AZIUVAL - Calm yourself, Mademoiselle, I will not reproach you in any way. You have not warranted it.

HERMINIE - D'Aziual! You [2nd p.s.] have been unfaithful to me!...Forgive me, Madame, forgive me this word. It is the first cry of love deceived. From now on I will learn to stifle it within my heart. I will be alone the victim of my own credulity.¹⁰ Oh! I understand, only virtue can be happy, I will ably punish myself for my mistakes and it is at your feet that I swear...

MADAME D'AZIUVAL - Get up, Mademoiselle. I cannot bear to see you at my feet.

HERMINIE - Oh! Madame, are you generous enough to view with sensibility a woman who has no doubt caused you much pain...however unintentionally. I had no idea that d'Aziual was married, I will say more. He is the first man who moved me to feel those loving sentiments that are today my shame and my despair. In a position that normally would seem to announce a style of life that is only too licentious I had, thanks to the severity of my education, to admit to that purity of mind which is our greatest advantage. But what bad example or the enticement or gold failed to achieve, love, a love quite deadly to my peace of mind...Ah! Madame, I have told you, I will punish myself. It is a duty that virtue imposes upon me. And I enter into the heart of it so as never to stray from it again.

MADAME D'AZIUVAL - Mademoiselle, I can see that nothing has been able to stifle within you this virtue that is so dear to you, I can see that it has always filled your soul, that it raises you above yourself, that it will always be responsible for your demeanour and that it elevates you above all your sex for whom a brilliant education frequently creates wrongs that are even less excusable! I cannot blame my husband for having felt for you...

HERMINIE - Spare me this vision that humiliates me, Madame, and keep in mind the assurance that I swear to you now never to see him again. My promises could not be made in better faith. I will leave the capital. Your spouse will easily return to you. His heart is not corrupt. Your charms, your virtue, your attentions, your caresses will bring him back to your feet. May you be forever happy! And may he soon forget the unfortunate Herminie! *She goes as if to exit. Madame d'Aziual runs to her side and kisses her.*

MADAME D'AZIUVAL - What feelings! What a terrible situation! Kiss me, love's unhappy victim...You deserved a better fate!

Herminie exits in tears. Madame d'Aziual accompanies her. D'Aziual half opens the door of the closet and seems very agitated. He is about to step out when Madame d'Aziual reappears.

MONSIEUR D'AZIUVAL - God! What did I hear! Herminie! You could leave me!...But here is my wife. I must contain myself. The Abbot will soon be here. I will listen.

SIXTH SCENE

MADAME D'AZIUVAL, *alone* - She is so unfortunate!...What fine feelings in such a situation! And we despise them. Ah! We know so little of the heart. If we were better able to judge, if we could feel less disdain for understanding it, we would be better equipped to know where virtue can reside.

¹⁰ Alternatively this phrase could read as - I will be the victim of my credulity alone.

SEVENTH SCENE

MADAME D'AZIUVAL, FATHER BASILIE, MONSIEUR D'AZIUVAL, *in the closet.*

PHILIPPE, *announcing* - The Right Reverend Father Basilie.

Philippe exits.

MADAME D'AZIUVAL - Let him enter. Come, Sir, come and share my troubles, come and enlighten me with you wise counsel and bring to my soul the consolation that your zeal exhorts. You know how ill-used I am by my spouse!...

FATHER BASILIE - I know, my dear lady, and I lament it from the depth of my heart. Oh Providence! Who can penetrate your designs! What a fearful change has come over the heart of your spouse in the space of a year! No couple was more united than yours! ...When I sought, at the time, models of virtue I came to find them amongst you. To increase your felicity was not within my powers but I sought to refine it, to sanctify it! How wrong I was! With what sadness did I see him forsake an amiable and virtuous woman! To throw himself into the abyss that the reprobates of this century artfully strew with flowers. How I wept to see his mistake, his perfidy, before telling you of your misfortune and his crime! Christian charity obliged me to cover it in the mantle of religion. But then, seeing that all my efforts to bring him back to you were useless...

MONSIEUR D'AZIUVAL, *aside from the closet* - Oh, the villain! What deception!

FATHER BASILIE - I found myself forced to entrust...

MADAME D'AZIUVAL - Yes, Sir, it is due to your zeal, to your pity, that I owe the certitude of my misfortune and the list of misdeeds of an ingrate that I adored, that I love still!...

FATHER BASILIE - Woman of virtue and sensibility! How good you are! He did not deserve such happiness; he values its excellence so little.

MADAME D'AZIUVAL - Never mind, Sir, he is my spouse. My duty is to love him, to seek to please him, to bring him back to a virtuous...

FATHER BASILIE - You will not be able to. I say it with tears in my eyes. Your happiness means the world to me and I wish I could...*(He squeezes her hand.)* But the corruption has surpassed itself and...

MADAME D'AZIUVAL - What? Sir, you believe there is no remedy?

FATHER BASILIE - None. All hope is lost on that score. Your beautiful eyes would drown in tears for nothing, you would waste your youth in anxiety and despair for nothing. Make a unstinting effort, create within yourself such sacred anger as to despise an ingrate who horrifies all worthy people. Religion does not expect that you should make yourself a victim to the waywardness of an unfaithful spouse...

MADAME D'AZIUVAL - Oh the monster!

FATHER BASILIE - As the innocent party you bear the brunt of an unjust quarrel. Repeatedly exposed to the crude insults of a tyrant who treats you as a slave, who despises everything about you, who sees your qualities as defects or vices, subjected to duties that can sow in your bosom the fatal germ of a destructive poison, you cannot be blamed for refusing these tyrannical duties. Eh! Who would even dare to accuse you if, finding secret satisfaction in the shadow of silence...

MADAME D'AZIUVAL - What are you daring to suggest, Sir? Is it really you that speaks? Have you not told me yourself that marriage is a sacred inviolable bond? That an unfaithful spouse is a perjurer; that a woman in such a case adds theft to the first sin, that both would be worthy of thunderbolts from on high?

FATHER BASILIE - No doubt I did tell you so. Your situation was then unknown to me. Perhaps at the time I could not address you in any other way. A livelier concern inspires me. Your beautiful days are numbered by languishing in such monotony. Pleasure

confined to the same object is not worthy of the name, it is an insipid duty. You will never know voluptuousness if you stay within this narrow sphere. ¹¹ Ah! Believe me! If pleasure is a benefit, it must be repeated, varied, to achieve real happiness.

Madame d'Aziuval rises up indignantly. A furious d'Aziuval nearly bursts forth but contains himself.

MADAME D'AZIUVAL - Is it to you, Sir, that I came for guidance along the path of virtue? You are not worthy of my anger! Leave my house, never to return!

FATHER BASILIE - May Heaven...

MONSIEUR D'AZIUVAL, *furious [There are no stage directions here so it is not clear whether d'Aziuval is seen or only heard.]* - Monster! How dare you still call forth that heaven that should annihilate you!...

FATHER BASILIE - My God! D'Aziuval! I must flee!
He flees.

EIGHTH SCENE

MONSIEUR D'AZIUVAL, MADAME D'AZIUVAL.

MADAME D'AZIUVAL, *falling into her chair* - D'Aziuval! God!

MONSIEUR D'AZIUVAL - If I reacted to my first transports of anger...

MADAME D'AZIUVAL - He heard everything.

MONSIEUR D'AZIUVAL - I compliment you Madame. So that is the pious comforter whose wise counsels...

MADAME D'AZIUVAL - Surely, Sir, it is your behaviour and not mine that has led me to be exposed to the humiliation of hearing his odious counsels...

MONSIEUR D'AZIUVAL - And why do you ask for them, these counsels? Why place your trust so inadvisably? You reprove my conduct, my tastes. If I have been guilty of an error then the object of that error excuses it, you have admitted as much yourself. You wanted to see her, to hear her...See now what kind of man you have trusted and make the comparison.

MADAME D'AZIUVAL - The comparison would be false in every way, Sir. One appeared to me to be as worthy of admiration as the other of disdain. But if, without design and through the good opinion I had of a respectable character, I made a mistake in the choice of man who was to have given me only good advice, it was reasonable and fair given your own behaviour that, betraying the trust that you had sworn to me...¹²

MONSIEUR D'AZIUVAL - Let us stop right there, Madame, and spare ourselves pointless reproaches. It cannot be long now before we will be free, one and the other, to break our ties; my impatience knows no bounds as I await...

NINTH AND LAST SCENE

THE SAME, ROSAMBERT, CONSTANCE, GERMEUIL, PHILIPPE.

¹¹ The somewhat ungrammatical sentence in the manuscript text 'La jouissance bornée au même objet ne mérite plus ce nom; c'est l'insipide devoir de la volupté ne vous sera jamais connue ['connue' agrees with voluptuousness and not insipid duty] si vous ne sortez de ce cercle étroit.' does not quite make sense as it is. If we alter the punctuation of the preceding phrase, remove the 'de' to make 'La jouissance bornée au même objet ne mérite plus ce nom, c'est l'insipide devoir. La volupté ne vous sera jamais connue si vous ne sortez de ce cercle étroit.' it tallies better, in my view, with the Abbot's devious seduction of Madame d'Aziuval.

¹² I have translated 'prévention' in '...par une prévention bien fondée...' as 'good opinion' because the use of the word in the 18th century commonly meant prepossession or prejudice: its judicial use for detention dates from 1792 and in terms of preventive measures, from the twentieth century.

ROSAMBERT - Joy! Joy, my friends! You will be happy. The great decree is launched. The Assembly with one voice has pronounced in favour of divorce and you can finally break your irons.

MADAME D'AZIUVAL, *falling back* - God! I die!

MONSIEUR D'AZIUVAL, *disconcerted* - What! My friend, divorce...

ROSAMBERT - Is assured. The National Assembly had already let loose all the convent birds, black, grey, white, of every hue. Today the cloud will be even denser since it will be made up of all the enslaved wives, all the discontented husbands. Here is your greatest wish, my poor d'Aziual, for you wife would ask for nothing better...

MONSIEUR D'AZIUVAL - My wife! Would leave me? What's that? Ah! The veil of illusion is torn asunder. I am aware of all my faults: I swear I will rectify them if she would deign to forgive me and consent to...*(He throws himself at her feet.)* My dear Eugénie! May I hope for this generous forgiveness...Yes, I can see in your eyes my blessing and my happiness. Yes, you will be my spouse forever, my adored spouse and nothing will be able to break the ties founded on love, respect, repentance and virtue.

MADAME D'AZIUVAL - Ah! D'Aziual! What a touching moment for my heart! Yes, I forgive you a fleeting error. Forgive me my moods and my reproaches. You will hear no more of them. I will redouble my efforts, my attentions, to prove to you my love. Us! Separate! Ah! My friend! All my heart trembled at the thought and I could not have survived losing you.

MONSIEUR D'AZIUVAL, *in her arms* - Oh my wife.

ROSAMBERT - Fine! Fine! My friends! What a pretty picture! And very precious!...For it is uncommon. But there is still an apology to grant.

MONSIEUR D'AZIUVAL - To who?

ROSAMBERT - To me! I deceived both of you but I hope you will not hold it against me. *(To Madame d'Aziual.)* You confided in me that you wished to arrange a meeting with Herminie. You joined, to your written invitation, another letter inviting Father Basile. I was as sure of the sensibility of one as I was of the perfidious designs of the other. Was I wrong?

MADAME D'AZIUVAL - No, Sir, I took my leave of one in tears. I chased the other away indignantly.

ROSAMBERT - I thought as much. I knew your feelings too well to fear the Abbot's seductive words. I saw no harm, therefore, in making d'Aziual a witness to your conversation. This discourse could only turn to your advantage in your husband's opinion. I made it possible for him to take your letters, I made him aware of the purity of your feelings, and I unmasked Father Basile in his, and in your eyes! Actually, I had an even stronger reason to force d'Aziual to stay at home...

MONSIEUR D'AZIUVAL - What reason?

ROSAMBERT - Well, having told you that the National Assembly was debating the great question of divorce, I had to stop you going out in case you were to discover my white lie. It was but a feint to try and establish whether or not there was any hope left that you could reunite.

ALL - What? That decree...?

ROSAMBERT - Is of my own invention. Perhaps it will be taken care of at another time, but at present, it is not yet considered. My stratagem achieved the happiest result and, as you can see, I was right to suggest that with divorce there would be fewer unhappy households and fewer separations than might be envisaged since, the first, albeit false, tidings of this law made a deep enough impression on you for you to forget your failings and reunite more tenderly than ever.

MONSIEUR D'AZIUVAL - Oh! My friend! I am so obliged!...

MADAME D'AZIUVAL - Oh! Sir! What gratitude!...

ROSAMBERT - You owe me nothing. I am indebted to you. I wanted to see you happy and

that is all! You are reunited! I am content!

PHILIPPE - Ah! Sir, I hold you in such esteem! I love you so much! My masters are so good! They were to be pitied! You have given them back their happiness! And you have given me back ten years of life.

MONSIEUR D'AZIIVAL, *taking his hand* - My dear Philippe.

GERMEUIL - But, dear Uncle, when you offer joy to all those who surround you, would you refuse to offer it to me?

ROSAMBERT - Tush! Tush! I am in good health, praise be to God, and you know very well that it is only at my death...

GERMEUIL - What! You would be so cruel...

MADAME D'AZIIVAL - Come, my friend, this day is too beautiful for it to be marred by a few clouds...

MONSIEUR D'AZIIVAL - My friend, they love each other...

GERMEUIL - Constance is so beautiful!...

CONSTANCE - Germeuil is so affectionate!...

ROSAMBERT - So...Very well! I consent! Get married: I'm warning you, you will regret it.

GERMEUIL - Oh! Never! Never.

CONSTANCE - If any clouds come to darken the clear days of hymen we will chose you as conciliator.

ROSAMBERT - Jolly good: but never forget, my children, that sensibility and affection are the only means of maintaining peace and unity in a state...that sadly cannot be changed, that each of us has our moods and our failings, and that mutual toleration alone can produce perfect harmony.

THE END.