VICTOR HUGO

LE ROI S'AMUSE

ENGLISH / FRENCH

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Le Roi S'amuse

PREFACE

The production of this drama gave occasion for a most extraordinary proceeding on the part of the ministry.

On the day following the first performance, the author received from M. Jouslin de la Salle, stage manager at the Theatre-Francais, the following note, the original of which he has carefully preserved:

“It is now half-past ten o'clock, and I am this moment in receipt of an order to suspend the performances of Le Roi s’Amuse. M. Taylor transmits the order to me from the minister.

“November 23.”

The author’s first impulse was to doubt the truth of the fact. The proceeding was so arbitrary as to be incredible.

The document called the *charte-verite* says:

“The French people have the *right to publish*.” Take notice that it is not simply the *right to print*, but a much broader expression, *the right to publish*. Now the stage is only one medium of publication, just as the press is, or engraving, or lithographing. The freedom of the stage is therefore impliedly guaranteed in the charter, with all other forms of freedom of thought. This fundamental law goes on to say: “The censorship shall never be re-established.” It does not say “the censorship of newspapers," or “the censorship of books,” but “*the censorship*” Therefore the stage can never again legally be subjected to censorship.

Furthermore the charter says: “Confiscation is abolished.” Now, the suppression of a drama after it has

once been performed is not only a monstrous and arbitrary application of the censorship, but it is downright confiscation: it is a forcible taking of their property from the stage and from the author.

Lastly, so that all may be clear and unmistakable, so that the four or five great social principles which the French Revolution cast in bronze may remain intact upon their granite pedestals, so that the common privileges of all Frenchmen may not be cunningly undermined by the forty thousand old worn-out weapons which are being consumed by rust and disuse in the arsenal of our laws, the charter in its last article expressly repeals everything in former laws inconsistent with or opposed to its letter and spirit.

This is most explicit. The ministerial suppression of a play which has been performed strikes a blow at liberty by the censorship, and at the sanctity of property by confiscation. The whole body of our public law rises in revolt against such a trespass.

The author unable to credit such inconceivable insolence and folly, hurried to the theatre. There the fact was confirmed on every side. The minister had, in fact, on his individual authority, by virtue of his divine right as minister, issued the order in question. The minister declined to give any reasons. The minister had taken away his play, had taken away his privilege, had taken away his property. It only remained to send the poet to the Bastille.

We say again, that in these times in which we live, when such a measure bars our passage, and seizes us by the collar, the first impression is unbounded amazement. A thousand questions throng our minds. "Where is the law? Where are our rights? Can these things be? Have we really had such a thing as the Revolution of July?” It is clear that we are no longer in Paris. In what pachalik are we living?

The Comédie-Francaise, bewildered and panic-stricken, made divers attempts to induce the minister to recall his unaccountable decision. But its trouble was thrown away.

The divan —I beg its pardon, the council of ministers assembled during the day. On the 23rd it was simply an order of the minister: on the 24th it was an order of the ministry. On the 23rd the piece was only *suspended*, on the 24th it was definitely *prohibited*. Indeed, the theatre was ordered to strike from its placards the four awful words: Le Roi s'Amuse. The unfortunate Théatre-Francais was ordered, furthermore, not to complain, not to utter a word. Perhaps it would be grand and noble and loyal to resist despotism so thoroughly Asiatic. But the theatres do not dare. The fear that their privileges may be withdrawn makes them servile and submissive, impotent and dumb, whatever tribute is exacted from them.

The author had, and should have had, no part in these proceedings on the part of the theatre. He is dependent upon no minister. The prayers and entreaties to which he might be led to resort if he basely consulted his interest and nothing else, his duty as an independent writer makes impossible for him. To ask pardon of the authorities is to recognize their right. Liberty and property are not things to be haggled over in ante-chambers. A right is not to be treated as a favor. For a favor present your claim to the minister. For a right, present your claim to the country.

He therefore appeals to the country. He has two channels through which to obtain justice, public opinion and the courts. He chooses both.

Before the bar of public opinion his cause is already tried and won. And the author desires now to thank most warmly those serious-minded and independent literary men and artists who have given him so many proofs of their cordial sympathy on this occasion. He reckoned beforehand upon their support. He knew that when the struggle was for freedom of thought and intelligence, he would not have to sustain it single-handed. Let us remark in passing, that the authorities, foolishly reckoning without their host, flattered

themselves that they would be powerfully assisted in this matter, even in opposition circles, by the literary passions which have aged so long around the author. They believed that literary animosity was more inveterate than political animosity, basing their opinion upon the fact that the former has its root in self-esteem, the latter in self-interest. The authorities made a mistake. Their brutal performance has disgusted honest men in all camps. The author has found the very men who were attacking him the most violently the day before, among the first to come to his assistance against arbitrariness and injustice. If perchance some few inveterate foes did persist, they regret now the momentary countenance they gave to the powers that be. Every honorable and true-hearted man among the author's enemies has held out a hand to him, reserving the right to recommence the literary battle as soon as the political battle is at an end. In France any man who is persecuted at once ceases to have any enemy beside his persecutor.

If at this point, having demonstrated that the act of the ministry is hateful, unprecedented and indefensible, we condescend to discuss it for a moment as a material fact, and seek to discover of what elements it is composed, the first question that presents itself is this—and there is no one who has not asked it of his own mind: What can have been the motive of such a measure?

We must say it, because it is the fact, and because, if posterity ever concerns itself with us petty men, and our petty affairs, it will not be deemed the least interesting detail of this interesting episode—it seems that our wielders of the censorship claim to be scandalized in their morals by Le Roi s'Amuse. The play offended the modesty of the gendarmes! the Léotaud brigade was present and considered it obscene; the department of public morals covered its face, and M. Vidocq blushed! In fine, the countersign furnished by the censorship to the police, and which they have been buzzing in our ears for some days

past, is simply this: *The play is immoral*! Ah! my masters! silence upon that point.

However, let us argue the matter, not with the police, for I, an honest man, decline to enter upon the subject with them—but with the small number of respectable and conscientious persons who, upon hearsay evidence, or after seeing the performance at a disadvantage, have allowed themselves to be led on to share this opinion, of which the mere name of the inculpated poet ought perhaps to be a sufficient reputation. The drama is printed to-day. If you were not at the performance, read it. If you were there, read it none the less. Remember that it was not so much a performance as a battle, a sort of battle of Montlhéry (we beg pardon for the somewhat ambitious comparison) in which the Parisians and the Burgundians each claim to have “pocketed the victory,” as Mathieu has it.

Is the play immoral? Do you think so? Is it immoral in its essence? This is its essence. Triboulet is deformed, Triboulet is ill, Triboulet is court-jester, —a three-fold wretchedness which makes him wicked.

Triboulet hates the king because he is the king, the nobles because they are nobles, and the rest of mankind because they have not all humps upon their backs. His only pastime is to keep the nobles forever hustling the king, to crush the weaker against the stronger. He corrupts and brutalizes the king; he urges him on to acts of tyranny, of ignorance and vice; he turns him loose among the noble families, incessantly pointing out to him a wife to seduce, a sister to kidnap, a daughter to dishonor. The king in Triboulet’s hands is nothing more than an all-powerful puppet, who ruins all the lives into which he enters and where he performs his antics under the jester’s guidance. One day, in the midst of a fete, just as Triboulet is urging the king to carry off M. de Cossé’s wife, M. de Saint-Vallier gains access to the king and reproaches him bitterly for the dishonor of Diane de Poitiers. Triboulet mocks and insults

this father whose daughter the king has stolen from him. The father raises his hand and curses Triboulet. Upon this episode the whole play turns. The real subject of the play is M. de Saint-Vallier's curse. Now we are in the situation in the third act which disturbs you? Read the third act and then tell us, in all candor, if the resulting impression of it is not profoundly chaste, virtuous and pure.

Is it the fourth act? But since when, pray, has it been improper for a king to make love upon the stage to a servant at an inn? That is by no means a novelty in history or on the stage. More than that, history would permit us to show you Francois I. tipsy in the purlieus of Rue du Pélican. Nor would it be a novelty to take a king into a bad house upon the stage. The Greek, which is the classic stage, did it: Shakespeare, who is in himself the romantic stage, did it; but the author of this drama has not done it. He is well aware of all that has been written concerning Saltabadil's establishment. But why make him say what he has not said? Why seek to make it out that he has crossed a line which he has not crossed? This gipsy, Maguelonne, who is held up to obloquy, is surely no more brazen-faced than all the Lisettes and Martons of the old stage. Saltabadil's hovel is an inn, a tavern, the Pomme de Pin cabaret, a suspicious place, a den of thieves, if you please, but not a brothel. It is a revolting, horrible, frightful place, but not an obscene place.

It remains to consider the style of the play in detail. Read it. "The author accepts as judges of the austere severity of his style the very persons who are most shocked by Juliet's nurse and Ophelia's father, by Beaumarchais and Regnard, by the Ezale des Femmes, and Amphitryon, by Dandin and Sganarelle, and by the great scene of Tartuffe, who was likewise accused of immorality in his day! But where it was necessary to be outspoken, he has thought it his duty to be so, at his own risk, but always with gravity and moderation. He believes that art should be chaste, not prudish.

Such is the work against which the ministry seeks to arouse so much prejudice! Its immorality, its obscenity are laid bare before you. How pitiful! The authorities had their secret reasons, and we will advert to them directly, for stirring up the greatest possible amount of prejudice against Le Roi s'Amuse. They would have been glad to induce the public to stifle the play without a hearing, for an imaginary offense, as Othello stifles Desdemona. *Honest Iago*!

But as it happened that this Othello declined to stifle Desdemona, Iago threw off the mask and undertook the task himself. On the morrow of its production, the play was prohibited *by order*.

Surely, if we deign to accept for an instant, for the purpose of this discussion, the absurd fiction, that in this matter our masters are governed by solicitude for public morality, and that, being scandalized by the state of demoralization into which certain theatres have fallen within a year or two, they have felt called upon, ignoring all laws and all rights, to make an example of a play and of an author, surely it must be agreed that their choice of a play is strange, and their choice of an author not less strange. For what manner of man is he whom these short-sighted powers that be attack in such an extraordinary way? He is a writer so situated that, although his talent may be denied by everyone, the uprightness of his character is denied by none. He is a man of established and approved honesty, a rare thing, and deserving of all respect in these times. He is a poet, who would be the very first to be disgusted and indignant at the demoralization of the stage; who, eighteen months since, upon a rumor that the inquisition of the theatres was to be re-established, went in person, in company with several other dramatic authors, to warn the minister to beware of taking such a step, and at that time loudly demanded a law to repress the abuse of their privileges by the theatres, while protesting against the

censorship in severe terms, which the ministry surely has not forgotten. He is an artist devoted to his art, who has never sought success by unworthy means, and who has made it a rule all his life to look the public in the eye. He is a sincere man, of moderate opinions, who has already fought more than one battle in behalf of liberty, and against arbitrary power in all its forms; who, in 1829, the last year of the Restoration, refused all that the then government offered him to make good his loss by the prohibition of Marion de Lorme; and who, a year later, in 1830, after the Revolution of July, steadfastly refused, notwithstanding all the arguments of his material interest, to allow that same Marion de Lorme to be performed, so long as it might be made a pretext of attack and insult upon the fallen king, who had proscribed it: conduct calling for no special encomiums, doubtless, and what any man of honor would have done in his place; and yet it ought perhaps to have placed him beyond the reach of any censorship thenceforth. On this subject he wrote as follows in August, 1831:

“Furthermore, he admits that success based upon deliberate scandal, and upon political allusions has little attraction for him. Such success is of little value, and lasts but a short time. It was Louis XIII., whom, with the good faith of an artist devoted to his art, he sought to depict, and not this or that one of his descendants. And then, too, when the censorship is removed is the time when authors should exercise an honest, conscientious and rigid censorship over their own works. In no other way can they so effectively assert the dignity of their art. When one enjoys full liberty he must use it with the utmost moderation.”

Now form your judgment. On one side you have the author and his work; on the other the minister and his acts. Now that the alleged immorality of this drama is reduced to the vanishing-point, and the whole structure of absurd, shameful reasons lies in ruins under our feet, it is time to point out the real motive of this proceeding, the ante-

chamber motive, the court motive, the secret motive, the motive that is not talked about, the motive that they dare not avow to themselves, the motive that is so carefully hidden beneath a pretext. This motive has already been discerned by the public, and the public has guessed aright. We will say no more about it. It may be of advantage to our cause that we should set the example of courtesy and moderation to our adversaries. It is well that a lesson in dignity and good judgment should be given by the individual to the government, by him who is persecuted to him who persecutes. Moreover we are not of those who think they can cure their own wounds by poisoning another's wound. It is only too true that there is a line in the third act of this play wherein the misplaced sagacity of certain familiars of the palace has discovered an allusion (fancy, an allusion!) which had never occurred to the public or the author until that time, but which, when once pointed out in this fashion, becomes the keenest and most cruel of insults. It is only too true that that one line was sufficient to cause the ill-fated advertisement of the Theatre-Francais to receive the order not to present the seditious little phrase:

Le Roi s'Amuse, again for the public curiosity to feast upon. We will not quote this line, this red-hot iron, at this time; indeed we shall not call attention to it at all, except in the last extremity, if we are absolutely driven to it. We have no wish to revive ancient historic scandals. We will, so far as it lies in our power, spare a certain person in high station the consequences of this courtiers' folly. One may make war generously, even upon a king, and we propose to do so. But let those who are in power reflect upon the inconvenience of having for a friend the bear, who knows no other method to crush the imperceptible allusions which are reflected in their faces, than with the paving-stone of the censorship.

We cannot say that we may not show some indulgence for the ministry itself in the contest. All this business, to tell

the truth, moves us to pity. The government of July is newly-born; it is only thirty-three months old and is still in the cradle, and it has a child’s little fits of temper. Does it in very truth deserve any considerable expenditure of virile indignation? When it has attained its growth, we will see.

However, to look at the matter for a moment from a private point of view, the censorial confiscation in question is perhaps more damaging to the author of this drama than it would be to any other. As a matter of fact, during the fourteen years that have elapsed since he began to write, there has not been one of his works that has not had the melancholy honor of being selected for a battle-field upon its appearance, and which has not disappeared at first, for a longer or shorter period, in a cloud of dust and smoke and noise. And so, when he places a piece upon the stage, the most important thing for him, as he cannot hope for a calm and judicious audience on the first evening, is a series of performances. If it happens that his voice is drowned in the tumult the first day, and his thought not fully understood, this state of things may be corrected on the following days. Hernani was first played in a tempest, but Hernani was played fifty-three times.

Marion de Lorme was first played in a tempest, but Marion de Lorme was played sixty-one times. Le Roi s’Amuse was played in tempest, but, thanks to the violent procedure of the ministry, Le Roi s'Amuse will not be played again! Assuredly the wrong inflicted upon the author is a great one.

Who will give back to him intact, and at the point where it was before the order was promulgated, this third venture, which is of such importance to him? Who will tell him what would have been the sequel of that first performance? Who will give him back his public as it would have been on the morrow, his public ordinarily so impartial, without friends or enemies, which teaches the poet and learns from him?

The present is a curious period of political transition. It is one of those moments of general weariness when all sorts of despotic acts are possible in the society most thoroughly permeated with the principles of emancipation and liberty. France moved fast in 1830; she had three good days; she made three long stages in the journey of civilization and progress. Now many people are out of breath, many are calling for a halt. They seek to hold back the generous minds which are not weary, and are always for going forward. They desire to wait for the sluggards who have fallen behind, and to give them time to catch up. Hence arises a singular fear of everything that moves or speaks or thinks. A strange condition of affairs, easy to understand, but hard to define. All forms of existence stand in dread of ideas. It is a league of petty interests endangered by the movement of theories. It is commerce in dread of new systems; it is the merchant who has goods for sale; it is the street terrifying the counting-house; it is the armed shopkeeper defending himself.

In our opinion the government is abusing this inclination to repose, and this dread of new revolutions. It has begun to play the petty tyrant. It is wronging itself no less than us. If it thinks that men’s minds are indifferent now to the principles of liberty, it is mistaken; they are simply weary. It will be held to a strict accounting someday for all the illegal acts we have seen accumulating for some time. What a distance it has traveled. Two years ago there was reason to fear for public order, now there is reason to tremble for liberty. Questions of free thought, of intelligence and of art are solved without ceremony by the emissaries of the king of the barricades. It is profoundly sad to see such a conclusion to the Revolution of July, *mulier Formosa superne*.

If one considers nothing in this connection save the small importance of the work and the author involved, the ministerial act which attacks them will doubtless seem a

trifling matter. It is simply a pitiful little blow at the literary profession, and has no other merit than this—that it does not break the continuity of the collection of arbitrary acts which have gone before. But if we look a little deeper we shall see that something more is involved than a drama and a poet, and that, as we said in the beginning, liberty and the right of property are both at stake. Grave and momentous interests are they, and although the author may be compelled to proceed by a simple commercial suit against the Theatre-Francais, being unable to attack the ministry directly, as they are protected by the plea in bar of the council of state, he hopes that his cause will be in the eyes of all men a great cause, when the day comes for him to present himself at the bar of the Tribunal de Commerce, with liberty at his right hand, and property at his left. He will speak with his own mouth, if need be, for the independence of his art. He will maintain his rights firmly, with due seriousness and simplicity, without hatred, and likewise without fear. He relies upon the cooperation of all, upon the frank and cordial support of the press, upon the justice of public opinion, upon the equity of the courts. He has no doubt of his success. The state of siege will be terminated in the literary city as well as in the political city.

When this is accomplished, when he has carried back to his home his liberty, as poet and as citizen, intact, inviolable and sacred, he will peacefully resume his life-work, from which he has been forcibly torn away, but which he would have preferred not to lay aside for an instant. He has his work to do, of that he is well aware, and nothing shall turn him aside from it. For the moment a political role is thrust upon him. He did not seek it, but he accepts it. In very truth, the power that makes this assault upon us will have performed no great exploit by forcing us artists to lay aside our conscientious, calm, sincere, earnest labors, our holy labors, our labors of the past and of the future, to mingle, indignant, offended and stern, with the irreverent

and mocking audience, which for fifteen years past has watched with hisses and hooting the procession of poor devils of political bunglers, who fancy they are constructing a social edifice because they go every day, sweating and puffing, from the Tuileries to the Palais-Bourbon, and from the Palais-Bourbon to the Luxembourg, with great bundles of projected laws.

NOVEMBER 30, 1832.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

FRANCOIS FIRST
TRIBOULET
BLANCHE
M. DE SAINT-VALLIER
SALTABADIL
MAGUELONNE
CLÉMENT MAROT
M.DE PIENNE
M.DE GORDES
M.DE PARDAILLAN
M.DE BRION
M.DE MONTCHENU
M.DE MONTMORENCY
M.DE COSSÉ
M.DE LA TOUR-LANDRY
MADAME DE COSSÉ;
DAME BERARDE
A GENTLEMAN IN ATTENDANCE ON THE QUEEN
THE KING'S VALET A PHYSICIAN
Lords, Pages, Populace.
Scene—Paris. Time—152…

ACT FIRST. M. DE SAINT-VALLIER

A féte at the Louvre. Superb apartments filled with men and women in rich attire. Brilliant illumination, music, dancing, and shouts of laughter. Servants pass in and out laden with gold and enamel dishes. Groups of gentlemen and ladies are walking back and forth.

The féte is drawing towards its close, and the first rays of dawn are whitening the windows. A considerable degree of freedom marks the conduct of the guests; the féte has to some extent the aspect of a debauch.

Architecture, furnishing, and costumes all in the style of the Renaissance.

SCENE I

THE KING, as he is represented in the painting by Titian; M. DE LA TOUR-LANDRY.

THE KING.

It is my purpose, count, to follow this adventure to the end. A woman of the people, if you will, and of ignoble birth, but charming none the less.

M. DE LA TOUR-LANDRY.

And you and she do meet at church?

THE KING.

At Saint-Germain-des-Pres. My wont is to go thither every Sunday.

M. DE LA TOUR-LANDRY.

And such has been your wont for two months past?

THE KING.

E’en so.

M. DE LA TOUR-LANDRY.

The fair one’s dwelling-place?

THE KING.

Is at the cul-de-sac Bussy.

M. DE LA TOUR-LANDRY.

Near the hotel Cossé?

THE KING (nodding his head).

Just where there’s a high wall.

M. DE LA TOUR-LANDRY.

Ah, yes! I know the place. And, sire, you do follow her?

THE KING.

A pestilent old crone, who doth keep watch on her with eyes and lips and ears, is always by.

M. DE LA TOUR-LANDRY.

Is ’t so?

THE KING.

But what doth greatly pique my curiosity is that a man of most mysterious mien, close wrapped, the better to shun observation, in a sable cloak and in the ebon darkness of the night, doth steal into the house.

M. DE LA TOUR-LANDRY.

Go you, and do the same.

THE KING.

Good lack! the house is tightly closed and
barred to the next comer!

M. DE LA TOUR-LANDRY.

Has the fair lady ever given sign of life at such times as your Majesty has followed her?

THE KING.

Why yes, a stray glance ever and anon gives me to think, without undue conceit, that she has no antipathy for me that may not be o’ercome.

M. DE LA TOUR-LANDRY.

Is she aware that the king loves her?

THE KING (shaking his head).

I disguise myself in a gray frock and
woolen livery.

M. DE LA TOUR-LANDRY (laughing).

I see that you do love with a pure flame some haughty Toinon, mistress of a curé!

(Enter several gentlemen and Triboulet.)

THE KING (to M. de la Tour Landry).

Peace! someone comes. In love one must know how to hold one's peace, if one would have success.

(He turns to Triboulet, who has drawn near while he is speaking, and heard his last words.)

Is it not so?

TRIBOULET.

Yes, mystery 's the only envelope wherein so frail a matter as a love intrigue can rest in full security.

SCENE II

THE KING, TRIBOULET, M. DE GORDES, several other gentlemen. All the gentlemen in magnificent costumes. Triboulet in his fool's dress, as painted by Boniface.

(The king watches a party of ladies as they pass.)

M. DE LA TOUR-LANDRY.

Madame de Vendome is divine!

M. DE GORDES.

Mesdames d'Albe and De Montchevreuil are very pretty women.

THE KING.

Madame de Cossé doth eclipse all three of them.

M. DE GORDES.

Madame de Cossé! Sire, not so loud.

(He points to M. de Cossé, who is passing across the back of the stage. He is a short, pot-bellied man, — " one of the four stoutest gentlemen in France," says Brantôme.)

Her husband hears you.

THE KING.

Bah! my dear Simiane, what matters it?

M. DE GORDES.

He'll tell Madame Diane.

THE KING.

What matter if he does?

(He walks to the back of the stage to talk with other ladies who are passing.)

TRIBOULET (to M. de Gordes).

He will arouse Diane de Poitiers' ire. For eight long days he has not spoken to her.

M. DE GORDES.

Think you that he will send her to her husband?

TRIBOULET.

Nay, I hope not.

M. DE GORDES.

She has paid the full price of her father's pardon: so let her go.

TRIBOULET.

Speaking of Monsieur de Saint-Vallier, what prompted the absurd old man to toss his fair Diane, his daughter, rare and lustrous pearl of loveliness, a very angel sent to earth from heaven,—pell-mell into the marriage-bed with an old hunch-backed seneschal?

M. DE GORDES.

He's an old fool. I was upon his scaffold at the time that he received his pardon. A dismal, sallow-faced old fool. I was as near to him as I am now to thee. Naught did he say save this: " God save the king!" Now he is altogether mad.

THE KING (passing with Madame de Cossé).

Inhuman creature, thus to go from us!

MADAME DE COSSÉ (sighing).

I go to Soissons with my husband, and at his command.

THE KING.

Is it not infamous, that when all Paris, all the greatest noblemen and the most brilliant wits have their eyes fixed on you, instinct with fond desire, just at the fairest moment of so fair a life, when all the sonneteers and duelists are keeping their best-rounded verses and most famous thrusts for you, and when your lovely eyes are sowing passion everywhere and making all the women look to their lovers —that you, whose luster so bedazzles the whole court that, when your sun has disappeared, they know not if it be day or night, —that you, disdaining emperor and king and prince and duke, should flit away, to shine, a bourgeois star, ’neath a provincial sky.

MADAME DE COSSÉ.

Be calm!

THE KING.

No, no. I ’ll none of it. A pretty whim, when the ball ’s at its height, to put out all the lights!

(Enters M. de Cossé.)

MADAME DE COSSÉ.

Behold my jealous guardian, sire!

(She hastily leaves the king’s side.)

THE KING.

The devil take his soul!

(To Triboulet.)

Nath’less, I writ a quatrain to his wife. Prithee, did Marot show thee my last verses?

TRIBOULET.

I never read your verses. The verses a king writes are always wretched stuff.

THE KING.

Rascal!

TRIBOULET.

Let the canaille make *amour* rhyme with *jour* at their sweet will. But do you hold to your respective roles where beauty is concerned. Sire, make love, and let Marot make verses. A king who rhymes demeans himself.

THE KING (enthusiastically).

Ah! but it stirs the heart to make rhymes for the fair. I long to give wings to my royal prison-house.

TRI BOULET.

And make a windmill of it.

THE KING.

But that I see Madame de Coislin yonder, I would have thee scourged.

(He runs up to Madame de Coislin, and seems to address some gallant remark to her.)

TRIBOULET (aside).

Follow the wind that blows you toward
that one, too.

M. DE GORDES (approaching Triboulet, and calling his attention to what is taking place in another part of the room).

See, Madame de Cossé comes in by the other door. I ’ll stake my head that she will drop her glove, so that the king may pick it up. -

TRIBOULET.

Let ’s watch.

(Madame de Cossé, who is vexed by the king’s attentions to Madame de Coislin, does in fact drop her bouquet. The king leaves Madame de Coislin and picks up the bouquet, after which he engages in what seems to be very affectionate conversation with Madame de Cossé.)

M. DE GORDES (to Triboulet).

Did I not say as much?

TRIBOULET.

’T is wonderful!

M. DE GORDES.

The king is caught again.

TRIBOULET.

A woman is a devil made more perfect.

(The king puts his arm around Madame de Cossé’s waist, and kisses her hand. She laughs and prattles unconcernedly. Suddenly M. de Cossé enters by the door at the rear. M. de Gordes calls Triboulet’s attention. M. de Cossé stops, with his eyes fixed upon his wife and the king.)

M. DE GORDES (to Triboulet).

Look! the husband!

MADAME DE COSSÉ.

(She notices her husband, and addresses the king, who is almost embracing her.)

Let us part!

(She slips from his arms and runs off.)

TRIBOULET.

What is this great, pot-bellied, jealous witling doing here?

(The king goes to the buffet at the rear, and pours out a glass of wine.)

M. DE COSSÉ (coming toward the front of the stage in deep thought. Aside).

What were they saying?

(He eagerly approaches M. de la Tour Landry, who motions to him that he has something to say to him.)

What?

M. DE LA TOUR-LANDRY (mysteriously).

Your wife's a very lovely woman!

(M. de Cossé tosses his head, and goes to M. de Gordes, who seems to have something confidential to impart to him.)

M. DE GORDES (in an undertone).

In God’s name what is running in your brain? Why do you cast your eyes so frequently aside?

(M. de Cossé leaves him angrily, and finds himself face to face with Triboulet, who draws him into a corner with a very knowing air, while Mm. de Gordes and de la Tour Landry are roaring with laughter.)

TRIBOULET (in an undertone to M. de Cossé).

Monsieur, you have a most embarrassed air!

(He bursts into a laugh, and turns his back upon M. de Cossé, who goes off the stage in a rage.)

THE KING (returning to the front of the stage).

Ah! what a happy life is mine! Compared with me great jove himself and Hercules are mirth-provoking fools! Olympus is a miserable hole! These women are adorable! Yes, I ’m a happy man! And thou?

TRIBOULET.

Oh! reasonably so. I laugh behind my hand at ball and games and amourettes. I criticise and you enjoy yourself. You are as happy, sire, as a king, and I, as happy as a hunchback.

THE KING.

Oh! joyous day, wherein my mother with glad heart gave birth to me!

(He looks after M. de Cossé as he goes off.)

Monsieur de Cossé yonder is the only blemish on the beauty of the fete. How does he seem to thee?

TRIBOULET.

A most insufferable boor.

THE KING.

No matter! save yon jealous idiot, there’s naught that does not give me pleasure. Unbounded power, passion and possession! Triboulet, what happiness to be upon the earth, and what a blessed thing to live! What bliss!

TRIBOULET.

I verily believe that you are tipsy, sire!

THE KING.

Yonder I spy—What lovely eyes! what lovely arms!

TRIBOULET.