



DRAMA

C R I T I C I S M

V O L U M E

4



DRAMA

C R I T I C I S M

Criticism of the Most Significant and Widely Studied
Dramatic Works from All the World's Literatures

VOLUME 4

Lawrence J. Trudeau, Editor

J.A. Edwards, Alan Hedblad, Michael Magoulias, Zoran Minderović,

Brian J. St. Germain, Anna J. Sheets

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Preface

D*rama Criticism (DC)* is principally intended for beginning students of literature and theater as well as the average playgoer. The series is therefore designed to introduce readers to the most frequently studied playwrights of all time periods and nationalities and to present discerning commentary on dramatic works of enduring interest. Furthermore, *DC* seeks to acquaint the reader with the uses and functions of criticism itself. Selected from a diverse body of commentary, the essays in *DC* offer insights into the authors and their works but do not require that the reader possess a wide background in literary studies. Where appropriate, reviews of important productions of the plays discussed are also included to give students a heightened awareness of drama as a dynamic art form, one that many claim is fully realized only in performance.

DC was created in response to suggestions by the staffs of high school, college, and public libraries. These librarians observed a need for a series that assembles critical commentary on the world's most renowned dramatists in the same manner as Gale's *Short Story Criticism (SSC)* and *Poetry Criticism (PC)*, which present material on writers of short fiction and poetry. Although playwrights are covered in such Gale literary criticism series as *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC)*, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism (TCLC)*, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism (NCLC)*, *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800 (LC)*, and *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism (CMLC)*, *Drama Criticism* directs more concentrated attention on individual dramatists than is possible in the broader, survey-oriented entries in these Gale series. Commentary on the works of William Shakespeare may be found in *Shakespearean Criticism (SC)*.

Scope of the Series

By collecting and organizing commentary on dramatists, *DC* assists students in their efforts to gain insight into literature, achieve better understanding of the texts, and formulate ideas for papers and assignments. A variety of interpretations and assessments is offered, allowing students to pursue their own interests and promoting awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Each volume of *DC* presents:

- 10-12 entries
- authors and works representing a wide range of nationalities and time periods
- a diversity of viewpoints and critical opinions.

Organization of an Author Entry

Each author entry consists of some or all of the following elements, depending on the scope and complexity of the criticism:

- The **author heading** consists of the playwright's most commonly used name, followed by birth and death dates. If an author consistently wrote under a pseudonym, the pseudonym is listed in the author heading and the real name given in parentheses on the first line of the introduction. Also located at the beginning of the introduction are any name variations under which the dramatist wrote, including transliterated forms of the names of authors whose languages use nonroman alphabets.

- A **portrait** of the author is included when available. Most entries also feature illustrations of people, places, and events pertinent to a study of the playwright and his or her works. When appropriate, photographs of the plays in performance are also presented.
- The **biographical and critical introduction** contains background information that familiarizes the reader with the author and the critical debates surrounding his or her works.
- The list of **principal works** is divided into two sections, each of which is organized chronologically by date of first performance. If this has not been conclusively determined, the composition or publication date is used. The first section of the principal works list contains the author's dramatic pieces. The second section provides information on the author's major works in other genres.
- Whenever available, **author commentary** is provided. This section consists of essays or interviews in which the dramatist discusses his or her own work or the art of playwriting in general.
- Essays offering **overviews and general studies of the dramatist's entire literary career** give the student broad perspectives on the writer's artistic development, themes and concerns that recur in several of his or her works, the author's place in literary history, and other wide-ranging topics.
- **Criticism of individual plays** offers the reader in-depth discussions of a select number of the author's most important works. In some cases, the criticism is divided into two sections, each arranged chronologically. When a significant performance of a play can be identified (typically, the premier of a twentieth-century work), the first section of criticism will feature **production reviews** of this staging. Most entries include sections devoted to **critical commentary** that assesses the literary merit of the selected plays. When necessary, essays are carefully excerpted to focus on the work under consideration; often, however, essays and reviews are reprinted in their entirety.
- As an additional aid to students, the critical essays and excerpts are prefaced by **explanatory annotations**. These notes provide several types of useful information, including the critic's reputation and approach to literary studies as well as the scope and significance of the criticism that follows.
- A complete **bibliographic citation**, designed to help the interested reader locate the original essay or book, follows each piece of criticism.
- The **further reading list** at the end of each entry comprises additional studies of the dramatist. It is divided into sections that help students quickly locate the specific information they need.

Other Features

- A **cumulative author index** lists all the authors who have appeared in *DC* and Gale's other Literature Criticism Series, as well as cross-references to related titles published by Gale, including *Contemporary Authors* and *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. A complete listing of the series included appears at the beginning of the index.

- A **cumulative nationality index** lists each author featured in *DC* by nationality, followed by the number of the *DC* volume in which the author appears.
- A **cumulative title index** lists in alphabetical order the individual plays discussed in the criticism contained in *DC*. Each title is followed by the author's name and the corresponding volume and page number(s) where commentary on the work may be located. Translations and variant titles are cross-referenced to the title of the play in its original language so that all references to the work are combined in one listing.

A Note to the Reader

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume in *Drama Criticism* may use the following general formats to footnote reprinted criticism. The first example pertains to material drawn from periodicals, the second to materials reprinted from books.

¹Susan Sontag, "Going to the Theater, Etc.," *Partisan Review* XXXI, No. 3 (Summer 1964), 389-94; excerpted and reprinted in *Drama Criticism*, Vol. 1, ed. Lawrence J. Trudeau (Detroit: Gale Research, 1991), pp. 17-20.

²Eugene M. Waith, *The Herculean Hero in Marlowe, Chapman, Shakespeare and Dryden* (Chatto & Windus, 1962); excerpted and reprinted in *Drama Criticism*, Vol. 1, ed. Lawrence J. Trudeau (Detroit: Gale Research, 1991), pp. 237-47.

Suggestions are Welcome

Readers who wish to suggest authors to appear in future volumes of *DC*, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor.

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Beaumarchais
Aphra Behn
Alice Childress
Euripides
Hugo von Hofmannsthal
David Henry Hwang
Ben Jonson
David Mamet
Wendy Wasserstein
Tennessee Williams

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Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais

1732-1799

INTRODUCTION

Beaumarchais is considered one of the greatest playwrights of eighteenth-century France. Working in a period of stylistic transition, he effectively synthesized elements of Molière's comedy of manners, Italian *commedia dell' arte*, and the ideas of Denis Diderot concerning the *drame bourgeois*. Although such early plays as *Eugénie* (*The School for Rakes*) and *Les deux amis; ou, Le négociant de Lyon* (*The Two Friends; or, The Liverpool Merchant*), both derivative of Diderot's dramas, are rarely performed, *Le barbier de Séville; ou, La précaution inutile* (*The Barber of Seville, or The Useless Precaution*) and, above all, *La folle journée; ou, Le mariage de Figaro* (*The Follies of a Day; or, The Marriage of Figaro*) are considered masterpieces of the comedic genre and are frequently produced. Renowned for their ingenious plot construction, assured pacing, and clever dialogue, both are presided over by the celebrated comic persona of Figaro, whose penetrating intelligence epitomized the critical spirit of the age.

Beaumarchais was born Pierre-Augustin Caron in Paris on 24 January 1732, the son of a clockmaker. He was educated at the École d'Alfort to age thirteen, then apprenticed to his father. During his employment as a designer in his father's shop, Beaumarchais invented a new type of escapement for regulating watches that was recognized by the Académie des Sciences in 1754. He was presented at court the same year, where he soon won the favor of Louis XV and his mistress Madame de Pompadour. Beaumarchais consolidated his position at Versailles in 1755 when he bought an annuity from a retiring court official, Franquet. The following year, he married Franquet's widow, who died in 1757, leaving him a small property from which he derived the name Beaumarchais. An increasingly influential figure at court, he became the music instructor to Mesdames, the daughters of the King, and organized concerts for special occasions. During this period he became friendly with Joseph Paris-Duverney, a powerful banker who invited Beaumarchais into the world of high finance and made him a partner in speculative business schemes. Through Duverney's assistance, Beaumarchais purchased in 1761 the title of Secrétaire du Roi, which conferred legal status of hereditary nobility.

Beaumarchais visited Spain from 1764 to 1766, where he attended court and pursued financial negotiations on behalf of Duverney. He returned to Paris in 1767 to present *Eugénie*, his first serious effort as a playwright. His next play, *The Two Friends*, was produced three years later. Beaumarchais was involved in a series of highly controversial court cases in the 1770s, and consequently his influence at Versailles in the final years of Louis XV greatly diminished. With the accession of Louis XVI in 1774, however, his fortunes rapidly improved; he even served as a



government agent in 1774-75, providing aid to American forces during the early phases of the Revolutionary War. Also in 1775 he produced *The Barber of Seville*, and in 1784 his masterpiece, *The Marriage of Figaro*, which enjoyed an extraordinary success at the Théâtre de la Comédie Française. Beaumarchais's interest in opera became manifest when he wrote the libretto for *Tarare*, set to music by Salieri and produced in 1787.

Although Beaumarchais initially welcomed the meeting of the Estates-General in Paris in 1789, the increasingly radical course of the French Revolution made his position extremely precarious, and he was arrested in 1792, narrowly escaping the September massacres. Beaumarchais subsequently fled to England and Holland before settling in Germany as an *émigré*; meanwhile his family was imprisoned and his properties alienated to the Jacobin regime. Beaumarchais returned to France in 1796, but his appeals for the restoration of his property were unheeded, and he was left destitute. He died of a stroke in Paris on 18 May 1799.

Beaumarchais's earliest dramas were short, frivolous pieces known as *parades*, a popular genre that drew its romantic repertoire from French and Italian comedy and Parisian street entertainments. They were performed privately for the circle of Charles Lenormant d'Étoiles, husband of Madame de Pompadour, and contain the themes, situations, and stylistic attributes of Beaumarchais's later dramas. Beaumarchais was also interested in dramatic theory, particularly that of Diderot, which called for a

drame bourgeois—serious and moving drama in simple prose that emphasizes moral instruction in modern social contexts. His *Un essai sur le drame sérieux* (1767) critiques the precepts of French seventeenth-century classical tragedy and argues for the necessity of modern plays written in simple language unrestricted by rules of decorum. These concerns inform Beaumarchais's first full-length drama, *Eugénie*, which was based on his sister's seduction and subsequent betrayal by the Spanish nobleman Don José Clavijo y Fajardo. In his next play, *The Two Friends*, Beaumarchais's subject—the complicated financial affairs of two businessmen—exemplifies Diderot's concept of generating conflict from social conditions, though the inclusion of the traditional device of a romantic subplot reveals the weakness of this formula. *The Barber of Seville* and *The Marriage of Figaro*, Beaumarchais's supreme theatrical achievements, reveal his gift for complex, sophisticated intrigue, original interpretation of character types, and brilliant, sustained dialogue. *The Barber of Seville* deploys a constellation of characters in elaborate and sometimes farcical romantic intrigues, culminating in the marriage of Rosina and her youthful suitor Count Almaviva, who outmaneuvers his rival Dr. Bartholo with the assistance of Figaro, Bartholo's clever barber. *The Marriage of Figaro* reunites the characters of *The Barber of Seville* three years later. Count Almaviva now has designs on Suzanne, maid of Countess Almaviva and the betrothed of Figaro, who again cleverly outwits his opponents and finally marries her with the Count's approval. The dramatic action consists of a complicated series of intrigues that result in unexpected turns of plot and hilarious character revelations. In the play's famous monologue in the Fifth Act, Figaro ironically comments on the abuses of the privileged classes against the common people, interpreted by many critics as a forecast of the impending revolution and demise of the French aristocracy. Both of the Figaro plays were transformed into operas, the first by Rossini and the second by Mozart. The final part of the Figaro trilogy, *L'autre Tartuffe; ou, La mère coupable* (*Frailty and Hypocrisy*) was produced in 1792. Here, the main characters of *The Barber of Seville* and *The Marriage of Figaro* are revisited twenty years later in an attempt to portray Count Almaviva as a virtuous man. Considered by some critics a competent exercise in the sentimental style of Diderot, *Frailty and Hypocrisy* has been attacked by many others as overly moralizing or practically unperformable.

Beaumarchais's critical stature is considerably higher in France than in the English speaking world, where his work has received scant attention. Critics from England and America have explored diverse themes in their analyses of Beaumarchais's plays. Whereas some commentators consider them merely an extension of particular historical movements—for example the French Enlightenment—others consider the plays as autonomous texts, discussing character types, dramatic structures, or thematic motifs, such as that of children's games explored by Walter Rex. Critics are in general agreement, however, that Beaumarchais transformed classical French comedy by emphasizing its social discourse as opposed to its formal stylistic properties.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

PLAYS

- **Eugénie* 1767
[*The School for Rakes*, 1769]
- Les deux amis; ou, Le négociant de Lyon* 1770
[*The Two Friends; or, The Liverpool Merchant*, 1800]
- Le barbier de Séville; ou, La précaution inutile* 1775
[*The Barber of Seville, or The Useless Precaution*, 1776]
- La folle journée; ou, Le mariage de Figaro* 1784
[*The Follies of a Day; or, The Marriage of Figaro*, 1785]
- Tarare* 1787 [librettist; musical score by Salieri]
[*Tarare*, 1787]
- L'autre Tartuffe; ou, La mère coupable* 1792
[*Frailty and Hypocrisy*, 1804]

OTHER MAJOR WORKS

- Oeuvres complètes* 7 vols. (collected works; edited by P.P. Gudin de la Brenellerie) 1809
- Oeuvres complètes* (collected works; edited by Eduard Fournier) 1876
- Oeuvres complètes* (collected works; edited by Albert Demazière) 1973

*Published with *Un essai sur le drame sérieux*.

OVERVIEWS AND GENERAL STUDIES

Anthony R. Pugh (essay date 1963)

[Pugh is an English-born Canadian critic who has published numerous studies of early modern French literature, including Beaumarchais—"Le Mariage de Figaro": An Interpretation (1968). In the following essay, originally a paper presented in 1963, Pugh traces the stylistic development of Beaumarchais's theater from the early *dramas bourgeois* to *La mère coupable*. The latter, Pugh asserts, is an early example of nineteenth-century *théâtre utile* or "le pièce bien faite."]

Beaumarchais's evolution as a dramatist is in some ways puzzling. As soon as one looks beyond *le Barbier de Séville* and *le Mariage de Figaro* one is faced by two problems: first, how did the author of two maudlin *dramas bourgeois* (*Eugénie* and *les Deux Amis*) ever come to 'ramener l'ancienne et franche gaieté' to the French stage? and secondly, having done so, how ever did he come to revert to the sterile formula of the *drame bourgeois*, as he did (the manuals tell us) in his fifth play, *la Mère Coupable*? The present paper, which was first read before the Society for French Studies, in March 1963, attempts to look at these questions afresh, and to offer a corrective to the stock view of Beaumarchais's development.

One can understand that the writers of manuals will often be content to follow the experts, but one is surprised to find that even the experts seem agreed that of the two *dramas bourgeois*, the second is even worse than the first, and that *le Barbier de Séville* reveals a totally new Beaumarchais, supreme master of the *comédie d'intrigue*. Even so enlightened a writer as René Pomeau talks in this way; Professor Arnould accepts the standard view in his notices to the Figaro plays; and the American lady who wrote a thesis on the Plot and its Construction in Eighteenth Century Comedy 'with particular reference to the Practice of Beaumarchais' apparently saw nothing unusual about the structure of either *les Deux Amis* or *la Mère Coupable*. Beaumarchais's position seems impregnable. It may appear presumptuous to challenge such a well-established view, but honesty to my own experience compels me to. We shall look at all the five plays in turn.

The main action of *Eugénie* concerns a girl who believes herself married to a Count (for a *drame bourgeois* the characters of this play are singularly un-bourgeois—and un-French into the bargain), but the wedding was an amateur theatrical affair, and dishonour is imminent. The Count, cornered by the girl's father, refuses to be browbeaten—but he goes off and repents and returns, to claim her as his bride. It is a variation on the theme of the secret marriage, pathetic, but hardly dramatic. Drama comes from another source: Eugénie's brother, involved in a duel, is fleeing, but he is set upon, and shortly afterwards he is rescued by the Count, the very man who seduced his sister. He repays the debt by helping to get the Count out of the way of his angry father, but then, when he realizes that his father's accusations are correct, he goes off to fight a duel with him. The structural fault is glaring: the dramatic interest is concentrated in the second part of the play, affects a secondary plot, and is in fact unnecessary to the working-out of the principal plot. The preface, however, the celebrated *Essai sur le genre dramatique sérieux*, shows that Beaumarchais was very thoughtful about questions of craft, and one point which he makes must be quoted:

Une autre cause principale . . . de l'intérêt de ce drame, est l'attention scrupuleuse que j'ai eue d'instruire le spectateur de l'état respectif et des desseins de tous les personnages. Jusqu'à présent les auteurs avaient souvent pris autant de peines pour nous ménager des surprises passagères, que j'en ai mis à faire précisément le contraire.

As soon as the facts are established,

on prévoit qu'une catastrophe affreuse sera le fruit du premier coup de lumière qui éclairera les personnages.

The crisis is

d'autant plus pénible pour le spectateur qu'il l'a vue se former lentement sous ses yeux, et par des moyens communs et faibles en apparence.

Les Deux Amis has never recovered from its failure in 1770. It is the tale of a man (a French merchant) who gets into a very awkward situation (he has apparently embezzled funds) through helping a friend anonymously; the

friend is appalled at his apparent dishonesty, but tries to free him. There is certainly a lot of padding in the play. The love-plot, for example, (the son of the one loves the daughter of the other) has nothing to do with the main action, but it receives undue preponderance in Act I. The two plots are, however, woven together with care; there is not the same sense of starting afresh that we have in *Eugénie*. There is the usual secret marriage also, which brings about the revelation that the trader's niece is in fact his daughter, but this is handled in a subtly different way from normally. But it is in Beaumarchais's handling of the main plot that *les Deux Amis* marks, in my view, an advance on its predecessor, an advance, moreover, precisely in the direction of *le Barbier*.

Aurelly, a 'négociant de Lyon', is obliged to pay all his clients the following day. His money is in the form of assets entrusted to a Paris friend, and he is expecting at any moment to receive from Paris the money which he has requested. However, the Paris friend has suddenly died, and for the time being his money cannot be touched. This disastrous piece of information is received by Aurelly's secretary, Dabins, who immediately goes for help to Aurelly's friend, Mélac the tax-collector. Now Mélac could, at a pinch, lend the money out of the taxes. It would be most irregular, but he would run no real risk, he thinks. He does not know (although we do) that the tax-inspector has just arrived. So after a tussle with his conscience, he lends Dabins the money. Shortly afterwards the inspector arrives with orders to collect all local collectors' money and to transport it to Paris. Mélac has to admit, of course, that he has not got the money. Aurelly is dismayed at this, his faith in humanity is rudely shattered, but nevertheless he will help his friend, if he can. He has enough money, but some of it is a 'dépôt sacré', and belongs to his daughter. He asks his 'niece' if she would in a similar situation sacrifice her fortune. She would, of course, and here we have the 'recognition scene'. So he has the money now, and can free his friend. He gives the tax-inspector a note for his Paris friend, Préfort. 'But', says the inspector, 'Préfort is dead'. Aurelly calls for Dabins to explain what is happening, but Dabins has promised Mélac not to disclose the secret. When however he hears that Aurelly is discharging Mélac's debt, he has to speak out. Mélac now enters, and everyone acclaims him. 'Dabins, vous m'avez trahi!'—'Pouvais-je garder votre secret, en apprenant que monsieur acquittait votre dette?' All that remains is for the tax-inspector to stand surety until the frozen assets are cleared.

This last Act is, to my mind, the crux of the matter. The recognition-scene, we notice, is not placed here, but at the end of Act III. The disclosure that Pauline is Aurelly's daughter only enables the circle to be completed (because she lets him use her money to clear Mélac), it ties the knot, it is not the dénouement. Normally the dénouement has an element of surprise, despite 'preparations' which make it defensible. *Eugénie* is of this sort, despite the Preface,—the dénouement is the Count's change of heart, which averts the duel. But what we really require from any true aesthetic experience is some sense that it was inevitable, and in this scheme of things the dénouement is the completion of the pattern. It is this important truth which

Beaumarchais sees. At the beginning of Act V all the complications have been announced, and the purely arbitrary resolution of a difficulty (by a recognition-scene) has been put out of the way. Part of the last Act is taken up with a secondary interest: the tax-inspector is attracted to Pauline, but steps aside when he realizes he is second in the field. One effect of this sacrifice is to prepare us for his generosity in offering to stand surety to Aurelly. The important sequence is not there, however, it is at the end, when Aurelly realizes the truth, and especially when Mélac finds that the truth is out. Despite the criticisms that can be made against this play, and despite the remoteness of the characters and the conventions of the *drame bourgeois*, I find this moving. It is moving because there is no intrusion of surprise. Beaumarchais has had the courage to allow dramatic irony in this play, and here the characters catch up with us, progress from partial knowledge to complete knowledge. This is a true resolution, because it resolves *our* relation with the characters. And the very last point, about the inspector standing surety, completes the pattern in a neat way, which satisfies us.

Le Barbier de Séville, of course, breaks free of the *drame bourgeois* convention, and is all the better for it. But it seems to me that the mechanical defects of the *Barber* have been as much underplayed as the mechanical virtues of *les Deux Amis*. Beaumarchais turns his back on the brave attempt he had made in *les Deux Amis* to bind his plots together, and adopts instead the simplest episodic framework: exposition, two attempts to get into Rosine's presence, midnight rendez-vous. The 'plot' is very slender, and really only affects the last act. The purely structural invention of the first two acts is extremely feeble; verbal invention carries him through. The play opens with a monologue; information is given us by the simple device of having two people meet each other after a long absence; they themselves learn that the situation is critical by overhearing a monologue. Beaumarchais takes little care over verisimilitude; for example, the Count leaves as soon as he has given his letter to Rosine, as if Beaumarchais considers he has made his point.

But the third Act reveals a new Beaumarchais. Again we find, I think, that after a very awkward beginning, Beaumarchais suddenly discovers a new insight which will take him a stage nearer to *le Mariage de Figaro*. Now he finds the ability to sustain a highly complicated intrigue. Beaumarchais here seems to be making things deliberately more complicated for himself as well as for his characters. He wishes Almoviva to give Bartholo Rosine's letter, without finding an opportunity to tell Rosine what he has done. This precipitates the 'tragic' misunderstanding in Act IV, and hence the dénouement. Apart from this consequence, it is virtually a self-contained episode. Banking on the fact that Bazile will not visit Bartholo, Almoviva passes himself off as a pupil of the music-master, Alonso, who has come with some important information for Bartholo, on behalf of Bazile who is ill. He takes a risk: he not only tells Bartholo that Almoviva is around, he also, in order to buy his confidence, shows him the letter he had received from Rosine in Act II, and Bartholo takes it from him. He wants to see Rosine, first to arrange the midnight rendez-vous, and secondly, of course, to tell her

that he has had to give up the letter. To give himself a pretext for seeing her, the Count suggests to Bartholo that he should give her a lesson, so that Rosine will not be suspicious, will not think that Bartholo's visitor is up to no good. The Count is playing a desperate game, and he fails, because Bartholo overhears the conversation he is eventually able to snatch with Rosine, and so prevents him from explaining about the letter, which Bartholo now possesses. One of the most involved of the complications is the arrival of Bazile, which could easily bring about a catastrophe. But as Almoviva's suggestion that he should give Rosine a lesson was his own, even Bartholo is not suspicious when Bazile seems not to know the new music-master, he simply takes it that he is acting well. And so all the characters tell Bazile to go back to bed. 'Qui diable est-ce donc qu'on trompe ici?' After this the 'discovery' of Bartholo is merely a convenient way to end, to cut the knot. The point is that nobody is in control. The Count is stalling, with reckless brilliance, and if the arrival of Bazile leaves him still standing, that is not because of his quick wit, the outcome has been taken out of his hands by that time, and the action carries the play along with its own impetus, taking complete charge of the characters. Nothing the characters do has any effect. The characters attempt to deceive, but events around them are far better at that game than they are. The real role of chance is to complicate, not to rescue. Beaumarchais alone is in complete control; the arrival of Bazile is *his* problem.

Le Mariage de Figaro seems to me to be in a totally different category. Here we have a true artist at work, a man who sees significance not so much in things themselves as in the relationships between things. The sinners and the virtuous no longer command automatic hostility and sympathy. As in *Les Deux Amis*, the true dénouement is not a surprise for us, (that is pushed back into Act III), but a growth into understanding on the part of the characters. The notion of chance is fully integrated into the comic vision. As in *le Barbier de Séville*, the play is constructed in episodes, but the episodes now form a definite pattern, relying on a combination of complexity and chance (two main themes of the play). But one cannot sum up artistic miracles in a few sentences. Our next question is: what happened when Beaumarchais wrote the sequel, the third Figaro play, *la Mère Coupable*? We find there that the Count and Countess never made a success of their marriage, and that both have illegitimate children. The Countess's son, Léon (whose father is Chérubin, now dead) is in love with the Count's daughter Florentine (who passes for the Count's ward). The only person to know the full story is a friend of Chérubin's, Bégearss, who wants Florentine—or her dowry—for himself. Keeping all suspicion off himself, he manages to let the Count into the Countess's secret, and everyone into the Count's. The marriage of Léon and Florentine is of course stopped, as they appear to be brother and sister. By the end of the play, however, the Count has repented, and the wily Bégearss is brought to book by the astute Figaro.

It is not unknown for the writer of a masterpiece to go on to produce inferior stuff, of course. But *la Mère Coupable* is nonetheless a puzzle. In Act IV, Scene 4, Bégearss says to Suzanne: