The Barber of Seville Study Guide

The Barber of Seville by Pierre Beaumarchais

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Introduction

The Barber of Seville was Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais's first comic work and first successful play. Beaumarchais drew on age-old themes and comic types to create a work that dazzled the audience with its humorous wordplay, irreverent activity, and lively characterization. The use of archetypal characters allowed viewers to readily relate to Figaro and company. However, Beaumarchais imbues his characters with traits of particular importance to his original pre-Revolutionary audience. Thus does *The Barber of Seville* successfully take on weightier issues than do most comedies.

Figaro easily emerges as the star of *The Barber of Seville*. So popular was he that Beaumarchais brought Figaro back a few years later in *The Marriage of Figaro*. In addition, the radical cry that Beaumarchais raises, the condemnation of the prevailing social system, is most apparent through Figaro. As Geoffrey Brereton points out in *French Comic Drama from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century,* "Figaro's self-confidence, rooted in the conviction that inherently he is as good as any other man, is the basis of the social criticism already apparent, though muted, in this play." Figaro also is a successful character because of his joyful yet irrepressible behavior. He survives in contemporary times as the epitome of the roguish figure, endowed with cleverness, wit, and restrained insolence.

Author Biography

Beaumarchais was born in Paris, France, on January 24, 1732. He attended school until the age of thirteen and then went to work as an apprentice for his father, a clockmaker. In 1753, Beaumarchais devised a mechanism for watches. He was presented at the court of Louis XV in 1754, and he soon became the royal watchmaker as well as music instructor to the king's daughters. Upon marrying Madeleine-Catherine Aubertin Franquet, a widow, he became Clerk Controller and gained her husband's property, called the property of Beaumarchais, from which he took his name. He became wealthy through business associations and purchased the title of Secretary of the King, which gave him noble status.

Beaumarchais's first literary efforts were *parades,* short comedic plays. Beaumarchais's *parades* were performed privately among the nobility, but they were not published until long after his death. They contain many of the themes, situations, and stylistic characteristics that Beaumarchais would more fully develop in his later dramas.

Beaumarchais became a serious playwright after a visit to Spain in 1764. This trip gave him the opportunity to observe Spanish life and culture, including the wastefulness of the nobility and the abuses of the government. He returned to Paris in 1767 to present his play *Eugénie*, which made use of these experiences. His next play, *Two Friends*, appeared three years later. Neither of these plays, however, was a critical success. Also in 1770, Beaumarchais became involved in a highly controversial series of court cases. Although he eventually won his case, he was stripped of his civil rights. With the ascension of Louis XVI to the throne in 1774, however, Beaumarchais's civil rights were reinstated. The king also hired Beaumarchais as a secret government agent operating out of London. He became interested in the cause of American independence, and, with the support of the French government, helped provide money and arms to the American colonists.

He continued to work on his writings, and *The Barber of Seville*, which some critics believed derived from one of his *parades,* was produced in 1775. His *Marriage of Figaro*, which reintroduced the members of Count Almaviva's household, was produced four years later, in 1784. The libretto *Tarare* was staged 1787; it was reproduced in 1790 with a new ending adapted to the political changes brought about by the French Revolution. His final play, *A Mother's Guilt*, was presented in 1792 and culminates the Figaro trilogy.

Beaumarchais pursued other important work as well. In 1777, he founded the Society of Dramatic Authors, one of the first organizations that protected authors' rights and gave them copyrights to their works. Between 1783 and 1790, he published a complete seventy-volume edition of the works of the French writer Voltaire.

Throughout this busy period, Beaumarchais also continued to pursue his business interests. On behalf of the French revolutionary government, he undertook arms negotiations in 1792 but was imprisoned on suspicion of hiding guns. Freed in 1794,

Beaumarchais .ed to England and then to Hamburg, Germany. In response, the French government declared him an émigré (a French noble living abroad who wanted to overturn the Revolution) and barred his return to France, imprisoned his family, and seized his property. Beaumarchais remained in exile in Germany until 1796, when the new government, under pressure from Beaumarchais's family, .finally allowed him to return. He died of a stroke in Paris on May 18, 1799.

Plot Summary

Act 1

Beaumarchais explains the plot of *The Barber of Seville* in his foreword: "An amorous old man intends to marry his ward on the following day; a young man who is more clever forestalls him, and on that very day, captures the girl in the guardian's house, right under his nose, and makes her his wife." The play opens on a street in Seville, where Count Almaviva waits under a window for Rosine to appear. After seeing and falling in love with Rosine in Madrid, he has tracked her down and now is determined to make contact with her. While he is waiting, Figaro, his former servant, appears. The Count explains his predicament, and Figaro promises to help him.

Soon, Rosine and her guardian, Bartholo, appear at the window. He is angry with her for reading a modern play that he finds foolish. Dropping a note into the street, she asks the Count to identify himself. Bartholo sees that she drops a piece of paper, but she claims it is only song lyrics. Bartholo, however, suspects trouble and resolves to marry

Rosine as soon as possible. He sends his servant Bazile to a notary to make arrangements for the wedding to take place the following day. Meanwhile, Figaro urges the Count to identify himself to Rosine in song. The Count claims to be an undistinguished young man named Lindor. After Rosine is forced to retire into the house, Figaro and the Count plot. Figaro comes up with the idea of getting the Count into the house disguised as a soldier who has billeting orders.

Act 2

To make his plot work, Figaro incapacitates the household staff with medications. Then he goes to Rosine's room and tells her that Lindor does love her. Rosine, who has been writing Lindor a letter, gives it to Figaro to deliver. When Bartholo enters, he is immediately suspicious. His suspicions are further aroused when Bazile arrives with the news that the Count has been seen in Seville, looking for Rosine. Again, Bartholo resolves to marry Rosine the following day. Figaro, hiding in the closet, learns of this plan. Once Bartholo and Bazile leave, Figaro tells Rosine of Bartholo's intention. He also tells her that he and Lindor will prevent the planned wedding.

Bartholo returns to Rosine and demands to know if Figaro brought her a reply to the note she dropped earlier. Just then, the Count appears, disguised as a drunken soldier. Although he manages to pass Rosine a letter, Bartholo sees him. After the Count has been ejected from the house, Bartholo demands to read the letter. While at first Rosine refuses, she manages to switch the letter with a letter she received from her cousin. After Bartholo leaves, Rosine reads the Count's letter.

Act 3

The Count returns to Bartholo's home, this time disguised as Alonzo, an assistant of Bazile. He says that Bazile is ill and that he will give Rosine her singing lesson. To gain Bartholo's trust, Alonzo hands him Rosine's letter, saying it was written to the Count. Bartholo determines to foil the Count's plan. Alonzo gives Rosine her singing lesson and manages to tell her about the plan that he and Figaro have devised to get her out of Bartholo's household that evening. Bazile shows up unexpectedly during the lesson, but Figaro and the Count prevent him from unmasking Alonzo. However, Bartholo realizes that something is amiss, and they all argue. Rosine announces that she will not marry Bartholo *Pierre-Augustin de Beaumarchais instead*, she will marry whoever rescues her from him. Bartholo chases the Count and Figaro from his house.

Act 4

After Bazile informs Bartholo that he does not know Alonzo and was not sick, Bartholo grows even more upset. He sends Bazile to bring the notary immediately. He then confronts Rosine with her letter, claiming that he got it from another woman who is involved with the Count. Rosine is confused because she does not know who the Count is, and Bartholo convinces her that Lindor is not in love with her but rather is wooing Rosine on behalf of the Count. Believing that she has been betrayed, Rosine agrees to marry Bartholo. She also tells him that the Count and Figaro are planning to return to the house that night.

Figaro and the Count arrive as planned. At first, Rosine rebuffs the Count, but when he explains his true identity, she realizes that she has not been betrayed. The three try to leave the house only to discover that they have been locked in. Then Bazile arrives with the notary. Bribed, he serves as a witness to the marriage of Rosine and the Count. Then Bartholo returns. He had gone to fetch a justice of the peace to arrest the Count. However, the couple is already married, and the magistrate refuses to make the arrest. The play ends with Figaro remarking that when love and youth conspire against an old man, anything he does to stop the romance will be a useless precaution.

Act 1, Part 1

Act 1, Part 1 Summary

It is nighttime in Seville, Spain. Count Almaviva, an attractive young aristocrat, paces the street as he waits for Rosine, the woman he loves, to appear at her window. He is disguised as a priest in a cloak and turned down hat, afraid he will be recognized by either the woman's over-protective guardian or one of his friends from the royal court. He is willing to run the risk, though, in the hope of winning Rosine's affection. He feels confused about his situation: on the one hand, he is leaving behind the various, easily obtained pleasures of the court, but he is also tired of the constant pursuit of those pleasures. He longs to be loved for who he is, rather than for his position or his money. Suddenly he hides, someone is coming.

Figaro, a roguish barber and part-time poet, comes in with a guitar hung over his shoulder and a pencil and paper in his hand. Composing a song, he goes through several different sets of lyrics before settling on the one that says what he feels in his heart. As he finishes singing his new composition, the barber notices the "priest," realizing he looks familiar. At the same time, the Count recognizes Figaro. Figaro was once in the Count's service, and they quickly fall back into their old teasing ways of speaking to each other.

The Count asks what Figaro is doing in Seville, since the Count got Figaro a job in the government. When Figaro starts to tell him and calls the Count "my lord," the Count tells Figaro to call him "Lindor" in order to conceal his identity. Figaro tells the Count about the job situation: he was apprenticed to a horse doctor, but when his superior found out that he was also writing poetry, love letters and contributing to the local newspaper, he was fired.

As Figaro continues his story, the Count keeps an eye on Rosine's window. Figaro tells of his move to Madrid and attempt at writing for the theatre, but even though audiences enjoyed his writing, the critics condemned him. When he realized that the critics were more interested in their own political in-fighting and were never going to welcome him, Figaro left Madrid and cheerfully wandered through Spain, "welcomed in one place and jailed in the next," facing good fortune and bad, acting as barber for anyone who needed him, and finally ending up in Seville. He concludes by just as cheerfully offering his services to the Count in any capacity. The Count asks what taught him to be so positive. Figaro responds by saying he forced himself to laugh out of being afraid that he would cry. He then asks the Count why he keeps looking at the window. The Count quickly pulls Figaro out of sight as Rosine and her guardian, Bartholo, appear.

Act 1, Part 1 Analysis

The structure, story and characters of *Barber of Seville* (first performed in 1775) were inspired at least partly by the *commedia dell'arte*; a type of theatre that first appeared in Italy late in the 1600's. This type of drama spread throughout Europe and dominated theatre throughout the continent for several years. Actors played the same sorts of broadly defined comic roles in every production: the clever servant, the attractive young lovers, the grumpy old man, etc. The comedy was both physical, like clowns in a circus, and verbal, telling jokes, making witty or sarcastic comments. The stories followed the same pattern repeatedly: the young people and/or the servants made fools out of the old people. A few details might change, such as, a story might take place in Madrid or Rome or Paris; the pretty young woman might be kept from true love by a self-important professor or a miser or an arrogant soldier; the clever servant (more often male but sometimes female) might get in trouble, stay out of trouble or create trouble. Whatever the details were, the basic plot stayed pretty much the same, sometimes built around politics or money, but most often around romance.

In the case of this play, which is definitely a romance, the basic types from the *commedia dell'arte* are blended with satire based on the playwrights' own experiences. In other words, the playwright is using the play and its characters to make a point about the *way* society works, which was another common characteristic of *commedia*. When Figaro complains about theatre critics, for example, his experiences are the same as the playwright's. What makes the comments fully satirical is the way in which they are exaggerated to illustrate how silly and shallow they are.

This sense of satire is also present in many of the characters and situations of this play. The Count is a slightly exaggerated portrayal of a bored aristocrat and lover; Bartholo and Rosine are portrayals of selfish old men and eager young women. Only Figaro, as was the case with the clever servant characters in *commedia dell'arte,* is relatively realistic. His function in the play is to point out the silliness of the central characters to us, even while he is playing an important role in the silliness of the plot.

Another element, or convention, common to *commedia* introduced in this scene is disguise (such as the Count wears). More conventions show up later in the action.

Act 1, Part 2

Act 1, Part 2 Summary

Rosine stands at her window, saying she enjoys the night air. When Bartholo asks what is on the paper she is holding, she tells him it is a new song from her music teacher called "The Futile Precaution." Bartholo assumes it is a "new sort of silliness," and talks grumpily about how there is so much nonsense around- especially the "new fangled Drama."

Rosine drops the song out the window and asks Bartholo to run downstairs to retrieve it. Grumbling all the way, Bartholo leaves. As soon as he is gone, Rosine whispers down to the Count that the paper is for him. He darts out from his hiding place and grabs it just before Bartholo comes out. Bartholo searches everywhere for the song, but not fining it, he goes back into the house, still grumbling. Once he is back at Rosine's window, he hurries her back inside.

The Count and Figaro come out from their hiding place, discovering that the song is actually a letter. Figaro comments on Bartholo's desire for information regarding "The Futile Precaution," suggesting that Bartholo's attempts to keep Rosine for himself are themselves futile precautions. Meanwhile, the Count is excitedly reading Rosine's letter, which refers to his devotion. As the Count falls deeper and more enthusiastically in love with her, Figaro comments on how the cleverness of women increases when they are locked up.

The Count tells Figaro that he met Rosine by chance on a street in Madrid. He searched and searched for her, but only recently found out her name, that she is an orphan, and married to Bartholo. Figaro tells him that Rosine is not married, and that that's a story Bartholo spread around to keep potential lovers away, since he (Bartholo) wants to marry her himself. The Count instantly resolves to court her and marry her.

Quickly devising a plan, Figaro reveals that he is Bartholo's barber, and he can easily gain access to the house. He decides to use his knowledge of drugs, which he got when he was studying with the horse doctor, to put Bartholo's servants to sleep. He then tells the Count to pose as a drunken member of a military detachment in town and introduce himself to Bartholo, who will be obliged to invite him in. Bartholo, who comes out of his house, interrupts their planning. He calls to Rosine, telling her not to let anyone in, and then heads off to visit his friend Bazile, who is supposed to be making all the arrangements for the wedding between Bartholo and Rosine for the next day. Bartholo exits, leaving Figaro and the Count in a panic; there is no time to lose.

Act 1, Part 2 Analysis

The song title "The Futile Precaution" is ironic, as Figaro points out. He, and we, know that Bartholo is taking futile precautions in trying to keep Rosine all to himself.

Bartholo's grumbling about "the new fangled drama" and all the other "silliness" is another example of satire. In making Bartholo so extreme in his dislike of anything new, so prejudiced, the playwright is saying how silly the critics of the time are making themselves because of their prejudices.

A dropped letter, like the one Rosine drops, is another *commedia* convention. It showed up in almost every *commedia* scenario, or story, and it is a device used in comedies, including those of Shakespeare, for centuries. The dropped letter was not used exclusively in romances, however. It was also used in dramas to reveal other kinds of important secrets and information.

Another *commedia* convention used in this scene is the one of the beautiful young girl kept selfishly by the grumpy old man. Like many other *commedia* devices, this one also showed up in most *commedia* scenarios and provided the basis for many of their plots: how to set the girl free.

Act 1, Part 3

Act 1, Part 3 Summary

Figaro reassures the Count that everything is going to be all right, saying, "difficulties only add spice to the undertaking." He also tells the Count that Bazile is Rosine's music teacher, self-absorbed and greedy.

Rosine appears at her window. Figaro reminds the Count that the letter asked him to sing. The Count resolves to keep his real identity a secret, and then wonders what to sing. Figaro lends him his guitar, telling him to sing anything that comes into his mind, because love will make it sound sweet no matter what.

The Count strolls under Rosine's window, playing the guitar and singing. Figaro encourages him, and then after a while, Rosine sings along with him, just before she closes her window. The Count romantically comments on her attractiveness, which makes Figaro comment sarcastically on her cleverness. The Count vows to marry her, implying that if Figaro helps him, he will be rewarded.

Figaro then puts their plan into action. He will go into the house and drug the servants while the Count gets himself into his disguise as a soldier. Figaro is about to run off, when the Count asks how to find him again. Figaro describes his shop, including its windows, the barber pole, the motto "By Skill and Dexterity" and the name FIGARO over the door.

Act 1, Part 3 Analysis

Bazile is based on another *commedia* type, the self-absorbed, money-grasping old man. At a performance of this play when it was first written, as soon as such a character was mentioned, an audience would have certain expectations of how this character would behave and how the other characters would react to him. What kept their interest was wondering about the details of both the character and the reactions. In many ways, *commedia* was not too much different from today's television sitcoms. Both have central characters that generally behave the same way no matter the specifics of the story in which they are involved. Those stories tend to follow similar patterns and resolve in similar ways. Their popularity is built on familiarity as much as it is on their humor.

The musical interlude between the Count and Rosine is another *commedia* convention: the young lovers in *commedia* often sing. It is also an example of the way that in the theatre of the time when this play was written, the differences between regular theatre and opera were more indistinct than they are today. There was more spoken dialogue in opera than there tends to be now, and there was more music in plays.

Act 2, Part 1

Act 2, Part 1 Summary

This scene takes place in Rosine's room in Bartholo's house. The servants are all either unwell or busy, meaning that Rosine is alone at last and free to do as she pleases. She writes a love letter to "Lindor," wondering how she will be able to get it to him. She hopes it becomes possible to speak with Figaro, whom she describes as a "good fellow," and wonders whether he could pass the letter on.

She is surprised when Figaro suddenly comes in, but she is soon able to ask him to tell her about the young man with whom he was talking on the street. Figaro describes him as a poor relative who might have done well if he had not had to leave Madrid so quickly. Rosine protests that she is sure he will soon make a good name for himself. Figaro says that his only defect is that he is in love. Rosine tries to be delicate when she asks with whom is he in love, but she quickly becomes eager and excited. Figaro teases her by not revealing the truth right away, but when Rosine suggests that Bartholo might come back any minute, Figaro reveals that it is she.

Rosine is flattered, excited, embarrassed and frightened all at the same time, and when Figaro tells her that "Lindor" is passionately eager to tell her of his love in person, she says she would prefer it if he would be calm. Figaro suggests that it is impossible to be both in love and calm, but Rosine suggests that being excited might lead to careless behavior, which would end everything. Figaro sees her point, and suggests that Rosine send "Lindor" a note saying exactly that. Rosine hands him the note she had just written, and tells him to tell "Lindor" that all she wants is friendship. Figaro agrees, but tells her that "Lindor's" passion is so intense that Figaro feels it as well.

Rosine hears Bartholo coming, and she panics. She tells Figaro to go out through the music room and downstairs. Figaro leaves and Rosine gets ready to deal with Bartholo.

Act 2, Part 1 Analysis

This scene contains a number of asides; a theatrical convention (that does not occur only in *commedia dell'arte)* in which a character speaks his thoughts aloud to the audience but the other characters in the scene cannot hear him. Asides appear more often in comedy than in drama, and they are generally used ironically so that one character can point out the real truth about what another character has just said. They are also used to explain a character's actions and choices.

Figaro tests Rosine in this scene to find out whether she is as attracted to the Count as much as the Count is attracted to her. When she says that she hopes that "Lindor" will be calm and that she wants to be just friends, Figaro knows the truth (that she is attracted to the Count), but she decides that the letter will be able to convey that truth better than he will.

Act 2, Part 2

Act 2, Part 2 Summary

Bartholo storms in, shouting that Figaro has put the "whole household" out of commission. He goes on to complain that there is no-one downstairs to keep strangers from coming up or playing tricks, like that stranger did when he took the song that Rosine dropped "by accident." When Rosine protests that it was an accident and it was a stranger, Bartholo tells her he is going to make sure that such "accidents" do not happen again. In fact, he is going to board up her window.

Rosine loses her temper, accusing Bartholo of keeping her in a dungeon. Bartholo says that is not such a bad idea and comments that it is dangerous to put trust in anyone. Best friends take advantage, and the servants help them do it. Rosine wonders whether he thinks she would not be able to resist even the attractions of a servant like Figaro, which leads Bartholo to suggest that women can find any man attractive. If that is the case, Rosine angrily says, then why does she find him so unattractive? Before he can answer, she goes on to tell him that she has seen Figaro, that he was very helpful, and that she hopes Bartholo chokes on his "own bad temper."

She storms out and Bartholo calls for his servants, who are not very helpful after being drugged by Figaro. He asks them why they did not tell him that Figaro had been in to see Rosine, but they tell him they did not think he meant that Figaro (who, after all, works for Bartholo) was not allowed in. After some more unhelpful questions and answers, Bartholo dismisses the servants and grumbles about how worthless Figaro is.

The entrance of Bazile, Rosine's music teacher, interrupts his complaining. With Figaro peeping out of a nearby cupboard and overhearing, Bazile tells Bartholo that the Count is in town, has taken rooms at a fancy hotel and is going out every evening in disguise. Bartholo suggests that the best way to deal with the Count is to wait for him and beat him up. However, Bazile tells him to start a nasty, slanderous rumor about the Count instead. That would, Bazile suggests in a long and comically graphic speech, destroy the Count more thoroughly than a beating. Bartholo tells him he does not have time for that, because he plans to marry Rosine "before she even knows [the Count] exists." Bazile, who had been contracted to make the wedding arrangements, asks for money so he can finish making the wedding arrangements. Bartholo hands over some cash, grumbling the whole time, and then shows Bazile out, saying that he needs to lock the front door behind him.

Figaro emerges from his hiding place, promising to unlock the door and commenting on what a scoundrel Bazile is. Rosine runs in, and she is surprised when Figaro tells her he has been listening to Bazile plotting. Rosine is shocked to hear about the plans for the wedding, but Figaro comforts her by promising to keep Bazile busy so that the plans are never completed. Rosine hears Bartholo returning, and she sends Figaro off again.

When Bartholo comes back in, he demands to know about what Figaro wanted to see Rosine. She tells him that Figaro wanted to let her know how the housekeeper (one of the servants he put out of commission) was. Bartholo does not believe her, accuses Figaro of delivering letters back and forth between Rosine and her lover, and finds evidence that Rosine has been writing such letters, including the ink on her fingers, fewer sheets of paper in her drawer than there should be, and Rosine's blushing every time she lies about one of the other pieces of evidence.. Bartholo loses his temper, and promises that next time he goes into town the door will be double locked.

Act 2, Part 2 Analysis

More *commedia* conventions appear in this scene: big emotions (Bartholo's extreme jealousy and over-dramatic anger); eavesdropping (Figaro hiding in the closet and overhearing the conversation between Bartholo and Bazile); and stupid servants (the two servants drugged by Figaro) as secondary characters.

In addition, another *commedia* character appears after being spoken about, and immediately displays the character trait that the character type was known for. Where the servant type (Figaro) was known for cleverness and the lover types (the Count, Rosine) were known for being romantic, the miser type (Bazile) was known for doing everything in the name of money. His insistence on being paid for the wedding expenses fulfills the audience's expectations of how the character would and should act.

Bazile's speech about rumors and slander is another example of the playwright putting his own feelings into the mouths of his characters, as he did with Figaro's earlier speech about critics. The playwright was the victim of such rumors himself, and used Bazile to make satirical comments about how truly dangerous they could be. This is a good example of the way the playwright used the foundations of *commedia dell'arte* to make his own unique points and create a unique play.

Act 2, Part 3

Act 2, Part 3 Summary

The Count comes in, disguised as a soldier and pretending to be drunk. As he comically struggles to pronounce Bartholo's name correctly, and as Bartholo struggles to throw him out, the Count whispers to Rosine who he really is and tries to pass a letter to her. Bartholo sends Rosine out, saying that it is dangerous for a woman to be alone with a drunken man. She leaves, without taking the letter.

Bartholo sees the Count putting the letter back in his pocket. The Count sings a teasing song about Bartholo's appearance, which makes Bartholo angry and distracts him from the letter, which is what the Count wanted. The Count then teases Bartholo about how bad a doctor he is. Bartholo gets even angrier, and challenges the Count to say what he came for. The Count pretends to get angry himself, Rosine rushes in to keep him from losing his temper and the Count "drunkenly" says that she is the only person in the house with whom he wants anything to do. He shows her the letter while telling Bartholo to do his duty to the military and put him up for the night. Bartholo demands again to see the letter, but the Count gives him a second letter.

Bartholo reads this letter aloud, which tells Bartholo to give "Lindor" a bed for a night. As Rosine reacts with delight to hearing the name "Lindor," Bartholo reveals that he is exempt from this particular duty as he now lives in Madrid. This takes the Count by surprise, but he recovers quickly enough to insist that Bartholo show him his letter of exemption. Bartholo runs off to get it, leaving the Count and Rosine alone to flirt with each other. The Count tries to hand Rosine the real love letter, but Bartholo comes back too soon.

As Bartholo reads his letter of exemption, the Count knocks it out of his hand. Bartholo threatens to call his servants to throw the Count out. The Count grabs his gun, sets up a mock battle between himself and Bartholo and drops the real letter in the hopes that Rosine can pick it up in all the confusion. Bartholo saw him do it, but before he can grab it, the Count picks it up again and says that it fell out of Rosine's pocket. Bartholo grabs for it but Rosine gets there first and puts it in her apron.

Now that Rosine has the letter, the Count leaves, after taking one last shot at Bartholo's skills as a doctor. Bartholo tries again to see the letter he saw the Count drop. She tells him it is an insult to read other people's mail. Bartholo realizes that what she is doing is the same thing as the Count: trying to distract him by making him angry), but before he takes the argument any further, he leaves to lock the door behind the Count. While he is gone, Rosine quickly changes the Count's letter to one from her cousin.

When Bartholo returns, Rosine pretends to faint. Bartholo sneaks what he thinks is the letter from the Count out of her pocket, and is surprised when he finds that it is the cousin's letter. When Rosine "recovers," Bartholo apologizes and asks for forgiveness.

She tells him that if he had only asked nicely in the first place, she would have been happy to let him read the letter. She offers it to him to read but he refuses, saying that he trusts her. He expresses the belief that if she would only love him, she would be very happy. She expresses the belief that if he only knew how to please her, she would love him.

Bartholo goes to see how the housekeeper is doing after Figaro's "treatment." Rosine reads the letter from the Count, which advises her to pick a quarrel with Bartholo. She then puts the letter aside, comments that she is too innocent to know how to remain calm in any situation, and adds that being subjected to the will of a tyrant like Bartholo would make "innocence itself become cunning."

Act 2, Part 3 Analysis

There are few indications of it in the stage directions, but this section of the act is where the physical comedy aspect of *commedia dell'arte* takes center stage. The fight over whose hands are on which physical prop at what time was a popular lazzi, or a familiar moment of physical comedy that *commedia* actors, individually or as a group, repeated in every performance and in every scenario. The prop in question was not always a letter; it may have been a book, an article of clothing, etc. Many times, though, and often in the romances, letters played a key role. It is never explained where the second letter came from – the one commanding Bartholo to give "Lindor" a bed for the night. We can assume that either Figaro or the Count wrote it.

As the action gets more physical and the emotions get higher, this entire act takes on some of the aspects of farce, an intense and physical form of comedy in which desperate characters go to extreme lengths to achieve their goals. This is typical of the *commedia* form, where satire and farce were both the main means of getting laughs. It was not a subtle art form.

In the middle of it all, the goals of the young lovers (to get together) are being met, while the goals of their antagonist (the person trying to keep them from achieving those goals) are not. As a result, emotions on both sides of the conflict are running high and promise to get even higher, creating effective dramatic tension.

At this point, the themes of the play are beginning to become clear. Because the playwright was ridiculed and punished for being the way he was, writing the plays he wrote and loving in the way he loved, this play is all about people fighting for the freedom to do the same sorts of things, to be the way they are and love who they love in the way they want to love. Figaro, the character who both inspires the Count and Rosine to fight for their freedom and helps them fight, embodies both this theme and the playwright's dislike for the people in society who don't believe in that kind of freedom.

Act 3, Part 1

Act 3, Part 1 Summary

We are still in Rosine's rooms. Bartholo is alone, trying to understand why Rosine has refused to have any more lessons from Bazile.

The Count knocks and comes in wearing another disguise. This time he is pretending to be Alonzo, a student of Bazile. He tells Bartholo that Bazile is ill, and that he is here to teach Rosine singing in his place. Bartholo is immediately suspicious, and becomes even more so when "Alonzo" tells him that Bazile gave him a message to pass on. When Bartholo tells "Alonzo" to speak loudly because he's deaf in one ear, "Alonzo" shouts his news: that Bazile discovered that Count Almaviva was in town; that Rosine had written to him; and that Bazile got his hands on the letter and given it to "Alonzo" to give to Bartholo. When Bartholo asks to see the letter, "Alonzo" tells him he's concerned about being overheard. Bartholo leaves to make sure there's nobody around to overhear.

In an aside, the Count reveals he can't decide whether it would be a better idea to keep the letter to himself, or follow through on the original plan and hand it over.

Bartholo returns and tells "Alonzo" there is no chance they can be overheard. "Alonzo" hands over the letter, and as Bartholo reads it, "Alonzo" passes on his second piece of news from Bazile: the arrangements have all been made for the wedding tomorrow. When he asks for the letter, Bartholo holds onto it. "Alonzo" tries to get back by telling Bartholo that he ("Alonzo") will tell Rosine that the Count showed it to another woman, which would mean that Rosine would be exposed to ridicule.

Bartholo agrees to this plan, and suggests that the best way to make it happen would be for "Alonzo" to give Rosine a singing lesson and show her the letter then. He goes out to fetch Rosine.

In another aside, the Count worries about what will happen if Rosine refuses to come out for the lesson. He hears Rosine and Bartholo arguing as they come into the room, and hides.

Act 3, Part 1 Analysis

Between the end of Act 2 and the beginning of this act, it seems that Figaro and the Count have concocted a new plan, that the Count should pose as Bazile's assistant in order to get access to Rosine. They have also apparently decided to make their lies a little more believable by building them around the truth: Rosine has written to the Count, but he and Figaro have found a way to turn a potential danger into a potential strength by using the letter as the basis of a plot to get the Count in to see Rosine.

When the Count shows up in a second disguise and Bartholo does not recognize him, we might wonder why. It is not a question of it being a very good disguise: after all, Rosine later recognizes the Count right away. It was a *commedia* convention that even the easiest disguises were not seen through unless the playwright wanted them to be. This suspension of disbelief, believing in things that are obviously impossible because the play demands it, became to a convention in other comedies as well: it is similar to the way that characters in Shakespeare's plays, like *Twelfth Night* or *As You Like It*, never realized that male characters were actually women.

Act 3, Part 2

Act 3, Part 2 Summary

Rosine comes in, refusing to take any more music lessons from anybody – and then quickly changes her mind when she sees "Alonzo" and instantly realizes who he is. She exclaims in surprise, then covers her exclamation by saying she cried out in pain after spraining her ankle. Bartholo panics and runs for a chair, leaving the Count and Rosine alone for a moment, free to express their feelings for each other, and hoping that Figaro will help them. Bartholo, eager to be nice to Rosine, brings her a chair and tries to dismiss "Alonzo," saying she is too upset to have a lesson. Rosine says she is fine but Bartholo continues to try to get rid of "Alonzo" who convinces him that it might be wiser to let her have her own way. Bartholo decides to stay and hear the whole lesson, which sends Rosine into despair, but "Alonzo" saves the situation by showing her the song he wants her to sing: "The Futile Precaution."

As she sings the song (which has lyrics about the beauty of spring and the presence of love everywhere), Bartholo falls asleep and the Count gives in to his feelings, kissing Rosine's hand passionately. This makes Rosine stop singing, which makes Bartholo start to wake up. She sings again, the Count kisses her again; Bartholo wakes up again, and so on and so on.

When the song ends, Bartholo apologizes for falling asleep, explaining that seeing patients makes him tired. As he talks, Rosine and the Count have asides wondering where Figaro is. Bartholo tells "Alonzo" that he has asked Bazile to teach Rosine something more lively. As Bartholo sings the song he wants Rosine to learn, Figaro appears. Bartholo sees him and accuses him of coming back to cause more disturbances in the house. Figaro protests his innocence. As they argue, the Count tries to speak with Rosine, but Bartholo is watching the whole time.

Bartholo asks Figaro whether his daughter liked the sweets Rosine sent. At first Figaro does not know what he's talking about, but then Rosine steps in to explain, and Figaro suddenly understands. Bartholo realizes he is lying and warns him that Bartholo always wins his battles with "knaves." Figaro retorts that he is not a knave: he is a writer.

Bartholo challenges Figaro to say what he came for. Figaro says he came to shave Bartholo as usual, nothing more. Bartholo tells him to come back. Figaro says he is unable to. Bartholo, who is still suspicious of "Alonzo" and Rosine, says Figaro can shave him immediately. Rosine refuses to allow a man to be shaved in her room. Bartholo apologizes for making her annoyed. Figaro calls to the servants for water and a basin. When Bartholo tells Figaro that the servants are too worn out from their being drugged, Figaro volunteers to get the basin, but Bartholo refuses to give Figaro the keys to his bedroom and goes himself.

Figaro, the Count and Rosine barely have time to discuss the need to have the keys (so that Rosine's window can be opened and she can escape) when Bartholo returns, angry with himself for leaving Figaro alone with "Alonzo" and Rosine. He gives Figaro the keys, tells him where to find a basin and sends him out. Bartholo, still believing that "Alonzo" is an ally, tells him that Figaro is the troublemaker running letters between Rosine and the Count. Rosine interrupts and asks to continue her lesson.

There is a noise of breaking china from offstage. Bartholo rushes out; assuming whatever happened was Figaro's fault. The Count uses this moment alone with Rosine to ask her to meet him that evening in order to help her escape. Before she can answer, Bartholo returns angrily: it was what he expected; Figaro broke some china. Figaro returns and defends himself, saying he caught himself "on a key." As he says this, he shows the Count the key to Rosine's window, which he took from Bartholo's key ring. Suddenly, Bazile arrives.

Act 3, Part 2 Analysis

In this section suspension of disbelief continues, since we are asked to believe that Rosine can recognize the Count instantly while Bartholo still does not.

Bartholo, who up to this scene has been nasty to Rosine, is suddenly more concerned for her and eager to help her. This is because of what happened at the end of Act 2, when Rosine told him if he would only treat her well, she would be able to love him. Even though Bartholo is sure she is going to marry him, he wants her to love him as well. This almost makes him sympathetic, but he has been too nasty (but comically so) for us to really feel sorry for him.

Figaro's appearance here is timed just right. Just when it looks as though the Count and Rosine are not going to be able to move forward in their romance, Figaro steps in and changes the circumstances so that a private conversation between the two of them becomes possible. The arrival of a catalyst character, someone who causes the action of the play to change direction, just when it seems impossible that the action can move forward was a *commedia* convention and remains common in many comedies, and in dramatic story telling in general.

Then, at the end of the scene, a second instance of this convention occurs with exactly the opposite result. Where Figaro's arrival helped the lovers, Bazile's arrival throws a wrench into the whole plan. This is another *aspect* of *commedia* convention in particular and theatrical convention in general – the constant reversals of fortune (good moments suddenly turning bad and vice versa).

Act 3, Part 3

Act 3, Part 3 Summary

Bartholo greets Bazile happily and hopes he is feeling better, mentioning that "Alonzo" made him quite worried. When Bazile is clearly confused about whom "Alonzo" is, Figaro tries to change the subject by asking when he is going to be able to do his job and shave Bartholo. The Count jumps in and explains to Bazile that he told Bartholo about the arrangement for teaching Rosine. After a lot of whispering back and forth between the characters, all trying for different reasons to convince Bazile to go along with the "Alonzo" story, the Count finally wins Bazile's support by giving him a bag of coins. Everybody, again for different reasons, joins in convincing Bazile to go back to bed. Bazile, completely confused, decides it probably is a good idea for him to get out of there.

Once he leaves, Figaro prepares to shave Bartholo – but before he can get started, "Alonzo" pulls Rosine aside. While Figaro stands so Bartholo cannot see their conversation, the Count whispers to Rosine that Figaro has the key to her locked window, and that the two of them will come to free her at midnight. Figaro tries more and more desperately to keep Bartholo from listening, but Bartholo gets past him and hears the Count speak of his disguise. Bartholo finally realizes that "Alonzo" is not who he pretends to be. "Alonzo" pretends to be offended by Bartholo's sneakiness, and he says he is not surprised that Rosine is reluctant to marry him. Rosine's temper flares, and over Bartholo's protests, she promises to marry the man who can free her from him, and runs out.

Bartholo completely loses his temper, ranting about people betraying him. Figaro and the Count both run away in self-preservation.

Act 3, Part 3 Analysis

Misunderstandings abound in this section, as Bazile becomes increasingly bewildered by what the others are telling him. The action and dialogue move quickly in order to create even more of a sense of confusion. The misunderstanding is resolved when Bazile illustrates a characteristic of the miser type to which he belongs; everything is fine as long as he gets money.

In the middle of all the comic confusion, the set-up for the climax is put into place. Everything is ready for Rosine to make her escape and for the lovers to live happily ever after.

Act 4, Part 1

Act 4, Part 1 Summary

In the middle of a storm raging in the dark, Bartholo and Bazile, carrying a lantern, appear,. He tells Bartholo that he has no idea who Alonzo is. Bartholo asks him why he accepted the cash. Bazile says it seemed as though everybody was knew of secret except for him, and that when confusion arises, money always settles it. Bartholo asks for the cash back, but Bazile refuses to return it and turns the tables on Bartholo by telling him he would not want to "possess" Rosine in the same way Bartholo does. In Bazile's opinion, marrying a woman who is not in love with her husband is asking for trouble. Bartholo says it is better that she should be unhappy at being with him than it is for him to be unhappy at being without her.

Bazile bids Bartholo farewell, telling him that he will arrive with the notary to perform the wedding at four o'clock. When Bartholo asks why they will not be here earlier, Bazile tells him that the notary is engaged to perform the wedding of Figaro's niece earlier in the afternoon. Bartholo shouts that Figaro does not have a niece, and he realizes there is a plot afoot. He tells Bazile to go to the notary and bring him back immediately, because he intends to marry Rosine that night.

As he shows Bazile the door, Rosine comes out of her room, worrying that it is past midnight and her lover still has not come. Bartholo returns, and gently confronts Rosine with the love letter she wrote, which he says was written to Count Almaviva. She is surprised: she still does not know that the Count and "Lindor," her lover, are the same man. Bartholo explains that the Count showed the letter to another woman, who then told Bartholo the whole story in the hopes of getting Rosine away from the Count. He goes on to suggest that Rosine is the victim of a conspiracy between the Count, Figaro and "Alonso."

Rosine is shocked and humiliated that "Lindor" was in fact deceiving her, expressing love on someone else's behalf. She is so shocked that she impetuously agrees to marry Bartholo, and tells him that there is a plan to take her away. Figaro has the key to the window, and he and "Lindor" are coming to take her away. Bartholo promises to protect Rosine no matter what. He quickly devises a plan, and tells Rosine to lock herself in the housekeeper's room while he runs to the police to have Figaro and the Count arrested as burglars. When he is gone, Rosine grieves for the loss of her love, but says she wants to see "Lindor" one more time as proof that he really is wicked, and not the noble lover she thought he was. She runs off just as Figaro appears at the window.

Act 4, Part 1 Analysis

Once again, Bazile speaks for the playwright when he offers an opinion about marrying a woman who is not in love with her husband-to-be. The playwright's first two marriages

were short on love, were not happy, and ultimately ended in divorce. The number of occasions that the playwright puts his own experiences and opinions into the lives and mouths of his characters make this play unique for its time, since most playwrights did not do this at that time, neither as often nor as boldly.

When Bartholo tells Bazile to fetch the notary immediately, he raises the stakes for everyone concerned. He makes the danger of the young lovers not having their happy ending more immediate and more apparent, therefore making it more important for them and their allies to act quickly.

Bartholo's words to Rosine as he tells her about the conspiracy indicate that he is still doing his best to treat her nicely. He tells her he is not reproaching her, and that he is her friend. This change in the way he talks to her seems to work this time: she senses his feelings for her and this, combined with her shock at learning what she thinks is the truth about "Lindor" makes her agree to marry Bartholo. Once again suspension of disbelief is necessary, both for us to accept that she still has not worked out who the Count really is and for us to accept that Rosine's feelings would change that quickly.

Act 4, Part 2

Act 4, Part 2 Summary

Figaro opens the window, sees the room is empty, comes in and helps the Count to come in as well. Figaro complains about how they are both soaked because of the rain, but the Count does not mind: he is worried about how to convince Rosine to leave with them to be married. Figaro tells him to keep his identity a secret, but as "Lindor" accuse her of being cruel for keeping him at arm's length for so long. If she protests that her love is still true, Figaro says, that is the moment to reveal who he truly is.

Rosine returns, and because she is still angry with him (since she still thinks he is Lindor acting on somebody else's behalf) she speaks very coldly and formally to him. The Count protests that he adores her and is about to say more, but she cuts him off. Crying angrily, she says she did love him but changed when she found out that he was plotting to betray her to "this horrible Almaviva." She shows him the letter Bartholo gave her. The Count confesses that he gave it to Bartholo but never had the chance to warn her. He takes her being upset as evidence that she truly loves him for himself and not because he's "Count Almaviva" (which is what he said he wanted right at the beginning of the play). Figaro is surprised to hear this, and calls the Count "my Lord." Rosine is surprised to hear that, which makes the Count reveals his true identity to her and confess that he's loved her and been searching for her for six months. Rosine apologizes for misunderstanding him, and confesses that because of her hurt feelings she was going to marry Bartholo right away.

Figaro discovers that someone has taken away the ladder he and the Count used to climb into the room. Rosine says that it was probably Bartholo, confesses that she told him about the plan to take her away, and that he is planning to bring the police. The Count protests that he will protect her and marry her no matter what.

Act 4, Part 2 Analysis

In this brief scene, Rosine's confusion is finally cleared up, and the true nature of the Count's love is revealed. It is ironic that in order to be loved "for himself," the Count had to pretend to be someone else, and this is perhaps another of the playwright's themes. The Count, in many ways, has a personality constructed to fill the demands of society and of what society expected him to be. Therefore, the playwright is saying that to be true to oneself and to win true love, one has to go deeper than what "society" thinks you are, become more honest than what society thinks you have to be, and feel more deeply than society allows. It is likely that the playwright, who had in fact been damaged by what society thought of him, felt this way profoundly and used the familiar form of *commedia* to explore this unfamiliar theme.

Act 4, Part 3

Act 4, Part 3 Summary

Bazile arrives with the notary. The Count quickly changes the plan, and tells the notary that the marriage between himself and Rosine scheduled for later that day is to be performed now. The notary asks the Count to confirm that he is, in fact, Almaviva because the notary has two marriage contracts with him: one for the wedding of Bartholo and Rosine, the other for the wedding of Almaviva and Rosine. "Apparently," the notary says, "the brides are sisters and bear the same name." The Count agrees to sign the contract, suggesting that Bazile act as a witness. As the Count and Rosine sign the contract, the Count tosses the confused Bazile a bag of money, who – of course – witnesses the contract.

At that moment, Bartholo appears with two police officers. He sees the Count kissing Rosine's hand and Figaro embracing Bazile, loses his temper, and grabs the notary by the throat, but is forced to let go. One of the police officers recognizes Figaro and asks why he is there "at this time of night." Figaro says he is in the company of the Count. Bartholo recognizes the Count's authority as an aristocrat, but insists that because the Count is in his home, he is the one who has authority. The Count says that he has authority because he is the preferred lover of Rosine, who then tells Bartholo that she has just married the Count.

Bartholo asks to see the contract. The notary tells him everything's legal. Bartholo insists that because Rosine is under the legal age to marry, she had no right to do so without his consent. The Count insists that because he has a title and is rich, the marriage is an honorable one. The notary and the police officer support him, and Bartholo has no choice but to accept defeat. Bazile tries to encourage him by saying he still has control over Rosine's money, but Bartholo dismisses that argument with disgust, commenting that that's all that Bazile ever thinks about.

The Notary, still confused, asks whether there are in fact two ladies with the same name and two marriages to be performed. Figaro tells him the ladies are the same. Bartholo, defeated and sad, says he took the ladder away thinking it would make his wedding to her a sure thing. Figaro says it was far from a sure thing: "when youth and love are at one," he says, "anything that age may do to prevent them can only be described as a futile precaution."

Act 4, Part 3 Analysis

This scene is the climax of the play, where all the complications of who knows what, who told who what, who loves who and who is going to marry who are sorted out. However, while the Count does the quick thinking and saves the situation, it is still

Figaro who has the last laugh, bringing the ironic idea of *"futile precaution"* into the action one last time.

The Count's contention that he has the better right to Rosine because he has money and position is also ironic, given the playwrights' negative attitudes towards societyThe playwright seems to be saying at this point that society, or money and position, has its uses, especially when used to allow the course of true love to run smoothly.

The ending is a typical *commedia* ending, with the young lovers united, old age defeated, and the clever servant emerging unpunished for his cleverness.

The sequel to this play, *The Marriage of Figaro,* was first performed in 1784, eleven years after the premiere of *The Barber of Seville*. It again used *commedia dell'arte* as a dramatic foundation, but the playwright went even further in the direction of criticizing and satirizing society and its values.

Characters

Count Almaviva

Count Almaviva is a young nobleman with one thought on his mind: to woo the beautiful Rosine. Having fallen in love with her at first sight in Madrid, by time the play opens, his continual presence under her window has made Rosine fall in love with him as well. The Count's desire to wed Rosine forms the intrigue of the play. The Count manages to achieve his goal of winning Rosine only through the help of the clever Figaro.

To win Rosine, the Count takes on numerous roles. Because his interest in Rosine is known to her guardian, Bartholo, he disguises himself to get into the older man's household. He dresses up as a drunken soldier demanding to be billeted, and later he masquerades as Alonzo, a music teacher and assistant to Bazile. Through both of these disguises, he is able to communicate important information to Rosine. However, he also disguises his true identity to his love. He claims to be an undistinguished, penniless man named Lindor because he wants to be sure that she, unlike the other women he knows, loves him instead of his wealth and position. He finally reveals his true identity to Rosine, once he is certain of her sincerity.

Alonzo

See Count Almaviva

Bartholo

Bartholo is an old man and the guardian of Rosine, whom he plans to marry. The crotchety, curmudgeonly Bartholo is far from an ideal match for Rosine. He despises any sign of modernity, treats Rosine like property, and tries to rule his household with absolute authority. He is constantly suspicious of Rosine's actions as well as of the actions of Figaro and the Count (in his numerous disguises). To this end, he tries to keep Rosine isolated in his household. Fearful that he will lose Rosine, he arranges for the notary to come to his home and perform the marriage ceremony. His machinations to wed Rosine are foiled, and, at the end of the play, even the law will do nothing to help him. Thus, he must accept the loss of Rosine to his rival.

Bazile

Bazile is Rosine's music teacher, but he also performs numerous duties and favors for Bartholo. However, Bazile awards his loyalty to whoever can pay the highest fee for it, which, in two important instances, is the Count. Because of this characteristic, Bazile does not tell Bartholo the truth about Alonzo, which likely would make Bartholo even

more vigilant in guarding Rosine from the Count. He also fails to stop the notary from performing the ceremony.

Figaro

Figaro is a former servant of the Count. He is a sort of jack-of-all-trades; since leaving the Count's service, he has worked at many jobs, including as a writer. His personality is an unexpected mix of tenacity and laxity. He currently is employed as a traveling barber, serving Bartholo's household, but he willingly puts his job at risk to help the Count. Figaro has long proven his ability to survive and to take care of himself under any circumstances. The clever, quick-thinking Figaro agrees to help the Count win Rosine. He masterminds the complicated series of events that lead to the union between the lovers. He devises the plan to get the Count into the house to speak with Rosine, passes letters between the two, and tries to thwart Bartholo and his mounting suspicions. He performs these services for twofold reasons. He initially agreed to do the favor for the Count, but then the Count also added a financial incentive.

Despite the aid he renders the Count, Figaro is always aware that the Count treats him condescendingly because he is a member of the lower class. However, while he does not refuse to help the Count as a result of this behavior, he continually speaks out□usually with subtlety but occasionally not□and points out this poor treatment. His comments are a statement on the inequities of the social system that prevailed in France during Beaumarchais's time as well as on the smugness of the French aristocracy.

Lindor

See Count Almaviva

Rosine

Rosine is the young ward of Bartholo. She knows Bartholo intends to marry her very soon, and when the Count, as Lindor, makes his interest known, she quickly falls in love with him. Thus, she wholeheartedly goes along with Figaro's plans. She takes chances to bring about her union with Lindor and acts obstinately toward Bartholo. To keep her affairs secret, she tells Bartholo many lies and refuses to accede to his demands. However, when she believes that Lindor has deceived her, she agrees to marry Bartholo. Upon learning that Lindor is the Count and is not merely attempting to woo her for the Count, she forgives and marries him.

Themes

Useless Precaution

The subtitle of *The Barber of Seville* is "The Useless Precaution." The useless precaution theme in drama focuses on an old man trying to isolate his young wife or intended wife, and it harkens back to the days of Roman theater. By the 1770s, the useless precaution premise was a stock element of French literature, found in countless plays and stories, and while Beaumarchais's theme was highly derivative, his treatment of it was wholly original. As Frédéric Grendel wrote in *Beaumarchais: The Man Who Was Figaro,* "The thing that matters is that Beaumarchais made the theme his own. No one before him, not even Molière, had used the devices of ellipsis and punning so freely and so naturally." John Dunkley concurred, writing in the *Reference Guide to World Literature,* "Beaumarchais infuses it [the theme] with new life through memorable characters and a brilliantly honed dialogue." Beaumarchais emphasizes the theme when the audience is first introduction to Rosine in act I. She claims to drop a lyric sheet from a new comedy entitled *The Useless Precaution.* Her interest in this play indicates her distaste for a marriage to the antiquated Bartholo, who assesses the play as "modern rubbish" that represents a "barbarous century." He refutes the accomplishments of the contemporary world, railing against it as filled with "Every kind of stupidity: freedom of thought, the law of gravity, electricity, religious tolerance, inoculation, quinine, the encyclopedia." Thus does Beaumarchais make clear that Bartholo is far too old and set in his ways to be an appropriate spouse to Rosine.

Verses from *The Useless Precaution* continue to appear throughout the play. In act III, Rosine sings a song that celebrates the coming of spring and youthful love. Her paraphrasing of the song is more telling, however. She describes the disappearance of winter□which, like Bartholo, has kept people shuttered inside□and compares herself to the "slave who has been locked up for a long time and then appreciates his liberty more than ever." The play ends by invoking the theme. As Figaro reminds Bartholo□and the audience□"when love and youth unite to deceive an old man, anything he does to try and stop them can only be called a useless precaution."

Disguises

Figaro's plot to keep Bartholo from marrying Rosine and to bring about her marriage to the Count relies on a series of disguises. In order to get close to Rosine, the Count takes on several roles and costumes. Figaro first comes across the Count as the latter lurks outside Rosine's window, dressed in the long brown cloak and broad-brimmed hat of a priest. Though he has donned the clothing of a priest, however, the Count is unable to cover up other qualities that indicate his true station in life; as Figaro remarks to himself upon first seeing the Count, "No, he isn't a reverend. That haughtiness, that nobility. . . . I wasn't wrong: it's Count Almaviva."

The Count is physically introduced into Bartholo's household□where he is able to communicate his love as well as important messages to Rosine□in the guise of a drunken soldier who demands that Bartholo give him quarters for the evening. He next enters Bartholo's house in the guise of a music teacher. Bartholo comments upon the inefficacy of the Count's disguise: "You look more like a disguised lover than an official friend." However, even the suspicious Bartholo does not realize that he has hit upon the truth. The Count uses disguises for other purposes as well. He refuses to reveal his true identity to Rosine. Instead, he claims to be a penniless young man named Lindor. As he explains to Figaro, "Since she's already interested in me without knowing who I am, I'll keep this name Lindor; it'll be better to hide my title until I've won her." The Count wants to be sure that he is loved for himself, not for his wealth or social station.

Music

Music provides an underpinning for the play's structure and plot. Viewed in that light, it is not surprising that Figaro's introduction upon the stage takes place while he composes a song for a comic opera. Additionally, Rosine claims to carry a song sheet as she is introduced to the audience, though the sheet in her hand is actually a letter for the Count. Bazile, her music teacher□notably the only person outside Bartholo's household with whom Rosine is allowed contact□gives her verses from a new comedy entitled *The Useless Precaution.* Thus, the audience realizes immediately that music has an important role in the play and that music will reiterate the overarching theme.

The lyrics that the characters sing are important to the advancement of the plot. They give the lovers voice to "speak" with each other and express their feelings. The song the Count sings to Rosine in act I allows him to introduce himself□albeit disguised as Lindor□and declare his love. When the Count masquerades as a music instructor, he gains access to Rosine, who then communicates her dislike of the idea of a marriage to Bartholo by singing lyrics from *The Useless Precaution* that specifically celebrate young love. In marked contrast to their verses are those of Bartholo, who vulgarly sings a verse alluding to sexual relations between an older man and a younger wife: "I may not be handsome, yet/I know how to play. When the night gets dark as jet/Every cat looks grey."

Lyrics also allow characters to impugn others. For instance, in act II, the Count describes Bartholo impudently in song as "Greedy and destructive and as vicious as a stoat. A scraggy old, baggy old, cheap minded churl" and as a doctor who "eliminate[s] not merely pain and disease. But also your patients." Bartholo readily recognizes the insult and throws the Count out of his house.

Style

Comedy

In his two earliest plays, Beaumarchais tried to uphold the dramatic theory known as the bourgeois drama, which was an attempt to replace the neoclassical forms of drama with subject matter and method more suited to contemporary times. Bourgeois drama was serious drama written in simple prose that emphasized moral instruction in modern social contexts. However, Beaumarchais's bourgeois dramas were generally critical failures, and, with *The Barber of Seville*, Beaumarchais abandoned the bourgeois drama and embraced pure comedy. The essential plot derives from comedies stretching back to the Greek New Comedy circa 300 B.C.E. However, as John Richetti writes in *European Writers,* "what made his [Beaumarchais's] play much more than popular farce is . . . the irrepressible wit and cascading linguistic vivacity." The comic tone of the play is embodied in Figaro, who, Beaumarchais writes in his foreword to the play, is "a comic, happy-go-lucky fellow who laughs equally at the success and failure of his enterprises."

Characterization

The characters in *The Barber of Seville* are stock characters; they represent archetypes dating back to ancient Greek drama. Figaro derives from the wily slave or servant; the Count and Rosine represent the young lovers; Bartholo is the aging man who attempts to thwart the relationship; Bazile is the fool who possesses hardly an ounce of common sense. Beaumarchais also makes use of two character types popular in Spanish *entremeses,* which were after-dinner entertainments held in private homes: the itinerant Spanish barber, represented by Figaro, and the comic sacristan, whom Beaumarchais has transformed into Bazile.

Autobiography

Many critics have pointed out the parallels between Figaro's adventures and those of his creator, Beaumarchais. John Wells writes in his introduction to *The Figaro Plays,* "Figaro became Beaumarchais's spokesman on stage, and the three plays represent a kind of autobiography." Both Figaro and Beaumarchais began their careers as dramatists in Spain. Both men dreamed of a more liberal future, in which a person's social class mattered less than his personal ability.

Figaro is introduced to the audience while he is composing a comic opera. It is in his monologues, however, that the resemblance is more substantial, as Figaro refers to life experiences that often match those of Beaumarchais. For example, like Beaumarchais, Figaro has become an author, one of those "beset by . . . their critics, their booksellers, their censors, the people who envied them, and the people who imitated them." Figaro's recitation of traveling "philosophically through the two Castiles, La Mancha,

Estremadura, Sierra Morena, and the Andalusia, being acclaimed in one town, jailed in another, but always on top of events; praised by these people, denounced by those people . . . laughing at my misfortune" evokes Beaumarchais's own travels around Europe. While today's audiences generally are ignorant of such allusions, Beaumarchais's audience understood the subtle attacks on those who attempted to stand in the dramatist's way.

Trilogy

Beaumarchais's Figaro plays, *The Barber of Seville*, *The Marriage of Figaro*, and *A Mother's Guilt*, make up a trilogy. *The Barber of Seville*, the first play, focuses on Figaro's successful plan to win the hand of Rosine for the Count. *The Marriage of Figaro* places former conspirators Count Almaviva and Figaro at odds, as Figaro must use his resourcefulness to protect his fiancée from the amorous yearnings of the Count. The final play in the trilogy, *A Mother's Guilt*, finds the Count and Countess and their loyal servants, Figaro and his wife, living in France.

Although the plays form a trilogy, several inconsistencies appear among them. Notable is the shift in the Count's character. In *The Barber of Seville*, he is a smitten young lover devoted to Rosine, but in *The Marriage of Figaro*, he is a lecherous husband who attempts to exercise his legal rights as lord of the manor to deflower his vassal's wife on her wedding night. Another significant inconsistency is the setting. The first two plays of the trilogy take place in Old Spain, while *A Mother's Guilt* takes place in Revolutionary France.

Historical Context

France on the Brink of Revolution

Though France was the largest and most powerful nation in Europe during the 1700s, it experienced serious domestic discord by the middle of the century. French society had long been stratified. French people belonged to one of three legal, social, and political classes, called estates. The First Estate consisted of members of the Roman Catholic clergy, who made up less than one percent of the population. The Second Estate consisted of members of French nobility, who made up less than two percent of the population. People were born into the Second Estate, but they also could purchase titles, as did Beaumarchais. The Third Estate consisted of everyone else in France, from the peasants to the bourgeoisie, and constituted about ninety-seven percent of the French population. Neither the First nor the Second Estate paid any significant taxes, thrusting France's growing financial burden upon those who could least afford it.

In the aftermath of the Seven Years' War (1756-1763), France was left with huge debts. King Louis XV, who ruled France from 1715 to 1774, raised taxes, borrowed money from bankers, and refused to economize. Under his successor, Louis XVI, France's debts continued to rise as the country aided the colonists in the American Revolution. While Louis's financial advisers advocated taxing the First and Second Estates, the nobles protested, refused to cooperate, and even rioted when such taxes were proposed.

Throughout this period, France's Third Estate also experienced growing discontent. Peasants were forced to pay higher rents, and laborers' wages did not match the rising cost of food. The bourgeoisie the urban middle-class wanted a rise in their status equal to their economic strength. They wanted greater political power, less governmental interference in business dealings, and important positions in the church, government, and army for their sons. The Third Estate also resented being the only group to pay taxes. All these factors forced France to the edge of financial ruin in 1787, when bankers refused to lend the government any more money. Having little choice, Louis XVI called representatives of all three estates to the Estates General, a meeting at the Palace of Versailles in May 1789. He hoped that the group would approve his new plan of imposing taxes upon the wealthy. However, the Third Estate refused to follow the old custom that called for each of the three representative bodies to cast a single collective vote. This custom had long allowed the top two estates to outvote the Third Estate. When the king closed the meeting with no action being taken, the Third Estate, on July 17, 1789, declared itself the National Assembly. This action began the French Revolution, which brought an end to the French monarchy.

The French Theater

French drama developed greatly in the 1600s. France's neoclassical period dominated the seventeenth century. Pierre Corneille wrote more than thirty plays. While most of his plays followed Aristotle's precept of unity of time, place, and action, Jean Racine introduced a simpler style with more realistic characters and plot structures. Molière, a comic genius, explored social, psychological, and metaphysical questions. The works of these playwrights remain mainstays of French and world theater. Other playwrights who contributed to the development of French drama during this period include the romantic playwright Pierre Marivaux and the absurd comic Paul Scarron. Beaumarchais drew his subtitle for *The Barber of Seville* from a Scarron short story.

The 1700s ushered in fewer great developments; however, Beaumarchais introduced exciting changes into French comedy, such as social discourse, rapid action, lively dialogue, and complex intrigue. While his plays were explicitly comedies, with fun-filled plots and schemes, they implicitly underscored and critiqued social abuses of contemporary society.

Enlightenment

In the 1700s, many educated Europeans began to question traditional rules and mores that had long guided society and politics. This change of ideas and attitudes was known as the Enlightenment, and its great thinkers were called *philosophes* (French for philosophers). The *philosophes* wanted to perfect themselves and society, and, to this end, they inspired a growing sense of individualism and personal freedom. Significantly, they also believed in the basic equality of all people, which stood at odds with governmental and social systems throughout Europe.

France was an important location for the development of Enlightenment thinking. Many political ideas that are still current today, such as separation of powers and popular sovereignty, came from French Enlightenment thinkers. The Baron de Montesquieu published *The Spirit of Laws* in 1748, in which he defined the perfect government as one in which powers are separated among different branches to prevent any single branch from becoming too powerful. Jean-Jacques Rousseau believed in the inherent goodness of all humans; he thought that society was what corrupted people. In *The Social Contract* (1762), Rousseau described his perfect society as one composed of free citizens who created their own government, according to their will.

Critical Overview

In 1772, Beaumarchais wrote his first version of *The Barber of Seville* as a comic opera, complete with Spanish airs, or melodies, he had collected on his trip to Spain. When the play was rejected by the Comédie-Italienne, a group of Italian actors playing in France, Beaumarchais decided to transform it into a play for the Comédie Français, France's national theater. The play was set to be staged in early 1774 when rumors started that it included allusions to earlier legal run-ins Beaumarchais had had with a French judge. The production was forbidden. Finally, in February 1775, the play was mounted as a comedy in five acts. To the delight of Beaumarchais's numerous enemies, the French audience found the play too long and drawn out. Beaumarchais's friend Gudin de la Brunellerie (quoted in John Richetti's "Pierre- Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais") explained part of the problem: "The comedy that enchanted us when we read it was too long for the theater. Its superabundance of wit surfeited and fatigued the audience." Beaumarchais revamped his play swiftly, editing it down to four acts and producing it again a scant two days later. This abbreviated play enjoyed instant success. Madame du Deffand was at both performances and recalled (quoted in Richetti's "Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais"), "At first it was hissed, yesterday it had an extravagant success. It was exalted to the clouds, and applauded beyond all bounds."

Within a year, *The Barber of Seville* had been translated into English and performed on stage in England; over time, it was translated into most European languages. In 1785, the royal court at France's Palace of Versailles even performed the play, with Marie Antoinette acting the role of Rosine and the Comte d'Artois, King Louis XVI's brother, acting the role of Figaro. Today, along with *The Marriage of Figaro*, it remains one of the only French eighteenth-century comedies to survive as part of the modern comedic theater.

Despite its great success, some critics nevertheless attacked the play, along with the stylistic devices employed by its creator. Some of Beaumarchais's contemporaries disliked his manner of allowing his characters to speak directly and without affectation. These critics believed that by allowing his characters to attack French mores he violated the overruling decorum that prevailed upon the French stage. The critic for the *Journal de Bouillon* lodged numerous criticisms against the play, which he found to be "low comedy," alleging that it had no plot, that its action was implausible, and that Rosine was a "badly brought-up daughter" (as quoted by John Wells in an introduction to Beaumarchais's *The Figaro Plays*). One of Beaumarchais's main impetuses for writing the foreword to his play was to contradict such public statements.

Beaumarchais has consistently enjoyed a high critical reputation in France, where he is seen as instrumental in transforming comedy by emphasizing social discourse over formal style. However, his writings have received far less attention in the English-speaking world.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

Korb has a master's degree in English literature and creative writing and has written for a wide variety of educational publishers. In the following essay, Korb discusses the disparity between social classes as seen in The Barber of Seville.

Despite its comedic situations, clever word play, and inane posturing, *The Barber of Seville* carried social messages of great importance to its earliest audiences. One of these messages was the irrationality and arbitrariness of the division of social classes. This issue was of rising interest in a society in which the majority of members, the exception being clergy and nobility, held few legal, political, or economic rights. To a self-made man such as Beaumarchais, a system that honored wealth and birth, as opposed to ingenuity, was absurd; thus, Beaumarchais created Figaro, a servant who is smarter and more capable than people with greater wealth and higher social standing. Indeed, Figaro's triumph was an example of a theme to which he would return more definitively and more bitingly in the play's sequel, *The Marriage of Figaro*.

The role of the social classes emerges as a major theme in this play. While the Count and Figaro work together to achieve a common goal - notably, one that serves to benefit only the Count - each individual is acutely aware of the social chasm between them. Their social roles are manifest from their first reintroduction on the street in front of Rosine's window. The Count alternately calls Figaro a rogue and a fool, while the former servant benignly acknowledges the Count's ill manners. He ironically comments, "You always honored me with that kind of friendly greeting," and his audience understands his tacit criticism. The Count proceeds to further insult Figaro, telling him, "When you were in my employ, you were a pretty slovenly character. . . . Lazy, disorganized." Figaro responds to the Count's numerous remarks calmly yet wittily. Notably, when the Count discovers that Figaro is his key to getting close to Rosine, his attitude quickly changes: "Figaro, you are my friend, my guardian angel, my liberator, my savior," he says, embracing his former servant. Figaro accurately notes that "Now I'm useful to you we're close friends." Also significant is Figaro's immediate recognition of his former master, even though the Count is dressed as a priest. For despite this humble disguise, the Count's "haughtiness" and "nobility" - traits inherent to the Count's nature, as will be proven by his actions over the next twenty-four hours - are apparent in his very stance and bearing. Even though the Count is attempting to conceal his true self, he is unable to alter his innate sense of superiority, which he wears as clearly as any article of clothing. His air of superiority - cultivated by his social class and life experiences - is key in his dealings with Figaro. Although the Count is no longer Figaro's master and therefore has no real authority over him, the current relationship between the two men recalls their former relationship of master and servant. (Indeed, as seen in *The Marriage of Figaro*, after his chance encounter, Figaro once again returns to work in the household of the Count.)

Being superior is second nature to the Count, as is evident in the smallest details of the play. For example, he is unable to recognize the "fat" and "flabby" Figaro upon their first meeting because poor people, or members of the servant class, are supposed to be

thin. The Count's attempt to enter Bartholo's household as a drunken soldier is even more telling. Figaro coaches the Count to act more intoxicated, but the Count rejects this advice, saying, "No, that's how commoners get drunk." His words imply that there is a great difference between men of low rank and men of high rank, even in such basic behaviors as becoming intoxicated. When the Count does enter the household, thusly disguised, he is impertinent, rude, and even obnoxious to Bartholo. As bets a man accustomed to getting his way, he knocks Bartholo's papers on the floor, demands to see his exemption from quartering soldiers, and sings a song describing the older man in the most unflattering terms.

Bartholo, as well, is not impervious to social rank. When the Count, disguised as Alonzo, offers the letter that Rosine wrote him, tell Bartholo that it was for the Count, Bartholo reads aloud the words, "Since you have told me your name and rank," and immediately throws the letter down. Not knowing that the Count withheld the truth about his social position, Bartholo grows angry, recognizing that the Count's social position will make him infinitely more attractive to Rosine - as well as better suited to her. However, when dealing with Figaro, a member of a lower class, he treats him as shabbily as the Count (disguised as the soldier) had previously treated Bartholo. He calls Figaro a fool, accuses him of saying "idiotic things," and impugns his honesty. "You are so rude to the lower classes," Figaro succinctly concludes.

The importance of social rank in all aspects of daily life is made apparent, not only in the relationship between Figaro and his former master, but throughout the play. The Count's status is the reason that Bartholo and his assistant Bazile are unable to vanquish the young rival. "We could soon frighten him away if he were an ordinary citizen," Bazile muses, and Bartholo agrees that if the Count were not a Count, they would be able to attack him, thus scaring him away from Madrid. Bazile instead strikes upon the idea of spreading rumors about the Count. However, this strategy is bound to fail, for Bazile is completely unsuited for slandering the much more highly placed Count. As Figaro points out, "You need an estate, a family, a name, a rank, in other words, quality, if you want to become a professional scandalmonger." His words also tacitly impugn these men of "quality," implying that they spread rumors - and perhaps spread them often.

By contrast, in his budding relationship with Rosine, the Count is so aware of his appeal as a member of the noble class that he refuses to reveal his true identity. He tells Figaro, "I am bored with these unending conquests of women whose motives are self-interest, social climbing, or vanity. It is sweet to be loved for oneself," and he determines to see if Rosine loves him and not his money and power. From his first communication with Rosine, the Count takes on the identity of a man lacking social distinction and even a modicum of wealth. His song of introduction emphasizes his "low birth" and the "simple, sincere" pledge that a poor man is making to a woman of noble rank. He sings, "I wish I could offer my dear one/ High rank and estates of great birth."

Rosine, who happens to possess a fortune of her own, cares for Lindor despite his impoverished circumstances. As she points out once the Count has revealed himself (both in words and in "magnificent" dress), "Fortune, birth! These are things that come by chance." Her words show that even in a world ordered by social stratification, some

people are able to see beyond class implications and restrictions. Bartholo's reaction, upon learning Lindor's, or the Count's, true identity, warrants mention as well. "Anywhere else, my lord, I am your humble servant, but in my house, rank does not mean anything, and I ask you to leave," he says. The insincerity of his words is manifest - he has already shown himself as rude and condescending to the lower classes - and they are predicated merely by his desire to keep Rosine for himself.

To Bartholo's words, the Count responds with the noble sentiment, "No, rank doesn't mean anything here; I have nothing over you except Rosine's preference." Interestingly, however, once the Count admits his true identity to Rosine, he no longer hesitates to make use of his status. The arrogant Count Almaviva who emerges in the final moments of the play is a far cry from the mild, hopeful Lindor. His sense of his own grandeur is most apparent when Bartholo opposes the marriage that has just taken place between the Count and Rosine on the grounds that she is not of legal age to enter into a legal contract. "The young lady is noble and beautiful. I am now a man of rank, and I am young and rich," the Count declares. "She is my wife. Is anybody prepared to dispute this marriage which honors us both?" No one present will speak against the Count's "honorable marriage."

Though *The Barber of Seville* focuses on the intrigue surrounding Count Almaviva's efforts to woo and win Rosine, at the heart of the play is the relationship between Figaro and his former master. These two characters bring to life the issue of social classes brewing in France at the time in which Beaumarchais wrote his play. However, critics hold differing views on this relationship. Joseph G. Reish writes in "Revolution: Three Changing Faces of Figaro," "Neither Figaro nor the Count is guided by social role playing; class distinctions are set aside." By contrast, John Richetti asserts in *European Writers* that the play upholds "the social and moral positions of man and master." He also believes that "Figaro recognizes in Count Almaviva a noble dignity that deserves his service as well as a power that he needs to placate in order to survive and prosper." Frederic Grendel holds yet another view of the relationship between the two men. Writing in *Beaumarchais: The Man Who Was Figaro,* he states, "Figaro may still call his master 'Your Excellency' or 'My lord,' but he does so only to conform with custom." Perhaps at the time of writing, the conflict between social groups was not as pressing a topic as it would become. For, a scant few years later, Beaumarchais produced *The Marriage of Figaro*, which bitingly and archly demonstrates the rising conflict in pre-Revolutionary France.

Source: Rena Korb, Critical Essay on *The Barber of Seville,* in *Drama for Students,* The Gale Group, 2003.

Adaptations

The Barber of Seville was adapted to a four act opera, *Il barbiere de Saviglia,* in 1782. Giovanni Paisiello wrote the music, and Giuseppe Petrosellini wrote the libretto.

A three-act comica opera, also entitled *Il barbiere de Saviglia,* was performed in 1816, with music composed by Gioacchino Rossini and a libretto written by Cesare Sterbine. While it was initially unfavorably received, partially because Paisiello's opera was so popular, it has since been recognized as one of Rossini's masterpieces. Numerous recordings of it are available. By the early twentieth century, at least nine more operatic versions of *The Barber of Seville* were written and performed.

Topics for Further Study

Learn more about the hypothesis that Figaro was Beaumarchais's stand-in on the stage and in the eyes of French society. Do you think this hypothesis is true? Write a persuasive essay supporting or disagreeing with this theory.

What do you think will happen next with the Count and Rosine. Write a short summary explaining what course you believe their relationship will take.

Some critics believe that Figaro's monologue in act V, in which he chronicles the nobility's abuses of the lower classes, forecasts the French Revolution and the end of the French aristocracy. Write a persuasive essay supporting or disagreeing with this theory.

Read *The Marriage of Figaro*. Compare and contrast Beaumarchais's characterizations of the Count, the Countess (Rosine), and Figaro in the two works.

Research the social classes of Beaumarchais's time. Does Beaumarchais portray them accurately? Explain your answer.

Find out more about Beaumarchais's life. In what ways do you think his own experiences affected the creation of *The Barber of Seville*? Conduct research on the historical development of the comedic play. Comment on the importance of Beaumarchais's contribution to this genre.

Compare and Contrast

1770s: France is a monarchy ruled by King Louis XVI, who holds absolute power. Throughout the eighteenth century, Enlightenment philosophers increasingly call for new governmental institutions.

Today: France is a republic headed by a president who is elected by popular vote to a seven year term.

1770s: Only about one-third of the population is literate, and the vast majority of those who can read are male. Outside the aristocratic and upper bourgeoisie classes, few women can read and write.

Today: France has a literacy rate of 99 percent.

1770s: French women lack the rights afforded to men. For instance, the father is the absolute authority of the family, and males usually supersede females in inheritance rights.

Today: Laws guarantee women political, economic, and social rights equal to those of men. However, French women still earn less money than men and hold fewer high-level jobs and, at home, they complete about 80 percent of the domestic tasks.

1770s: The nobility, who make up less than two percent of the population, enjoy special privileges such as the right to collect feudal dues from peasants. Nobles hold the highest positions in the army and government. Members of the Third Estate, however, may purchase titles and thus enter the aristocratic class.

Today: A French aristocratic class still exists, but many members of this class work for a living. Class distinctions are generally accepted in France, and many class divisions remain rigid, even though children of all classes attend state schools.

What Do I Read Next?

Beaumarchais's *The Marriage of Figaro,* first produced in 1784, reintroduces many of the characters from *The Barber of Seville.* In this play, Figaro, now manservant to Count Almaviva, is betrothed to Suzanne, maid to the Countess. However, Almaviva attempts to thwart these plans out of his own desire for Suzanne.

Many of the plays of Molière, the great French comedic dramatist, share similar themes with *The Barber of Seville.* His *Don Juan* (1665) features the universal symbol of libertinism (a state of unrestraint or freethinking). Molière's Don Juan is particularly rebellious, disclaiming all types of obligation, while his servant is portrayed as his opposite and as one who passes judgment on Don Juan privately. *The School for Wives* (1662) concerns a pedant who decides to marry his ward, Agnes. These plans are thwarted when a young man falls in love with Agnes at first sight. Molière's *The Imaginary Invalid* (1673) features a foolish would-be doctor contrasted against young, sensible lovers.

French writer Victor Hugo's play *Roy Blast* (1838) centers on a valet Roy Blast who is in love with his queen. On the orders of his master, who has been banished by the queen, Roy Blast takes on a new identity with orders to take revenge upon the queen.

Jean Racine, a French dramatist and contemporary of Molière, produced his play *The Litigants* in 1668. This satire attacks the Parisian legal system as a pair of young lovers obtain consent for their marriage through a trick. Like *The Barber of Seville, The Litigants* is filled with verbal dexterity, wit, and farcical elements.

Twelfth Night, a comedy by William Shakespeare, was first performed in 1601. This play makes use of mistaken and disguised identities to reveal the folly of lovers.

Further Study

Hayes, Julie C., *The Age of Theatre in France,* edited by David Trott and Nicole Boursier, Academic Printing & Publishing, 1988.

This volume collects essays about the French theater in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

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Howarth analyzes Beaumarchais's plays and their critical reception in the context of the political and theatrical events of the period.

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McDonald discusses the depiction of familial relations in *The Barber of Seville, The Marriage of Figaro,* and *A Mother's Guilt*.

Sungolowsky, Joseph, *Beaumarchais,* Twayne, 1974.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

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Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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