PHILAMINTE: It certainly was. Do you think I am an unreasonable woman?
CHRYSALE: Has she been careless, and mislaid a jug or a silver platter?
PHILAMINTE: I wouldn't have minded that.
CHRYSALE (to Martine): Oh, wretched girl! (To Philaminte) What then? Did you catch her being dishonest?
PHILAMINTE: It's worse than anything of that sort.
CHRYSALE: Worse than that?
PHILAMINTE: Far worse.
CHRYSALE: What the devil! The jade! Ah! did she (whisper) . . .
PHILAMINTE: With an impudence the like of which was never seen, and though she's had thirty lessons, she insulted my ears by making improper use of a low, common word which Vaugelas categorically outlaws.¹
CHRYSALE: Is that all she—
PHILAMINTE: All? She's been told often enough and yet she still goes on mangling the foundation of all learning—grammar, which makes even monarchs come to heel and obey the rules!
CHRYSALE: I thought she must have done something quite appalling.
PHILAMINTE: What! You mean you don't find this outrage unforgivable?
CHRYSALE: Oh, but I do!
PHILAMINTE: I'd just like to see you try to let her off lightly!
CHRYSALE: Wouldn't dream of it!
BELISE: It's pitiful, it really is. She rides roughshod over every construction known to man, though we've drilled her in the rules of language over and over.
MARTINE: What you preach is all very genteel, I'm sure. But I'll never be able to talk that lingo of yours.
PHILAMINTE: The impudence! She calls the way we speak, which is rooted in reason and good usage, a lingo!
MARTINE: If others folks can understand what you're on about, then you're talkin' proper. All your fancy lessons don't do no good to man nor beast.
PHILAMINTE: Do you hear that? 'Don't do no good!' That's another example of her style.
BELISE: Such a recalcitrant brain! When I think of all the trouble we are always going to, and you still can't learn to speak correctly!

₁ You've put a 'not' with a 'no' again, though you've been told it's one negative too many.
MARTINE: Lawks! Ain't one for book-learnin' like you. I just talks plain like wot folks down our way do.
PHILAMINTE: Oh, I can't bear it!
BELISE: Such ghastly syntax!
PHILAMINTE: It's death to a sensitive ear!
BELISE: Your mind is, I confess, utterly material. 'I' is first person and 'talks' is third person. Do you intend to spend the rest of your life abusing your grammar?
MARTINE: Who said anything 'bout abusin' me grandma—or me grandpa neither?
PHILAMINTE: Heavens above!
BELISE: You've misunderstood the word 'grammar'. I've told you where it comes from.
MARTINE: Mercy, whether it comes from Chaillot, Auteuil or Pontoise, it don't make no odds to me.
BELISE: What a rustic simpleton! Grammar teaches us the rules of the agreement between subject and verb, adjective and noun.
MARTINE: I must say, Madame, as how I don't know any of them people.
PHILAMINTE: This is torture!
BELISE: They are the names of words and we must be careful to ensure that they agree with one another.
MARTINE: Wot's the difference if they agree with each other or knock each other's blocks off?
PHILAMINTE (to her sister): Oh what's the use. Don't go on with this. (To her husband): Now don't you want to send her packing?
CHRYSALE (to herself): Indeed I do not, but I'd better go along with her whim. (To Martine): Go, don't upset her further. You'd best leave.
PHILAMINTE: What! Are you frightened of offending her? You talk to her in a most civil tone.
CHRYSALE: Not at all. Come now, be off with you. (To Martine who leaves:) Just go, poor child.
Scene vii:
PHILAMINTE, CHRYSALÉ, BÉLISE

CHRYSALE: There, you’re satisfied now. She’s gone. But I don’t approve of packing her off like that. She’s a good girl, well suited to her duties, and you’ve turned her out of my house for a very trivial reason.

PHILAMINTE: Would you rather I kept her on in my service so that she could go on forever assaulting my ears and breaking every rule of usage and reason by coming out with her barbaric assortment of grammatical errors, mangled words only occasionally strung together to make sense, and proverbs she’s dragged up out of the gutters of the fish-market?

BÉLISE: It’s true. Putting up with the way she speaks makes a person break out in a cold sweat. She tears Vaugelas to tatters each day that passes. The least of the errors perpetrated by that crude intellect of hers are tautology and cacophony.

CHRYSALE: What does it matter if she neglects the rules of Vaugelas as long as she doesn’t neglect her duties in the kitchen? Myself, I’d much prefer her, when she’s peeling vegetables, to put her pronouns next to the wrong verb form and repeat some common or vulgar word as often as she likes, than burn my meat or put too much salt in my stew. I live on good dinners, not on refined speech. Vaugelas doesn’t tell you how to make a good soup. And maybe Malherbe and Balzac, though they could turn a fine phrase, would have been nincompoops in a kitchen.

PHILAMINTE: These coarse observations of yours are really too trying!
It’s so gross, when you speak of the human race, to be forever lowering yourself to these material considerations when you should be rising to the call of the spirit! Is the body, which is dross, so important that all you can think of is what profits it? Shouldn’t such things be far beneath us?

CHRYSALE: But my body is me and I intend to take good care of it.
Call it dross if you like, but I’m very partial to my dross.

BÉLISE: Body and spirit are one, brother. But, if you believe learned opinion, the spirit must lead the body and our prime concern, our paramount attention, should be to feed it with the milk of science.
of my business, but for all this useless knowledge which you go to
such lengths to acquire, you’ve no idea how my dinner is coming
on, which is something I do need. The servants have taken up science
to make you happy and they do no work save what they absolutely
have to. Everyone under my roof is fully employed having discussions,
and all this discussing has driven out common-sense. One servant
burns my roast because he’s reading some story. Another is thinking
about his poetry when I ask for a glass of wine. Which is to say I
observe that they follow the example you set, with the result that I
have servants but get no service. I did have one maid left, poor girl,
who hadn’t been contaminated by inhaling your noxious fumes, but
now she’s been sent packing after a tremendous scene because she
didn’t talk like Vaugelas. I find the whole business very irritating
and I’m telling you all this, Bélise, because, as I said, these remarks
are intended for you. I don’t like all your Latin-speaking friends who
come here, and particularly the great Monsieur Trissotin. It was he
who turned your heads with his poems. Everything he comes out
with is twaddle. You have to try to work out what he’s said after
he’s said it. Personally, I reckon he’s cracked.

PHILAMINTE: Heaven help us! Such baseness of spirit! And such gross
language!

BÉLISE: Was there ever a more solid agglomeration of base matter? a
mind composed of such crassly middle-class atoms? Is it possible
that the same blood runs in my veins that runs in his? I refuse to
believe I am of the same race. I am quite mortified and shall withdraw.

Scene viii:

PHILAMINTE, CHRYSALE

PHILAMINTE: Have you got any more criticisms to make?
CHRYSALE: Me? Why no. Let’s not talk of quarrelling, it’s over and
done with. There’s something else we need to discuss. It looks as if
your oldest daughter is none too keen on matrimony. She’s a bookish
girl, and that’s no odds to me. You keep a strict eye on her and
rightly so. But the other one, Henriette, is a different character
altogether and it seems to me it would be a good idea to be thinking
of marriage for her, of finding her a husband . . .

PHILAMINTE: I’ve already given the matter some thought and I shall
now inform you of what I have in mind. Monsieur Trissotin, who
stands accused of turning our heads with poems and does not have
the honour of being liked by you, is the man I have chosen to be
the husband she needs. I am a better judge than you of his many
qualities. It’s no good arguing, for my mind is utterly set on this. I
ask you most particularly not to mention this business of a husband.
I wish to speak to my daughter before you do. I have my reasons
and they will justify my actions. Remember, I shall know if you’ve
said anything to her.

Scene ix:

ARISTE, CHRYSALE

ARISTE: Well? Your good lady has just salied forth brother. I see that
the two of you have been having a little talk.
CHRYSALE: Yes indeed.
ARISTE: How did it go? Do we get our way with Henriette? Did
Philminte agree? Is it all arranged?
CHRYSALE: Not quite yet.
ARISTE: Did she refuse?
CHRYSALE: No.
ARISTE: Is she hesitating?
CHRYSALE: Absolutely not.
ARISTE: Well what, then?
CHRYSALE: The fact is she already has someone in mind to be my
son-in-law.
ARISTE: Someone else . . .
CHRYSALE: Another candidate.
ARISTE: What’s his name?
CHRYSALE: Monsieur Trissotin.
ARISTE: What! Not the Trissotin who –
CHRYSALE: Yes, the one who’s always going on about poetry and
Latin.
ARISTE: Did you say yes?
CHRYSALE: Me? God forbid!
ARISTE: What did you say?
CHRYSALE: Nothing, and I'm very pleased I didn't. That way, I haven't commended myself.
Ariste: I suppose so. It's a step in the right direction. But at least were you able to put Clitandre's name forward?
CHRYSALE: No. When I saw she was talking about another son-in-law, I thought it best not to show too much of my hand.
Ariste: But isn't that carrying prudence rather too far? Aren't you ashamed of being so weak-kneed? How's it possible that a man can be so unassertive that he hands absolute power to his wife and doesn't dare challenge what she has decided?
CHRYSALE: By God, it's all very well for you to talk, brother, but you've no idea how much I loathe squabbling. I like a quiet life, I like peace and calm. My wife is terrifying when she loses her temper. She makes a great thing about being what she calls 'philosophical' but I haven't noticed that it's improved her character. Her moral beliefs, which take a dim view of money, are guaranteed to rouse her bile. If you try to oppose whatever she's set her mind on, you uncork a whirlwind which can last a whole week. She scares me so much when she goes on the rampage that I don't know where to put myself — she's a fire-breathing dragon. All the same, though she can be the very devil, I've still got to call her 'my sweet' and 'dear heart'.
Ariste: That's rubbish. Between you and me, if your wife wears the trousers it's because you've been so lily-livered. She is only strong because you are weak and she only thinks she is in charge because you allow it. You surrender to her domineering manner and let yourself be led by the nose, like an ox. Look, given the way you're treated, can't you bring yourself for once to behave like a man, force a woman to do what you want and have the guts to say 'No, my mind's made up'? Would you, without another thought, let your daughter be sacrificed to your family's idiotic ideas and hand over your whole estate to some oaf who is the apple of their eye because he can mumble half a dozen words in Latin? A pedant on whom your wife unhesitatingly confers the title of Great Wit and Deep Philosopher? A man whose ability to spout courtesy verses is second to none but who, as everybody knows, has nothing else to be said in his favour? I repeat: you're talking rot. You're a coward and deserve to be laughed at.

CHRYSALE: Yes, you're right and I see that I'm wrong. Well then, I'm going to have to learn to be more forceful, brother.
Ariste: That's more like it.
CHRYSALE: Being under the thumb of a woman is degrading.
Ariste: Well said.
CHRYSALE: She has taken far too much advantage of my mildness.
Ariste: True.
CHRYSALE: And abused my easy-going nature.
Ariste: That she has.
CHRYSALE: So no later than today I intend to let her know that my daughter is my daughter and that I'm entitled to choose whatever husband I like for her.
Ariste: Now you're talking sense. That's how I like to see you.
CHRYSALE: You've given your backing to Clitandre. You know where he lives. Ask him to come here right away.
Ariste: I'll go and get him now.
CHRYSALE: I've put up with it for far too long. I'm going to be a man, and to hell with the lot of them!

Act III

Scene i:

Philaminte, Armande, Bélise, Trissotin, Lépine

Philaminte: Come, let us sit here where we shall not be disturbed and listen to the poem and weigh each and every word as they deserve.
Armande: I can't wait.
Bélise: We're all dying to hear it.
Philaminte (to Trissotin): Everything you say and write casts a spell on me.
Armande: Your verse is sweeter than any I know.
Bélise: It is ambrosia to my ears.
Philaminte: Do not let our lofty longings languish any longer.
Armande: Do hurry!
BELISE: Please begin and let our joy commence.

PHILAMINTE: Nourish our impatience with your epigram.¹

TRISSOTIN: Alas Madame, it is but a new-born babe. Yet there is a
reason why his fate should touch you: I gave him birth only moments
ago in your very own courtyard.

PHILAMINTE: To make him dear to my heart, it is enough for me to
know that you are his father.

TRISSOTIN: And your applause shall be his mother.

BELISE: Ah! such wit!

Scene ii:
HENRIETTE, PHILAMINTE, ARMANDE, BELISE,
TRISSOTIN, LÉPINE

PHILAMINTE (to Henriette who enters and tries to leave): Stop! Why are
you going?

HENRIETTE: I was afraid I might be interrupting your pleasant pro-
cedings.

PHILAMINTE: Come here. Open your ears and share our pleasure as we
listen to these wonderful verses.

HENRIETTE: I know little of the beauty of what poets write. Things of
the mind are not my strong suit.

PHILAMINTE: That doesn’t signify. Anyway, when it’s over, I’ve some-
thing to tell you, a secret you must know.

TRISSOTIN (to Henriette): So, you are not enthused by matters of the
intellect. The only thing that interests you is how to be charming.

HENRIETTE: The one interests me as little as the other. I really have no
wish to —

BELISE: Ah! please! Let us not forget the new-born babe!

PHILAMINTE (to Lépine): Come boy, a chair for the gentleman. (The
footman falls over the chair he’s carrying.) Ungrateful wretch! How
can anyone possibly fall over when they’ve been told about the
equilibrium that rules the natural world?

BELISE: You stupid boy, can’t you see the reason why you fell? You
fell because you allowed the fixed point to move out of alignment
with what we call the centre of gravity.

LÉPINE: I saw it clearly Madame, being on the floor at the time.

PHILAMINTE (to Lépine as he goes out): Clumsy oaf!

TRISSOTIN: It’s just as well for him he’s not made of glass.

ARMANDE: Oh! The wit just flows out of him!

BELISE: It never dries up.

PHILAMINTE: Being on your gracious feast this very minute.

TRISSOTIN: To satisfy the gnawing hunger I see in your faces, a single
course of eight lines seems very little. I think it would do no harm
were I to add to my epigram, or shall I say my madrigal,⁴ by way of
relish, a sonnet which, in the salon of a princess, was lately found
to be not lacking in finesse. It is liberally sprinkled with Attic salt⁵
and you will find it, I venture, in the very best of taste.

ARMANDE: I have no doubt of it.

PHILAMINTE: Let us compose ourselves to listen.

BELISE (interrupting him each time he starts to speak): I feel my heart’s all a
flutter with anticipation . . . I love poetry with a passion that simply
will not be denied . . . Especially, when the verse has a gallant turn . . .

PHILAMINTE: If we talk all the time, he won’t be able to get a word in
edgeways.

TRISSOTIN: A Sonnet —

BELISE (to Henriette): Hold your tongue niece!

ARMANDE: Oh, let him get on with it!

TRISSOTIN: *A Sonnet. To Princess Uranie, on her fever.*⁶

Your prudence surely sleeps, I trow,
That you should treat so royally
And lodge so wondrous lavishly
A guest who is your bitt’rest foe.

BELISE: It begins very prettily!

ARMANDE: Such a beguiling conceit!

PHILAMINTE: No one makes verse sing as sweet!

ARMANDE: ‘Prudence sleeps’ takes one’s breath away.

BELISE: I find ‘Lodge a guest’ utterly charming.

PHILAMINTE: I like ‘royally’. I like ‘lavishly’. Those two adverbs go
admirably together.

BELISE: Let’s hear the rest.

TRISSOTIN: Your prudence surely sleeps, I trow,
That you should treat so royally
And lodge so wondrous lavishly
A guest who is your bitt’rest foe.
ARMANDE: 'Prudence sleeps!'
BELISE: 'Lodge a guest!'
PHILAMINT: 'Royally!' 'Lavishly!!'
TRISSOTIN: Evict him, brooking no delays,
From your gorgeous premises
Where the trait'rous tenant promises
To end your dear, your precious days.
BELISE: Oh stop there! You must, I beg you, let me catch my breath.
ARMANDE: Please, give us a moment to marvel.
PHILAMINT: Listening to these verses, one feels a certain je ne sais
quoi which rushes to the depths of one's heart and makes one feel
quite ill.
ARMANDE: 'Evict him, brooking no delays, From your gorgeous premsis.' 'Gorgeous premises' is deliciously turned. How wittily the
metaphor is exploited!
PHILAMINT: 'Evict him, brooking no delays.' 'Brooking no delays' is
in such wonderful taste! To my sense, it is incomparable.
ARMANDE: My heart too has surrendered utterly to 'brooking no delays'.
BELISE: I share your opinion. 'Brooking no delays' is a happy phrase.
ARMANDE: I wish I'd written it.
BELISE: It's a whole poem in itself.
PHILAMINT: But do you feel all its subtleeties the way I do?
ARMANDE and BELISE (together): Ah! Ah!
PHILAMINT: 'Evict him, brooking no delays.' Here the poet speaks of
the fever. Forget all else, pay no heed to what others might say.
'Evict him, brooking no delays.' Brooking no delays, brooking no
delays! That 'brooking no delays' says far more than it seems to. I
have no idea if everyone else feels as I do but, speaking for myself,
I hear a million other words reverberate behind that one little phrase.
BELISE: That's very true — it speaks very loudly for its size.
PHILAMINT (to TRISSOTIN): But, as you penned your wonderful 'brooking
no delay', did you yourself feel the full force of it? Were you aware
of all the things it says to us? Were you conscious of putting quite
so much wit into it?
TRISSOTIN: Well,
ARMANDE: I can't get over 'trait'rous tenant' either, the 'trait'rous
tenant' being the fever, so unjust and unscrupulous, which turns so
abominably on the hostess who gives it houseroom.
HENRIETTE: Everyone here below reacts as best he or she can admit. Not everyone can be clever and witty.
TRISSOTIN: Perhaps my verse bores Mademoiselle?
HENRIETTE: Not at all, I don't listen.
PHILOMINTHE: Bah! Let's have the epigram.
TRISSOTIN: On a Vermilion Carriage, Offered as a Gift by the Poet to a Lady of his Acquaintance.
PHILOMINTHE: All his titles have something novel about them.
ARMANDE: The novelty is invariably a promise of innumerable beauties to come.
TRISSOTIN: Love has sold me his chains so dear...
PHILOMINTHE, ARMANDE and BÉLISE: (together): Ah!
TRISSOTIN: ... That half my wealth is spent, I fear.
Now, when you see her carriage pass
So richly decked with gold and glass
That as a marvel strikes all eyes
A glorious triumph for my Lais...
PHILOMINTHE: Ah! 'My Lais': A learned reference...
BÉLISE: Which is symbolic. And quite priceless!
TRISSOTIN: Now, when you see her carriage pass
So richly decked with gold and glass
That as a marvel strikes all eyes,
A glorious triumph for my Lais,
Say not this carriage is vermilion:
Say it cost me... above a million.
ARMANDE: Ooh! Aaah! We weren't expecting that!
PHILOMINTHE: Here is the only man who can write with such taste.
BÉLISE: 'Say not this carriage is vermilion: Say it cost me... above a million.' You see how cleverly it rhymes: 'million, vermilion, above a million.'
PHILOMINTHE: I don't know if the very first time I met you I was somehow drawn to your mind, but I admire all you write in prose and verse.
TRISSOTIN (to Philominte): Won't you read us something of yours, so that we in turn might admire?
PHILOMINTHE: I have penned no verse, but I make so bold as to entertain hopes that soon I might be able to show you, as a friend, eight chapters concerning a literary Academy we propose to found. Plato simply stopped at the idea when he outlined his plans in the Republic. It was with the intention of realizing his concept that I have framed it on paper in prose. For I feel most strongly the wrongs done to us in matters of the mind. I intend to avenge women, all women everywhere, for the inferior position to which men have reduced us, for having restricted our talents to trivial pursuits and for closing the doors of higher learning to us.
ARMANDE: It is an immense insult to our sex to know that the scope of our intelligence is limited to judging a skirt or the hang of a coat or the beauty of a piece of lace or a sample of new brocade.
BÉLISE: We must rise above this shameful segregation and emancipate our minds.
TRISSOTIN: My respect for women is known in all quarters. If I pay homage to their sparkling eyes, I also pay tribute to their enlightened minds.
PHILOMINTHE: And our sex acknowledges your fairness in this matter. But we wish to demonstrate to certain men, whose pride in their knowledge leads them to treat us with scorn, that women too can have a scientific turn of mind, that like them we too can meet in learned assemblies run according to the best principles, that in them we intend to bring together what is kept apart elsewhere, to marry fine language with the higher knowledge, to penetrate the secrets of nature by experiment and in all questions selected for study to ensure that every school of thought is admitted but that none is espoused exclusively.
TRISSOTIN: In the matter of Order, I myself incline to the peripateticism of Aristotele.²⁰
PHILOMINTHE: In the matter of abstract reasoning, I favour Platonism.
ARMANDE: I like Epicurus — such lucky doctrines.
BÉLISE: Personally, I am quite drawn to atoms and particles. But I do find it hard to accept the vacuum. I am much more drawn to the idea of subtle matter.
TRISSOTIN: Descartes proposes the principle of the magnet, which meets my way of thinking.
ARMANDE: I love his swirls and eddies.
PHILOMINTHE: And I his falling worlds.
ARMANDE: I cannot wait for our very own Academy to open and make us famous with some new discovery.
TRISSOTIN: We are expecting great things from the light you will shed on Nature which has few secrets from you.

PHILAMINTE: I do not wish to flatter myself, but I have indeed already made a discovery: I have clearly observed men standing on the moon.

BÉLISE: I haven't seen men there, as far as I know. But I have made our church steeples there as plain as I see you.

ARMANDE: Along with physics, our studies will include grammar, history, poetry and both moral and political philosophy.

PHILAMINTE: There is in the study of morals something which my heart cannot resist. In times gone by, it was the first love of the greatest minds. But to my sense, the Stoics were nearest the mark and I cannot conceive anything finer than their idea of the wise man. 11

ARMANDE: And in the area of language, 12 we shall make our own rules and they shall soon–we intend to cause a stir. Each one of us, impelled by an aversion rooted in either reason or taste, has conceived a mortal loathing for certain words, both verbs and nouns, which we no longer use to each other. We are preparing to pronounce sentence of death on them, and it has been decided that we shall inaugurate our scholarly debates by editors condemning all these different words of which we are determined to rid both prose and verse.

PHILAMINTE: But our Academy’s finest project, a noble enterprise which thrills me, an endeavor so glorious that it will be trumpeted loudly by all the best minds that posterity will produce, is this: the amputation of suggestive syllables which start scandalous echoes in even the most beautiful words. Such sounds are the perennial playthings of imbeciles in every age, the unimaginative commonplace of tasteless jokers and the source of a mountain of disgusting tedium which are used to insult the modesty of women.

TRISSOTIN: Clearly, these are quite admirable plans.

BÉLISE: You shall see our rulings when they are all ready.

TRISSOTIN: I don’t see that they can be anything but judicious and wise.

ARMANDE: With our laws, we shall become the arbiters of all new works. By our laws, all that is written in prose or verse will be subject to our decision. No author shall be allowed to be considered clever except by us and our friends. We shall seek out infringements everywhere and we shall find that no one henceforth will write well if they are not with us.

Scene iii:

LÉPINE, TRISSOTIN, PHILAMINTE, BÉLISE, ARMANDE, HENRIETTE, VADIUS

LÉPINE (to Trissotin): Sir, there’s a man outside who’d like a word with you. He’s dressed all in black and talks very quiet.

TRISSOTIN: It’s the scholarly friend who’s been begging me to do him the honour of arranging for him to meet you.

PHILAMINTE: You were absolutely right to ask him to come. (To Armande and Bélide:) Let us at least do him the honours of our minds. (To Henriette, who makes as if to leave:) Stop! I told you in the plainest terms that I need you here.

HENRIETTE: But what for?

PHILAMINTE: Come here. You’ll be told soon enough.

TRISSOTIN (as Vadius enters): This is the man who has been dying to meet you. In bringing him here, Madame, I have no fear that I shall be taken to task for introducing an uninitiate into your company. He is more than qualified to take his place among the finest minds of the age.

PHILAMINTE: The hand that has guided him here is sufficient guarantee of his standing.

TRISSOTIN: He is utterly steeped in the writings of the ancients and knows as much Greek, Madame, as any man in France.

PHILAMINTE: Greek! Oh my God, sister, he knows Greek! Bélide: Did you hear that niece? Greek!

ARMANDE: Greek! What bliss!

PHILAMINTE: So, sir, you know Greek. I beg you, allow us to embrace you for the love of Greek. (Vadius kisses the cheeks of all the ladies but when he gets to Henriette she turns away.)

HENRIETTE: Pray excuse me sir. I do not understand Greek.

PHILAMINTE: I positively dote on books written in Greek.

VADIUS: I fear that I might be intruding, Madame, in my eagerness which impels me to choose this day to offer my respects. Perhaps I am interrupting some learned discussion?

PHILAMINTE: Sir, a man who knows Greek cannot interrupt anything.

TRISSOTIN: He also performs miracles in both verse and prose and, if he is agreeable, he might give you a sample.
VADIUS: A common fault with authors is that they dominate the conversation by always dragging their works into it and by being indefatigable readers of their own fatiguing verses—in the Palais de Justice, the fashionable walks, in salons, even at the dinner table. Personally, to my way of thinking, there is nothing more ridiculous than an author who goes round looking for praise, bending the ears of whoever comes along and making them suffer the torments of the damned for the midnight oil he has burned. No one has ever seen me behaving with such tiresome persistence, and in this matter I share the opinion of a Greek sage who issued a clear instruction requiring authors to curb their unworthy enthusiasm for reading their own works aloud in public. I have here some lines, intended for young lovers, on which I would very much like to have your views.

TRISSOTIN: Your verse has a beauty of which other poets are quite incapable.

VADIUS: Venus and all the Graces preside over yours.

TRISSOTIN: Your lines flow so freely and you choose your words so well.

VADIUS: In every corner of yours the idilia and the pathos are visible.¹¹

TRISSOTIN: You have given us eclogues in a style which far outstrips the sweetest charms of Theocritus and Virgil.

VADIUS: Your odes strike notes of such nobility, delicacy and sweetness that they leave Horace¹ limping in your wake.

TRISSOTIN: Was ever love sung more sweetly than in your songs?

VADIUS: Was there ever anything to equal the sonnets you have penned?

TRISSOTIN: Or anything more delightful than your little rondeaux?

VADIUS: Or anything more full of wit than all your madrigals?

TRISSOTIN: Your ballads are admirable.

VADIUS: I think your gift for improvising is quite captivating.

TRISSOTIN: If France would only acknowledge your gifts . . .

VADIUS: If the age in which we lived really valued its writers . . .

TRISSOTIN: . . . you would ride through the streets in a golden coach.

VADIUS: . . . the public would raise statues to you. But I have a ballad here and I insist that you—

TRISSOTIN: Have you come across a certain little sonnet upon the subject of the fever with which Princess Uranie has been struck?

VADIUS: Why yes. It was read out to me yesterday in a salon.

TRISSOTIN: Do you know who wrote it?

VADIUS: No. But this much I do know: without wishing to flatter him, his sonnet is quite worthless.

TRISSOTIN: Yet many people have found it admirable.

VADIUS: That doesn't prevent it being twaddle. If you'd read it, you'd think as I do.

TRISSOTIN: But I think no such thing! Few men are capable of writing such a sonnet.

VADIUS: Well, God preserve me from perpetrating any like it!

TRISSOTIN: I maintain that no one could do better and my reason for saying so is that I myself am its author.

VADIUS: You are?

TRISSOTIN: Yes.

VADIUS: I can't think how such a misunderstanding could have arisen.

TRISSOTIN: The fact is that one was unfortunate enough not to please you.

VADIUS: My mind must have wandered as I listened, or perhaps whoever read it out ruined it for me. But let's say no more about it and come to my ballad.

TRISSOTIN: I have always thought the ballad as being rather insipid. It's quite out of fashion nowadays. It reeks of the past.

VADIUS: Yet many people find the ballad charming.

TRISSOTIN: That does not prevent my disliking it intensely.

VADIUS: It's none the worse for that.

TRISSOTIN: It has a special charm for pedants.

VADIUS: How odd then that you don't care for it yourself.

TRISSOTIN: You should not be so stupid as to attribute your own failings to other people.

VADIUS: But you throw yours in my face with rare impertinence.

TRISSOTIN: Ignoramus! Scribbler!

VADIUS: Hack! You're a disgrace to the profession!

TRISSOTIN: Purveyor of second-hand poems! Bare-faced plagiarist!

VADIUS: Penfogging pedant!

PHILAMINTe: Please gentlemen! Whatever are you thinking of?

TRISSOTIN: Be off with you and restore what you have so shamelessly stolen from the Greek and Roman authors who demand the return of what is theirs!
VADIUS: Be off yourself and do the decent thing by the Muses for having murdered Horace in your poems!
TRISSOTIN: Have you forgotten your book and how little impact it made?
VADIUS: Have you forgotten your publisher whom you have reduced to bread and water?
TRISSOTIN: My reputation is assured. Nothing you can say will undermine it.
VADIUS: Really? Then let me refer you to the author of the Satires.15
TRISSOTIN: Allow me to do the same for you.
VADIUS: I can at least take satisfaction from the fact that people can see that he treats me more honourably. He directs a brief aside at me when speaking of a number of writers revered in the best-informed circles. But he simply cannot let you alone in his verse where you crop up everywhere as the butt of his venom.
TRISSOTIN: But for that very reason it is I who emerge the more honourably. He rebukes you to the crowd, like some miserable hanger-on. He obviously thought one thrust was enough to see you off and never did you the honour of striking a second time. But he singles me out for personal attention as a worthy opponent for whom he must needs call upon all his resources. And the fact that his attacks are repeated here, there and everywhere only goes to prove that he does not believe that he has won.
VADIUS: My pen will teach you what kind of man I am.
TRISSOTIN: And mine will show you who your master is.
VADIUS: I challenge you in verse and prose, Greek and Latin.
TRISSOTIN: Well then, we shall meet again, face to face, at Barbin's.16
(Exit Vadius.)

Scene iv:
TRISSOTIN, PHILAMINTE, ARMANDE, BÉLISE, HENRIETTE

TRISSOTIN: Do not blame me for losing my temper Madame, for I was merely defending your opinion on my sonnet which he had the impertinence to attack.
PHILAMINTE: I shall do everything I can to patch things up between you. But now let's turn to something else. Come here Henriette. For some time now I have been uneasy that you show no sign of possessing any intellectual curiosity whatsoever. But I have found a way of making you take an interest.
HENRIETTE: You shouldn't concern yourself about me on that score. Debating learned topics doesn't appeal to me. I prefer the simple life, for it's obvious from your discussions that you have to work very hard to be brilliant. I have absolutely no ambitions in that direction. I am quite happy, mother, to settle for being dull. I'd much rather have only ordinary things to say than have to go through argonics to be able to make clever remarks.
PHILAMINTE: I see. I am hurt by what you say, but I have no intention of allowing myself to be shamed like this by my own daughter. A beautiful face is a fragile advantage, a transient flower, a passing glory, which is never more than skin deep. But a beautiful mind exists beneath the surface and is more durable. That is why I have long been trying to find a way of giving you the kind of beauty which time shall not harvest, of encouraging a taste for learning in you, of opening your mind to the higher knowledge. That thought, the fruit of my deepest wishes, has finally led me to decide to find you a husband, a man of intellect. That man is none other than this gentleman, and you will oblige me by regarding him as the husband I have chosen for you.
HENRIETTE: For me, mother?
PHILAMINTE: Yes, for you. Now don't be coy.
BÉLISE (to Trissotin): I understand. Your eyes implore me to consent if you now wish to bestow upon another a heart which I possess. Very well, I agree. I shall not stand in the way of a marriage which will be the making of you.
TRISSOTIN (to Henriette): Madame, I do not know what to say, I am quite overwhelmed . . . , for this marriage by which I see I am honoured, makes me—
HENRIETTE: Hold on sir! We are not married yet. You must not be so hasty.
PHILAMINTE: That's no way to answer. Don't you realize that if . . . But I'll say no more. I think you understand me. (To Trissotin) She'll see reason. Come, we'll leave her to think about it. (Philaminte, Bélie and Trissotin leave.)