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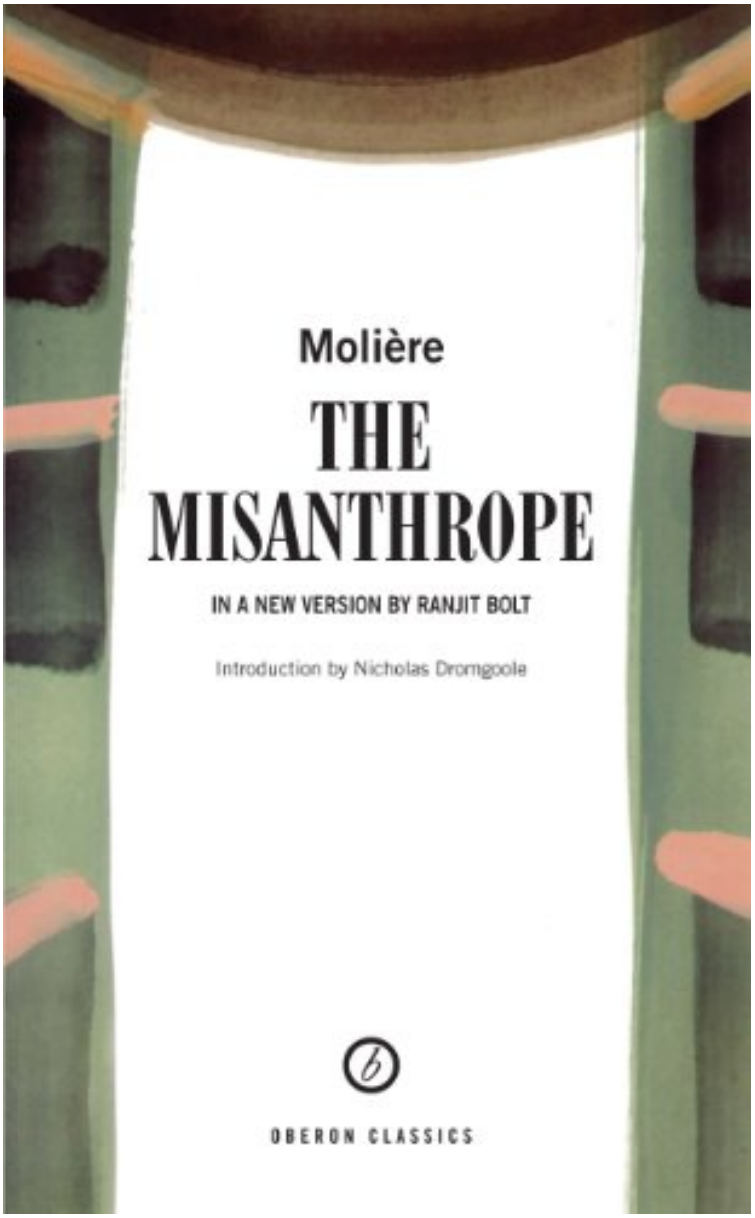
The Misanthrope



Par Jean-Baptiste Poquelin Moliere, Ranjit Bolt
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(Mobile ebook) The Misanthrope

Par Jean-Baptiste Poquelin Moliere, Ranjit Bolt : The Misanthrope before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Misanthrope:

Description : Description du produitTragdies et comdies du grand sicle, marivaudages, drames romantiques, pices bourgeoises ou de boulevard, thtre de l'absurde, critures contemporaines.... La collection Comdie-Franaise vous propose le rpertoire de la maison de Molire dans des mises en scne de rfrence. --diteur

Prsentation de l'diteurFirst performed in Paris in 1666, The Misanthrope is one of Molires great comic masterpieces. Exasperated by the corruption of society, the cynical but noble Alceste wrestles with his love for the wordly and coquettish Climne.This version of The Misanthrope was first performed at the Piccadilly Theatre, London, by The Peter Hall Company, starring Michael Pennington, Elaine Paige, and Peter Bowles. Ranjit Bolt has translated many of the worlds masterpieces of theatre including works by Sophocles,

Goldoni, Corneille, Beaumarchais and Brecht. His highly successful translation of Molires The School for Wives (The Peter Hall Company) ran in the West End for six months..frComment Alceste, qui n'aime que la vrit, la sincrit, la droiture, lui qui est la rigidit faite homme, comment a-t-il pu s'prendre de Climne, qui reprsente tout ce qu'il dteste: l'hypocrisie, la lgret, le persiflage, les apparences? Il a pourtant bien succomb aux charmes de la jeune veuve, et voudrait qu'elle ne se consacre qu' lui, qu'elle renonce cette mondanit qu'il hait tant. videmment, elle n'en a aucunement l'intention: c'est tout l'enjeu de la pice, qui orchestre le spectacle des bassesses, des manoeuvres, mais surtout des faiblesses des deux protagonistes. Difficile alors de dire qui a tort et qui a raison... Pice part, avec Dom Juan, dans la production de Molire, Le Misanthrope reste une comdie, mais une comdie grinante, qui fait tomber les masques et constitue une peinture sur le vif de la nature humaine. C'est sans doute pour cela que les plus grands metteurs en scne ont voulu s'attaquer cette pice et les plus grands comdiens se mesurer ses rles. --Karla Manuele ExtraitABOUT THE AUTHORSTITLE PAGECOPYRIGHTSELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHYINTRODUCTIONMolire is probably the greatest and best-loved French author, and comic author, who ever lived. To the reader as well as the spectator, today as well as three centuries ago, the appeal of his plays is immediate and durable; they are both instantly accessible and inexhaustible. His rich resources make it hard to decide, much less to agree, on the secret of his greatness. After generations had seen him mainly as a moralist, many critics today have shifted the stress to the director and actor whose life was the comic stage; but all ages have rejoiced in three somewhat overlapping qualities of his: comic inventiveness, richness of fabric, and insight.His inventiveness is extraordinary. An actor-manager-director-playwright all in one, he knew and loved the stage as few have done, and wrote with it and his playgoing public always in mind. In a medium in which sustained power is one of the rarest virtues, he drew on the widest imaginable range, from the broadest slapstick to the subtlest irony, to carry out the arduous and underrated task of keeping an audience amused for five whole acts. Working usually under great pressure of time, he took his materials where he found them, yet always made them his own.The fabric of his plays is rich in many ways: in the intense life he infuses into his characters; in his constant preoccupation with the comic mask, which makes most of his protagonists themselvesconsciously or unconsciouslyplay a part, and leads to rich comedy when their nature forces them to drop the mask; and in the weight of seriousness and even poignancy that he dares to include in his comic vision. Again and again he leads us from the enjoyable but shallow reaction of laughing at a fool to recognizing in that fool others whom we know, and ultimately ourselves; which is surely the truest and deepest comic catharsis.Molires insight makes his characters understandable and gives a memorable inevitability to his comic effects. He is seldom completely realistic, of course; his characters, for example, tend to give themselves away more generously and laughably than is customary in life; but it is their true selves they give away. It is an obvious trick, and not very realistic, to have Orgon in Tartuffe (Act I, sc. 4) reply four times to the account of his wifes illness with the question And Tartuffe? and reply, again four times, to each report of Tartuffes gross health and appetite, Poor fellow! But it shows us, rapidly and comically, that Orgons obsession has closed his mind and his ears to anything but what he wants to see and hear. In the following scene, it may be unrealistic to have him in one speech (ll. 276279) boast of learning from Tartuffe such detachment from worldly things that he could see his whole family die without concern, and in the very next speech (ll. 306310) praise Tartuffe for the scrupulousness that led him to reproach himself for killing a flea in too much anger. Butagain apart from the sheer comedyit is a telling commentary on the distortion of values that can come from extreme points of view. One of Molires favorite authors, Montaigne, had written about victims of moral hubris: They want to get out of themselves and escape from the man. That is madness: instead of changing into angels, they change into beasts. Molire is presenting the same idea dramatically, as he does with even more power later (Act IV, sc. 3, l. 1293), when Orgons daughter has implored him not to force her to marry the repulsive Tartuffe, and he summons his will to resist her with these words:Be firm, my heart! No human weakness now!These moments of truth, these flashes of unconscious self-revelation that plunge us into the very center of an obsession, abound in Molire, adding to our insight even as they reveal his. And even as he caricatures aspects of himself in the reforming Alceste or in the jealous older lover Arnolphe, so he imparts to his moments of truth not only the individuality of the particular obsession but also the universality of our common share in it.Molire is one of those widely known public figures whose private life remains veiled. In his own time gossip was rife, but much of it comes from his enemies and is suspect. Our chief other source is his plays; but while these hint at his major concerns and lines of meditation, we must beware of reading them like avowals or his roles like disguised autobiography.*He was born Jean-Baptiste Poquelin in Paris early in 1622 and baptized on January 15, the

first son of a well-to-do bourgeois dealer in tapestry and upholstery. In 1631 his father bought the position of valet de chambre tapissier ordinaire du roi, and six years later obtained the right to pass it on at his own death to his oldest son, who took the appropriate oath of office at the age of fifteen. Together with many sons of the best families, Jean-Baptiste received an excellent education from the Jesuit Fathers of the Collge de Clermont He probably continued beyond the basic course in rhetoric to two years of philosophy and then law school, presumably at Orlans.Suddenly, as it appears to us, just as he was reaching twenty-one, he resigned his survival rights to his fathers court position, and with them the whole future that lay ahead of him; drew his share in the estate of his dead mother and a part of his own prospective inheritance; and six months later joined in forming, with and around Madeleine Bjart, a dramatic company, the Illustre-Thtre. In September 1643 they rented a court-tennis court to perform in; in October they played in Rouen; in January 1644 they opened in Paris; in June young Poquelin was named head of the troupe, and signed himself, for the first time we know of, de Molire.Molires was an extraordinary decision. Apart from the financial hazards, his new profession stood little above pimping or stealing in the public eye and automatically involved minor excommunication from the Church. To write for the theater, especially tragedy, carried no great onus; to be an actor, especially in comedy and farce, was a proof of immorality. Though Richelieus passion for the stage had improved its prestige somewhat, this meant only that a few voices were raised to maintain its possible innocence against the condemnation of the vast majority.Obviously young Molire was in love with the theater, and had to act. He may also have been already in love with Madeleine Bjart; their contemporaries were probably right in thinking them lovers, though all we actually know is that they were staunch colleagues and business partners. Their loyalty was tested from the first. Although the Bjarts raised all the money they could, after a year and a half in Paris the company failed and had to break up; Molire was twice imprisoned in the Chtelet for debt; he and the Bjarts left Paris to try their luck in the provinces. For twelve years they were on the road, mainly in the south.For the first five of these they joined the company, headed by Du Fresne, of the Duc dpernon in Guyenne. When dpernon dropped them, Molire became head of the troupe. From 1653 to 1657 they were in the service of a great prince of the blood, the Prince de Conti, until his conversion. Even with a noble patron, the life was nomadic and precarious, and engagements hard to get. However, the company gradually made a name for itself and prospered. Molire gained a rich firsthand knowledge of life on many levels. In the last few years of their wanderings he tried his hand as a playwright with such plays as Ltourdi and Le Dpit amoureux.At last in 1658 they obtained another chance to play in the capital. On October 24 they appeared before young Louis XIV, his brother, and the court, in the guard room of the old Louvre, in a performance of Corneilles tragedy Nicomde, which Molire followed with his own comedy The Doctor in Love. Soon they became the Troupe de Monsieur (the Kings brother) and were installed by royal order in the Thtre du Petit-Bourbon. Though they still performed tragedies, they succeeded more and more in comedy, in which Molire was on his way to recognition as the greatest actor of his time.Within a year he made his mark also as a playwright with The Ridiculous Prcieuses (November 18, 1659), which, though little more than a sketch, bore the stamp of his originality, keen observation, and rich comic inventiveness.* Nearly thirty-eight, Molire was to have thirteen more years to live, and was to live them as though he knew this was all. To his responsibilities as director and actor he added a hectic but glorious career as a very productive playwright, author of thirty-two comedies that we know, of which a good third are among the comic masterpieces of world literature. The stress of his many roles, of deadlines, and of controversy, is well depicted in The Versailles Impromptu. Success led to successand often to more controversybut never to respite. He was to be carried off the stage to his deathbed. No doubt he wanted it that way, or almost that way; for probably no man has ever been more possessed by the theater.On February 20, 1662, at the age of forty, he married the twenty-year-old Armande Bjart, a daughter (according to the mostly spiteful contemporaries) or sister (according to the official documents) of Madeleine. Though what we know of their domestic life is almost nothing, contemporary gossip, a friends letter, and Molires own preoccupation in several plays with a jealous older man in love with a flighty young charmer, combine to suggest an uneasy relationship. They had two sons who died in infancy and a daughter who survived. The King himself and his sister-in-law (Madame) were godfather and godmother to the first boyno doubt to defend Molire against a charge, or rumor, that he had married his own daughter.When the Petit-Bourbon theater was torn down in October 1660 to make way for the new faade of the Louvre, things looked bad; but the King granted the company the use of Richelieus great theater, the Palais-Royal, which remained Molires until his death. An early success there was his regular, elaborate verse comedy, The School for Husbands. Within a year of his marriage he wrote his first great play and one of his most popular, The School for

Wives. It aroused much controversy; when Molire published it, he dedicated it to Madame; the King gave him the support he sought in the form of a pension of one thousand francs for this excellent comic poet. The Critique of the School for Wives and The Versailles Impromptu (June and October 1663) completed Molires victory in the eyes of the public.However, his attack on extreme piety and hypocrisy in Tartuffe showed him the strength of his enemies. The first three-act version, performed in May 1664, was promptly banned. For the next five years much of his time and energy went into the fight to get it played: petitions, private readings, revisions, private performances. In August 1667 a five-act version entitled The Impostor was allowed a second public performancethen also banned. Only in February 1669 was the version that we know put on, with enormous success; and this time it was on the program to stay.Meanwhile Molire had hit back at his enemies in 1665 in Don Juan, which he soon withdrew. In August of that year his company became The Kings Troupe, and his pension was raised to six thousand francs. A year later he completed his greatest and most complex play, The Misanthrope, which met only a modest success, and the light but brilliant farce that often served as a companion piece, The Doctor in Spite of Himself. In 1668 he displayed the bitter comic profundities of The Miser; and in the last four years of his lifestill to mention only his finest playsThe Would-Be Gentleman, The Mischievous Machinations of Scapin, The Learned Women, and The Imaginary Invalid.Molires last seven years were dogged by pulmonary illness. A bad bout in early 1666 and another in 1667 led him to accept a milk diet and spend much of the next four years apart from his wife in his house in Auteuil. The year before his own death saw those of his old friend Madeleine Bjart and later of his second son. As his health grew worse, he composedcharacteristicallyhis final gay comedy about a healthy hypochondriac. Before its fourth performance, on February 17, 1673, he felt very ill; his wife and one of his actors urged him not to play that evening; he replied that the whole company depended a lot on him and that it was a point of honor to go on. He got through his part, in spite of one violent fit of coughing. A few hours later he was dead. Since he had not been able, while dying, to get a priest to come and receive his formal renunciation of his profession, a regular religious burial was denied at first, and later grudgingly grantedat night, with no notice, ceremony, or serviceonly after his widows plea to the King. He died and was buried as he had livedas an actor.Translations of Molire abound. Two of the most available, both complete, are by H. Baker and J. Miller (1739) and Henri Van Laun (187576). The former is satisfactory, but its eighteenth-century flavor is not always Molires; the latter is dull. Better for the modern reader are the versions of selected plays by John Wood (1953 and 1959), George Graveley (1956), and especially three others.Curtis Hidden Page has translated eight well-chosen plays (Putnam, 1908, 2 vols.) which include three verse comedies done into unrhymed verse. Though it sometimes lacks sparkle, his version is always intelligent and responsible.Morris Bishops recent translation of nine plays (one for Crofts Classics, 1950, eight for Modern Library, 1957) is much the best we have for all but two. His excellent selection includes six in prose (Prcieuses, Critique, Impromptu, Physician in Spite of Himself, Would-Be Gentleman, Would-Be Invalid) and three done into unrhymed verse (School for Wives, Tartuffe, Misanthrope). His knowledge of Molire and talent for comic verse make his translation lively and racy, and his occasional liberties are usually well taken.Richard Wilbur has translated Molires two greatest verse plays, The Misanthrope and Tartuffe, into rhymed verse (Harcourt, Brace, World, Inc., 1955 and 1963). They are the best Molire we have in English. My sense of their excellence is perhaps best stated personally. I have long wanted to try my hand at translating Molire. When the Wilbur Misanthrope appeared, I decided not to attempt it unless I thought I would do that play either better or at least quite differently. When I finally tried it, I was surprised to find how different I wanted to make it. Wilburs end product is superb; but in his Misanthrope I sometimes miss the accents of Molire.* His Tartuffe seems to me clearly better, since it follows the original closely even in detail. Both are beautiful translations. Again and again my quest for sense and for rhymes has led me to the same solution that Wilbur found earlier.The question whether foreign rhyme should be translated into English rhyme has been often debated and seems to me infinitely debatable. I think a different answer may be appropriate for each poet, and perhaps for each translator. Page explains his rejection of rhyme as something unnatural to good English dramatic verse; but he also recognizes that he often found it harder to avoid rhyme than to use it, and that unrhymed verse is more difficult than rhymed to write well. I think this last point explains my disappointment at some of his and Bishops lines. Against the point that rhymed dramatic verse is not natural in English, I would argue that it seems to me almost necessary for Molire. Wilbur has made the case brilliantly in his introduction to The Misanthrope, pointing to certain specific effectsmock tragedy, musical poetic relationships of words, even the redundancy and logic of the argumentwhich demand rhyme. In my opinion, rhyme affects what Molire says as well as the way he says it

enough to make it worthwhile to use it in English, and the loss in precision need not be great.Fidelity in meter, however, seems clearly to mean putting Molires alexandrines into English iambic pentameter, and, although allowing some liberties with syllable-count as natural to English, holding rather closely to the precise count that the practice of Molires day demanded. However, this reduction in length, while translating (which normally lengthens) even from French into English (which normally shortens), often forces the translator to choose between Molires ever-recurring initial ands (and occasional buts) and some key word in the same line. I have usually chosen to retain the key word; but at times I deliberately have not, for fear of losing too much of Molires generally easy flow and making him too constipated and sententious.Molires characteristic language is plain, correct, functional, often argumentative, not slangy but conversational. Since in Frenchdespite many savory archaismshe does not generally strike the modern reader as at all archaic, he should not in English. For most of his writing, verse and prose, I have sought an English that is familiar and acceptable today but not obviously anachronistic.However, there is much truth in Mornets statement that Molire is one of the few great writers who has no style, but rather all the styles of all his characters. The departures from the norm noted above are as common as the norm itself. The earthy talk of peasants and servants is in constant (and sometimes direct) contrast with the lofty affectation of bluestockings and prcieuses and the pomposity of pedants; manner as well as matter distinguish a Don Juan from a Sganarelle, Lucile and Clonte from Nicole and Covielle; Alcestes explosiveness colors his language and enhances his opposition to Philinte; Charlotte even speaks better French to Don Juan than to her peasant swain Pierrot. To render this infinite variety the translator must call to his aid all the resources of his languageanachronistic or notthat he can command.A special problem is that of dialect, as in Don Juan and The Doctor in Spite of Himself. To the dialect of the Ile de France that Molire uses, familiar to his audience, I see no satisfactory equivalent in English. Since part of the dialect humor rests on bad grammar (javons and the like) and rustic oaths, I have tried to suggest this by similar, mainly countrified, lapses and exclamations.My aim, in short, has been to put Molire as faithfully as I could into modern English, hewing close to his exact meaning and keeping all I could of his form and his verve.The edition I have mainly relied on for this translation is that of Molires uvres by Eugne Despois and Paul Mesnard (Paris: Hachette, 18731900, 14 vols.). I have followed the standard stage directions and division of the play into scenes. The stage directions do not normally indicate entrances and exits as such, since in the French tradition these are shown in print by a change of scenes and signalized only in that way.I should like to acknowledge three debts: to earlier translators, especially Page, Bishop, and Wilbur; to Sanford R. Kadet for his thorough reading of the Tartuffe and valuable suggestions; and, as always, to my wife, Katharine M. Frame, for her ready and critical ear and her unfailing encouragement.DONALD M. FRAME COLUMBIA UNIVERSITYThe MisanthropeTHE MISANTHROPEA verse comedy in five acts, first performed June 4, 1666, at the Thtre du Palais-Royal in Paris by Molires company, the Troupe du Roi. In his privilege to print the play Molire used the subtitle Or, The Melancholy Lover (Ou lAtrabilaire amoureux); but he later abandoned this. Molire played Alceste; his wife played Climne; the distribution of the other roles is not known. The play was not a box-office success; after two months it was withdrawn in favor of The Doctor in Spite of Himself, and during Molires lifetime it was performed only a few times a year. However, it won many admirers from the first, and Boileau hailed it as Molires best.Within a century Jean-Jacques Rousseau brought out the possibilities of a heroic, if not a tragic, Alceste in what he considers Molires masterpiece. The authors aim, he argues, is to make virtue ridiculous by pandering to the shallow and vicious tastes of the man of the world; the play would have gained in beauty and consistency if Alcestewith whom he obviously identifies himselfhad been meek toward injustice to himself, indignant against public vices; and Philinte the converse. The notion of a tragic Alceste, though not common today, may be dormant, not dead; in any case, it has had a long and vigorous life.Yet Rousseau was quite right in seeing that Molire had made the play a comedy, and a comedy of virtue. As Ramon Fernandez shows, in the three great plays of the mid-1660s Molire was clearly testing the limits of the comic, struggling to enlarge its domain. In Don Juan and Tartuffe he had shown that vice is not immune to comic treatment; here he does the same with virtue. Perhaps even more than these two others, this play shows just how serious a Molire comedy can be. Hence the tension of the play, the problems it raises, the contradictory views it has aroused.Of Molires comic intent there is no reasonable doubt; nor is there much more of his success. Playing the leading comic role (here, of Alceste), as he always did, from the very first scene he makes this fully clear. Alcestes constant excessiveness is demonstrated from the start: it may be honorable to protest against the white lies of social life, but it is comic to urge suicideto ones best friend at thatas the only atonement for such a crime; the objective correlative that T. S. Eliot speaks of is clearly

inadequate. An unconscious but tyrannical egoist, Alceste is always full of himself; his speech abounds in what in English would be the vertical pronoun, characteristically followed by a statement of how he wants men to be. In his first two long speeches (ll. 1428, 4164) he gives his own motives away as he moves from the good reason of pure principle to the hatred he feels (l. 43) for social pretense and at last (l. 63 and 5364 passim) to the clear avowal of what irks him: that standardized politeness frustrates his thirst to be singled out for what he alone is.In the same first scene, after hearing Alcestes theory of utter frankness, his friend Philinte tests his theoretical practice by asking whether he would really say just what he thinks of them to such grotesques as the tedious Dorilas and the old coquette milie; and Alceste answers a resounding Yes. The very next scene, however, shows his failure to practice what he preaches. To be sure, he finally makes an enemy of his sonneteering rival Oronte; but this is only after much more temporizing and deviousness (Sir... ll. 267277; I dont say that. But... ll. 352362), not to mention the obvious exemplum of what he told another, hypothetical scribbler, that is not at all consistent with the way he says he would, and others should, behave.A different kind of inconsistency seems, from the early subtitle noted above, embedded in Molires original concept of the play: Alcestes love for Climne. To be sure, to most modern readers at least, this is as endearing and poignant as it is comic. But here too we find Alceste misled by vanity. From the first he is sure that she loves him and that his love will prevail and change her character (ll. 233237). Later we findand so does hethat he is abjectly in love with her (ll. 13711390) and ready to accept any explanation that will allow her to seem faithful, and that her love for him, such as it is, is merely the best she can manage for anyone but herself. The self-assurance of his early statements leads to a comic fall.The virtue that is ridiculed in Alceste is not virtue itself but the unexamined virtue of the theoristwho talks plausibly but does not practice what he preachesand of the nonconformist, who has eyes for all the vices of society except his own. It is the barnacles on the ship of morality, the excesses and other vices that naturally accompany Alcestes virtuesself-righteousness, inconsistency, and consequently a certain hypocrisythat Molire holds up to our laughter.Alceste is by no means merely comic. Characteristically, Molire did not merely play the role, but endowed it with some of his own traits: his love, as an older man, for a younger woman, his eagerness to criticize and correct human foibles.* There is obviously something noble about Alceste, for all his comic flaws; and the sincere liante, the most trustworthy character in the play, pays homage to it (ll. 11651166):...the sincerity that is his prideHas a heroic and a noble side.Moreover, Molire endows Alceste with a magnetism that is his alone. Not only does Oronte seek to become his friend; he enjoys the devoted friendship of Philinte, and he is the man most loved by the three leading ladies of the play. Moreover, of Climnes suitors, he is the only one whose love is greater than his vanity.Even his view of human nature is shared by his main theoretical opponent, Philinte. What separates them is not their opinion of it, but their reactions. Philinte clearly finds it no more shocking (ll. 176178)To see a man unjust, self-seeking, sly,Than to see vultures hungry for their prey,Monkeys malicious, wolves athirst to slay.Finally, this view of human nature, expounded so angrily by Alceste and so matter-of-factly by Philinte, seems to be fully borne out by the action of the play. If it is fair, as I think it is, to regard Alceste, Philinte, and liante as in a sense the we of the play, and the others as the theythe world, or perhaps the court; for all the principal characters are members of high societythen clearly they are shown to be vain, unloving, and malicious. The polished world of high society is just a lacquered jungle. And it is at least one of Molires aims to bring this out even while the principal railer against these vices is made, by his own unwitting flaws, a comic, not a tragic, hero.THE MISANTHROPECHARACTERSALCESTE, in love with ClimnePHILINTE, friend of AlcesteORONTE, in love with ClimneCLIMNE, beloved of AlcesteLIANTE, cousin of ClimneARSINO, a friend of ClimnemarquisACASTECLITANDREBASQUE, servant of ClimneAn OFFICER of the Tribunal of Marshals of FranceDU BOIS, servant of AlcesteThe scene is a salon in Climnes house in Paris.ACT IScene 1. ALCESTE, PHILINTEPHILINTE. Well then? Whats wrong?ALCESTE.I pray you, let me be.PHILINTE. Wont you explain this sudden wrath to me?ALCESTE. Leave me alone, I say; run off and hide.PHILINTE. Without such anger you should hear my side.ALCESTE. Not I. I will be angry. I wont hear.PHILINTE. The reasons for your fits escape me clear;And though were friends, I feel I must insist...ALCESTE. What? I, your friend? Just scratch me off your list.Till now I have professed to be one, true;10But after what I have just seen in you,I tell you flatly now that here we part;I want no place in a corrupted heart.PHILINTE. Then in your eyes, Alceste, Im much to blame?ALCESTE. You should go off and die for very shame;Theres no excuse for such an act as yours;Its one that any decent man abhors.I see you greet a man like a long-lost friendAnd smother him in sweetness without end;With protestations, offers, solemn vows,20You load the frenzy of your scrapes and bows;When I ask later whom you cherish so,Even

his name, I find, you barely know.As soon as he departs, your fervor dies,And you tell me hes nothing in your eyes.Good Lord! You play a base, unworthy roleBy stooping to betray your very soul;And if (which God forbid) Id done the same,Id go right out and hang myself for shame.PHILINTE. To me the case does not deserve the rope;30Pray you, allow me to retain the hopeThat I may exercise some leniencyAnd need not hang myself from the nearest tree.ALCESTE. With what bad grace this jesting comes from you!PHILINTE. But seriously, what would you have me do?ALCESTE. A man should be sincere, and nobly shrinkFrom saying anything he does not think.PHILINTE. But when a man embraces you, I findYou simply have to pay him back in kind,Respond to his effusions as you may,40And try to meet offers and vows halfway.ALCESTE. No, I cannot endure this fawning guileEmployed by nearly all your men of style.Theres nothing I so loathe as the gyrationsOf all these great makers of protestations,These lavishers of frivolous embraces,These utterers of empty commonplaces,Who in civilities wont be outdone,And treat the good man and the fool as one.What joy is there in hearing pretty phrases50From one who loud and fulsome sings your praises,Vows friendship, love, esteem for evermore,Then runs to do the same to any boor?No, no; a soul that is well constitutedCares nothing for esteem so prostituted;Our vanity is satisfied too cheapWith praise that lumps all men in one vast heap;Esteem, if it be real, means preference,And when bestowed on all it makes no sense.Since these new vices seem to you so fine,60Lord! Youre not fit to be a friend of mine.I spurn the vast indulgence of a heartThat will not set merit itself apart;No, singled out is what I want to be;The friend of man is not the man for me.PHILINTE. But one who travels in societyMust show some semblance of civility.ALCESTE. No, I say; an example should be madeOf hypocrites who ply this shameful trade.A man should be a man, and let his speech70At every turn reveal his heart to each;His own true self should speak; our sentimentsShould never hide beneath vain compliments.PHILINTE. But utter frankness would, in many a case,Become ridiculous and out of place.We sometimesno offense to your high zealShould rather hide what in our heart we feel.Would it be either fitting or discreetTo air our views of them to all we meet?Dealing with someone we dislike or hate,80Must we always be sure to set him straight?ALCESTE. Yes.PHILINTE. What? Old milie youd promptly tellThat she has passed the age to be a belle,And that her makeup is a sorry jest?ALCESTE. No doubt.PHILINTE.Tell Dorilas that hes a pest,That all his talk has wearied every earAbout his noble blood and brave career?ALCESTE. Assuredly.PHILINTE.Youre joking.ALCESTE.I am not.Ill spare no one on this point, not one jot.It hurts my eyes to see the things Ive seen,90And court and town alike arouse my spleen.Dark melancholy seizes me anewEach time I watch men act the way they do;Cowardly flattery is all I see,Injustice, selfishness, fraud, treachery;Ive had my fill; it makes me mad; I planTo dash head-on with the whole race of man.PHILINTE. You overdo your philosophic bile;I see your gloomy fits and have to smile.We two are like the brothers in The School100For Husbands,* who, though reared by the same rule,Yet...ALCESTE. Heavens! spare us these inane charades.PHILINTE. No, really, you should drop your wild tirades.Your efforts will not change the world, you know,And inasmuch as frankness charms you so,Ill tell you, frankly, that this maladyIs treated everywhere as comedy,And that your wrath against poor humankindMakes you ridiculous in many a mind.ALCESTE. By heaven! so much the better! thats first-rate.110Its a good sign; my joy in it is great.All men are so abhorrent in my eyesThat Id be sorry if they thought me wise.PHILINTE. Toward human nature you are very spiteful.ALCESTE. I am; the hate I feel for it is frightful.PHILINTE. Shall all poor mortals, then, without exception,Be lumped together in this mass aversion?Even today you still find now and then...ALCESTE. No, it is general; I hate all men:For some are wholly bad in thought and deed;120The others, seeing this, pay little heed;For they are too indulgent and too niceTo share the hate that virtue has for vice.Indulgence at its worst we clearly seeToward the base scoundrel whos at law with me:Right through his mask men see the traitors face,And everywhere give him his proper place;His wheedling eyes, his soft and cozening tone,Fool only those to whom he is not known.That this knave rose, where he deserved to fall,130By shameful methods, is well known to all,And that his state, which thanks to these is lush,Makes merit murmur and makes virtue blush.Whatever notoriety hes won,Such honor lacks support from anyone;Call him a cheat, knave, cursd rogue to boot,Everyone will agree, no one refute.Yet everywhere his false smile seems to pay:Everywhere welcomed, hailed, he worms his way;And if by pulling strings he stands to gain140Some honor, decent men compete in vain.Good Lord! It fairly turns my blood to iceTo see the way men temporize with vice,And sometimes Ive a strong desire to fleeTo some deserted spot, from humans free.PHILINTE. Lets fret less over morals, if we can,And have some mercy on the state of man;Lets look at it without too much austerity,And try to view its faults without severity.In this world virtue needs more tact than rigor;150Wisdom may be excessive in its vigor;Perfected reason flees extremity,And says: Be wise, but with

sobriety.The unbending virtue of the olden daysClashes with modern times and modern ways;Its stiff demands on mortals go too far;We have to live with people as they are;And the greatest folly of the human mindIs undertaking to correct mankind.Like you I note a hundred things a day160That might go better, done another way,But notwithstanding all that comes in view,Men do not find me full of wrath like you;I take men as they are, with self-control;To suffer what they do I train my soul,And I think, whether court or towns the scene,My calms as philosophic as your spleen.ALCESTE. But, sir, this calm, that is so quick to reason,This calm, is it then never out of season?If by a friend you find yourself betrayed,170If for your property a snare is laid,If men besmirch your name with slanderous lies,Youll see that and your temper will not rise?PHILINTE. Why, yes, I see these faults, which make you hot,As vices portioned to the human lot;In short, its no more shock to my minds eyeTo see a man unjust, self-seeking, sly,Than to see vultures hungry for their prey,Monkeys malicious, wolves athirst to slay.ALCESTE. Then I should be robbed, torn to bits, betrayed,180Without...? Good Lord! I leave the rest unsaid;Such reasoning is patently absurd.PHILINTE. Less talk would help your cause, upon my word:Outbursts against your foe are out of place;You should give more attention to your case.ALCESTE. Ill give it none. Thats all there is to say.PHILINTE. Then who will speak for you and pave the way?ALCESTE. The justice of my cause will speak for me.PHILINTE. Is there no judge that you will stoop to see?*ALCESTE. No; dont you think my case is just and clear?190PHILINTE. True, but intrigue is what you have to fear,And...ALCESTE. No, Ill take no steps, Ill not give in;Im either right or wrong.PHILINTE.Dont think youll win.ALCESTE. I shall not budge.PHILINTE.Your enemy is strong.And by collusion he...ALCESTE.What then? Hes wrong.PHILINTE. Youre making a mistake.ALCESTE.All right; well see.PHILINTE. But...ALCESTE.Let me lose my case; that will please me.PHILINTE. But after all...ALCESTE.In this chicaneryIll see if men have the effrontery,200And are sufficiently base, vile, perverse,To wrong me in the sight of the universe.PHILINTE. Oh, what a man!ALCESTE.My casedespite the cost,For the sheer beauty of itId see lost.PHILINTE. People would really laugh at you, you know,Alceste, if they could hear you talking so.ALCESTE. Too bad for those who laugh.PHILINTE.Even this rigorWhich you require of all with so much vigor,This rectitude that you make so much of,Do you observe it in the one you love?It still amazes me when I see you,210Who censor humankind the way you do,And see in it so much that you abhor,Find in it anyone you can adore;And what astonishes me further yetIs the strange choice on which your heart is set.The candid liante finds you attractive,Arsino the prude would like you active;Meanwhile your unconcern with them is plain;Instead you are bewitched by Climne,One whose sharp tongue and whose coquettish ways220Are just the things in fashion nowadays.How is it that in her you tolerateFailings which, found in others, rouse your hate?Are they no longer faults in one so dear?Are they unseen? Are others too severe?ALCESTE. No, love for this young widow does not blindMy eyes to all the faults that others find,And I, despite my ardor for her, amThe first to see them and the first to damn.But still, for all of that, she has an art;230She finds and fills a soft spot in my heart;I see her flaws and blame them all I will,No matter what I do, I love her still;Her grace remains too strong. My love, no doubt,Will yet prevail and drive these vices out.PHILINTE. If you do that, it will be no small coup.You think she loves you, then?ALCESTE.Indeed I do!Id not love her unless I thought she did.PHILINTE. But if her fondness for you is not hid,Why do your rivals cause you such concern?240ALCESTE. A smitten heart wants to possess in turn,And all Ive come here for is to revealTo her all that my passion makes me feel.PHILINTE. For my part, if mere wishes had a voice,Her cousin liante would be my choice.Her heart esteems you and is staunch and true;Shed be a sounder, better match for you.ALCESTE. Youre right, my reason says so every day;But over love reason has little sway.PHILINTE. Your loving hopes I fear that she may flout,And...Scene 2. ORONTE, ALCESTE, PHILINTE250ORONTE. liante, I hear downstairs, is out,And likewise Climne, with things to do,But since they told me that I might find you,I came to tell you frankly, anyway,That I esteem you more than tongue can say,And that I long have wished and now intendTo ask you to accept me as a friend.Yes, yes, I would see merit have its due;In friendships bond I would be joined with you.An ardent friend, as nobly born as I,260Can surely not be easily passed by.(To ALCESTE)For you, if you dont mind, my words are meant.(At this point ALCESTE is lost in thought and seems not to hear that ORONTE is speaking to him.)ALCESTE. Me, sir?ORONTE.You. Are they something to resent?ALCESTE. No, but your praise of me comes unexpected;Such high regard I never had suspected.ORONTE. My great esteem should come as no surprise,And you can claim the like in all mens eyes.ALCESTE. Sir...ORONTE.Our whole State possesses nothing higherThan all your merit, which men so admire.ALCESTE. Sir...ORONTE.Yes, you are far worthier, say I,270Than all I see that others rate so high.ALCESTE. Sir...ORONTE.If I lie, may heaven

strike me dead!And, to confirm to you what Ive just said,Allow me, sir, a heart-to-heart embrace,And in your friendship let me find a place.Shake on it, if you please. Then it is mine,Your friendship?ALCESTE.Sir...ORONTE.What? Then do you decline?ALCESTE. Sir, most excessively you honor me;But friendship asks a bit more mystery,And surely we profane its name sublime280By using it on all, and all the time.Upon enlightened choice this bond depends;We need to know each other to be friends,And we might prove to be so differentThat both of us might presently repent.ORONTE. By heaven! Thats wisely spoken on that score,And I esteem you for it all the more.Let us let time prepare friendships fruition;But meanwhile I am at your disposition.If you need help at court for anything,290You know I have some standing with the King.He listens to me, and in every wayTreats me more decently than I can say.In short, consider me as all your own;And, since your brilliant mind is widely known,Ive come to ask your judgment as a friendUpon a sonnet that I lately penned,And learn whether I ought to publish it.ALCESTE. For such a judgment, sir, Im hardly fit.So please excuse me.ORONTE.Why?ALCESTE.For this defect:300Im always more sincere than men expect.ORONTE. Exactly what I ask; I could complainIf, when I urged you to speak clear and plain,You then disguised your thought in what you said.ALCESTE. Since you will have it so, sir, go ahead.ORONTE. Sonnet... It is a sonnet. Hope... You see,A lady once aroused some hope in me.Hope... This is nothing grandiose or sublime,But just a soft, sweet, tender little rhyme.(At each interruption he looks at ALCESTE.)ALCESTE. We shall see.ORONTE.Hope... The style may not appear310To you sufficiently easy and clear,And you may think the choice of words is bad.ALCESTE. We shall see, sir.ORONTE.Moreover, let me add,A quarter hour was all the time I spent.ALCESTE. Come, sir; the time is hardly pertinent.ORONTE. Hope does, tis true, some comfort bring,And lulls awhile our aching pain;But, Phyllis, tis an empty thingWhen nothing follows in its train.PHILINTE. That is a charming bit, and full of verve.320ALCESTE (aside). You call that charming? What! You have the nerve?ORONTE. My flame you once seemed to invite;Twas pity that you let it live,And kept me languishing, poor wight,When hope was all you had to give.PHILINTE. Oh, in what gallant terms these things are put!ALCESTE (aside). You wretched flatterer! Gallant, my foot!ORONTE. Should an eternity to waitRender my ardor desperate,Then my decease shall end my pains.330Your fond concern you well may spare;Fair Phyllis, it is still despairWhen hope alone is what remains.PHILINTE. That dying fall casts a seductive spell.ALCESTE (aside, to PHILINTE). Poisoner, you and your fall may go to hell.I wish youd taken one right on your nose.PHILINTE. Ive never heard verses as fine as those.ALCESTE. Good Lord!ORONTE.You flatter me; perhaps youre trying...PHILINTE. I am not flattering.ALCESTE (aside).No, only lying.ORONTE (to ALCESTE). But you, sir, you recall what we agreed;340Please be sincere. How do these verses read?ALCESTE. Questions of talent, sir, are ticklish matters,And we all yearn to hear the voice that flatters;But when a manno matter whoone dayRead me his verses, I made bold to sayA gentleman must have the will to fightOur universal human itch to write,That he must overcome his great temptationsTo make a fuss about such recreations,And that our eagerness for self-display350Can give us many a sorry role to play.ORONTE. I think I gather what youre getting at:That I am wrong to want...ALCESTE.I dont say that.But frigid writing palls, and can bring downSo I told hima worthy mans renown;Though one had every other quality,Our weakest points are what men choose to see.ORONTE. Then with my sonnet, sir, do you find fault?ALCESTE. I dont say that; but urging him to halt,I pointed out to him how, time and again,360This thirst has spoiled extremely worthy men.ORONTE. Am I like them? Dont I know how to rhyme?ALCESTE. I dont say that. But, I said, take your time:Have you some urgent need to versifyAnd see yourself in print? I ask you, why?The authors of bad books we may forgiveOnly when the poor wretches write to live.Take my advice and overcome temptations,Hide from the public all these occupations,Against all urgings raise a stout defense,370And keep your good name as a man of sense;Dont change it in some greedy printers stallFor that of author ridiculed by all.Thats what I tried to make this man perceive.ORONTE. All right. I understand you, I believe.About my sonnet, though: may I be told...?ALCESTE. Frankly, your sonnet should be pigeonholed.The models you have used are poor and trite;Theres nothing natural in what you write.What is this lulls awhile our aching pain?380This nothing follows in its train?Or kept me languishing, poor wight,When hope was all you had to give?And Phyllis, it is still despairWhen hope alone is what remains?This mannered style, so dear to peoples hearts,From human nature and from truth departs;Its purest affectation, verbal play,And Nature never speaks in such a way.Standards today are wretched, I maintain;390Our fathers taste, though crude, was far more sane.What men now prize gives me far less delightThan this old song which I will now recite:If the king had given me Great Paris for my own,And had said the price must beTo leave my love alone,I would tell the king

Henri:Then take back your great Paris,*I prefer my love, hey ho,I prefer my love.400The rhymes not rich, the style is old and rough,But dont you see this is far better stuffThan all this trumpery that flouts good sense,And that here passion speaks without pretence?If the king had given meGreat Paris for my own,And had said the price must beTo leave my love alone,I would tell the king Henri:410Then take back your great Paris,I prefer my love, hey ho,I prefer my love.Thats what a really loving heart might say.(To PHILINTE)Laugh on. Despite the wits who rule today,I rate this higher than the flowery showOf artificial gems, which please men so.ORONTE. And I maintain my verse is very good.ALCESTE. Im sure that you have reasons why you should;But grant my reasons leave to disagree420And not let yours impose themselves on me.ORONTE. Enough for me that others rate it high.ALCESTE. They have the art of feigning, sir; not I.ORONTE. No doubt you think youve quite a share of wit?ALCESTE. To praise your verse, I should need more of it.ORONTE. Ill get along without your praise, I trust.ALCESTE. I hope youre right, sir, for I fear you must.ORONTE. Id like to see you try, in your own way,On this same theme, to show what you could say.ALCESTE. My verses might be just as bad, I own,430But Id be careful not to make them known.ORONTE. Your talk is high and mighty, and your ways...ALCESTE. Look elsewhere for a man to sing your praise.ORONTE. My little man, dont take this tone with me.ALCESTE. Big man, my tone is just what it should be.PHILINTE (stepping between them). Come, gentlemen, enough! I pray you, no!ORONTE. My fault, I do admit. And now Ill go.With all my heart, I am your servant, sir.ALCESTE. And I, sir, am your humble servitor.Scene 3. PHILINTE, ALCESTEPHILINTE. Well, there you are! You see? By being candid,440Just note in what a nasty mess youve landed;Orontes desire for praise was obvious...ALCESTE. Dont speak to me.PHILINTE.But...ALCESTE.Finis between us.PHILINTE. Youre too...ALCESTE.Leave me.PHILINTE.If...ALCESTE.Not another word.PHILINTE. But what!...ALCESTE.Im deaf.PHILINTE.But...ALCESTE.More?PHILINTE.This is absurd.ALCESTE. Good Lord! Ive had enough. Be off with you.PHILINTE. You dont mean that. Where you go, I go too.ACT IIScene 1. ALCESTE, CLIMNEALCESTE. Madame, shall I speak frankly and be brief?Your conduct gives me not a little grief;It rouses too much bile within my heart,450And I can see that we shall have to part.I have to tell you this for conscience sake:Sooner or later we must surely break.A thousand pledges to the contraryI might make, but I could not guarantee.CLIMNE. Indeed, your wish to bring me home was kind,When scolding me was what you had in mind.ALCESTE. I do not scold; but what is my dismay,Madame, that the first comer makes his wayInto your heart? By suitors youre beset;460And I cannot see this without regret.CLIMNE. You blame me for my suitors, this I see.Can I prevent people from liking me?And when they try to visit me, no doubtI ought to take a stick and drive them out?ALCESTE. A stick, Madame, is not what I suggest,Merely a heart less easily impressed.I know that everywhere you cast a spell;But those your eyes attract you greet too well;Your graciousness to all who yield their arms470Completes the conquering action of your charms.The over-brilliant hopes that you arouseSurround you with these suitors and their vows;If only your complaisance were less vast,This sighing mob would disappear at last.But by what spell, Madame, if I may know,Does your Clitandre contrive to please you so?In worth and virtue is he so supremeThat you should honor him with your esteem?His little fingernail is very long:480Is that why your regard for him is strong?Has his blond wig, which has such great effectUpon society, won your respect?Do you love him for the ruffles at his knees?Or do his multitudinous ribbons please?Is it the charm of his vast German breechesThat, while he plays the slave, your soul bewitches?Is it his laugh and his falsetto voiceThat make of him the suitor of your choice?CLIMNE. To take offense at him is most unfair!490You know why I must handle him with care,And that hes pledged his many friends supportTo help me when my lawsuit comes to court.ALCESTE. Then lose your suit, as bravely as you can,And do not humor that offensive man.CLIMNE. Why, everyone excites your jealousy.ALCESTE. You welcome everyone so charmingly.CLIMNE. But this should reassure your anxious mind:That all who seek, this same complaisance find;And you would have more cause for discontent500If there were only one recipient.ALCESTE. But I, Madame, whose jealousy you blame,In what way is my treatment not the same?CLIMNE. Knowing that you are loved sets you apart.ALCESTE. How can I prove this to my burning heart?CLIMNE. To say what I have said exacts a price;I think such an avowal should suffice.ALCESTE. But how can I be certain, even then,You do not say the same to other men?CLIMNE. My! Thats a charming way to pay your court,510And that makes me appear a pretty sort!Well then, to give you no more cause to sigh,All I have said I here and now deny.Theres no deceiving to be fearful ofExcept your own.ALCESTE.Lord! And Im still in love!If I could just get back my heart, Id blessHeaven above for such rare happiness!I do my bestand this I dont concealTo break the cruel attachment that I feel;But I have toiled

in vain, and now I know520That it is for my sins I love you so.CLIMNE. Its true, your love for me is matched by none.ALCESTE. Yes, on that score Ill challenge anyone.My love is past belief, Madame; I sayNo one has ever loved in such a way.CLIMNE. Indeed, your way is novel, and your aim;The only token of your love is blame;Your ardor shows itself in angry speech,And never was a love so quick to preach.ALCESTE. It rests with you that this should pass away.530Lets call a halt to quarreling, I pray,Speak out with open hearts, then, and begin...Scene 2. CLIMNE, ALCESTE, BASQUECLIMNE. What is it?BASQUE.Its Acaste.CLIMNE.Well, show him in.ALCESTE. What? Can one never talk to you alone?Must you then always welcome everyone?And can you not for just one moment bearTo have a caller told you are not there?CLIMNE. Youd have me quarrel with him too, for sure?ALCESTE. Some of your courtesies I cant endure.CLIMNE. That man would bear a grudge for evermore,540If he knew I find the sight of him a bore.ALCESTE. And why should this make you put on an act?CLIMNE. Heavens! Influence is an important fact.I dont know why, but people of his sortCan talk loud and importantly at court.They push their way into each interview;They cannot help, but they can damage you;And even if your other aid is stout,Dont quarrel with these men who love to shout.ALCESTE. No matter what the reason or the base,550You find cause to receive the human race;And the precautions that you take, perforce...Scene 3. BASQUE, ALCESTE, CLIMNEBASQUE. Madame, here is Clitandre as well.ALCESTE (showing that he wants to leave).Of course.CLIMNE. Where are you going?ALCESTE.Leaving.CLIMNE.Stay.ALCESTE.What for?CLIMNE. Stay here.ALCESTE.I cant.CLIMNE.I want you to.ALCESTE.No more.These conversations weary me past cure;This is too much to ask me to endure.CLIMNE. You shall remain, you shall.ALCESTE.It cannot be.CLIMNE. All right, then, go; its quite all right with me.Scene 4. LIANTE, PHILINTE, ACASTE, CLITANDRE, ALCESTE, CLIMNE, BASQUELIANTE. Here are the two marquis whove come to call.Were they announced?CLIMNE.560Indeed. (To BASQUE) Bring chairs for all.(To ALCESTE) You havent left?ALCESTE.No, Madame. I demandThat you declare to all just where you stand.CLIMNE. Oh, hush.ALCESTE.You shall explain yourself today.CLIMNE. Youre mad.ALCESTE.I am not. You shall say your say.CLIMNE. Ah!ALCESTE.Youll make up your mind.CLIMNE.I think youre joking.ALCESTE. No, you shall choose; this doubt is too provoking.CLITANDRE. My word! Ive just come from the Kings levee,Where Clonte played the fool for all to see.Has he no friend who could, with kindly tact,570Teach him the rudiments of how to act?CLIMNE. Indeed, in social life the mans a dunce;His manner startles every eye at once;And when you see him, later on, once more,You find him more fantastic than before.ACASTE. Speaking of characters fantastical,Ive just endured the greatest bore of all:Damon, the talker, kept me, by your leave,One hour in the hot sun without reprieve.CLIMNE. Yes, his strange mania for reasoning580Makes him talk on, and never say a thing;His discourse in obscurity abounds,And all you listen to is merely sounds.LIANTE (to PHILINTE). Not a bad opening. Soon the entire nationWill be in danger of annihilation.CLITANDRE. Timante is quite a character, you know.CLIMNE. The man of mystery from top to toe,Who gives you a distracted glance, aside,Does nothing, yet is always occupied.Grimaces lend importance to each word;590His high portentousness makes him absurd;He interrupts your talk, in confidence,To whisper a secret of no consequence;At making trifles great he has no peer;Even Good day he whispers in your ear.ACASTE. Gralde, Madame?CLIMNE.He tells a tedious tale.All but great nobles are beyond the pale;He mingles with those of the highest note,And none but duke or princess will he quote.He is obsessed with rank; his monologues600Are all of horses, carriages, and dogs;He uses tu in speaking to the great,And seems to think Monsieur* is out of date.CLITANDRE. They say Blise appreciates his merit.CLIMNE. How dry she is in talk, and poor in spirit!I find it torture to receive her call:You labor to say anything at all,And the sterility of her expressionAt every moment kills the conversation.In vain, her stupid silence to annul,610You try each commonplace, however dull:Sunny or rainy weather, heat or frostAre topics that you rapidly exhaust;Meanwhile her visit, draining all your strength,Drags on and on at terrifying length;You ask the time, you yawn and yawn, but no:She sits there like a log and will not go.ACASTE. What of Adraste?CLIMNE.Oh, what colossal pride!His love of self has puffed him up inside,At court he misses due consideration,620So railing at it is his occupation;No post or benefice goes to anyone,But that he thinks injustice has been done.CLITANDRE. On young Clon what will your verdict be?He entertains the best society.CLIMNE. He has a cook who is extremely able;And what they come to visit is his table.LIANTE. He serves you nothing but the finest food.CLIMNE. He serves himself as well, and thats less good:His stupid person is a sorry dish630That spoils the taste of fowl and roast and fish.PHILINTE. Some think Damis, his uncle, rather fine.What do you say?CLIMNE.He is a friend of mine.PHILINTE. He seems

a decent sort, I must admit.CLIMNE. Yes, but he tries too hard to be a wit;He talks so stiltedly you always knowThat hes premeditating some bon mot.Since he has set his mind on being clever,He takes delight in nothing whatsoever;In all thats written he finds only flaws,640And thinks that cleverness forbids applause,That criticism is a sign of learning,Enjoyment only for the undiscerning,And that to frown on any book thats newPlaces him high among the happy few;He looks on common talk with condescensionAs much too trivial for his attention;Folding his arms, from high above the rabble,He glances down with pity on our babble.ACASTE. Damme, Madame, that is exactly true.650CLITANDRE. Theres no one can portray a man like you.ALCESTE. Thats right, my courtly friends, be strong, spare none,Strike hard, and have your sport with everyone;Yet when one of these victims comes in sight,Your haste in meeting him is most polite,And with a kiss and offer of your hand,You demonstrate that youre at his command.CLITANDRE. But why blame us? If what is said offends you,Tis to Madame that your remonstrance sends you.ALCESTE. By God, no! Tis to you; your fawning laughter660Affords her wit just the applause shes after.Her bent for character assassinationFeeds constantly upon your adulation;For satire she would have less appetiteWere it not always greeted with delight.Thus flatterers deserve our main assaultsFor leading humans into many faults.PHILINTE. But why so eager to defend the nameOf those in whom you damn the things we blame?CLIMNE. Dont you see, he must be opposed to you?670Would you have him accept the common view,And not display, in every company,His heaven-sent gift for being contrary?The ideas of others he will not admit;Always he must maintain the opposite;Hed fear he was an ordinary humanIf he agreed with any manor woman.For him contrariness offers such charms,Against himself he often turns his arms;And should another man his views defend,680He will combat them to the bitter end.ALCESTE. The laughers are with you, Madame; youve won.Go on and satirize me; have your fun.PHILINTE. But it is also true you have a wayOf balking at whatever people say;And that your spite, which you yourself avow,Neither applause nor censure will allow.ALCESTE. My God! Thats because men are never right;It always is the season for our spite;I see them on all matters, in all ways,690Quick with rash censure and untimely praise.CLIMNE. But...ALCESTE.No, Madame, you shall learn, though it kill me,With what distaste some of your pleasures fill me,And that I find those persons much to blameWho foster faults that damage your good name.CLITANDRE. As for me, I dont know; but I averThat up to now Ive found no fault in her.ACASTE. Her charms and grace are evident to me;But any faults I fear I cannot see.ALCESTE. I see them all; she knows the way I feel;700My disapproval I do not conceal.Loving and flattering are worlds apart;The least forgiving is the truest heart;And I would send these soft suitors away,Seeing they dote on everything I say,And that their praise, complaisant to excess,Encourages me in my foolishness.CLIMNE. In short, if were to leave it up to you,All tenderness in love we must eschew;And love can only find its true perfection710In railing at the objects of our affection.LIANTE. Love tends to find such laws somewhat austere,And lovers always brag about their dear;Their passion never sees a thing to blame,And everything is lovely in their flame:They find perfection in her every flaw,And speak of her with euphemistic awe.The pallid ones the whitest jasmine yet;The frightful dark one is a sweet brunette;The spindly girl is willowy and free;720The fat one bears herself with majesty;The dowdy one, whos ill-endowed as well,Becomes a careless and neglectful belle;The giantess is a divinity;The dwarf, a heavenly epitome;With princesses the proud one can compete;The tricky one has wit; the dull ones sweet;The tireless talkers charmingly vivacious,The mute girl modest, womanly, and gracious.Thus every man who loves beyond compare730Loves even the defects of his lady fair.ALCESTE. And I, for my part, claim...CLIMNE.Lets end this talkAnd step outside for just a little walk.What? You are leaving, sirs?CLITANDRE and ACASTE.No, Madame, no.ALCESTE. Youre certainly afraid that they may go.Leave when you like, sirs; but Im warning you,I shall not leave this place until you do.ACASTE. Unless Madame should be a little tired,Theres nowhere that my presence is required.CLITANDRE. I must go later to the Kings couchee,740But until then I am quite free today.CLIMNE. Youre joking, surely.ALCESTE.No. I need to knowWhether you wish for them, or me, to go.Scene 5. BASQUE, ALCESTE, CLIMNE, LIANTE, ACASTE, PHILINTE, CLITANDREBASQUE. Sir, theres a man to see you in the hallWho says his business will not wait at all.ALCESTE. Tell him I have no business of such note.BASQUE. He has a uniform, a great tailcoatWith pleats and lots of gold.CLIMNE.Please go and see,Or let him in.ALCESTE (to the OFFICER).What do you want with me?Come in, sir.Scene 6. OFFICER, ALCESTE, CLIMNE, LIANTE, ACASTE, PHILINTE, CLITANDREOFFICER.Sir, with you I crave a word.750ALCESTE. You may speak up, sir; let your news be heard.OFFICER. The Marshals,* sir, have ordered me to sayYou must appear before them right away.ALCESTE. Who, I, sir?OFFICER.You yourself.ALCESTE.What can they want?PHILINTE. Its that

ridiculous business with Oronte.CLIMNE. Hows that?PHILINTE.They are about to take the swordOver some verse with which Alceste was bored.The Marshals want of course to quash the matter.ALCESTE. Theyll never force me to back down and flatter.PHILINTE. Youll have to follow orders; come, lets go.760ALCESTE. What can they reconcile, Id like to know?Shall I now, after everything thats passed,Be sentenced to admire his verse at last?I dont take back a single thing I said.I think theyre bad.PHILINTE.But with a calmer head...ALCESTE. I wont back down; his verse is a disgrace.PHILINTE. Intransigence like yours is out of place.Come on.ALCESTE.Ill go; but I shall not unsayOne thing Ive said.PHILINTE.Come, lets be on our way.ALCESTE. Unless I have the Kings express command770To like these verses, I have made my stand.That they are bad, on this Ill never falter,And that their author well deserves the halter.(To CLITANDRE and ACASTE, who laugh)By God! Messieurs, I never really knewI was so funny.CLIMNE.Come, be off with you.Go where you must.ALCESTE.I go, Madame, but straightI shall return to settle our debate.ACT IIIScene 1. CLITANDRE, ACASTECLITANDRE. You glow with satisfaction, dear Marquis:Youre free from worriment and full of glee.But do you think youre seeing things aright780In taking such occasion for delight?ACASTE. My word! When I regard myself, I findNo reason for despondency of mind.Im rich, Im young, Im of a familyWith some pretention to nobility;And through the rank that goes with my condition,At court I can aspire to high position.For courage, something we must all admire,Tis known I have been tested under fire,And an affair of honor recently790Displayed my vigor and my bravery.My wit is adequate, my taste discerning,To judge and treat all subjects without learning;When a new play is shown (which I adore),To sit upon the stage, display my lore,Determine its success, and stop the showWhen any passage merits my Bravo!I make a good appearance, rather chic;I have fine teeth, an elegant physique.And as for dress, all vanity aside,800My eminence can scarcely be denied.I could not ask for more regard; I seemTo have the ladies love, the Kings esteem.With all this, dear Marquis, I do believeThat no man anywhere has cause to grieve.CLITANDRE. When elsewhere easy conquests meet your eyes,Why linger here to utter useless sighs?ACASTE. I? Pon my word, Im not the sort to bearA cool reception from a lady fair.It is for vulgar men, uncouth in dress,810To burn for belles who will not acquiesce,Pine at their feet, endure their cold disdain,Seek some support from sighs and tearsin vain,And strive to win by assiduityWhat is denied their meager quality.But men of my class are not made to yearnFor anyone, Marquis, without return.However fair the girls, however nice,I think, thank God, we too are worth our price;If they would claim the heart of one like me,820They should in reason pay the proper fee;And it would be no more than fair that theyShould meet our every overture halfway.CLITANDRE. Then you are pleased, Marquis, with prospects here?ACASTE. They offer me, Marquis, good grounds for cheer.CLITANDRE. Believe me, leave these fantasies behind;Dear chap, your self-delusion makes you blind.ACASTE. Of course, delusion makes me blind; ah, yes.CLITANDRE. But what assures you of such happiness?ACASTE. Delusion.CLITANDRE.Have you grounds for confidence?ACASTE. Im blind.830CLITANDRE.What constitutes your evidence?ACASTE. I tell you, Im all wrong.CLITANDRE.Well, have you, then.Received some secret vow from Climne?ACASTE. No, I am badly treated.CLITANDRE.Tell me, please.ACASTE. Nothing but snubs.CLITANDRE.A truce on pleasantries;Tell me what makes you set your hopes so high.ACASTE. Yours is the luck, and I can only sigh.So great is her aversion for my waysThat I shall hang myself one of these days.CLITANDRE. Come now, Marquis, to mend our rivalry,840Let us agree on one thing, you and me:If either one can show beyond a doubtThat in her heart he has been singled out,The other shall admit defeat and yield,Leaving the victor master of the field.ACASTE. My word! Your notion matches my intent;With all my heart and soul I do consent.But hush!Scene 2. CLIMNE, ACASTE, CLITANDRECLIMNE. Still here?CLITANDRE.Love will not let us go.