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A comparative study of Le Légataire Universel of Regnard and Le Barbier de Séville of Beaumarchais

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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF LE LÉGATAIRE UNIVERSEL OF REGNARD
AND LE BARBIER DE SÉVILLE OF BEAUMARCHAIS

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ATLANTA UNIVERSITY IN
PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

BY
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DEPARTMENT OF FRENCH

ATLANTA UNIVERSITY

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PREFACE

The average French student is very well acquainted with the French classical drama of the seventeenth century and the romantic drama of the nineteenth century. He seems to be less interested in the theatre of the eighteenth century; obsessed with the idea that with the exception of the theatre of Marivaux and Beaumarchais, there is little or no need to read works that have been done by other dramatists of the century.

Today Regnard is considered to be a minor writer while Beaumarchais has received literary fame. Yet the writings of these two authors are very similar. In this study an attempt will be made to bring into focus the parallels that can be discerned in *Le Légataire Universel* and *Le Barbier de Séville* as regards to theme, style and character development. The writer will analyze the plays with special emphasis on similarities and differences that can be found in them.

This study will consist of three chapters. In the introductory chapter the writer will discuss the authors their works, the century in which they lived and the forces which influenced their lives and works. In the second chapter a detailed analysis of each play will be presented. Emphasis will be placed on theme, style and character development. The third chapter will be devoted to a comparison of the two plays. In this chapter the writer will point out the essential similarities and differences discernable in the two plays. This will be followed by a summary in which the writer will discuss the relative merits of each author.

The writer is indebted to Dr. B. F. Hudson, Chairman of the French Department, for his guidance and encouragement in making this study
possible. The writer wishes to express sincere thanks to her parents Mr. & Mrs. Robert Pitre for their encouragement and sacrifice during her stay at Atlanta University. The writer is also grateful to her friends and relatives for their encouragement and inspiration.

M. P.
CHAPTER I

MEN AND THEIR LIVES

A man does not usually transcend the age in which he lives, nor can he be separated from his environment. In order to understand the works of any writer, it is necessary to know something about the period in which he lived and the forces which influenced his life and works. It is the aim of the writer, in this chapter, to give a historical background to the authors' lives and the period in which they wrote.

Regnard belongs to the seventeenth century by birth and education, and to the eighteenth century by production. In order to place Regnard in his proper milieu, it would be wise to take a look at the last half of the seventeenth century and the first half of the eighteenth century.

Louis XIV had one of the longest reigns in the history of France. During the first part of his reign, there were complete order and stability in government and no one dared to speak out against it. At the end of his reign, the old order of things had suffered a decline and France was now plunged into economic distress. War, famine, public debt and oppressive taxation had discredited the monarchy. It was also at the end of his reign that criticism of the government had begun to appear in literary works.

The alarm was sounded by La Bruyère and was later echoed by St. Simon, Fontenelle, Bayle and Fénelon. La Bruyère, in his Caractères, spoke in favor of the common man while St. Simon gave astonishing criticism of the reign of Louis XIV in his Mémoires. Fénelon, in his Télémaque, made an even bolder attack on the government, while Bayle and
Fontenelle expounded new ideas of science as opposed to the superstitions of their time. The last years of Louis XIV's reign can be defined as a period of transition where the old order was beginning to be attacked and new ideas were in sight.

The period of the Regency followed that of the absolute monarchy. This period of the Regency, which lasted only eight years, contributed nothing of significance to foreign affairs. On the domestic front, there was social unrest. The collapse of the John Law System contributed greatly toward the discrediting of the monarchy and the increasing criticism of social injustices. The ministry of the Duke of Bourbon succeeded the Duke of Orleans. It lasted only three years and is distinguished by its bitter persecution of the protestants.

By the time Louis XV came to the throne, France had lost much of her prestige in Europe and national conditions went from bad to worse. One might very well consider Louis XV's reign as a period of general and cumulative disaster.¹

Socially, the Regency set the tone for the century. The dissolute life of the Duke of Orleans and his sympathy with the ideas of the philosophes marked a reaction against the ideology and manners of the previous century. The courts were no longer the center of literary activities, for the center had shifted to the parisian salons. Beginning with the freedom of the Regency, France entered into an era of gambling, debauchery and extravagant living. Louis XV was indirectly involved in all of these activities. From the beginning of the Regency to the reign

of Louis XVI, everyone seemed to be care-free and cared little about politics. Neither the king nor the courtier had any time for business. Their real business was society.¹

It was during those care-free and chaotic years of the last half of the seventeenth century and the first half of the eighteenth century that Regnard made his debut into the literary world. In 1665 Jean Francois Regnard was born to bourgeois parents who resided in Paris. At the age of two years, his father died. Shortly afterwards, his mother gave him to a lady to whom he became strongly attached. This lady was responsible for the good education that Regnard received at the Academy.

Regnard was a man of pleasure. He was a gambler and adventurous person who loved to drink. The thing that he detested most was to be bored. In order to escape this boredom he traveled from city to city. Not only was his foster mother responsible for the education that he received, but she even financed his trip to different countries.

At the age of 20, Regnard left France to visit Italy and Constantinople. While being in Italy and Constantinople he found some inscriptions to decipher, some monuments and statues of antiquity to bring back to France. Being a man of pleasure, naturally he was attracted by the festivals, the games, the balls and the masquerades. In memory of his trip, he brought back a novel, Provencale, in which he is the hero. He began his novel in Bologne where he met Elvire, a young girl with whom he later fell in love.

After having seen Italy, Regnard dreamed of returning to France with Elvire. By this time his novel was almost completed, but fate

¹Ibid., pp. 361-365.
prevented him from finishing it. Regnard and his friends were captured by a group of Algerian pirates on their return home. Thanks to a French monk, they were able to return safely to France.

After returning to France, Regnard, obsessed with the need for movement and adventures, decided to take another trip. This time, he went to Sweden, Lapland, Poland and Austria. Regnard returned to Paris after one year abroad, at which time he purchased a post as "Tresorier de France." Shortly afterwards, he began his literary career while living near the Italien theatre and La Comédie Francaise.

Regnard began his literary career by writing a tragedy Sapor. Failing in this regard, he decided that he would change to another genre - comedy. From 1688 onward, he wrote comedies. He composed plays for the Italien theatre, then for La Comédie Francaise. His most important works are still played at La Comédie Francaise. They include Le Joueur, Le Distrait, Les Ménechmes, Les Folies Amoureuses and Le Légataire Universel.

As it has been stated previously, Regnard wrote during the last years of Louis XIV. That is to say that he also wrote after the death of Moliere. As a comic writer, he was greatly influenced by Moliere, and is considered by many critics as Moliere's successor. Voltaire said that anyone who does not admire Moliere, cannot admire Regnard. Regnard wrote comedies of intrigue and was more interested in laughter than manners. Le Légataire Universel is the best example of his gay comedies and also a reflection of the age in which he wrote.

Now that we have some historical information as regards to Regnard's

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life and the period in which he wrote, we can turn our attention to Beaumarchais.

Beaumarchais lived and wrote in the last half of the eighteenth century during the time when France was in a great political upheaval. The monarchies of Louis XV and Louis XVI were apparently indifferent to the interest of the country. The supremacy that France had held in Europe since Richelieu and Louis XIV had obviously passed into the hands of the English. The social and political circumstances contributed to new theories and new demands. It was not very long after Louis XVI came to the throne that a tremendous wave of anger rose throughout France and broke out against those who were held responsible for the status quo. The government at Versailles and the aristocratic ruling class became the target of sharp criticism.¹

The eighteenth century is referred to as the age of Enlightenment. Special emphasis has been placed on the second half of the century and many have referred to it as the age of the Philosophe. The term philosophe had a special meaning in the eighteenth century. It implied the method of free inquiry based on the study of political, social and religious questions. It implied also criticism of the old regime with a desire to reform it and to bring into being the ideas of tolerance, freedom and equality. In order to make these ideas accessible to the public, the writer used all literary forms possible, from serious essays to satirical pamphlets.

The eighteenth century in France was above all notable for its literature of ideas. The abuses of this pre-

¹George Lemaitre, Beaumarchais (New York: Alfred A. Knoff Inc., 1949), p. 76
Revolutionary society were many and blatant. In any protest against the crying evils, of any injustice, oppression, and torture, there arose a brilliant corps of writers wielding their pens of vigor and originality rarely equalled. The leaders of thought of this crucial time were masters of style which compelled the attention even of their enemies.1

The literature of that age was militant, whether it was a serious essay of Voltaire or a satirical comedy of Beaumarchais.

Pierre Auguste Caron, who assumed the name de Beaumarchais in 1761, when he bought the office of the secretary of the king, was born January 24, 1732. He attended boarding school at Alfort until the age of 13, at which time he began work in his father's watchshop. Clever, ambitious, with a flair for business and intrigue, he led an adventurous life. He educated himself by reading the ancients, the classics and by studying mathematics and mechanics. At the age of twenty-one, he invented an escapement for watches which resulted in his appointment as watchmaker of the King. At twenty-three, he married the widow of a court official and gained the favor of the Royal Princesses to whom he taught music. His acquaintance with the king's daughters resulted in his obtaining a post as a judge in the Louvre.

Beaumarchais's first wife died after ten months of their marriage. It was not very long after her death that Beaumarchais became acquainted with Paris Duverney. Paris Duverney was an old man when Beaumarchais met him, but he was still active in numerous financial enterprises in which he had made not only his fortune, but that of several other people including Voltaire. Beaumarchais' acquaintance with Paris Duverney came at a particularly fortunate time. Not only had he received nothing

from the estate of his first wife, but she had even left debts for which he found himself liable.¹

Paris Duverney treated Beaumarchais as a relative rather than a business associate. The full extent and nature of their dealing will probably never be known, for in their correspondence with one another, they used a secret code which made it impossible to unravel their activities.² Shortly after the death of Beaumarchais' second wife, Paris Duverney signed a testament which recognized Beaumarchais as his heir. The old man's failure to legalize their dealing in the proper manner caused a chaotic situation in Beaumarchais's future.

In October 1771 La Blache, the only true heir of Paris Duverney, brought a suit against Beaumarchais in which he insinuated that the will that Paris Duverney had signed was false. La Blache lost the first round of the battle but he quickly appealed to Parliament. While Beaumarchais awaited the second round of this battle, he consoled himself by turning to literary composition. That is to say that he continued to write *Le Barbier de Séville*. By the time the second round of the battle came along, Beaumarchais was detained in jail and this meant that he would not be able to see Goezman, the counsellor of the case. The fact that Beaumarchais was unable to see Goezman, along with Goezman's accusation that Beaumarchais had attempted to bribe him during the trial led to Beaumarchais's condemnation by Parliament.

According to Havens to be blamed was more than a mere rebuke. It


²Ibid.
entailed the loss of his civil rights. His credit as a businessman was impaired and his whole fortune was threatened. Beaumarchais was fully aware of his social position. He knew that his low birth was a serious obstacle in his path, yet he hoped somehow to get over it. Still, at the time of the trial, he found it very difficult to overcome this obstacle. At the end of his trial, his attitude toward the nobility had become hostile. He felt that men of nobility would do everything possible to crush him because he was a commoner. It is important to note that Beaumarchais was placed in an ambiguous social position. The noblemen, up to the time of the trial, had not accepted him as a nobleman and the bourgeois no longer welcomed him as a bourgeois.

After Beaumarchais's condemnation by Parliament, his only weapon of defense was his pen. He appealed to the public in a series of printed Mémoires. His Mémoires Contre Goezman achieved literary fame. This work is a satire directed not only against Goezman and his associates, but also against the whole judicial system, recently organized by Maupon, the Minister of France. This pamphlet coincided with the wave of public indignation that was prevalent in France during those times.

Le Barbier de Séville was started by Beaumarchais prior to the time of the trial. After the trial he included another act to this play in which he attacked the nobility. When the play was performed in five acts, it did not meet with much success; therefore the author reduced it to four acts.

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1 Havens, op. cit., p. 364

2 Lemaitre, op. cit., p. 77.
In 1764 Beaumarchais took a trip to Spain. He wanted to avenge the honor his sister who had been seduced and abandoned by a Spaniard, Clavigo, and to carry out some schemes with the Spanish government in which Paris Duverney was interested. Whatever Beaumarchais' motives for going to Spain might have been, this trip exerted a great influence on his writings. When Beaumarchais left Spain, he had failed in his industrial speculation, but he returned home richer than he had realized, for he brought back a considerable amount of information that he later put into his comedies.

When Beaumarchais returned to France from his trip to Spain, he turned his attention to the theatre. The first plays that he wrote were Eugénie and Les Deux Amis. In Les Deux Amis he told of some of his experiences in Spain. This play illustrated the life of a businessman and the moral principle that followed in this transaction. Both Eugénie and Les Deux Amis failed, but Beaumarchais won his greatest writing victory with Le Barbier de Séville and Le Mariage de Figaro.

As had been stated previously, Beaumarchais began writing Le Barbier de Séville in 1770. It was accepted by La Comédie Francaise in 1773 and was not presented until 1775. This play had to be altered several times before it was performed with success. His personal experiences of the years between 1770 and 1775 are reflected in the changes introduced in the different versions of the Barbier de Séville. Experiences with the courts and with the injustice of men in power had developed somewhat a spirit of revolt already present in the author.¹

Le Mariage de Figaro was written in 1778 and was not performed until 1784. This play was banned for six years because of its daring political and social criticism. Beaumarchais, like other writers of his time seized the opportunity of the social and political condition of his time, to hit back with the weapon of ridicule against those under whose hands he had suffered. It is important to note that even though the monologues of Le Barbier de Séville and Le Mariage de Figaro give daring criticism of the nobility, Beaumarchais was not a revolutionist. The political significance given to Le Mariage de Figaro is due to the fact that it was performed only five years before the French Revolution. It is important to note that this political significance went far beyond the author's intention and even beyond what most of his contemporary audience saw in it.¹

In considering the personalities of these two writers and period in which they lived, it seems reasonable to conclude that their works reflect the age in which they lived. With these facts in mind, we are now prepared to analyse the two plays.

¹Cox, op. cit., p. 144.
CHAPTER II

AN ANALYSIS OF LE LEGATAIRE UNIVERSEL AND BARBIER DE SEVILLE

The most important work of Regnard is Le Legataire Universel. It is considered as his masterpiece. This work occupies the same place in Regnard's dramatic career as Malade imaginaire occupies in that of Moliere's. This work is his last dramatic success. In Le Legataire Universel, Regnard was not interested in the study of manners nor in the painting of characters. He was interested in amusing his audience and therefore he wrote without any moral intent.

Le Legataire Universel is a comedy of intrigue depending largely on the disguise and cleverness of the servants. Geronte is a rich old man, ill and on the verge of death. He is surrounded by a group of greedy expectant heirs, among whom is his nephew, Eraste. Eraste has been promised the hand of Isabelle in marriage, under the condition that he receives the bulk of his uncle's estate. Geronte feels that he is dying and wants to marry Isabelle in order to keep his expectant heirs from getting his inheritance. When his plan for marriage is thwarted, Geronte uses another method in order to keep his expectant heirs from getting his inheritance. He intends to leave part of his inheritance to two distant relatives. This plan is thwarted by Eraste's valet, Crispin, who in disguise plays the part of the relatives and through his conduct, he is able to turn the old man against his relatives. Geronte collapses before making his will and many of his heirs think that he is dead. When this happens, Eraste instructs Crispin to disguise himself and
dictate a will to the notary which would recognize him, Eraste, as the universal heir. While dictating his will, Crispin decides to include himself and the maid, Lisette, whom he intends to marry. When Géronte recovers from this spell, the conspirators find themselves in a precarious situation, for all will be lost if Géronte discovers what actually happened. They succeed in extricating themselves from this predicament by convincing Géronte that he dictated this will while he was in a trance.

This play is divided into five acts. The first act serves as an introduction. In this act all the major characters are introduced and the personality of each of them is revealed. In the first scene the ridiculousness of Géronte's character is revealed, as seen through the eyes of Crispin and Lisette. The cleverness of the servants is also shown in this act. In scene 2, the author reveals the inner feelings of Crispin, Lisette and Eraste in regards to their interest in Géronte's physical state. According to Géronte's actions in scene 4, he affirms the ridiculousness that had been accorded to him by Lisette and Crispin in scene 1. Scene 8 is important for several reasons. It is in this scene Mme Argante is introduced and her main desire is made known to the reader—that is her interest in money. It is also in this scene that Géronte's plan for marriage is revealed. The author uses this incident to further the action of the play.

Act II serves as a transition between act I and act III. Scene 1 reveals the efforts of Eraste to prevent Géronte's marriage. Lisette's personality is exposed in scene 3 in the conversation between her and Eraste. Scene 5 reveals Eraste's first success in winning the hand of Isabelle. In scene 6 Géronte reveals his intention of leaving part of
his inheritance to two distant relatives. In scene 8 Lisette informs Crispin of Geronte's new plan.

Act III deals largely with the cleverness and disguises of Crispin. Scenes 2 and 8 are scenes that deal directly with the disguises. In these scenes, the author is able to provoke laughter from his audience, for they show the frustration of an old man who is caught in the game that he is playing. Scene 10 is also important because the action of this play is furthered when Lisette announces that Geronte is dead.

Act IV deals with Geronte's conspirators who seize upon the opportunity of his death to obtain his inheritance. In scene 1 Eraste and Crispin conspire against Geronte in a manner that will be beneficial to both of them. Scene 6 is important because the author portrays Crispin as the manipulator of the action. From the role that Crispin has played and from the action that he has performed in scene 6, the author leaves no doubt in the readers mind that he has complete control over the intrigue. In scene 8, the author provokes both surprise and laughter from his audience when Lisette announces the resurrection of Geronte.

The denouement of the play is reached in act V and the action is centered around the resurrection of Geronte. In scene 1 the author reveals Eraste's intention of holding on to the money (the will) that he had just received, in order that his ultimate purpose could be accomplished. Scene 4 is important because this marks the first appearance of Geronte since his collapse. The climax of the play comes in scene 7. This is the most comical scene in the entire play. Geronte almost caught the conspirators in the act of being themselves. The author in this scene once again, exposes a clever servant who is able to find a way out
of any situation.

This comedy is written in verse form. Every scene contributes to the smooth and logical development of the plot. Most of the scenes that have been cited in the preceding paragraphs, contribute directly or indirectly toward the rapid actions of the play. The dialogues between the characters are gay and lend themselves to the comical elements of the play. An example of a gay dialogue can be cited in scene 7 of act V. This scene reveals the resurrection of Géronte. Upon Géronte's arrival, he sends for two notaries to administer his will. The notaries later tell him that he had already signed the will.

M. Scrupule

Voici donc le papier que, selon vos desseins, Je vous avais promis de remettre en vos mains.

Géronte

Quel papier, s'il vous plaît? pourquoi? pour quel affaire?

M. Scrupule

C'est votre testament que vous venez de faire.

Géronte

J'ai fait mon testament!

M. Scrupule

Oui, sans doute, monsieur.¹

In this play one finds two traditional themes that were prevalent

¹J. Regnard, Théâtre de Regnard, with an introduction by M. L. Moland C. Paris: Libraire Frères, n.d.), Act V, scene 7, p. 404. Unless otherwise indicated all further references to Regnard's work are taken from this text.
In many comedies during the eighteenth century. One is that of a valet or servant triumphing over his master and the other is an old man falling in love with a young lady.

In order to understand what the author is trying to do in this play, let us consider the characters. As far as the characters are concerned, they all have one thing in common: they all place a great value on money.

Crispin is the hero of the intrigue. He is a clever valet who initiates all the actions. His main concern is pleasure. Pleasure and wit combine with his energy to make him the main comical character and the prime mover of the action. Crispin's cleverness and personality are first revealed in act I when he speaks to Lisette of Geronte's physical condition:

\[
\text{Si mon maître pouvait être fait légataire, Je ferais de bon coeur les frais du luminaire.}^1
\]

Crispin seems to have had a genius for creating comical situations. It is his cleverness and disguises that create some of the most effective comical scenes in the play. Another sign of his cleverness is shown in his first attempt to thwart Geronte's plan for leaving his inheritance to two distant relatives:

\[
\text{Mais feu monsieur mon père, Alexandre Choupille, Gentilhomme normand, prit pour femme une fille, Qui fut, à ce qu'on dit, votre soeur autrefois, Et qui me mit au jour au bout de quatre mois.}^2
\]

\[\text{Regnard, Act I, scene 1, p. 342.}\]

\[\text{Ibid., Act III, scene 2, p. 371.}\]
It is Crispin's convincing performance as the nephew of Geronte, that forces the latter to say.

Apprenez, mon neveu, si par hasard vous l'êtes, Que vous êtes un sot, aux discours que vous faites. Ma soeur fut sage: et nul ne peut lui reprocher Que jamais sur l'honneur on l'ait pu voir broncher.¹

Crispin's talents are again revealed in act V as he dictates a will to the notary in favor of Eraste, and does not forget to include himself:

J'ai trois ou quatre mots encore à faire écrire. Je laisse et je guè à Crispin quinze cent francs de rentes viagères, Pour avoir souvenir de moi dans ses prières.²

One has only to look at scene 7 of Act V to see the skill with which Crispin extricates himself from any situation in which he does not want to be involved. When Geronte questioned his heirs about the will that he had signed, it is Crispin who gives him the information. It is also he who is the first to tell Geronte the condition under which he signed this will. Crispin said:

C'est votre létargie.³

Even though Crispin plays a vital role in deceiving Geronte, he is not portrayed as a detestable character. His principle role in this

¹Ibid., p. 372.

²Ibid., Act IV, scene 6, pp. 393-394.

play is to provoke laughter and he does so by maneuvers initiated by his master, Éraste.

In analyzing the character of Géronte, it seems that Regnard depicts him as neither good nor bad. Géronte is a comic character because his actions evoke neither fear nor pity. It is in the absence of these sentiments that Géronte becomes ridiculous.

All actions are centered around Géronte as revealed by the servants in act I. According to Lisette, he is a ladre vert, who can easily be duped. Looking at Géronte from another point of view, one could say that he is egoistic and interested mainly in his own welfare. He has a utilitarian love for Isabelle. This is to say that he wants to marry her only as a means of avoiding leaving his estate to his expectant heirs. Géronte made this clear in act I:

J'ai toujours reconnu du bon
dans cette fille.
Je veux pourtant songer à mettre
ordre à mon bien
Avant qu'un prompt trépas m'en ôte le moyen.

Que me sert-il d'avoir une
avid cohorte
D'héritiers qui toujours, veille
et dort à ma porte;
De gens qui, furetant les clefs
du coffre--fort,
Me détendront mon lit peut-être avant ma mort?
Une femme, au contraire, à son devoir fidèle,
Par des soins conjugaux me marquera son zèle;
Et, de son chaste amour recueillant tout le fruit,
Je me verrai mourri en repos
et sans bruit.1

1Ibid., Act I, scene 4, pp. 349-350.
Whatever Geronte's motives may be, he used many schemes in order to prevent his greedy relatives from inheriting his estate. Geronte is an old schemer, who later falls into his own trap when he is out-witted by Crispin. At the end of the play, realizing that he had been duped Geronte says:

```
Eh bien! s'il est ainsi, par devant
le notaire,
Pour avoir mes billets je consens
a tout faire;
Je ratifie en tout le présent
testament,
Et donne 'a votre hymen un plein
consentement.
```

Eraste has an important role in this play. In order to marry Isabelle he needed money which could only be attained by inheriting his uncle's estate. Eraste was a hypocritical, unscrupulous and selfish young man and tried every possible means to obtain this inheritance. In his first confrontation with his uncle in act I, Eraste embraced him tenderly and caressed him in order to win his confidence:

```
Qui, vous avez raison, c'est une tyrannie
Mais je ferai les frais de votre maladie.

Votre santé me touche, et me plaît davantage
Que tout l'or qui pourrait me tomber en partage.
```

The quality that makes Eraste detestable is reflected in the actions that he takes to obtain Geronte's inheritance. He was despondent not because of grief over the death, but because he heard that his uncle had died without making a will. He quickly insisted that Crispin make him

---

1Ibid., Act V, scene 8, p. 412.

the universal heir. In speaking to Crispin he said:

Faudra-t-il qu'un espoir fonde sur
la justice
En stériles regrets passe et s'évanouisse?
Ne saurais-tu, Crispin, parer ce coup
fatal,
Et trouver promptement un remède à
mon mal?
Tantôt tu méditais un héroïque ouvrage:
C'est dans les grands dangers qu'on
voit un grand courage.¹

Eraste's greed for money was shown when he questioned the will which included Crispin and Lisette:

Et de ta conscience! Et ces quinze
cents francs
De pension à toi payables tous
les ans,
Que tu t'es fait léguer avec tant
de prudence,
Et-ce encore l'acquit de cette conscience?²

Mme Argante is the most important of the two female characters in the play. She is an irritable old lady, who would sacrifice even her daughter's happiness for money. Mme Argante is egoistic and mainly interested in Géronte's estate as a means of satisfying her extravagant taste. Like Eraste, she will do anything in order to obtain money to satisfy her selfish desires. Her interest in money is revealed in these words:

Tous ces beaux sentiments
sont fort bons dans un livre.
L'amour seul, tel qu'il soit
ne donne point à vivre:
Et je vous apprends, moi
que l'on ne s'aime bien

¹Ibid., Act IV, scene 1, p. 385.

²Ibid., scene 7, p. 396.
It is her willingness to sacrifice her own daughter's happiness which disgusts the reader.

Lisette like all characters in this play is grasping for money. She makes her interest known from the beginning of the play:

Je lui dis, à son nez, des mots assez piquants:  
Voilà tous les profits que j'ai depuis cinq ans.\(^1\)

She is active in working for others and unusually clever in working for herself. When Eraste decided to prevent the wedding between Géronte and Isabelle, believing that she would gain something out of it, she decided to enter into the plot:

Je veux dans le complot entrer conjointement.  
Et que deviendrait donc enfin le testament  
Sur lequel nous fondons toutes nos espoirances.\(^2\)

Lisette is willing to marry Crispin only if it means that she will be able to receive a part of Géronte's estate. Like Crispin, she is clever and also plays a vital role in out-witting her master - Géronte.

Isabelle has a minor, but important role in this play. The irony of her role lies in the fact that even though she makes only a few speeches in the play, without her there would be no play. Her position in the

\(^1\) *Ibid.*, Act V, scene 1, p. 400.


\(^3\) *Ibid.*, Act II, scene 4, p. 357.
play is vital to all characters. The action of the play seems to evolve around her. In order not to pass his inheritance to his expectant heirs, Geronte tries to marry her, even though he doesn't love her. In order to win Isabelle's love, Eraste tries every possible means to obtain Geronte's estate. Mme Argante is ready to sacrifice Isabelle's happiness, if it becomes necessary, in order to satisfy her selfish desires. In spite of the brevity of her appearances on the scene, her influence on the other characters is ever present.

Even though manners are relatively unimportant in this play, Regnard does give the reader a glimpse of the society during the time in which he lived and wrote. He wrote during the decline of Louis XIV's reign, and in Le Legataire Universel, seized upon the opportunity to point out the vices and weaknesses of his society. In this play he portrays a group of greedy people and the effects that money had upon them.

Some sixty-three years after the presentation of Le Legataire Universel, another French dramatist produced two outstanding plays, the action of which centered around the cleverness of a valet -- Le Barbier de Seville and Le Mariage de Figaro. They are considered as Beaumarchais' greatest dramatic successes. When Le Barbier de Seville was produced on stage in 1775, Le Harp described it as the "best constructed and best written of all the dramatic works of Beaumarchais."¹

Le Barbier de Seville is a comedy which depicts how a Spanish nobleman, Comte Almaviva with the aid of a resourceful servant, Figaro wins the young Rosine under the very nose of Bartholo, her elderly guardian.

¹Cox, op. cit., p. 65.
Bartholo has his ward, Rosine, closely guarded in his house against her will and intends to marry her. Comte Almaviva, who has seen Rosine and has fallen in love with her, meets Figaro while serenading Rosine under her window. Rosine drops him a letter encouraging him in his amorous desires. Figaro, who is persuaded by the Count to use his guile to aid the young lovers, contrives to introduce the Count into Bartholo's house. He instructs the Count to disguise himself as a drunken soldier and when this attempt fails, Figaro instructs him to disguise himself as a music teacher. By means of these disguises, Rosine and the Count were able to communicate successfully. In spite of the aid that Bartholo solicited from Bazile and the precautions that he has taken, Rosine and the Count were married and under Bartholo's very nose.

This play written in prose is divided into four acts - two short acts and two long acts. The first act is the exposition. In this act all the major characters are introduced with the exception of Bazile. The personality and the occupation of each character are revealed through their actions and speeches. The author uses monologues in this act, as well as in the others, to express the state of the soul of each character. In the first monologue in scene 1, the Count lets us know his role and his position in the play. His social status and his reason for coming to Séville are also revealed in this scene. In scene 2, Figaro, who is introduced for the first time, and the Count renew their acquaintance after a long separation. It is also in this scene that Figaro's personality and occupation are brought into focus. At the beginning of the play, as early as scene 2, the author exposes his criticism of the old regime as seen through the eyes of Figaro. In scene 3, the jealousy
of Bartholo is first revealed as he questions Rosine about the letter that she was reading. In scene 4 the action of the play is furthered by a letter in which Rosine invites the Count to meet her. It is in this scene that Figaro begins his strategy which will enable the Count to enter Bartholo's house. Scene 6 is devoted to indicating Figaro's role in the play. He controls the action and sets the stage for the Count.

Act II is concerned largely with the first disguise of the Count. Scene 1 reveals that Figaro has succeeded in the first part of his plans. This is to keep all Bartholo's servants busy so that they will not interfere with his plans. In scene 2 the reader is presented with a physical description of the Count as seen through the eyes of Figaro as he tries to get Rosine to confess her love for the Count. In scene 4 there is a change in action of the play. The author provokes laughter from his audience as Bartholo storms into the house, ignorant of the fact that Figaro is in his closet. Scene 8 is important because it introduces Bazile in the play and reveals his evil personality as he encourages Bartholo to use slander against the Count. Scenes 12, 13 and 14 reveal the Count's failure in his first disguise as a drunk soldier, for Bartholo orders him out of the house when he insults him. These scenes also reveal the stupidity of Bartholo, for he is not able to detect that the Count has any serious interest in Rosine. Scene 15 is important for it reveals the cleverness and guile that Rosine uses against her guardian in order to keep the Count's letter.

Act III is concerned with the second disguise of the Count. In scene 2 the Count disguises himself as a music teacher. In this scene he has to show Bartholo Rosine's letter inspite of the fact that she is
listening to him. Scene 4 reveals the tension that is built up as Rosine almost betrays the Count when she refuses to take music lessons. In scene 5 Bartholo and Figaro meet for the first time and Figaro dupes Bartholo as he persuades him to let him go into his room to get the shaving kit. Scenes 6-10 reveal more than ever Bartholo's mania for precaution. In scene 6, he has to decide whether to give his keys to Figaro so that he could enter the room, or to leave Rosine in Figaro's presence while he goes into the room. He decides to take more precaution with Rosine and to remain with her in the room. He gave Figaro the key to the room which aided him and the Count at the end of the play in winning Rosine's hand. Scene 11 is perhaps the most comical scene in the entire play. The plot that was formed by Bartholo and the Count, to make Rosine marry Bartholo, unfolds when Bazile enters the house. The author provokes laughter from the audiences when Bazile, who is unaware of what is happening, sides with the Count because he offers him some money.

The denouement is reached in Act IV, in which the last obstacle to the marriage of Rosine and the Count is removed. Scene 3 marks the first triumph of Bartholo as he gains the confidence of his ward by speaking of the infidelity of the Count. In this scene, the Count reveals himself to Rosine as the real "Comte Almaviva." The denouement is reached in scene 7 when the Count and Rosine are married. In this scene the author depicts the cynicism of Bazile, the ridiculousness of Bartholo and the cleverness of Figaro. In scene 8 Bartholo realizes how useless precautions can be.

The structure of the plot of this comedy is classical in that it
observes the three unities—times, place and action. The unity of the action is derived from the fact that all of the efforts of Bartholo, Almaviva and Figaro are centered around winning the love and hand of Rosine. Everything done by Figaro and Almaviva on the one hand and Bartholo (aided by Bazile) on the other, is directed toward this one objective. The comical elements are derived from the efforts of each set of protagonist to thwart the plans of the other.

The secret of Beaumarchais' success in composing the comedy of intrigue, may be found in his talent for creating suspenseful and comical situations towards the climax and denouement. He was not interested in psychological analysis of characters, but rather in the alertness with which they adapt themselves to changing circumstances.¹

In order to understand better what the author is trying to do in this play, let us consider the characters. Beaumarchais defined his main characters as follow:

Quant à ce moi, ne voulant faire, sur ce plan, qu'une pièce amusante et sans fatique, une pièce d'imbroille, il m'a suffi que le machiniste, au lieu d'être un noir scélérat, fût un drôle de garçon, un homme insouciant qui rit également du succès et de la chute de ses entreprises, pour que l'ouvrage, loin de tourner en drame sérieux, devint une comédie fort gaie;---.²

Figaro, the main character, corresponds exactly to his creator's definition. He is the manipulator of the intrigue, but at no time is he affected by it. His detachment leaves him free to direct the


²Beaumarchais, Barbier de Séville, ed. Leon Lejealle ("Classique Larousse;" Paris: Libraire Larousse, 1952), pp. 33-34. Unless otherwise indicated all references to this play will be taken from this text.
intrigue and to manipulate the other characters according to his own will. This is what makes him a personnage superior to all events. The comic atmosphere which surrounds him also serves to minimize any dramatic tension which might alienate the play from the comic. Intrigue is his major concern. He made this clear before he left the stage in Act I.

Figaro is an artist and schemes for the sake of scheming. His character is filled with wit. Figaro, the porte parole of the author, takes every opportunity that he can to criticize the social injustice of his time. He represents the unrest of the common people oppressed by the institutions of the Ancien Regime. In speaking of the servant-master relationship Figaro said:

\[
\text{Aux vertus qu'on exige dans un domestique, Votre Excellence connaît-elle beaucoup de maîtres qui fussent digne d'être valets?}^2
\]

The implication that Figaro gives in the above speech is that a servant triumphs over his master. Figaro was being satirical when he associated valet with vertu while implying the opposite for his master—the Count. Figaro made another attack on his master when he spoke of his former job:

\[
\text{Figaro.-- Je vendais souvent aux hommes de bonnes médecines de cheval...}
\]

\[
\text{Le Comte.-- Qui tuaient les sujets du Roi!}
\]

\[
\text{Figaro.-- Ah! ah! il n'y a point de remède universel; mais qui n'ont pas laisse de guérir quelquefois des Galiciens, des Catalans des Auvergnats.}^3
\]

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3Ibid., p. 54.
In this speech Figaro was implying that what is good for the horse is good for its master.

Figaro is used by Beaumarchais to express his criticism of the men of lettres. In act I scene 2, the satiric portion of Figaro’s speech is a degrading image of the men of letters.

Voyant à Madrid que la république des lettres était celles des loups, toujours armes les uns contre les autres...

In order to make this criticism of the man of lettres more effective, Figaro referred to them as parasites:

...Tous les insectes, les moustiques les cousins, les critiques, les maringouins, les envieux, les feuilliates, les libraires, les censeurs, et tout ce qui s'attache à la peau des malheureux gens de lettres, achevait de déchiqueter et sucer le peu de substance qui leur restait,...

Even though it is not stated directly in the text by Figaro, it is believed that Beaumarchais was affected by these parasites during his literary career.

Not only does Figaro attack the men of letters in his satiric speech in Act I scene 2, but he also described his fortune. In this description of his life, his mood is first melancholy:

...fatigue’d’écritre, ennuyé de moi, dégoûté des autres, abîme de dettes et léger d’argent; à la fin convaincu que l’utile revenu du rasoir est préférable aux vains honneurs de la plume, j’ai quitté Madrid;...

As he continues his mood becomes humorous:

1Ibid., p. 56.
2Ibid.
3Ibid.
In spite of Figaro's hardships in life, he was able to triumph over his misfortune.

Figaro is the counter-part of Beaumarchais. Figaro is an artist, financier, journalist and a man of the world. He is not revolutionary, but is instinctively restless under authority and only happy when he is mocking it. It is fate, not the social order that he questions. What he wants is not the social order be reversed, but that there should be room enough at the top for an *homme intelligent* like himself.

Among the major characters, Bartholo is the only one who is pleased with the status quo. This is to say that he is a conservative who is not in favor of progress.

Bartholo.— Euh, euh, les journaux et l'autorité, nous en feront raison. Siècle barbare!
Rosine.— Vous injuriez toujours notre pauvre siècle.
Bartholo.— Pardon, de la liberté! Qu'a-t-il produit pour qu'on le loue? Sottises de tout espèce: la liberté de penser, l'attraction, l'électricité, le tolérantisme, l'inoculation, le quinqua, l'Encyclopédie, et les drames.

Bartholo is a jealous old lover who remained attached to the prejudices of the past. He is selfish, cynical and tyrannical. According to Rosine he has an *instinct de jalousie*. Between Bartholo and Rosine, there can be nothing but hostility.

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3*Beaumarchais, Act I, scene 3*, p. 58.
In the romantic sensibility youth calls to youth, and age has no hearing.  

Bartholo is blinded by self confidence and cannot recognize his enemy even if evidence strikes him in the face. He cannot recognize his enemy as being a drunken soldier or disguised music teacher. He is ridiculous in his actions toward Rosine and to keep her for himself. In spite of all the precautions that he takes, Rosine communicates successfully with her suitor. Bartholo is a victim of his own misguided logic. Bartholo is a comic character because the author reduces his intelligence to stupidity.

Bartholo used several tactics in order to win the hand of Rosine. He used anger, authority, threats and promises in his futile efforts, but for all of these he gained nothing but frustration. In all instances his pride as a man and lover was destroyed. Figaro summed up Bartholo's defeat when he said:

...Quand la jeunesse et l'amour sont d'accord pour tromper un vieillard, tout ce qu'il fait pour l'empêcher peut bien s'appeler à bon droit la précaution inutile.

The Count plays a very important role in this play. Comte Almaviva is a Spanish nobleman who depends on the cleverness of his former servant to accomplish his desires. At the beginning of Act I the Count lets us know his role in the play. He is a "Don Juan" type.

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1 Ratermanis, op. cit., p. 20.

2 Ibid., p. 32.

3 Ibid.

4 Beaumarchais, Act IV, scene 8, p. 140.
The Count is a young man who fell in love with a young lady and later decided to marry her. Even though he plays tricks on Bartholo he is not evil. According to the author he was used to break into a stronghold defended by a suspicious old guardian.

A quality that makes the Count amiable is that he is able to understand his weakness. Even though the Count is superior to Figaro, he realizes that he is not as clever as he and thus, he seeks the aid of Figaro. Even though the Count is not as clever as his servant, he is not stupid nor ridiculous. His cleverness is shown by the manner in which he put into practice the plans prepared by Figaro.

Comte Almaviva's contribution to the comic elements of this play is limited. Except for the two disguises, which were suggested by Figaro, the Count remains a harmless, amiable personnage. At the beginning of the play he seems to be the Don Juan type, but at the end he seems to have become more mature.

Rosine is a young innocent lady who is in love. One easily excuses her for the tricks and falsehood that she uses in order to free herself from Bartholo. She is confident that she can be rescued from Bartholo by her admirer, Count Alamaviva, and therefore, she matches trick with trick. In this play Rosine is almost as clever as Figaro. She makes Bartholo look ridiculous by telling him the truth without exposing herself. To a certain degree one could consider Rosine as being vindictive. When she thought that she was betrayed by the Count, she confessed everything to Bartholo and agreed to marry him. She forgot

\[^{1}\text{Ibid.}\text{, Act I, scene 1, p. 51.}\]
about her repugnance for Bartholo, in order to make up for the wrong that she had received from the Count and to give herself the satisfaction that she had done the right thing. Rosine, who at the beginning of the play was not in love, became a lover and even a wife at the end.

Bazile is a detestable character and basically corrupt. His God is the money offered by Bartholo. He would sell himself to anyone without asking for an explanation, provided that he could fill his pockets. He thrives well in an evil atmosphere and has no trouble in serving an evil cause. In giving advice to Bartholo, he told him that slander was the most effective way of driving Count Almaviva out of Seville:

La calomnie, monsieur! Vous ne savez quère ce que dédaignez; j'ai vu le plus honnêtes gens près d'en être accablés... Le mal est fait; il germe il rampe, il chemine, et rinforzando de bouche en bouche il va le diable.1

Bazile represents everything that Figaro detests. His only sign of goodness, as opposed to his evil traits, was shown when he advised Bartholo not to marry Rosine.

Beaumarchais' style is original. His dialogues are superb and the language that he uses is appropriate to the social or professional station of each character. It is his choice of words that makes Figaro sound more like a barber than the Count. Note Figaro's speech:

...a la fin convaincu que l'utilre revenu du rasoir est préférable aux vains honneur de la plume...2

in comparison to that of the Count's:

Je suis las des conquêtes que l'intérêt, la convenance

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1Ibid., Act II, scene 8, p. 81.

2Ibid., Act I, scene 2, p. 56.
In reading the dialogue between Bartholo and Rosine one can easily see that Bartholo is a learned man, as opposed to Rosine who is a naive young lady:

Bartholo.— J'aime mieux craindre sans sujet que de m'exposer sans précaution. Tout est plein de gens entreprenants d'audacieux...
Rosine.— C'est bien mettre 'a plaisir de l'importance 'a tout! Le vent peut avoir éloigné ce papier...

*Le Barbier de Séville* is a satirical comedy as well as a comedy of intrigue. The author's primary purpose for writing this comedy was to give his criticism of the old regime. He used this comedy as a weapon of ridicule to hit back at those under whose hands he had suffered. In writing this comedy the author also had another purpose in mind. He wanted to bring gaiety to the theatre:

...Me livrant a mon gai caractère j'ai depuis tente' dans *le Barbier de Séville* de ramener au théâtre l'ancienne et franche gaiete, en alliant avec le ton de notre plaisanterie actuelle?

The author wanted to show that humanity, like Figaro "se presse de rire tout de peur d'être obligé d'en pleurer."\(^4\)

The theme of a young lady versus an old guardian is one of the oldest and most fertile topics in European literature. In this comedy,

\(^1\) *Ibid.*, Act I, scene 1, p. 51.

\(^2\) *Ibid.*, Act II, scene 4, p. 75


\(^4\) Beaumarchais, Act I, scene 2, p. 57.
the author wanted to show the ridiculousness of an old man who falls in love with a young lady.

Actions, characters, dialogues and monologues operated reciprocally throughout this play. The action depended largely on the performance of each character. While monologues were used to introduce new situations, the dialogues made these situations more lively.

After having analyzed the two plays, it is obvious that some similarities and differences exist between them. In the following chapter the writer will compare the two plays.
CHAPTER III

A COMPARISON OF THE TWO PLAYS

In placing the work of Regnard beside that of Beaumarchais' one might very well ask how can they be compared, when the reputation of Beaumarchais as a dramatist has far exceeded that of Regnard's. Yet significant similarities and differences can be found in Le Légataire Universel and Le Barbier de Séville as regards to theme, character development and style.

The obvious starting point for a comparison of the two plays is the theme. The themes in the two plays remain not only similar but traditional. In both works one finds the themes of a servant or valet triumphing over his master and an old man falling in love with a young lady. However, the authors differed in their treatment of the theme of love. In Le Barbier de Séville, Bartholo was in love with Rosine and the author wanted to show the ridiculousness of an old man falling in love with a young lady. In Le Légataire Universel, Géronte was not really in love with Isabelle. He only wanted to marry her as a means of not having to pass his inheritance to his expectant heirs.

As far as the characters are concerned, in both plays they lacked psychic or emotional power. Neither Regnard nor Beaumarchais was concerned with the psychological analysis of the characters. In view of this fact, one can compare Géronte and Bartholo, who experienced frustration but were not crushed by it. Both Géronte and Bartholo were thwarted in their efforts to win the hand of a young lady. However, neither remained seriously afflicted by their fate at the end of the plays.
Looking at Geronte and Bartholo from another point of view, both were ridiculous in their methods or techniques in attempting to win the hand of a young lady. Their ridiculousness lay in the fact that they were victims of their own misguided logic. While Geronte thought that money could win the hand of Isabelle, Bartholo took too many precautions to win Rosine's hand. As a result of their actions, both plans were thwarted in their efforts to win these young ladies.

One could hardly compare Le Barbier de Séville and Le Légataire Universel without comparing Crispin and Figaro. First of all, both were heroes of the intrigues. Crispin and Figaro played a vital role in out-witting Geronte and Bartholo. They were the manipulators of the actions in both plays. In out-witting Geronte and Bartholo both used disguise, but in a different manner. Crispin was directly involved in the disguises and Figaro was indirectly involved. While Crispin went through the process of disguising himself to out-wit Geronte, Figaro drew up the plans for the Count to disguise himself, so that he could out-wit Bartholo. Unlike Figaro, the speeches and actions of Crispin were not to be taken seriously. In Le Barbier de Séville the author used Figaro to voice his opinion as he ridiculed and satirized the institutions of the old regime. In Le Légataire Universel the author used Crispin primarily to amuse his audience.

Two other personnages that can be compared in the two plays are Bazile and Mme Argante. The sole interest of each was material gains. Mme Argante would sacrifice her daughter's happiness in order to fill her pockets, whereas Bazile would sell his services to anybody and not ask for an explanation if money was presented to him. While Bazile deceived
his master, Mme Argante was not as interested in her daughter's welfare as she was in her own.

A contrast can be drawn between the two young ladies, Isabelle and Rosine. While Rosine was clever and possessed will power, Isabelle was a timid young lady who was completely subjected to the authority of her mother. Rosine could make a choice between her suitor and her guardian, whereas Isabelle's mother chose the man that she wanted her daughter to marry.

Regnard and Beaumarchais shared a common purpose in the writing of these comedies. Both wanted to bring gaiety to the theater; therefore, they wrote comedies of intrigues, in which action played a major role. In both comedies, the action developed swiftly toward the denouement. It is the swift progressive action of each play that arouses suspense and excitement of the audience, and creates many comical elements. In both plays comical elements have been pointed out. They are useful either because they minimize tension or because they define the character more clearly.

Similarities and differences can be cited in the style of both authors. Regnard's style is a reflection of his personality. He writes in quick vivid verses and the movement in his play seems to be as natural as in his life. His lively dialogues, like that of Beaumarchais' contributed to the comical elements in his play. Comical elements could also be cited in the language and personalities of Regnard's characters.

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2Ibid.
Beaumarchais wrote in a gay free style. Unlike Regnard, who wrote in verses, Beaumarchais wrote Le Barbier de Séville in prose. Unlike Regnard, who was mainly concerned with amusement, Beaumarchais used monologues and tirades in order to express the state of mind of his characters. In his play, Le Barbier de Séville, Beaumarchais like Regnard adheres to the classical unities. Beaumarchais' language depicts the personalities of his characters, and his dialogues, for the most part, are lively. It is also interesting to note that Beaumarchais gives his reader a long description of the physical features of his characters.

Conclusion

Parallels can be drawn between, the lives, works and personalities of each author. Both authors belonged to bourgeois families and both had a desire for adventure and intrigue. Both authors were writers of the eighteenth century.

The period in which Regnard and Beaumarchais lived had a great bearing on their works. Regnard wrote during the decline of Louis XIV's reign when criticism of the government was kept at its minimum and when the society was carefree. It is therefore obvious that one finds more amusement than satire in Le Légataire Universel. Beaumarchais wrote at the end of the eighteenth century during the time in which the cry of social injustice had reached its peak. According to many critics, Beaumarchais' work, Le Barbier de Séville, is considered as a summary of the philosophical ideas of the eighteenth century, for not only did it include Diderot's philosophical idea of chance, but also the idea of many philosophes in their quest for justice.

In looking at each author and the period in which he lived, one can
easily see why Regnard in *Le Legataire Universel* did not dare to satirize or criticize the government in a manner that Beaumarchais has done in *Le Barbier de Séville*. One can also see why *Le Barbier de Séville* is considered as a comedy of satire while *Le Légataire Universel* is simply a comedy of intrigue.

The merits of each writer may be determined by their contribution to literature. Regnard's great popularity with *Le Légataire Universel* caused him to be regarded by many critics as second only to Moliere. Regnard, who today is still considered as a minor writer, brought gaiety to the French theatre by his sparking dialogues and brilliant versification.

Beaumarchais, whose work is still very much alive today, made many contributions to literature. He like Regnard, is noted for bringing gaiety to the French theatre. In *Le Barbier de Séville*, he is noted for introducing songs into drama and especially for his characterization, particularly that of Figaro. He gave to the world the dynamic Figaro, who was imbued with the spirit of his own epoch and with an individuality of his own—which is in many respects that of Beaumarchais himself.

Regnard's literary fame may not be as great as that of Beaumarchais, but each author, in his own way, made an important contribution to French Literature.

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