A drawing room before the French Revolution, a bunker after the Third World War.

Scene 1 While waiting for the Viscount de Valmont, the Marquise de Merteuil reflects on the attention that her one-time lover has recently shown her. She feels cold but reveals her deep ambiguousness of sentiments.

Scene 2 Enter Valmont. The Viscount and the Marquise provoke each other with sarcasm: Valmont tells Mme Merteuil that he believes she is in love again; the Marquise asks him who the present woman of his desires is. When she hears that Valmont has an interest in Mme de Tourvel, the Marquise is irritated, and tries to rouse his jealousy by stating that her new lover is handsome and, more to the point, young.

Scene 3 The lost youth of both becomes the source of mutual derision and provocation. Valmont’s attempts to seduce Mme de Tourvel irritate the Marquise; she would rather he showed interest in the young Volanges, an innocent virgin whom Valmont appears to consider too easy a prey.

Scene 4 Valmont takes up the challenge to seduce the young Volanges. He asks the Marquise when there will be a chance to approach her. Instead of being pleased, the Marquise replies by attacking Valmont again, and stating that, generally, man is nothing but the inanimate vehicle of woman’s pleasure. At this point, the Viscount declares that he is bored by the brutality of the conversation.

Scene 5 The Marquise expresses her terror of the physical decay; then she tells Valmont that he will be able to meet the young Volanges the following day, at the Opera.

Scene 6 A role play begins. The Marquise plays the part of the Viscount trying to seduce Mme de Tourvel and pretending to be sorry about his libertine past; the Viscount, in the part of Mme de Tourvel, answers doubting the sincerity of what is said.

Scene 7 The dialogue of the previous scene continues, gathering greater pace: Mme de Tourvel (that is, Valmont) suspects that the Viscount’s (the Marquise) good intentions are all simply pretence and deception.

Scene 8 The seduction scene continues and reaches a climax: the Viscount (the Marquise) appears to have worn down the resistance of Mme de Tourvel (Valmont), after contrasting the chaste love that the real Mme de Tourvel inspires in him, with the more passionate feelings aroused by the young Volanges.
Scene 9 The Viscount and the Marquise, suddenly unsure, interrupt their game and stop acting for some moments.

Scene 10 A new role play begins: now Valmont starts to seduce the innocent Volanges, impersonated by the Marquise. This scene, too, reaches a climax when the young girl appears to be all but lost.

Scene 11 The Viscount, announcing the fall of Mme de Tourvel, and the Marquise interrupt their game for a second time. They begin a direct and increasingly bitter confrontation of self- and mutual destruction.

Scene 12 By now, the role play is to pieces: with an extreme fiction Valmont takes the part of Mme de Tourvel, who has decided to kill herself out of shame for succumbing to the Viscount. The Marquise offers the Viscount a glass of poisoned wine. At this moment, the game and the acting end, and the Marquise watches Valmont die.

Scene 13 The Marquise plays out the actions of Ophelia in Heiner Müller’s Die Hamletmaschine: she destroys her prison-home and her objects, she burns her clothes, she tears her heart from her breast and goes onto the street covered in her own blood.

(Traduzione di Chris Owen)