

# Portrayal of the 18th century france in beaumarchais's |the marriage of figaro

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Portrayal of the 18th Century France in Beaumarchais's "The Marriage of Figaro" Though Pierre Beaumarchais's play "The Marriage of Figaro" takes place in a purely homely setting, it successfully portrays a vivid picture of the sociopolitical context of France in the 18th century. Published and staged several years before the French Revolution (1789-1799) the play depicts the tumults of the Parisian aristocracy and monarchy. Beaumarchais's "Marriage of Figaro" itself appears to a voice against the tyranny of the aristocratic society and it champions the commoners' triumph in their attempt to amend these frontiers of the society. In a homely setting the portrayal of a ridiculously lustful Count, his subjects' attempts to teach him a lesson and their subsequent success, in Beaumarchais's age, could foretell a series of oncoming changes in the country's sociopolitical and economic context. In this regard Alan Woods notes that Beaumarchais's sole target was to prove that the social regime "that has outlived itself, is in conflict with itself, has no reason to exist and must be brought down" (2). The plot of Beaumarchais's play revolves round the intelligent valet Figaro's attempt to thwart Count Almaviva's plan to seduce Susanne before her marriage with Figaro. Though the Count has abolished a "dubious right" that permits a count to enjoy his maids before their marriage, he now endeavors to restore it. Thus the play depicts the Parisian aristocracy's lust and its lack of attentions to the commoners' expectation and their whims to continue an oppressive and old social order. By his attempt to restore the old social order of 'dubious right', the Count rather goes against the contemporary trends of his society and ultimately he has to pay for his whims at the end of the play. In a way, by succumbing to the protests of his subjects he rather officially

acknowledges the weight of the society's expectation. The subplots of the play are also tied to the main with the same strings of the Count's subjects' triumph to force him to comply with their expectations. The Countess Rosina's to win back Almoviva also becomes successful at the end of play. Again Marceline and Dr. Bartolo's plot to postpone the wedding adds a twist on the social message that the play conveys' to its audience. At first, Marceline and Bartolo attempts to serve the Count's cause by intriguing Figaro to run into debt and to force him to Marcelina in case he fails to repay the loan. But gradually it is revealed that Figaro is the son of Macelina and Dr. Bartolo. Apparently the homely but royal setting of the play may provoke the readers to assume the play as a mere farcical comedy on the peculiar lustfulness of the aristocratic society of the Parisian society in the 18th century. But the play bears an array of messages while depicting the heart of the society critically. While ridiculing the abuses of the monarchy as well as the aristocracy of the Parisian, the play also depicts the society's expectations from the ruling class. Figaro and Susanne's plot to thwart the Count evil intention necessarily tells about the middle class's perception and feeling about the whims of the aristocracy. Also it tells about their challenge to the ruling class of the society. Meanwhile the countess's attachment to Figaro's plan to thwart the count's desire refers to the various groups' interest in the political system of the 18th century France. In Act II, when Countess Rosina laments the loss of her husband, the count's tyrannical image is vividly portrayed. He appears to be a tyrant. His tyranny is only a personal one, rather a social one since his tyranny though sexual affects not only his household but also the others in his palace. It forces Figaro to revolt

and Bartolo and Marcelina to go against their son. By underlining the inner conflicts of the aristocracy, Beaumarchais refers to the hollowness of the existing political system. On the surface level, Beaumarchais's "The Marriage of Figaro" is a comedy that portrays the ridiculous sexuality of the people in power in Parisian society. But an in-depth analysis will necessarily reveal that the play conveys the emerging changes in the sociopolitical context of France in the 18th century. It depicts a society that was preparing itself to challenge the abusive power of monarchy and ultimately became successful through the French revolution, as Woods says, " Figaro is a comedy, but with a serious message. Here is high comedy and low farce" (2). Indeed it depicts a society which was then preparing itself for the oncoming French Revolution. The middle class part of the French society in the later half of the 18th century decisively challenged the aristocracy of the country. The middle class people were, rather, viewing themselves as a victim of the power of the monarchic political system. In such a context, Figaro and others' scheme to thwart Count Almaviva's intention to seduce Figaro's girl Susanne might symbolize the middle-class Parisians' challenge to the aristocracy. Works Cited Beaumarchais, Pierre. The Marriage of Figaro. April 6, 2012. Available at Woods, Alan. " Figaro and the French Revolution", May 9, 2001. April 6, 2012. Available at