

## PREFACE

### TO MOLIÈRE VISITS NINON.

CONVINCED of the enmity of the *Comédie Française*<sup>1</sup> and persuaded of its injustice with regard to all my concerns, I decided to put it to the test once again, despite knowing what it is capable of. How did I imagine that it would look kindly on the new efforts that I would make to present it with a work that would allow it to treat me more evenhandedly. One may complain, one may tolerate, yet an Author cannot easily give up the *Comédie Française* once they have been favourably received and not failed there. It is not the *Comédiens* who need to be taken into consideration [for] it is the Theatre, it is the Nation's discernment, that covers an author with glory once they have been lucky enough to succeed. But in order to give it up, without having been wrecked by it, one must be rebuffed as I was, provoked by the *Comédiens* as will be seen in this Preface, make the sacrifices that I am planning for myself, in accordance with the principles of Mademoiselle Contat, Madame Bellecourt, and the supposed unshakeable rules of the *Comédie Française*. I searched my mind for a means of appealing to it. Soon my imagination offered me the plan for *Molière Visits Ninon*. I will admit, sincerely, that I completed its conception in a dream. No sooner had I addressed this subject, than, filled with enthusiasm, I lost sight of the bad procedures of the *Comédie*. On behalf of Molière I forgot all about them and assumed that the *Comédie*, in its turn, would take the greatest interest in the Play that it is supposed to perform [*Zamore et Mirza, ou l'Heureux naufrage*] and in the one that I was about to offer it, that bore a name it considered sacred. Prior to asking it for a reading of this Play, I submitted it to the lights of the most esteemed Men-of-Letters of the century: all of them praised it highly and it is owing to their good opinion that I requested a reading. What! I cried out to myself. I have written a good Comedy and I owe this happy subject to the injustice of the *Comédiens*! Molière, their support, their Founder, has such a good role in it; I have had the good fortune to create the Great Man in an unaffected way. Ah! The *Comédie* will be so grateful that I have shown it my love for this immortal man! How annoyed they will be that they misinterpreted my Letters; how encouraging they will be; how they will thank me for having sought to please them to such an extent. The suffrage of enlightened men could not have reassured me as much as Madame Bellecourt's Letter in which I only had eyes for her phrases: 'As for the *Maison de Molière*, if it were as bad as it appears to us to be (for truthfully this is what she meant to say) it bears a name sacred to all the French, nay, for the whole of Europe and I can assure you, Madame, that from the most erudite of the *Littérateurs* to the most ignorant *Scribblers* on paper, none other than you has found the homage we have made to this immortal man extraordinary.'<sup>2</sup>

After these lines, I added that such and such an Author, or the Actress who will not do me justice, blushed in shame at having misconstrued me and so improperly interpreted my expressions and that if, in truth, they respect the name of Molière in all its embodiments, then they will receive my Play, should it be detestable, for love of the Great Man alone. Anyone other than me would have thought the same. Thus I coloured my reveries and my hopes towards the *Comédiens Français*. Thrilled to have written, in less than six days, a Work of such substance, having plucked from History the most interesting

1 In order to avoid confusion between the *Comédie Française*, the institution, and the more general sense of French comedy I have used italics for the former to distinguish one from the other; capitalizations remain as in the original text.

2 In 1787 Louis-Sébastien Mercier (1740 - 1814), de Gouges's close friend, adapted a play by Goldoni - *La Maison de Molière* (a name often used to describe the *Comédie Française* which had been formed from Molière's troupe of actors after his death) - that was accepted by the troupe and performed with particular attention to detail on 20 October of that same year. De Gouges revisits this moment in *Les Comédiens Démasqués* of 1790 in which she denounces her treatment at the hands of the theatre company (see [www.olympedegouges.eu](http://www.olympedegouges.eu)).

facts and having brought them to life, without leaving out the slightest occurrence and not having lost from view its moral aim, I admit that I believed I had a distinguished talent but the Bulletins of the *Comédie* obliged me to recognise my own mediocrity and ignorance. I, who had educated myself for the first time, I had hoped, thanks to fruits of my labours, that if I devoted myself to studying I might encounter less obstacles. If I believed the *Comédiens* I could learn nothing more and I would become as ignorant as them, despite the fact that they learn a great deal. However, the opinion they had of my Play did not destroy my own and I will not think mine misplaced despite their views, unless the enlightened men who praised it tell me that they were themselves mistaken and educated Journalists assure me that I am wrong. So, good people, I will admit that you are right, that you are not ignorant of Molière's History or that of all the Great Men that I have put on stage, and that I will no longer think of you as a cheerful Troupe who make us laugh and cry thoughtlessly, never understanding the characters that you interpret. I will forever be convinced that you have a ready wit! That you are learned! And fair, moreover! I will admit, therefore, begging your pardon in advance, that if my Play is judged again according to the views that you have already made known then I am a ridiculous woman and that, lacking the wit to understand the Characters that I had treated, I even lack common sense; I dare assure you that you may take revenge on this outrage that I am perpetrating against you if, conversely, these are not truths that you have merited a hundredfold. But here is the letter that will justify me and I defy the *Comédie* to deny a single word that I advance.

## LETTER

### *To the Comédie.*

'FOLLOWING the quantity of plotless Plays that you perform I could have hoped, without prejudice, that the *Comédie* would see clearly the action and the interest of my Drama which is written, I admit, with more artlessness than elegance: it seems that even the Public is tired of being addressed without being moved. I thought I noticed that the *Comédie* felt towards me an implacable hatred. What convinced me was the ridicule in which I was held by some of its Members when I had occasion to use the great Molière [as subject]: I who only became an Author thanks to my admiration for this immortal man. I therefore sought every means to persuade it of this truth and to disarm it on my behalf. At first *Molière's Maid* appeared to me to be a subject conducive to interesting them in my favour: barely had I conceived it than Molière appeared to me in a dream. He himself traced out the outline that I have lately used. "Follow it" he told me, "I promise you that the *Comédie* will reconsider your case." But barely had I written the last word of this painful Work than I was utterly discouraged on deciding to ask you for a reading. People of talent, preoccupied by Literature, assured me that this Production was good: in my opinion there is none better and I am entitled to think so but it has not yet obtained your vote and its success is in doubt. Therefore my hopes are limited to obtaining another reading soon thanks to the name that it bears: *Molière chez Ninon ou le Siècle des grands-hommes*.

I have the honour being etc.'

Despite my letter being redolent of enthusiasm and the fire of composition I could still have expected a most satisfying response on behalf of the *Comédie* but, as it claims that it is dangerous to write to me, it responded to me, viva voce, that I was awarded a reading for a week later. In a few words I must make an observation on its repugnance at writing to me: if its intentions were good, why does it fear putting them down on paper? But as it is convinced that its behaviour would be refuted it prefers to keep a dishonest silence; it has made it a rule to reply to virtually no one; therefore I should not complain particularly.

During the four years that the *Comédie* has been the torment of my life, I, having more to complain of than most, I alone among Authors, have kept quiet for so long; until now I have never printed anything hostile to it; by a quirkiness particular to me, or to put it better by justice rendered to talent, did I not rather praise those *Comédiens* who deserved it. What excited the verve of the Men-of-Letters in favour of Preville's retirement if not my Preface to *L'Homme Généreux*?<sup>3</sup> Very recently I was favourable to the *Comédie* in the Preface of the *Philosophe corrigé* by taking the blame on myself and my excessive petulance, this, and its letter, unfair to my sex, that I hid from the Public in such circumstances, proves well enough how I am moved by, and grateful for, the smallest favour. On this occasion I will quote a most courteous remark made by Mademoiselle Contat when she called on me to thank me for the part I had played during her indisposition.<sup>4</sup> When I mentioned to her that I resented the *Comédie*'s letter which agreed that my sex runs an obvious risk on the French stage. ["] It must seem, Madame, that when this letter was addressed to you there were no women on the Committee. ["] I appreciate that if all of them were as spirited as Mademoiselle Contat there would be fewer disputes between the Authors and the *Comédiens*. Luckily (as a witty man wrote to me) this war is not murderous, but I know only too well that if I were a man blood would have been spilt. I would have cut off so many ears! It is only with the pen that I can take revenge. But, alas? What revenge? It will cost me the greatest asset of my life. The *Comédie Française* will only perform my play once and if it could still do without it and lead M. le Marquis \*\*\* astray it would commit a second injustice as revolting as the first.<sup>5</sup> If only I could hope that he would cast his eyes over the behaviour of the *Comédie* towards me, he would see that it has reached a peak in the injustice and vexations that it has imposed upon me. M.\*\*\* .....If my sensitivity were not wounded, I would love to be able to joke about all this. One does not laugh at what is despicable. I accept that one does not speak of it either but I must instruct the Authors who will have the courage to presume to approach the *Comédie Française* and who will not have the strength to abandon it as I have. Lately I have been told: 'When you are in a calmer frame of mind you will not think as you do now.' I reply: 'Eternally.' Learn, Gentlemen, that the self respect of women like me takes the place of all those qualities with which Nature has favoured you over us. This strength of character and mind bows to your interests, while I would trample even glory underfoot if I had to acquire it at the cost of my resolve. I have never taunted the *Comédiens*; I wished for their approval: I behaved honestly but they did not behave in the same way towards me. As can be seen by my Letters, I lowered my own lofty ideals. For, judging things as I see them, I believe that the *Comédiens* are more indebted to the Authors than the Authors are to them. It should then be up to them to take the submissive route or at least that of modesty. I actually care very little for what they might undertake against me so I will allow myself to tell them my way of thinking without rancour or bad humour, convinced that the Public will not be able to prevent itself applauding my actions and my observations, and that it will recognise, despite the indignation to which the *Comédie* has reduced me, the candour of my Propositions. I have not used any falsehoods to overpower them for if I were to make public the *Memoir* that I had written against it previously, it would be evident that the

3 Pierre-Louis Dubus aka Préville (1721 - 1799) an actor at the *Comédie Française* since 1753 retired in 1786 after a successful career. He created lead roles in Beaumarchais' *Barber of Seville* in 1775 and in the *Marriage of Figaro* in 1784. His looks and personality made him a favourite at court. De Gouges did indeed eulogise Préville in her Preface to *L'Homme Généreux* claiming, rightly, that he was one of the greatest actors of his generation.

4 Louise Contat (1760 - 1813) made her debut at *Comédie Française* in 1776 aged 16. Known for her pretty looks La Harpe alleged she had little talent and no voice. She was kept by the statesman Maupeou's son which allegedly explained her rapid rise in the theatre. She bore him two children and lived in great style; she had a two week fling with comte d'Artois (the King's brother) and bore him a son. She was given a handsome pension and the royal attention proved good for her career. Her theatrical reputation really took off when she created the role of Suzanne in *The Marriage of Figaro* by Beaumarchais.

5 I have not been able to establish the identity of the marquis.

particular anecdotes of each Actor against the Authors would create a Collection of bad proceedings that would discourage even M. C. B. who according to me.....<sup>6</sup>Let us come to the agreeable M. Fleuri; then we will move on to the amiable M. Florence.<sup>7</sup> It is pointless for me to print all the Letters that I wrote to these two great Characters, although the talent of one is quite different to the other. As for the two leading men, prior to the reading of *Ninon*, they appeared to me to be openly honest and even supportive of my interests. I was begged to delay the reading due to the rehearsals of the Glorious *Reputations* a Work that is worth a *million* of my *Ninon* but I am one of those women that the Author wished to designate

'Of whom one barely grasps the jargon  
And who speaks about all without rime or reason.'<sup>8</sup>

He will allow me to say on this occasion two words as clear as they are intelligible: when one wants to condemn everyone one must know how to produce a Work safe from criticism; all the puns stuffed within it are just pointless applications in a Play that has not succeeded; to be satirical in a Comedy one must possess dramatic talent and that is what my jargon and my gibberish could teach him.....I, myself, delayed this reading to attend to Mademoiselle Contat's recuperation but M. Florence assured me that her illness, although not very serious, would be lengthy and that I had to speed up my reading. It was therefore planned for a Wednesday. Reader, do not lose me from sight just now; if I have been verbose up to now it is because I dash off the facts without reflection: you will no doubt do this for me. On Monday, as is well known, the general Assembly is held: I wrote it the simplest, most honest and shortest letter: here it is.

## LETTER

*written to M. FLORENCE, permanent Semainier of the Comédie Française.*

'I beg you, Sir, to tell your Comrades, that my Play will be read on Wednesday. I trust that in the name of Molière all the *Comédie* will be good enough to attend as this Work merits the presence of all the *Comédiens*; if it is not accepted I wish to see it refused with battle honours to convince me that my Judges are impartial.

I have the honour of being, etc.'

I acted in good faith and I truly believed that the *Comédie* would act similarly towards me. At the same time I wrote to M. Fleuri whose character I thought had augured so well two months previously during a visit he paid me himself stating that he had played

6 M.C.B. is Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais (1732 - 1799) the famous playwright, who did not behave well towards de Gouges; this ellipsis would probably have been understood as an ironic avoidance of spleen venting by the author.

7 Abraham-Joseph Bénard aka Fleury (1750 - 1822) debuted his successful career as a character actor at the *Comédie Française* in 1772, retiring in 1818. He was imprisoned in August 1793, along with Molé and other performers, for appearing in a theatrical version of Richardson's *Pamela*; two lines suggesting that persecutors are deplorable while tolerance should reign offended the Committee of Public Safety to such a degree that they shut the theatre and incarcerated the actors, who were lucky to survive.

Nicolas-Joseph Billot de la Ferrière aka Florence (1749 - 1816) was a not very talented actor who joined the *Comédie Française* in 1778 having played there anonymously a year earlier; he devoted himself to running the theatre. He was the theatre's '*semainier*', an actor who, for a seven days, would be responsible for all aspects of every play being performed in a given week. Florence appears to have held the post in a longer-term capacity. I know of no English equivalent.

8 'Dont à peine on entend le jargon,/Et qui parlent de tout sans rime ni raison.'

*Reputations* was an unsuccessful play, performed just once in 1788, written by François-Georges Maréchal, marquis de Bièvre, (1747 - 1789) an author famed for his puns and double entendres.

no part in the latest dispute that I had with the *Comédie* concerning the turn that I had been offered. Also, I envisioned only him in the role of Molière; the justice and candour of this Great Man seemed to me to be analogous with the probity of this good Actor. I could not prevent myself from dedicating this role to him if my Play were received; I made him aware of my enthusiasm, I even wanted to chose him as the Reader but he refused with so much honesty, convincing me that he never read so I insisted no more. But he promised to be among the first at the reading and lest he forget, I refreshed his memory at the Assembly by a personal letter. On Wednesday I arrived at the *Comédie* before eleven of the clock, one of the clock struck and thirteen [*Comédiens*] were still missing; they used the pretext that the journey to Versailles led them to sleep late: several Theatre Lackeys were sent to discover whether these Gentlemen were awake and would attend the reading. They were obliged to come for the rehearsal of the new Actress and of *L'Optimisme* [sic] but they were awake too early for me, despite the journey to Versailles, since they were already out, according to the Theatre Lackeys' report.<sup>9</sup> After a million winks I was put off until the following Sunday. M. Fleuri and M. Florence did not attended my reading; I found their absence remarkable given the promises both of them had made. The Public will be aware that most of the *Comédiens* live around the *Comédie* and that I, for my sins, live opposite.<sup>10</sup> All the *Comédiens* ran like wolves from this reading but, one after the other, returned to the *Comédie* like sheep after I had departed! The scrupulous M. Florence, no longer able to restrain himself, told my son that he promised himself never to attend my reading. These words exemplify the plot that the *Comédie* has long hatched against me.

LETTER  
TO M. FLORENCE.

'I could not be more astonished, Sir, that you were not able to attend my reading, you, who as the *Semainier*, attends everything. I believe you are too loyal to have wished to lay a trap for me. I trust that Sunday you will prove the opposite and that I will forever be convinced of your total honesty.

I have the honour of being, etc.'

With regard to M. Fleuri I extended myself a little further; I was even, at the time, going to point out the difference between a well bred man and a bad mannered one. I had found in a great Prince so much simplicity, so much honesty in according me the favour that I sought from him, that in truth the bad manners of the *Comédiens* towards a woman seemed unbearable and my thoughts extended themselves in my letter as far as M. Fleuri.

LETTER  
TO M. FLEURI.

'It is wrong of me to complain, Sir. In fact, the *Comédie*, in general, treats me in the best possible way but it appeared to me that you wished to exceed the routine sincerity that it had shown me. I would never have believed that Molière, under my name, could have been of so little worth to them; they had written to me that, on his account, the most mediocre Work would always gain their respect. Mine is not even known yet it is refused a reading. I had gained your interest in this Play sufficiently, Sir, to trust that you would do me the favour of being there. I was obliged, lately, to ask a favour of a great Prince, he granted it with much goodness and enthusiasm; a discerning woman should always be

9 *L'Optimiste*, a five act play, performed in 1788, written by Jean-François Collin d'Harleville (1755 - 1806).

10 In 1782 the troupe had moved to its new theatre in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, now the Odéon theatre. For a few years de Gouges lived opposite the theatre, in what is now the Place de l'Odéon: she liked to think that she could keep an eye on the tricky actors from her window.

able to do business with men of such character: his encouragement of my sex gives an accurate idea of this man's way of thinking. You promised me, Sir, that you would attend this reading; I choose to believe that it was not possible for you to be there. Well, perhaps next Sunday I will be luckier; no doubt I will be compensated for the injury that I felt at the lack of zeal shown towards me by the *Comédiens* until now and for the way they discarded their rules in my case.

I have the honour of being, etc.'

One must hope that M. Fleuri will justify his absence from the Committee with honesty and that he will convince me that, despite his not being a Prince, he nonetheless exhibits the same consideration due to my sex. On the eve of the reading of my Play I was cleverly advised, by the Usherette, that someone wished to see me. What a surprise to see M. Fleuri; he drew me aside and ungraciously told me that, as it was dangerous to write to me he was coming to give me his reply orally! This opening stratagem struck me (it must be believed) as insolent as it was out of place but I listened to the end; he added that, were I not a woman, he would show me how one replies to a letter as impertinent as mine. At these words, had I only had a sword, I should have soon been another Chevalière d'Eon.<sup>11</sup> The blood boiled in my veins but I knew how to maintain my self-respect: he continued by adding that he was not a Prince, but an Actor. 'Alas!' I replied, 'that is only too obvious....But, based on Molière, I believed that an Actor should have the principles of a gentleman: that is certainly not the case for those of your disposition.' And, shrugging my shoulders, I left. Behind me I could hear the same words from M. Florence, saying he would never attend my readings and that he wanted to tell me himself. I learnt that these two Gentlemen had created a riot in the Foyer and in the Wings, and that they complained bitterly to all their Comrades of my insolence and my pride. Thus the conspiracy was perfect and my work was banned before its reading: no *Comédiens*, however perfidious, will be able to deny my claim; let a judgement be made as to whether or not I should upbraid myself with regard to the *Comédie*, unless it be that I was too constant and too moderate to combat such bad proceedings. But now that my indignation is at its height I renounce the *Comédie* unreservedly and I will treat it as it deserves by taking back my place [play?]. Let the Reader read my amiable *Ninon* and pronounce its fate and find the *Comédie's* Bulletins ridiculous rather than wise. Afterwards I will question whether there is anything worse in the world than *Comédiens* gathered together with no delicacy or good manners and without the slightest shred of equity. The judgement to be found at the end of this Play will destroy the public's good opinion of it [the *Comédie*].

**MOLIÈRE**

**CHEZ NINON,**

**OU**

**LE SIÈCLE**

<sup>11</sup> Charles Geneviève Louis Auguste André Thimothée de Beaumont, chevalier d'Eon, (1728 - 1810) soldier, spy, ambassador, transvestite whose life as a man, and then as a woman, was so complex and full of incident that it would be impossible to relate it here. At the time de Gouges was writing it was assumed that he was a woman; his true identity was revealed on his death bed.

## DES GRANDS HOMMES.

Molière Visits Ninon, or The Century of Great Men.<sup>12</sup>

AN EPISODIC PLAY,

IN PROSE AND IN FIVE ACTS.

By Madame DE GOUGES.

PARIS,

From the AUTHOR, rue and place du Théâtre Français.  
From CAILLEAU, Printer - Bookseller, rue Gallande, N° 64.

M. DCC. LXXXVIII.

With the Approval and Privilege of the King.

### CHARACTERS.

MOLIÈRE, Ninon's friend.

<sup>12</sup> This five act play was written at the end of 1787, read by the *Comédie Française* in February 1788 (where it failed to be accepted) and published later that year. De Gouges probably gleaned her facts from a biography of Ninon de l'Enclos by Antone Bret published in 1751 and used the pastoral and courtly literature popular in the seventeenth century to influence the style of the play, creating its period flavour. The piece is episodic in form and broadly follows a day in the life of Ninon de l'Enclos encapsulating many of the famous moments depicted in the aforementioned biography. The play seeks to be true to life and to depict historical figures as people not mythical beings; it aims to move and educate its audience through its realism and confronts the eternal questions of friendship, love, ageing, the role of women in society and tolerance towards those who are different either by choice or by an accident of birth. De Gouges saw in Ninon de l'Enclos an intelligent, independent, liberally generous female role model and wrote the play as an homage both to Ninon and to Molière, another exemplary individual and a useful association for a woman trying to gain a foothold as a playwright. The position of natural children in society was of great concern to de Gouges and this play provided her with the perfect opportunity to portray the situation as she would have wished it to be, hoping to encourage greater understanding both within families and in the wider world. Ninon de l'Enclos makes another appearance in de Gouges's later play *Mirabeau aux Champs-Élysées* (1791).

Ninon de l'Enclos (1623 – 1705) was a free-spirited courtesan who refused to marry, had high-born lovers and insisted on maintaining her independence, managing her finances accordingly. She was famed for her wit, beauty, musical talent and the ability to maintain friendships among her lovers, to the point of ensuring that everyone remained on good terms and regularly attended her salon which was renowned for the talent of its varied habitués. Ninon's lifestyle and outspoken disregard for organized religion led to a brief imprisonment within a convent. Her marital prospects were blighted by a father who committed murder and ran away making it impossible for his daughter to be viewed as an acceptable match by any decent family. It is said that in time she created her own persona effectively dropping the inauspicious patronymic and became known by her given name alone, Ninon; interestingly de Gouges affords her eponymous character the respect of having almost everyone address her as Mademoiselle de l'Enclos which may give the lie to the 'Ninon' story.

Confusingly, another play exists also entitled *Molière chez Ninon*; dated 1802 it is written by MM. Chazet and Dubois and concerns the banning and subsequent reading of Molière's *Tartuffe* made possible by Ninon de l'Enclos.

LE GRAND CONDÉ.  
LE MARQUIS DE LA CHÂTRE, Ninon's Lover.  
M. DE GOURVILLE, Ninon's past Lover.  
LE COMTE DE FIESQUE, Ninon's latest Lover.  
LE CHEVALIER DE BELFORT, Ninon's natural son and Olympe's Lover.  
CHAPELLE, Ninon's friend.  
M. DE SAINT-EVREMOND, Ninon's friend.  
SCARON [sic], Ninon's friend.  
DESYVETEAUX [sic], Ninon's friend.  
LE MARQUIS DE CHÂTEAUROUX, Olympe's father.  
FRANCISQUE, Ninon's Valet.  
MATHURIN, a Peasant.  
BLAISE, Desyveteaux's Valet.  
LUCAS, Desyveteaux's Valet.  
QUEEN CHRISTINA.  
NINON.  
OLYMPE, Châteauroux's daughter.  
Mad. SCARON [sic], Ninon's friend.  
Mad. LA MARQUISSÉ DE LA SABLIERE.  
Mlle LE ROI, Ninon's Maidservant.  
MIGNARD, Painter and Architect.  
LA DUPUIS.<sup>13</sup>  
MARSHAL D'ESTRÉES.  
A SERGEANT.  
PRESIDENT D'EFFIAT.  
THE GRAND PRIOR.<sup>14</sup>

*The action takes place at Ninon's house in the Marais.*

13 These last five characters' names have been added by hand in ink having been omitted when printed.

14 Some of the characters are historical and some fictional. The following are some of the better known historical individuals. Jean-Baptiste Poquelin aka Molière (1622 -1673), considered to be one of France's, if not the world's, greatest playwrights. Louis de Bourbon, Prince de Condé, duc d'Enghien (1621 - 1686), known as le Grand Condé thanks to his fearless glittering military career, was a well-read unorthodox man who claimed to be an atheist while remaining true to his Jesuit upbringing. He knew both highs and lows, his arrogance allied to his brilliance often leading him to challenge the king's and the state's authority. He supported many of the free-thinkers and writers of his time. Louis, marquis de La Châtre (1613 - 1664) was a well-born young officer who, being orphaned young, attached himself more than most to Ninon, his mistress. Queen Christina of Sweden (1626 - 1689) reigned from 1644 to 1654. A highly intelligent well-educated and politically astute queen, her abdication shocked Europe. She took up residence in Rome and became an influential patron of the arts. In 1656 Christina visited France and particularly chose to visit Ninon who at the time was under house arrest outside Paris, her activities having offended the sensibilities of the pious Queen of France who resented seeing all the young men of the court pay homage to such an impious free spirited (or debauched, depending on one's view) woman. Paul Scarron (1610 - 1660) the author started to write at 28 when he suffered from paralysis that left his body twisted and disabled for life. Aged 42 he married a young impoverished orphan who later became Madame de Maintenon future morganatic wife of Louis XIV, following the death of the French queen in 1683. Scarron wrote burlesque comedies and a satirical novel. His company was much sought after; he held court in his house in the Marais, Paris. Nicolas Vauquelin baron des Yveteaux (1567 - 1649) was a libertarian, and libertine, poet who abandoned his life at court to live a bucolic epicurean existence in Saint-Germain allegedly dressing as a shepherd. He had been preceptor to the Dauphin, later Louis XIII, until his mother refused to employ a man whose habits flew in the face of religious conformity. He is better known for his unconventional lifestyle than his poetry. Pierre Mignard (1612 - 1695) the renowned painter and portraitist lived near Ninon and painted her likeness.

**MOLIÈRE**  
**CHEZ NINON,**  
*AN EPISODIC PLAY.*

**FIRST ACT.**

*The set represents an old-fashioned, richly furnished, salon; there are several portraits including those of Monsieur and Madame de l'Enclos, Ninon's father and mother; there are Busts of several Great Men on pedestals and several musical instruments such as a Clavichord and a Lute among others.*

FIRST SCENE.

FRANCISQUE, *asleep on a sofa, wrapped up in a coat, wakes up yawning* - I'm dog tired. The Masters think a couch is a very comfortable piece of furniture; as for me, I don't find it makes a good place to sleep. It has to be said that being a Valet is a hard career. We're given neither the time to eat nor the time to rest. Yet my fate is less pitiful than that of others in my business. To be in the service of the amiable Ninon, a woman of sensibility, is that not equal to serving all the Goddesses at once? *(He rubs his eyes.)* It's early, everyone is still resting: come, let me try and nap some more.

SCENE II.

Mlle LE ROI, FRANCISQUE.

FRANCISQUE, *jumping up with a start* - What, is that you, Mademoiselle le Roi? Eh! Who's woken you up so early this morning?

Mlle LE ROI - What about you, Monsieur Francisque, you're awake.

FRANCISQUE - What would you have me do, Mademoiselle? I don't have the strength to go to bed when everyone else is getting up.

Mlle LE ROI - Mademoiselle de l'Enclos does not suggest that her servants should stay up as late as she does; we have orders to go to bed at midnight. Why do you not conform to them?

FRANCISQUE - How can a good servant take advantage of his Mistress's generosity! I will admit, Mademoiselle, that it is jealousy that leads me to disobey her.

Mlle LE ROI - All well and good, if that is what pleases you; I would do the same as you if Mademoiselle Ninon did not insist that I retire to my room after supper.

FRANCISQUE - Is it wariness that makes her take such precautions? Yet nothing is unknown to us.

Mlle LE ROI - She does not dissimulate enough, nor is she hypocritical enough, to hide her way of life from us, she does not make of us her confidants yet she is unconcerned by what we may perceive.

FRANCISQUE - Oh! She is a woman with no equal!

Mlle LE ROI - Oh! I second that!

FRANCISQUE - Likewise the famous Molière said to Monsieur de Saint-Evremond and to Monsieur de la Rochefoucault: "Ninon is a good man in the guise of a woman", and the greatest Courtiers agree when thinking of her. By the way, we haven't yet seen Monsieur le Prince de Condé since his return from the army.

Mlle LE ROI - Oh! I am sure that he will not fail to pay a visit to Mademoiselle; that is not

what concerns me. But what frightens me on her behalf is that Monsieur Desyveteaux has not come back in six months. I can't tell you how many people she has sent out to try and find him without getting any news...By the way, Mademoiselle urged me to give you this letter this morning to deliver to Monsieur de Gourville.

FRANCISQUE - This one will meet the same fate as all the others. He neither wishes to see nor to reply to Ninon.

Mlle LE ROI - Monsieur de Gourville is an idiot and has no idea how to behave: he refuses to see Ninon when the greatest grandees of the Kingdom can think of nothing but paying court to her.

FRANCISQUE - And that is precisely what upsets him. I believe that he is still in love with her and fears that his passion will reignite if he sees her again. Meanwhile, he is not unaware that Monsieur de Villarceaux has replaced him; but he is unaware, apparently, that Monsieur de la Châtre has succeeded this last one.

Mlle LE ROI - His reign will be short-lived as he is leaving for the army this morning.

FRANCISQUE - What are you saying? When did this news come?

Mlle LE ROI - Last night. Monsieur de la Châtre is in an unimaginable state. Mademoiselle is desolate. Madame Scaron has not left her side yet all her attentiveness has not been able to console her or calm her for a single moment.

FRANCISQUE - I am going to hurry off and deliver this letter, for a Lover who arrives has a better chance than a Lover who leaves. But, who is coming to visit us so early?

Mlle LE ROI - It's the Grand Prior! What does this sad character want from us? He will find Mademoiselle in a mood to send him packing for she does not possess the virtue of bearing boredom patiently.

FRANCISQUE - Well I'm off.

### SCENE III.

#### THE SAME, THE GRAND PRIOR.

THE GRAND PRIOR, *stopping Francisque by grabbing his arm* - Listen, my friend, I need to talk to you for your own good, and mine.<sup>15</sup>

FRANCISQUE - Sir, my duty calls me elsewhere.

THE GRAND PRIOR - But, listen to me, I pray; do me a favour and your fortune is made. You must know that I adore Ninon; start by accepting this purse as proof of my gratitude towards you.

FRANCISQUE - Fie, Sir; I do not recognise, in this behaviour, the Grand Prior of Malta; even if you can forget yourself to this extent can you forget Mademoiselle de l'Enclos' principles of honour and probity? The Valets of an Opera girl can be paid but us, we must not even be questioned.

### SCENE IV.

#### THE GRAND PRIOR, Mlle LE ROI.

THE GRAND PRIOR, *watching him leave, aside* - That clown is playing the sentiment card! Let's see if I get on better with the companion.

Mlle LE ROI - So it's my turn now: well, you will find out whether I am more biddable than my chum.

THE GRAND PRIOR - Good day, Mademoiselle le Roi, how is the incomparable Ninon?

Mlle LE ROI - You do her a great honour; she is fine, Sir, though at present a great

<sup>15</sup> The Grand Prior uses the informal 'tu' to address Francisque, a commonplace when addressing servants, but reverts to 'vous' when addressing Mlle le Roi who is also in service.

affliction troubles her.

THE GRAND PRIOR - May I not be told the cause of her suffering?

Mlle LE ROI - She is deeply affected by the loss of a friend.

THE GRAND PRIOR - Who is the lucky man, actually?

Mlle LE ROI - I, Sir! I have no idea; I don't even know if my mistress bestows her love on any lucky man.

THE GRAND PRIOR - The poor innocent thing! She knows nothing.

Mlle LE ROI - Sir, I am no more innocent than another. Mademoiselle Ninon de l'Enclos not only knows how to gain the respect of all those who know her, but also of her servants; an art that is very hard to master, but even harder to exercise.

THE GRAND PRIOR - One must give Ninon's confidante her due and grant that no one is better able to appreciate the rare quality of her mistress. But, Mademoiselle, you can, without compromising your sensibility, take my interests to heart, a little. Here is a diamond worth two thousand *écus*, take it, help me, I beg you, and be sure that Ninon will never know.

Mlle LE ROI, *curtseying to the floor* - All that I can do, Sir, on behalf of your generosity and discretion, is to run and announce you to my mistress.

#### SCENE V.

THE GRAND PRIOR, *watching Mlle le Roi go away*.

I am beginning to see that the contempt these people have for my gifts is more affected by the disdain their mistress feels for my sentiments than by their own disinterest. This is what I have just realised for the final time. Ah! Cruel Ninon, favouring so many people less worthy than me; if I must fail at your side then a good epigram will be my revenge for your harshness. Let me have it ready: here is just what is needed to write it...*(He approaches a table, sits and reflects.)* I have it, it is wounding...*(He writes then folds the paper.)* Let me fold it so that I can use it when the time is right.

#### SCENE VI.

NINON, THE GRAND PRIOR.

NINON, *aside, catching him unawares* - What an unbearable man! Once and for all I will have to make myself understood. *(Aloud.)* Forgive me a thousandfold, Grand Prior, for appearing in my dressing-gown. It is not usual to visit women so early; I am not wanton, I believe in decency.<sup>16</sup>

THE GRAND PRIOR - Love is my excuse, and I flattered myself that...

NINON - Please listen to me, Grand Prior, and allow me to bear my soul to you in its entirety.

THE GRAND PRIOR - I'd much rather interest your heart.

NINON - I can believe it but I cannot return your sentiments. The friendship that I offer is more certain and enduring. Will you accept it?

THE GRAND PRIOR - Without a doubt it would have been a joy if I had started, like your friends, by obtaining a sweeter title.

NINON - Is this what you think, Sir? That all the men who are my charming companions have been my lovers? The Abbé Gedoin, Monsieur de la Rochefoucault, The Abbé de Château-Neuf, Chapelle, Scaron, Desyvetaux; all these estimable men had never aspired

<sup>16</sup> De Gouges disliked entertaining people in a state of undress (*déshabillé*) as was the fashion among some women at the time and resented the suggestions that a woman seeking political and social freedom and responsibility, a woman prepared to enter the public sphere, would perforce flout social conventions in the private sphere. De Gouges was neither a prude nor over-familiar.

to anything other than my regard.

THE GRAND PRIOR - All these men doubtlessly have a character different to mine. They hope to end with you as I would have liked to start: for my part, I declare myself and will not wait.

NINON - I find the way you express yourself totally bewildering but it corresponds precisely to my suspicions regarding your feelings: believe me, Sir, you would be better off commanding the Galleys in Malta than serving that little scoundrel, love, who being even more stubborn than capricious, loves to flout those who are unable to win his approval.<sup>17</sup> Never having been one to encourage anyone to err, I find it painful to watch you stubbornly desire to become my lover; if you insist any more you will lose my respect without gaining my friendship. The loss is not immaterial, be careful.

THE GRAND PRIOR, *angry and resentful* - I would not know how to pass from one to the other. I see you as you are; you will no longer be importuned by my assiduous visits. You will soon discover what I am made of.

*He exits throwing his written note on the table.*

#### SCENE VII.

NINON, *alone* - He thinks that he can offend and humiliate my self-esteem, but instead he fills me with the greatest pity; I am kind enough to forgive him and even to commiserate with him. But la Châtre has not come back, what can be delaying him? Does he want to hide his leaving from me. Ah! Cruel destiny! Will love always bring new fears. What is this? A love letter? Ah! No doubt it only looks like one. The style will be acid. (*She reads.*) Just as I thought: the epigram is unpleasant, but does not sting me. Let me see, how shall I reply.

#### SCENE VIII.

MOLIÈRE, CHAPELLE, NINON.

MOLIÈRE, *whispering to Chapelle* - Chapelle, are we interrupting her?

CHAPELLE - Yes, if she's writing to a lover.

MOLIÈRE - But, if it's to a friend, we may be being imprudent.

NINON, *turning round* - Ah! There you are, Monsieur Molière. You've come at just the right time, both of you, to judge this note.

MOLIÈRE - We were afraid of disturbing you and we were debating whether you were writing to a lover or to a friend.

NINON - Well, for the first time, it's neither to one nor the other.

MOLIÈRE - So you were writing to no one?

CHAPELLE - Other than these two feelings, what in the world can take up your time?

NINON - Pity.

CHAPELLE - Is it the suffering of humanity?

NINON - Yes, if love that is despised creates suffering and makes man unjust.

MOLIÈRE - I will wager that it's our lovesick Grand Prior.

NINON - Quite right.

MOLIÈRE - What has he done now?

CHAPELLE - Versifying.

NINON - And an epigram that reeks of its author.

CHAPELLE - That has not stung you?

<sup>17</sup> From 1530 to 1798 Malta was ruled by the Knights of the Order of St John of Jerusalem to counter the hostilities between the Islamic world and Christendom. Large numbers of sea-farers and merchants were caught up in the maritime warfare (akin to piracy) and incarcerated as slaves on Malta, to be trafficked or used as labour by the Order, in their galleys or in the construction of fortifications, palaces and churches.

MOLIÈRE - Let me see: (*He reads.*) It is too bland.

NINON - You have to admit it would take the salt of Boileau to make it bearable.<sup>18</sup>

MOLIÈRE, *reading* - Have you replied to him?

NINON - Yes, I was brave enough.

MOLIÈRE, *reading* - It's delicious: the reply will honour you. Chapelle, listen to the silly epigram and the pretty response:

“Unworthy of my fire, unworthy of my lament,  
I renounce your faint allure and feel no pain:  
Those charms my love did complement,  
Ingrate, you've always held in vain.”<sup>19</sup>

CHAPELLE - That is Grand Prior through and through.

MOLIÈRE - A petty rhymester.

CHAPELLE - Let us see the reply.

MOLIÈRE, *reading* -

“Indifferent to your fire, indifferent to your lament,  
I see you renounce my faint allure without pain:  
But if love charm can complement,  
How did you manage to evade its gain?”<sup>20</sup>

CHAPELLE - Where is the woman who would have refused a similar nastiness, if she had, like you, the wit to reply with such charm?

MOLIÈRE - Well this one will never be your friend.

NINON - He's not worth it: so, let's not speak of him any more.

CHAPELLE - You must send the Verses to their author.

NINON - That isn't necessary: let's spare him the ridicule of answering my reply, dictated to me by my resentment.

MOLIÈRE - I, I will take on the task of broadcasting it: you do not fear the publication of your epigram.

NINON - Why should I fear it? I would only fear it for him.

MOLIÈRE - Sympathy. Ah well! She is capable of it. But you are too good. I would like to make known the Grand Prior's style.

CHAPELLE - It's in good hands; it belongs right at the heart of you. Ridiculous types never escape him.

NINON - But there's not enough here to create the subject of a Comedy.

MOLIÈRE - I promise you, it will find its place.

NINON - By the way, I must tell you, my dear Molière, about Madame de Villarceaux and her foolishness. It's partly the result of her ignorance and meanness of spirit. She obviously has no idea that her husband is secretly taking his revenge, with Madame Scaron, for the time when I stole his heart. Love and friendship are betraying me at the same time, but I forgive them. La Châtre, by the way, has alone ruled my heart for quite some time. He is leaving this morning and therein lies my greatest sorrow.

CHAPELLE - He has the most to lose.

MOLIÈRE, *to Ninon, making a sign to Chapelle to keep quiet* - And, Madame de

18 Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux (1636 - 1711) French poet, admirer of Molière and Racine, famed for his mordant satire and rhetoric; salt, he wrote, was like piquancy in poetry and prose, encouraging a thirst for more.

19 "Indigne de mes feux, indigne de mes larmes,/Je renonce sans peine à ces faibles appas:/Mon amour te prêtait des charmes,/Ingrate, que tu n'avais pas."

20 "Insensible à tes feux, insensible à tes larmes,/Je te vois renoncer à mes faibles appas:/Mais si l'amour prête des charmes,/Pourquoi n'en empruntais-tu pas?"

Villarceaux?

NINON - The other day she had a large gathering at her house: she wanted to show everyone the progress and learning of her son: she called him forth with his Preceptor and ordered the latter to ask the boy questions on the latest subjects he had studied. Straight away the Preceptor asked him: *Quem habuit successorem Belus Rex Assyriorum?* The child replied: *Ninum*.<sup>21</sup> Straight away this jealous woman went into a rage that disconcerted all the gathering. 'It ill behoves you,' she said, apostrophising the poor Preceptor, 'to discuss with him his father's follies.' The whole circle insisted that *Ninum* did not mean Ninon; that only made her angrier and she ended by saying that it was terrible how the whole world applauded my misdemeanours.

MOLIÈRE - What a ridiculous woman! This will give me a delicious scene. I can just see some trying not to laugh, others trying to soothe her, the disconcerted child and the gaping Preceptor: there's enough there for a theatrical situation.

NINON - How easily he grasps all the nuances!

CHAPELLE - I'll wager that, while speaking to you, he's already composed the Play.

MOLIÈRE - Oh no: not so fast, but I will work on it. At the moment I have a thorny subject to wrestle with and Ninon, your advice would be very helpful.

NINON - Following on from that of your servant.<sup>22</sup>

MOLIÈRE - Oh! Certainly not, if you please. This is not within her grasp. She's good at earthy gaiety but my subject is too noble to submit it to her judgement.

NINON - And you think I am capable of pronouncing more judiciously than a natural wit.

MOLIÈRE, *with passion* - I need more than a natural wit...An enlightened talent, whose delicacy and taste can grasp the character traits that I wish to put on stage.

CHAPELLE - Would that not be your Courtier?

MOLIÈRE - Far from it.

NINON - The Misanthrope?

MOLIÈRE, *kissing her hand* - No one has found me out, but you.

NINON - I'll always be proud of that. How I need your trust in the situation I find myself in! Your genial readings often make me forget what I hold most dear, and in this circumstance it will console me for the loss that I am about to suffer.

CHAPELLE - Molière, you fill the mind, the same can't be said for everyone else. (*To Ninon.*) Allow me to be envious of him.

NINON - This reign is most enduring and nothing can alter its longevity.

MOLIÈRE, *scratching his ear* - Indeed, but to see you and to hear you and yet not to desire to reign here (*He points to his heart.*) is a very difficult thing. Not even my Misanthrope would manage and I want to portray him in love: from now on I will change my plan, it will be more original, and his character will appear more natural. (*Reflecting.*) This bizarre singularity will create new theatrical effects.....(*Enthusiastically taking Ninon's hand.*) Oh my goddess! My Apollo, adorable Ninon! You are responsible for these new ideas.

CHAPELLE - The truth is, he's mad.

MOLIÈRE - If I were wise, would I create Plays for the Theatre, knowing all the difficulties

21 'Who succeeded Belus, King of the Assyrians?' 'Ninum' (Ninus son of Belus said to have founded Nineveh). Madame de Villarceaux had every reason to be jealous as Ninon had been her husband's beloved mistress for several years, bearing him a son, and establishing herself (partly at the errant husband's expense) in a property overlooking the one inhabited by the marquis and his family. That a courtesan should ignore moral decency was frowned on but accepted, Ninon however pushed further and legally acquired rights and money in a way that shocked the righteous who feared her behaviour would undermine the very fabric of society. The marquise de Villarceaux had the ear of Anne of Austria the erstwhile, but still powerful, Queen Regent; a year's house arrest for Ninon in a convent swiftly followed. The marquis de Villarceaux was handsome, talented, a great bon viveur and famed for his love affairs; he beguiled both Ninon and Madame Scarron, among others.

22 Molière was in the habit of reading his plays to his maid to ascertain their public appeal; Ninon's fine sense of the ridiculous led the playwright to also seek her approval on numerous occasions.

entailed.

CHAPELLE, *to Ninon* - His genius carries away his reason.

NINON - Ah! Let yourself be guided by him. He does what he does better than this stupid reason that creates obstacles, which genius will always flatten. You will be imitated, but never, Molière, never will you be equaled; your Plays are the foundation stones of good Comedy: they will always be its most concrete ornament. Bad taste may insinuate itself but your masterpieces will always remain the touchstones.

MOLIÈRE - You honour me too much; I have no more merit than another but perhaps my glory depends on my good fortune.

CHAPELLE, *to Ninon* - He's as modest as you are.

NINON - By the way, Molière, have you seen the dear Prince? I know him, he wants to rid himself of affairs of State so that we can enjoy his august presence more freely.

MOLIÈRE - I have just left him, I was going to tell you.

CHAPELLE - Hey ho! How did he receive you?

MOLIÈRE - As a man. Seeing me in the distance he cried: 'Molière, come forward, do, it feels as though you daren't advance.' Straight away you would have seen a path opening up leading right to him. 'My Prince,' I said, 'I feared...!' He interrupted me. 'What are you saying, my friend? Understand that I see no man more fit to approach me other than you, and you will do me the honour of coming to see me as often as you can. One finds your conversation instructive (*Reflecting.*), as though this great man needed to learn.' He ended by asking me many questions about you (*Speaking to Ninon*). As you can imagine, the conversation did not end too soon. I gleaned from his words that you would probably not pass the day without him coming to do you homage. But this Queen of the North who attracts all eyes, she may delay him for she influences the hour of his departure.

NINON - This woman is quite surprising! She does not give the impression of being such a great philosopher. Ah well, my friends, will you continue to see me as a woman, worthiest of my sex.

MOLIÈRE - You have your merit as she has hers.

CHAPELLE - You admire her just as she would you, if she had the good fortune of knowing you as we do.

NINON - Would I ever have had the courage to forego the Crown at twenty-seven? Such a flattering ornament for a young sovereign queen.

#### SCENE IX.

THE SAME, Mlle LE ROI.

NINON - What is it?

Mlle LE ROI - There is a young Noblewoman who is over there in a carriage and she is asking to speak to Monsieur Molière: she has, she says, the most important things to communicate to him, ones she has already mentioned in a letter.

MOLIÈRE - Ah! I had forgotten her; it's my aristocratic young lady. I compliment myself on her coming to find me here; you'll help me, Ninon, to calm her exalted ideas and return her to her duties. May I introduce you to her?

NINON, *to Mlle le Roi* - Mademoiselle, go and fetch her and bring her here.

#### SCENE X.

NINON, MOLIÈRE, CHAPELLE.

NINON - What is her story?

MOLIÈRE - I will read you her letter and you will understand it in a few words. (*He reads.*) 'Sir, The most unhappy creature, the girl to be pitied above all others, takes the liberty of recounting her misfortunes to you. Monsieur, my only hope lies in your goodness. I know your noble ways, your genius and all your works. I was born, perhaps, with a fortuitous disposition for Comedy; my rank, my fortune, have prevented me from pursuing my interests. Necessity forces me now to do so. I am only sixteen years old; I am to be married to a man of sixty. I love, and am loved by, a well-born young man that my parents cruelly refuse on my behalf; I have given much thought to the step I am taking; I have seen that there is more prejudice attached to the work of an Actor than to the status itself and that a place in your troop could not diminish either my name or my sentiments. I shall come and introduce myself to you tomorrow. I know by heart all your Plays; you will be able to evaluate my suitability for employment.'

CHAPELLE - The role of a lovesick girl, surely: that will provide you with a most intriguing subject.

MOLIÈRE, *resentfully* - You are no doubt joking. Do you think I am an Actor in all the phases of my life? Probity has called a ceasefire on my delirium. But here she is. What a shame!

#### SCENE XI.

THE SAME, OLIMPE [sic], Mlle LE ROI.

Mlle LE ROI, *to Olimpe* - Mademoiselle, there is Monsieur Molière.  
*She exits.*

#### SCENE XII.

THE SAME OTHER THAN Mlle LE ROI.

NINON, *aside* - How beautiful she is...(Aloud.) Come, Mademoiselle. Do you wish to address Molière in particular? We will leave you in his company.

OLIMPE - I have no fear of speaking in your presence, Mademoiselle, for your uncommon virtues are known to me and my misfortunes will move your heart. I would be too happy to obtain your esteem and your support.

NINON - Ah! You have it already...(Aside.) Her candour, her age....(Aloud.) Mademoiselle, what is your name.

OLIMPE - Olimpe, only daughter of the Marquis de Châteauroux.

MOLIÈRE - And without any thought for your illustrious family you wish, Mademoiselle, to throw yourself into Playacting.

OLIMPE - My happiness depends upon it. When you joined this estate, Sir, allow me to speak freely for I am addressing the greatest Genius of Europe and in the presence of the most admirable of women, could anything have dissuaded you from writing for the honour of France and adding, to the title of Author, that of Actor? Did you not prefer to become Director of the *Comédiens* than to accept the honourable positions that you were offered?

MOLIÈRE, *turning away* - I did no better, and if I had to start again I'm not sure I would do the same.

CHAPELLE - Such is man! Never satisfied. This one is covered in glory and still finds fault.

NINON - Truly, I don't understand you, Molière, when everyone sings your praises.

MOLIÈRE - My friends, my dear friends, you only see the roses that are strewn, here and there, at my feet, the ones your friendship gathers for me. But I, as I pass, I find at each instant only thorns underfoot.

OLIMPE - You are too hard on yourself, and you are not happy. I had been told it was so.

MOLIÈRE - Mademoiselle, do you want to know the reason? It is because I am an Actor. This word does not degrade my status; I believe that it is in itself noble but that it only suits those who are inspired, and is everyone inspired? And is the Public not equally unjust in its desires and caprices?

CHAPELLE - Talent always shines through.

MOLIÈRE - Twaddle.

NINON - That is his favourite proverb.

CHAPELLE - Because it is meet and well used.

OLIMPE - But Monsieur Molière, may I ask you a question?

MOLIÈRE - Any that you may please.

OLIMPE - Were you in love when you took up Comedy?

MOLIÈRE, *reflecting* - One moment...Yes, of course, a little with my uncle's old governess. I was very young.

NINON - You would indeed have needed to be very young, it can hardly have been a passion.

MOLIÈRE - Oh! You are so right.

NINON - And Mademoiselle takes up the passionate estate of Comedy only after having consulted her heart.

OLIMPE - That is true, Mademoiselle, and my distress is the greater because my Beloved is without family and has no other protection or support than that offered by my father. In losing his goodwill he has lost everything. The only course open to him now is the *Comédie*. A course that must unite us one day for, resolved to join this estate, we have sworn to be together eternally.

NINON - Ah! Mademoiselle, what have you done? I am not fond of promises of love for they are no sooner pledged than they seem destined to be ruptured. But this young man, without knowing him, interests me just as you do. (*Aside.*) Ah! Monsieur, Monsieur de Coligny, what have you done? Must I feel nature reveal itself in the depth of my soul at the mere name of an unknown man!

OLIMPE - But, in the cruel position I find myself in, surely I can do nothing better than to embrace Comedy?

MOLIÈRE, *firmly* - Go and throw yourself at your parents' feet and beg forgiveness for your imprudence, your desertion, and all other manifestations that may condemn your actions; if I must I will take you there, I will speak to your parents, to your father; they will listen to me and I hope I may obtain your pardon.

OLIMPE - But I would lose my Beloved!

MOLIÈRE, *with alacrity* - Eh! You'll lose him much sooner at the *Comédie*. Understand, Mademoiselle, that wisdom and constance are two virtues that are banned in the Theatre. I wish to believe that you possess them, and once you acquire a most austere virtue no one will believe it; should you have the misfortune to add faith, then you will have no friends, no applause: you will hear shouted from the back of the auditorium: 'Ah! Here is that Prude! Where's she stowed her virtue and why doesn't she attend the Convent rather than the Comedy?

NINON - Molière's right and you should believe him, Mademoiselle.

MOLIÈRE - And to make your misery even worse, your Beloved himself will probably punish you more for your misdemeanour than your father. Distracted by charming objects, bored of sighing and waiting for a favourable time, he will forget you: this inconstancy is natural in men.

NINON - He who says 'men' means 'women' also, Mademoiselle.

CHAPELLE - That goes without saying. Mademoiselle seems to me to be well enough informed not to sense it.

OLIMPE - I will bow to your judgement, Monsieur Molière for I can now see the danger of

my actions. But, in the end, I am obliged to tell you the truth.

CHAPELLE, *aside* - All is done: she can now enter the *Comédie*.

MOLIÈRE - Explain yourself, Mademoiselle. (*To Chapelle, while rubbing his chin.*) I fear that....

CHAPELLE - Oh! You can take her on.

OLIMPE - I disappeared three days ago with a governess who brought me up.

MOLIÈRE - You have a poor Teacher there, Mademoiselle.

OLIMPE - Today is the first time I have left the Hotel where we took refuge because one of my father's Valets, who had my interests at heart, told me this morning that he was at Court suing for an edict to have me locked up.

NINON - He'll have no trouble getting it.

MOLIÈRE - That is too true, but your submission must prevent it. Did your Beloved ever come to the hotel you retired to?

OLIMPE - No, Sir; even at my father's I never spoke to him but in the presence of my governess.

NINON - But this governess seems to me to be very amenable.

OLIMPE - I agree but I have never put to the test a propensity that would have led to my downfall.

NINON - How blessed you are to plan so far ahead and to be so strong.

OLIMPE - Ah! Mademoiselle de l'Enclos, honour me with your goodwill.

NINON - I, my child; my honour will wrong you in the eyes of the world.

OLIMPE - My father will have to be disarmed before I can present myself to him.

MOLIÈRE, *to Ninon* - She's right. Let's hide her for today. You must offer her your hospitality, then we will find a means to approach this inexorable father.

CHAPELLE - One moment...one of our friends in common is closely linked to him.

OLIMPE - Monsieur, what is his name?

CHAPELLE - It's Saint-Evremont.

OLIMPE - It's true; they have been friends since the earliest age.

CHAPELLE - I will run off and find him and you won't see me again until I have good news to offer.

NINON - If yours are no swifter in coming than Desyveteaux's Mademoiselle will have a long wait; you did promise me that you would unearth him.

CHAPELLE - You cannot imagine how many avenues I tried, and all were fruitless.

NINON, *to Olimpe* - Come, Mademoiselle, I will take you to a Salon where, I'm sure, you will be comfortable. My Library is next door and you will find plenty to distract you in my choice of books. (*To Molière.*) I will be with you in a moment, Molière. (*To Chapelle.*) No doubt we will see you this evening, Monsieur Chapelle?

CHAPELLE - Do you need to ask? Do I not have two reasons to come, as of now?

NINON, *exiting* - That is why I fear you will fail to attend.

*Mademoiselle de Châteauroux nobly salutes Chapelle and Molière: Ninon takes her by the arm and they exit.*

## SCENE XII.[sic]

MOLIÈRE, CHAPELLE.

MOLIÈRE, *teasing Chapelle* - She's right. She knows you [2ps] well; the more you have to do, the less you achieve.

CHAPELLE - Oh! I admit that I am not like the two of you, you [2ps] always find time too short and you never have enough of it to deal with all the subjects that pass through your head; she is the same when making love and when pleasing her friends.

MOLIÈRE - Leave your observations for now and think of serving this young person. If you

cannot find Saint-Evremont I will myself go and find Monsieur de Châteauroux.  
CHAPELLE - We will meet up this evening.  
*Chapelle exits.*

SCENE XIII.

NINON, MOLIERE.

NINON - I will admit, my dear Molière, that I find this young person extraordinarily intriguing.

MOLIERE - I'm sure of it.

NINON - But if Monsieur de Saint-Evremont does not succeed, nor you, when you undertake it, then I will not hide from you that I will be devastated to have made her acquaintance.

MOLIERE - I see an infallible method.

NINON - What is it?

MOLIERE - You will see Monsieur de Châteauroux, you will represent to him the perils that his daughter faces, the danger into which his cruelty has thrown her. But I have no need to tell you what to do, you have a thousand ways of moving him and I am certain that the honour of success is reserved entirely to you.

NINON - I agree, as you have a good opinion of my methods.

SCENE XIV.

THE SAME, M. DE GOURVILLE, FRANCISQUE.

FRANCISQUE - Mademoiselle, here is Monsieur de Gourville.

NINON - Finally, it was about time.

MOLIERE - He is tardy in understanding how much he owes you.

NINON - We don't know his reasons, but we'll find out. *(She indicates to Francisque that he may retire.)*

GOURVILLE, *from the back of the stage* - I am embarrassed to appear before her, especially since I imagined the worst of her: perhaps I was right. Let me see if I will find more probity in this astonishing woman than in this man of means.

NINON - Come, Gourville, we are both discomfited and fear explaining ourselves. In your absence, a great misfortune struck me, I beg you to forgive me for it.

GOURVILLE, *aside* - Just as I thought, I'm not surprised; this opening gambit will no doubt mean that my casket will have been stolen.

NINON - I have lost the feelings I had for you, but I have not lost my memory. Here, in this casket, are the thirty thousand *écus* you asked me keep before you left. They are in the same state in which you gave them to me; take them back and let us only see each other as friends from now on.

GOURVILLE, *with the greatest tenderness* - I am overcome; what a vile man I am to have distrusted such a good soul.

NINON - Why are you surprised? I am mortified, Gourville.

GOURVILLE - What! Ninon, is it you that is capable of such a fine act.

NINON - But I see nothing particularly good about it: is there anything fairer than to restore a sum for which one is the depository, or to return an asset that has been entrusted to one's care.

MOLIERE - You are right; an asset that is entrusted to us is a sacred pledge. Yet your conduct surprises him because the abuse of confidence is so common among men. But I am not at all surprised by your stance.

GOURVILLE, *even more tenderly* - I fall on my knees; no, only at your feet can I expiate the cruel injury I may have inflicted upon you.

NINON - What are you thinking, Gourville: do get up.

GOURVILLE - No, and I want to make this avowal in front of the great Molière.

#### SCENE XV.

#### THE SAME, LA CHÂTRE.

LA CHÂTRE, *from the back of the stage* - Thankless wretch! There she is. Could I not have counted one moment on her constancy?

NINON, *noticing la Châtre* - What are you doing here, la Châtre? Come closer. One more friend is joining me.

LA CHÂTRE, *bitterly* - Yes, a friend on his knees, that's how he has been with you. But as you say, he arrives and I leave.

GOURVILLE, *getting up* - Sir, no doubt I should envy your fate yet you should learn to have more respect for a heart where you have reigned, and a soul as pure as the light of day: before you, Gentlemen, I will accuse myself of having (*To la Châtre*) like you, believed her capable of the worst actions.

LA CHÂTRE - I have no idea what you mean, Sir: what you are telling me sounds like Hebrew to me.

GOURVILLE - In a few words you will understand: when I left to rejoin the Prince, during the civil wars, I had to safeguard a mediocre fortune; sixty thousand *écus* was all I possessed. I split up this sum and begged Ninon to keep half for me as a secret deposit. I entrusted the same sum to that man who is the talk of Paris for his austerity and probity. I come back and my first concern is to visit him. I beg him to be good enough to return the sum that he had been willing to guard during my six month absence. For a few moments he seems astonished and in a pious and naive tone says: 'My God, my dear Sir, I have no idea what you are talking about.' I was even more surprised when he added that in their monastery they were only accustomed to receive *deniers* to be distributed among the poor; an obligation that was always seen to immediately. I begged and insisted in vain, I was shown the door with many benedictions and assurances that I would not be forgotten in their prayers and that God would repay the favour that I had given the unfortunates. His words were accompanied by gestures and, with his hands joined and pointing heavenwards, he left without wishing to hear another word. Furious, desperate, what could I expect from a woman, when a man of God, a minister of peace, had taken the abuse of confidence to its limit. Ninon, hearing of my return, solicits me to call on her, even writes to me to ensure my visit. I arrive, she makes light of love and returns my deposit, and offers her friendship as well. And there, Monsieur, is the reason for my falling on my knees to her. Are you still jealous of the cravenness that allowed me to suspect such a noble heart.

LA CHÂTRE - Oh Ninon! Oh Gourville! I alone am to be pitied; you will rejoice in her friendship, in the joy of seeing her every day, and I, I must leave.

NINON - La Châtre, do not upset me further. And you, Monsieur de Gourville, I must hold it against you that you could forget that I was Ninon and not a Religious man.

LA CHÂTRE - Molière is absorbed: see how busy he is.

NINON - Ah! Gourville, what you have just recounted has provoked him.

GOURVILLE - He is an honest man, it does not surprise me. His genius does not corrupt behaviour, he only purifies it.

MOLIÈRE, *in a reverie* - Ah! Rascal, how I would congratulate myself if I could only capture you just as you are, your odious portrait so recognisable that I could wage war on vice. One day I'll grasp you [2ps] and you won't escape me.

NINON - Molière, such a man is worthy of your attentions,

MOLIÈRE - Oh! I'll answer for it. I had thought of it before. I know the type of man, more or less...but I will admit that I had not expected to find hypocrisy and deceit taken to this extreme. Abominable cheat! I would take up my pen instantly but that I fear weakening my subject matter by undertaking it recklessly.

NINON, *to la Châtre and Gourville* - This indignation, Gentlemen, shows you the respectable aims of our famous Author and estimable man.

LA CHÂTRE - Good times are with us now, in Paris. The fury of the civil wars is extinguished, the Court is scintillating, Ninon's house is the home of pleasure and good company, and I, I am leaving to squander my life fighting the enemy. But I am French and love will not take precedence over glory.

MOLIÈRE, *to Gourville* - Their time is precious, Monsieur Gourville, believe me: follow me. Ninon, I have things to do so I will leave you.

GOURVILLE - I will go with you, Monsieur Molière.

NINON - Molière, one moment.

LA CHÂTRE, *with humour* - It will be said that she never gave me a moment, but love has its rights as has friendship.

MOLIÈRE - Does it make you jealous?

NINON - He's right. There are no rivals more fearful than friends.

MOLIÈRE - That's her! A friend for life! A lover for an instant.

#### SCENE XVI.

#### THE SAME, FRANCISQUE.

FRANCISQUE - Mademoiselle, Madame la Marquise de la Sablière would like you to know that Monsieur Desyveteaux has been found, that he is in his country house in the Faubourg Saint Germain, that he is hiding and that his servants are dressed up as peasants.

NINON - I will straight away get my horses harnessed; Molière, you will accompany me. Do you want to be of the party, Monsieur de Gourville? La Châtre, for you it will be impossible.

LA CHÂTRE, *bitterly* - Courage! All that's left is to allow me to leave without a word.

MOLIÈRE - It must be said that you treat him too harshly. We will leave: at least give him the satisfaction of kissing your hand without onlookers. You will find us along the way.

*They exit.*

#### SCENE XVII.

#### THE SAME, FRANCISQUE.

NINON - Francisque, take this casket and follow Monsieur.

#### SCENE XVIII.

#### NINON, LA CHÂTRE.

LA CHÂTRE - Finally, I can breathe.

NINON - You wish to be pitied, yet I am a hundred times more pitiable than you. I seek consolation from the sorrow of your absence in friendship though I know full well that I won't find it there.

LA CHÂTRE - No, cruel one, you will forget me and betray me: I know your heart and it alarms and horrifies me. I know it is still true to me, I can see it, you are not unfaithful to me at the moment. But I am speaking to you, myself, of my love: who will remind you of it when I am gone? The love that you knowingly inspire, Ninon, is very different from the one you feel. I will always see you in my mind's eye: absence is a new passion that will consume me but for you absence is a term of affection. Far from you, I will find all objects odious, but you will find all of them intriguing.<sup>23</sup>

NINON - Oh! La Châtre, what can I do to convince you of my constancy and my fidelity? I cannot fault your fears but you have less reason to dread than anyone. There is a time for everything and I am beginning to see that, at my age, love is more stable.

LA CHÂTRE - Listen, Ninon, you are, without a doubt, in a thousand ways, an extraordinary woman. Whatever can soothe me must be just as extraordinary. I want my happiness to be guaranteed by something above love itself. I insist that you write me a letter in which you will promise me an inviolable fidelity. I will dictate it to you as the most sacred of human promises. I will not leave you until I have obtained this pledge of your constancy; I need it for my peace of mind.

NINON - I consent: trying to persuade you that this precaution is unnecessary would only increase your fears, and I am only too happy to satisfy you on this point.

LA CHÂTRE, *takes her by the hand and gently leads her to a table* - Oh! Ninon, how wonderful it is to please you but how terrible it is to lose your heart!

NINON, *with great tenderness* - La Châtre, if only I could follow you. I have no idea if I am committing a folly by writing this note, but, by doing what you desire, I will soothe my own heart.

LA CHÂTRE, *dictating* - Yes, I promise by the honour, the probity...

NINON, *repeating* - Probity...

LA CHÂTRE, *continuing* - That have always underpinned my emotions, that I will not attach myself to anyone...romantically.

NINON - As you will. (*Repeating.*) Romantically.

LA CHÂTRE, *continuing* - And to remain faithful for ever to the love I have sworn to la Châtre.

NINON, *repeating* - To la Châtre...

LA CHÂTRE, *continuing* - No mortal will be able to make me renounce my pledge. I give my faith, Ninon.

NINON, *stammering* - Give my...faith...Ninon.

LA CHÂTRE, *throwing himself excitedly on the paper* - Bearing this note I will fly to do battle, the luckiest of men. Farewell my adorable Ninon: we must part.

NINON - What? So soon!

## SCENE XIX.

NINON, LA CHÂTRE, FRANCISQUE.

FRANCISQUE - Monsieur le Comte de Fiesque asks, Mademoiselle, if you are seeing visitors.

LA CHÂTRE, *alarmed* - Oh my dear Ninon, avoid him: you admitted to me that if he had not left for Rome you would have loved him. He is young, amiable, educated; such qualities as to make you forget your pledge! Remember that you are now engaged to me by your honour.

NINON - I am quite prepared to sacrifice him, more to oblige you than for fear of my own feelings. (*To Francisque.*) Tell Monsieur le Comte de Fiesque that I am very sorry but I cannot receive him.

<sup>23</sup> 'Object' in this instance refers to a person who provokes admiration i.e. potential lover.

SCENE XX.

LA CHÂTRE, NINON.

LA CHÂTRE - Would you be telling the truth?

NINON - Why misinterpret my choice of words?

SCENE XXI.

THE SAME, Madame SCARON.

LA CHÂTRE, *to Madame Scaron* - Come, Madame Scaron, I leave my dear Ninon in your care, may your friendship remain steadfast.

*He makes it clear that he is leaving but that he does not want Ninon to notice.*

NINON, *plunged into the deepest despair suddenly notices that la Châtre is gone: she utters a piercing cry* - He's gone!

Mme SCARON - Indeed.

NINON, *abandoning herself to the greatest misery, collapses on the sofa* - I am so unhappy! I am the most wretched woman! What! Can Love ceaselessly torment me anew? The pledge that I have made is a sure guarantee that this will be the last time for if I lose la Châtre I will never love another. (*She gets up and speaks in an assured tone.*) My dear friend, how pleased I am that you are here at this time. You must come to my assistance; I have to take on a quite different task. Will you join me in going to console the poor Desyveteaux that Madame de la Sablière has found for me.

Mme SCARON - My dear Ninon, am I not bound to find whatever is agreeable to you equally enjoyable?

NINON, *to Madame Scaron* - I'm sure of it. (*To all [sic].*) Let us not waste time, I have to finish my toilette but it won't take long.

*End of the first Act.*

AN EPISODIC PLAY.

**ACT II.**

*The Stage represents a bucolic setting; in the distance there is a hill, with a woman at its foot. At the back one can see a prairie, with sheep. The Shepherd's wheelbarrow is on one side of the stage, opposite, on the other side, is the Shepherdess's hut. A fountain plays next to the hut, several trees provide cover and a grassy knoll below provides a seat.*

FIRST SCENE.

BLAISE, LUCAS.

LUCAS - Ah well, la Fleur, our Master's eccentricities multiply and become more extraordinary every day.

BLAISE - Stop using the name la Fleur, since my master has taken a fancy to de-baptise me and give me the name of Blaise and you of Lucas. He will not forgive us the slightest confusion on the subject; we'll be out of a job straight away. I'm just as happy keeping sheep as I was being a valet in Paris from dawn till dusk.

LUCAS - This peaceable life pleased me for a few days but actually, I have to tell you, I now find it very boring.

BLAISE - You're a Parisian all right. All those Nincompoops who go to the outskirts of Paris every Sunday to contemplate the beauties of nature. What beauties! They're only seeing what's ugly. They wish the day would never end but if they were forced to spend a week there, they'd think they'd been buried alive. As for me, I was born in the fields, this rustic life suits me better than being in Town. And I get on well with Mathurin who's a good peasant, like me. But here he is already with his bell.

*A bell can be heard from the back of the Stage.*

LUCAS - Oh! How I wish Mademoiselle de l'Enclos could see us in these accoutrements! How she'd tease us.

BLAISE - Do you think so? Ah well, I think that on the contrary she'd find it really funny.

LUCAS - That's more or less the same thing.

## SCENE II.

### THE SAME, MATHURIN.

MATHURIN, *with a bell in his hand* - Gosh! How strange I feels pretendin' to be keepin' beasts, however much I repeats the same old business, every day, it still seems to us like a dream.

LUCAS - Doesn't it bore you?

MATHURIN - Not so much, but wait a moment, I only wish to know why our Master wants me to become father to a daughter I never do set eyes on, nor met, and who seems to me to be a bit odd to say the least.

BLAISE - She is even craftier, i' faith . The way she plays the innocent. The clever way she serves our Master's madness. She behaves like a simple shepherdess who has only ever sighed for shepherd Corydon.

LUCAS - She's one of those shepherdesses who abandon their flocks and go astray in the Capital.

MATHURIN - Zounds! You're that comical! And what a tale you be tellin' me, the both of yer. I'm not so blind that I don't see our Master's an old fool. I've not known 'im longer than six months but I've yet to see six minutes of common sense.

BLAISE - You forget who he is. Understand that he was a great Lord, full of wit, and who was the first person to teach a King of France to read.

MATHURIN, *surprised* - Oh! Oh! Be that possible, 'e got the look of a simpleton.

LUCAS - That simpleton has been the toast of Paris and he is sorely missed in the best circles, including that of a renowned woman, Mademoiselle Ninon de l'Enclos.

MATHURIN - Mademoiselle Ninon de l'Enclos. Never 'eard of her. In Paris, I knows only our shepherdess of the Alps.

BLAISE - But, in our village, you [2ps] might have heard mention of le Grand Condé.

MATHURIN - A thousand troops, 'ave I 'eard of 'im. I'd a cousin who served wi' 'im.

LUCAS - Hey, idiot, say, rather, who served as a soldier in the army he commanded.

MATHURIN - Who served, who commanded. 'Tween soldiers tis all the same.

BLAISE - You're right, Mathurin, and the great man would not be offended by the comparison.

MATHURIN - Good! I do believe it, by my troth. If you fancies a chat with my cousin about it I be sure, by my troth, 'e'll tell you more. It be thanks to 'is fine speeches that three quarters of the village boys signed up and that's not countin' the married men. It worked like magic.

BLAISE - Ah well! Understand, that this great Prince, who works miracles in your Village, has long loved Monsieur Desyveteaux, now Shepherd Corydon.

MATHURIN - What the devil! Can't get a grip on any o' the nonsense you tells us; 'ow comes 'e's lost 'is senses then, since what 'e mixes with such fine persons?

LUCAS - He's got plenty to say on that subject.

MATHURIN - I couldn'a manage to understand them fine words. Gosh! Still I be pretty curious, what with shepherd Corydon, the Alpine shepherdess, a great Prince, seems a right carry-on to us.

LUCAS - Some things in this world are so surprising that you could think there's witchcraft involved.

BLAISE - Have you never read any Fairy tales?

MATHURIN - God save me. That's how to get bewitched and I can see well enough that our Master's lost 'is common sense, what with all 'is fine readin'.

BLAISE - There's some truth in what you say but, in two words, I will tell you of your fate.

MATHURIN - Are you goin' to make fun o' me again?

BLAISE - No, just pay attention.

MATHURIN, *pulling up his hair from under his hat* - Will do, I'll prick up my ears.

BLAISE - Understand that our Master was the most amiable man of his days, wealthy, witty, he aged surrounded by pleasure.

MATHURIN - God's blood! What a shame, for seems to me that if I had no worries I would never age.

LUCAS - Is that how it seems.

BLAISE - Listen to the end.

MATHURIN - I'm all ears but all this to us is so extraordinary, that I can't even believe what I see.

BLAISE - You're right, but it's also true that everything that seems to you to be far from the truth, is actually real.

MATHURIN - Spit the rest out then.

BLAISE - This young shepherd that you see wandering around with his flock, and sighing at the feet of the shepherdess, is only ninety years old.

MATHURIN - Never. No wonder 'is common sense is not what it was. And 'is shepherdess, is she as young as 'im?

LUCAS - You're so dim! My poor Mathurin, she's only seventy years younger.

MATHURIN - That's not much.

BLAISE - One night, when he came home really late, he found her sitting on his doorstep.

MATHURIN - Did 'e let 'er in?

BLAISE - Indeed. And as he really wanted to live a bucolic life he got it into his head to shut himself up with his shepherdess, in this garden, where he created a sheep-fold. As you can see, nothing is lacking, unless it's that the place doesn't really serve. We could hardly keep thirty odd sheep here so the ringing of the bell makes up for all the livestock we're missing.

MATHURIN - But why do 'e want me to be father to that 'ussy who ran round in the streets of Paris so someun' would pick 'er up.

BLAISE - To give his folly more reality and as he wants to marry her, he wishes to obtain her only with the consent of her father. Shepherd Corydon is chaste in the romances of his old age.

MATHURIN, *laughing* - Oh, oh, oh! Ah! 'Ow droll t'is all, what you've told me. But 'ere 'e is with 'is sheep and 'is shepherdess; I'm goin' to laugh all the more.

BLAISE - Be careful not to let him see what you're doing, just pay attention to ringing your bell.

SCENE III.

## THE SAME, DESYVETEAUX, LA DUPUIS.

*Desyveteaux is dressed as a Shepherd, crook in hand and knapsack slung over his shoulder, his hat is decorated with ribbons, among which one can spot a yellow ribbon topknot that Ninon had given him. La Dupuis is dressed as an elegant Shepherdess and is holding a guitar. Desyveteaux is leading a lamb and watching his flock crossing the back of the Stage.*

DESYVETEAUX, *from the back of the Stage sings this well known Romance -*

The size of my flock constantly grew,  
The lamb following the bleating ewe;  
About the flowers where we stay,  
A thousand new ones bloom each day:  
Ivy grows in ivy's sphere,  
Young pines rise up beneath the blue.  
Ah! tell me therefore my sweetest dear,  
Why we remain forever only two?<sup>24</sup>

Come adorable shepherdess, come nearer to your dear Corydon while our sheep gamble on those flowery meadows, beside this fountain.

LA DUPUIS - The dear little lamb that you are leading by the hand is grazing, let him follow his innocent instinct. Let him graze with the freedom of those you entertained me with in your love song.

DESYVETEAUX, *letting go of the lamb's ribbon* - Go and join the flock. Don't stray from the faithful dog who will save you from the wolf's cruelty. *(To la Dupuis)* Let us sit on this grassy knoll, shepherdess, in the shade of this leafy green canopy.

LA DUPUIS - Every day the sun opens my eyes, and I see you, Shepherd, more in love than ever.

DESYVETEAUX - Every morning, in these peaceable environs, my love halts the dawn. You arrive together, and more beautiful than the break of day, my preference for you makes her jealous.

LA DUPUIS - Ah! If I had the skill, and if it were in my power to rejuvenate you, as Aurora did Tithonus, Shepherd, you would no longer fear the outrage of passing years.<sup>25</sup>

DESYVETEAUX - The change has taken place, Shepherdess, Corydon has nothing left to fear. The God's have given him an eternal Spring. This transformation is thanks to the charm of your voice, to the melodious sounds of your lyre. Apollo, who always protected me, and promised to recompense me for the vigils I devoted to him, told me in my sweet dreams: 'A Shepherdess from the Alps will come and find you, tear you away from your tumultuous life, and teach you the joy of a bucolic life, by opening you eyes to the past.'

LA DUPUIS, *aside* - The poor dear man is unaware that he is closing them instead. But as it makes him happy and is to my advantage, his error must be allowed to pass.

DESYVETEAUX - Adorable Shepherdess, sing me the Song of Lise and Colin. She had to fear her father, just as we have to fear yours.

MATHURIN, *hidden in a corner* - Ah! That's a good one. I be a father to be feared seein'

24 Des mes Moutons le nombre augmente,/L'Agneau suit la brebis bélante;/Autour des fleurs de ce séjour,/Mille fleurs naissent chaque jour:/Le lierre croît au pied du lierre,/Des jeunes pins s'élèvent sous les Cieux;/Ah! dis moi donc, dis moi, ma chère,/Pourquoi toujours ne restons-nous que deux?

25 Tithonus, a Trojan prince, was abducted by the dawn goddess Aurora (Eos in Greek mythology) to be her lover; one version of the myth tells that Eos made Tithonus immortal, another that she had to ask Zeus to give him eternal life and forgot to ask for his eternal youth. Tithonus is generally represented as someone obliged to live forever, but as a bitter old man desperately waiting for death to relieve him, he is the symbol of decrepitude.

that's what they've ordered. Ah! Zounds, what a strange Story! Back in the Village they'll never believe it. Let's listen to the song, it's what amuses me most of all the eccentricities that I do see all around.

DESYVETEAUX - Delightful Shepherdess, I languish as I wait.

MATHURIN, *aside* - 'E can wait and languish, 'e won't do much else...wantin' to make love at such an old age. Eh! What nonsense!

LA DUPUIS, *tuning her guitar, sings to the tune We'll count all the Diamonds* -

LISE, drifting on the River  
With Colin the other day,  
Felt a secret quiver,  
Mysteriously she did say:  
As on this water I do float,  
Strongly palpitates my heart;  
Colin, is it the rolling of the boat  
Or of love I feel the start?

COLIN so that he could tell,  
Placed her down upon the shore;  
Now, Lise, do you feel unwell  
In the boat, or on land more?  
At the moment, Colin, I can see  
That it's not due to the river,  
For the same sensation is within me,  
Near you here on terra firma.

FATHER arrives quite unforeseen,  
And Colin flees along the shore;  
Aboard the skiff in which she'd been  
He took his daughter home once more:  
Soon the flow began to sway  
The buoyant boat so slight;  
Lise felt shaken underway,  
Yet her heart stayed calm and light.<sup>26</sup>

MATHURIN, *aside* - Ah! Let's see: let's 'ave a bit of fun and arrive, all in order, like Lise's father. Gosh, how droll it'll be, let's see if 'e'll leg it as quick as that young Fella.

DESYVETEAUX, *noticing Mathurin* - Gentle Shepherdess, here is your father.

MATHURIN - Yes, egad! 'Ere I am. Caught you at it, didn't I, handsome Shepherd, talking 'bout birds and bees to our daughter.

DESYVETEAUX, *timidly* - Ah! Monsieur Mathurin, permit me to ask of you a favour.

MATHURIN - A favour, I've got none for you. I forbid you to even ask 'er any ag'in. 'Ave you no shame, abusing the innocence of a young girl in that way. (*Aside.*) 'E's takin' it just right. Ah! What an odd bod! (*Aloud.*) Instead of watchin' over your flock and keepin' the

26 LISE, l'autre jour, navigait/Avec Colin sur la rivière;/Je sens un mouvement secret,/Dit-elle, d'un air de mystère:/Lorsque je vogue sur cette eau,/Et que mon coeur si fort palpite;/Est-ce le roulis du bateau,/Colin, ou l'amour qui l'agite?

COLIN d'abord pour le savoir,/La descendit sur le rivage;/Maintenant, Lise, tu peux voir/Si le mal provient du voyage:/Je le vois, dit-elle, à présent,/Colin, ce n'est pas la rivière;/Je sens le même mouvement,/Quand près de toi je suis à terre.

LE père à l'instant arriva,/Et Colin s'enfuit sur le rivage;/Puis avec sa fille il monta,/Et revira vers le village:/L'onde fut bientôt balancer/La barque légère et mobile;/Lise se sentit agiter,/Mais son coeur demeura tranquille.

ewes from the wolf you're like a wolf yourself who devours this lamb with your eyes, but you won't get even a bite.

LA DUPUIS - Oh father!...

MATHURIN - What's that, oh father? With that honeyed tone. Go, go, I know you, Miss Tricky. Go away and mind your flock what's scattered over there.

LA DUPUIS - I fly, father (*Aside.*) He's acting the part really well.

#### SCENE IV.

DESYVETEAUX, MATHURIN.

DESYVETEAUX, *watching his Shepherdess leave he takes a handkerchief out of his pocket* - She's going away from me, a cruel duty deprives me of her presence. (*Falling to Mathurin's feet.*) Oh father!

MATHURIN, *laughing, aside* - I, your father! What the deuce! How 'e do carry on. I'd 'ave to be as old as the wanderin' Jew to be 'is dad. I'll leave 'im to chat as he pleases: 'e'll tell us some good ones.

DESYVETEAUX - I'm throwing myself at your feet, I beg your mercy, give me Colinette, the Shepherdess, and become my father. Your severity throws me into mortal despair and if you resist granting me the object that I love, that I adore, any longer I will die at your feet from the pains of love.

MATHURIN, *laughing, aside* - Ah! I'm chokin' an' got no idea what more to say to 'im. What if 'e were to up an' die as dead as a doornail, 'e's just the age to play them tricks. There's no way I wanna be the cause. (*Aloud.*) Come now, get up, son-in-law, and take courage for you're sorely in need of it. Don't cry so, I'm a minded to send you your beloved and I swears to no more upsets you in your romancin'. (*Exiting.*) In truth, me conscience can't bear it, and I wanted to serve 'is folly. Gracious 'e do make us laugh so with 'is stories an' songs that I'll be that upset if 'e gets to be more reasonable. What is wit after all. It's no more solid than time.

*He exits. Desyveteaux watches him leave and salutes him with both arms outstretched; this encourages Mathurin to comically mimic the gesture.*

#### SCENE V.

DESYVETEAUX, *alone* - Oh lucky father of the most respectable Shepherdess! But how tardy she is! Let me go towards her lamb, his bleating cries will recall the image of her love in my mind. Oh adorable Shepherdess, for whom I abandoned everything, family, friends and you, renowned Ninon, whose amiable society was my delight, I abandoned you too. But forgive me, love is my excuse. Eh! Ninon, who better than you can vindicate me? If you can imagine my happiness! Love though has not made me ungrateful. Your dearest ribbon, pledge of your friendship, decorates my hat and will always be precious to me.

#### SCENE VI.

LA DUPUIS, DESYVETEAUX.

LA DUPUIS - Oh dear Corydon, what joy! My father permits me to speak to you.

DESYVETEAUX - Oh delight of my heart! What charm follows my despair? I can hardly believe such happiness.

LA DUPUIS - Come, shepherd; come and refresh yourself at this pure stream, symbol of our love.

DESYVETEAUX, *holds Dupuis' hand and takes a shepherd's mug out of his pocket* - We

will drink together, from the same mug, this silvery water, so preferable to shepherds than the nectar of the Gods.

*He bends down to reach the fountain and falls in.*

LA DUPUIS - Oh my! Help! Quick, Shepherd Corydon will drown if you don't come at once.

## SCENE VII.

THE SAME, BLAISE, MATHURIN.

MATHURIN - So! What be the matter?

BLAISE - Good God! Help, quick, shepherd Corydon is half in the fountain.

MATHURIN - So! 'e won't drown seein' as its dry.

BLAISE - Didn't you put any water in this morning?

MATHURIN - Gosh! Bit lucky that I 'ad the foresight, or else where'd 'e be, the dear man? Just for once 'e'd have drunk it all at 'is leisure.

*Blaise and Mathurin lift him and place him on the grassy knoll.*

MATHURIN, *to la Dupuis* - Come, sing 'im a good song to revive 'is heart: 'e's so pale.

BLAISE - Are you hurt, handsome shepherd. (*Aside.*) In truth, actually, this breaks my heart.

DESYVETEAUX - Rest assured Blaise, and you too Mathurin. I've just twisted my foot a little. There, it's getting better just from sitting down.

MATHURIN - A sweet song from your shepherdess will make it better.

LA DUPUIS - I'll strum a tune for you that will give you back your strength. (*A loud noise is heard.*) Ah! Shepherd Corydon, what new problem threatens us! Can you hear that noise at the entrance to the sheep-fold?

NINON, *from the back of the Stage* - I'm telling you that I want to see him, to speak to him.

DESYVETEAUX - The sound of that voice seems familiar.

LUCAS, *from the back of the Stage* - Mademoiselle, it pains me to refuse you but those are my Master's orders.

MOLIÈRE, *from the back of the Stage* - If your Master was instructed that it is Mademoiselle de l'Enclos, he would not refuse her entry.

LUCAS, *from the back of the Stage* - Ah! Sir, if you knew the state he is in!

NINON, *from the back of the Stage* - You are increasing my anxiety and my impatience. I won't listen to you anymore.

DESYVETEAUX - Ah! I recognise that enchanting voice; it belongs to my genial Ninon.

LA DUPUIS, *with affected surprise* - Ah! Dear Corydon, you will be wrenched from my arms.

DESYVETEAUX, *throwing himself at la Dupuis' feet* - Oh my beloved! Do not fear such an outrage. Shepherd Corydon will always be faithful to you, the same tomb will enfold our hearts.

MATHURIN, *aside* - Oh! The shepherdess calculates quite differently, that's not 'ow she plans the outcome.

## SCENE VIII.

NINON, Madame SCARON, MOLIÈRE, GOURVILLE, & several others, THE PRECEDING CHARACTERS.

NINON, *surprising Desyveteaux at the feet of la Dupuis* - My friends, is it really him? But yes, I am not mistaken, it is he, himself. What a metamorphosis!

MOLIÈRE - I am overwhelmed. Is this a dream? Is this madness? Chapelle was right.

NINON, *calling him* - Desyveteaux, my friend, do you not recognise me, are you no longer the same.

DESYVETEAUX, *still at la Dupuis' feet* - I am so in friendship; but in love, I am the shepherd Corydon, and here is my shepherdess.

Mad. SCARON - One cannot be madder than this, and his extravagance is at its height.

MOLIÈRE - Is it possible! I would never have believed it.

GOURVILLE - A man who was so full of wit: it's inconceivable.

MOLIÈRE - Love produces quite remarkable consequences.

NINON, *affectionately* - My friends, let us respect his folly and take care not to hurt him by denying him his sweet reveries; we could end by denying him his happiness.

MOLIÈRE - Ninon is right, and I'd rather find him happy with his pastoral ideas than unhappy with all his wits about him. I could not wish for any other fate.

NINON - I agree with you, Molière, but perhaps fate won't allow us this favour. Let's try and lure him through his weakness. (*To Desyveteaux.*) Far from wishing to trouble your delights, shepherd Corydon, your friends have come to share them. Can you refuse their homage.

DESYVETEAUX - If it is agreeable to my shepherdess, then no doubt it will be dear to me. But I have devoted all my delights to her, my life and all that I hold most dear in the world, other than the dearest pledge that your divine hand attached to my hat and which, for fifteen years, has adorned my head.

MOLIÈRE, *to Ninon* - See to what lengths your friends are faithful to you.

Mad. SCARON - His frenzy has not destroyed his sentiment.

MOLIÈRE - His folly seems to me to be a hundred times more interesting.

NINON, *with the liveliest emotion* - I find him all the more loveable.

Mad. SCARON - What's this, my gentle friend, you're overcome with emotion.

NINON, *wiping away her tears* - I don't deny it; his situation and his constancy move me to tears. (*To Dupuis.*) Whoever you are, Mademoiselle, you could not be so inhuman as to deprive us of the pleasure of seeing him.

LA DUPUIS, *to Ninon* - Rest assured, Mademoiselle; I will dedicate my happiness to keep him in the friendship that he has promised you for life.

NINON - I have no doubt you will. (*Whispering to Madame Scaron.*) Who is this girl?

Mad. SCARON, *sotto voce* - Her face is familiar.

LUCAS, *sotto voce to Ninon and Madame Scaron* - You've certainly heard of her: she's that guitar player.

MOLIÈRE - Good! This young girl is called la Dupuis? She is, indeed, pretty, and it is said she is not stupid.

NINON - I can believe it, and we'll learn a lot from her.

GOURVILLE - By gad, my friends, let's try and bring him back to reason; since friendship has such a hold on his heart, it will no doubt have an equal hold on his mind. Come, Mademoiselle de l'Enclos, make the most of the ascendancy you have over him.

MOLIÈRE - Monsieur de Gourville, let us not use violent means, on the contrary friendship must lend itself to the situation he finds himself in. Perhaps we could cure him by bringing him back into the world, with his shepherdess.

Mad. SCARON - I don't believe it for a moment, and I agree with Monsieur de Gourville. It would be better, by clear arguments, to make him see how ridiculous he is.

NINON - God save me, I'll only follow Molière's advice. Both of us have studied, more than you, the human heart. (*To la Dupuis.*) And you, Mademoiselle, can I trust to your goodwill, that you will bring him back, occasionally, among his old friends.

LA DUPUIS - I will always make it my duty.

DESYVETEAUX - I will follow you everywhere, and the good Ninon will always be dear to me.

NINON - Yet you do not look at me.

DESYVETEAUX - I only have eyes for my shepherdess.

Mad. SCARON, *laughing* - You must admit, my dear friend, that it is so obliging, it's impossible not to laugh.

NINON - I agree. (*Noticing that Mathurin is watching her closely.*) Who is that watching us so closely. I have never seen this man at Desyveteaux's.

MATHURIN - Gosh! I'm lookin' at you because you're good to see, like that beautiful Dame who's beside you.

Mad. SCARON - His face is quite comical.

BLAISE - This good man that you see here, Ladies, is the worthy father of the shepherdess Colinette.

MATHURIN - You're tellin' fibs, I'm only 'er father on purpose, not for real at all.

BLAISE - Shut up: run away, you're not needed here.

GOURVILLE - Here's another fine one! What does all this mean?

MOLIÈRE - That is easy to divine. Can't you see that everything is fake here, and that this peasant isn't as well versed as the others.

## SCENE IX.

THE SAME, FRANCISQUE, *running in.*

NINON - What is it? You seem very agitated.

FRANCISQUE - Mademoiselle, Monsieur le Prince de Condé is at the door, in his carriage. He wants to know if he can see you, as well as Monsieur Desyveteaux.

NINON - By what coincidence did he find me here?

FRANCISQUE - He came to see you and Mademoiselle le Roi told him everything. (*Looking.*) But it seems to me that he is unaware of his [Desyveteaux's] disaster. Monsieur le Comte de Fiesque accompanies him along with several other Lords.

NINON - I am not surprised by his action: he unites the qualities of a good citizen, a good friend, to the great art of warmongering. But I must ask Desyveteaux's permission before I present the Prince to him. Shepherd Corydon, the Heroes, like the Gods, wish to honour your retreat. Le Grand Condé asks to see you.

DESYVETEAUX - If the Shepherdess is willing, I am ready to receive him.

LA DUPUIS - If I am willing; how can you ask, gentle Shepherd? (*Aside.*) This moment glorifies me too much for me to let it go.

NINON, *to Francisque* - Tell the Prince that he may enter with his retinue. He will be very surprised!

*Francisque exits looking at the Shepherd and Shepherdess in astonishment.*

## SCENE X.

THE SAME, apart from FRANCISQUE.

MOLIÈRE - Francisque is totally confused: this is all an enigma for him.

DESYVETEAUX - *taking the Shepherdess by the hand* - Come, Shepherdess, let us go to meet the greatest of Mortals, our Lord, our Master.

## SCENE XI.

THE PRECEDING CHARACTERS, LE PRINCE DE CONDÉ, LE COMTE DE FIESQUE,

other Lords, A HAIDUK [either a Hungarian soldier or an attendant dressed in Hungarian costume], several VALETS, MATHURIN, LUCAS, BLAISE.

MATHURIN - Look out! Look out! My word 'ere's fancy gents...Oh! what fine coats.

*All the Actors range themselves on both sides of the Stage. Le Grand Condé is in the middle, at the back of the Stage.*

DESYVETEAUX, *throwing himself at the feet of the Prince* - Mars, the God himself, comes to visit the cottage of a peaceable Labourer. Shepherd Corydon presents his girl to him and asks, on his knees, that to his love be given the Shepherdess Colinette.

THE PRINCE, *surprised and taking Desyveteaux by the hand* - Arise, Desyveteaux; is this a party that you have arranged for me? You are always known for your amiable gallantry. It gives me pleasure to see that I was misinformed about you and that you are, on the contrary, very happy.

NINON - My Prince, don't you see?

THE PRINCE, *approaching Ninon* - At last, Mademoiselle de l'Enclos, I see you: how I suffered from being so delayed, but it could not be helped. I have just come from your house and I would not have returned from there without having seen you.

NINON - I could not be more grateful for, or sensible of, the honour you do me, my Prince. I share, along with the Nation, the joy of seeing you once more in your Motherland, but I take a more particular interest in it.

THE PRINCE - Ah! I can believe it, and I have never lost from sight your advice. It will always be dear to me as it led to my glory. Good day, Molière, good day my friends. (*To Ninon.*) How happy I am to be once again in your amiable company, Ninon; but why this Shepherdess, this bucolic place? No doubt Desyveteaux prepared this surprise for you. He always had a taste for the pastoral life.

NINON - This pastoral taste is now, my Lord, quite normal for him and, as you say, I was as surprised as you; Desyveteaux did not expect me. He is no longer a man of the world: he is the Shepherd Corydon, sighing at the feet of his Shepherdess.

THE PRINCE - Is this true, are you telling me this in good faith, it's not one of your pleasantries?

NINON - I never impose in that way, and if I were about to start, it would not be with you, my Prince. Like you, I was taken by surprise. At first I wept at his fate, but seeing him happy in his chimerical world, I am less afflicted.

THE PRINCE - I beg your pardon; forgive me, Mademoiselle de l'Enclos. I now see quite clearly how things stand.

DESYVETEAUX - Shepherdess, sing one of your cheerful songs to the Grand Condé and let the surrounding echoes resound it across the plain.

MATHURIN, *surprised and popping his head between Lucas and Blaise* - Gosh! Let us have a look, chaps, at our leisure. Zounds! Me coz was right to tell that 'e cuts a fine figure, martial like; what a noble and imposin' stance. I do love to see 'im, it's givin' me the goose bumps that's creepin' up all over.

THE PRINCE - Oh! Oh! What is this man?

MATHURIN - Zounds! Great Warrior, Sir, I be but a peasant who do love to see a fine man like yerself, so. And if I not done sees yer till now, don't mean I int 'eard speak of yer. What tales they tell of you. Them says you be no more at all affrighted of a Cannon ball than I be of a bottle of wine. What a man you be. You appears to 'ave been forged from stones, and guns and bayonets. Gosh, I be not surprised now, seein' as you been so well built.

NINON - My Prince, you could be eulogised with more pomp, but not with more truth or sincerity.

THE PRINCE - He pleases me greatly. (*To Mathurin.*) I am most grateful to you, my friend.

MATHURIN - Blow me down! Rather we should be grateful to the chance that afforded us such a great man: it could just as easy 'ave given us a useless un to the Motherland, like

so many, and I'd not be able wipe out the enemy, not as I could with your arms.  
DESYVETEAUX, *going to the back of the Stage* - Come, Shepherds and Shepherdesses, come and salute the God of combat. Let the sound of the bagpipes blend with the cries of joy as the assembled crowd follows in his footsteps.  
MOLIÈRE - Ah! If only I had a Ballet and a Choir all ready, at the back of the garden.

## SCENE XII.

THE SAME, a troop of Shepherds and Shepherdesses.

THE PRINCE - Have we been transported into a fairy glade? Everything I see is like a dream.

NINON - My Prince, like you I marvel, and in times to come, Desyveteaux's story will seem like a fantastical fable and yet we see it with our own eyes.

MOLIÈRE - It's just like being at the Opera. There is enchantment here. *(To the Peasants.)* Where do the Shepherds and Shepherdesses come from?

*The Prince listens.*

LUCAS - They are Shepherds and Shepherdesses from the Sheepfold of Monsieur Desyveteaux. That is to say the friendly Companions of Mademoiselle Dupuis. The folly of our Master is at its height and these she-devils do what they like. I have just seen them arranging their lovely chicaneries; it's one of their strengths.

THE PRINCE - Never has a madman had such good taste. *(To Ninon and Molière.)* I assure you, all of this amused me greatly when I thought it was an illusion, but I am much more entertained to see that it is real.

MOLIÈRE, *seeing the Dancers getting ready* - What the devil! Original dances!

*Six men and six women dance a charming Pastoral ballet. The first Couple wear a crown of laurels which they will offer to the Grand Condé. A Shepherdess sings a couplet about life in the countryside. A Shepherd sings a couplet in honour of the Prince. Another Shepherdess sings in praise of Ninon. Desyveteaux sings a couplet to the glory of the Prince. The Shepherdess Colinette sings another one on the same subject and all the Shepherds and Shepherdesses repeat the end of the couplet as a chorus. The Ballet retires and only the Actors previously on stage remain.*

*(One may dispense with this first Ballet if the Act is too long.)*

## SCENE XIII.

THE PRECEDING ACTORS.

THE PRINCE - I wish to take your arm, Mademoiselle de l'Enclos, for I will still hold you to your promise of a visit. *(To the Comte de Fiesque.)* Comte, you will not be offended if I introduce you. *(To Ninon.)* Having been admitted by you, he feared that he had been banned from your company, while being worthy of it. This action is not like you.

NINON - My Prince, I am distressed that a circumstance, most excusable I assure you, prevented me from receiving the Comte and I apologise to him a thousand times. It will always be a pleasure for me to welcome him to my circle.

THE COMTE DE FIESQUE - This avowal negates the false alarm that I experienced this morning, in your name.

NINON, *aside* - This man is so like la Châtre that I could confuse the two, if I did not know

better.

THE PRINCE, *to Ninon* - Have you tried, Mademoiselle de l'Enclos, to return Desyveteaux to the bosom of his friends?

NINON - Yes, my Prince, but I did not succeed. You alone, perhaps, my Lord, can enthruse him to turn towards glory. You could suggest he serve under your standard...Who knows? Perhaps this means...

THE PRINCE, *interrupting her* - It seems doubtful to me, but never mind, to please you I will attempt it. (*To Desyveteaux.*) Mister Desyveteaux, Sir, would you like to join me in the army? I promise you an honourable and distinguished service.

DESYVETEAUX, *looking at the Shepherdess* - Ah! Shepherdess Colinette, did you hear these orders, and didn't they make you shudder?

LA DUPUIS - I can see that a great Warrior is calling you to glory, and that my loss is certain.

DESYVETEAUX - No, Shepherdess, no, glory will never make of me a second Renaud.<sup>27</sup> Shepherd Corydon will die at your feet rather than abandon this happy sanctuary; let me make known to the Prince the impossibility of my obeying his distinguished orders.

THE PRINCE, *to Ninon* - It is as I thought, there is nothing we can do. So, as he has just said, let us leave him to enjoy the harmony of this happy sanctuary.

NINON - Come, let us bid farewell to his Shepherdess. But I must embrace him before I leave him. (*Embracing him.*) Farewell, my poor Desyveteaux; be happy with your Shepherdess, but don't abandon us altogether.

LA DUPUIS - I promise that I will bring him to you often, and that from now on it will be my only care.

NINON - Mademoiselle, I am sure you will.

MOLIÈRE, *embracing Desyveteaux* - Farewell, my old friend; may the Heavens keep you in this happy revery.

*End of the second Act.*

### ACT III.

*The stage represents a Salon.*

#### FIRST SCENE.

Mlle LE ROI, *alone* - The house is so deserted when Mlle is away! Le Grand Condé went to join her at Monsieur Desyveteaux's: perhaps they will all come back together....That young girl, who is shut in the Summer-room with her governess, what connection does she have with Ninon? That is their secret, and it is no business of mine. Someone has arrived...It's that dear Monsieur Scaron. Quick, I must tidy up his seat. (*She goes over to the sofa and arranges the cushions. She also arranges the armchairs.*) How he suffers, the dear man, yet how cheerful he is. He is bound to tell me a joke, as he always does.

#### SCENE II.

Mlle LE ROI, SCARON, *carried by four men who sit him on the sofa.*

<sup>27</sup> The 12th century legend of Renaud became a source of inspiration for many writers (most famously Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* of 1516) and opera librettists. In 1686 Quinault adapted a part of the story for Lully (*Armide*); the libretto was then re-used by Gluck in 1777. It is highly likely that de Gouges would have been familiar with this last opera, popular in her lifetime, for she was a keen theatregoer. Armide, with her magic, has imprisoned Renaud and won his heart, she fears that Glory (represented by his knightly comrades who will free him and return him to his chivalric code) is her true rival in love.

SCARON - This is the only place I feel at ease. (*To the porters.*) Farewell, my children, until the next time, see you this evening.

*The porters withdraw.*

THE FIRST PORTER, *leaving* - Gosh! Monsieur Scaron, if you gave us a few pennies, I'd go and drink to your good health.

SCARON - Rascals! If I give you a tip it doesn't make me bear up better, and I don't want to expose myself to being tipped out to break my neck. It's enough that my body is broken. I want to keep my head for the benefit of my friends.

Mlle LE ROI - Well said, Monsieur Scaron for yesterday these rascals were as drunk as lords.

SECOND PORTER - Come, let's get on with it, there's nothing doing today.

*They exit.*

### SCENE III.

Mlle LE ROI, SCARON.

SCARON - How are you, my chick? And my angel, Ninon, the dove has already flown the nest and the Tournelles birds are in the fields.<sup>28</sup>

Mlle LE ROI - Ah! Monsieur Scaron, you haven't heard the good news? Monsieur Desyveteaux has been found.

SCARON, *joyfully* - Ah! I am so pleased! Presumably Ninon is aware of this.

Mlle LE ROI - Yes; she flew to his side straight away.

SCARON - And does one know where the fellow had hidden himself for the last six months?

Mlle LE ROI - In a house on the faubourg Saint-Marceau.<sup>29</sup>

SCARON - So he had had enough of it.

Mlle LE ROI - Mademoiselle de l'Enclos was told nothing more other than that his Valets were all dressed as peasants.

SCARON - He always liked the rustic ways, and he acted in pastorales.

Mlle LE ROI - We will know all about it when my Mistress returns.

SCARON - This news redoubles my impatience to see my adorable Ninon. But listen, my chick, let us make the most of our time. Bring me some paper and a writing desk and I will bid farewell to that charming Marais, and the Queen of hearts, whom no one will ever rebel against.

Mlle LE ROI - Here, let your wit and you soul work for my Mistress. But why are you leaving?

SCARON - It is not me that is leaving, it's my infirmities that are forcing me to go, and that horrid death who's been dragging me along, and will soon mow me down with her scythe. But as I am not her dupe, I want to profit from the time that is left to me.

*He writes.*

Mlle LE ROI, *aside* - What a fortunate philosophy! In truth, it is a great shame when men of such spirit and gaiety are exposed to suffering and loss of life. Here, appropriately, is Marshal d'Estrées, with President Deffiat, to keep him company.

*Scaron continues to write. She exits.*

<sup>28</sup> Ninon's particular friends were often referred to as 'the birds of Tournelles' because she lived in the rue des Tournelles (turrets) in the Marais district of central Paris.

<sup>29</sup> There is a discrepancy here as in Act 1, scene 16, Francisque announces that Desyveteaux has been found living in the faubourg Saint-Germain, which is historically correct.

SCENE IV.<sup>30</sup>

MARSHAL D'ESTRÉES, PRESIDENT DEFFIAT, SCARON.

PRESIDENT DEFFIAT, *from the back of the Stage, addressing the Marshall* - No, Marshall, Sir, I cannot cede my rights on this point; they are those of nature, and I insist on them.

THE MARSHALL - But I have the same rights, and you cannot take them from me without the greatest injustice.

SCARON, *removing his cap* - I am your servant, Marshall, I am your Valet, President.

THE MARSHALL - Our friend Scaron will be our judge, and relieve our troubles. Will you hold to his decision?

PRESIDENT DEFFIAT - Yes, but the person must not be named.

MARSHALL - Do you think he'll guess who it is?

SCARON - I already know of your affair. This disagreement is much discussed and is of a nature to make known its authors; it honours both the woman and the men.

PRESIDENT DEFFIAT - But the Marshall only held sway after me.

THE MARSHALL - I am the father of the pledge she gave me of her love.

THE PRESIDENT - I am quite sure of the dates, and you are wrong, Marshall.

SCARON - What the devil! President, you are a poor chronologer, despite your best intentions. You want to calculate the secrets of women. The best Mathematicians in the world would lose their algebra over it but what flabbergasts me even more is to see your small band collar a Marshall of France.<sup>31</sup>

THE MARSHALL - There is no rank or state that can prevent a father from claiming his child and, in this, I praise the President.

SCARON - Fine, I will make a pronouncement like King Solomon. I won't order you to share the babe, but you will roll dice for it.

THE MARSHALL - Yes: here are some that will settle our quarrel once and for all.

PRESIDENT DEFFIAT - I agree.

THE MARSHALL, *taking the dice* - Ten or over. (*He rolls the dice.*) Six; your turn President.

SCARON - Surely, he will score lower.

THE PRESIDENT, *taking the dice* - I may score the same. (*He rolls.*) Didn't I say so?

SCARON - This is worthy of attention. Here are two equally valued champions. What the devil! A Lawyer holding up to a Marshall of France: come, Gentlemen, you must start again.

*The President rolls the dice a second time and scores straight threes.*

THE MARSHALL, *jumping up* - Good! He's only scored nine; now it's my turn, for the last time. (*He rolls, and jumps for joy.*) Twelve. Good! I've won.

SCARON - I am relieved, and convinced that fate turned in favour of the Marshall, and that this child is his; he will make of him a good Soldier, of more use to the fatherland than a useless idler.

THE MARSHALL - Ninon will not be troubled by this. President, her friendship will make up for this loss.

Mlle LE ROI, *entering* - Gentlemen, I hear carriages, I think it is Mademoiselle arriving.

SCARON, *aside* - This dispute favours my verse; I will pay homage to her with it when she

30 This scene is based on rumours suggesting that Ninon had a child by one or other of these two men. Michel Vergé-Franceschi, in his biography of Ninon de l'Enclos (Payot: 2014) writes that the only child that can be traced is Louis-Francois de la Boissière de Mornay (1653 - 1730) son of Louis de Mornay, marquis de Villarceaux (1619 - 1691) who legally recognised him as his own by letters patent in 1657. Ninon, like de Gouges, brought up her son in an exemplary fashion; he was a most successful naval officer.

31 A 'band', in this instance, refers to a type of collar worn by clergy and lawyers: in the French, as in the English, there is a play on words, the French 'collet' like the English 'collar' being both an item of dress and the rough handling of an individual.

arrives.

## SCENE V.

THE SAME, FRANCISQUE.

FRANCISQUE, *running in* - Oh, quick, quick, Mademoiselle, get the chairs ready, our mistress is arriving with the Grand Condé.

SCARON - Did he go with her to Desyveteaux's?

FRANCISQUE - No, but he went to find her there, and has come back with her; their two carriages are full. Allow me, Gentlemen, to set out the seating.

*Francisque, aided by Mademoiselle le Roi, places seats on the front of the stage, facing Scaron.*

SCARON - As for me, I'm not budging; sitting like an Emperor of China, here I am on my Throne.

PRESIDENT - Always cheerful despite your torment.

THE MARSHALL - No one is more amiable to his friends. Thus the amiable Ninon devotes every moment to him.

SCARON - And at times, the best ones. One could say she is great man in petticoats.

## SCENE VI.

THE SAME, NINON, THE GRAND CONDÉ, GOURVILLE, MOLIÈRE, LE COMTE DE FIESQUE, Madame SCARON.

NINON, *running up to Scaron* - Oh! My dear friend, you were at my house and I was absent. My friend, were you very bored?

SCARON - As soon as you are out of my sight I am afflicted in that way, it is the least bearable of my pains, but, you are always present in my imagination, are you not.

MOLIÈRE, *going to Scaron's side, and seeing the Verse that he has written for Ninon: to Ninon* - And it has worked while waiting for you.

THE GRAND CONDÉ - What has it made then? Only in this house do I see pure and simple friendship reign. It is no surprise if all good people gather here.

Mad. SCARON - He has written some Verse. Ah! Please, share them with us.

MOLIÈRE - And they're most appealing, I guarantee, given what I can see.

SCARON, *to Madame Scaron with a flippancy air, removing his cap* - Oh! Good day to you, Madame Scaron. (*Turning towards Molière.*) And you, is it any of your business? I would have to imitate you to do anything worthy of Ninon.

MOLIÈRE, *taking Scaron by the hand* - Come, my friend and comrade, don't be angry; we both do our best to do homage to so many exceptional qualities, to such a great soul.

SCARON - For your indiscretion you will read the Verse.

MOLIÈRE, *joyfully* - Oh! What an agreeable penitence.

THE GRAND CONDÉ - What a punishment for the company!

NINON - In truth, you spoil me, I say so every day; and you, my Prince, you whose heroic actions are above all the adulations that, sooner or later, weaken women....

THE GRAND CONDÉ - Are you not a man in spirit and in courage?

NINON - At times I have thought so but I fear my sex for as I get older, it gets weaker.

SCARON - It is not for my dear Ninon to fear the problems of this too feeble and too arrogant sex

THE GRAND CONDÉ - Come, Molière, read us this pretty production.

MOLIÈRE, *thinking and scanning the text, says, aside* - What facility! What cheerful

happiness! How far I am from achieving this sublime Philosophy, (*Embracing Scaron.*) My friend, I am a mere infant next to you.

SCARON - What a child? I refer to you, my Prince. He's a hundred pikestaffs taller than me in ability.

THE MARSHALL - My Prince, here are two men who do not believe in their talent.

THE GRAND CONDÉ - Such modesty is rare.

NINON - Less that such courage. Ah! My Lord, how strong you must be when faced by the enemy...

THE GRAND CONDÉ, *rising* - Molière, you forget that you have some Verses to read to us.

MOLIÈRE - Ah! My Prince, I beg you pardon a million times.

NINON, *to the Prince* - This distraction is excusable.

MOLIÈRE, *reading* -

Farewell to the Marais, by the most faithful bird of the Tournelles.

Farewell, though you be not blonde fair,  
Girl, spoken of across the sphere.  
Charming object, lovely Ninon,  
The mistress of Agamemnon  
(Had nothing that's comparable,  
To all that makes you admirable;)  
She had no voice, she had no lyre,  
And yet those Greeks had to retire  
In such unseemly passion,  
That thus, after a fashion,  
Their camp was quite wasted,  
By Mister Hector so irritated.  
So it is that a girl too beautiful,  
Gives rise to nothing but a quarrel,  
In fear that this could arise anew,  
Do try and wound less, or few,  
Commanding your too sparkling eye,  
To limit those that would wish to die.<sup>32</sup>

THE GRAND CONDÉ, *to Ninon* - So, call a truce on your charms, or give us the strength to resist them.

SCARON - You would have to be like me, a poor cripple, to have the strength to withstand them.

NINON - So you will leave us and you think I won't follow you. My friend, I want to be your lead sick-nurse.

THE GRAND CONDÉ, *pointing to Madame Scaron* - And you think that Madame would cede her rights.

SCARON, *taking Ninon's hand, who is the only person sitting beside him on the sofa, while everyone else is standing, since the Prince stood up* - My Prince, here is my wife, and here is my friend.

32 This is taken from a poem by Scarron entitled *Adieu au Marais et à la place Royale*: Adieu, bien que ne soyez blonde,/Fille, dont parle tout le monde./Charmant objet, belle Ninon,/La Maitresse d'Agamemnon/(N'eut jamais rien de comparable,/A tout ce qui vous rend aimable;)/Était sans voix, était sans luth,/Et mit pourtant les Grecs en rut/De si furieuse manière,/Que, ma foi, ne s'en fallut guère/Que tout leur camp n'en fût gâté,/Par Messire Hector irrité./Tant est vrai que fille trop belle,/N'engendre jamais que querelle./De peur qu'il n'en arrive autant,/Tâchez de n'en blesser pas tant;/Et commandez à vos oeillades,/De faire un peu moins de malades.

NINON - And at the moment only friendship rules....

SCARON - What, no lover, my beautiful angel. (*Looking at the assembled company.*) Ah! Gentlemen, you will not be long in leaving me free rein.

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE - Who could stop themselves trying? Happy the man whose attempt succeeds.

THE GRAND CONDÉ - It seems that you have failed, Comte.

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE - Yes, my Prince, but that doesn't mean I have lost faith.

NINON, *gayly* - I am glad to see that no one is discouraged, but, Gentlemen, will you cease discussing me for should we not be occupying ourselves with the fate of the unhappy Desyveteaux, however happy his sanctuary may be.

SCARON - By the way, my beloved, I forgot to ask you for news of him; on seeing you one forgets the entire Universe but, come, share with me all his eccentricities.

NINON - He is ending as he has lived; he is already eighty and some years and he rejuvenates every day in his folly. If you could see him, my friend, in his Shepherd's garb, his crook in hand, knapsack at his side, a straw hat adorned with ribbons, among which one can spot a yellow topknot that I decorated it with fifteen years ago. It's hard to know whether to laugh or cry at first but barely has he spoken that pity makes room for gaiety. I had to applaud and praise his eccentricity.

THE MARSHALL - Your wisdom must have been tested.

MOLIÈRE - She's quite capable of it: her joy exists only alongside that of her friends.

SCARON - Why trouble that of Desyveteaux. Is he not of an age to return to that happy infancy.

THE MARSHALL - If he has lost his reason, all well and good.

NINON - No, Marshall, Sir, he has all his senses; you will judge for yourself at any moment. I imposed on his long standing friendship that he come to see his good friends in the real world, and that as he had abandoned the society that should have been dear to him, he had a duty to at least bid it farewell.

SCARON - Oh! How happy I will be to embrace the gentle Desyveteaux for the last time; we will bid our farewells together, but what a difference! He in pleasure, I in torment.

NINON - My friend, you afflict us.

THE GRAND CONDÉ - I was meant to dine tonight at Court but, my friends, I will stay with you.

NINON - But, my Prince, despite the joy that we feel at your presence, we prefer your glory to our pleasure. You know, My Lord, that I have enemies at Court.

THE MARSHALL - Not among the men, invariably.

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE - So I believe.

NINON - It is precisely because I have too many friends.

Mad. SCARON - And the Prudes, Gentlemen?

NINON - Madame Scaron is right: do they count for nothing?

THE GRAND CONDÉ - Does one stop to take account of prattling Prudes?

NINON - Sometimes, My Lord! They often take revenge on those who have never known how to imitate them.

MOLIÈRE - That is the only talent that Nature refused you.

NINON - But have I not perhaps been a little too much in opposition to this character?

## SCENE VII.

### THE SAME, A SERGEANT.

SERGEANT - I come, in tears; duty obliges me to serve you with orders that are disagreeable and cruel for a gallant man.

NINON, *alarmed* - Oh! Sir, what are you saying? Molière, they have come my house to remove that young girl.

SERGEANT - Oh! Mademoiselle, how I wish that these orders could pertain to someone other than yourself.

NINON - What, Sir, these orders concern me alone. Ah! you reassure me, I promise you, I feared...

*Everyone is concerned and le Comte de Fiesque puts his hand on the hilt of his sword; the Prince signals him not to take it any further.*

SCARON, *alarmed* - What does this mean?

MOLIÈRE - I am devastated.

THE GRAND CONDÉ, *to the Sergeant* - I beg you, explain yourself, Monsieur de Saint-Faur; I know that you are honest, and you would not want to mislead us with regard to the complaints against Ninon.

SERGEANT - Here they are, my Prince: a clamour has arisen against Mademoiselle de l'Enclos. The zealots, in particular, have spread their animosity all around, to blacken the name of the most amiable woman of the century: certain things have even been suggested that are not fit to be repeated here. Finally, the worst that calumny has to offer has been imputed to Mademoiselle Ninon.

Mad. SCARON - What an indignity!

SCARON - Oh! If I could move freely I would go there, straight away!

MOLIÈRE, *aside* - Why am I a simple citizen?

THE MARSHALL - I have some influence on the Queen, I will go...

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE, *excitedly drawing his sword* - I, I will defend Mademoiselle de l'Enclos to the last drop of my blood.

SERGEANT, *firmly* - Sir, this act of violence is misplaced, if I wished to use force it would not prevent me. But rest assured, I am as far removed as you from fulfilling these orders that I have been given.

THE GRAND CONDÉ, *with pride* - Ye Gods! Gentlemen, you are forgetting that I am here. Are you not aware that I would be able to defend her better than all of you put together and if ever I took up arms for a cause that soiled my reputation then at least I will make amends now by defending the most commendable of women, one who has never distanced herself from honour or probity.

NINON - My Prince, moderate this transport of generosity and do not modify your honour with unpardonable excess. What have I in common with the State? My exile, or imprisonment, will surely not be too rigorous and, perhaps, my friends will be able to come occasionally to enquire of my state of health?

SCARON - I'll have to be locked up with her for I won't leave her side. What can one fear from a man who is but a head?

NINON - Explain yourself once and for all, Monsieur de Saint-Faur. Where am I supposed to retire to?

SERGEANT - Mademoiselle, it shames me to say it; to the Girls who Repent.<sup>33</sup>

33 [Original footnote.] One may wish to correct the term 'Girls who Repent' and also the style of Ninon and Scaron's replies in this scene but I made every effort not to impose my own; the only merit of this Work is that the characters are true to themselves.

The *Filles Repenties* also known as *Filles Pénitentes* were a Catholic religious order created in the 1490s made up of 'girls of ill-repute' who had been converted and gave up their trade in favour of devoting their lives to God. Later on, 'honest' women - under 30 - were allowed in. In the 18th century the convent was used as a house of correction for prostitutes who were imprisoned there without taking vows. A famous convent *Les Madelonnettes*, named after Mary Magdalen, was founded in Paris in 1620, it was not a part of the *Filles Repenties* but the two are often confused. *Les Madelonnettes* soon became a place of incarceration for women who were deemed to have behaved inappropriately. Ninon was imprisoned within its walls in March 1656, but not for long; her male well-wishers created such a fearful, and endless, ruckus around the convent that she was soon transferred to a pleasanter convent in Picardie from which she was freed in March 1657.

Mad. SCARON - How frightful!

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE - That is awful.

SCARON - It's impossible.

NINON - You are right for I am neither a girl, nor repentant.

SERGEANT - That was the Queen's intention at first, now she will allow you to choose the Convent.

NINON - Oh! If the choice is left to me I may incite even more clamour and there would be an irreconcilable quarrel.

SCARON, *aside* - It's certain that she won't choose a woman's Convent. Her mind is too great, too sublime, to descend to the minutiae of feminine cloisters.

THE GRAND CONDÉ, *to the Sergeant* - Monsieur de Saint-Faur, will you go back with me right away to see the Queen. I will get this misplaced order revoked, convince Her Majesty of the truth and make known to her the atrocity of such calumny.

SERGEANT - My Lord, I can refuse you nothing especially since I have no trouble in believing that the Queen will pay attention to your requests.

THE GRAND CONDÉ - I hope so. Marshall d'Estrée, follow me.

SCARON - Alas! My Prince, if only I could follow you! The Queen, once upon a time, held me in some esteem, felt some goodwill...My infirmities, my suffering, soothed and alleviated by the care, the friendship of Mademoiselle de l'Enclos, could persuade the Queen that she is the most respectable person in Europe.

THE GRAND CONDÉ - No doubt, my dear Scaron. Gentlemen we must do even more, everyone must go to the gallery in the Tuileries so that I can show the Queen Ninon's friends. Molière, you will be among them.

MOLIÈRE, *modestly* - My Prince, my rank...

THE GRAND CONDÉ - Is it your rank that one sees? It is the man that is considered.

SCARON - Come, let us call the servants to put me in a sedan chair.

MOLIÈRE - My friend, I'm going to pick you up in my arms.

THE GRAND CONDÉ, *throwing his hat aside, and taking Scaron in his arms* - Between the two of us, Molière...

SCARON - My Prince, what are you doing?

THE GRAND CONDÉ - I am testing my strength to make sure I have not lost it.

MOLIÈRE - My word, he's carrying him on his own, what a man! Ah! There aren't many left of such stern stuff.

Mad. SCARON, *to Ninon* - I am leaving you, my dear friend; I cannot at a time like this, abandon my husband.

NINON - What, are you leaving me all alone: in truth, I'd prefer six months in the Convent.

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE - I am not leaving you, and until this affair is clarified I will be your surety and answer for the consequences.

*The Prince exits carrying Scaron in his arms, the Marshall gives his hand to Madame Scaron, all the others exit in great disorder, apart from le Comte de Fiesque who stays behind.*

## SCENE VIII.

NINON, LE COMTE DE FIESQUE.

NINON - I'm not staying with you, you're too dangerous.

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE - Imagine that I am taking the place of the Sergeant and that it would compromise his trustworthiness to leave you to your own devices.

NINON - That is quite shrewd but you must believe that I am quite calm and that there is nothing to fear.

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE, *sighing* - Happy the man who makes you impervious and indifferent to the love you are so adept at inspiring.

NINON - What! Are you still dreaming of that?

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE - More than ever.

NINON - And your trip to Italy was unable to distract you? I admit that you are unlucky for you always speak to me of love when my heart is already taken.

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE - But if my information is true, you will soon be free.

NINON - How so, if you please?

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE - Did our friend la Châtre not leave this morning?

NINON - But I love him still.

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE - He is already thirty leagues away from you and I am right here. I can see you, I can hear you. Oh! Ninon, could I be so unhappy as to displease you for life; can the most impassioned man mean nothing to you?

NINON, *aside, with emotion* - He is so expressive! In truth no one is more amiable.

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE - Consider, adorable Ninon, that you have been tormenting me for a year, that I hoped to be able to forget you on my voyage, that I come back, see you once more and am enchained again. I will not use tears and threats the way other Lovers do; nor will I tell you that I could have distracted myself elsewhere, for I did not seek the opportunity. You are free, I am here, I love you: will you accept me?

NINON, *laughing* - You are free, I am here, I love you: will you accept me? This lighthearted tone would disconcert a prude. (*Aside.*) This man is much more engaging than the Grand Prior; if he continues I will never have the strength to resist him.

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE - What are you saying Ninon? Are you afraid to explain yourself? That is not like you.

NINON, *despondently* - But why, Sir, have you stayed behind with me? Why don't you go, like all my friends, and plead for my forgiveness?

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE - It is so easy to obtain that it will make no difference if I plead for it, but the same cannot be said for my love. I am convinced that the Queen will be less inflexible than you towards me.

NINON, *despondently* - And who told you, Sir, that I am so angry with you? (*Aside.*) I no longer know what I am doing, nor what I am saying.

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE, *throwing himself to his knees* - Oh, most beautiful, most lovable of women, cease and proclaim my joy; see how the most affectionate of Lovers is at your feet.

NINON - Courage! Kneeling at my feet, that is too much: my word, I cannot hold back. (*Observing him closely.*) He shares certain traits with la Châtre and even the same timbre in his voice, so much that one could be mistaken.

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE, *gayly* - It is always a boon to have something in common with the absent one.

NINON, *laughing* - You are joking, but in truth, you are very like him.

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE - Ah well, as a kindness to this resemblance, love me, Ninon, and make a man happy who has only burned with true love since first meeting you.

NINON - I must escape from you; I wish to, I ought to.

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE, *putting his hand to his sword* - So you want me to die. Very well, I must renounce life since I don't have the good fortune of pleasing you, for I would find it unbearable.

NINON, *stopping him* - Stop, my dear de Fiesque. You are, in truth, a terrible man, but what would you have me do, I find myself in a cruel position.

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE - What would I have you do? Oh! Ninon, how can you ask? That heart that I burn for.

NINON, *despondently* - Ha! You have it already.

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE, *kissing her hand* - Oh! Ninon, what are you saying? I am deliriously happy!

NINON - *turning her head* - Ha! La Châtre indeed has a worthy note.

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE - Do you still miss him?

NINON - No, not as much as this morning but I am still entitled to think of him. (*Reflecting.*) In truth, it is scarcely believable: all my friends are pleading for my forgiveness and I, I am here making love at my ease with Monsieur. Ah! If this latest anecdote was made known, it would not be so easy to obtain a pardon.

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE - So, what would be said? That you do not waste time and that a spirited woman, like you, must always be occupied.

NINON - I agree, but this kind of occupation does me no favours. (*Aside.*) Which reminds me, I have forgotten the fascinating Olimpe. Let me go and reassure her for she must be very agitated, though hardly less than I am. (*Aloud, to the Comte.*) I am leaving you for a moment, I am called away by a benevolent action.

*She exits.*

#### SCENE IX.

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE, *alone* - Ninon regrets having been so forward with me which I find praiseworthy for the more I love her the more I fear her. What man could resist such a seductive woman, she unites spirit, talent, charm, beauty and a hundred other rare qualities that are usually lacking in women. Oh! Ninon, by making me happy you will make me the most miserable man. Will I be able to resist the fate that awaits me? No, I only have what it takes to avoid the danger for ever. Let me flee Ninon, and her engaging company.

*He exits.*

#### SCENE X.

NINON, *watching him leave* - He's going....But it looks as though he's leaving for good. Oh! Monsieur le Comte de Fiesque, that's very harsh of you. Can I blame him? He's convinced, is he not, that I am flighty and inconstant? But I wasn't totally bewitched...Ah! Monsieur le Comte, Monsieur le Comte, you are resisting me. I will show you that I am not one of those women who can be tamed in this way.

#### SCENE XI.

LE GRAND CONDÉ, MARSHALL D'ESTRÉES, NINON.

LE GRAND CONDÉ, *eagerly* - I come, Mademoiselle de l'Enclos, to execute the Queen's orders and to assure you, on her behalf, that she is aggrieved that the reports she was given concerning you were false; she will punish the informers; her favours will never extend to the perfidious women who dared slander you in her presence.

NINON - I expected no less from Her Majesty's righteousness and goodness, but, my Prince, I owe it to you and, without your assistance, I would perhaps still be a woman deserving of the worst excess in the eyes of the Queen.

LE GRAND CONDÉ - No, the Marshall had already pleaded your cause in the presence of the Queen of Sweden, the illustrious Christina, who yearns to meet you and who asked the

Marshall to be gracious enough to introduce you to her.

NINON - What! My Prince, what are you thinking? I, Ninon, an ordinary person, how can I be fit to receive this great Queen? No, this honour is not meant for me.

THE MARSHALL - She has been asking me to bring her here for some time but, as she no longer mentioned it, I thought that reasons of convenience had diverted her. Today, she came to see the Queen at the moment that I was confounding your vile slanderers. The Prince arrived with his entire escort, including the Philosopher Scaron, who visibly pleased the Queen. Her Majesty deigned to speak to your friends. Queen Christina, seconding the Prince and Her Majesty, spoke out: 'It would be a real honour and a pleasure to go and pay homage to this celebrated young woman, whose beauty and talents are the least of her exceptional qualities.'

NINON - I owe this great eulogy to my friends who think too highly of me and I cannot approve of it without giving way to inappropriate vanity. No doubt it would be glorious for me to receive this great Queen, whose wit and enlightenment impress us though we should not marvel at it. A rare and sublime philosophy drew her down from the Throne to find the universe at her feet in admiration of her exceptional talents and profound knowledge. If her visit could remain incognito it would be the greatest joy that I, alone, should be blessed by her august presence but this kindness would create too many enemies, and it would threaten to increase my own vanity.

THE GRAND CONDÉ - So you will therefore refuse her your door; I need to warn you that the Marshall and I, we are going to present her to you this evening.

NINON - Ah well, I must rejoice in the kindness. I will therefore receive this illustrious Sovereign, but yet I must receive her with all the dignity that her rank deserves. In faith, my friends, we will welcome her all together as best as we can. If only Molière could come, his genius would be a great asset. He has so much facility that only he may save us from embarrassment.

THE MARSHALL - Here he comes with Chapelle and Saint-Evremont.

LE GRAND CONDÉ - His arrival is very apt.

## SCENE XII.

THE SAME, MOLIÈRE, CHAPELLE, SAINT-EVREMONT.

THE GRAND CONDÉ - Greetings, Gentlemen. (*To Molière.*) Come along, Monsieur Molière. My friend we have been awaiting you with the greatest impatience.

MOLIÈRE - My Prince, I would have flown here if I had realised.

THE GRAND CONDÉ - And neither do you realise, my friend, that you are going to save us from embarrassment?

MOLIÈRE - Save you from embarrassment! My Prince, one would have to be as intrepid as you, it would take another like yourself, and only the blue blood of the Bourbons produce any that can compare.

THE MARSHALL - Your observation is true. Happy are those, my Prince, who serve under your flags.

NINON - The name of Condé will always be dear to posterity.

THE GRAND CONDÉ - I am much obliged, your words are too kind. But, Gentlemen, and you too, Ninon, we are not here to discuss either my glory or my valour. If we were to mount an assault or lift a siege I would not call on Molière to save us.

MOLIÈRE - I can believe it, my Prince but admit that you are not familiar with the latter.

THE GRAND CONDÉ - Courage and strength cannot answer for these events. It is often prudent to retire at times, and sometimes a second attempt is more advantageous than the first. That is the art of war, so let us only speak of peace. The splendour of the Court

announces a Reign as flourishing as that of Augustus.

NINON - You are, my Prince, its most solid support. The young Monarch, from his Crib, saw his Throne undermined, your invincible arm strengthened it.

THE GRAND CONDÉ - Everyday, as he aged, his friendship for me grew, and every day his taste developing alongside his love of the Arts, and of other subjects, proves that he will be a great King. Molière, he spoke of you yesterday evening, 'My cousin,' he said, 'what do you think of this man and his works?' 'Sire,' I replied, 'I believe his latest ones are masterpieces, and I always find his conversation inspiring.' 'It pleases me,' he told me, 'that you combine the art of warfare with art of understanding and appreciating talent. I compliment you, for ordinarily the greatest Warriors are savage and only distinguished by their bravery in battle; they are seemingly born for this state alone.' Which of us, you or I, Molière, can be the most pleased with this young Monarch?

MOLIÈRE, *respectfully* - My Prince, I am overcome by this wealth of kindness and the King, by speaking thus, feared that his right hand man might be the enemy of his pleasures: when he witnessed your own introspection he christened you accurately, 'From now on,' he said, 'he will be known as the Grand Condé.'

THE GRAND CONDÉ - Have you heard, Molière, that Ninon is once again favoured by the Queen?

MOLIÈRE - Yes, my Prince; and also that Queen Christina wished to pay her a visit; it is already known throughout Paris.

NINON - But how can I receive her? Molière, you will have to come and assist me, so that one of your pleasing impromptus gives her a good impression of my circle.

MOLIÈRE, *eagerly* - I will do the best in my power. My Prince, allow me to take leave of Your Highness so that I can set myself to work. (*To Ninon, aside.*) Saint-Evremont and Chapelle will tell you all about their assignment: all will be fine, if you so wish it.

*He exits.*

### SCENE XIII.

THE SAME, EXCEPT MOLIÈRE.

THE GRAND CONDÉ - I will also retire, and take my leave, Ninon, while you take the time to prepare yourself.....Ninon, stay, please.

*He exits, the Marshall follows him out.*

### SCENE XIV.

NINON, CHAPELLE, SAINT-EVREMONT.

NINON - What a privilege it is for me to have ruled over the heart of this great Prince!

CHAPELLE - Ninon, I think that glory has enflamed you.

NINON - How can it be helped? One could lose one's head for less. I'm esteemed, I'm honoured, a great Queen is coming to visit me today: in truth, my friends, if you do not watch over me, I will become quite mad and will only be fit to accompany Desyveteaux; he, in his sweet reveries and his rural pleasures; I, in pompous, martial follies. Canons and Trumpets will be my cortege and you will see a Throne by a hut. This is rather accurate, if I am not mad.

SAINT-EVREMONT - You are making fun, Ninon, were it any other than yourself I would be quite afraid.

NINON - Come on; let us speak of this poor child who is not having fun, shut up alone with

her Governess. Have you seen her father, Monsieur de Saint-Evremont?

SAINT-EVREMONT - Yes, but he is the most stubborn of men.

NINON - Oh! What are you saying?

SAINT-EVREMONT - You alone may bring this to term.

NINON - And what should I do?

CHAPELLE - Go and see him. He would not be worthy of being a father if he could resist your arguments.

NINON - I will do all that I can, but you must at least introduce him to me.

SAINT-EVREMONT - Tomorrow morning I will present him to you, if you think it appropriate. By the way, the Marquis is very desirous of being admitted into your circle.

NINON - It will be a pleasure: so, tonight, we only have to concern ourselves with the Queen of Sweden. Saint-Evremont, you will adorn the celebration, and you, Chapelle, you will not fail to be there.

CHAPELLE - We will take our leave.

NINON - Fine, but busy yourselves writing a few couplets in honour of this astonishing woman.

CHAPELLE - You have put this task into such good hands, we would not dare take part.

NINON - You are fishing for compliments but I only know how to tell the truth to my friends. We will all write some and the worst ones will be the most sincere; it is the heart that will dictate them, not genius.

*End of the third Act.*

## **ACT IV.**

### FIRST SCENE.

NINON, Mlle OLIMPE.

NINON - Yes, Mademoiselle, tomorrow I will see Monsieur your father, and rest assured that if you do not obtain the husband that your heart has chosen, it will not be due to my lack of effort.

Mlle OLIMPE - Oh! Of that I am quite sure, but I fear I may disturb you, Mademoiselle, so I will retire.

NINON - No, Mademoiselle, despite being thrown into confusion by the Queen of Sweden's visit, it gives me the greatest pleasure to rejoice in your amiable company. I cannot invite you to join this celebration for it would compromise your position, and I hold that more dear than my own.

Mlle OLIMPE - I am deeply aware of it; if the sincerest friendship can ever repay your kindness then, one day, I will prove my gratitude! Pray do not allow me to impose on your goodness any longer. I will retire.

NINON - Allow me to arrange your return: my horses are harnessed to my carriage....Mademoiselle le Roi!

*Mademoiselle le Roi appears at the back of the Stage with Mademoiselle Olimpe's governess.*

### SCENE II.

NINON, Mlle LE ROI, Mlle OLIMPE.

NINON, *to Mademoiselle le Roi* - Conduct Mademoiselle to my carriage. (*Curtseying.*)  
Farewell Mademoiselle.  
*Mademoiselle Olimpe curtseys nobly and exits with her Governess.*

### SCENE III.

NINON, *alone* - This child interests me a great deal! Her love is so pure! If only I had loved likewise! But the Comte de Fiesque is an unbearable man. Ah well! This man preoccupies me despite myself; I am so weak! And yet I wish to be brave. My sex governs me, for I am still a woman.  
*Reflecting.*

### SCENE IV.

NINON, MOLIÈRE.

MOLIÈRE, *eagerly* - I am come to tell you the plan for your celebration, but I cannot guarantee that it will be to your taste. What do I see? What new anxiety agitates you?

NINON - Oh! My dear Molière, I am in great need of your presence: my friend, I am more cracked than ever.

MOLIÈRE - What's this? Are you still preoccupied by la Châtre. Yet since this morning he is far away.

NINON - Oh! that is so true: another has already taken his place.

MOLIÈRE, *laughing* - Already.

NINON - Are you surprised?

MOLIÈRE - Not a bit. But you announce it with such an air. How lucky you are to treat love like the child it is. In truth, I think you must be its mother. You are Venus masquerading as Ninon. To confuse us, and to seduce us, she could not have found anyone better.

NINON - Amuse yourself at my expense, Molière; you are capable of it, and I deserve it.

MOLIÈRE - Come now, no sulking; it is not your way. Tell me who is the lucky man who interests you at the moment?

NINON - You cannot guess?

MOLIÈRE - Oh! Yes, I have an idea: the one who, this afternoon, wanted to.... (*He imitates the Comte putting his hand on the hilt of his sword.*) I should have guessed from that gesture. He is courageous. He is likeable. In one word, he is made to be your Lover.

NINON - But he resists me, and even seems to disdain me.

MOLIÈRE - That is not possible...More probably he fears you, and to flee, in similar circumstances, is quite pardonable.

NINON - Well then, take my part: I want, from now on, to only concern myself with my friends; otherwise I could end up more unpleasantly than the miserable Desyveteaux. He has found, in his old age, a Shepherdess to console him, and I, at that age, will not find a Shepherd.

MOLIÈRE - I predict, Ninon, that at eighty you will still ignite passions.

NINON - By the way I have promised that age to Abbot Gedoin.<sup>34</sup> But where will we be at such a time, any of us?

MOLIÈRE - I would like to live that long to see it, but you are young still, whilst I am nearly

34 Abbé Nicolas Gédoyne (1667 - 1744) was a French cleric and writer who was rumoured to have had a liaison with Ninon in her old age, some suggested the youthful cleric lover of the ageing courtesan was rather the Abbé de Chateauneuf, neither is deemed likely in reality. Although the play compresses elements of Ninon's life into approximately seventy hours this reference to Abbé Gédoyne stretches credulity given that he was not yet born at the time of Queen Christina's visit in 1656.

forty.

NINON, *laughing* - The poor old man, how I pity him. Have some respect, I pray, for I am your senior by five or six years.<sup>35</sup>

MOLIÈRE - That is not possible; you have all the beauty and bloom of a fifteen year old.

NINON - As you please. But it is none the less true that I have overtaken forty by a few years: yet you are not wise enough to advise me to renounce the art of pleasing and allowing myself to be seduced.

MOLIÈRE - Do not ask for my advice on this matter for I can assure you, you will find that I am less reasonable than you.

NINON, *sighing* - Ah well, let us look at your plan.

MOLIÈRE, *aside* - What an ingenious change of conversation.

NINON - It is charming, but then what else can one expect from you, if it be not admirable things. Ah! You are quite unique.

MOLIÈRE - What is Mademoiselle de Châteauroux doing?

NINON - I sent her away, my friend. It was not wise for me to prolong her stay at a time when my house will be open to all my acquaintances. But tomorrow morning she will come here before her father arrives. You will be here, without fail, and then I hope we can work together, successfully, for the happiness of this amiable person.

MOLIÈRE - You are going to get involved, that is beyond doubt?

NINON - In truth, with your support, I will gain great strength.

#### SCENE V.

#### THE SAME, FRANCISQUE.

FRANCISQUE - Madame la Marquise de la Sablière et Monsieur Mignard are asking, Mademoiselle, if you are seeing visitors.

NINON - Let them in.

*Francisque exits.*

#### SCENE VI.

#### MOLIÈRE, NINON, Mme DE LA SABLIÈRE, M. MIGNARD.

NINON, *going towards Madame de la Sablière* - Now, I am in your debt, Madame la Marquise, for finding the poor Desyveteaux.

Mme DE LA SABLIÈRE - I have heard of his adventure, Monsieur de Gourville has just recounted it. It is as pleasing as can be, and his madness is as gay as it is inconceivable.

NINON - Oh! I can vouch for that.

MIGNARD - I have just heard the story, and my imagination is still full of it.

MOLIÈRE - You should treat this subject, Monsieur Mignard, only an artist like yourself could do justice to the painting.

MIGNARD, *thinking deeply* - Yes....A great Prince, the love for the fatherland....a pastoral setting, the Peasant's surprise, Shepherd Corydon. We will discuss it, Monsieur Molière.

NINON - By the way, Monsieur Mignard, how is Mademoiselle, your daughter? She is like Love in beauty, Venus in grace and Minerva in talent.

MIGNARD - Yes, but she has no memory.

NINON - She has no memory! Ah! Monsieur Mignard, how lucky you are! She will not quote anything.

MOLIÈRE - Your antipathy towards quotations will make you prefer even the deepest

35 Ninon was two years older than Molière.

ignorance.

NINON - I admit it; I prefer a mediocre mind to those clever people who find every opportunity to quote on any subject. From what you have told me, Monsieur Mignard, you can be assured that your daughter will be a truly amiable woman.

Mme DE LA SABLIÈRE - Mademoiselle de l'Enclos, I am charged to ask you a favour on behalf of two young ladies, less compelling than Mademoiselle Mignard, but they none the less burn with the desire of making your acquaintance.

NINON - It is the Mesdemoiselles de la Sablière. I recognise them from the way they wish to favour me, and from the modesty of their mother. I have long awaited the pleasure of embracing them.

Mme DE LA SABLIÈRE - They will have the satisfaction of dining with you, and la Fontaine, tomorrow. I count on Monsieur Molière. What a party for them! But they wish to precede this pleasure by coming to visit you today. My carriage has gone to fetch them from the Convent, and I am waiting for them in order to introduce them to you.

NINON - Allow me, Madame la Marquise, to oppose the honour that you wish to confer on me by presenting me your Demoiselles. They are young, beautiful, rich, pleasing and well born; they are born to aspire to the highest rank and if it were known that they had come to visit me, this action could do them the greatest harm.

Mme DE LA SABLIÈRE - Can you think of such a thing, Mademoiselle de l'Enclos? Eh, what people could possibly have such a poor impression of you?

MOLIÈRE - Only hypocrites, women who lack honourable principles or probity and seek to tarnish your reputation.

MIGNARD - Devoid of any worthwhile qualities they seek to obscure them in those that possess them. Eh! Where is the woman worthier than you, Mademoiselle, you who are praised by all honest people.

Mme DE LA SABLIÈRE - For my part, I congratulate myself on having a different view of you than that held by those allegedly virtuous women.

NINON - My God, I crave your esteem more than I fear their attacks, but slander and calumny can be so damaging to young Ladies who are already drawing the attention of the most illustrious Houses that one must deny cruel people the malicious pleasure of spreading their venom.

## SCENE VII.

### THE SAME, FRANCISQUE.

FRANCISQUE, *announcing* - Mesdemoiselles de la Sablière.

NINON - *with alacrity to Madame de la Sablière* - Allow me, Madame, to go and receive them at the door, and to embrace them.

*They exit with Monsieur Mignard.*

## SCENE VIII.

MOLIÈRE, *alone* - What a noble spirit! What a mind! What sensitivity! Ah! Women, women, you who arm yourselves against her, learn to imitate her and you will ennoble yourselves. What an example. Her weaknesses, her errors, they make her great and sublime qualities shine all the more. Could one have ever imagined, by her modest conversation, that she is, this evening, expecting a visit from the Queen of Sweden? After this homage, she will be able to receive, it seems to me, two young Ladies of quality without fear of damaging their reputation in any way.

SCENE IX.

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE, MOLIÈRE.

MOLIÈRE - Ah! There you are, Monsieur le Comte. My word, I fear that you may have arrived too late. One has been giving it some thought.

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE - What, how is that possible?

MOLIÈRE - But also, Monsieur le Comte, what kind of man are you, to leave a woman time to think, especially Ninon...Come, embrace me, you will be one of us. Friendship can compensate for the losses incurred by love.

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE, *despondently* - My word, that is a cheerful consolation.

MOLIÈRE - Not one to be disdained. Not all men are worthy of it.

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE - I agree, but you will admit that my reign was short-lived; it had hardly begun.

MOLIÈRE - One day saw it begin and end; you will admit, in turn, that the day which brings joy to a Lover is one of the most beautiful days of his life.

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE - I would rather flee from her for ever than give rise to my misfortune thanks to this day you seem to find so blessed.

MOLIÈRE - Good for you, if you can avoid it.

SCENE X.

NINON, LE COMTE DE FIESQUE, MOLIÈRE.

NINON, *to Molière* - Molière, you are awaited....(*Noticing the Comte.*) Oh! There you are, Monsieur! What news do you bring us? Good, no doubt, for you have had time to reflect. Molière is not a problem, we can explain ourselves in front of him.

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE, *aside* - Ow, ow, ow, all is lost since she is teasing me.

NINON, *vivaciously* - Hurry up now, your nonchalance tries my patience.

MOLIÈRE, *aside* - A calm Lover does not suit her.

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE, *looking at Ninon, and sighing* - Ninon, how wonderful it is to love you, but how cruel it is to please you.

*He goes to the back of the stage.*

NINON, *to Molière* - Molière, can you resolve this problem?

MOLIÈRE - I understand it perfectly, and you have grasped it just as well as I.

NINON, *to the Comte* - Come back, do: being caught making a declaration by an Epigram is not a reason to leave. I perceive that you actually fear me more as a Lover than a friend.

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE - I fear both, I have to admit. I will only be able to reclaim friendship through flight, assuming I have the strength to flee from you.

MOLIÈRE, *aside* - Ah! That is the courage he lacks; I can see him on his knees.

SCENE XI.

THE SAME, Mlle LE ROI.

Mlle LE ROI - Monsieur and Madame Scaron have just arrived and I have just heard several carriages in the courtyard.

SCENE XII.

THE SAME, FRANCISQUE.

FRANCISQUE - The salon is filling up, Mademoiselle; Monsieur Scaron has already taken his place, and asks for you, and Monsieur Molière, with loud cries.

MOLIÈRE - For myself, I will run along, especially as I have my task to finish and Scaron could be most helpful to me.

*He exits.*

NINON, *to Francisque* - Let me know as soon as you see the Queen arrive.

FRANCISQUE - Without fail, Mademoiselle.

*He exits.*

SCENE XIII.

NINON, LE COMTE DE FIESQUE.

*Both stay silent for a while.*

NINON, *aside, observing the Comte* - How foolish one is when in love. I would like to speak to him and I don't know how to begin. (*Scratching her ear.*) In truth, I am ashamed; I will leave in order to avoid him.

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE, *running after her* - Have you the strength of purpose to leave me on my own.

NINON - When people like to dream, they must not be deprived of this pleasure and I, I don't like to be in anyone's way.

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE - But it is you I think about. My eyes see no one else, you are the one I hold most dear in the world, but I fear...

NINON, *joyfully* - The lover who fears the future, and who quantifies constancy, is only too ready to break his promises. Love needs to be free; it escapes when enchained. (*Aside.*) If la Châtre had believed me...

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE - What are you saying, Ninon?

NINON, *stammering* - Nothing....just a thought....

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE, *interrupting her and throwing himself at her feet* - Well, let's not think anymore, either of us and let me flatter myself that I might be happy for a long time.

NINON, *helping him stand* - Oh! I hope so.

SCENE XIV.

THE SAME, CHRISTINA, THE PRINCE DE CONDÉ, MARSHAL D'ESTRÉES,  
FRANCISQUE.<sup>36</sup>

FRANCISQUE, *running in* - Mademoiselle, I was taken by surprise, I didn't hear the carriage.

*He exits.*

NINON - Heavens! I am quite discomfited.

<sup>36</sup> Queen Christina did particularly ask to visit Ninon when visiting France in September 1656. At the time the courtesan was imprisoned in the convent at Lagny, in Picardie; this is where their meeting took place. The Queen was so impressed by their conversation that she wrote to her French counterpart requesting, to little effect, that Ninon be pardoned and released.

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE, *aside* - Ninon's imprudence is all my fault!

NINON, *coming back to her senses and throwing herself at the feet of the Queen* - I fall at the feet of Your Majesty; I graciously thank you for the honour of your favour.

CHRISTINA, *lifting her up with kindness* - You! Mademoiselle de l'Enclos at my feet! I will forgive you. Others are often prostrated at yours. Firstly, to put you more at your ease, I must embrace you. I wish two kisses to form the premise of our liaison. (*She embraces her.*) Imagine that I am here as an ordinary person and that I wish to avoid any particular distinction.

NINON, *surprised* - Oh! Madame, I thought I was a woman with something to offer but I can see that I am nothing compared to such Philosophy, courage, nobility and modesty.

CHRISTINA - There must be some analogy between our characters, Mademoiselle, that I should so eagerly desire to meet you. (*Turning towards the Grand Condé.*) It does not surprise me, Prince, to find that she has your esteem and friendship.

LE GRAND CONDÉ, *to Christina* - She is worthy of both. I believe, Madame, that it would be your wish to be left at liberty to engage with her without witnesses. I will take advantage of this moment to attend the Queen's counsel. Marshall, you will come with me, we will return together. (*To the Comte.*) And you, Comte de Fiesque, you are not needed here either.

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE - My Prince, I was about to retire.

*The Grand Condé bows respectfully to the Queen, as do the Marshall and the Comte. They retire. Christina acknowledges the Grand Condé as a Prince, and the Marshall and the Comte with a glance.*

## SCENE XV.

CHRISTINA, NINON.

CHRISTINA, *straightforwardly* - Let us sit down. (*She sits and signals to Ninon to sit.*) How grateful I am to the Prince that he left us alone, I dared not ask him. My intentions could not have been divined more appropriately.

NINON - Madame, the Prince does what he does well. Nothing escapes his attention and what is most admirable in this hero, that nothing can withstand, is his modesty and unaffected friendship. It is not his equals that he mostly honours by his friendship. He accords it only to true merit and great talent, when those qualities are accompanied by sentiments that distinguish a man and show his true character.

CHRISTINA - How fortunate that the Court of France has, in a Prince of its Blood, such a great Leader. If I had had this thunderbolt of war at the head of my armies, I could have kept my Crown with glory, and made my people happy. But I had long observed their ingratitude and being only weakly supported, I descended from the throne with the same tranquility that I had mounted it. Then I saw the love and the regret of my subjects; a superfluous response! The decision was taken. I unfastened the diadem from my head and placed it on the brow of my Successor. This abdication calmed minds and, mistress of my fate, without rank or brilliance, I began to reign for myself.

NINON - The common people consider that a Crown is a gift from Heaven but I can easily understand, Madame, that Kings are victims of prejudice and that doing all in their power for the happiness of their people, they yet have not done enough. They confer laws but are enslaved at the centre of the brilliance which surrounds them.

CHRISTINA - You might add that they are trapped by their cruel duty. A King has no right to think or to act as an ordinary man. Always observing himself, always being observed and obliged, at every hour of the day, to portray a false character. Finally he grows weary of this most wretched role and if he is Philosophical enough, he tears off the mask and

regains, with no trouble, his true self.

NINON - All Sovereigns think as you, Madame, but where is the one who will have the courage to imitate you. It is so flattering to one's vanity to command and be adored, by an entire people.

CHRISTINA - This love is so capricious; believe me, Mademoiselle, I did not abandon my States due to pride, or dissatisfaction, but I did not wish to expose myself to the hatred of my subjects when I had sacrificed my partiality to ensure their happiness.

NINON - In the eyes of the universe, you are the greater for abandoning your Crown.

CHRISTINA - Let us cease there, Mademoiselle de l'Enclos, and leave the weight of the Crown to those who are charged with it. I have taken up too much of your time on the subject but I wished to open up all my soul to you. Let us speak now of your friends, of your circle; I have heard that it is charming, that it unites men of the greatest merit, the greatest talent, the highest rank, that, definitely, the best company in Paris is to be found here.

NINON - It is true, Madame that the men of my circle have nearly all recommended themselves in their century, and that I have the fortune of gathering them in my home, without anything troubling this reunion.

CHRISTINA - That is praiseworthy indeed and it does not surprise me that you excite the jealousy of women, especially the pruders.

NINON - They are pedants and censorious of love.

CHRISTINE - You are much more gracious towards it: I have also heard it said that it has established its court in your house.

NINON - It is true that love favours me but I wish this God could be like Thetis and render me invulnerable to the ravages of age, hiding my wrinkles under my heel, so that I could be subject to its laws for longer.<sup>37</sup>

CHRISTINA - How charming! None is more amiable, true, or sincere. But what is your point of view when you consider love? Why does it make some happy and torment others? I believe I have heard that you are philosophical about it.

NINON - Up to a certain point. Meanwhile, the circumstances, and particularly the events of the war, have at times exposed me to changes. I have even been forced, in certain cases, to stifle love in my heart in order to give up to glory those that I loved. But, by thinking of love as it is, it has seemed to me to be a predilection based on the senses, a blind feeling that assumes no merit in the object of desire, and does not impose on it any recognition; in a word, a caprice whose time does not depend on us, and that is followed by disgust and repentance.

CHRISTINA, *rising* - What a woman! There is more heroism than weakness in your soul. My good friend! You will allow me henceforth to call you such.

NINON - I will do my utmost to maintain this favour but, how can I have deserved it?

CHRISTINA - By the qualities that place you above your sex. I wish, Ninon, that a happy chance could bring you closer to me. You have not travelled, you should accompany me to Rome.

NINON - If I only consulted my pleasure and my glory, that would be both my fancy and my desire, but, great Queen, the Universe has its eyes on you, it resounds with your praises and perhaps its support would change to satire. Have you not seen, Madame, to what extent I have excited envy and calumny. What would be the result if I was seen to be in your entourage? Your genius, your virtues place you above censure, but with me, Madame, you would no longer be exempt. It costs me a lot to refuse such a flattering proposition, but I am only led by your glory.

CHRISTINA - I am convinced of the sincerity and delicacy of your sentiments. I will not

37 Thetis, a sea nymph, was the mother of Achilles. Myth has it that she dipped him, as a baby, in the underworld's river Styx to render him invulnerable. She had to hold him by one heel and this is why he died when hit there by an arrow during the Trojan war.

insist any more on something that I would have much desired, to learn with you on my voyage. My dear l'Enclos, it goes without saying that we only like glory on behalf of our friends. When one has self-esteem one is above being judged. Those who see the course of a lifetime with a philosophical eye do not halt at the insubstantial opinions of men, they ensure their happiness in the company of like minded people, without burdening themselves with commonplace ideas. Those are their merits, that is their superiority, anything else is inconsequential.

NINON - Madame, you express yourself so compellingly that I do not know how to reply. Your reasoning cannot be faulted; therefore, Madame, dispose of me as you will, I am ready to follow you.

CHRISTINA - No, my dear Ninon, you will not be alone in being generous. When you refused you only took my glory into consideration; I could only see my satisfaction when tearing you from a company to which you must be lovingly attached. You are adored by it: be its ornament and honour. Stay in this place where your presence is cherished, I will limit myself to writing to you, for I wish to maintain our acquaintance through an amiable correspondence.

NINON - My true happiness starts at this instant; it is only with Christina of Sweden that I have found a way of thinking analogous to my own, but to be worthy of her, I would have needed not a few of her virtues.

CHRISTINA - Eh! You have so many more advantages than I, but let us be equal, Ninon, and as all comes to us from Nature, and as it has created such a connection between the two of us, let us fulfil its aim by binding our friendship with all the amity of a gentle fraternity.

NINON - This favour overwhelms me.

CHRISTINA - I would be most interested to see your company, your friends, among others the famous Molière and the Philosopher Scaron, it is said that he bears his pains with an admirable gaiety.

NINON - He has to be seen, Madame, for it to be fully appreciated. They are both here along with the amiable Madame Scaron; as are most of my friends who all aspire to nothing, other than to rejoice in your august presence.

#### SCENE XVI.

THE SAME, THE PRINCE OF CONDÉ, MARSHAL D'ESTRÉES.

THE GRAND CONDÉ - Perhaps I have arrived too early. Madame, I fear I have been thoughtless.

CHRISTINA - I will admit, Prince, that I lost all sense of time conversing with Mademoiselle de l'Enclos; she is the only woman in France who should be cited and admired. Your account of her to me, Marshal, was not nearly as perfect as what I perceive but you were right to say that the greatest praise cannot do her justice. One has to meet her to appreciate her fully; it is with enormous gratitude that I thank you for having made it possible for me to meet such a perfect woman.

NINON - My debt to the Marshal, for having raised me so high in your opinion, is beyond compare since it has allowed me the unparalleled advantage of seeing myself esteemed and loved by the most sublime woman in the Universe....Here, Madame, is a man who is no less worthy of your esteem.

#### SCENE XVII.

THE SAME, MOLIERE, *respectfully bows to the Queen.*

CHRISTINA - Come closer, famous man, I am enchanted to meet Mademoiselle de l'Enclos' friend. This title is a worthy accolade.

MOLIERE - Madame, her friends are her equals, and that is my greatest merit.

CHRISTINA - You will allow me, Mister Molière, to increase their number.

MOLIERE - Madame, you will add yet more lustre to the company, the like of which may not be seen again in centuries to come: it unites Heroes and Kings, the most distinguished of men of Letters and the most estimable Artists. The equal of us all, modest, unaffected, she is feted by all classes and loved by all great souls.

NINON - My friends spoil me, Madame, but I do not complain. I am so used to hearing them sing my praises that I am inclined to believe that friendship, like love, is blind. To convince me of this, I wish to consult my enemies.

CHRISTINA - I beg you, my dear Ninon, to do this when I am no longer in Paris.

NINON, *whispering to Molière* - Is everything ready?

MOLIERE, *whispering* - I was coming to tell you.

NINON, *at the back of the Stage* - Come, my friends, let talent, enthusiasm and merit crown this august Queen. Let friendship everywhere offer her a Throne, and let her reign in our hearts.

*The set changes to represent a superb Salon with columns and pilasters on which are painted the tale of Psyche's Love.<sup>38</sup> A superb Throne is on one side of the stage, and opposite is a rostrum for Ninon's friends. The Throne is supported by Victory and Fame. Scaron is sitting on a kind of pedestal next to the Throne, dressed as a Herald at Arms. Madame Scaron is on the other side, with a crown of laurels, dressed as the Goddess of Friendship. At the back is a troupe of Male and Female Dancers with interlaced garlands in their arms, dressed in Swedish costumes.*

CHRISTINA - Where am I? I have never seen anything so elegant!

THE GRAND CONDÉ - Queen, may a brave Soldier place you on the Throne that friendship offers.

CHRISTINA - What a pleasure it is to accept! (*Observing Scaron*) But who is this Herald at Arms on this column? He is so expressive. Is it the estimable la Fontaine?

SCARON - Great Queen, it is the legless cripple who can only salute Your Majesty sitting down.

CHRISTINA - So here is this suffering man, who is so amiable at the same time.

SCARON - In this house one forgets all, even one's pains.

CHAPELLE - By the way, Ninon, you should have introduced the old chap to the Queen, since she is asking for him.<sup>39</sup>

MOLIERE - The old chap, my friend, will live longer than us.

SCARON - His glory will never fade. His Fables will suit the taste of every era.

CHRISTINA - True worth always gives talents its due praise.

*Christina sitting on the throne, insists that the Prince takes his place beside her which he does with all the social graces.*

Mad. SCARON, *advancing up the Stage* - Great Queen, accept this olive leaf diadem given with respect and friendship.

38 Cupid falls in love with the mortal Psyche whose beauty has enraged Venus (Cupid's mother); to safeguard their love Cupid must remain unseen, and visit only at night. Finally Psyche succumbs to her desire to see her lover and in doing so loses him. Venus sets her impossible tasks to win him back: Cupid, finding Psyche's cruel trials unbearable appeals to the gods who allow her to become immortal and be united to Cupid as his wife. De Gouges could be referencing Molière's five act tragi-comedy/ballet produced in collaboration with Corneille and Quinault, music by Lully, in 1671, at Versailles for the King and later in Paris for the general public. It was a famously sumptuous spectacle celebrating the 1668 Aix la Chapelle peace treaty between Spain and France ending the year long War of Devolution.

39 Jean de la Fontaine (1621 - 1695), French poet famous for his *Fables* was often referred to as 'bon homme', i.e. old or good chap.

*She places the diadem on the Queen's head.*

*A chorus that is yet to be created; I have no doubt that one of our good Poets will take charge of it given the subject matter.*

*BALLET - The Grand Condé, at the head of the enemy's army; a French General comes to him, with the debris of his army amounting to about twenty Soldiers, and explains France's precarious position; the Prince cannot bear this revelation, he tears the enemy Party's sash from them and flies to place himself at the head of his compatriots. There, more or less, is the form of the Ballet.*

*Chaconne of the majestic genre, a troupe of Bohemians. The little black man, known from the History of Madame Scaron, will tell everyone their good fortune, in couplets corresponding to their character.<sup>40</sup> A Ballet of Bohemians and Soldiers will tell the Story of the Grand Condé, when he took up arms again for France; battles, victories against the enemy. All will kneel in front of the Throne. The Soldiers will reverse arms in front of the Grand Condé, and present him with the enemy army's Banner; meanwhile, a cannon, cymbals, trumpets, must play martial music. It finishes piano, piano at the moment when one should hear a chalumeau in the distance, which must be a contrast to the great Music.<sup>41</sup>*

MOLIÈRE, *to Ninon* - Where's the chalumeau sound coming from?

NINON - You're asking me, I have less idea than you.

## SCENE XVIII.

### THE SAME, DESYVETEAUX, LA DUPUIS.

MATHURIN - Mind your backs, mind your backs, make way for Shepherd Corydon and Shepherdess Colinette!....My! What a fine gathering.

MOLIÈRE - Oh! It's charming; this scene is better than our celebration.

NINON, *to Molière* - The Shepherdess kept her promise.

MOLIÈRE - She is an honourable girl.

SCARON, *surprised* - I can't believe it. Poor dear man! How he is changed. He is unrecognisable.

DESYVETEAUX, *kneeling at the foot of the Throne with his Shepherdess, to the Queen - Goddess, whom I do not know, and who appears to be a stranger at this Court, no doubt you are Bellona, beside the God Mars.*<sup>42</sup> Suffer that the Shepherd Corydon, with his

<sup>40</sup> An age-old myth exists that a little old (supernatural?) man dressed in black visited certain women and told their fortune while also predicting their often imminent deaths, the inference being that beautiful, successful, free spirited women could not avoid their fate. Alternatively, according to Céline Grihard in her critical edition of the play [http://crht.paris-sorbonne.fr/gouges\\_moliere-ninon](http://crht.paris-sorbonne.fr/gouges_moliere-ninon) the 'little black man' fortune teller might have been someone called Barbé, a Freemason interested in astrology and a friend of Scarron, who predicted that Madame Scarron would one day be Queen. The Bret biography of Ninon de l'Enclos, probably used by de Gouges as source material, mentions a night owl (also referred to as a little black man) who came to Ninon and told her fortune i.e. she would be everlastingly beautiful and conquer all hearts. De Gouges appears to have been aware of both versions of this story.

<sup>41</sup> De Gouges's ends her tableau with a chaconne, a slow dance in triple-time popular in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, which was often used to end a ballet or opera. The 'piano, piano' instruction refers to the musical interlude and means it should be played quieter and quieter. A chalumeau is both an early reed instrument and a shepherd's flute, which in this instance would be case given Desyveteaux's imminent arrival.

<sup>42</sup> In ancient Greco-Roman mythology Bellona is considered to be the sister, wife or nurse of the god Mars and embodies a female military ideal, bearing arms, wearing breastplate and helmet, beloved of artists and writers since time immemorial.

Shepherdess, pay homage to you.

CHRISTINA, *to Ninon* - Are these two part of the celebration, Mademoiselle de l'Enclos? They are so natural that I admit I am surprised.

NINON - We all share your surprise, and we were not expecting Monsieur Desyveteaux to be costumed so.

CHRISTINA, *astonished* - Desyveteaux! But I know some fine works that bear this name.

LE GRAND CONDÉ - Madame, in a few words I will tell you his story. (*He speaks softly to Christina.*)

NINON, *embracing Desyveteaux* - My dear Desyveteaux, how pleased I am to see you again.

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE, *who had not taken his eyes off Ninon during the whole scene, aside* - Even a kiss given in simple friendship makes me jealous. See if love has any power over this great soul. She has yet to cast her eyes on me even once.

DESYVETEAUX, *turns his head aside, not listening to Ninon.*

NINON, *to Molière* - He no longer recognises me.

MOLIÈRE, *at the front of the Stage, to Ninon* - It would seem to be so: you called him by his name. Have you forgotten that he is now only Shepherd Corydon?

NINON, *laughing* - Ah! That's true. (*Turning towards Desyveteaux.*) Shepherd Corydon, do you no longer love your Ninon?

DESYVETEAUX, *surreptitiously taking her hand in his, and glancing at la Dupuis to see if she had noticed.*

NINON, *laughing* - Molière, he is taking my hand in secret.

MOLIÈRE - If you were a Shepherdess he would soon be unfaithful. One may change one's folly but the character of the man always breaks through.

MATHURIN, *to Molière* - Oh! I can answer for that...But tell me, Sir, you seems to me to be somethin' of an expert, who is that great Lady beside the fine Prince, the one 'e's talkin' to quiet like.

MOLIÈRE - My friend, that's the great Queen of the North, the famous Christina of Sweden.

MATHURIN - Gosh! I do believe that be so. I did spy 'er when she made her gallant entry into Paris. I can see 'er now, on her white 'orse, with an handsome scarlet coat and that many white feathers atop 'er 'at. But tell me, pray, brave Sir, she seemed then like a man astride but 'ere she do have the air of a fine Lady.

MOLIÈRE - Listen, my friend, these great geniuses appear as they wish to be seen. When you saw her on horseback you saw her like a warrior Queen of old. Amazons who united beauty with an imposing martial air. She is the only one left in the world with this character; she renounced her throne in favour of her Successor and here you can see that friendship has offered her another.

MATHURIN - Zounds! What a grand thing; she looks like a fine Queen on there!

NINON, *aside to the Comte de Fiesque* - See how this great man understands how to be at ease with every one, every sort of person: he is so straightforward with that Peasant!

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE, *despondently* - Yes, Madame, I agree but I do not share your talent for admiration, or to put it better, our aspirations are different. I never praise men.

NINON, *aside to the Comte* - More's the shame. This does not show your discernment in a good light, at least....You are, I believe, annoyed; that concerns me.

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE - So it would seem.

NINON, *aside to the Comte* - Look at yourself a bit closer, and you will understand that I cannot do otherwise.

CHRISTINA, *to the Prince de Condé* - Prince, what you are telling me is astonishing: I will question the Shepherdess.

MATHURIN, *aside to Molière* - She'll tell 'er some good ones, my word, that Shepherdess. Ha! She's a sharp one. She's got plenty left for the Queen.

MOLIÈRE, *aside to Mathurin* - I can assure you that she won't be duped by her.  
CHRISTINA, *to la Dupuis* - Tell me, Shepherdess, how long have you been enthralled the most gallant of Shepherds, and how did you remove him from the bosom of his friends, and make him forget his name?  
LA DUPUIS, *accompanying herself on the guitar and singing the following words* -

### A SONG.

For six months, in my arms he's found repose,  
My only support, my Lover, my Spouse;  
Of his love, it is I that am the cause,  
My adoration Heaven's jealousy allows.  
To him my tender traits I expose,  
And yet his friend's anger I arouse.

When his writings celebrated victory,  
I held him in a charming space:  
It's in my arms that he forgot his glory,  
For punishment, he left this Courtly place;  
And my sorrow, avenging his memory,  
Expiates within me love's disgrace.<sup>43</sup>

CHRISTINA, *descending from the Throne* - She understands her role to perfection.  
THE GRAND CONDÉ - She wittily makes the most of the circumstances.  
CHRISTINA, *to Ninon* - Mademoiselle de l'Enclos, I have never received a more flattering homage than the one I have been offered in your amiable presence: it will always be dear to me and I will never forget it. It is time, however, for me to thank you and to bid you farewell. It is with the greatest regret that I leave such an amiable assembly. (*She salutes everyone.*) Mademoiselle de l'Enclos we will write to each other, and I trust that you will encourage your friends to remember me. I am counting on it.  
NINON, *accompanying her* - You will always be in their minds.  
*The Friendship Chorus is taken up again until the Stage is empty.*

*End of the fourth Act.*

## ACT V.

### FIRST SCENE.

[FRANCISQUE, Mlle LE ROI.]

FRANCISQUE - What an unforeseen event!

Mlle LE ROI - But who could have imagined such a swift reversal, after so many honours, and festivities and fun?....Mademoiselle de l'Enclos is unrecognisable. She is anxious, in a reverie, could it be Monsieur de la Châtre's departure that is the cause of her despair, and inspires the idea of retirement?

43 Depuis six mois, entre mes bras repose/Mon seul appui, mon Amant, mon Epoux;/De son amour, c'est moi qui suis la cause,/Je l'aime trop, le Ciel en est jaloux./A mille traits ma tendresse l'expose,/De ses amis j'excite le courroux.

Quand ses écrits célébraient la victoire,/Je le retins dans un charmant séjour:/C'est dans mes bras qu'il oublia sa gloire,/Pour s'en punir, il quitta cette Cour;/Et ma douleur, qui venge sa mémoire,/Expie en moi le crime de l'amour.

FRANCISQUE - Quite the contrary, it is the Comte de Fiesque who is the cause.

Mlle LE ROI - Is that possible? I have never seen her so sad. 'My child' she said to me, when it was barely half past six this morning, 'I am going to make you sad. I have decided, for several reasons, to quit the world and my circle, which I will miss the most.' She shed a few tears at the thought of the pain that she would cause her friends but soon her strength came to the fore again. She straightaway called her old Governess, 'It is you, my nurse' she said to her, 'who will accompany me.' (*Mademoiselle le Roi begins to cry.*) 'As for you' she added, 'I will pay you one year's wage, likewise Francisque, and today I will retire to the Convent of the Capuchin Sisters.'

FRANCISQUE, *surprised* - Can that be? What, Mademoiselle de l'Enclos, a spirited woman, would do such a foolish thing? She is not capable of it, you must be wrong, Mademoiselle le Roi.

Mlle LE ROI - Spirited people, Monsieur Francisque, often make great mistakes, and sometimes repair them too late, for I know the mind, and heart, of Mademoiselle Ninon. Solitude is not her element, the life of the Convent is so tedious. Within four days she will die of boredom; is the character of the Beguines such that it will accord with hers?<sup>44</sup> Unreasonable, particular, malicious and false as women who are deprived of male society, and who hate those who have lived in high society.

## SCENE II.

NINON, Mlle LE ROI, FRANCISQUE.

NINON - Take my carriage, Francisque, and go and fetch Mademoiselle de Châteauroux.

FRANCISQUE - I fly there. But, Mademoiselle, do you not have to send me somewhere else first?

NINON, *coldly* - No, I have no other instruction. Hurry along.

*He exits.*

## SCENE III.

NINON, Mlle LE ROI.

Mlle LE ROI - Mademoiselle, are you going to begin your toilette?

NINON - My toilette, Mademoiselle, will be quickly done....A large bonnet.

Mlle LE ROI, *leaving* - Hey! Hey! Hey! There's a whiff of the Convent about all this.

## SCENE IV.

NINON, *alone* - Have I thought this through sufficiently? Have I consulted my heart enough? Oh! Yes, my reason will tame it and love will not be its master. But what of Nature, my children! My children! This thought makes me weep. They can only blush if they admit that I am their mother. So be it, I will keep silent, I will make this effort. But can I refrain from seeing them, or from taking an interest in their fate? The example of Monsieur de Coligny has shown me that I should fear giving up my children to their fathers' care.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Beguines were a female lay Christian order created in the Low Countries in the 12th century who chose to live in poverty and chastity helping the poor and the sick. The woman took no vows and were free to leave at any time. Never a large organization, their numbers declined from the early 17th century: the term beguine was often used pejoratively to indicate an excessively religious superstitious woman.

<sup>45</sup> Gaspard (IV) de Coligny (1620 - 1649) was a handsome, well connected, young homosexual army officer,

Marshall d'Estrées presses me in vain to abandon my family to him entirely. What! Soon he will behave like Monsieur de Coligny who hid from me, while he lived, the name and the fate of the victim of my early errors. Dear child, whose existence has been unknown to me for eighteen years. Alas! Perhaps I am worrying about his fate in vain for who knows whether death has not already taken him from me? This doubt fills me with despair...No young man is ever presented to me without my believing that I may recover a son.

#### SCENE V.

NINON, Mlle LE ROI.

Mlle LE ROI - So, Mademoiselle, is not having her hair done today?

NINON - No, Mademoiselle. I told you that I would wear a large bonnet. Have you brought it?

Mlle LE ROI - Here are several, you may choose the one that pleases you.

#### SCENE VI.

THE SAME, THE COMTE DE FIESQUE'S VALET.

Mlle LE ROI - Here is someone.

NINON, *turning around* - Who is it?

THE VALET, *giving Ninon a letter* - It is from le Comte de Fiesque.

NINON - Give it to me. (*The Valet and Mademoiselle le Roi retire to the back of the stage.*) Does he wish to justify himself, or are these new reproaches? (*Reading.*) 'Mademoiselle, I cannot reproach you any more.' (*Ninon reflects.*) I was quite wrong. But let me see the end. 'Perhaps I alone deserve it...I appeal to your fair-mindedness. Your attitude to love is different to mine and we love each other in very different ways. You are strong when you want to separate. A Lover that you wish to leave, or that circumstances have distanced from you, makes you Philosophic. I, on the contrary, am like that only when I fear attaching myself to an object whom I fear will fill me with more torment than pleasure. Without wishing to cause offence, I believe that one runs this risk with you. I will therefore be Philosophic, and begin where you end. If I am ever calm enough to see you again, I trust that you will not refuse to count me as a friend, and as one can be such without alarm, I will work to obtain this title as soon as I am able.' (*Ninon lets the letter fall and drops her arms on the table.*) There is the man that I needed to understand all my faults, and unfortunately, I love this man. I will punish myself for it. (*Angrily grabbing some scissors she cuts off a part of her hair which should just be attached with hairpins to maintain the illusion.*)

probably Condé's lover. Homosexuality and bisexuality were rife in the army at the time and condoned to some extent as it meant that many officers and soldiers were happy to stay away on campaigns for long periods. Ninon genuinely fell in love with Coligny and did have a brief liaison with him although this may have been, on his part, to prepare him for marriage. There is no suggestion that she had a child by him. Many stories exist concerning Ninon's children. A persistent one is that one of her sons fell in love with her, both parties being unaware that she was his mother. Ninon, on being told the truth by the father, put an end to the young man's hopes (there is never any suggestion of incest taking place) by admitting to being his mother. The young man, on the spur of the moment, killed himself (by sword or pistol) leaving his distraught mother to discover the body. Several men are named as the father of this unfortunate person but no credible substantiation exists for any part of the story. Roger Duchêne biographer of Ninon (Fayard, 2000), suggests that the myth grew up as a way of making clear that a woman like Ninon, a courtesan of unparalleled intelligence, independence and longevity of career must suffer such elemental tragedy in order to 'pay' for the choices she made.

Mlle LE ROI, *from the back of the Stage* - Heavens! What fury! What despair!  
NINON, *taking her cut hair, she gives it to the Valet* - Here, Monsieur, take this hair and give it to your master; tell him this is my reply.  
*The Valet, surprised, looks on Ninon with compassion, and exits.*

#### SCENE VII.

NINON, Mlle LE ROI.

Mlle LE ROI, *troubled* - Mademoiselle, allow me to suggest....  
NINON, *interrupting her firmly* - Your suggestions are pointless.  
Mlle LE ROI, *aside* - She is right. What a strong woman! I have no idea how to reply. I had better keep quiet.  
NINON, *taking a large bonnet, and putting it on* - This big bonnet will suit me better at present.  
Mlle LE ROI - Few women would have made a similar sacrifice, for it is an ornament that adds great charm to beauty.  
NINON - Oh! Of that I am certain....(*Looking at her watch.*) It is nine of the clock, and Mademoiselle Châteauroux is yet to arrive! What can be keeping her? (*A knocking is heard.*) Go and see, Mademoiselle, who it is that can be knocking at my door.  
*Mademoiselle le Roi exits.*

#### SCENE VIII.

NINON, *alone* - Perhaps it is only Mademoiselle de Châteauroux.

#### SCENE IX.

NINON, Mlle LE ROI.

Mlle LE ROI - Mademoiselle, it is a very elegant young man, with a charming face, who appears to be a Stranger, and who is not known to you but you comes to talk to you of Monsieur Molière.  
NINON, *enthusiastically* - Show him in.  
*Mademoiselle le Roi exits.*

#### SCENE X.

NINON, *alone* - No doubt it is the young Belfort.

#### SCENE XI.

NINON, THE CHEVALIER DE BELFORT, Mlle LE ROI.

Mlle LE ROI, *from the back of the Stage, pointing out Ninon to the Chevalier* - Sir, there is Mademoiselle.  
*She exits.*

SCENE XII.

NINON, THE CHEVALIER DE BELFORT *who bows deeply to Ninon.*

NINON, *aside* - Oh! What a fine figure; how interesting his face is!

DE BELFORT, *aside* - I am quite disconcerted, I cannot find the reason for my timidity. (*To Ninon.*) Mademoiselle, you know the grounds that have allowed me to take the liberty of presenting myself at your house.

NINON, *aside* - What agitation overtakes me! The sound of his voice, his age, his features...he is the living image of the Comte de Coligny. The more I study him, the more moved I am....Is it possible?

DE BELFORT - Mademoiselle, forgive my confusion, but hardly had I seen you than a sudden fear seized all my senses.

NINON, *aside* - Should I question him? And if he were my son, that I burn to find again...Oh! Nature, you win the day...and I absolutely must resolve my doubt. (*To the Chevalier.*) May I ask you, Sir, your name?

DE BELFORT - Mademoiselle, my name is the Chevalier de Belfort.

NINON - Sir, may I ask further, is your father Monsieur de Belfort? You are not, it seems to me, the eldest of your family? (*De Belfort lowers his eyes in embarrassment.*)

NINON, *troubled* - You turn your eyes away, and seem to be surprised, Monsieur le Chevalier, by the questions that I ask you. Have I been indiscreet in asking them?

DE BELFORT - Oh! Mademoiselle, you do not know all my troubles.

NINON - You have troubles, Monsieur le Chevalier, other than those of love. May I know them? You can count on my discretion, and especially on my zeal to be of service to you. (*Examining him, aside.*) The more I observe him, the more my agitation increases. (*Aloud.*) Do not hide anything from me, and think of me as your best friend.

DE BELFORT - Oh! Mademoiselle, you fill me with so much confidence; if I had the good fortune to know my mother, I could not trust her more.

NINON, *greatly troubled, aside* - I tremble. (*Recovering her composure.*) Let me stifle nature, and attempt to convince myself without revealing anything. (*Aloud.*) You do not know your mother, but at least you know the author of your days.

DE BELFORT, *distressed* - My birth is a mystery, I have no idea to whom I owe my life.

NINON, *aside, enthusiastically* - It is he! I can no longer be in any doubt. Oh destiny! These are thus your blows. (*Aloud.*) Would you by any chance have known Monsieur le Comte de Coligny?

DE BELFORT, *with emotion* - Oh! Madame, what name have you uttered? I have lost my greatest protector, my friend (*in a half-whisper*) and perhaps, my father.

NINON, *with the greatest despair, observing him* - And perhaps your father.....No doubt a mother alone is left to you, one that you could only acknowledge resentfully.

DE BELFORT, *with the greatest emotion* - Oh! Mademoiselle, what are you saying? If my mother were the least suitable of all women I would respect her, I would cherish her. But I feel that my soul is too good to have acquired its feelings from base blood.

NINON, *falling into an armchair* - I cannot bear it any longer. Nature! You win.

DE BELFORT, *throwing himself at Ninon's feet* - What are you saying, Mademoiselle? Have I the pleasure of finding in yourself such a favourable mother?

NINON, *kissing him* - Yes, my son, I am your mother; I can no longer doubt it.

DE BELFORT - Oh! What are you telling me? What! I would be your son...Such inexpressible joy! I am the happiest of men.

NINON - My son, let us hide our happiness, and keep secret what I am to you. Do not even discuss it with your friends.

DE BELFORT - I, deny that you are my mother? I want to boast of it everywhere. But what am I saying? Admitting that I am your son may damage your reputation. Oh! If I resolve to keep silent, believe me mother, it will be only for you, for your glory.

NINON - Be assured, my son, that it is not for my sake. According to his daughter, the Marquis de Châteauroux appears to be unaware of what you have chosen to become lately. Do you believe that he knows anything about your birth?

DE BELFORT, *taking Ninon's hand* - No, mother, or at least he has not made it obvious to me. But I am so happy!

NINON - I will soon know if he is aware of it. I will see in his conversation if uniting his daughter to an illegitimate son is his sole revulsion.

DE BELFORT - Oh! How pleased I am to be yours! I could never find, on this earth, a more respectable mother, nor, equally, a more favourable one.

### SCENE XIII.

#### THE SAME, MOLIÈRE.

NINON, *running up to Molière* - Oh! My friend, my dear Molière, can you ever guess who the Chevalier de Belfort is connected to?

MOLIÈRE - No but the author of his days must be congratulating themselves on having such a son.

NINON - Have you forgotten, my friend, that I had confided in you regarding the Comte de Coligny, and the child that I thought was lost?

MOLIÈRE - You are his mother?

NINON - I am sure of it.

MOLIÈRE, *to the Chevalier* - Young man, thank Heaven for the gift of Mademoiselle de l'Enclos as a mother.

DE BELFORT - Yes, I will thank it eternally.

MOLIÈRE, *embracing the Chevalier* - I must embrace him. My friend, you will be married, I will answer for it.

DE BELFORT - Alas! I would die of sorrow at not gaining Mademoiselle de Châteauroux, but now that Heaven has given me a mother such as Mademoiselle de l'Enclos, I wonder whether I will forget everything, including love itself. Nature has made such an immediate impression on my heart that Mademoiselle de Châteauroux now holds second place there, following my mother.

NINON - He is so affecting! Oh! My heart has also greatly changed: I see only my son and his happiness.

### SCENE XIV.

#### NINON, MOLIÈRE, THE CHEVALIER, Mlle DE CHÂTEAUROUX, FRANCISQUE.

FRANCISQUE, *announcing* - Mademoiselle de Châteauroux.

*He exits.*

NINON, *to her son and to Molière* - Be careful, my son, and you my dear Molière, to not let her become aware of anything. (To Mademoiselle Châteauroux.) Come, Mademoiselle, your greatest friends are here.

Mlle DE CHÂTEAUROUX - Oh! I am convinced of it, Mademoiselle.

NINON - What a pity, Mademoiselle, that Monsieur your father does not share your opinion! He fears giving his daughter to a young man whose birth is obscure, but you have

not feared being attached to him.

Mlle DE CHÂTEAURoux - What do birth and titles represent to man if their honour is not maintained. The first man in society is the esteemed man who has no other principles than those of good parentage, and who has risen above the common herd through feeling and education.

DE BELFORT - I was educated alongside you; can I be so different in my manner of thinking, and the sound principles that I learnt, could they have failed to improve what Nature has given me? And if, today, Mademoiselle de l'Enclos occasions my happiness, by persuading Monsieur your father to view me favourably, will I not be forever in her debt?

NINON - How I cherish both of you! (*To Mademoiselle de Châteauroux.*) Let us withdraw. Ho, Francisque! (*To Francisque who appears.*) Let me know when Monsieur de Saint-Evremont arrives, accompanied by another person.

*She exits with Molière, et al.*

#### SCENE XV.

FRANCISQUE, *alone* - My word, if ever I had the misfortune to lose Mademoiselle de l'Enclos, I should never have the strength to work for anyone else. What a Mistress! I could never find another like her. But, who is coming?....It is the Comte de Fiesque: if only the devil had broken his neck when he first put a foot in here!

#### SCENE XVI.

##### LE COMTE DE FIESQUE, FRANCISQUE.

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE, *excitedly* - May I speak to Mademoiselle de l'Enclos? But, straight away. (*Aside.*) I could not allow myself to leave her any longer in this cruel uncertainty. (*Aloud.*) I am going to go to her.

FRANCISQUE - No, Sir, if you please; have the goodness to wait until I have announced you.

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE, *petulantly* - Well, be quick then: you stare at me as though you'd never seen me before.

FRANCISQUE - It is true that today I find you to be most unusual, but I will forgive this petulance quite willingly if you have persuaded Mademoiselle de l'Enclos not to bury herself in a Convent at the prime of her life.

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE - Oh! My friend, what are you saying? Run, quick, and be assured that I will put her off this cruel project.

FRANCISQUE, *running* - Very well, I run to announce you.

#### SCENE XVII.

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE, *alone* - This is all my fault; I am so unfortunate! I was loved and I was able to pain the most sensitive heart!....Sending her hair in answer; what spirit! What finesse! What passion! Were she to abandon me in a week, I would not leave her. No man is luckier than me, I have attracted Mademoiselle de l'Enclos, I reign in her heart, I am adored by her and yet I was able to be insensitive to so much love! Here she is....how beautiful she is in that simple dressing-gown!

## SCENE XVIII.

NINON, THE COMTE DE FIESQUE.

THE COMTE DE FIESQUE - Oh, most adorable woman, I come to abjure my wrongs, my mistake, at your feet and to swear eternal love to you. I, avoid you! I, forget you! I don't have the strength for it...I swear....

NINON, *interrupting him and making him get up* - Listen to me, Comte, and get up. We will consider, if you will be so kind, and please be assured that it is not to snub your return; it pleases and pains me both at the same time. I have known how to love, Sir, but never to pretend. I have not known how to make use of grimacing, that asset of coquettes who only guarantee their love by the wiles of their wit and who play at passion with an icy heart.

THE COMTE DE FIESQUE - Oh! Ninon, do you think I am so insensitive, and can you believe that my heart fails to feel all that yours is suffering? You are not made to hide your true sentiments. You allowed me to glimpse you were not indifferent to me, or rather you showed me the proof of the most real tenderness, so, forgive me my real fears, they were only caused by the fear of losing you.

NINON - There is a way of envisaging love, and its principles, that is not entirely based on admiration. My thoughtful disposition has led me reflect that the attributes which convention demands of both sexes are unequal. I can feel the injustice and I cannot bear it. I can see that we have been burdened by that which is most frivolous; men have reserved for themselves the right to essential attributes. From now on I will become a man. Thus, I will no longer have to blush at the way I use the precious gifts that I have received from nature. If one could become young again, and if I were fifteen once more, I would change nothing in the way I have lived my life, but I am approaching fifty....that surprises you, particularly that I have the strength to admit it.

THE COMTE DE FIESQUE - Ninon, this argument that freezes my blood, where is it leading? And what is the connection, I pray, between my passion and your age? Are you not blessed with the beauty, the grace, of the happiest youth? Love has not blinded me. I see you as you are.

NINON - But I, I do not see myself through your eyes, and I see that I am today, quite different to how I was yesterday, especially with regard to you. But, do become my friend, you will lose nothing by it; even in the seclusion to which I propose to retire I do not intend to abandon the pleasure of seeing my friends from time to time. Compelling reasons, that I cannot reveal to you, oblige me to take this decision. Please do not imagine that my conduct is tinged with bitterness or regret; I have told you before, Monsieur le Comte, that good Philosophy obliges one, on occasion, to gladly mortify oneself. In the flush of youth, the fires of passion silence this Philosophy. In more advanced years, it takes the upper hand, admit that, had I not suffered a moment of weakness when my heart was open to all the effects of tender feelings, you yourself would not have returned to me once more. I cannot return to you, I have taken my decision and that decision is unshakeable. You know me, Monsieur le Comte, be my friend and let us speak of love no more.

THE COMTE DE FIESQUE, *astonished* - Yes, I do know you, my fate is settled, inconceivable woman, whom I cannot but admire. So be it, I accept the offer that you propose, but understand that in accepting it, and in order to merit it, my heart's repose is lost. If, in order to renounce your right to please, and to make a Lover happy, you are going to permanently live in solitude, then I will, myself, leave Paris from today only to return on learning that Mademoiselle de l'Enclos is delighting it with her presence.

## SCENE XIX.

THE SAME, M. DE SAINT-EVREMONT, M. DE CHÂTEAUX, FRANCISQUE.

FRANCISQUE, *announcing* - Monsieur de Saint-Evremont, Monsieur de Châteaux.

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE, *with feeling* - I will retire, Mademoiselle de l'Enclos: allow me to bid you farewell, and to beg to be allowed to ask after you. You are not denying friendship the liberty of writing to you or maintaining a cordial correspondence.

NINON - I accept the proposition with pleasure.

LE COMTE DE FIESQUE, *taking Ninon's hand* - Farewell, Ninon.

*He exits, bowing to the Gentlemen at the back of the Stage.*

## SCENE XX.

NINON, M. DE CHÂTEAUX, M. DE SAINT-EVREMONT.

M. DE SAINT-EVREMONT - It is an honour, Mademoiselle, to present to you a brave Officer, the Comte de Coligny's good friend who witnessed his cruel end.

NINON - I am delighted, Monsieur de Saint-Evremont, to make the Gentleman's acquaintance, and I am indebted to you.

M. DE SAINT-EVREMONT, *making a sign to Ninon* - Mademoiselle, you see before you the most unfortunate of fathers who will find your advice very valuable.

M. DE CHÂTEAUX - I fear it may be indiscreet of me to share my concerns with you on a first visit.

NINON - You wrong me, Sir, by forming this opinion of me. I hope that in future you will judge me less harshly and that you will be assured that one cannot do me a greater favour than to ask for my help.

SAINT-EVREMONT - Come, my friend, open your heart to Mademoiselle de l'Enclos and have faith that in hers you will find all the consolation that you could wish for.

M. DE CHÂTEAUX - Alas! I have great need of her. Our children, from the moment they are born, torment our lives.

NINON - Let us sit down, Monsieur.

*She makes a sign to Saint-Evremont to warn Molière.*

SAINT-EVREMONT - Allow me to leave you to chat together.

NINON, *sotto voce to Saint-Evremont* - Molière is in my house, tell him only to come in when the time is right.

*Saint-Evremont exits.*

## SCENE XXI.

M. DE CHÂTEAUX, NINON.

NINON - You were the friend of a man, Monsieur, whose name was dear to France, and he, Monsieur le Comte de Coligny, was no less cherished.

M. DE CHÂTEAUX - This friendship is most detrimental to me now; Mademoiselle, I wish I had never known him.

NINON - What are you saying, Monsieur? And what reproach can you hold against his memory?

M. DE CHÂTEAUX - None. It is without stain, but the trust he had in me will forever dishonour my family. I am a father and I see myself deprived for life of a daughter who was my sole consolation.

NINON, *feigning* - I pity you, Sir, but may I ask why you believe that you will be deprived of

this daughter for ever? Death has not taken her from you.

M. DE CHÂTEAUX - Oh! If only Heaven had wished to enclose her in the same tomb as her mother! Time would have consoled me. I could have lamented her loss as I did her mother's. She is the only fruit of our love, and today I weep that she exists. She stole away from my influence to follow a young man of no name and no rank, brought up in my house by my own well-intentioned hands.

NINON - And who is this young man who has proved so unworthy of your efforts? Was he then born thankless and of bad blood?

M. DE CHÂTEAUX - I would not have wished for any other son, I thought he had every virtue, but he seduced my daughter, he has stolen her away from my influence, nothing can justify him, nor shelter him from my prosecution.

NINON, *aside* - For the first time I doubt that my influence will dominate. Oh! The cause is too close to my heart which increases my fear. (*Aloud.*) Allow me, Sir, to suggest to you, that this young man may not be as guilty as he seems. You may be unaware that your daughter fled from your control without dishonouring herself? If you promise me that you will remain a calm and clement father, rather than being a severe Judge, I could give you some information.

M. DE CHÂTEAUX - Oh! Mademoiselle de l'Enclos, what are you saying? What! My daughter could be innocent! She would not be dishonoured! She would not have covered me in opprobrium! Oh! Speak, her pardon lies in my bosom.

*Molière listening.*

NINON - You are aware, Sir, of Monsieur Molière's principles and probity. Despite being an Actor he honours the most illustrious Parisian society. Le Grand Condé loves and admires him.

M. DE CHÂTEAUX - I know, Mademoiselle, that he is a perfectly good man, that the best men are his great supporters. I can see what you are about to tell me. My daughter, no doubt, has approached this great man to remove herself from my control; if he is advised of who she is then my fears are over. Her passion for the Theatre would perchance have inclined her to this method of escaping from me.

NINON - Here is Molière. He will, himself, instruct you, Monsieur, regarding the violent party to which you exposed your daughter.

## SCENE XXII

### THE SAME, MOLIÈRE.

NINON, *to Molière* - Molière, here is Monsieur de Châteaux, whose daughter came to find you here yesterday and to whom you spoke, in my presence, as a father, as a friend; all we need to do now is to disarm the most loving father. If we could divest him of his erroneous prejudice....but I fear that we may solicit him in vain.

MOLIÈRE - You surprise me, Mademoiselle de l'Enclos, what a view you hold of men at the moment! Monsieur de Châteaux is a brave officer, he is a father; he will be fair and prudent. (*He pulls Mademoiselle de Châteaux's letter from his pocket, and gives it to Monsieur de Châteaux.*) Read, Sir. Discover Mademoiselle your daughter's account.

NINON, *aside to Molière while Monsieur de Châteaux reads* - Ah! I cannot bear it. I will never have the strength to admit to him that I am the mother of the young man who is causing him so much grief. I will leave you with him, you will fulfil the undertaking.

MOLIÈRE, *aside* - Courage, God's sake! It's not you that should be short of it.

NINON - I have none left. I am a mother, Molière.

M. DE CHÂTEAUX, *crushed* - Unhappy child! She took his side, and alleges that I refuse to join her to a well-born young man. She is ignorant of his story, and I did not

inform her of it. I myself was unaware of his origins for a long time.

MOLIÈRE - Sir, I have met this young man. He does not seem so unworthy of your goodwill or your esteem.

M. DE CHÂTEAUX - What, Sir, can I give my daughter to a natural son!

MOLIÈRE, *robustly* - A natural son! Eh! So what, Sir, if this young man has honour and distinguished sentiments? Is he not a man; does he not have a right to common respect if he is worthy of it?

NINON, *disconcerted, turning her head* - I can't bear any more.

M. DE CHÂTEAUX - He is the son of a good man, I know this from a friend who was dear to me, but what does anyone know of his mother? She may be a worthless object and I would be giving my daughter a woman for a mother-in-law who would make her blush, and who would sentence her to everlasting regret!

NINON, *aside, and in the greatest distress* - I can't breathe! (*Aloud.*) Oh! Sir, allow me to retire. I find myself indisposed. I will return to you when I feel a bit better. (*Leaving.*) It is from today that I feel the pangs of true sorrow. Oh! None are stronger than those of nature. *She exits.*

MOLIÈRE, *aside* - How her fate pains me! And given her strength, she must suffer so much more.

### SCENE XXIII.

MOLIÈRE, M. DE CHÂTEAUX.

M. DE CHÂTEAUX, *watching Ninon leave* - Monsieur Molière, what sudden ill has overcome Mademoiselle de l'Enclos? She paled, and suddenly changed colour. Her state concerns me. You, who know her, tell me, is she often afflicted by these minor indispositions?

MOLIÈRE - I have never seen her in such a state. Sir, put yourself in the place of Mademoiselle de l'Enclos. Blessed with all the advantages of Nature, and splendidly educated, she has been attacked more than most, and no doubt she has more feeling, she has loved and been adored, as you must be aware, and do you know whether or not she has been a mother? Can you not see that the way in which you spoke of a natural son would have hurt her in the depth of her soul. The more this soul is fine and sensitive, the more offensive the affront.

M. DE CHÂTEAUX - Oh! Monsieur Molière, what are you telling me? I sense that I am in the wrong, and you can see that I despair of it. But how does my observation bear upon Mademoiselle de l'Enclos, what connection is there between a worthless creature and such a respectable woman? Would my friend have hidden the name of this son's mother if she were an honourable woman? He only told me he was his father in his last moments. He had entrusted him to me as the product of an unfortunate family.

MOLIÈRE - Oh! Sir, be wary of suspecting Monsieur de Coligny's conduct. He kept silent out of respect for the woman he had made a mother.

M. DE CHÂTEAUX - That may be so, Monsieur Molière, but I am not sure, and that doubt will always prevent me from giving my daughter to a young man who does not know his mother, and who may become known in a way that I find too disagreeable. I submit myself to your genius and your sentiments.

MOLIÈRE - I am of your opinion, Sir, but if this unfortunate mother was as appealing as Mademoiselle de l'Enclos, as estimable thanks to her rare qualities, what would you do, Sir?

SCENE XXIV.

THE SAME, NINON, Mlle OLIMPE, LE CHEVALIER DE BELFORT, *at the back of the Stage.*

NINON, *aside* - I tremble....

M. DE CHÂTEAUX - What would I do, Monsieur Molière! If she resembled Mademoiselle de l'Enclos I would throw myself at her feet, cast aside my errors, and ask her, as the greatest favour, to join her son to my daughter.

NINON, *with the greatest joy, falling on her knees to Monsieur de Châteaux* - It is for me, Sir, to kneel at your feet...Come, my children...*(They fall on their knees to Monsieur de Châteaux.)*

Mlle OLIMPE - My father, forgive your daughter.

M. DE CHÂTEAUX, *lifting Ninon* - What are you doing, Mademoiselle de l'Enclos? I beg you, explain yourself.

NINON - Sir, here is your daughter, and here is my son; by proclaiming their joy you will affirm mine.

M. DE CHÂTEAUX, *with the greatest surprise* - What! You were his mother and you allowed this to be unknown to me!

MOLIÈRE - Oh! Sir, trust that her silence has been the cruellest heartache.

DE BELFORT, *still kneeling* - Sir, may I call you father?

M. DE CHÂTEAUX - Yes, you may. Arise my children; kiss me, my daughter, your choice actually honours me!

DE BELFORT - Oh, my mother, my incomparable mother, what happiness that I owe my days to you.

MOLIÈRE - What a spectacle! It seems made for me, for my sensibility. I rejoice in this moment on my behalf, it is a recompense for my attentiveness and my pains.

Mlle OLIMPE, *to Molière* - Oh, my Benefactor! My dear Monsieur Molière, could my gratitude last as long as you will be remembered, then I would wish it to inform the centuries to come of all that I owe to you.

MOLIÈRE - Chance dictates all. How thrilled I am that it brought you to Mademoiselle de l'Enclos' house, and that in her you have found a mother, one that is unsurpassable.

NINON - Oh! Molière, let us hide this mystery in the depth of our souls. And you, Monsieur le Marquis, you who deigns to ally yourself to me, let us unite only to rejoice in silence. For my part, you have nothing to reproach yourself for but this alliance once formed, will create a storm that will besiege the happiness of these children.

M. DE CHÂTEAUX - Why should we condemn ourselves to silence? I can only be honoured to have given my daughter to the son of such a good man, and of a woman that all the world respects.

NINON - Sir, I do not wish to be their mother in society; to rejoice in this title with you, with Monsieur Molière, would be a greater joy than the honour that you wish to do me. Allow me this favour, and trust that it is only for their happiness and your peace of mind.

MOLIÈRE - Sir, be governed by her perceptiveness.

M. DE CHÂTEAUX - Very well, so be it, we must do as you wish, adorable Ninon.

NINON - You will not be surprised either that I should retreat to a Convent.

DE BELFORT - You, mother! I cannot agree.

NINON - My son, it must be; before we met my decision was taken and you only strengthen it.

MOLIÈRE, *surprised* - Is what you have just said really possible, Mademoiselle de l'Enclos? What? You would abandon your circle, your friends; that is tantamount to ordering their end, to burying them alive.

NINON - My friend, it vexes me, but this decision is necessary. I owe it to myself, I owe it to my son.

MOLIÈRE, *aside* - I tremble; she is so determined in her resolutions.

## XXV AND LAST SCENE.

### THE SAME, CHAPELLE, SAINT-EVREMONT.

CHAPELLE - Can I believe what is being broadcast all over Paris? It is said that you are going to leave us, Ninon?

MOLIÈRE - Yes, my friends; join me in pleading with her and let us prevent this fatal project.

CHAPELLE - Come and see all your friends crowding in to your house, even the unfortunate Scaron who has had himself placed across your door to bar your way. Come and see them all, more dead than alive.

NINON - Their sweet friendship afflicts me, but it cannot change my mind.

MOLIÈRE, *to Saint-Evremont* - She has just brought joy to her children. But you who have studied her in all the circumstances of her life, and have known her so much longer than we have, are we to fear this fatal resolution?

SAINT-EVREMONT - Her mind takes her away from us, but her heart will bring her back.

*End of the Play.*

## POSTFACE.

In the eyes of enthusiastic Authors the Committee of the *Comédie Française* enjoys more credit and consideration than the famed Areopagus of Athens: I myself have been intoxicated by it.

Let Authors recover the sang-froid that opened my eyes; they will soon see the *Comédie's* pride yield in the face of its masters, and when, in future, it refuses Plays, it will do so with the decency and equity that should govern its conduct and its opinion. The Authors who lose the fruit of their labours, of their nights, are always worthy of consideration and should not expect the *Comédiens* to be so impertinent as to jeer and ridicule during the entire reading.

Let us move on to the one that concerns me, and let us remain as laconic as possible. I have already worn out the Reader, and I can feel their longing to hear the sentence pronounced that condemns the Play that they have just read. I must nonetheless make a few remarks. For example, at the moment when Francisque nobly defied the Grand Prior's blandishments, during that passage the *Comédiens* shrugged their shoulders, and laughed excessively at the maidservant's refusal: decent Valets on stage are beyond their comprehension but they are infinitely suited to Mademoiselle de l'Enclos and are quite different from Susanna and Figaro.<sup>46</sup>

In the Scene with Mademoiselle Olimpe they found Molière revolting, in particular his modesty; virtue.....[sic] and which always accompanies true merit.

Let us arrive at the Desyvetaux Act: here they laughed in good part, despite their mood being set against me.

<sup>46</sup> Susanna and Figaro are the servants in Beaumarchais' *Marriage of Figaro*; they are famously irreverent towards their master and other members of the household.

Let us move swiftly on to the third Act, they did not appreciate it at all and recognized none of the characters, not even Scaron, however vividly I had portrayed them.

I hasten to reach the fourth: the reading was quite interrupted, and each laughed or whispered in his neighbour's ear, and the Scene with Ninon and Queen Christina excited yawns that ended this act peaceably for, without exaggerating, three quarters or more of the Committee were asleep.

To wake them up a little let us progress to the pathos of the fifth and to the true philosophy of Mademoiselle de Lenclos [sic] that renders this woman immortal. I had high hopes of my denouement, and I thought that the heart of the *Comédie Française* would return its mind to my favour. Sadly an accursed back door, through which the *Comédiens* constantly pass, could not be held shut; everyone in turn got up to try and close it. Finally, the reading of my Play ended with the clanking of the accursed door; they would never have stopped it up for it was their escape route.

I am now at the Bulletins. Bulletins of the *Comédie Française*! Dear Public, you have no idea; you have never read any; none have ever been printed. But this merits more than publication; I plan to have them engraved all around my portrait, to prove that, if destiny wished me to be ignorant, it also wished to show me that there are other sorts of ignorant beings who do not even possess any common sense. Let my Reader be aware that Bulletins are written, and that I have the time to reflect with them.

This conversation would seem to me to be more agreeable than the pretty things said to me by the *Comédiens* in order to momentarily bewilder me, so that they could take pleasure in my surprise and confusion. I was luckier than I could have expected. I demonstrated neither one nor the other and I left this cavern as tall as they were small. The Public must also know that, when the *Comédiens* definitively accept a Play, or suggest corrections, they surround the Author and only say pleasant things about the Work. The Bulletins done, all the *Comédiens* rushed to eulogize my Play, dependent on a few corrections, and were already distributing the roles amongst themselves. They seemed so candid in their behaviour that I was almost duped for a moment by their falseness, especially when the upright M. des Essart asked if I had designated the role of Desyveteaux to him. I was artless enough to reply that, as he was asking me for it, I could see no one but him better suited to master the parody that would befit Shepherd Corydon. Everyone laughed heartily and I could not prevent myself from laughing in good faith. Everyone appeared to be solely looking forward to the moment when they would see Shepherd Corydon's costume, and I would bet that if the *Comédiens* were for once capable of admitting the truth, they would regret having sacrificed their feeling against this Play, in favour of the comical which they more or less grasped. But no doubt M. des Essarts could not bear to use his talent to sustain the character of a man who is elderly and mad enough to attract all of Paris and to make them constantly laugh anew. Tired of being the butt of everyone's jokes, and impatient that I should suffer the consequences, he shouted to the Prompt in his monstrous voice, 'Come, Monsieur, read the Bulletins.'

And you, Literary Postulants, both women and men, learn to understand the *Comédiens Français* before you entrust to them the fruits of your cherished occupations.

#### FIRST BULLETIN.

This work is charming; it honours the heart, the soul and the mind of the author: I accept it.

Auspicious start.

#### SECOND BULLETIN.

This work is full of merit, but there are dull parts that need cutting. I accept it if corrected.

No reason to give up hope yet.

### THIRD BULLETIN.

There is a great deal of talent in this work. I accept it if corrected.  
There is hope left.

### FOURTH BULLETIN.

I like pretty women; I like them even more when they are fun-loving but I only like to see them in their homes and not in the theatre. I refuse this play.

Aargh!.....Aargh!.....This smells of Dugazon. But soft, my dear friend; you must learn to understand the aim of the theatre. *The Courtisanes*, *The Corrected Coquette*, do they not have a moral purpose?<sup>47</sup> And my Ninon, is she not as decent as the latter? At least she has not made the confessions of the former, and her weaknesses are not shown on the Stage. I have shown her in a good circumstances for the Theatre. So much for your discernment if you did not know how to appreciate her.

### FIFTH BULLETIN.

This play is merely made up of poorly constructed Episodes; there is not a single character in this Work. The second Act is entirely lacking in taste and the madness of Desyvetaux is unbearable. It is neither within the rules of theatre nor those of decency. I refuse this work for the author's sake.

Ah! Shepherd Corydon! Just as you have recognised the intentions of the author, so you are recognizable by the elegance of your size allied to the charm of your character; you were right to refuse it, you would, in effect, have been too funny in the role; I even admit that your rotundity would have overwhelmed it, it could not have been maintained. Let us imagine you dressed as a Shepherd, a hat over one ear carelessly held by a pink ribbon under the chin, and a multi-coloured pom-pom falling on to your immense shoulders, a haversack slung at your side and a crook in your hand! Tell me there is nothing to see more comical than this costume. And you feared it! Yet the public has yearned for real comedy and drama in Plays, and you cast it away! Too bad.

### SIXTH BULLETIN.

Oh reader! Oh reader! I beg you to be patient and hear this with composure.

This play is tasteless, and talentless; I am indignant to see that the author has been so remiss as to make Molière the Confidant of Ninon's amours: I have some advice to give, the author must give up this play and never show it to anyone. For I refuse it.

I could not find out who this was written by unless the Committee made it all up. Molière would be so shocked and humiliated, if he could come back amongst us, to see to what ends his spirit and his memory are used! He who was Ninon's confidant and friend, as were all the great men of the kingdom, as well as the most virtuous women. Who in the world would not have felt covered in glory when they were honoured to be admitted into the circle of Ninon de l'Enclos. But the *Comédiens* feared seeing her amongst them.....She would have been out of place.....But the Public would have welcomed her as is her due, and this woman, shown in her true colours, could only have made women more equitable, even given their imperfections. But a fine character is foreign to them: though I could imagine that if Mademoiselle Contat had been at the reading, her discernment would have prevailed. I had secured M. Molé, and I think that I recognize him in the first Bulletin: I perceive three honest *Comédiens* whom I will name later.

### SEVENTH BULLETIN.

I have trouble bearing the thoughts that this Play has fostered in me. I see no depth to it, nothing of interest, all the characters speak alike and the Author has put in twenty-

<sup>47</sup> *Les Courtisanes, ou l'école des moeurs* is a five act play by Charles Palissot de Montenois (1730-1814) dating from 1775. *La Coquette corrigée* is a 5 act play by Jean-Baptiste De La Noue (1701-1760) first performed at the *Comédie Française* in 1756.

nine Actors when the *Comédie* only has twenty-three; therefore, I cannot accept this Play.

At one stroke of the pen I slaughtered seven characters by doubling up certain roles; it will be clear that one can perform this Play with fifteen or sixteen. The clothes of the peasant, or a costume change can produce this metamorphosis. For example, La Châtre could play the Comte de Fiesque, given their resemblance; Blaise, the Marshall d'Estrées; Lucas, the President.....[sic] Mathurin, M. Mignard; Scaron, Saint-Evremont; Chapelle, the Sergeant; M. de Gourville, Mademoiselle de Châteauroux's father; and so on up to Ninon's son, he can be transvested, this is no doubt what would be done in small Troupes, and it is for these that I suggest it.

#### EIGHTH BULLETIN.

I have the highest regard for the author, and like her too much to expose her to failure. I refuse.

This one is handsome and cannot make me angry.

#### NINTH BULLETIN.

Nothing interests me in this Play other than the fifth Act; the recognition scene between Ninon and her son is quite affecting and lends itself to a moral purpose: Ninon's circle, and a few facts here and there cannot create a five Act Comedy; if the Author were to believe me then it would be reduced to one, but as I foresee that the Author will none of it. I refuse it.

Good judgements.

#### TENTH BULLETIN.

Ninon's valets are unbearable in this work for they play on delicacy and spirit: I refuse it.

#### ELEVENTH BULLETIN.

It is pleasing to remember the reign of Louis XIV but in this play it is unbearable: I believe I am doing the author a favour by refusing it.

Patience, Reader, we are nearing the end.

#### TWELFTH BULLETIN.

Every scene in this Play consists of nothing but eulogies, that become stupefying for the Audience. It is impossible to conceive that the Author intended to create a Play with Molière visits Ninon as its subject for this great man is out of place at every instance. I sincerely believe that I am obliging the Author by suggesting the Play should never be seen.

This is where I stop.

I was not interested in having that last little bit of opinion so I prayed M. de la Porte to dispense with reading the thirteenth.

During the reading of these famous bulletins I scrutinised all the faces, but everyone sought to avoid my gaze; only des Essarts's expression stayed the same; his head was fit for a portrait, his cheek leaning on his walking stick and his mouth wide open, with a tongue half out that expressed the joy he felt as each Bulletin was read and my embarrassment redoubled.

If the famous Greuse ever sought to paint a Committee, I would furnish him with a subject fit to vary his genre, which he would render as sublimely as the others.<sup>48</sup>

They all expected that I would behave immoderately in a way that would have embarrassed me more than the Chevalier de Saint-Louis, who wanted

48 Jean-Baptiste Greuze (1725 - 1805) was a French painter famous for his genre scenes in second half of the 18th century; he also painted several well-known portraits e.g. Benjamin Franklin, Denis Diderot and a very young Mozart.

to.....to them. And I would have been pleased to imitate him. But I got up, and I said to them, in a modest voice, 'Ladies and Gentlemen, I am distressed that you have not accepted my Play: this must come as no surprise. I can see that I must have been mistaken but I am consoled by the fact that MM. Palissot, Mercier, Lemiére, and twenty-four other commendable persons were as mistaken as I, and that they are even more in the wrong because they encouraged me to present you with such a poor production.

I am honoured to salute you.'

All of them dropped their heads, only Mademoiselle Jolie grimaced.....I may have changed a few words but not the substance and as I have a very good memory, one can have faith in what I say, and particularly in my probity for I have invested so much that I would not take liberties. There are times when the most sincere being is not necessarily obliged to tell the truth: this is what I did in the Preface to the *Philosophe corrigé*, in favour of the *Comédie Française*, by hiding its letter and by replacing it with its supposed favour that I believed to be sincere.

Let none say, now, that I am wrong to make a complaint against it or to have an aversion to it. Ah, it has had an effect that would convince the Public to what extent a woman can be affronted, once she can cool her frenzy, her passion, and all that could have made life delightful and finally renounce, for ever, making a scene at the *Comédie*; if at any time I could alter my resolve, it would be on behalf of society and my friends alone.

As soon as the *Comédie* accepts a Play, it favours the Author with the offer of tickets: this favour is no longer my prerogative for the gift, from those one might esteem, must now be paid for and is thus unworthy of my gratitude. These tickets were dear to me for several reasons; I love the theatre and I am not rich enough to go every day. I had obtained them through merit and they were nothing if not gratifying; I used to go to the *Comédie* gladly but I doubt that at present any novelty could drag me there, and if I were ever to go, I would pay to get in. So, I am publicly returning their right of entry; I will only take it up again when my Drama is performed, and if it succeeds I will enjoy my reward without blushing: there is my true salary.<sup>49</sup> How glorious it will be to enjoy it! But at present it would disgrace me, and whilst one is complaining about the *Comédiens*, as I am, one should not take advantage of their favours.

To prove to the Public that I am a woman who acts in accordance with her beliefs, I offer my ideas to Authors who will not disdain to cast their opinions upon them; I will give them plans that are not unworthy of their enlightenment. Those that lack the art of writing are sometimes blessed with the art of making plans instead. I have thirty subjects that need to be addressed, even scripted, in parts. I have already stated that I will no longer write Plays, nor correct any. I have two left that I attended to, they are not nearly as good as the one I am proposing. But I have finished them, and there is nothing more I can do.

Thus, they will find themselves in my fourth Volume along with the start of a new literary plan that I propose to follow in future. Those that have read my *Ninon* have suggested that I read it to the *Comédie Italienne*. Two reasons prevent it. I could not bring myself to offer them the one refused by *Comédie Française*; secondly, I am afraid that they will think badly of me for complaining too vehemently about their rival. Nonetheless, they cannot be unaware that I presented a Play to them that they refused but with such decency and honesty that they never reduced me to the harsh necessity of complaining, and that, on the contrary, I could only praise them. The *Comédie Italienne* can likewise give me credit; I wish I could say the same of the *Comédie Française*, and then it would be clear that I am not belittled by a refusal. But a sensitive and delicate woman cannot bear such aggravations, and such bad procedures heaped one on top of the other. If the *Comédie Italienne* is interested in performing my Play, I make it an offer in public. Two Episodic Scenes could be cut; the one with Mignard and the one with Marshall d'Estrées, then the Play could be performed by twelve Actors. But as these are interesting Historical

49 This passage refers to *Zamore et Mirza* which had been accepted by the *Comédiens*, though its performance was continually stalled.

facts I had to have them printed, and in a large Troupe it would be preferable to leave them in. The costume of the period must be observed with great exactitude; it must also be noted that a woman of twenty, just as one of forty, can play the role of Ninon, if she is graceful and unaffected; Ninon's son can be replaced by a woman who transvests herself; the Play must make up the whole Spectacle, like *Figaro*, and *les Amours de Bayard*; as long as the Spectator is not biased against my work, he will go home content, after the Performance of this Play.

What true Frenchman would not revisit this amiable Society with enthusiasm, especially the Men of Letters, that perfect union of Arts and talent, the Princes and the Great and Good who formed Mademoiselle de Lenclos' incomparable Circle! And how grand it would be, in this century, to boast of a woman of such great merit! When I study her as she is, and consider her spirit, her depth of feeling, I no longer see her errors or her weaknesses. There is more than one woman who, lacking the virtue of admitting it aloud, secretly wishes to be like her. I dare hope, therefore, with no fear of being wrong, that my Ninon, on the Stage, will have an effect on all women, most of whom are not exempt from her weaknesses though three-quarters of my sex lacks her virtues. Not being able to destroy the bad to detach it from the good, I judged it appropriate to make them move forward together, without offending decency nor the rules of the Stage. But my Ninon is stronger than she is weak, and, apart from the *Comédiens Français*, everyone will welcome her. *Comédiens Français*! What a name those people profane! Oh! If it just depended on me they would soon lose it, but what consoles and pleases is that I have been assured that in England it [the play] will have the greatest success, and that the English will be only too pleased to perform it; the Madness of Desyvetaux is quite to their liking; therefore, if I do not have the satisfaction of seeing my Nation welcome it, I will go and see if it can be translated and performed Abroad. Meanwhile, I commend it to the French Public who will recall with pleasure the Characters that I present, especially le Grand Condé, that Prince whose name will always be dear to the Motherland. No doubt he will secure me some approval and increase the indignation felt by the Public against the *Comédie Française*; even he could not get the better of them, he whose name alone made the Peoples in the furthest corners of the Earth tremble. I cast him as an ordinary man at Ninon's, just as he wished to be, and a friend to Molière. I would never have allowed myself to cast him in all his splendour: it would take another skill, another capacity than mine; a fiery pen and Corneille's pencil.

It is thus without affectation that I placed him amongst women and men that were worthy of his company. If I have had the felicity of mastering his most simple conversations then I will be happy. It is for the Public to judge whether or not the *Comédie Française* did well to refuse this Play, and if I am within my rights to formalise my view. But I can protest that if it had presented me with some powerful reasons that would have prevented it from receiving it, then I would never have complained and I would not even have had it printed. But as its behaviour, and my Work, attest to the injustice of its refusal, I have a right to hope that the Public will offer me its approval and admire my Play. As for the three *Comédiens* whom I must name, they are MM. Mollé [sic], d'Azincourt and Belmont; this last, as simple as he is honest, did not attend my last reading, it seemed to me that he was angry that the full complement of *Comédiens* had not attended the first. I know this Player only through his talent, a talent that might be hard to replace, such is the truth and artlessness of his acting; to this he adds his reputation as an honest man, which I can believe since he did not conspire with the *Comédiens* against my Work. It is confirmed that he has never wished to either dip into intrigue or join in his comrades' cabals.

Possible the change of Setting in my second Act, to Desyvetaux's retreat, excites criticism, at least according to M. Piegres; I must make a few comments regarding this to the Reader. This worthy Author, this estimable man, assures me that my Play reduced to four Acts would have much success, and that the Desyvetaux Act could be cut with no ill

effect to the Play; I took his wise advice, he added that it could certainly be made into a small, separate Work, I believe this too, and have no doubt that several other people agree but it is the last advice I received and it was after my Play was already printed: if it were not for the bad luck that has pursued my Preface for six weeks, the last Volume would already be published. I have to ask the Journalists for an especial favour; it is that they give an opinion on my *Ninon* according to their understanding and knowledge for I am confident that the *Comédiens'* prejudice and injustice will not have perverted their discretion or judgement. Educated men, who have made a particular study of theatrical subjects, will easily afford me the satisfaction that I have the right to expect of their intellect. If I must renounce the *Madness of Desyvetaux*, which seemed to me to be good Comedy, and in accordance with History, then I will make this sacrifice without any trouble. I am not one of these stubborn Authors whose self-respect cannot accept good advice. I bow down and submit graciously to solid and reasonable observations. Three opinions will suffice to convince me and if the *Comédie* had suggested that it could not accept my second Act, how pleased I would have been to give it up and, having been fair to me, it would have played it in four [acts]. But it is recognised that the *Comédie* has long pronounced against my Works; my first altercation with it was caused by just one comment from M. Florence that I report, it was delivered while I was in the presence of an estimable man who was giving me his arm, 'The *Comédie* has heard that you have been complaining about its refusal of your Play on *Cardégno*, you will be complaining about it a great deal more for it has resolved never to receive anything you present to it.'<sup>50</sup> Time and a first letter from the *Comédie* had effaced this unjust comment from my heart but time has taught me that the *Comédie* never forgets its intrigues against a banned Author and that it never loses from sight its dark plots. But this Author is a woman. I ask you, Reader, did I merit this odious treatment? If my sensibility was not to be considered, at least there should have been some regard for my sex. But, instead, this weakness gave them the strength and courage to make me the victim of all their vexation, and all their injustice, with impunity. No doubt they would have had more consideration for a man for they would have feared his legitimate charges. But I have no less mind or courage once I have decided on an action.

The sensibility of my way of thinking gives me strength and energy. Glory has enthralled me, as it has many Authors; I was humble and submissive before this empty idol but reason spoke to me and my sentiments regained their integrity. I can reproach fate for only one thing: that it made me the mother of children more touching than those of Literature; one can make bonfires of those poor unfortunates but the ones that are the gift of Nature make the heart speak louder than the mind. Any true mother wants to bear children and bring them up in an honest state; all this is very difficult without a fortune, without shame, and with integrity and an honest character. One must be swayed by circumstances, know how to flatter and solicit and I do not have the heart for it. Meanwhile I have subdued my feelings and my disgust and the title of mother dominates my heart. But if fate had wished me to be denied this delight, no doubt I would have chosen to renounce society. I have met very few people with whom I am in sympathy. I despair at duplicity and impudence and, as luck would have it, most men are either one or the other. Oh! If only I could see my son secure in his position! The *Comédie* and the wider world would no longer trouble my solitary pleasures; I would go and live peaceably in a rural spot where I could reflect at leisure on the ridiculousness of men, without sparing those I love, and laugh wholeheartedly as I would no longer need to be angry. I do not know if it is my fault, or someone else's, but has anyone else, apart from me, had such unkindness to complain of? Oh! If I can ever expose the truth as I would like, then tremble, vile and unbridled souls; the wrong that you did me has affected my sensibility, I cannot hide it but time, that terrible master from whom the wicked do not escape, will take revenge on my behalf, even though I do not ask for it, for your odious plots. I have forgotten that I was only speaking of the vexatious *Comédiens* and my reflections have carried me further. It is an enigma that I will explain one day, but I will finish by recommending my dear *Zamor* [sic] *et Mirza* to all sensitive souls, especially to fathers, mothers and children who are not ignorant of Nature.

50 In 1785 de Gouges wrote a play entitled *Lucinde et Cardénio*, no copies are known today.

As for the Century of Great Men, all Men of Letters, as well as people of great understanding, will take its part and be avidly interested by my amiable *Ninon*, whose mother I am proud to be. Witty women, women of good taste and even virtuous women will be grateful to me for having conceived her; the Prudes and the *Comédiennes* will certainly berate me for it but I am already laughing at their spite and silliness.