

The libretto in brief

Act I

Paris 1730. Foyer at the Comédie-Française.

The no longer young stage-manager Michonnet has for some time been in love with the famous actress Adriana Lecouvreur. Tonight he has made up his mind to declare his love to her before the curtain goes up. But he is thwarted when Adriana herself confides to him that she loves Maurizio, an officer in the service of the Count of Saxony. Unbeknown to her, the officer is in reality the Count in person, and pretender to the throne of Poland. Maurizio comes to see her and the actress gives him a bunch of violets, promising him a rendezvous after the play. In the meantime Prince Bouillon has intercepted an anonymous letter addressed by his lover – the actress Duclos – to the Count of Saxony, in which she arranges to meet him at a country house belonging to the Prince. Unaware that the sender of the letter is actually his own wife, Princess Bouillon, who is in love with the Count, the Prince invites the whole company of actors to an entertainment at his country house, his intention being to publicly unmask Duclos and her lover there. While Michonnet listens to Adriana's monologue, the Count, who has received the letter, tells his beloved that he will be unable to keep their appointment. The performance has now ended and, on hearing that the Count of Saxony will be attending the party, Adriana accepts the Prince's invitation. This will give her an opportunity to plead her young lover's cause.

Act II

A villa at Grange-Batelière.

The Count of Saxony, who has in the past for reasons of political convenience courted Princess Bouillon, his protectress, now wishes to break off their relationship. But the Princess loves him passionately and, in an attempt to allay her jealousy, he gives her the bunch of violets received from Adriana. The unexpected entry of her husband the Prince compels the Princess to hide in the next room. Convinced that the Count is hiding the actress Duclos, the Prince thanks his rival for having presented him with the opportunity to rid himself of his lover. He then introduces Adriana to him. The actress is surprised to discover that Maurizio and the Count of Saxony are one and the same person, and fears that he has betrayed her with Duclos. But he reassures him: the lady in the adjacent room is not Duclos but another woman with whom, for political reasons, he had arranged a secret rendezvous. Maurizio asks Adriana to protect the lady's anonymity and help her to get away. The actress consents and, alone now, invites the mysterious woman to make her escape. But the Princess wishes to know the identity of the lady who has saved her and, from her reticence, realises that the person standing before her is none other than Maurizio's new lover. Just as the two ladies are about to confront one another, the Prince's return forces the Princess to escape.

Act III

The Bouillon Palace.

Preparations for a reception are in full swing. The Princess is tormented by jealousy and would like to know the identity of her rival who, from the tone of her voice, she believes must be Adriana Lecouvreur. So she decides to put the actress to the test by declaring in her presence that the Count has been wounded in a duel. On hearing this, Adriana faints, but rapidly recovers when the Count suddenly enters. Now the Princess has no further doubts. At the end of an Arcadian dance, she ironically invites Adriana to act. The actress, who in her turn realises that the lady before her is the mysterious one she had saved, takes the opportunity to address insulting lines at her in public during her performance. The Princess swears revenge.

Act IV

Adriana's house.

Michonnet and his colleagues watch over Adriana, who is still shaken by what has happened. In a small casket that has just been delivered to her, she finds the bunch of violets previously given to Maurizio. Believing this to be a brutal gesture of farewell, Adriana disconsolately inhales the scent of the withered flowers. At this point Maurizio enters and asks her to be his bride. But Adriana's joy quickly turns to despair: the flowers she has smelt have been poisoned by the Princess of Bouillon. The actress dies in the arms of her beloved.

(Traduzione di Rodney Stringer)