In 1760, the French playwright Charles Palissot de Montenoy wrote *Les Philosophes* – a scandalous farcical comedy about a group of opportunistic self-styled philosophers. *Les Philosophes* emerged in the charged historical context of the pamphlet wars surrounding the publication of Diderot and d’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie*, and delivered an oblique but acerbic criticism of the intellectuals of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, including the likes of Diderot and Rousseau.

This book presents the first high-quality English translation of the play, including critical apparatus. The translation is based on Olivier Ferret’s edition, and renders the text into iambic pentameter to preserve the character of the original. Adaptations are further provided of Ferret’s introduction and notes.

This masterful and highly accessible translation of *Les Philosophes* opens up this polemical text to a non-specialist audience. It will be a valuable resource to non-Francophone scholars and students working on the philosophical exchanges of the Enlightenment.

Moreover, this translation – the result of a year-long project undertaken by Jessica Goodman with six of her undergraduate French students – expounds the value of collaboration between scholar and student, and, as such, provides a model for other language tutors embarking on translation.

As with all Open Book publications, this entire book is available to read for free on the publisher’s website. Printed and digital editions, together with supplementary digital material, can also be found at www.openbookpublishers.com.


Cover Design by Anna Gatti.
Letter by Mr Palissot, Author of the Comedy The Philosophes, to Serve as a Preface to the Play

You whom Corneille, Racine and Molière always respected, and who should not have expected to see yourselves insulted in prefaces by a sect of new men who have provoked neither any respect nor any surprise: you who are free from self-interest, from prejudice, from hatred, and to whom I owe so much gratitude, allow me to put to you the views that guided me in the preparation of the work that you have had the indulgence to applaud.

Certain people, humiliated by the encouragement with which you deigned to honour me, not daring to attack your support directly, instead raised cries of libel and malice. I felt it necessary to justify myself against these reproaches, so alien to my sentiments and to my heart. I address my apologia to you. Read and judge.

An imperious sect, formed in the shadows of an enterprise which could have been the glory of our century, exercised its rigorous despotism over science, literature, art and morality. Armed with the fire of philosophy, its members inflamed the minds of the people rather than shedding light therein: they attacked religion, laws and morals; they preached pyrrhonism and independence, and at the same time as denouncing all authority, themselves imposed a universal tyranny. It was not enough for them pompously to publish their opinions; rather, they declared war on anyone who did not bow to their idols. The Encyclopédie, a work that should have been the glory of the nation, became its shame; but from its very ashes were born a number of converts who, purporting to be men of character, inspired in women ideas of anarchy and materialism.

The most detestable maxims of Hobbes and Spinoza and the most republican ideas appeared everywhere in their writing and speech.
True philosophers, ministers of religion, true citizens; indeed, all honest men trembled at the audacious dogmas they put forward against divinity and supreme authority. Some complained that the might of the Church and the sword of the law struck only the weakest blows against them; but these were whispers rather than true complaints, for no-one dared raise their voice.

These new philosophers thought themselves the masters of renown: they handed out reputations and artistic accolades on a whim, but no-one had a chance of receiving their attentions unless they too were part of the sect. Indeed, this malady was so widespread, it had so effectively made its way into every area of life, that a whole part of the nation was caught up in it, thinking only according to what these oracles prescribed.

The only means left to cut these powerful people down to size was to attack them with ridicule before the eyes of an assembled public: this was to return theatre to its original purpose, and it might be said that it was a moderate response only to take up such arms against their excesses.

But for this task a soul was required that was sufficiently courageous; sufficiently inflamed (if I dare say it) by the love of public good, so as not to be afraid of either obstacles or dangers. I did not shy away from all that might be attempted to bring my name into disrepute; I foresaw the malicious use that would be made of the portraits contained in the play of individuals whose talent and morals I respect, though I might not adopt their philosophical systems. Had I been capable of remaining under any illusions in this regard, I would have been disabused of them even before the first performance of Les Philosophes, when I saw discussed in public extracts from my play which only ever existed in the imagination of those who attributed them to me.

When I saw it claimed in writing that I attacked that rare genius, of whom I have only ever spoken with delight, who received me with such kindness in his home when I went to pay him my respects and admiration, and who has since often honoured me with letters that I shall keep safe for all my life.

When, moreover, I saw that I was being accused of not even having spared the illustrious Montesquieu, these so-called wise men flattering themselves by the implication that there was no immense gulf separating
them from these great men. Though these famous geniuses who have enlightened their century may at times have forgotten themselves through human weakness, this group of philosophers, who have only imitated them in their faults, have no right to make any sort of comparison with them.

What I would never have anticipated, however, is that people would affect to have forgotten all of the models that authorise my choice of subject and the manner in which I have treated it: that they would be unable to remember that Molière mocked in the theatre the Hôtel de Rambouillet, Cotin, Ménage, the court, the devout and doctors; that even Racine put the magistrature on stage.

Moreover, convinced that the truly philosophical action of a good citizen is to have the courage to pull his country out of dangerous errors, and to sacrifice everything to this glory, I could not be held back by any personal considerations; not even the fear of the pamphlets in which I knew I would be attacked, and to which I shall never respond. I must rely for my defence on all those who still believe in the respect of authority, in natural feeling, in ancient morals. I will simply observe that the most hateful recriminations will never prove anything either against my play, or in favour of the false philosophers, but will on the contrary give me the satisfaction of seeing honest men join me in my scorn.

In response to the charges of malice made against me, I will simply employ these judicious and remarkable words of M. Diderot: ‘I know that people speak thus of works in which authors have let loose all their indignation: This is horrible! People must not be treated so harshly! These are terrible insults that should not be published, and other similar claims that have been made across time about all those works in which idiocy and evil are painted in the strongest colours, and which we read today with the greatest pleasure. Let us explain this contradiction in our judgements. At the moment at which these formidable productions were published, all villains were alarmed, and feared for themselves. The more a man was full of vice, the more vociferously he complained. He objected to the satire based on the age, the rank, the dignity of the person attacked; on hundreds of those little fleeting considerations, which lose their importance day by day, and which evaporate before a century has passed. Passing circumstances are forgotten, posterity sees nothing but folly, ridicule, vice and evil, covered in ignominy, and rejoices in this as
an act of justice... It is only reprehensible weakness that prevents us from demonstrating towards baseness, envy, and duplicity, that strong and profound hatred that all honest men should feel.\textsuperscript{18}

In the light of such decisively authoritative words, I would therefore be justified in making no apology: but there are some delicate and honest souls, whose errors deserve some indulgence, who are troubled by the word ‘malice’; not always taking the time to consider whether its application is just. It is for their sake that I will add this question, which seems to me apt to calm them regarding any pleasure that they may have taken in my comedy.

Who is really evil: he who devotes himself to the defence of legitimate authority and of the most sacred bonds of society, or those men who,\textsuperscript{19} impatiently struggling against all restraints, the enemies of all power, dare to publish what follows?

‘Between animal and man there is no real division. Animals have a soul capable of all the mental operations carried out by man: conceiving and assembling ideas, and drawing from them a just consequence.’ (\textit{Interprétation de la Nature}, page 35.)\textsuperscript{20}

‘Our soul is made of the same ingredients and the same fabric as that of animals.’ (\textit{L’Homme plante}, page 31.)\textsuperscript{21}

‘It has been demonstrated by a thousand irrefutable proofs that there is only one life, and one happiness, and that the proud monarch dies completely, just like the modest subject and the loyal dog.’ (\textit{Discours sur la vie heureuse}, page 34 and 35.)\textsuperscript{22}

‘That which pleases the body is the sole route to happiness.’ (\textit{Discours sur la vie heureuse}, page 6.)\textsuperscript{23}

‘The pleasures of the senses can inspire in us all sorts of feelings and virtues.’\textsuperscript{24}

‘Physical sensibility and personal interest are the authors of all justice.’

‘Probity is nothing but the habit of undertaking useful actions, and must necessarily be founded in personal interest.’\textsuperscript{25}

‘The idea of virtue is not by any means absolute, nor independent of circumstances.’

‘Virtue and truth are beings that are only worthy insomuch as they serve those who possess them.’ (\textit{Discours sur la vie heureuse}, page 106.)\textsuperscript{26}
‘Neither vice nor virtue, moral good nor evil, justice nor injustice exist in themselves: everything is arbitrary and constructed by the hand of man.’ (Discours sur la vie heureuse, page 11.)

‘The inequality of conditions is a barbaric law: no natural subjection into which man is born with respect to his father, or to his prince, has ever been regarded as a bond that obliges him, without his own consent.’ (‘Discours préliminaire’ of the Dictionnaire encyclopédique.)

‘A child is not born as the subject of any country or any government; when he reaches the age of reason he is free to choose the government under which he wishes to live, and to become part of the political body that pleases him the best.’ (Dictionnaire encyclopédique, art. ‘Government’, vol. VII, page 789.)

‘Nothing is capable of submitting man to any power on earth but his own consent.’ (ibid.)

‘A tacit consent binds us to the laws of the government under which we enjoy the benefit of holding certain possessions, but if our obligation begins with those possessions, it ends with our enjoyment of them.’ (ibid. page 791.)

‘Governments can dissolve when the legislative and executive powers act with force beyond the authority that has been accorded to them.’ (ibid.)

‘It is only thanks to the weak and ignorant state into which they are born that children find themselves naturally subject to their fathers and mothers.’ (ibid. art. ‘Child’, vol. V, p. 652.)

‘A son owes his father no gratitude for having brought him into this world.’ (Les Mœurs, page 59.)

‘Filial love is very susceptible to exemptions.’ (Les Mœurs, page 459.)

‘The best way to free oneself from the inopportune nature of desires is to follow them.’ (Les Mœurs, page 75.)

‘In order to be happy, it is necessary to stifle any remorse: useless in advance of a crime, it is no more useful once the crime has been carried out. Good philosophy would do itself a disservice if it were to occupy itself with such irritating reminiscences, or dwell on such old prejudices.’ (Discours sur la vie heureuse, p. 63.)

The fear of raising ire in my readers makes me lay down my pen, and prevents me from looking through the Pensées philosophiques and L’Interprétation de la Nature.
The Philosophes

Characters

Cydalise
Rosalie (Cydalise’s daughter)
Damis (Rosalie’s lover)
Valère, philosophe
Théophraste, philosophe
Dortidius, philosophe
Marton (servant)
Crispin (valet)
M. Propice (bookseller)
M. Carondas

The play takes place in Paris, in Cydalise’s house.
ACT I

SCENE I

DAMIS, MARTON

DAMIS
No, I shall never recover from this shock
A promised match thus rudely broken off!

MARTON
All’s changed, I say.

DAMIS
How so?

MARTON
You’re but a guard.
Madame won’t make a match with such as you.
She seeks a husband cut from different cloth
A man, in short, who is a philosophe.

DAMIS
What can you mean, Marton?

MARTON
You seem surprised;
But out of sight, you drifted out of mind.
In three short months, this house has been transformed:
Three more, perhaps, and all will shift again.
Once more in highest favour you will stand;
’Til then, you have no claim. The verdict’s in:
Though you were sure that you would soon be wed,
The prize goes to the philosophe instead.

DAMIS
Alas, that all should thus have changed so fast!
MARTON
Monsieur, all women fickle creatures are. As seasons change, so Cydalise does too,
Each fleeting fancy grips her heart anew.
At times she’s giddy, overcome with joy,
Yet then she’s solemn, sulking like a child;
A scandalous seductress, fancy free,
Then prudish, chaste, and virtuous as a nun.
Her nights are spent at balls, then church by day,
With scholars one moment, buffoons the next. ’Twas once her way. But now the time has come
For finer morals, for a wiser tone.
Madame her household has of late reformed.
Now naught but reason governs all our acts.
First banished from her home was vulgar jest:
The usurer’s delight, the common fare;
Now dining here we barely raise a smile.
Yet if we yawn, at least it is with wit.
Instead of merry vaudevilles and verse,
We must endure the music of the wise;
Those long and arduous tunes our only joy.
But our true strength, Monsieur, in reason lies.
Though once we spoke of worldly politics,
In metaphysics all is now subsumed.

DAMIS
The image that you paint is strange indeed,
But you’re the artist, and I’ll trust your brush
To paint Madame. But what of Rosalie?

MARTON
Why she grows bored, just as we all do, Sir.
DAMIS
And has her heart surrendered to my foe?

MARTON
Her heart’s still yours, for love has held it safe
Against your rival, and his daring plans.
Your fate, though, in a mother’s hands doth lie;
A woman so bewitched I see no hope.
Please pardon me these words. I speak things plain.

DAMIS
She was my friend; I trust this has not changed...

MARTON
Great wit, Monsieur, is all that she admires.
A malady unknown among the young
But common at her age. But still, with time,
Perhaps to wisdom she could be recalled
If only there were someone who could fight
And play upon such progress as she’s made.
Myself, I hoped, back when this all began;
But now the ills to come are all too clear.
Between us...

DAMIS
What?

MARTON
Madame has writ a book.

DAMIS
Good god!

MARTON
Anonymous; and now in press.
DAMIS
Some kind of pamphlet?

MARTON
No: a handsome tome.

DAMIS
I hope and pray she won’t reveal her name.
But among those wits our Mistress holds so dear,
Is none so frank, so apt to speak the truth,
To spare her from the shame of her mistakes:
Enlighten her?

MARTON
They play her for a fool:
They strive as one to flatter her, you know;
Your rival most of all. He knows her tastes,
And more than just applaud her fancy words
Parades her wit before like-minded men,
Those practised flatterers and charlatans,
In raptures to be part of her salon,
To bring their errors into it, to vaunt
Their power over credulous esprits,
Whose hides must toughen against their taunts and jibes.

DAMIS
And they are, so you say, philosophers?

MARTON
Yes, though they give themselves much greater airs.
The city’s full of them. To charm Madame,
To pull on every heartstring that she has,
They’ve taken on positions in her house.
When they advise, inspired by reason’s light,
Whatever they pronounce, Madame delights.
Yet from among their number I suspect
The ‘secretary’, received by her as wise,
Is nothing but a schemer and a crook,
Deceiving her to carry out some plan.
But in the end, I will expose the truth.

DAMIS
What has he done for you to scorn him so?

MARTON
Else I’m mistaken, or it is your foe
Who’s had him taken on to serve his ends.

DAMIS
What man is he?

MARTON
A rogue, who virtue feigns;
Yet native of Pézenas, so they say,
His pompous title: ‘Monsieur Carondas’.
Known for his mind, or that is what he claims
His speech replete with Greek and scholar’s terms;
Outlandish jargon, and at every turn,
He references great erudites of old.

DAMIS, laughing.
Ha, ha, ha, ha.

MARTON
The portrait’s true to life.

DAMIS
This Monsieur Carondas sounds like bad news.
But with your help and that of Crispin too...
MARTON
What? Crispin, here?

DAMIS
Indeed, ma’am, it is so.
And I intend to join the pair of you:
I hope that you will swear to serve me well.

MARTON
Leave it to me, I’ll put Crispin to work.

DAMIS
I’ll count on you.

MARTON
Oh Sir, I hope you do!
I’ll wage a war against philosophy.

DAMIS
The greatest joys of life I’ll owe to thee.
But... just one thing

MARTON
I know just what you’ll say.
Hold fast, Monsieur, by ardour you’re forewarned:
Your love arrives!
SCENE II

ROSALIE, MARTON, DAMIS

DAMIS

   After three months away
Returning to you, full of love and hope
To claim what was once promised, in deep faith,
I find now that a foe, in jealous spite,
Dares rob me of the only prize I crave.⁴³
That against me, with your mother he conspires.
Ah me! At least console my hopeless heart.

ROSALIE

Think you my own to be more blithe than yours?
I watch these drastic turns with dreadful pain;
Like you I suffer, but I love you still.
At least in this I may retain some hope.
Who could oppose two souls, so intertwined?
My mother loved you. Maybe at your sight,
Some fondness may return to her cold heart.
A heart over which I used to hold more power.
Now you, Damis, must try to move this stone;
That with the happy union I seek,
My mother’s love I’ll also owe to you.

MARTON

Fine words, but mark, that plan will come to naught.

ROSALIE

Let me be wrong.

MARTON

   Through hard combat alone
Can Cydalise to good sense be returned.
DAMIS
Yet we might try, perhaps, our little scheme.

MARTON
Yes; sighs and tears, that’s just the way to go!
Oh, how philosophy inures the heart.

ROSALIE
Why, that is a surprise! But if Maman
Has promised me forever to Valère;
If this grand plan is truly so advanced,
Why until now has it not been announced?
What yet could hold her back?

MARTON
I’d be most vexed.
She has not yet invited the notaire,
It’s true; the witnesses are not yet come,
Indeed; a few formalities remain,
I grant you that; perhaps the day has not
Been quite established yet in certainty;
That I’ll admit. But does she not embrace
How publicly he worships all your charms?
And are you not at all times drawn to his?
But no; I was quite wrong; it’s naught, in truth.

ROSALIE
Mercy! Must you disturb me so Marton?

MARTON
‘Twas just a dream.

DAMIS
Marton...
MARTON

Mere idle talk.

A childish tale.

DAMIS

Marton.

MARTON

A vision; false;

Absurd.

ROSALIE

But Marton...

MARTON

Feverish, frenzied, mad.

A great illusion.

ROSALIE

Yet in truth, Marton,

This cruel tomfoolery becomes you not.

MARTON

Ma’am, I was wrong.

ROSALIE, making as if to leave.

Don’t follow!

DAMIS, stopping her.

Rosalie.

ROSALIE

No Sir, it’s far too much.

DAMIS

Please stay, I pray.
MARTON
Ah! Now you’ve lost your temper? Just as well.
But let us reason. Tell me, if you please,
Was such deceit required? I know that doubt
Can cause us to discount our dreaded fears.
To shy from danger’s natural enough,
If only to avoid a tiresome weight.
I’d be the first to hide from you the truth,
To close my eyes to such a blinding light,
If not for my concern, which makes me speak.
Forgive me, but you lovers are quite mad,
First calm, and then despairing without cause,
A happy balance never to be found;
When cool sangfroid’s a better guide by far
Than love, which is a blindfold on your eyes.

DAMIS
Now that is real philosophy, indeed!

MARTON
Live amongst wolves and you will learn to howl,
Or so the proverb goes. And it is true.
Philosophy’s a plague upon this house.
But let us put aside these solemn thoughts,

(To Rosalie)
Let’s make our peace. With no bad blood from you?
Can you promise me this?

ROSALIE
Of course, I swear

MARTON
I swear to have your interests at heart.
You Sir, who unperturbed in mind and soul
Would spend your days with eyes set on Madame,
Must now retreat, and promptly would be best.
Beware that it’s broad daylight in this house,
We risk at every moment being caught,
But Cydalise must see you first of all,
Before you plan for other rendez-vous.

DAMIS
Wholeheartedly I’ll follow your command.
My happiness I shall entrust to you.
My darling one, adieu, my Rosalie!
SCENE III

MARTON, ROSALIE

MARTON
Have strength! To languish will not help your cause. With firmness you may overcome your grief.

ROSALIE
If you could feel my hatred for Valère!

MARTON
Damis has left, it’s true. But you must speak To Cydalise as soon as time allows. For if you love him, her consent you’ll need Or so I do suppose.

ROSALIE
Indeed.

MARTON
Young girls Do naught, you know, without their parents’ say, So go the rules. And so you have to voice Hate for the one, and for the other, love.

ROSALIE
Of course!

MARTON
And can your spirit thus stand firm?

ROSALIE
Without a doubt Marton.

MARTON, cunningly.

I hear her come.
ROSALIE, scared.
Ah! Marton...

MARTON

Well! That’s not the best of starts.
Most promising...

ROSALIE

Why must you scare me so?
When it’s required, my love will give me strength.

MARTON, mimicking her.
Your love! Oh yes, you’ll both do very well...
I’ll wager that, in such a flustered state,
A word let slip by chance...

ROSALIE

No, you will see.

MARTON
It’s not love’s place to save you from despair;
Love is too maladroit. Think of your hate;
That is the sentiment that must prevail,
Your hatred must take hold, direct your soul.
I do not know if love, which I revere,
Is truly of all passions the most dear;
It’s really naught but weakness and self-doubt.
Whilst hatred stems from ardour, drive, and fire.
Where one destroys, the other animates,
And in a female heart more natural is.
You’re yet to know this sentiment, it seems.
May you then taste it, only for today.
I love Crispin and for Valère I feel...
But it’s a game no more, your mother’s here.
ROSALIE
Will you support me?

MARTON
Yes.
SCENE IV

CYDALISE, ROSALIE, MARTON

CYDALISE

Be gone, Marton.
Go, take my keys; lock Plato safe away.
His world of ideal forms has dulled my mind.
I sought l’Encylopédie, it was gone.
That book shall leave my cabinet no more

(To Rosalie)

Please stay; I wish to speak with you alone.

(To Marton)

Leave us, Marton.

MARTON, to Rosalie.

Hold firm, and prove your worth.

CYDALISE

Do as I say.
SCENE V

CYDALISE, ROSALIE

CYDALISE

You are both fair and wise,
My Rosalie, I’ve always held you dear.
Now let’s see if you merit such esteem.
To vulgar sentiment I’ll give no weight:
To love so biased, shallow, à la mode
That’s born, they say, from blood shared ‘twixt our veins,
And yet, in truth, is nothing but sweet lies;
Mere weakness...

ROSALIE

What’s that? Mother Nature’s voice,
That sacred link, so touching and so pure,
That early duty, that first, august bond?
(I can’t describe that which I feel so well,)
Is all forgot? Does my poor mother’s heart
Today pour scorn on this most holy trait?
Remember, pray, the love that once you felt;
Which reasoning on too much has caused to fade.

CYDALISE

I fell, as many do, for those vain dreams;
Led like our forebears by mere common sense.
Though blind and credulous, I was content,
Machine-like, following the common herd.
Now I begin to feel, to think, to know.
And if I love you now, ’tis as a Being.
But you should know that any other soul
Would have an even smaller claim than thine.
The Philosophes by Charles Palissot

ROSALIE
You tear my heart to shreds. But please, Maman,
Allow me at your knees to plead my case:
Ask what is rightly mine, and kinder words.
Why untie all the bonds which held us close,
Of which my trembling and my tears stand proof?

CYDALISE, slightly moved.
Poor girl! ... to err for you is full of charms!
I pity you. But follow reason’s path.
The fashion for such puerile love has passed.
I see your claim to own a mother’s heart
But elevate it; if to you I’m dear,
If I some rights over you can also claim
It’s not down to the chance that brought your birth.

ROSALIE
I cannot bear to hear these loathsome words
An insult to us both, a horrid slur.
Think you that I’d so easily forget?
My very life, I owe it all to you.

CYDALISE
I took great care to guide your girlish mind
And that, indeed, deserves your love and thanks;
The worthy object of my dearest hopes.
To teach you thought, that’s all that I desire.
Imagine how much joy in genius lies:
In opening your eyes to reason’s light;
Dispelling all the fog that clouds your mind,
And freeing it from judgment’s evil yoke.
That art of life known only to the wise,
Of which I’ve now experienced the joys,
That day of reason, scattering its rays:
My dear, my love wants you to know it too.
Your marriage to dear Damis was agreed;
My head and heart by minor gains were led:
Questions of fortune, and a trial to end
All pointed to your union, it seemed.
This is indeed how most things come about;
But now, today, I break those vulgar ties,
Damis has good sense, honour, virtue too.
The least the world requires, it must be said;
Not all young men are destined for great heights.
And some respect we owe him, it is true.
For you, my child, I want another spouse:
One much more fitting, worthy of your mind.
Valère can please, he knows how to seduce,
But more than love you, he will teach you too.
So yes; he is the object of my choice.

ROSALIE
Have you forgot that Damis once did have
The blessing of my father, and yourself?

CYDALISE
Your father! True, I hardly thought of him.
Always the pleasant voice of power. Ha!
The Earth’s most narrow-minded soul to date.
A talentless and impotent machine,
A man of habit, mired in routine,
Who seemed to think of nothing much at all,
Apart from that which made up his estate,
And hundreds other trivial things beside.
A champion of antiquated thought,
His morals primitive; and he allied  
The rank of his dark robes with bourgeois tone.  
He never spoke without due solemn weight, 
Preoccupied at all times with the law, 
Yet out of court relapsing into sin;  
Like Dandin, keen to judge at every turn.  
But now he’s dead, let’s let him rest in peace.

ROSALIE  
Please, Maman!

CYDALISE  
What! And would you take his part?  
A father is, all said and done, a man,  
I’m justified to speak about his faults.

ROSALIE  
If that’s what your philosophy will teach,  
Why, then, I shall renounce it, here and now.  
Enlightened, I would stand to lose so much,  
I state the truth. Permit me, please, I beg,  
To speak to you in favour of Damis;  
Recall your former kindness, for your child.

CYDALISE.  
No, Valère is the partner that I choose,  
Tonight you shall become husband and wife;  
A union that will enrich your life.  
And as for your disdain for reason’s light:  
You must, as I have, rid yourself of scorn.  
With time and reason, you will find a cure.  
You’re at an age where life is just begun;  
Where all yet seems unclear; but read my book.
It teaches of the mind and of good sense;
Of passions, laws and of good governance,
Of virtue, morals, habits, etiquette;
Of peoples civilised and wild in turn;
The disorder that we see, order beneath,
Of happiness, that’s both ideal and true.
Therein I show the theory of all things,
The secret ties that link cause and effect;
I’ve written just for you a thoughtful text,
A chapter on ‘Your duties, as they stand’.
A treatise, in encyclopedic form
That Valère swears shows genius and wit.
You’ll be delighted with so fine a spouse.
One day you’ll see how much I’ve done for you
You’ll thank me for it. Now, my dear, adieu,
See that you do my bidding.
SCENE VI

OSALIE, MARTON

ROSALIE, without seeing Marton.

Oh, such pain!
Oh what to do? Ah me! It’s you, Marton.

MARTON

Indeed, and I heard all. But she’s quite mad!
What lunacy!

ROSALIE

I’ll die.

MARTON

Oh, quite the jest.
You, die? You silly girl; that’s out of style.
Even in novels it’s no longer done.

ROSALIE

But then...

MARTON

Now calm your nerves, engage your mind.

Had you not, after all, foreseen this trial?

ROSALIE

That does not help my stricken, shaking state.

MARTON

Have you so little faith in all my plans?

ROSALIE

Oh Marton!

MARTON

Calm yourself, please, first of all.
If your desires are met, pray, tell me dear
What will your anxious worrying have done?

ROSALIE
Well yes, if you succeed, but if you don’t?

MARTON
You’ll cry as much as you could wish, my love;
And I’ll cry with you, never say a word;
But ‘til that moment, why not raise a smile?
In any case, a laugh is always good,
And when plans go awry we need it more.
Well that’s my view, at least. Why, sorrow’s vain,
And trying too; my nature’s quite opposed.
I think we should not dwell on it at all,
And when we seek out pity, we are wrong.
So let us plan instead some happy ruse,
Come, follow, see if wise philosophy
However strong its merits, can this day
Hold out against Marton, Crispin, and love.
ACT II

SCENE I

VALÈRE, M. CARONDAS

VALÈRE

Frontin!

M. CARONDAS

No good shall come of that damned name,
I’ve told you so. What if, by some malchance
Before Madame you should address me thus?
Frontin! For a savant? I should think not.
One lapse in your attention’s all we need,
And our philosophy is overturned.

VALÈRE

Of course.

M. CARONDAS

We must, at all costs, both abstain
From our more usual tone, for — so you say —
By nature’s right all men most equal are,
And I, though Frontin, am in fact your peer.

VALÈRE

Indeed, this is my sentiment, I swear.

M. CARONDAS

And I myself wholeheartedly concur.
For I have always thought the law was wrong;
And Cydalise in one great chapter proves,
Convincingly, I think...

VALÈRE

You trust the view
Of someone who, essentially, is mad?
Whose mind may be so effortlessly changed?
Her words are just as empty as her head.

M. CARONDAS
Between us two, the book, it’s truly bad?

VALÈRE
Useless.

M. CARONDAS
The style...

VALÈRE
It’s boring beyond words.

M. CARONDAS
And yet you flatter her with highest praise!

VALÈRE
Of course.

M. CARONDAS
The public?

VALÈRE
We shall tell them how
To think, to speak, to judge and how to write
We’ll settle this quite easily.

M. CARONDAS
Of course,
To tame and flatter them remains our aim.

VALÈRE
No, not at all, in fact just the reverse!
There is a much more certain way.
M. CARONDAS

How so?

VALÈRE
For instance, we must speak of them with sneers;\textsuperscript{46}
A strategy adopted by the wise,
It’s most effective, you can be assured.
You’ll see so soon yourself, and marvel too.
For we shall make that woman’s name renowned;
Some bold, revolting, scandalous remarks
Will have the most extraordinary effect
When added to her book.

M. CARONDAS

A novel trick!
But how to make her think it’s all her work?

VALÈRE
Is any of it hers? At first she will
Deny it all, then think the author’s her.

M. CARONDAS
Oh my, I say! I’d simply die of shame!

VALÈRE
Do you forget she’s of the female sex?
Believe me, cruder things we could have done,
Her pride’s a trait on which we may rely:
In this, all women stubborn creatures are.

M. CARONDAS
Society wits have nothing on them, true.
But do you think that with such little change,
We can expect the easiest success?
VALÈRE
Of course! And this idea is nothing new.
The book of Crates\textsuperscript{47} gives us proof enough.
Never has one man’s work risen so far:
For all spoke ill of it; still do today.
It’s known worldwide as the most dangerous book
And yet we know Crates as a good man.

M. CARONDAS
It’s true.

VALÈRE
Our Cydalise will have more fame
The fairer sex is judged with less disdain,
Additions made in secret by our hands
Will shock her audience, cause great delight.
Crates himself will envy how she’s known
And nothing’s simpler, with us on her side.

M. CARONDAS
Well, brought up in your school Sir, though I am,
I had naively taken at its face
Both book and author. Yet it seems she wrote,
Naught but your own words, Sir.

VALÈRE
The wretched fool!

M. CARONDAS
As for those phrases added to her book,
What if the law should come for us, Monsieur?

VALÈRE
She’ll hear her praises loudly sung abroad;
No matter then if she retracts it all.
Besides, a love of truth can courage breed.
Impressive words, like error, zest and zeal,
And persecution, to her aid will come.48
This ancient strategy always works well.
As guide in this, have we not Socrates:
Oppressed, condemned by his ungrateful land?49
All our admirers would speak with one voice.

M. CARONDAS
Sir, Socrates himself obeyed the laws.

VALÈRE
Philosophy, then in its infancy.
Maintained a mask of prejudice, you know.
The time for this is past.

CARONDAS
All’s then allowed?

VALÈRE
Except against us and against our friends.

CARONDAS
Praise be to wit and to philosophy!
For in this life there’s nothing more sublime.

VALÈRE50
What, virtue on a rocky hill did lie?
The hardy only reached it. Man was lost.
This king of beasts wandered without a guide
Across the oceans, moving with the winds.
But now we know what truly drives mankind.
His motivation’s happiness alone.
In living out his passions he’s fulfilled.
Take them away, and he would soon be left,
To languish aimlessly upon the earth.\textsuperscript{51}
This unseen power, man’s sole driving force
From our philosophy’s no longer hid.
Morality to genius must submit.
And on this Earth we humans rule supreme,
Our private interest at the root of all;
For it alone determines how we act;
Our light and guide in all we say and do.
Thus free from wrong; but bent to interest’s voice
The savage follows it deep in the woods,
To its dominion cultured man does bow;
It governs with one word all things that breathe.

M. CARONDAS
What? We must follow interest alone?

VALÈRE
Why, it is vital, nature tells us so.

M. CARONDAS
It pained me much to fool dear Cydalise;
But now I see that such a thing’s allowed.

VALÈRE
When fortune calls; why, take it at its word.

M. CARONDAS
Yes.

VALÈRE
Frankness is the virtue of a fool.

M. CARONDAS, \emph{preparing to steal from him.}
Yes Sir... but then, I do still have my doubts;
They hold me back.
VALÈRE

Why think such baseless thoughts?
From prejudice be free!

M. CARONDAS

Speak you the truth?

VALÈRE

You must find happiness, no matter how.

M. CARONDAS

You mean that?

VALÈRE

Yes, in wooing Cydalise,
You do a duty authorised by mores.
Should one not fawn when pleasing company?
To help oneself is nothing but good sense.
‘Our land is full of men who are but fools.’
One sailor’s words to Macedonian kings
Are full of truth.

M. CARONDAS, fumbling in Valère’s pocket.

Indeed.

VALÈRE

All property
Ought to be public; but the means exist
To overturn our fate. We can through skill
Attempt to change our stars. It’s simply weak
To moan and languish, stopped by ancient qualms.

(noticing Carondas trying to steal from him)

What are you doing there?
M. CARONDAS

Self-interest...
This hidden law... Sir... that inspires us all,
And governs every man that ever lived...

VALÈRE
What! Traitor, steal from me?

M. CARONDAS
No. It’s my right...
All goods are common.

VALÈRE
Fine, but have more skill!
For there are risks to which we are exposed,
When taken by surprise.

M. CARONDAS
Sir, I’ll take care.

VALÈRE
From this, good Monsieur Frontin, you should learn;
But since that name is no longer allowed,
You now shall help me out with Cydalise.
For now, all’s well; to Rose I am betrothed.
You know too well my thoughts on this affair.
So please, proceed to flatter where you can.
Your wise scholastic terms have wonders wrought;
Continue, pray, to fill her head with words;
With all that jargon which has worked before.
You have no fortune, and yet here you might
Begin to change your destiny; I’ll help,
If this procures the end I so desire.
Adieu, please be discreet, and I’ll be fair.
SCENE II

M. CARONDAS, alone.
My first attempt was not the best, it’s true.
To match my model, I have far to go,
For now, I’m destined for the second rate.
SCENE III

CYDALISE, M. CARONDAS

CYDALISE, without seeing M. Carondas.
At long last of those idlers I am rid.
How sloth is dull when one desires to think!
From all those bores with whom I was obsessed,
I never heard the germ of an idea.
Such insult to good sense cannot be borne;
But tiresome family, tolerate we must.

(To M. Carondas)
Ah, good! you’re here! Now please, Sir, take your place.
With just a little work on the preface,
My book will soon be done. But I had hoped
That Valère might be here.

M. CARONDAS

He’s leaving now;
Of you, Madame, we talked with so much joy.

CYDALISE
Did you speak of my book?

M. CARONDAS

He cannot stop.
He says its immortality is sure;
You will surpass the greats of every age.
My judgement I cannot compare with his;
But oh! my wonder heightens with each page.

CYDALISE
It pleases you?

M. CARONDAS

My mind is all confused.
Your book with such deep knowledge is replete;
Your word on Socrates’ demon I would trust.\(^{52}\)

CYDALISE
You know it well.

M. CARONDAS
Yes Ma’am, that’s what they say.
But tell me then, how did this come about?
You must know everything which has been writ.

CYDALISE
With many learned people I have met,
It’s pure and simple chance.

M. CARDONAS
You were inspired.
But what! Have you not read the great Vossius?\(^{53}\)

CYDALISE
Never.

M. CARONDAS
Casaubon?\(^{54}\)

CYDALISE
Even less.

M. CARONDAS
Grotius?\(^{55}\)

CYDALISE
Not once. So are these books by women writ?

M. CARONDAS
Good god, Madame, you shock me more and more,
You really know nothing of this?
The Philosophes

CYDALISE

It’s true.

M. CARONDAS

But of the law you speak so mighty well.
And surely Tribonien you must...

CYDALISE

I don’t.

M. CARONDAS

At least you know Thales? Democritus?

CYDALISE

No.

M. CARONDAS

Le Fils naturel?

CYDALISE

Yes, that I know.
These are the works we must above all quote.

M. CARONDAS

On this point I can’t claim authority,
But, like you, I did judge it by its name.

CYDALISE

I earnestly agree. In one small trait
The greatness of a work is plain to see.
By a je ne sais quoi... one’s soul is seized
A feeling... genius draws us by its skill.

M. CARONDAS

I see. It’s like steam rising from a stew
Which rouses both the sense of smell and taste.
CYDALISE
Well yes, but that analogy is crude.

M. CARONDAS
It’s from Lycophron.\(^{59}\)

CYDALISE
Ah! That changes things.
Let’s talk of my preface. I shall dictate.

\(\text{After a long silence, emphatically.}\)
Write this: \textit{I lived}.\(^{60}\) No, that’s no way to start.
Erase, \textit{I lived}. Please put yourself at ease.

\(\text{Tartly.}\)
Oh! Monsieur Carondas your pen is poor.

\(\text{Pensive.}\)
\textit{I lived} means nothing.

M. CARONDAS
I’d be satisfied.
\textit{I lived} means much!

CYDALISE
No, Monsieur, I desire
A philosophical and striking start.

M. CARONDAS
But such simplicity is good, Madame.

CYDALISE, dreaming.
No, no, I want a phrase that has more weight.

\(\text{With humour.}\)
Such ghastly paper I have never seen!
Erase that, Sir; your ink is truly foul.

\(\text{Pensive.}\)
Alas, I cannot find a better phrase!
(Impatiently.)
And after all, Valère ought to be here.
When I’m with him I’m so inspired with wit.
(Pensive.)
What! Not even a thought? Oh! woe is me.

M. CARONDAS
Why, inspiration comes and goes, you see?
This calls to mind the words of wise Souidas,\(^{61}\)
Who said with style...

CYDALISE
My! Monsieur Cardonas,
Forget the dead. I had the perfect phrase
(She thinks.)
But it escapes my mind. Wait... yes, this time...
(Impatiently.)
Write this! But no, that phrase is too obscure.
I never felt such intellectual drought,
I’ve had enough, I give up on this task!
The publisher awaits, give him my work.
Wait no, come back. At last I’ve found the words!
Write this: ‘Young man, take up this book and read.’\(^{62}\)
*Young man, take this and read.* Is that not fine?
Tell me your thoughts, Monsieur...

M. CARONDAS
Grand and sublime!
It has an air of true intelligence.

CYDALISE
In reading it, my woes are all forgot.
*Young man, take this and read.* It is unmatched,
Valère, therefore, will find it most august.

M. CARONDAS
You seem to tremble, shaken by your phrase.

*Young man, take this and read.* There speaks a sage;
Nature will thus reveal its beauteous face.
Why, nothing’s so sublime, yet modest too.

CYDALISE
But what does Marton want?
SCENE IV

MARTON, CYDALISE, M. CARONDAS

MARTON

Ma’am it’s Damis;
He wants to speak with you.

CYDALISE

At such a time!
Without his interruption I’d be done!
That tiresome man won’t leave me to my work.

MARTON
Valère will see it’s done.

M. CARONDAS

What say you ‘done’?
The book is writ, Madame, it is complete.
And ten years hence it still shall be revered.

CYDALISE
You’re right. Make twenty copies of it, go.
I breathe at last! The work was worth the pain.
Young man, take this and read! Damis, come in.
SCENE V

DAMIS, CYDALISE

CYDALISE
You’re back again?

DAMIS
Why yes, Madame, I am.
To seek compassion and expose my soul.
I see too clearly, with no little pain,
That I have lost my dear place in your heart,
Our friendship, once so close, seems sorely changed.
But in my mind our souls are allied still.
Allow me to recall to you a hope
That time should not have cast out from your mind.
Your daughter, as you know, to me is dear:
To you and to her father this was clear.
Today your blessing I shall seek once more,
For all I need from you is your consent.

CYDALISE
Your memory, I admit, is quite correct;
And I was wrong to hint that my esteem;
The friendship that once bound me tight to you,
Should no longer be sentiments I trust,
Indeed, I should have said this from the start:
But I was most deceived by wit and charm,
And privileged too long the foolish wrongs
Of my beloved world... By age I’m changed.
The day has come to choose philosophy,
To free myself from judgement’s heavy yoke,
At last existing only for the truth.
I’ve formed a learned company of men,
In number few, but wise: they share my life.
I learn to think through studying their books.⁶³
I’ve chosen one of these to be my son,
And on this eve my hopes will be fulfilled.
It’s up to you to judge if, though your friend,
I thus should sacrifice to you my joy.

DAMIS
Madame, I would do anything for you,
Your friendship will inspire me ever more.
But what could be the benefits, pray tell,
Of spending time with all these learned men?
I certainly can’t see as ‘wise’ these frauds;
These charlatans, performing for the crowd,
And showing off so-called philosophy:
My sense won’t let me trust these boastful men.
Such spectacle may lure the common herd.
But I am not so easily drawn in:
More apt to ask who’s truly wisdom’s friend,
And who instead a pedant, peddling rot.⁶⁴

CYDALISE
To pedants I’ll admit we owe contempt,
And I distinguish them from sages true.
Please spare me, dear Monsieur, your bitter scorn,
For those I name, Théophraste and Valère,
Dortidius, they are all widely known...

DAMIS
Of them I know only Dortidius.
So he’s among them?
CYDALISE

Why such great surprise?

DAMIS
I knew him; please excuse my being frank:
It seems back then he hid his game quite well:
A fool he was; he near admitted so.
When we were introduced, despite his smirk,
The dull and hackneyed compliments he spoke,
The sickly sweetness of his honeyed words,
I never found him witty, great or wise.
Despite his tone, and his affected air,
I couldn’t find him worthy of respect.
In short, I saw him merely as a man
Whose cold enthusiasm drew in fools.

CYDALISE
Such prejudice insults your common sense,
For Dortidius brings honour to our land.
By learned men he’s always been esteemed,
I cannot grasp why men speak ill of him.
But let us leave this matter. Speak instead,
Of what I gain by living with the wise:
Of this, I was to tell you, was I not?
And then, perhaps, you’ll censure them again.
No matter; at least see them as they are.
Once prejudice destroyed my very soul;
In vain my reason struggled to be free,
And habit soon returned me to my ways.
The most delusive terrors drove me mad:
Fearing thunder; swearing ghosts were real.
Admitting these absurdities, I blush,
But we are raised on just such futile fears,
And thus they are impressed upon our minds.
The trifling, useless schooling we receive,
Instead of shining light on right and wrong;
It teaches naught but how to hide our faults.
My eyes were opened, though perhaps too late!
Through these most blessed men I am reborn.
Once chance alone determined whom I loved:
My relatives were those I most adored,
According to their closeness to myself.
The same scheme to my learning I applied;
I had all this — and so much more — quite wrong.
But since my soul has found a different road,
Philosophy has purified my mind
Which now can see the whole world as my kin;
Thus moved by sensibility alone,
Humanity is now my only care.

DAMIS
Though this may cause displeasure, to my ear
This word ‘humanity’ is without weight,
And by so many rogues I hear it said
I’d wager they’d agreed to spread its fame.
They want to make it something of a trend.
A worthy and convenient veil, it seems,
To mask the dullness of their point of view.
And lend some beauty to their dreary tones.
Among the men who preach it without end
Are few who have compassion for the poor,
Who show themselves, in times of need, to be
More generous, or humane, or sincere,
To put aside their own profane desires,
To overlook the errors of their kin,
To praise the worthy, to, in short, seek out
The way to be a better citizen;
In faith, to tell the truth, I’d like to swear,
They love the human race, but hate all men.

CYDALISE
You hold against humanity some deep grudge.

DAMIS
The word is much abused; I hate the sound.
It is a sentiment too large for man,
I’ve even seen, in contrast too extreme,
That those who vaunt the notion most of all,
Abandon their own child, yet love the world.66

CYDALISE
We must, Monsieur, have pity on the wise,
For you’re an enemy that they should fear.
Our time and our great land have praised in vain,
’Twas better to be deaf to all their words,
And serve to amplify such envious thoughts.

DAMIS
What good has this philosophy produced?
I really cannot fathom its success.
I see around me self-important fools,
Who take on airs by joining with a sect,
And think thus to have raised themselves in worth.
Establishing a court and devotees,
They claim they save the poor, unfortunate arts,
Quite unaware of all of satire’s stings.
Of mocking laughter, these men take no heed,
Though it may ring about them as they go;
Admiring, praising, loving all abroad,
And all the while degrading their own land,\(^{67}\)
Is this the great success that we must praise?

CYDALISE
Your reasons I admire, they have some weight;
You cite me choice examples which I’ll grant
Are apt to press your cause. But never has
An insult such as this proved any truth.
Think you mere trifles would affect my view?

DAMIS
Madame, I see these horrors more and more.
Mark me, through them our morals will decline,
And I’m appalled by all these philosophes.

CYDALISE
Well then, think what you will, my good Monsieur.
For you it’s clear there’s no cure to be had.
Refusing absolutely to be swayed,
Too credulous for reason to win out.

DAMIS
You think you’ve said it all, with that one word.
That ‘credulous’ is equal to ‘a fool’:
To many men it seems that’s all too clear:
But I’m less certain of this strident view,
Which neither can persuade me, nor strike fear,
My own view I hold firm; if they’re displeased,
My censure’s aimed at them. I know my mind,
Believing what I must, I state it proud.\(^{68}\)
These men may laugh, it makes no odds to me:
Why, let them find enjoyment where they will.
But I in turn will see them as mere fools,
Quite stupid in their incredulity.69

CYDALISE
I praise these words, pronounced in such good sense,
And shan’t deny your right to have your say.
But without straying further from the point,
I know how much I owe to those great men,
Enlightened, whom you deign to persecute.

DAMIS
You owe to them the teaching of great truths?
That I cannot believe. They may destroy,
But nurture no, and certainly not teach.
What fruits expect you from their arguments?
Only too well I see how they will harm:
You’ll follow in their path of sophistry,
Be blinded in the night of Pyrrhic fate.
Renounce your ties to those who do disrupt,
It’s they who persecute, instead of I.
Reject these thoughts, unfitting as they are.
And rediscover, Ma’am, your former self.

CYDALISE
Have you now ended, Sir, your long tirade?
Your reasoning has strength, and much good sense.
I see your merit shines in brilliance;
It changes naught, you shall not have my girl.
Goodbye, Monsieur.

(She leaves.)

DAMIS
Oh God! What shall I do?
SCENE VI

CRISPIN, DAMIS

CRISPIN
Did you good progress make in your attack?
The marriage is back on? For Cydalise...

DAMIS
It’s she to whom I spoke just now, in vain!
I must renounce my dreams of Rosalie.

CRISPIN
But why?

DAMIS
I am dismissed.

CRISPIN
Once and for all?

DAMIS
Once and for all.

CRISPIN
How so? We try so hard
To please, yet she elects Valère instead?
And nothing to be done?

DAMIS
I cannot think.

CRISPIN
Please, have no fear, I see another way.
All we must do is kidnap Rosalie.
The quickest way.
DAMIS

What folly do you voice?
You count on her consent? You know her well,
Thus speak you to me so?

CRISPIN

A mere idea.
But since you have rejected it, we’ll choose
A far more certain path. I’ll find Valère
And speak to him with such a furious force,
That he will surely flee their house tonight.

DAMIS
That seems to me a better plan indeed,
But Cydalise?

CRISPIN

Yes?

DAMIS

She will be outraged.
There’s no more certain way to raise her ire,
And have me sent away for ever more.

CRISPIN

Well then it’s down to my audacious plan,
Through which I shall enlighten Cydalise,
And chase these false indulgers from her house.
Then finally some credit I’ll be due,
And if Marton should lend her help besides,
To reason you will see Madame submit.

DAMIS, initially with joy.
Ah! Crispin... yet, I’m loathe to fully trust...
CRISPIN, emphatically.
I want her torn between Valère and me.
You don’t yet know the reaches of my powers;
My model is Democrites’ Strabo.

DAMIS
You?

CRISPIN
Yes, for I’ve played many, varied roles:
A wise man once employed me as his scribe;
I could have made the royal authors’ list;
At least, that’s what he told me, full of praise.

DAMIS
It’s so?

CRISPIN
Already I had many fans;
But oh! he did me wrong when off he fled,
Eschewing honours, living in the woods.
It’s true he knew not artifice nor plots.
It was philosophy that filled his head,
With righteousness and stubborn innocence.
A cynical and misanthropic beast,
He truly was a mad and singular fool.

DAMIS
How can I listen when I’m in such pain?
SCENE VII

MARTON, DAMIS, CRISPIN

MARTON
Good Sir, we must cast light upon your woes;
Come on, some joy!

DAMIS
And what do you suggest?

MARTON
Well, let’s begin by laughing at your plight.

CRISPIN
Oh yes, let’s laugh.

DAMIS
I’m in such deep despair.

MARTON
Then think not on it; banish your black thoughts.

CRISPIN
I think the woman must have lost her mind.

MARTON
And smile.

DAMIS
Marton...

MARTON
Console yourself, I said.

DAMIS
Whatever can this mean?
MARTON

You’ll soon find out.

Yes, you’re amongst the luckiest of swains.
ACT III

SCENE I

DAMIS, MARTON, CRISPIN

DAMIS
No, I cannot recover from this shock!
Thus it is that they swindle Cydalise?

MARTON
But reason will, I hope, soon win the day.

DAMIS
I doubt it not, this note is far too good!
To what, then, do we owe this lucky find?

MARTON
The simple chance, Sir, of this open door!
For many hours I spied upon his steps;
I always said that he was one of them.
I would have sworn it.

CRISPIN
Frontin is his name:
And by it I’d have recognised the man.

MARTON
But who will see this note finds its true home?

DAMIS
You shall.

MARTON
But no, she’d hate me ever more.
I’d never dare.
DAMIS
Marton...

MARTON
A note like this
To give it to Madame! Ah! no, I can’t,
It would cost me too much.

DAMIS
But...

MARTON
It’s no use;
I shan’t do it.

DAMIS
Nor me.

CRISPIN
And nor will I.

MARTON
But in their presence it must be returned,
Or it will make no odds.

DAMIS
That’s true.

CRISPIN
Silence.
Has she yet seen my face?

MARTON
No, she has not.

CRISPIN
And no one knows my name in all the house?
MARTON
No.

CRISPIN
I’ll present myself and draw them in.
Give me the note, I’ll handle this affair.
Go forth, Sir, I’ll be sure to serve you well.

MARTON
I have the utmost faith in his success.

CRISPIN
And in return I only want Marton.
For such a prize, what won’t I dare to do?

MARTON
Be gone, you two, the company’s on its way.

DAMIS
By you I trust my hopes will be fulfilled.

MARTON
Be gone, I said! Don’t let them see us here!
SCENE II

MARTON, curtseying to the philosophers.
I shall announce you, sirs, to Cydalise.
SCENE III

THÉOPHRASTE, VALÈRE, DORTIDIUS

THÉOPHRASTE, to Valère.
So, Valère, have the marriage plans been made?

VALÈRE
Tonight’s the night. The notary’s on his way.

DORTIDIUS
What splendid news!

THÉOPHRASTE
I wish you all the best!

DORTIDIUS
It’s all down to your merit and your skill.

THÉOPHRASTE
Despite the rage of those who envy you.

DORTIDIUS
And yet, you really could have hoped for more.

VALÈRE
I say!

DORTIDIUS
But yes! It’s no false flattery.

VALÈRE
You mean...

DORTIDIUS
We know the value of your mind.

VALÈRE
Ah! You confuse me with your compliments.
DORTIDIUS  
But yet it’s true.

VALÈRE  
If I had all your gifts,  
If such almighty qualities I claimed,  
Perhaps then I’d be worthy of this praise.

THÉOPHRASTE  
Now does the bride-to-be agree to wed?

VALÈRE  
Reluctantly, but oh! why should I mind?

THÉOPHRASTE  
Of course, with time you’ll make her see good sense.

DORTIDIUS  
Good god, that girl is very hard to please!

VALÈRE  
I know not who at present holds her heart;  
But Cydalise could not be more content.

DORTIDIUS, laughing.  
I never saw a greater fool than her.

VALÈRE  
I cannot wait to wed, and quit this house.  
I should have died had this not ended soon,  
We’ve worked so hard to see our goal achieved.

DORTIDIUS  
And once the knot is tied, I swear I’m done!

THÉOPHRASTE  
I quite agree, I’ve more than had enough!
(To Valère)

But you, at least, with passion as your guide,
Could suffer boredom, driven by your love...

VALÈRE, laughing.
Ah, love! Yes, it was that which spurred me on!

DORTIDIUS
He’ll marry now into ten thousand crowns.

VALÈRE, to Théophraste.
What! Had you thought me some romantic fool?
Ridiculous at my advancing age.
These days this common folly we eschew;
Though pleasure may ensue, it’s gold we seek!

THÉOPHRASTE
Of course he’s right.

DORTIDIUS
And I, too, do concur.

VALÈRE
Without the thought of fortune I should not
Have put up with her presence, dull and dim.
Had she been Venus, I should still have left.
Oh! Such repellant habits I abhor.

THÉOPHRASTE
She should be warned, she must reform her ways;
She never was so tiresome in the past,
What do you think has changed her?

VALÈRE
Why, her book!
THÉOPHRASTE
And still she thinks to publish it?

VALÈRE
Why yes.

THÉOPHRASTE
If she does not change soon, she’ll be locked up.

DORTIDIUS
Perhaps; though such a thing would help our cause,
Should one day we desire her to suppress.

THÉOPHRASTE
You’ve read her essay on the work of kings?

VALÈRE
Don’t speak of it! I’ve read it many times!
A storm I have repeatedly endured.

DORTIDIUS, earnestly.
Between us three, it’s truly her best work.
But is it by her own hand?

VALÈRE
Why, you jest!

DORTIDIUS, still serious.
I swear, I found it excellent!

VALÈRE
Ha ha!

DORTIDIUS
I tell you, it is good!

VALÈRE
Don’t make me laugh!
It’s naught but incoherent silliness.

DORTIDIUS
Were I as wrong as you, I’d hold my tongue.

VALÈRE
Your heated tone disturbs me not one jot.

DORTIDIUS, angrily.
So, you pronounce and we must all agree?

VALÈRE
You’d think you were its author by your tone!

DORTIDIUS
If only that were true...

VALÈRE
Hard luck for you!

DORTIDIUS, angrier.
But my good sir!

VALÈRE
I’m speaking in good faith.

DORTIDIUS
I might be forced to tell you some hard truths!

VALÈRE
It always comes to insults when you’re wrong!

DORTIDIUS
You overstep the mark!\(^3\)

VALÈRE
What’s more, I laugh!
DORTIDIUS, furious.
Ah! That’s enough!

THÉOPHRASTE
Oh! Good sirs, please calm down.

DORTIDIUS
Most kind of you, to mock me quite so much!

THÉOPHRASTE, standing between them.
My friends, we’re not the pedants of Molière. Allow me please, to settle this dispute.

VALÈRE
I’m right!

THÉOPHRASTE, to Valère.
Without a doubt.

DORTIDIUS
And I’m not wrong.

THÉOPHRASTE, to Dortidius.
Of course you’re not. But here you might be heard, Dear Cydalise could take us by surprise.

DORTIDIUS
Esteem should always be our dearest guide...

THÉOPHRASTE
It’s not about considering ourselves; We know each other well: but must take care, At least, to make it seem that we are friends. By such appearances we shall prevail, And we are lost, unless we all unite. Forget these minor quarrels, for the cause. But hark! I hear her step. Forget this row.
SCENE IV

THE PHILOSOPHES, CYDALISE

CYDALISE, holding a book.
Excuse my lateness; my thoughts were of you
Such moments are the sweetest of the day.
Let’s sit, good sirs. Ah, Valère, is that you?
The notary’s proposal has arrived,
I’m sure you will be pleased.

VALÈRE

My dearest wish,
Madame, you know, is by this sacred bond,
Our friendship may be strengthened all the more.

CYDALISE
I owe to you the joy that fills my life,
And thank you for it dearly. But good sirs,
I heard you speak with rage. What could it be,
That’s caused this dreadful rift? I thought to hear
A quarrel amongst you three?

VALÈRE, slightly embarrassed.

It’s true.

CYDALISE

Tell me
The topic you discussed with such concern?

VALÈRE
I must confess, it’s you of whom we talked.

CYDALISE
Of me?
VALÈRE
    Yes, you: our fervour is the proof.

CYDALISE
What is it then?

VALÈRE
    Alas, I cannot say.
    I know not how to praise you to your face.
    Oh, speak, my friends.

THÉOPHRASTE
    We may?

VALÈRE
    But yes, of course.

THÉOPHRASTE
In centuries gone by we searched for one
Comparable to you. I chose to cite
Aspasia, but this enraged Monsieur.

VALÈRE
I find it quite outrageous; here’s my proof:
It’s true, in Greece, Aspasia shone bright,
But in that age philosophy was young.
The people, struck by its most radiant light;
Was bound to come and worship at its source;
In those days all was new. Most common gifts
Could shine with little work, in those crude times;
But nowadays our knowledge has progressed;
And it is hard, when we’ve achieved so much,
To set ourselves beside those famous men
By whom barbarity was changed to light,
And thus I cannot bear, without a fight,
To hear Aspasia compared with you.

(To Théophraste)

Think of the times, and see then where you stand.

THÉOPHRASTE
Comparisons are never without fault.

VALÈRE
Oh, you were wrong.

THÉOPHRASTE
I know it, and I blush.

CYDALISE
And on this subject do not ask my thoughts;
I know too much...

VALÈRE, with feeling.
We know you are sublime.

DORTIDIUS
These are our feelings too; but hear his tone!
He beautifies them.

CYDALISE, enthusiastically.
Oh, indeed he does!

VALÈRE, kissing her hand.
Oh, pardon me then, please, this gaiety.

CYDALISE
Though I should scold, his words disarm me so:
I can’t resist, I fall under his spell.77

DORTIDIUS
Of rousing interest he is truly king.
VALÈRE
Oh, how indulgent genius can be.

CYDALISE
Monsieur Dortidius, have you some news?

DORTIDIUS
I care nothing for kings, nor for their strife:
Nor siege nor fight means anything to me.
To idlers I leave these state affairs.
For my own land, I have but little care:
The truly wise are citizens of the world.

CYDALISE
Our homeland we hold dear, it’s our sole link...

DORTIDIUS
To be mere ‘citizen’ constrains the mind.
Far from the torments that divide the world,
The wise man must reside at home in peace;
His eyes divert from objects of dismay;
As sole king, he both rules and legislates;
There’s naught at all could shake his happiness;
It’s for great men to calm the woes they cause.

THÉOPHRASTE
His view is of a philosophe, and just.

CYDALISE
His mind never appears to be at fault.

VALÈRE
Madame, he’s right, the mind of such a man
Should not concern itself with politics.
These wars and treaties, trifles that they are,
Sink bit by bit into the gulf of time.
Pale into nothing, under genius’s flame.
If one may speak without false modesty
Excepting you and us, there’s not one soul
Who’s worthy of an honest tête-à-tête.

CYDALISE
Yes, you are right, these things aren’t worth our time.

THÉOPHRASTE
We’ll leave them then for much more vulgar minds.

CYDALISE
I will not challenge your authority.
Speaking of which, talk we of something new?

VALÈRE
There’s just one thing.

CYDALISE
A masterpiece, no doubt?

VALÈRE
It’s a discovery, a new approach,
That one of us has just begun to trace
A genre in which genius shines through.

CYDALISE
A tragedy?

VALÈRE
Of the domestic kind.
That’s what we seek.

CYDALISE
I’d fear a bad review;
With novel things, critique is always right.
The public?

VALÈRE
    Well, we know they are mere sheep;
But whatsoever their verdict, we’ll fight back.

CYDALISE
I’m not so sure, I fear old tastes don’t change.

VALÈRE
It’s true, the first few days will be a risk
But we shall make a noise to deafen men,
Our friends will move from loge to loge in turn,
Their cries of praise inciting all to cheer;
Our suppers show already such success.

CYDALISE
Why, that I had not thought, but you are right.

VALÈRE
So many do devote themselves to us,
Low-ranking authors praise us with such pride,
I’m sure that if we work a little more,
Then quickly they’ll abandon all good sense.

THÉOPHRASTE
Ha ha! You tell the truth just as it is.

VALÈRE
No Sir, it’s without jest these things are said.

CYDALISE
And will this work be debuted soon enough?
VALÈRE
We’re occupied by more important tasks.

CYDALISE
What tasks?

VALÈRE
An author of a comedy,
Will put us on the stage, they say.

CYDALISE
How bold.

DORTIDIUS, vehemently.
Play us! But that’s a crime against the State!
Play us!

VALÈRE
But we will block this bold attack.

CYDALISE
The audience will protest...

DORTIDIUS
I fear not:
We’ve misled them: perhaps they’ll make us pay?

CYDALISE
The magistrates will rise up in dismay.

THÉOPHRASTE
We’ve oft had muddy dealings with the law.

CYDALISE
The Court then...?

VALÈRE
It will never take our part,
For we have wronged it often in the past.

DORTIDIUS
Then with the author we must reason, fast.

THÉOPHRASTE
We’ll see if he’s afraid of us, at least.

VALÈRE
Our last resort is to wait out the storm,
’Til then let us defame both man and work;
Let’s take revenge by arming all those fools,
With someone else’s hand take striking blows.
Might we not buy up actors to our cause?
We’d have supporters everywhere backstage.  
We’ll start some whisperings, cause a cabale,
Show ourselves in the loges, before the crowd.
I’m sure our faces have but to be spied:
The public fear us.

CYDALISE
Yes, and we’ll prevail.
But say, our good bookseller’s late indeed.
He should be here, what might retain him still?

DORTIDIUS
Perhaps he’s waiting.

CYDALISE
We must bring him in.

THÉOPHRASTE
Ah, he is here.
SCENE V

A LACKEY, CYDALISE, THE PHILOSOPHES

LACKEY

Madame?

CYDALISE

Has no-one come
About my books?

LACKEY

No-one.

CYDALISE, with an agitated movement.

Then could it be
A secret order’s had them carried off?
Call Valentin!

LACKEY

He’s ill, and close to death.

DORTIDIUS

Our students of anatomy will fete
His loss: their gain.

CYDALISE

He really ails?

LACKEY

Indeed.

A desperate man, Madame, nigh in the grave.

DORTIDIUS

Poor Valentin! A man I most respect,
And whose dissection I’d have carried out.

(To Cydalise)
But you were just about, I think, to speak;  
Begin your lesson; yet you still demur?

CYDALISE
This project, for my part, is pure caprice...

LACKEY
Your man is here.

(He leaves.)
SCENE VI

M. PROPICE, CYDALISE, THE PHILOSOPHES

CYDALISE

Come in Monsieur Propice.
Have you new tomes?

M. PROPICE

Well, I don’t seek them out.
Ma’am, have you read *Les Bijoux indiscrets*?
A tale of philosophic jollity;
At least that’s what I’m told.

CYDALISE

A farce indeed.
But it’s not new.

M. PROPICE

Still popular, I’d say.

CYDALISE

And next?

M. PROPICE

Know you the *Lettre sur les sourds*?

CYDALISE

I have it from the man himself!

DORTIDIOUS

What art!

M. PROPICE

You wouldn’t want, I think, *Père de famille*?
Not cut from the same cloth.
DORTIDIUS, *ironically.*

And you would know.

M. PROPICE
It’s what the public says; I think it’s true.
And as for Toussaint’s *Mœurs,* I do recall
I sold it to you.

*(He reads the titles)*

*Réflexions sur l’âme?*

CYDALISE
Let’s see. I know it. Is that all?

M. PROPICE
Well, no.

*L’Interprétation de la nature.*

CYDALISE
Yes!

A wondrous book!

DORTIDIUS
Divine!

THEOPHRASTE
A vital text!

CYDALISE
I’ll keep it, for I passed my copy on.

M. PROPICE
Here’s the *Discours sur l’inégalité.*

CYDALISE, *taking it.*
I shall reread it with avidity.
And what’s this other work I see on top?
M. PROPICE
Why that’s the *Petit Prophète,* nothing, Ma’am.

CYDALISE
Ah! I recall; an entertaining read.

M. PROPICE
A never-ending stream of pleasant wit.
Require you nothing else of me today?

CYDALISE
I’ll keep this one. Good day, Monsieur Propice.
SCENE VII

CYDALISE, THE PHILOSOPHES

CYDALISE
And now, once more I’ll read my favourite tome!

VALÈRE
What, *Inequality*? That’s mine as well.

THÉOPRASTE
The book’s divine; returns all men again,
To animals, as we all are at heart!
Through making laws man has enslaved himself.
He’d lead a better life amongst the trees!

CYDALISE
Myself, I have no stronger a desire,
Than to return to our most natural state.

THÉOPRASTE
Our minds by error shrouded now persist,
By prejudice from progress we’re held back.
Some erudites are cut from faulty cloth...!

CYDALISE
What now Marton?
SCENE VIII

MARTON, CYDALISE, THE PHILOSOPHES

MARTON

Madame, a philosophe
Has asked to speak with you.

CYDALISE

His name?

MARTON

Crispin.

CYDALISE

A most uncommon name.

DORTIDIUS

 Quite so!

CYDALISE

And yet,
What’s in a name? Heavens! What a surprise!
SCENE IX

CRISPIN, CYDALISE, THE PHILOSOPHES, MARTON

CRISPIN, on all fours.86
Madame, there’s naught to which I take offense.
No longer do I feel I must conform,
This is the glad conclusion of my thoughts.
My ardent love for la philosophie,
Has made me choose the state of quadruped!
On these four columns I am most at ease,
And fewer fools I see to harm my eyes.

CYDALISE, to Valère.
His point of view is quite original.

VALÈRE
And quite amusing.

MARTON

I think I’m in love!

CRISPIN

In civilised society all is lost:
Our health, our happiness, our virtue too.
And thus I am again an animal;
My diet is both simple and restrained.87
One cannot be content with less, it’s true.
But by more frugal life, my soul’s enriched.
Great fortune always seemed to me unjust;
Now I am happier and more robust,
Than those whom luxury degenerates,
The price of which their wives know all too well.
Informed of how you welcome in the wise,
Madame, I came to pay you great hommage,
And to invite these men to take my lead,
Perhaps, should they be tempted by my case.

CYDALISE
You know, I think for all his rambling words,
I do discern some sense.

DORTIDIUS
And I agree!

MARTON
As great a philosophe as I have seen!

THEOPHRASTE
He’s what we sought: a man of solid views
Who, standing up to critics, quite convinced,
Eschews mere words, and lives his system out.

CYDALISE
A man like that seems worthy of respect;
Yet prejudice prevents my full assent.

CRISPIN
You find my resolution quite bizarre.

CYDALISE
I must say your example’s somewhat rare;
But your enthusiasm gives you charm;
You are a philosophe, in every sense.

CRISPIN
I pay no mind to fashions or to fads;
I’ve always thought that clothing served a use,
And nothing more. More so in humid climes...
THEOPHRASTE
Sir, here we judge a man by what he’s worth
And not by what he wears.

CRISPIN
You’re truly wise.

CYDALISE
But who is this who comes?
SCENE X

M. CARONDAS, CYDALISE, THE PHILOSOPHES, CRISPIN, MARTON

M. CARONDAS, stealing constant glances at Crispin, and looking uncomfortable.

  My work is done,
Madame... and soon... the notary will come.

CYDALISE
What’s wrong?

M. CARONDAS, indicating Crispin, who is hiding a little behind Cydalise.
Who is that strange, amusing beast?

CYDALISE
A worthy philosophe, who’ll join the feast.

CRISPIN
In truth... Madame...

M. CARONDAS, to Valère.
  Oh damn and blast it all,
They’ve found us out!

VALÈRE
  But what?

M. CARONDAS
  That’s Crispin, Sir.
The valet of Damis.

CRISPIN, standing.
  Yes, yes, Frontin:
Speak up; it’s him indeed.

CYDALISE
  What’s all this fuss?
CRISPIN, indicating Valère.
Your secretary is this monsieur’s valet.
I took on this, the very same disguise,
To bring to you a most important note,\(^88\)
(\emph{indicating M. Carondas})
Found in this rascal’s house.

CYDALISE, opening the note.
I know this hand;
(\emph{To Valère})
It’s yours, Monsieur.

CRISPIN
Pray, read it, Madame, do.

VALÈRE, to the philosophes.
Ah! All is lost!

CYDALISE, reads aloud, but in a changed voice, which becomes weaker and weaker.
‘My dear Frontin, I enclose the collection of impertinences that Cydalise calls her book. Keep flattering that madwoman, who is impressed by your wise reputation. Théophraste and Dortidius have just informed me of an excellent plan which will turn her head, and to which your involvement will be of paramount importance if it is to succeed. Her ridiculous fancies, her quirks, her...’

CRISPIN
Her voice is weakening,
She will not read much more, I’m sure of that.

M. CARONDAS
Ah, traitor, Crispin!

DORTIDIUS, to Valère.
I am sorely vexed,
But we’re found out.

VALÈRE, quietly.

What terrible disgrace!
What can we say? Let’s go.

CYDALISE

Read on, Monsieur;
And then give your excuses, if you dare.
So, I’m the victim of your flattering plans?
On the cusp of disgrace, now I can see!
What have I done for you to treat me so?
Go, thankless guests; don’t show yourselves again.
Your panicked state’s revenge enough for me
Though others may not treat you quite so well.
Leave; grant the wish of my affronted heart:
Be gone.

VALÈRE, furious.

Oh, damn it all.

M. CARONDAS

Our cue to leave.

(They leave.)

CYDALISE

So cruel! How they had caught me in their web!
SCENE XI

DAMIS, ROSALIE, CYDALISE, MARTON, CRISPIN

CYDALISE
Now Damis, come; I sense what you’re to say
Will show to me just how far I’ve been blind.

DAMIS
They’re now unmasked; the time of error’s past.
And punished, they no longer need be feared,
Madame, you have no further cause for woe.

CYDALISE
To these infernal men I sacrificed,
All my most sacred duties, and my friends,
How your revenge is sweet! Dear daughter mine,
I recognise my error; please forgive;
To right my wrongs, I give to you Damis.

DAMIS
And I, Madame, will love you as a son.

ROSALIE
My wishes have come true, Maman returned!

CRISPIN
To now complete this tale, I’ll wed Marton.

MARTON, to the audience.
The wise men of our time we’ve shown to you:
Unmasking all that’s false, we praise the true.