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Dramatic Publishing



LOVERS AND EXECUTIONERS

by
JOHN STRAND

A comedy based on the play
La Femme juge et partie (1669)

by
Antoine Jacob, known as Montfleury (1640-85)



Dramatic Publishing
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JOHN STRAND

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(LOVERS AND EXECUTIONERS)

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All producers of **LOVERS AND EXECUTIONERS** must include the following acknowledgment on the title page of all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and on all advertising and promotional materials:

“Originally commissioned and produced by Arena Stage,
Washington, D.C., March 1998.”

Lovers and Executioners is a translation and free adaptation of the 17th-century French comedy, *La Femme juge et partie* (Literally: "The Wife, Judge and Accuser") (1669) by Antoine Jacob de Montfleury.

Antoine Jacob, known as Montfleury (1640-85), was a contemporary of Molière, and one of his many bitter enemies. Antoine's father, Zacharie Jacob, also known as Montfleury (1600-67), was a playwright and renowned actor with the Hotel de Bourgogne, a rival theater troupe in Paris. Montfleury senior gained some infamy among later historians when (according to the playwright Racine) he denounced Molière to the king, accusing the greater playwright of having married his own daughter, a rumor that plagued Molière throughout his later years. Molière had attacked Montfleury publicly in his play *The Impromptu of Versailles*, mocking the rotund actor's playing style. In retaliation, Montfleury junior, a playwright, wrote *The Impromptu of the Hotel de Condé*, in which Molière was attacked in similar fashion.

Both Montfleuries wrote plays, although the son's are superior. His plays were highly regarded during his day, and some were considered by his contemporaries to rival those of Molière. *La Femme juge et partie*, considered his masterpiece, was performed nearly 500 times at the Comedie-Française through the mid-19th century; a comic opera was made of it in the 1860s. No version of the play has been performed, before now, in the United States.

Lovers and Executioners, however, is a new and quite different version, heavily adapted. Following a convention of the period, I have borrowed only a portion of the plot outline, the names of the characters and certain conventions of the genre. All else is new invention. Even so, the present version qualifies as something of a resurrection of the unjustly forgotten Antoine Jacob de Montfleury.

— John Strand

For Amanda

This translation and free adaptation of *Lovers and Executioners* was commissioned by Arena Stage, Washington, D.C. It premiered on the Fichandler Stage at Arena on February 27, 1998, directed by Kyle Donnelly and included the following artists:

CAST

Bernard	JAMES WARWICK
Julie/Frederic	JUDITH HAWKING
Constance	ELLEN KARAS
Don Lope	J. FRED SHIFFMAN
Guzman	WESLEY MANN
Octavius	T J EDWARDS
Beatrice	NANCY ROBINETTE

PRODUCTION STAFF

Settings	ZACK BROWN
Costumes	LINDSAY W. DAVIS
Lighting	NANCY SCHERTLER
Sound	ROB MILBURN
Fight Choreographer	DAVID DEBESSE
Voice and Speech Consultant	SARAH FELDER
Dramaturg	MARY RESING
Technical Director	JAMES GLENDINNING
Stage Manager	BARBARA ROLLINS
Director of Production	GUY BERGQUIST
Assistant Stage Manager	SARAH M. DELIA
Stage Management Fellow	ANJALI BIDANI
Directing Intern	BLAKE A LAWRENCE
Assistant Fight Choreographer	BRAD WALLER
Fight Captain	T J EDWARDS

LOVERS AND EXECUTIONERS

A play in 5 short acts
For 4 men and 3 women

CHARACTERS

BERNARD wealthy bourgeois, 40+
JULIE his wife, 30s;
 she also appears disguised as FREDERIC
CONSTANCE..... pursued by Bernard, 20s
DON LOPE..... Spanish captain, in love with Constance
GUZMAN..... valet to Bernard
OCTAVIUS..... valet to Julie
BEATRICE..... servant/companion to Constance

PLACE:

The principle action takes place in a town outside Paris.

TIME:

The mid-1660s.

Single set/two locations

Running time: Two hours

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

(A ship at sea. The sound of wind and waves: a storm is rising. BERNARD is at the rail. His valet GUZMAN, pacing nervously, is watching something in the distance, across the ship in the opposite direction.)

BERNARD

The sea runs against us. The wind is all wrong.
Can this vessel sail no faster? What is taking so long?
The storm is rising. The sky in anger grows black
And conspires with the waves to prepare its attack.
Where is the wind?

GUZMAN

The wind? In the sky, Sir.

BERNARD

Fool! What direction?

GUZMAN

North by south?

BERNARD

Do you spy her?

Damn your eyes, if you do. Give me open sea.
Put deep, dark water between this isle and me.

Curse this drunken crew! Must they move so slow?
Can she still be seen? Answer!

GUZMAN

Sir, even so.

On the shore where you left her, there she stays.

BERNARD

I left her? Not I.

GUZMAN

Look. Now she prays.

BERNARD

She did this to herself. This action I abhor.
Her own deceit has brought her to this shore.

GUZMAN

She'll be frightened, near to death. Crippled with fear.
Master, you have won. Let her torture stop here.

BERNARD

Shut up.

GUZMAN

One word from you, and she is reprieved.
Go back and reclaim her. Sir, by your leave—

(BERNARD looks back; for a moment, his resolve weakens.)

BERNARD

Go back...?

GUZMAN

I give the order myself, if you wish.

BERNARD

Shut up, I say, or I'll throw you to the fish!
Where's your stomach, coward? I'm within my rights.

GUZMAN

Or it's murder, if not. That's a damnable sight,
A woman left to die on a deserted shore.

BERNARD

Justice, not murder! I shall hear no more!
Vengeance is my duty. It was lawful and just.
She dishonored me. I have done what I must.

GUZMAN

To your mercy, the crew appeal. They fear a curse.
The captain himself, Sir, returns your purse,
And begs you take pity—

BERNARD

Let him keep his reward!
I purchased his silence. He swore on his sword.
Sail on, you cowards! Bring this misery to an end,
Before the sea swallows all and claims its revenge.
The wind grows mad. Like a ghost, it moans.
Ghosts, they say, fear water. She can't follow us home.

GUZMAN (*staring off*).

There, Sir! Look there. She's freed her hands.

BERNARD

To look on her now would blind me.

GUZMAN

Now she stands,

And cries out.

BERNARD

Stop up my ears!

GUZMAN

A curse on this crime.

BERNARD

Hell itself did fashion this place and time!

(To the winds.) Damn my soul! What have I done!?

*(JULIE, on the shore in the distance, kneels in the sand
and calls out to the departing ship.)*

JULIE

What have I done? Husband!

JULIE & BERNARD

What have I done!?

*(Rising sound of the wind and the waves. Lights fade to
black.)*

SCENE TWO

(A town outside Paris. The central square, with a fountain. Enter running and laughing, BEATRICE, a maid-servant.)

BEATRICE

Enough! Enough of your games. I refuse to play.

You keep your distance. What will people say?

(She halts. She looks behind, then all around, expecting to see her pursuer, but there is no one in evidence.)

Chasing me like a schoolboy through the town square.

It's disrespectful, I tell you. Guzman? Are you there?

Are you hiding? You come out here, I demand it.

Guzman? This is not funny. Guzman, dammit!

One last chance. I mean it. Stop this masquerade!

(GUZMAN, meanwhile, has crept up silently behind her.)

GUZMAN

Beatrice!

BEATRICE

Oh! You monster—!

GUZMAN

Pretty little maid...

BEATRICE

That was cruel. You nearly frightened me to death.

GUZMAN

You're delicious, my sweet, when you're all out of breath.

(Business: He places his hand on her breast; she slaps his cheek. He places the other hand on the other breast; she slaps the other cheek; etc. He fakes one; she stops in mid-slap. Again, his hand; she slaps, he ducks, etc.)

BEATRICE

Will you stop, you great fool? And tell me the news.
In detail. *(Grandly:)* Or henceforth your kisses I refuse.

GUZMAN

The news? Heaven's full of thunder, rivers full of rain.
The earth is full of dirt. And master's gone insane.

BEATRICE

Bernard? Insane?

GUZMAN

Completely.

BEATRICE

And why?

GUZMAN

Such evidence as only a woman could deny.

BEATRICE

He wants to remarry. Does that make him mad?

GUZMAN

It'll never make him rich, but sooner make him sad.

BEATRICE

He's rich enough now. Richer than most

Men of this town. Bernard can boast
Of property and gold, the respect of his peers.

GUZMAN

She'll piss it all away for him within the year.

BEATRICE

How so? Some logic, sweet dunce, to defend you.
Give me reasons.

GUZMAN

Oh, I intend to.
Bernard, being charged with burden, for life—

BEATRICE

What burden?

GUZMAN

The most burdensome: a wife.
Yet by heaven, was pardoned.

BEATRICE

Oh?

GUZMAN

And a widower made.
A gift that husbands each and every day
Beg to receive. Was he the wiser for it?
No. And he will live to deplore it.
After three years of freedom, again the crime.
He will take himself a wife, for a second time!
Newer. Younger. Heavier a load. You call that sane?

BEATRICE

I do.

GUZMAN

Not "I do"! A curse on that refrain!

BEATRICE

My Constance, I admit, is yet young and naive.

GUZMAN

She is a lethal flirt.

BEATRICE

She does like to tease.

But it's pleasing to love, and a marriage is sweet
When it is well made.

GUZMAN

But would you leap,
Once burned, into the very flames
That scorched you? Do you call that sane?

BEATRICE

It would seem mad to you, who leap into beds,
Leaving but promises and stealing maiden heads.

GUZMAN

Sweet Bea. Honestly given, and humbly received.
Though I have oft entertained, I've never deceived.
I am straight.

BEATRICE.

Too frequent, straight up.

GUZMAN

A touch of lust.

But healthily, Bea! Do believe me.

BEATRICE

I must.

GUZMAN

If this new wife plays Bernard as rudely as the first...

BEATRICE

Let Julie rest in peace. I'll not hear her cursed.
I cried a month through when I learned she was gone.
Two years I served Julie, before Constance took me on.
She was virtue and innocence, purity and light.

GUZMAN

Virtue, you call it? You were present that night
When the husband got his horns.

BEATRICE

Not so.

GUZMAN

Bernard, unsuspecting, arrived late to home.
So not to wake Julie, silently he crept
To the door—when out from its shadow leapt
A strange man. Master gave chase.
The intruder disappeared without a trace.
Bernard, raging mad, returned to find you,
Who, seeing nothing, could give him no clue.
He grabbed you by the throat—

BEATRICE

Marks I still bear—

GUZMAN

And threatened to kill you if you did not swear
The truth: her lover it was who fled that night.

BEATRICE

No more. The memory fills me with fright.
He swore me to silence, by the blade of his knife.
If he lost his reputation, I would lose my life.

GUZMAN

“Reputation”? Such hypocrisy I cannot abide.
Ah, those who have most have the most to hide.
A monument he erects to his wife, dear departed.
A monument to himself, the broken-hearted
Widower, tragic Bernard. If this town only knew.
There’s a secret here, Bea, and a dark one, too.

BEATRICE

Deliver me from secrets. To the keeper, they’re a plague.

GUZMAN

It’s by deception and secrets that the great are made,
And also undone. Dearest Bea: shall I tell?

BEATRICE

Knowing is trouble...

GUZMAN (*bowing, as if to leave*).
Your servant.

BEATRICE

But not knowing is hell.