

REMY BUMPPPO

think theatre

The Marriage of Figaro

by Beaumarchais

Adapted by Ranjit Bolt

STUDY GUIDE



Prepared by Daniel Smith
Dramaturg

November 13, 2008 – January 4, 2009

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Biographies of the Playwright and Translator	
Biography of Beaumarchais	3
Timeline of Major Works and Accomplishments of Beaumarchais	4
Biography of Ranjit Bolt	6
Timeline of Ranjit Bolt's Major Works	6
Synopses of <i>The Marriage of Figaro</i>	
Introduction: French scenes	8
Synopsis of <i>Le Mariage de Figaro</i> (Beaumarchais, 1784)	9
Synopsis of <i>The Marriage of Figaro</i> (Ranjit Bolt, 2008)	15
Translation and Adaptation	
Introduction: "Translation is Betrayal?"	20
Michael Billington, "Comic Timing" (on Bolt's <i>Figaro</i>)	21
Conscious Anachronisms and Anglicizing in Bolt's Translation	23
Mozart's opera: <i>Le Nozze di Figaro</i> (1786)	23
Four versions of Figaro's speech to Chérubin in Act I, scene 10	24
Historical Contexts	
The Comédie-Française	25
Beaumarchais' Preface	25
Beaumarchais' Character Descriptions	27
Thomas Holcroft's English Translation	28
Glossary	30
Critical Commentary on Productions	
Excerpt from Michael Billington, "How to Stage a Revolution"	31
1985 Circle in the Square production (trans. Richard Nelson)	31
1988 Crucible Production, Sheffield, England (trans. William Gaskill)	36
2006 Tara Arts Production, Wales and London, (trans. Ranjit Bolt)	37
Sources for Further Exploration	
Beaumarchais	39
Eighteenth-Century French Theatre and Drama	39
Eighteenth-Century French History and Culture	39
Translation and Adaptation	40
Film and Video	40
Web Resources	41
Books and Websites in French	41

BIOGRAPHIES OF THE PLAYWRIGHT AND TRANSLATOR

Biography of Beaumarchais



Jean-Marc Nattier's Portrait of Beaumarchais, 1755

Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais (1732-1799) was perhaps an even more colorful character than those he created for the stage. Literary historian Jean Fabre called him a “one-man band,” listing his various occupations: “watchmaker, harpist, courtier, munitions dealer... speculator, negotiator, forester, advocate and judge, double agent, detective, singing master, diplomat, arms dealer, pamphleteer, playwright, philanthropist, demagogue, patriote, and minister of the interior (well, almost).”

The seventh of ten children, Pierre-Augustin Caron was the son of a watchmaker. After studying at a trade school in Alfort from 1742-1745, he entered his father's trade, in which he excelled. Having invented a device that allowed him to make a watch that fit on a ring, he gave the prototype to Madame de Pompadour, mistress of Louis XV. He then parlayed this success into a post as harp tutor to the King's daughters.

After his first marriage in 1756, Caron took the name “Beaumarchais” from land owned by his wife. During the 1760s, Beaumarchais wrote a number of *parades*, fanciful and bawdy one-act plays staged in private theatres. His first full-length play, *Eugénie* was produced with moderate success at the Comédie-Française in 1767. A companion “Essay on the Serious Dramatic Genre” was published around the same time, as Beaumarchais attempted to develop Diderot's stage reforms. After he married his second wife, a second play, *The Two Friends* (1770), was produced with far less success.

Beaumarchais was embroiled in several legal disputes from 1770-1774. In a remarkable piece of self-fashioning (the *Mémoires contre Goëzman*), he argued his case before the court of public opinion and became something of a celebrity. He then served as a secret agent, carrying out diplomatic missions including a notable encounter with the Chevalier d'Eon, a transvestite French nobleman living in England. *The Barber of Seville* premiered in 1775, despite efforts by Beaumarchais' enemies to keep the play from being performed. In fact, *The Barber of Seville* was a resounding success. After thirty-two performances, Beaumarchais asked for an exact accounting of the money the actors owed him as his author's share of the receipts. The actors' reluctance to give this to him, and their bad treatment of authors in general, led Beaumarchais to found the Société des Auteurs Dramatiques in 1777.

Beaumarchais next tried his hand at arms dealing, raising money and sending weapons in support of the American Revolution. He finished a draft of *The Marriage of Figaro* in 1778 and submitted it to the Comédie-Française for production. The play would not be produced in public

until 1784. Beaumarchais married for the third time in 1786. His last play, *The Guilty Mother* was produced in 1792. Beaumarchais was briefly imprisoned that same year. While trying to make another arms deal in Amsterdam in 1793, he was denounced as a traitor to the Revolution and was unable to return to France until 1796. He died in 1799.

Discussion point: Beaumarchais drew heavily on his autobiography in his works, particularly to criticize his enemies. Don Guzman Brid'oison in *The Marriage of Figaro* is a bad judge; he is named to mock Goëzman. Also, Figaro talks about a controversial play he wrote.

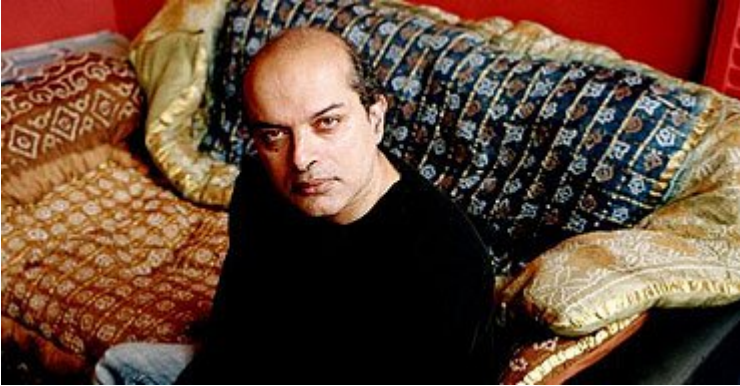
Timeline of Major Works and Accomplishments of Beaumarchais

Adapted from David Coward, The Figaro Trilogy

- 1745 Invents new escape mechanism for watches, allowing smaller watches to be made.
- 1753 Shows his invention to Lapaute, who claims it as his own. Beaumarchais provides evidence to the Academy of Sciences that Lapaute is lying.
- 1756 Marriage to Mme Franquet
- 1757 Takes the name Beaumarchais, from his wife's property. His wife dies in September, but he does not inherit her money.
- 1759 Harp Instructor to the King's daughters. Meets Pâris-Duverney, who will become his business partner.
- 1760 Begins writing *parades*, short plays for private performances in the homes of wealthy aristocrats. These plays include: **Les Bottes à Sept Lieux** (*The Seven-League Boots*), **Colin et Colette**, **Jean Bête à la foire** (*Stupid John at the Fair*), **Oeil pour Oeil** (*An Eye for an Eye*), and **Laurette**.
- 1764 Travels to Madrid in an effort to rescue his sister from a bad marriage.
- 1767 **Eugénie** is performed at the Comédie-Française and published with a preface entitled **Essai sur le Genre Dramatique Sérieux** (Essay on the Serious Dramatic Genre).
- 1768 Marriage to Geneviève-Madeleine Wattebled in April. Son Augustin born in December.
- 1770 **Les Deux Amis** premieres at the Comédie-Française. Pâris-Duverney dies in July. Beaumarchais' second wife dies in November.
- 1771 Legal troubles with the Comte de La Blache, nephew and heir of Pâris-Duverney.
- 1772 Beaumarchais publishes a *Mémoire* against La Blache and wins his case.

- 1773 Sent to prison after a conflict with the Duke de Chaulnes; La Blache's appeal succeeds, primarily because of his lawyer Goëzman. Beaumarchais publishes three **Mémoires contre Goëzman** (Memoirs Against Goëzman).
- 1774 Fourth **Mémoire contre Goëzman**. This leads to the cancellation of **The Barber of Seville**. Begins a relationship with Marie-Thérèse de Willer-Mawlas, who would eventually become his third wife. Travels to London as a spy.
- 1775 First performance of **The Barber of Seville** on February 23. Publishes another *Mémoire* against La Blache. Meets with Chevalier d'Eon in London.
- 1776 Helps to send ships and weapons to American revolutionaries.
- 1777 Daughter Eugénie is born. Beaumarchais organizes his fellow dramatic writers against the actors of the Comédie-Française.
- 1778 Writes **The Marriage of Figaro**. Wins his case against La Blache in July.
- 1779 Begins planning an edition of the complete works of Voltaire.
- 1781 **The Marriage of Figaro** is accepted for production at the Comédie-Française.
- 1783 **The Marriage of Figaro** is banned by King Louis XVI in June.
- 1784 **The Marriage of Figaro** is performed at the Comédie-Française on April 27.
- 1786 Marriage to Marie-Thérèse de Willer-Mawlas. Mozart's opera *The Marriage of Figaro* premieres in Vienna on May 1.
- 1787 **Tarare**, an opera with libretto by Beaumarchais and music by Antonio Salieri, is produced. Beaumarchais buys a plot of land near the Bastille and builds a house there.
- 1791 **The Guilty Mother** is accepted by the Comédie-Française.
- 1797 **The Guilty Mother** premieres at the Comédie-Française with great fanfare.

Biography of Ranjit Bolt



Photograph of Ranjit Bolt by Eamonn McCabe, 2006

Ranjit Bolt was born in Manchester, England and read Classics at Oxford University. After eight years working in the financial sector, Bolt embarked on a career as a theatre translator in 1990. He has translated more than twenty plays from such languages as Greek, Latin, German, Italian, and Spanish. He is perhaps best known for his accessible verse translations of seventeenth-century French plays, including three by Pierre Corneille (*The Liar*, *The Illusion*, and *Le Cid*) and eight by Molière (Bolt's version

of *Tartuffe* was produced by Remy Bumppo in 2006). Other French playwrights translated by Bolt include Marivaux, Scribe, Rostand, Anouilh, and of course, Beaumarchais. His translation of the *Fables of La Fontaine* was published by Barefoot Books in 2006. Bolt is the author of a novel in verse entitled *Losing It* (2001) and has written lyrics for two musicals: *Hard Times* (2004) and *Merry Wives* (2006). In 2003, Bolt was honored with the Order of the British Empire (O.B.E.) for his services to literature. In addition to his uncle Robert Bolt (author of *A Man for All Seasons*), Ranjit Bolt cites his father, a literary critic, and his mother, an English teacher, as influencing his work as a writer.

Timeline of Ranjit Bolt's Major Works

- 1989 ***The Liar***, a translation of Pierre Corneille's *Le Menteur*
- 1990 ***The Illusion***, a translation of Pierre Corneille's *L'illusion Comique*
- 1990 ***The Real Don Juan***, a translation of *Don Juan Tenorio* by José Zorilla y Moral
- 1991 ***Tartuffe***, a translation of Molière's play of the same title
- 1993 ***Lysistrata***, a translation of Aristophanes' play of the same title (Oberon Books, 2006)
- 1993 ***The Sisterhood***, a translation of Molière's *Les femmes savantes* (The Learned Ladies)
- 1993 ***The Venetian Twins***, a translation of Carlo Goldoni's *I Due Gemelli Veneziani*;
Mirandolina, a translation of Goldoni's play of the same title (Oberon Books, 1994)
- 1994 ***Le Cid***, a translation of Pierre Corneille's play (*Corneille: Three Masterpieces* published by Oberon Books, 2000 includes this play along with *The Liar* and *The Illusion*)

- 1995 **The Miser**, a translation of Molière's *L'Avare*
- 1995 **Cyrano de Bergerac**, a translation of Edmond Rostand's play (Oberon Books, 2007)
- 1996 **The Oedipus Plays**, translations of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* and *Oedipus in Colonus*
- 1997 **The Art of Seduction**, a translation of Marivaux's *La Double inconstance*
- 1997 **Hercules**, a translation of the play by Seneca (Oberon Books, 1997)
- 1998 **The Hypochondriac**, a translation of Molière's *Le Malade imaginaire* (The Imaginary Invalid); **George Dandin**, a translation of Molière's play; **Scapin**, a translation of Molière's *Les Fourberies de Scapin*; **The School for Wives**, a translation of Molière's *L'Ecole des femmes*.
- 2001 **Losing It**, a novel in verse (John Murray Ltd, 2001)
- 2002 **The Idiot**, a translation of Molière's *L'Etourdi* (Oberon Books, 2002)
- 2004 **Believe it or Not**, a translation of Eugène Scribe's *Le Puff* (Oberon Books, 2004)
- 2005 **The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui**, from Bertolt Brecht's *Der aufhaltsame Aufstieg des Arturo Ui*
- 2006 **The Marriage of Figaro**, an adaptation of Beaumarchais' *Le Mariage de Figaro*
- 2006 **The Hare and the Tortoise, and Other Fables of La Fontaine**, illustrated by Giselle Potter (Barefoot Books)
- 2006 **Merry Wives—The Musical**, adapted from Shakespeare (book by Gregory Doran, music by Paul Englishby, lyrics by Ranjit Bolt)
- 2007 **The Waltz of the Toreadors**, a translation of Jean Anouilh's 1952 play *La Valse des Toréadors*
- 2008 **The Grouch**, an adaptation of Molière's *Le Misanthrope*

SYNOPSIS OF THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO

Introduction: French Scenes

Ranjit Bolt has significantly pared down the play by Beaumarchais. He cuts several characters, and an entire plot line in which Marceline wants to marry Figaro because he owes her money...until she figures out that she is Figaro's mother! The following synopsis divides the play into "French scenes." Also known as "continental scenes," French scenes are a convenient way to follow the action of a play based on the exits and entrances of characters. Most French plays are published with the scenes indicated in this way, and the names of the characters in each scene labeled at the top of that scene.

Dividing these synopses into French scenes is one way to see just how much Bolt has cut, and where those cuts are most significant. The following table compares the number of French scenes in each act of the original French text with the number of French scenes in each act of Bolt's translation.

<i>The Marriage of Figaro</i>	Beaumarchais	Ranjit Bolt	Difference
Act I	11	7	4
Act II	25	22	3
Act III	20	6	14
Act IV	16	14	2
Act V	19	18	1
Total	91	67	24

While Bolt has cut some entrances and exits from each act, the major changes are in Act III. The primary action in Act III has to do with Marceline's lawsuit against Figaro. Since Bolt cuts the character Marceline entirely, it makes sense that Act III would be significantly shorter in Bolt's version. The smallest difference seems to be in the last act. While several characters that appear in Act V are cut from Bolt's text, the number of entrances and exits is almost the same because the last act relies on so many revelations of characters coming out of the pavilion. In total, there are 24 fewer French scenes in Bolt's adaptation than in Beaumarchais' original. Bolt has effectively cut an entire act's worth of scenes from the play.

Here are some other things to think about in comparing Bolt's translation with Beaumarchais' original:

- What happens when Bolt cuts characters but keeps some lines spoken by those characters in order to get information across to the audience or keep the plot moving? [Example: Fanchette replaces the Shepherdess in Act IV.]
- What is the significance of the names of the characters? Some of Bolt's changes are cosmetic (dropping the accent mark in Pédricille, adding an "l" to "Bazile"), while others might indicate an interest in situating the action of the play as more French than Spanish. "Antonio" becomes "Antoine," and Bolt never lists the Count's name as "Count Almaviva."

- Do Bolt's changes tend to clarify the love story at the expense of the play's politics? What is the effect of his emphasis on elements of farce and bawdy humor?

Synopsis of Le Mariage de Figaro (Beaumarchais, 1784)

Synopsis adapted in part from La structure du Mariage de Figaro, by Marie-Hélène Prat

Act I

Scene 1: Figaro and Suzanne. Figaro is measuring their bedroom to see if a bed will fit. They discuss their upcoming marriage. Suzanne informs Figaro that the Count wants to exercise his *droit du seigneur*, the "lord's right" to deflower the bride.

Scene 2: Figaro, alone. Figaro thinks about why the Count has invited him to go to London and realizes that the trip would allow the Count to be alone with Suzanne.

Scene 3: Figaro, Bartholo, Marceline. Bartholo and Marceline explain that Figaro must either pay Marceline or marry her.

Scene 4: Marceline, Bartholo. Bartholo and Marceline discuss their past sexual relationship and the illegitimate son that resulted from it.

Scene 5: Marceline, Bartholo, Suzanne. Suzanne discovers that Marceline wants to marry Figaro.

Scene 6: Suzanne, alone. Suzanne says nasty things about Marceline.

Scene 7: Suzanne, Chérubin. Chérubin expresses his love for all women, particularly the Countess. Chérubin steals the Countess's ribbon.

Scene 8: Suzanne, Chérubin (hiding), The Count. Chérubin jumps behind an armchair to hide from the Count. The Count tries to seduce Suzanne.

Scene 9: Bazile, Suzanne, Chérubin (hiding), The Count (hiding). As Bazile arrives, the Count hides behind the armchair and Chérubin manages to get around the armchair. Suzanne helps him hide under a rug on the chair. Bazile attempts to court Suzanne on the Count's behalf. Bazile insinuates that Chérubin and Suzanne are having an affair. The jealous Count leaps from his hiding place. As Bazile is accusing Chérubin of seducing Fanchette, he reenacts lifting a rug by lifting the rug where Chérubin is hiding. The Count threatens to send Chérubin away, because Chérubin has heard everything.

Scene 10: Figaro, the Countess, Fanchette, Bazile, Suzanne, Chérubin, the Count. Figaro and the Countess persuade the Count to give Suzanne a virginal toque as a symbol of his pure intentions. The Count postpones the wedding until late in the evening. Suzanne asks the Count to forgive Chérubin. The Count offers Chérubin a military commission, which means he has to leave.

Scene 11: Figaro, Chérubin, Bazile. Figaro and Chérubin make plans so that Chérubin will pretend to leave, but will not actually leave. Bazile cites some inane proverbs.

Act II

Scene 1: Suzanne, the Countess. Suzanne explains that the Count is trying to seduce her. The Countess laments that her husband no longer loves her.

Scene 2: Suzanne, Countess, Figaro. Figaro explains that he has written a note to the Countess from an imaginary suitor asking for a meeting in the garden during the wedding celebration. He tells Suzanne to inform the Count that she will meet him in the garden, and that they will send Chérubin in her place.

Scene 3: Suzanne, the Countess. The Countess expresses her contentment that Chérubin has not left. She fixes her hair.

Scene 4: Suzanne, Countess, Chérubin. Chérubin sings a song to the Countess. The Countess and Suzanne attempt to find a dress for Chérubin to wear.

Scene 5: Countess, Chérubin. Chérubin shows the Countess his commission. She notes that the Count has forgotten to affix his seal to it.

Scenes 6-9: Countess, Chérubin, Suzanne (in and out). Chérubin shows the ribbon to the Countess. As they are sharing intimate moments, Suzanne keeps interrupting them.

Scenes 10-12: Count, Countess, Chérubin (hiding). Chérubin hides in the closet. The Count expresses his jealousy toward the Countess. The Countess tells him that Suzanne is in the closet.

Scene 13: Count, Countess, Suzanne. Suzanne enters and hears the discussion about how she is in the closet. She hides. The Count locks the closet. He and the Countess leave.

Scenes 14-15: Suzanne, Chérubin. Chérubin gets out of the closet and Suzanne persuades him to jump out the window. Suzanne goes into the closet.

Scenes 16-17: Count, Countess, Suzanne (hiding). The Countess tells the Count that Chérubin is in the closet. The Count forces open the closet door, revealing Suzanne.

Scene 18: Suzanne, Countess. As the Count searches the closet, Suzanne explains how Chérubin escaped out the window.

Scene 19: Count, Countess, Suzanne. The Count is confused. The Countess says that this whole thing has been a plot to punish him for his jealousy. She tells him that Figaro wrote the note.

Scene 20: Figaro, Count, Countess, Suzanne. Figaro pretends not to know anything about the note, but then admits he wrote the note after Suzanne explains that the Count knows everything.

Scene 21: Antonio, Figaro, Count, Countess, Suzanne. The drunken gardener is upset that someone jumped out the window and harmed the plants below. To throw suspicion off of Chérubin, Figaro claims that he himself jumped out the window. Antonio produces Chérubin's commission, which fell out of the jumper's pocket. Figaro says that he has the commission because the Count forgot to seal it.

Scenes 22-23: Antonio, Figaro, Count, Countess, Suzanne, Bazile, Bartholo, Marceline, Gripe-Soleil. Marceline insists that the Count hear her case against Figaro. The Count agrees to do so.

Scenes 24-25: Countess, Suzanne (exits and re-enters). When the Countess realizes that they cannot send Chérubin to Suzanne's meeting in the garden, she decides to go in Suzanne's place.

Act III

Scenes 1-3: Count, Pédrille (exits and re-enters). The Count sends Pédrille to Seville to look for Chérubin.

Scene 4: Count (alone). The Count expresses his confusion in a monologue.

Scene 5: Count, Figaro. Figaro explains how much English he speaks. He knows the word "god-dam," which will be very useful. The Count is trying to figure out whether or not Figaro knows that the Count wants to seduce Suzanne.

Scene 6: Count, Figaro, Lackey. A lackey announces the arrival of Don Guzman Brid'oison, the judge.

Scenes 7-8: Count, Figaro. The Count tells Figaro how to arrange the room. Figaro exits.

Scene 9: Count, Suzanne. Under the pretext that the Countess needs smelling salts, Suzanne meets with the Count in order to make him believe that she is susceptible to his plans to seduce her and will meet him in the garden that evening.

Scene 10: Suzanne, Figaro. Suzanne tells Figaro that she has fooled the Count.

Scene 11: Count, alone. Having overheard what Suzanne said to Figaro, the Count expresses his suspicions.

Scene 12: Marceline, Bartholo, Brid'oison. Marceline discusses her case against Figaro and learns that Brid'oison will be the judge.

Scene 13: Figaro, Marceline, Bartholo, Brid'oison. Figaro greets the judge.

Scenes 14-15: Figaro, Marceline, Bartholo, Brid'oison, the Count, Antonio, Servants, Peasant, Judges, Lawyers, An Officer (crowd entrance is scene 15). The hearing of Marceline's case against Figaro. Brid'oison is fairly incompetent as a judge. Marceline gives several speeches cursing the conduct of men toward women. The Count rules in Marceline's favor, that Figaro must either pay her or marry her by the end of the day. Antonio leaves to tell Suzanne the result of the hearing.

Scene 16: Count, Marceline, Bartholo, Figaro, Brid'oison. Figaro explains that he was a foundling. He reveals a birthmark in the shape of a spatula on his arm. Marceline and Bartholo recognize him as their illegitimate son, Emmanuel. Marceline embraces Figaro.

Scene 17: Suzanne, Antonio, Count, Marceline, Bartholo, Figaro, Brid'oison. Suzanne arrives with the money that Figaro owes Marceline. The Count exits, feeling paranoid.

Scenes 18-20: Suzanne, Antonio, Marceline, Figaro, Bartholo, Brid'oison. Suzanne sees Figaro kissing Marceline and thinks that he is kissing her romantically. Figaro explains that Marceline is his mother. Marceline tells Suzanne that she can keep the money as her dowry.

Act IV

Scene 1: Figaro, Suzanne. Figaro asks Suzanne not to meet the Count in the garden.

Scene 2: Figaro, Suzanne, Countess. The Countess sends Figaro away so that she can talk to Suzanne alone.

Scene 3: Suzanne, Countess. The Countess asks Suzanne to write a letter to the Count, setting up the meeting for that night in the garden. She reiterates that she will go in Suzanne's place. The Countess and Suzanne decide to include a pin and to tell the Count to send back the pin as a token to indicate that he will meet Suzanne in the garden. As the Countess is giving Suzanne a pin, she drops the ribbon that she took back from Chérubin.

Scene 4: A Young Shepherdess, Chérubin (dressed as a girl), Fanchette, Suzanne, Countess, Girls of the town. A Shepherdess introduces her "cousin" (Chérubin) to Suzanne and the Countess. The Shepherdess's "cousin" gives a bouquet of flowers to the Countess, and the Countess gives "her" a kiss. Chérubin blushes.

Scene 5: Count, Antonio, Chérubin, Fanchette, Suzanne, Countess, Shepherdess, Girls. Antonio and the Count unmask Chérubin. The Countess admits that Chérubin was the man who jumped out the window earlier. Fanchette begs the Count to forgive Chérubin and allow her to marry him, based on a promise the Count made to her that she could have anything she wanted.

Scene 6: Figaro, Count, Antonio, Chérubin, Fanchette, Suzanne, Countess, Shepherdess, Girls. Figaro maintains that he was the one who jumped out the window, until he learns that the Count already knows that it was Chérubin who jumped out the window. Figaro tries to get everyone to go to the wedding festivities.

Scene 7: Count, Countess, Chérubin. The Count tells Chérubin to change clothes and stay away from him for the rest of the night.

Scene 8: Count, Countess. The Countess tells the Count that she is not feeling well. She tries to leave, but she ends up staying for the pre-wedding celebration.

Scene 9: Count, Countess, Figaro, Suzanne, Marceline, Bartholo, Brid'oison, Peasants, Young Girls. The two wedding parties arrive. Marceline and Bartholo are going to get married, as well as Figaro and Suzanne. The Count and Countess bless their unions. The Count receives Suzanne's note, and pricks his finger on the pin she has attached to it. He throws the pin away, but then sees the note that he should return the pin if he is planning to meet her in the garden, so he has to find the pin. Figaro sees him looking for the pin. The Countess tells Suzanne to leave with her so that they can change clothes.

Scene 10: Everyone from the previous scene except the Countess and Suzanne; Add Bazile and Gripe-Soleil. Bazile has an argument with Figaro and Marceline.

Scene 11: Everyone from the previous scene except Bazile. The Count agrees to sign wedding contracts for both couples. The Crowd cheers and disperses.

Scene 12: Gripe-Soleil, Figaro, Marceline, Count. Gripe-Soleil announces that he will set up the fireworks under the chestnut trees, which would ruin the Count's plans with Suzanne. The Count orders him to set them up elsewhere, on the pretext that the Countess will not be able to see them from the house.

Scene 13: Marceline, Figaro. Marceline tells her son that he should curb his jealousy and trust Suzanne.

Scene 14: Marceline, Figaro, Fanchette. Figaro questions Fanchette about the pin she is carrying for Suzanne and learns that it is from the Count. He becomes jealous.

Scene 15: Marceline, Figaro. Marceline makes fun of Figaro's jealousy and tries to assuage his fears again.

Scene 16: Marceline, alone. Marceline vows to protect Suzanne from Figaro's jealousy and makes fun of men in general.

Act V

Scene 1: Fanchette, alone. Fanchette looks for the pavilion where she is supposed to meet Chérubin and bring him some food.

Scene 2: Figaro, Bazile, Antonio, Gripe-Soleil, Brid'oison, Bartholo, Group of Servants and Workers. Figaro tells Antonio, Bazile, and the others that he plans to surprise the Count and Suzanne when they are together. Bazile convinces everyone that Figaro is possessed by the devil, and they all run away.

Scene 3: Figaro, alone. Figaro rails against women and the aristocracy in general, and the Count in particular. He also talks about freedom of speech and freedom of the press, telling the stories of a play he wrote that some people found offensive, and of a journal he published that was censored.

Scene 4: Suzanne, Countess, Marceline; Figaro (off to the side). Suzanne and the Countess are each wearing the other's clothes. Marceline tells them that Figaro is listening. They talk about their plan to have the Count think he is seducing Suzanne. Marceline goes into the pavilion.

Scene 5: Suzanne, Countess; Figaro (off to the side). Suzanne and the Countess speak louder for Figaro's benefit. The Countess says that she is going back in the house, but actually she remains and Suzanne withdraws near the wings, on the opposite side of the stage from Figaro.

Scene 6: Chérubin, Countess; Figaro, Suzanne (off to the side); Count (entering). Chérubin thinks that the Countess is Suzanne. The Countess pretends to be Suzanne and tells Chérubin to leave. Chérubin insists on a kiss first. The Countess is willing to oblige, but the Count gets in the way. Figaro is angry because he thinks that Chérubin has kissed Suzanne. Chérubin exits into the pavilion.

Scene 7: Count, Figaro, Countess; Suzanne (off to the side). Figaro rushes forward and the Count hits him, mistaking Figaro for Chérubin. The Count then kisses the Countess, thinking she is Suzanne. The Count explains to "Suzanne" that he has grown tired of the Countess. He gives her a dowry and a diamond ring, then invites her into a pavilion. Figaro interrupts them, and they run off. The Countess goes into the pavilion, and the Count goes off into the woods.

Scene 8: Figaro, Suzanne. Suzanne pretends to be the Countess and flirts with Figaro in order to teach him a lesson about jealousy. He figures out that it is actually Suzanne and flirts back, pretending that he wants to kiss the Countess. Suzanne slaps him. He tells her that he

recognized her voice. She explains everything that has happened and makes him beg for her forgiveness, which he does.

Scene 9: Count, Figaro, Suzanne. Suzanne and Figaro lead the Count to believe that the Countess is having an affair with a mysterious man (Figaro). Suzanne runs away.

Scene 10: Count, Figaro. The Count catches Figaro. Figaro pretends to be scared. The Count calls out for servants to help him.

Scene 11: Count, Pédrille, Figaro. Pédrille informs the Count that he has not been able to find Chérubin.

Scene 12: Count, Pédrille, Figaro, Bazile, Antonio, Brid'oison, Bartholo, Gripe-Soleil. The Count accuses Figaro of having an affair the Countess. He goes into the pavilion to see what is going on.

Scene 13: Figaro, Bazile, Antoine, Pédrille, Antonio, Brid'oison, Bartholo, Gripe-Soleil. Bazille, Antoine, and Figaro comment on the situation.

Scene 14: Count, Chérubin, Bazile, Antonio, Figaro, Brid'oison, Bartholo, Gripe-Soleil. The Count drags Chérubin out of the pavilion. Chérubin says that he has been hiding from the Count. The Count orders Antonio to bring the Countess out of the pavilion.

Scenes 15-16: Everyone from the previous scene, with Antoine exiting and re-entering with Fanchette. Antonio brings Fanchette out of the pavilion.

Scene 17: Everyone from the previous scene, plus Marceline. Marceline enters from the pavilion. Bartholo is upset. Everyone else is amused, except for the Count.

Scene 18: Everyone from the previous scene, plus Suzanne. Suzanne (dressed as the Countess) enters from the pavilion.

Scene 19: Everyone from the previous scene, plus the Countess. The Countess (dressed as Suzanne) enters from the pavilion. The Count figures out that Suzanne and the Countess traded places. The Count apologizes to the Countess. She forgives him. And so does everyone else. Figaro invites everyone to the wedding celebration. They all sing and dance.

Discussion Questions:

- Why might this play have been seen as scandalous in its time? Would some people still consider it scandalous today?
- Figaro points out the decadence of the aristocracy in his long monologue in Act V. What other characters make political statements about class?
- How are women portrayed in this play? Are all the women in the play smarter than all the men? How is the Countess similar to/different from Suzanne? How is Suzanne similar to/different from Marceline? How does Fanchette compare to the other women? Marceline's speeches about gender were cut out of the original production, but Beaumarchais included them in the published version.

Synopsis of The Marriage of Figaro (Ranjit Bolt, 2008)

Act I

Scene 1: Figaro, Suzanne. Figaro is measuring their bedroom to see if a bed will fit. They discuss their upcoming marriage. Suzanne informs Figaro that the Count wants to exercise his *droit du seigneur*, the “lord’s right” to deflower the bride.

Scene 2: Figaro, alone. Figaro thinks about why the Count has invited him to go to London and realizes that the trip would allow the Count to be alone with Suzanne.

Scene 3: Suzanne, Chérubin. Chérubin expresses his love for all women, particularly the Countess. Chérubin steals the Countess’s ribbon.

Scene 4: Suzanne, Chérubin (hiding), The Count. Chérubin jumps behind an armchair to hide from the Count. The Count tries to seduce Suzanne.

Scene 5: Bazille, Suzanne, Chérubin (hiding), The Count (hiding). As Bazille arrives, the Count hides behind the armchair and Chérubin manages to get around the armchair. Suzanne helps him hide under a rug on the chair. Bazille attempts to court Suzanne on the Count’s behalf. Bazille insinuates that Chérubin and Suzanne are having an affair. The jealous Count leaps from his hiding place. As Bazille is accusing Chérubin of seducing Fanchette, he reenacts lifting a rug by lifting the rug where Chérubin is hiding. The Count threatens to send Chérubin away, because Chérubin has heard everything.

Scene 6: Figaro, the Countess, Fanchette, Bazille, Suzanne, Chérubin, the Count. Figaro and the Countess persuade the Count to give Suzanne a virginal toque as a symbol of his pure intentions. The Count postpones the wedding until late in the evening. Suzanne asks the Count to forgive Chérubin. The Count offers Chérubin a military commission, which means he has to leave.

Scene 7: Figaro, Chérubin. Figaro and Chérubin make plans so that Chérubin will pretend to leave, but will not actually leave.

Act II

Scene 1: Suzanne, the Countess. Suzanne explains that the Count is trying to seduce her. The Countess laments that her husband no longer loves her.

Scene 2: Suzanne, Countess, Figaro. Figaro explains that he has written a note to the Countess from an imaginary suitor asking for a meeting in the garden during the wedding celebration. He tells Suzanne to arrange to meet the Count in the garden in the evening, and that they will send Chérubin in her place.

Scene 3: Suzanne, the Countess. The Countess expresses her contentment that Chérubin has not left. She fixes her hair.

Scene 4: Suzanne, Countess, Chérubin. Chérubin sings a song to the Countess. The Countess and Suzanne attempt to find a dress for Chérubin to wear.

Scene 5: Countess, Chérubin. Chérubin shows the Countess his commission. She notes that the Count has forgotten to affix his seal to it.

Scenes 6-9: Countess, Chérubin, Suzanne (in and out). Chérubin shows the ribbon to the Countess. As they are sharing intimate moments, Suzanne keeps interrupting them.

Scenes 10-12: Count, Countess, Chérubin (hiding). Chérubin hides in the closet. The Count expresses his jealousy toward the Countess. The Countess tells him that Suzanne is in the closet.

Scene 13: Count, Countess, Suzanne. Suzanne enters and hears the discussion about how she is in the closet. She hides. The Count locks the closet. He and the Countess leave.

Scenes 14-15: Suzanne, Chérubin. Chérubin gets out of the closet and Suzanne persuades him to jump out the window. Suzanne goes into the closet.

Scenes 16-17: Count, Countess, Suzanne (hiding). The Countess tells the Count that Chérubin is in the closet. The Count forces open the closet door, revealing Suzanne.

Scene 18: Suzanne, Countess. As the Count searches the closet, Suzanne explains how Chérubin escaped out the window.

Scene 19: Count, Countess, Suzanne. The Count is confused. The Countess says that this whole thing has been a plot to punish him for his jealousy. She tells him that Figaro wrote the note.

Scene 20: Figaro, Count, Countess, Suzanne. Figaro pretends not to know anything about the note, but then admits he wrote the note after Suzanne explains that the Count knows everything.

Scene 21: Antoine, Figaro, Count, Countess, Suzanne. The drunken gardener is upset that someone jumped out the window and harmed the plants below. Antonio produces Chérubin's commission, which fell out of the jumper's pocket. Figaro says that he has the commission because the Count forgot to seal it.

Scene 22: Countess, Suzanne. When the Countess realizes that they cannot send Chérubin to Suzanne's meeting in the garden, she decides to go in Suzanne's place.

Act III

Scene 1: Count, Pedrille. The Count sends Pedrille to Seville to look for Chérubin.

Scene 2: Count (alone). The Count expresses his confusion in a monologue.

Scene 3: Count, Figaro. Figaro explains how much English he speaks. He knows the word "bugger it," which will be very useful. The Count is trying to figure out whether or not Figaro knows that the Count wants to seduce Suzanne.

Scene 4: Count, Suzanne. Under the pretext that the Countess needs smelling salts, Suzanne meets with the Count in order to make him believe that she is susceptible to his plans to seduce her and will meet him in the garden that evening.

Scene 5: Suzanne, Figaro. Suzanne tells Figaro that she has fooled the Count.

Scene 6: Count, alone. Having overheard what Suzanne said to Figaro, the Count expresses his suspicions.

Act IV

Scene 1: Figaro, Suzanne. Figaro asks Suzanne not to meet the Count in the garden.

Scene 2: Figaro, Suzanne, Countess. The Countess sends Figaro away so that she can talk to Suzanne alone.

Scene 3: Suzanne, Countess. The Countess asks Suzanne to write a letter to the Count, setting up the meeting for that night in the garden. She reiterates that she will go in Suzanne's place. The Countess and Suzanne decide to include a pin and to tell the Count to send back the pin as a token to indicate that he will meet Suzanne in the garden. As the Countess is giving Suzanne a pin, she drops the ribbon that she took back from Chérubin.

Scene 4: Chérubin (dressed as a girl), Fanchette, Countess, Suzanne. Fanchette introduces her "cousin" (Chérubin) to Suzanne and the Countess. "Fanchette's cousin" gives a bouquet of flowers to the Countess, and the Countess gives "her" a kiss. Chérubin blushes.

Scene 5: Count, Antoine, Chérubin, Fanchette, Suzanne, Countess. Antonio and the Count unmask Chérubin. The Countess admits that Chérubin was the man who jumped out the window earlier. Fanchette begs the Count to forgive Chérubin and allow her to marry him, based on a promise the Count made to her that she could have anything she wanted.

Scene 6: Figaro, Count, Antoine, Chérubin, Fanchette, Suzanne, Countess. Figaro maintains that he was the one who jumped out the window, until he learns that the Count already knows that it was Chérubin who jumped out the window. Figaro tries to get everyone to go to the wedding festivities.

Scene 7: Count, Countess, Chérubin. The Count tells Chérubin to change clothes and stay away from him for the rest of the night.

Scene 8: Count, Countess. The Countess tells the Count that she is not feeling well and plans to skip the wedding ceremonies.

Scene 9: Count, Countess, Suzanne, Dancers. Suzanne announces the dancers for a pre-wedding celebration. The Count receives Suzanne's note, and pricks his finger on the pin she has attached to it. He throws the pin away, but then sees the note that he should return the pin if he is planning to meet her in the garden, so he has to find the pin. The Countess tells Suzanne that they can switch clothes after the dancing ends. The Count finds the pin.

Scene 10: Count, Fanchette. The Count entrusts Fanchette with the mission of delivering the pin to Suzanne, along with the message that he will be at the chestnut tree at eight o'clock.

Scene 11: Count, Fanchette, Figaro. The Count wants Figaro to leave with him, but Figaro finds a reason to stay and question Fanchette.

Scene 12: Fanchette, Figaro. Figaro questions Fanchette about the pin that the Count gave her. He learns that the pin is intended for Suzanne as a token of their meeting that night. He becomes jealous.

Scene 13: Figaro, alone. Figaro expresses bitterness at having told Suzanne he would not be jealous with regard to her.

Scene 14: Figaro, Count. Figaro suggests that he will set up the fireworks under the chestnut tree in an effort to ruin the Count's meeting with Suzanne, but the Count tells him to set them up elsewhere.

Act V

Scene 1: Fanchette, alone. Fanchette looks for the pavilion where she is supposed to meet Chérubin.

Scene 2: Figaro, Bazille, Antoine. Figaro tells Antoine and Bazille that he plans to surprise the Count and Suzanne when they are together.

Scene 3: Figaro, alone. Figaro rails against women and the aristocracy in general, and the Count in particular.

Scene 4: Suzanne, Countess; Figaro (off to the side). Suzanne and the Countess are each wearing the other's clothes. They laugh about their plan to have the Count think he is seducing Suzanne. Then they speak louder for Figaro's benefit. The Countess says that she is going back in the house.

Scene 5: Chérubin, Countess; Figaro, Suzanne (off to the side); Count (entering). Chérubin thinks that the Countess is Suzanne. The Countess pretends to be Suzanne and tells Chérubin to leave. Chérubin insists on a kiss first. The Countess is willing to oblige, but the Count gets in the way. Figaro is angry because he thinks that Chérubin has kissed Suzanne.

Scene 6: Count, Figaro, Countess; Suzanne (off to the side). Figaro rushes forward and the Count hits him, mistaking Figaro for Chérubin. The Count then kisses the Countess, thinking she is Suzanne. The Count explains to "Suzanne" that he has grown tired of the Countess. He gives her a dowry and a diamond ring, then invites her into a pavilion. Figaro interrupts them, and they run off. The Countess goes into the pavilion, and the Count goes off into the park.

Scene 7: Figaro, Suzanne. Suzanne pretends to be the Countess and flirts with Figaro in order to teach him a lesson about jealousy. He figures out that it is actually Suzanne and flirts back, pretending that he wants to kiss the Countess. Suzanne slaps him. He tells her that he recognized her voice. She explains everything that has happened and makes him beg for her forgiveness, which he does.

Scene 8: Count, Figaro, Suzanne. Suzanne and Figaro lead the Count to believe that the Countess is having an affair with a mysterious man (Figaro). Suzanne runs away.

Scene 9: Count, Figaro. Figaro runs off after "the Countess."

Scene 10: Count, alone. The Count calls out for servants to help him.

Scene 11: Count, Pedrille. Pedrille informs the Count that he has not been able to find Chérubin.

Scene 12: Count, Figaro, Bazille, Antoine. The Count accuses Figaro of having an affair the Countess. He goes into the pavilion to see what is going on.

Scene 13: Figaro, Bazille, Antoine. Bazille, Antoine, and Figaro comment on the situation.

Scene 14: Count, Chérubin, Bazille, Antoine, Figaro. The Count drags Chérubin out of the pavilion. Chérubin says that he has been hiding from the Count. The Count orders Antoine to bring the Countess out of the pavilion.

Scenes 15-16: Everyone from the previous scene, with Antoine exiting and re-entering with Fanchette. Antoine brings Fanchette out of the pavilion.

Scene 17: Everyone from the previous scene, plus Suzanne. Suzanne (dressed as the Countess) enters from the pavilion.

Scene 18: Everyone from the previous scene, plus the Countess. The Countess (dressed as Suzanne) enters from the pavilion. The Count figures out that Suzanne and the Countess traded places. The Count apologizes to the Countess. She forgives him. And so does everyone else. Figaro invites everyone to the wedding celebration.

Discussion Questions:

- Does Ranjit Bolt succeed in creating a faster version of the play that preserves the central plot and the thematic core?
- What are the implications of cutting Marceline entirely? Does this merely streamline the action by remove a sentimental plot that audiences today would probably find silly or boring? Does it really matter that one less person emerges from the pavilion in Act V? How much do we miss her commentary on gender and her switch from plotting against Figaro and Suzanne to plotting with Suzanne and the Countess against the Count?
- Similarly, what are the implications of cutting Don Guzman Brid'oison, Bartholo, and Gripe-Soleil? And all the crowds in the big scenes?

TRANSLATION AND ADAPTATION

Introduction: Translation is Betrayal?

“Traduttore, traditore!” is an Italian axiom that literally means “Translator, traitor!” The French version of this proverb is “Traduire, c’est trahir” which literally means “To translate is to betray.” We could potentially render these phrases in English as “The translator is a traitor” or “Translation is betrayal.”

Translators acknowledge that it is impossible to be completely “faithful” to the source text. According to James S. Holmes, different translators have different “correspondence rules,” meaning that translators prioritize which aspects of a text should be preserved. Walter Benjamin thought that it was most important to preserve the syntax of the source language in the target language translation. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has argued that it is essential to preserve a certain “foreignness” in the translated text, in order to show respect for the source language and culture.

However, many translators think that it is more important to render a text that will be comprehensible and enjoyable for the target audience. This philosophy was articulated in the 1960s by Eugene Nida, who used the phrase “dynamic equivalence” to describe strategies for translating the Bible. Incorporating not only linguistic translation, but also cultural translation, Nida’s model privileges the target culture over the source culture. He was primarily invested in translating Biblical languages and Judeo-Christian culture into indigenous languages and cultures, and argued that the best translators would be missionaries who had vast immersive experience in an indigenous culture. Such missionaries would be able to find equivalents for Biblical phenomena within the target culture. So, for instance, a translation of the Garden of Eden might incorporate aspects of an aboriginal creation myth, or the word choice for “resurrection” might be drawn from a widely known story in the target culture about someone coming back from the dead.

In an interview with Michael Billington (see page 31), Ranjit Bolt stated that his primary goal for his translation of *The Marriage of Figaro* was to create productive “pace and rhythm” in English. He positions himself as a translator who is more invested in the target audience than in the source culture by emphasizing that he is not very impressed with Beaumarchais as a “great” French author and that he wanted to cut “quite a lot of flab” from the script.

Bolt’s 2006 version of the play is also an adaptation, in that it relocates the action to India during the nineteenth century. Remy Bumppo’s production places the action in France in the 1950s. In a way, directors and designers become translators as well, translating the text from the page to the stage.

This section also invites you to consider Mozart’s opera *Le Nozze di Figaro* as an adaptation of the play. Where Bolt attempts to translate with as much economy as possible, Mozart and da Ponte sometimes embellish lyrically and musically on what Beaumarchais has written. A good example is Figaro’s monologue in Act I, scene 10. Bolt replaces much of the speech with physical gestures intended to get the point across; for Mozart the speech becomes an aria.

Michael Billington, "Comic Timing"

On Ranjit Bolt and his adaptation of *The Marriage of Figaro*.

The Guardian, October 16, 2006

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2006/oct/16/theatre1>

Sex and power are on Ranjit Bolt's mind right now. The translator's new version of Beaumarchais's *The Marriage of Figaro*, transposed to the 19th-century Mughal Empire, is touring in a Tara Arts production that comes to London this week. He has also written the lyrics for the RSC's *Merry Wives of Windsor*, starring Judi Dench, which opens in Stratford in December. By chance, both works feature titled figures vainly pulling rank in order to try and seduce women - but it was the Beaumarchais play, famously described by Napoleon as "the Revolution in action", that changed the course of history.

Or so I always thought. Bolt, however, shows a lively disrespect for his original. "Because they're French," he says over a cup of coffee at Tara Arts's London base, "writers often acquire a kudos denied our own dramatists. We don't call Sheridan 'maître' but he was a major genius, in another league from Molière. Just imagine if Shakespeare had been French! We'd never hear the last of it. In Paris there'd be a Place Shakespeare and lots of monumental buildings. And what do we have? One pigeon-shat-on statue in Leicester Square."

I once described Beaumarchais' play as a masterpiece, unfairly overshadowed by Mozart's opera. But Bolt disagrees. "I think it's a jolly good comedy," he says, "with quite a lot of flab. At the first performance at the Comédie Française, the actors threatened to go on strike unless there were cuts. So I've been quite radical, cutting out the silly, implausible sub-plot involving Dr Bartholo and Marceline. Setting it in 19th-century India also sharpens the relationship between the Nawab and his servant, Figaro. The Nawab is an old-fashioned potentate who expects women to put up with whatever is dished out and not fight back: he reminds me, in his male vanity, of the Shashi Kapoor character in *Heat and Dust*."

Bolt says he has focused more on pace and rhythm than the play's incendiary qualities. "What I hope we've come up with is a lively two-hour comedy, because for me that's a rule of thumb. Unless you've got a major work like *Twelfth Night* or *Midsummer Night's Dream*, comedy should never last more than two hours in the theatre. I thought the *Tartuffe* I did for the National worked beautifully: an hour either side of the interval, so people didn't feel cheated and yet weren't pining for dinner. I don't think Beaumarchais was a towering genius - just very, very good."

For all his iconoclasm about the French masters, Bolt does turn out to be something of a hero-worshipper: one of his great idols is the lyricist Alan Jay Lerner, who wrote *My Fair Lady*, *Gigi* and *Camelot*. "I've always worshipped Lerner's lyrics," he says, "because they're so elegant and sophisticated, but simple. When I was writing *The Merry Wives*, Lerner was always in the back of my mind."

Picking one's way through Ranjit Bolt's somewhat privileged life (his parents were academics; he grew up in Cambridge and studied classics at Oxford), a whole raft of other heroes begins to emerge. "I suppose one big influence, was my uncle, Robert [Bolt, author of *A Man for All Seasons*], who was both a famous playwright and enormously rich. He used to turn up in a

maroon convertible with the gorgeous Sarah Miles [his wife] in a see-through sweater, and I thought to myself, 'This looks like the life.' In my teens, I constantly read Byron's *Don Juan*, which for sheer dazzling expertise in the comic use of rhyme is unmatched in English. And, after I'd left Oxford and was bored to death doing a job in the City, I went to see Tony Harrison's version of Molière's *The Misanthrope* at the Old Vic. I thought it was just brilliant. If any one person made me realize that translation can be an art in itself, it was Tony Harrison."

Bolt believes passionately that, at its best, translation is more than a secondary skill. As he points out, English comic verse is a totally different animal from French verse. In his version of *Tartuffe*, Elmire says to the sexually predatory hypocrite: "And now you're rushing to the sweet/ Before we've had the soup and meat," which locks the laugh firmly into place. As Bolt says: "What you try and do is combine Molière's brilliance in making clear, moral points in a very funny way, with the English language's propensity for producing rhyming couplets."

Bolt has a whole slew of projects in store. He hopes to write another musical, based on a Hollywood film noir. He has an idea for a murder mystery set in a poker club. And - maybe because he once wrote a verse-novel of his own that sank without trace - he'd like to do a new version of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*.

Which raises the eternal question of how good any translation can be if one isn't steeped in the original language. "It's a fair point," says Bolt. "With French, I had the language in my blood, thanks to another amazing uncle who lives in an old robber baron's fort in the French Alps. I realise Pushkin is a different proposition, but I've a close Russian friend who has promised to prepare a faithful version of *Eugene Onegin* and explain everything to me. In the end I think it's more important to be able to write verse than to be a Russian scholar. I'd rather have a David Hare version of a Brecht play than that of an Oxford professor who spoke the language perfectly."

For Bolt, the translator is an artist rather than a mere journeyman - and, although he sometimes displays a certain recklessness towards his subjects, he is one of those contemporary writers who has proved that new adaptations of old classics can achieve a vibrant life of their own.

Points for Discussion:

- First produced in 1973, Tony Harrison's adaptation of *The Misanthrope* is set in 1966 (300 years after Molière's original), with the political circle of Charles de Gaulle taking the place of the court of Louis XIV. It is interesting that Bolt cites Harrison as an influence, since his 2006 adaptation of *The Marriage of Figaro* relocated the action to India during the nineteenth century, and Remy Bumppo's production sets the play in France in the 1950s.
- "I'd rather have a David Hare version of a Brecht play than that of an Oxford professor who spoke the language perfectly." David Hare is an accomplished British playwright. What Bolt is saying here is that the skills of a playwright are more important to the creation of a successful theatrical translation than the linguistic and cultural knowledge of a scholar.

Conscious Anachronisms and Anglicizing in Bolt's Translation

Ranjit Bolt's translation of *The Marriage of Figaro* offers quite a bit of wordplay, including revisions of English idioms and his use of anachronistic phrases that clearly move the language of the play out of the eighteenth century. Here are some examples:

I.1: Suzanne says, "the centime's dropped," using the smallest French monetary donation to replace the English denomination in the phrase "the penny's dropped," which means "now he understands."

End of Act II: Figaro tells Chérubin that there is no more "pack drill" after you die. "Pack drill" was a military punishment introduced during the nineteenth century in which soldiers were required to march in full gear, usually "on the double" meaning at twice the normal pace.

p. 31: The Count uses the phrase "conjugal sadism," which is a clever wink at the Marquis de Sade (1740-1814), a contemporary of Beaumarchais whose name had not yet inspired the term "sadism" at the time of the production of *The Marriage of Figaro*.

p. 40: Mocking Pedrille, the Count says "Yes, sir. No, sir. Three bags full, sir." This refers to the nursery rhyme "Baa, Baa, Black Sheep." Interestingly, that rhyme is sung to the tune of a 1761 French air that Beaumarchais probably would have known, "Ah, vous dirai-je, Maman?"

Mozart and da Ponte, Le Nozze di Figaro (1786)

Using Lorenzo da Ponte's libretto based on Beaumarchais' play, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) composed an opera that premiered in 1786. John Wells provides a succinct discussion of the changes made by da Ponte and Mozart:

By the time Mozart and da Ponte began work on the opera in Vienna in 1785, the play had already caused an uproar in Paris, and Joseph II, the Austrian Emperor, had already banned a version that was to have been performed there. Da Ponte therefore set about reducing its overtly political content to a minimum, cutting a great deal of Figaro's verbal skirmishing with the Count, and the whole of his long tirade against privilege as he waits under the chestnut trees...for the feudal lord he believes is about to plunder his 'property' in the person of Suzanne. Marceline's speech in defense of women's rights, on the other hand, which follows her reconciliation with Figaro and the Doctor, and which had been suppressed in Paris by the actors themselves, was partially retained by da Ponte in Marcellina's aria in Act IV, though it is not always performed. (in *English National Opera Guide 17: Le Nozze di Figaro*, pp. 10-11)

Mozart's work on *The Marriage of Figaro* is imaginatively portrayed in Peter Shaffer's play *Amadeus* and in the film based on that play.

A video of the great Welsh bass-baritone Bryn Terfel singing “Non piú andrai” in a 1998 production of *Le Nozze di Figaro* is available on YouTube:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LsmvqPOB3QA>

Comparing four versions of Figaro’s speech to Cherubin (Act I, scene 10)

Beaumarchais, <i>Le Mariage de Figaro</i>	David Coward’s translation	Ranjit Bolt’s translation	Mozart/da Ponte, “Non piú andrai,” from <i>Le Nozze di Figaro</i>
<p>FIGARO: Pourquoi cela, Monsieur? Il viendra passer ses hivers. Baise-moi donc aussi Capitaine! (<i>Il l’embrasse.</i>) Adieu, mon petit Chérubin. Tu vas mener un tran de vie bien different, mon enfant: dame! Tu ne rôderas plus tout le jour au quartier des femmes, plus d’échaudés, de goûtés à la crème; plus de main-chaude ou de colin-maillard. De bons soldats, morbleu! Basanés, mal vêtus; un grand fusil bien lourd: tourne à droite, tourne à gauche, en avant, marche à la gloire; et ne va broncher en chemin, à moins qu’un bon coup de feu...</p> <p>SUZANNE: Fi donc, l’horreur!</p> <p>LA COMTESSE: Quel prognostic!</p>	<p>FIGARO: Why the last time, Sir? He’ll be back to spend his winter leaves here. Captain, kiss me too! (<i>He embraces him.</i>) Good-bye Cherubin, my boy. Your life is about to be turned upside-down, laddie. From now on there’ll be no more prowling about outside ladies’ rooms all day for you! No more cakes and cream teas, no more hunt the slipper and blind man’s buff. Just tough old soldiers, by God! Weather-beaten, ragged, carrying long, heavy muskets. Right turn, left turn, forward march, onwards to glory—and no faltering on the way, unless a musket shot...</p> <p>SUZANNE: Stop that at once, it’s horrible!</p> <p>COUNTESS: What a picture!</p>	<p>FIGARO: (<i>playfully offers his cheek, which Cherubin declines in disgust:</i>) <i>teasing him:</i>) War’s a pretty grisly business. You may last six months, if you’re lucky. (<i>Cherubin lets out a pathetic whimper</i>) Still, there is one consolation...</p> <p>CHERUBIN: What’s that?</p> <p>FIGARO: Once you’re dead there’s no more pack drill!</p> <p>THE COUNTESS: (<i>shocked at his callousness</i>) Figaro!</p>	<p>FIGARO: lo vo’ parlati Pria che tu parta. Addio, Piccolo Cherubino. Come cangia in un punto il tuo destino.</p> <p>Non piú andrai, farfallone amoroso, Notte e giorno d’intorno girando, Delle belle turbando il riposo, Narcisetto adoncino d’amor.</p> <p>Non piú avrai questi bei pennacchini, Quel cappello leggero e galante, Quella chioma, quell’aria brillante, Quel vermiglio, donnesco color.</p> <p>Tra guerrieri, poffar Bacco! Gran mustacchi, stretto sacco, Schioppo in spalla, sciabla al fianco, Collo dritto, muso franco, Un gran casco, o un gran turbante, Molto onor, poco contante, Ed invece del fandango, Una marcia per il fango. Per montagne, per valloni, Con le nevi e i sollioni, Al concerto di trombone, Di bombarde, di cannoni, Che le palle in tutti i tuoni All’orecchio fan fischiar. Cherubino, alla vittoria! Alla Gloria militar! Cherubino, alla vittoria! Alla Gloria militar!</p>

HISTORICAL CONTEXTS

The Comédie-Française

The Comédie-Française was founded in 1680 by merging the actors left from Molière's troupe at the Hôtel Guénégaud with the troupe that was performing at the Hôtel de Bourgogne. The actors were shareholders, and they ran the company as a business, with some subsidization by the state. During the eighteenth century, the Comédie-Française had a monopoly ("privilege") on spoken tragedy. Beaumarchais clashed with the actors over his take of the box office for *The Barber of Seville*, and this event led him to found a union of playwrights that would eventually become the *Société d'auteurs dramatique*, which is still in existence today.

In spite of some theatres burning down and the dicey events of the French Revolution, the Comédie-Française has been operating almost continuously since it was founded. Actors who become company members are still known as *sociétaires*, though their status as shareholders has changed somewhat. Beaumarchais is among the most frequently produced playwrights at the Comédie-Française. In fact, a production of *Le Mariage de Figaro* is playing in rotating repertory until January 15, 2009. As of 1999, *Le Mariage de Figaro* was the thirteenth most-produced play in the repertoire with 1377 performances since its premiere, and *Le Barbier de Séville* was seventeenth with 1267 performances.

Beaumarchais' Preface to the 1785 edition of The Marriage of Figaro

Abridged and translated by Daniel Smith

In writing this preface, my goal is not to futilely question whether I have created a good or bad play—it is too late for that—but to examine scrupulously, which I still must do, whether I have created a work that is offensive.

Since no one wants to write a play that is like every other play, if I have deviated from the over-worn road, for reasons I found justifiable, shall I be judged, as certain Gentlemen have judged me, on a set of rules that I have rejected? To childishly print that I have brought art back to its infancy, because I am trying to beat a new path for this art whose primary law, if not its only law, is to entertain while instructing [as Molière wrote]. But this is not the issue here.

There is often a great distance between the evil that is said of a work and the evil that is thought of it. The real issues at stake remain buried in the heart, while the mouth avenges itself by railing against nearly everything else. Thus we can regard as an established convention in the theatre, in terms of reproaching authors, that what affects us most is what we speak of least.

It may be useful to expose to the eyes of all this double aspect of plays; and I will have also treated my play well if I manage, in examining it, to fix public opinion on what must be meant by these words: What constitutes THEATRICAL DECENCY?

In order to show ourselves off as delicate, fine connoisseurs, and to affect, as I have said elsewhere, the hypocrisy of decency in the face of a relaxing of social mores, we become empty ciphers, incapable of amusement and of judging what is appropriate—must I spell it out?—ignorant prudes who know neither what they want nor what they should like and dislike. Words such as *bon ton* and *bonne compagnie* have lost all meaning in the mouths of fools, thereby destroying the frank and true humor that once distinguished our national comic tradition from all others.

Add to this sorry state of affairs the pedantic abuse of such other great words as decency and good manners... and you will understand what is garroting genius, intimidating all authors, and dealing a death-blow to the vigor of plot, without which there are only statues.

[Next is a section in which Beaumarchais argues that the current state of the French theatre is such that most plays in the repertory cannot be performed for fear of offending someone. Racine's comedy *Les Plaideurs* offends lawyers and judges; LeSage's play *Turcaret* offends tax collectors; and Molière's plays offend all sorts of people.]

I have thus reflected that if some brave man does not shake off all this dust, soon the boredom of French plays will send the nation to the frivolous opéra-comique and, even further, to the street theatres where the decent freedom of the Comédie Française is perverted into frenetic licentiousness; where the youth will be nourished on disgusting falsehoods and will lose, along with its morals, its taste for decency and the masterpieces of our great authors. I have tried to be this man; and if I have not placed more talent in my works, at least my intention has manifested itself in all of them.

I believe that we can obtain neither great pity, nor profound morality, nor good and true comedy in the theatre, without strong situations that arise from a kind of social nonconformity in the subjects treated. The author of tragedy, taking a firm stance, dares to include atrocious crimes: conspiracies, usurpation of thrones, murder, poisoning, incest in *Oedipus* and *Phaedra*...etc. Comedy, less audacious, does not go beyond nonconformity, because its tableaux are drawn from our mores. But how to strike against avarice, without placing a contemptuous miser on stage? How to unmask hypocrisy without showing an abominable hypocrite? A libertine man without a circle of corruptible women? An inveterate gambler without surrounding him with cheats, if he is not already a cheat himself?

All these people are far from virtuous; the author does not present them as such. He is not the master of any of them; he is the painter of their vices. Because the lion is ferocious, the wolf voracious and gluttonous, the fox wily and tricky, are fables without morality? When the author directs it against a fool who is intoxicated by flattery, he would have to finish his apology as such: "The fox took the cheese and devoured it, but the cheese was poisoned." The fable is a light comedy, and all comedy is nothing more than a lengthy apology: the only difference is that in a fable animals have wit, and in our comedy men are often beastly...

It is neither vice nor the events that it causes which make up theatrical indecency, but the lack of lessons or morality. If an author, either weak or timid, does not dare to draw a lesson from his subject, that is what renders his play equivocal or vicious.

When *Eugénie* was produced [in 1767] (and I must cite myself, for it is always me who is attacked), when *Eugénie* was produced, all our tabloid-sellers of decency were up in arms over the fact that I had dared to show a libertine lord dressing his valets as priests and pretending to marry a young person who appeared pregnant on stage without being married.

Despite their cries, the play was judged, if not the best, then at least the most moral of dramas, constantly played in theatres and translated into several languages. Good souls saw only morality, whose interest arose entirely from a vicious, powerful man's abuse of his name and his credit to torment a weak young girl without resources, tricked, virtuous, and ruined. Thus all the work's useful and good qualities arise from the courage its author had in daring to display a social dilemma at the highest point of freedom...

Beaumarchais' Character Descriptions

Published versions of *The Marriage of Figaro* often include the character descriptions written by Beaumarchais for the first printing of the play in 1785. Note that Beaumarchais indicates the actors who played most of the roles in the original production. Here are some excerpts, from David Coward's translation (Oxford, 2003):

COUNT ALMAVIVA should be played to express the nobility of rank, but also his grace and great ease of manner. The dastardly nature of his intentions should not detract from the sophistication of his manners. According to the custom of those days, gentlemen took a less than serious view of any attempt on a woman's virtue. The part is made more difficult to play by the fact that the character is consistently the least sympathetic. But in the hands of an excellent actor (Monsieur Molé), it raised the profile of all the other roles and ensured that the play was a success.

THE COUNTESS, torn between two conflicting emotions, should keep a tight rein on her feelings and show only muted anger, and above all there should be nothing to damage the audience's perception of her sweet, virtuous character. This part, one of the more difficult in the play, offered a challenge which was triumphantly met by the great talents of the younger Mademoiselle Saint-Val.

FIGARO. The actor who plays this role cannot be urged too strongly to enter into the character's mind and feelings, as Monsieur Dazincourt did. If he construes his part as anything other than intelligence seasoned with high spirits and flashes of wit, and especially if he adds the smallest whiff of earnestness, he would reduce the impact of a role which, in the view of Monsieur Préville, the theatre's leading comic actor, should bring out the talent of any performer capable of capturing its many nuances and able to rise fully to the occasion.

SUZANNE. A shrewd, sharp-witted young woman, fond of laughter but with none of the almost brassy high spirits of the scheming maids of the theatrical tradition. Her character is sketched in the preface, which actresses who did not see Mademoiselle Contat in the part should study. [From the Preface:] Why should the maid Suzanne, quick-witted, resourceful, and cheerful, also

have a claim to our attention? Because, being propositioned by a powerful nobleman who has more advantages than he needs to seduce a girl of her class, she does not hesitate to disclose the Count's intentions to the two people who have the most reason to keep a close eye on his character: her mistress and her fiancé. And also because, throughout her entire role, she does not speak one sentence, not one word, which does not express her sound good sense and devotion to duty.

ANTONIO should appear in only a partly drunken state which wears off by degrees, so that by Act V it is scarcely noticeable.

FANCHETTE is a girl of 12, very innocent. Her costume consists of a brown bodice with silver buttons and braid, skirt of a contrasting color, and a black toque with feathers.

CHERUBIN. This part can only be played, as it was, by a pretty young woman. The stage currently boasts no young male actor mature enough to grasp all its subtleties. Excessively timid in the presences of the Countess, he is at other times an engaging scamp. The basis of his character is a restless, vague longing. He has reached puberty but knows nothing, not even what he wants, and is completely vulnerable to every passing event. He is perhaps what every mother in her heart of hearts would like her own son to be, though he would be a great source of anxiety to her.

BAZILE. Character and costume as in *The Barber of Seville*. The role is of secondary importance only.

Points for Discussion:

- Actors today tend to be interested in emotional honesty and in characters' objectives (i.e., what characters want). But Beaumarchais advises actors who play Figaro to avoid earnestness, and defines Cherubin as not knowing what he wants. How might actors today respond to these descriptions?
- Fanchette is listed as an innocent twelve-year-old. Is this surprising? In Remy Bumppo's production, she is older and perhaps a bit wiser.
- Cherubin, according to Beaumarchais, should always be played by a woman. In our production, a male actor plays Cherubin. Theatrical conventions have changed, and "breeches roles" are less common today than they were during Beaumarchais' time. It would be much more difficult to make this gender change in Mozart's opera, because Cherubin is written as a soprano. How might the play seem different if Cherubin were played by a woman dressed as a man (dressed as a woman in Act IV)?

Thomas Holcroft's English Translation (1785)

The first English translation of *The Marriage of Figaro* was created by Thomas Holcroft, who watched several performances of the play in Paris and developed his translation from his notes and his memory. Holcroft's version was produced in London and in Dublin in 1785. In British

theatres during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was customary for an actor to give a prologue before the performance. Holcroft wrote the following prologue, which he delivered himself at the first three London performances. The first section discusses the play's popularity in France, and the rest expresses hope that the translation will be equally popular in England.

To-night a child of chance is hither brought,
Who could be neither borrow'd, begg'd, nor bought;
Nay, so alert was said to be the droll,
'Twas well affirm'd he was not to be stole;
But hence dispatch'd, back by Apollo's warrant,
A messenger has kidnapp'd this wag-errant;
Poetic fugitive, has hither dragg'd him,
And safely here arriv'd has now unagg'd him;
To plead before this court his whole amenance,
Where, should you sentence him to public penance,
Oh, sad-reverse! How would he foam and fret,
And sigh for Paris and his sweet Soubrette!
Where twice ten thousand tongues are proud to greet him,
And wing'd applause on tip-toe stands to meet him;
Where the grim guard in nightly rapture stands,
And grounds his musket to get at his hands;
Where the retentive pit all prone t'adore him,
Repeats his *bon-mots* half a bar before him;
While every *bel-esprit* at every hit,
Grows fifty-fold more conscious of his wit.

If "far-fetch'd and dear bought," give trifles worth,
Sure you'll applaud our Figaro's second birth.
Nought of his present merit must we say;
Bear but in mind our day's a Spanish day.
Cupid in warmer climes urg'd by the grape,
Calls not each petty violence a rape!
But, oft his vot'ries leaves intoxicate.
Fain would I speak a word of what I feel,
My bosom hopes and fears; but I appeal—
Not to your justice—that I dread to meet—
But to the clement heart, that gracious feat;
Where melting mercy sits enthron'd, sedate,
Turning her eyes from errors, mild in state,
Bidding this maxim for her mem'ry live,
"Tis human to offend, 'tis godlike to forgive!"

Sanction'd by you, howe'er this little blot,
If once in fashion will be soon forgot;
That signature which each kind hand bestows,
Shall make him well-receiv'd where'er he goes.

Glossary (See also *Conscious use of Anachronism*, page 23)

Le droit du seigneur

The legendary right of the feudal lord to deflower the bride on the wedding night before the groom does. There is no historical evidence that this right ever actually existed. It is, rather, a literary invention. Voltaire wrote a play called *Le droit du seigneur* in the 1760s.

Chargé d'affaires

A diplomat in charge of a mission temporarily.

Toque

A kind of hat. Suzanne's virginal toque is something akin to a wedding veil.

Egress

A fancy word for "exit."

Courgette

The French word for zucchini; a synonym for zucchini in English.

When Figaro says, **we don't have servants** to help us dress, this is a rather outspoken commentary, but also very logical. Servants were generally able to dress themselves, while their masters wore clothing with lots of lacing and needed help getting into and out of it.

The Vapors

The name given to women swooning or fainting due to weakness. When Suzanne says that she "can't afford" the vapors, what she means is that only upper-class women get the vapors. This is primarily because upper-class women wore corsets, which constrained their breathing. This also explains why the Count is carrying **smelling salts** around, as these would revive someone who had fainted.

Lemmings

Rodents from Scandinavia. They are not, in fact, suicidal. But when they migrate, they sometimes all jump into the sea together.

The Count's reference to an **evil genius** invokes René Descartes's concept of the evil daemon that makes him believe that he has a body and that there is an actual external world.

Cuckold

Generally a man whose wife has been seduced by another man. Many comedies in the Italian tradition, and particularly several plays by Molière, feature characters with debilitating fears of being cuckolded.

Dowry

A sum of money given to the groom, usually by the bride's father, when the marriage takes place. In this case, Figaro and Suzanne have received "dowries" from the Count and Countess. (In the original, they also receive one from Marceline.)

CRITICAL COMMENTARY

Excerpt from Michael Billington, "How to Stage a Revolution" *The Guardian*, January 6, 2006

But did *The Marriage of Figaro* really help overturn the social order? Carlyle, I think, was aesthetically wrong but historically right when he wrote in *The French Revolution*: "Small substance in that Figaro: thin wire-drawn intrigues, thin wire-drawn sentiments and sarcasms; a thing lean, barren; yet which winds and whisks itself, as through a wholly mad universe, adroitly, with a high-sniffing air: wherein each, as was hinted, which is the grand secret, may see some image of himself, and of his own state and ways."

Carlyle, for all his genius, was no dramatic critic: *The Marriage of Figaro* is a very fine play. But Carlyle was spot on when he suggested it afforded everyone an image of himself. At one point, for instance, the Count complains that "the servants in this house take longer to dress than their masters" to which Figaro replies, "Because they have no servants to assist them." It is not difficult to imagine the effect of exchanges like this on the audience at the Comédie Française, where the play ran for 100 nights; and, as Carlyle says: "All France runs with it, laughing applause."

Circle in the Square Production (1985), trans. Richard Nelson, dir. Andrei Serban. Starring Christopher Reeve, Dana Ivey, Anthony Heald, Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio, Caitlin Clarke (3 articles)

The Play Mozart Didn't Write

By Randall Short

The New York Times, October 6, 1985, Sunday, Late City Final Edition
Section 2; Page 4, Column 6; Arts and Leisure Desk

When Circle in the Square opens its 35th season Thursday with Andrei Serban's production of Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais's "Marriage of Figaro," an acknowledged classic of world drama will receive one of its rare outings on the New York stage. For "Figaro," a tapestry of farce and polemic that alternately satirizes and condemns the privileged state of 18th-century France's ancien regime, has not been seen here in a major production since it was performed at the City Center in 1964 by Jean-Louis Barrault, Madeleine Renaud and the Theatre de France.

The reason for the play's neglect? In a word: Mozart. The master's opera, "Le Nozze di Figaro," is one of the great comic glories of Western musical culture. And surely no one can regret that Mozart and his librettist, Lorenzo da Ponte, casting about in 1786 for a dramatic foundation for a new opera, took note of a two-year-old play that had all Paris clamoring for seats in the Theatre Francaise and transformed it to their own purposes.

Genius, as it will, eclipsed talent almost immediately; Mozart's opera, rather than Beaumarchais's play, became what one meant when referring to "Figaro," a situation that remains virtually unchanged 200 years later. ("The Barber of Seville," Beaumarchais's first play about his proletarian hero - there are three, of which the "Marriage" is the second - underwent similar adaptation at the hands of Rossini in 1775, and disappeared just as promptly from the nonmusical stage.) That is unfortunate, because "The Marriage of Figaro" possesses an importance all its own in the histories of both drama and politics. Its protagonist, a valet trying to find happiness and better his position in the world, is the French farce tradition's response to the Enlightenment of Diderot and Voltaire. Figaro is not one of Moliere's glib, wisecracking servants; rather, he is the new man, low-born but graced with intelligence and pluck, climbing his way toward an aristocracy based on merit rather than inheritance.

Figaro ("Thrown alone into the black sea of humanity, I survived on wit and cunning") represents the first depiction in modern drama of a commoner's attempts to climb the social ladder - and represents, too, more than a little of the up-and-down fortunes of his passionate, self-contradictory creator. Son of a watchmaker, musician and secretary to Louis XV, banker and gunrunner to the American Revolution, a self-made political zealot who fought fiercely to incite a revolution in France but died confused and embittered by the bloody results, Beaumarchais wrote his most famous character's speeches in blood and tears as well as ink: "Ambitious out of vanity, hard working when necessary, lazy whenever possible. Fast talker when in trouble, poet when time permits, musician when occasion demands, lover on and off. I have seen everything, done everything, exhausted everything. Every illusion has been shattered and I am disillusioned! Disillusioned! Disillusioned!"

Few events in theatrical history can have had such fateful effect as the sound of those spiteful, sardonic words upon the audiences that gathered to hear Beaumarchais's play performed in 1784. At a time when dissatisfaction with the monarchy was at its worst, "Figaro" served the incipient French Revolution much as Thomas Paine's "Common Sense" served America's - as popularization of ideas that focused resentment against a moneyed, corrupt aristocracy and sent protesters into the streets. "To arms!" cried Camille Desmoulins, the revolutionary and poet, jumping onstage to take Beaumarchais's arm at the conclusion of the first performance of the play. "The hour has come!" All this from a farce? Well, yes and no. Audiences at Circle in the Square, watching a cast that includes Anthony Heald, Dana Ivey, Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio and Christopher Reeve, will find no lack of such farcical conventions as characters hiding under beds and in closets, mistaken identities, double-edged conversations and overheard assignations. Nonetheless, says Richard Nelson, translator and adapter for this production, "For all the comic hijinks, it is at bottom a seriously political play."

Mr. Nelson's interest in "Figaro," which has consumed a considerable number of his working hours over the past three years, dates from a 1972 visit to London during which he viewed Jonathan Miller's acclaimed production at the National Theater.

"I was just bowled over by it," Mr. Nelson recalled, "by the daring, the chances the writer had taken, the mixture of styles." Thus began a 10-year involvement with the play - research, the evaluation of available translations, queries to producing directors at regional theaters around the country - that finally paid off in 1982. Mr. Nelson, at that time, was employed as principal

dramaturg at the Tyrone Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis, which is headed by the Rumanian director Liviu Ciulei, whose reputation is based on vigorous, postmodern interpretations of the classics. Mr. Ciulei arranged a meeting between Mr. Nelson and a fellow Rumanian, Andrei Serban, which resulted in the Guthrie's commissioning a wholly new translation of "Figaro" from Mr. Nelson to be produced at the Guthrie under Mr. Serban's direction.

"I'm not an opera buff at all," said Mr. Nelson, who studiously avoided contact with Mozart during his work on Beaumarchais's text and claims, even now, to know no more than a few scattered "bits and pieces" of the opera. He preferred, he said, while adapting from a literal English rendering prepared by himself and the Guthrie literary staff, "to come to the original with as unbiased an eye as possible."

Asked how his and Mr. Serban's regard of "Figaro" might have changed in the three years separating the Guthrie production and the present one, Mr. Nelson said: "I guess you could say in a general way that our sense of genuine outrage beneath all the funny business has sharpened a bit. In the first production, both factors had equal importance as we went about the business of discovering all the riches that the play contained. After living with it for awhile, though, the darker colors - Figaro's disillusionment with the world of politics - just seemed to become more interesting, more essential."

Mr. Nelson also feels that the play's sensibility parallels his own as one who was shaped by the political events of the 1960s. "To grow up with a sense of overpowering social change just on the horizon, and then to spend years and years watching it not happen; that's Figaro's experience, too, and you - I - can't help but sympathize."

Stage: Serban's 'Figaro,' with Skates and Radio

By Frank Rich

The New York Times, October 11, 1985, Friday, Late City Final Edition

Section C; Page 3, Column 1; Weekend Desk

TAKE three of New York's most stylish comic actors, mate them with a classic play that's ideally suited to their talents, and what is the result? Not necessarily what you might hope or think. The Circle in the Square's new production of "The Marriage of Figaro" is the barely living proof, if any were needed, that even performers as fetching as Anthony Heald, Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio and Dana Ivey - or a playwright of the caliber of Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais - stand little chance against a director with his own set of self-aggrandizing priorities. As staged by Andrei Serban, this "Figaro" is first and last the Andrei Serban show; its subject is the director's artifice rather than that of Beaumarchais's civilization. The evening is most likely to be enjoyed by audiences with an undying nostalgia for avant-garde gimmicks of 10, even 20, years ago, as well as by those who prefer a "Figaro" more suggestive of the Three Stooges than Mozart.

Mr. Serban's principal visual conceits, competently designed by Beni Montresor and usually slapped arbitrarily onto the text, include all-white costumes (changed to all-black for the "darker" conclusion), anachronistic props (a power saw), a mirrory Mylar setting (high-tech art reflects life, you see) and various forms of mechanical locomotion. Indeed, one might say that in this

"Figaro," Peter Brook's "Midsummer Night's Dream" (or a vulgar approximation of it) meets the roller derby: Those performers who don't glide on skates enter via skateboard, wheelbarrow, wheelchair, bicycle, supermarket shopping cart or motorized antique car. The accompanying incidental music, by sometime Brook composer Richard Peaslee, attempts to arouse the spirit of silent film comedies. Like the incessant sound effects, lighting cues and bits of fussy physical business, the score merely upstages the actors and their lines.

The lines are not always Beaumarchais's in Richard Nelson's adaptation, in which cute updatings like "She's crazy about me!" or "He's my man!" are de rigueur. So unwilling are Mr. Serban and Mr. Nelson to let the play speak for itself that those unfamiliar with "Figaro" in its original or operatic forms will have difficulty cutting through all this production's visual and oral debris to follow the convoluted plot. And that plot, a farcical chain of interlocking shaggy boudoir stories set in and around a Spanish castle, is essential to the French author's egalitarian critique of his society at revolution's brink. In telling of the obstacles and intrigues that precede the wedding of the valet Figaro (Mr. Heald) and the chambermaid Suzanne (Miss Mastrantonio), Beaumarchais mounted a bitter attack on the aristocratic prerogatives that continued to thwart the less privileged during the late 18th-century death throes of the ancien regime.

Mr. Serban has no more regard for the biting politics of the work than he does for its delicate stylistic finesse or farcical intricacies. When the time comes for Mr. Heald to deliver the hero's famous Act V monologue indicting the oppressive inequities of his class-stratified world, the actor's impassioned performance and his outraged invective must fight a losing battle against another gimmick: Figaro recites the speech while riding on a swing. This spectacle comes shortly after a sequence in which some of the cast's least appetizing members perform a bump-and-grind striptease to a tinny recording of Mozart's "Figaro" overture, as played on a contemporary boom box.

When Mr. Serban actually must stage Beaumarchais's own comic scenes - which often involve hidden lovers, eavesdroppers and disguises - he seems incapable of mastering the geometrical, precisely timed choreography that makes physical farce funny. Sliding screens, chairs and beds are all sloppily deployed, as are the periodic jack-in-the-box appearances by a band of peasants and the occasional invasions of actors into the auditorium. To my eyes, only two of Mr. Serban's ideas illuminate rather than mutilate the play - an early moment in which a tape measure summons up the space of a nuptial bed and a closing image in which the Countess's red ribbon forms an almost umbilical bond between her and that adolescent fount of puppy love, the page Cherubino.

With the happy exception of the actress Caitlin Clarke, whose appearance as the male Cherubino is one of Mr. Serban's few bows to tradition, most of the supporting players are as coarse as the production: Louis Zorich (Dr. Bartholo), Carol Teitel (Marceline), Debbie Merrill (Fanchette), William Duell (Antonio) and, especially, James Cahill as an apparently cunnilingus-obsessed Bazile. As the imperious, narcissistic Count, Christopher Reeve tries so hard to lighten up - he even affects a Cary Grant accent - that one is sad to see his efforts at clowning sink with the finality of pure lead.

The three leads can be faulted only for wasting their gifts and hard work. The edgy Mr. Heald, who often races about in a state of hyperventilation here, would be a winning scamp and rebel in a sounder "Figaro," and so, under other circumstances, might Miss Ivey unveil her full range of comic ditsiness as the Countess. As Suzanne, Miss Mastrantonio remains an actress of breathtaking poise and good humor in search of her step-out leading role. The most skillful roller-skater, however, is Miss Clarke, whose Cherubino sails by with a levity and speed that the rest of the evening knows not.

Theatre: Maturity hits Broadway

By Holly Hill

The Times (London), November 20 1985, Wednesday

Issue 62300. (Excerpts)

Only a block away, performers are also gliding about the stage, but they are on skates and skateboards, in wheelchairs, wheelbarrows and roadsters, on bicycles and a swing, in Andrei Serban's staging of *The Marriage of Figaro* (Circle in the Square). This is one of those productions which provokes love or hate. I loved.

Anyone who now goes to the Circle in the Square expecting a straightforward rendering of a classic has a very short memory. John Malkovitch's staging of *Arms and the Man* in at least four jovially clashing acting styles, just closed, and George C Scott's exuberant upending of two Noel Coward comedies are examples of the Circle's cheeky approach.

Perhaps there may be, as is often argued (especially by playwrights), one 'right' way to do a play - exactly as the author wrote it in substance, style and spirit - but almost every good play can be taken on more than one level. In the Circle production, Beaumarchais's revolutionary comedy is a bedroom farce. Its darker dimensions are disguised (Figaro does his monologue while performing acrobatics on a swing) and burlesqued (when she is trying to signal Figaro that Cherubino's orders have been sealed, Suzanne barks like a seal).

The setting is white, the first-act costumes are modern whites and the second-act period blacks. Cherubino (fetchingly acted by Caitlin Clarke with just a few too many frogs in her throat) and Fanchette are on roller-skates, Bazile is in a wheelchair, and everyone else is on various wheels here and there. None of this makes any sense, but its execution is zestful, the pace is brisk, and spirits are high.

Christopher Reeve is delightfully deft playing Cary Grant playing the Count. Playing straight whether mid-air, on a bicycle built for two, or grounded, Anthony Heald as Figaro and Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio as Suzanne fit as appealingly into their zany surroundings as they would in the real Beaumarchais play. In the Serban version I have seen only the superficial layer of *The Marriage of Figaro*, but that was so entertaining that I long for the rest.

Crucible production, Sheffield, England (1988), translated by William Gaskill. (1 review)

Dramatic score; Review of 'The Marriage of Figaro' at the Crucible, Sheffield; Theatre; The Arts

By Irving Wardle

The Times (London), October 8 1988, Saturday
Issue 63208.

Beaumarchais's comedy enjoyed only two years of independent stage life before being gobbled up by Mozart and da Ponte who with all respect to that sublime partnership succeeded in hiving off an inflammatory work within the conformist walls of the opera house. It is a rare experience to see the unaided Beaumarchais going into action with the gloves off.

Admittedly, when the National Theatre gave him that chance in the 1970s, the play floundered. Not so this version, translated and directed by William Gaskill, which is as exhilarating as a cold shower after the voluptuous comforts of the opera. Again and again you find yourself waiting for a song that never comes. Instead you get nakedly stinging dialogue and undistracted focus on one of comedy's most perfectly articulated intrigues.

Gaskill deliberately plays on operatic expectations by substituting a quaveringly amateurish song for *Voi che Sapete*, thus intensifying the sense of Cherubino's romantic agonies. By contrast, there is accomplished violin and guitar playing from Patrick Collins and Michael O'Connor (a wickedly crafty Bazile) who link the scenes.

The action is whipped along by a team of principals whose flair and aggressive timing is matched by their rapport. Myriam Cyr's Suzanne bubbles over with mischievous virtue, Ian Fitzgibbon's lubberly Cherubino squirms irresistibly and Alison Fiske raises the Countess from languishing melancholy into resolute composure.

These characters' serious plight is starkly expressed through the relationship between Figaro (Jim Findley) and the Count (Paul Whitworth) former allies now turned adversaries. There are scenes where they refer to the old days; always revealing that the smoothly charming master is loyal to nothing beyond his own desires; and that Figaro may find his wits no match against the power of entrenched privilege.

Tara Arts production (2006), Ranjit Bolt's adaptation. (2 articles)

Review in the Western Daily Press

Western Daily Press

November 16, 2006 Thursday

Pg. 30

Bristol Old Vic's studio theatre was only half full for Tara Arts' quirky, colourful production of *The Marriage Of Figaro* - a shame because Ranjit Bolt's interpretation of Beaumarchais's searing 18th-century satire deserves a bigger audience.

Tara Arts, Britain's first Asian-led theatre which celebrates its 30th birthday next year, was founded on the idea that stories have no passports, and that's true of this classic tale.

It is set in 18th-century India, a class-driven society where the play's central themes - the servant outwitting his master and the battle between the sexes - fit just as well as in its original setting.

Manservant Figaro is to marry his love, the maid Rukhsana, but their master, the Nawab, is determined to enforce his right to consummate the marriage himself, while concealing his plans from his wife.

This is an energetic, at times quite bawdy, physical show which draws on a style of Indian folk theatre known as Bhavai. There's dancing, singing, and beautiful live traditional music played by V Chandran.

Figaro is played with gusto and sly wit by Bristol Old Vic-trained Chris Nayak, while Dina Mousawi gives Rukhsana a joyful, feisty appeal, and Shammi Aulakh makes an entertaining Nawab.

The play, simply but effectively set and beautifully costumed, runs until Saturday.

Review: Theatre: *The Marriage of Figaro*, New Players, London: 2/5

By Brian Logan

The Guardian (London) - Final Edition

October 26, 2006 Thursday

GUARDIAN REVIEW PAGES; Pg. 44

Good stories do not have passports, says Tara Arts' director Jatinder Verma. And, sure enough, his new production proves that Beaumarchais' 18th-century comedy can be transposed to Mughal empire-era India. But what is achieved by the relocation? Verma's staging (in a jaunty new translation by Ranjit Bolt) never convinced me that the story was worth the retelling. This

bamboozling farce of bed-hopping masters and servants is performed with spirit and charm, but the laughs are nevertheless mild and the action stubbornly trivial.

The play is given a commedia dell'arte (or the Indian equivalent, bhavai) makeover: so characters move and interact in a semi-choreographed fashion. This may be why the performances are so broad and boggle-eyed. When, on the eve of their marriage, Chris Nayak's upstart barber, Figaro, learns that his beloved fiancée is to sleep with his boss, the Nawab, he simulates distress but doesn't seem to feel it. This is a show in which winking and eye-rolling replace, rather than represent, real emotion.

Presumably the show's bhavai influence also explains the curious, unexpressive masks the five actors wear when playing peripheral characters. The longer the play goes on, and the more convoluted its plot gets, the less I was able to unravel its tangled knot of mistaken identities.

But the show is partly redeemed by a cast whose charisma keeps asserting itself amid the farcical goings-on. Dina Mousawi makes a pert, impertinent Rukhsana and, as the Nawab, Shammi Aulakh is every bit as spluttering and pompous as his part demands. The production may successfully fuse French farce and Mughal India, but it doesn't have anything urgent to tell us about either.

SOURCES FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

Beaumarchais

Beaumarchais, *The Figaro Trilogy*. Trans. David Coward. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Cox, Cynthia. *The Real Figaro: The Extraordinary Career of Caron de Beaumarchais*. New York: Coward-McCann, 1962.

Grendel, Frederic. *Beaumarchais: The Man Who Was Figaro*. Trans. Roger Greaves. New York: Thomas Crowell, 1977.

Howarth, William Driver. *Beaumarchais and the Theatre*. London: Routledge, 1995.

Morton, Brian N. and Donald C. Spinelli. *Beaumarchais and the American Revolution*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2003.

Eighteenth-Century French Theatre and Drama

Brown, Gregory S. *A Field of Honor Writers, Court Culture and Public Theater in French Literary Life from Racine to the Revolution*. Text (HTML). Columbia University Press, 2002.

Gérould, Daniel. *Gallant and Libertine: Eighteenth-Century French Divertissements and Parades*. New York: PAJ Publications, 1983.

Hayes, Julie Candler. *Identity and Ideology: Diderot, Sade, and the Serious Genre*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: J. Benjamins and Company, 1991.

Isherwood, Robert M. *Farce and Fantasy: Popular Entertainment in Eighteenth-Century Paris*. London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.

Ravel, Jeffrey. *The Contested Parterre: Public Theater and French Political Culture, 1680-1791*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999.

Eighteenth-Century French History and Culture

Darnton, Robert. *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*. New York: Vintage Books, 1984.

Friedland, Paul. *Political Actors: Representative Bodies and Theatricality in the Age of*

the French Revolution. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002.

Goodman, Dena. *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994.

Hunt, Lynn. *Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.

Jones, Colin. *The Great Nation: France from Louis XV to Napoleon*. London: Allen Lane, 2002.

Kates, Gary. *Monsieur D'Eon Is a Woman: A Tale of Political Intrigue and Sexual Masquerade*. New York: Basic Books, 1995.

Maza, Sarah. *Private Lives and Public Affairs: The Causes Célèbres of Prerevolutionary France*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

Smith, Jay. *Nobility Reimagined: The Patriotic Nation in Eighteenth-Century France*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005.

Translation and Adaptation

Bassnett, Susan. *Translation Studies*. London and New York: Routledge, 2002.

Holmes, James S. "Describing Literary Translations," *Translated! Papers on Literary Translation and Translation Studies*, 1978, Second Edition. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994. pp. 81-92.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. London and New York: Routledge, 2006.

Nida, Eugene. *Toward a Science of Translating: With Special Reference to Principles and Procedures Involved in Bible Translating*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1964.

Scolnicov, Hanna and Peter Holland. *The Play Out of Context: Transferring Plays from Culture to Culture*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Steiner, George. *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Film and Video

Beaumarchais, l'insolent (Beaumarchais the Scoundrel). Dir. Edouard Molinaro. Starring Fabrice Luchini as Beaumarchais. France: Canal+, 1996.

Dangerous Liaisons. Dir. Stephen Frears. Starring Glenn Close, John Malkovich.
Lorimar, 1988.

Marie Antoinette. Dir. Sofia Coppola. Starring Kirsten Dunst as Marie Antoinette.
Columbia Pictures, 2006.

Le Nozze di Figaro. Dir. Derek Bailey. Starring Gerald Finley, Alison Hagley. UK:
Channel 4, 1994.

La Révolution Française. Dirs. Robert Enrico, Richard T. Heffron. Starring Sam Neill,
Jane Seymour. Les Films Ariane, 1989.

Ridicule. Dir. Patrice Leconte. Starring Charles Berling, Fanny Ardant. France: Epithète,
1996.

Web Resources

Education Resource Pack created by Helen Cadbury for Tara Arts' Production of Ranjit Bolt's
2006 adaptation of *The Marriage of Figaro*:

<http://www.tara-arts.com/HTML/whatson/documents/figpackonlinetara.pdf>

Entry on Beaumarchais from Eighteenth Century Bibliography:

<http://www.c18th.com/author-works.aspx?id=341>

Beaumarchais and Mozart: <http://www.uh.edu/engines/epi588.htm>

"How Beaumarchais Shaped the Eighteenth Century" by Michael Billington:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2006/jan/06/classicalmusicandopera>

"French Drama in the Eighteenth Century"

http://www.theatredatabase.com/18th_century/french_drama_001.html

The History of the Comédie-Française in English:

<http://www.comedie-francaise.fr/CFUS/histoire/sommaireA.php>

Books and websites in French

Larthomas, Pierre. *Le Théâtre en France au XVIIIe siècle*. Paris: Presses Universitaires
de France, 1980.

Frantz, Pierre. *L'Esthétique du tableau dans le théâtre du XVIIIe siècle*. Paris: Presses
Universitaires de France, 1998.

Rougemont, Martine de. *La Vie théâtrale en France au XVIIIe siècle*. Paris: Champion, 1988.

Schérer, Jacques. *La Dramaturgie de Beaumarchais*. Paris: Nizet, 1967.

Trott, David. *Théâtre du XVIIIe siècle: Jeux, écritures, regards*. Montpellier: Editions Espace, 2000.

CESAR: Calendrier électronique des spectacles de l'Ancien Régime <http://www.cesar.org.uk/>

Resources Gathered by David Trott: <http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/~trott/theat18.htm>

Comédie-Française website in French: <http://www.comedie-francaise.fr/dev/index.php>