

6 · FROM BEAUMARCHAIS
TO DA PONTE:
THE METAMORPHOSIS
OF FIGARO



A I S
T E :
S I S
R O

Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, born the son of a Parisian watchmaker in 1732, worked his way upward in society by marrying a widow with property. By 1760 he was harp teacher to the unmarried daughters of Louis XV. The path of his long climb to prominence was strewn with litigations and brilliantly written polemic pamphlets. In March 1774 he traveled to London as a secret agent under the false name Ronac in order to squelch a pamphlet attacking Madame Du Barry, the king's mistress. With the aid of a large bribe he succeeded in buying off the pamphlet's author and burning the manuscript along with three thousand copies already printed. When he returned to Versailles he found, instead of the hoped-for reward, a mortally ill king. Louis XV died on 10 May 1774, with the succession passing to his nineteen-year-old grandson, the dauphin, and his Austrian bride, Marie Antoinette, who was only eighteen. Beaumarchais schemed to ingratiate himself with the new rulers along lines all too plainly related to the Du Barry episode.

Under the guise of defending the honor of Marie Antoinette and her mother, the empress Maria Theresa, Beaumarchais made a secret trip to Vienna in the summer of 1774 (once again under the name Ronac), supposedly in pursuit of the last copy of a scurrilous pamphlet and its publisher. On the way he staged a wounding attack on himself near Nuremberg, ascribed it to said publisher, rescued the pamphlet, then hastened on to Vienna, where, admitted to see the empress almost at once, he presented her with the pamphlet. Her chancellor of state, Prince Kaunitz, had the good sense to see through his cock-and-bull story and to suspect that Beaumarchais himself was the pamphlet's author. Beaumarchais was clapped into

Revised and expanded from *San Francisco Opera Magazine*:
Le nozze di Figaro (Fall 1986).

prison and interrogated by Joseph von Sonnenfels (who was also a playwright).¹ Word soon came from the first minister in Paris to release him. Did Beaumarchais know so much that the French royal family feared him?

Beaumarchais, then, was in ill repute with the rulers in Vienna long before the question arose of tolerating his outrageously cheeky play *La folle journée, ou Le mariage de Figaro*—as this episode makes clear. Maria Theresa had died in 1780, but Chancellor Kaunitz remained all-powerful, alongside her son, Joseph II. Their reaction to a proposed play by the Parisian adventurer and scandalmonger of 1774 can well be imagined. Yet the way to acceptance was paved by the Viennese success of the first Figaro play by Beaumarchais, *Le barbier de Séville*, German versions of which played in the Burgtheater from 1776 to 1783.² As adapted in an Italian libretto by Petrosellini and set to delightful music by Paisiello, *Il barbiere di Siviglia* enjoyed some seventy performances in the same theater between 1783 and 1788. The Viennese public was naturally curious to follow the fortunes of Figaro and the other characters further.

In January 1785, Joseph instructed his censor that a German translation of the second play planned for production in the Kärntnerthor Theater should be banned unless expurgated of its more offensive passages. Nevertheless, he permitted the unexpurgated version to be printed at once, and even made jesting reference in a letter to one of the play's touchy issues, "le droit du Seigneur," a lord's right to deflower any virgin on his domain (the "right" was in fact a fabrication of Beaumarchais).³ Da Ponte told a tale in his memoirs, written over three decades later, about how Mozart and he surprised the emperor with a secretly written Figaro opera in the spring of 1785. Mozart's Czech friend and early biographer, Niemetschek, told what sounds like the unvarnished truth: "Emperor Joseph determined Mozart to seek fame on the Italian operatic stage with this play, after it had been suitably altered to serve as a libretto."⁴

Mozart composed most of the music for *Figaro* in the fall of 1785. The opera was no secret. By late October, the emperor's chamberlain and deputy theater director, Count Rosenberg, was pressing the composer to finish his score, as Mozart at that time wrote to his father. A premiere was originally planned for the early months of 1786, but other premieres intervened and *Le nozze di Figaro* was not revealed to the public until the first of May. The emperor made it a practice to attend rehear-

1. Alfred Ritter von Arneth, *Beaumarchais und Sonnenfels* (Vienna, 1868), reproduces the entire interrogation. In his memoirs, Beaumarchais plays the innocent injured party, as might be expected. For a recent study of him, see René Pomeau, *Beaumarchais, ou la bizarre destinée* (Paris, 1987).

2. Hadamowsky, *Das Wiener Hoftheater (Staatstheater) 1776–1966, Teil 1: 1776–1810* (Vienna, 1966), No. 118.

3. Payer von Thurn, *Joseph II als Theaterdirektor*, pp. 69–70. The correspondence at one point concerned giving permission to Luisa Laschi to marry the tenor Domenico Mombelli. Joseph wrote Count Rosenberg from Prague on 29 September 1786: "Le mariage de Mombelli avec la Laschi peut s'exécuter sans attendre mon retour, et je vous cede à ce sujet le droit du Seigneur" ("The marriage of Laschi and Mombelli may take place without awaiting my return, and in this matter I cede to you the *droit du Seigneur*").

4. "Mozart ward vom Kaiser Joseph dazu bestimmt, diesem Lustspiele, nachdem es in ein Singspiel umgegossen ward, auch auf dem italienischen Operntheater durch sein Musik Celebrität zu verschaffen"; Niemetschek, *Leben des k. k. Kapellmeisters Mozart*, p. 25.

sals, which the new opera, being the longest and most complicated one ever staged in the Burgtheater, required in great numbers. Despite a noisy cabal against Mozart and Da Ponte, the first two performances won over the public, and by the third the emperor had to prohibit the encoring of any pieces other than solo numbers. He was aware of having sponsored the creation of an epochal work and took pride in it. A clever critic in the *Realzeitung* pointed up the history of the Figaro saga in Vienna during 1785–86 by beginning his review, "Nowadays what is not allowed to be spoken is sung"; his astute readers would have recognized this as a paraphrase of a line spoken by Figaro at the beginning of *Le barbier de Séville*.⁵ The reviewer also said that opinions were divided at the first performance, "which is understandable, since the work is so difficult it did not go as well as it might have, but after repeated performances one would have to admit either to being a part of the cabal or to tastelessness in maintaining any view other than that Mozart's music was a masterpiece of art."⁶

What offended authorities in *Le mariage de Figaro* by Beaumarchais was mainly Figaro's great political speech in the last act, an attack on the establishment that took in rulers, magistrates, censors, and prisons, all of which had brought Figaro to grief; and in this regard, the character Figaro was but a thin disguise for the playwright himself. Beaumarchais had wrapped this diatribe within a denunciation of women, Figaro's imagined deception at the hands of his bride becoming the capper to his woes. Da Ponte preserved only the wrapping and turned Figaro's self-pitying rantings into a catalog of feminine wiles, probably working closely with Mozart, who usually knew what kind of text he needed for the musical effect he had already conceived. All the emphasis placed by the operatic Figaro on women's faithlessness ran the risk of offending Viennese canons of morality, which were much stricter than those of Paris, at least on the public stage.

The countess was given a complex character by Beaumarchais. She is very adept at feminine wiles, as we know from our encounter with her as Rosina in the first play, but is also generous and forgiving, which she remains in the second play. (For the sake of simplicity we adopt the Italian name forms throughout.) As the young Rosina, she was not insensitive to the lure of the sensual. It is thus only consistent with her character that, even as Countess Almaviva, she should be moved to some degree by the amorous attentions of her young page, especially since she has been neglected and betrayed by her husband. She retains a typically Gallic independence of mind (the Spanish setting used by Beaumarchais fooled no one). While her subtly drawn portrait was bound to please the Parisians, it was not one that could be exhibited in Vienna without being cleaned up. Two paeans to conjugal love,

5. Act 1, scene 2: "Aujourd'hui ce que ne vaut pas la peine d'être dit, on le chante." The reviewer transformed "what is not worth being said" into "what is not allowed to be spoken": "Was in unseren Zeiten nicht erlaubt ist gesagt zu werden, wird gesungen." The review is quoted at length in Michtner, *Das alte Burgtheater*, pp. 208–9; and in Deutsch, *Dokumente*, pp. 243–44.

6. "Und folglich waren mit Ende des Stückes die Meinungen geteilt. Überdies hat es seine Richtigkeit, dass die erste Aufführung, weil die Komposition sehr schwer ist, nicht am besten von statten ging. Jetzt aber nach wiederholten Vorstellungen würde man sich offenbar entweder zur Kabale oder Geschmacklosigkeit bekennen, wenn man eine andere Meinung behaupten wollte, als dass die Musik des Herrn Mozart ein Meisterstück der Kunst sei"; *ibid.*

"Porgi, amor" at the beginning of the operatic second act and "Dove sono" in act 3, sufficed to achieve the transformation of the countess into a model wife, a nearly saintly tower of constancy. (The relationship of these two pieces to other music by Mozart is explored at the end of this chapter.)

Young Count Almaviva is a complex personality, too. In the first play, what inflamed his desires for the eighteen-year-old Rosina was not her beauty or her noble soul, but her unavailability. Winning her over obstacles did wonders for his self-esteem, but not much for his long-term commitment to her. In the second play, he says he loves his wife, the countess, "but three years together makes marriage so respectable!" Even though the countess is still very young, her husband seeks the titillation of new challenges. Being much concerned with propriety and appearances, he is not about to go the libertine route of another Spanish grandee, Don Giovanni; yet he has more than a little of the Don Juan complex in him.

"A quasi-novel genre of spectacle" is what Da Ponte calls *Le nozze di Figaro* in his preface to the original printed libretto. He also says, "I have not simply translated this excellent comedy, but rather made an imitation, or better put, an extract." (See the Appendix to this chapter for the complete preface text.) The number of roles in the play was cut from sixteen to eleven (still requiring at least nine singing voices, two or three more than normal), and "many most charming scenes" had to be cut, laments Da Ponte, who goes on to apologize with this understatement: "In spite of all . . . study, diligence, and care taken by the composer and by me to be brief, the opera will still not be the shortest one ever put on in our theater." It was in fact much longer than the average opera. Mozart listed it in his catalog of works as thirty-four numbers, but about four of these were abandoned or perhaps never set to music. Even so, the opera is so long that it is almost never given without a few numbers being cut. Primarily responsible for its inordinate length were the intricacies of the five-act play by Beaumarchais, the longest comedy that Parisian theatergoers had ever witnessed. "We hope that excuse enough will be found," says Da Ponte, "in the variety of threads with which the action of this drama is woven, the vastness and greatness of the same, and the multiplicity of musical numbers that had to be made, in order . . . to express step by step with diverse colors the diverse passions that rival each other, and to carry out our desire of offering a quasi-novel genre of spectacle to a public of such refined taste and such just understanding."

The richness of the play is evident especially in Beaumarchais's deft characterization of the accessory figures. Take the case of Marcellina. She is only mentioned in the first play, as Rosina's governess. In the second play she has a small but crucial role and undergoes considerable character development. From the bitter and faded beauty who first arrives at the château with Doctor Bartolo, by the end she has turned into a wise and sympathetic matriarch.⁷ We see her throughout mainly in

7. Wye J. Allanbrook, "Pro Marcellina: The Shape of 'Figaro' Act IV," *Music and Letters* 63 (1982): 69-84.

interaction with Susanna, first as a rival pretender to Figaro's hand in marriage, later as a doting mother to Figaro and his bride-to-be, and finally as a staunch defender of women in general, and Susanna in particular, against the silly vituperations of Figaro. As Marcellina grows in human qualities, so does Susanna, who at first is almost as shrill as her future mother-in-law. Susanna's sharp tongue in the initial encounter finds these choice expressions for Marcellina: *pédante* (turned by Da Ponte into *vecchia pedante*), *vielle sibyle* (*Sybilla decrepita*), *femme savante* (*dottoressa arrogante*). As Marcellina makes her exit in the play, Susanna says: "Just because she has studied a little and tormented the youth of my mistress, she thinks she can run things here in the château." Da Ponte manages to shorten even this, and he sharpens the point about Marcellina's studies by having her drop into a few words of French, at which Susanna exclaims, "Che lingua!"

Bartolo remains the same old curmudgeon who delighted us in *Le barbier de Séville*; indeed, it belongs to his character that he cannot change with the times. In the first play he inveighs against everything that might be called social or scientific progress: freedom of thought, the theory of gravity, electricity, religious toleration, inoculation, quinine, the *Encyclopédie*, and, finally, modern dramas. We learn early what kind of medical doctor he is—a menace to man and beast alike, as Figaro says. Much of the malicious wit with which he is drawn by Beaumarchais has to be sacrificed in the opera's text, but Mozart makes up for it in a single stroke with the doctor's one aria, "La vendetta," a consummate portrait of pomposity mingled with stupidity. Don Basilio, Rosina's singing teacher, while not as stupid as Bartolo, is even more corrupt and malevolent. His weapons are calumny, behind a person's back, or, face to face, innuendo. "One is wicked," he tells Susanna in the play, just before Cherubino is discovered hiding in the armchair, "because one sees things clearly."

Da Ponte says in his preface that he had to omit one whole act of the play. More accurately, he combined the trial (act 3) with the double engagement (from act 4) to make his third act, while moving the solo scenes for Barbarina and Marcellina to the beginning of his fourth and last act. Some loose ends remained untied in the opera's libretto after all this cutting and splicing. Da Ponte does not explain how Susanna got the purse of money with which to buy Figaro's freedom from his promissory note obliging him to marry Marcellina, a boon that Beaumarchais spelled out as coming from a characteristic act of generosity on the part of the countess. An advantage of treating a play that was so popular and well known becomes obvious here: the libretto could cut many corners and still remain intelligible. Similarly, the play, with all its richness of detail and allusion, could serve as a kind of subtext or commentary on the compressed action of the opera.

Beaumarchais also availed himself of a preface—a very long one—when the definitive edition of *Le mariage de Figaro* was printed early in 1785.⁸ He defended

8. It is reprinted in Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, *Théâtre: "Le barbier de Séville." "Le mariage de Figaro." "La mère coupable,"* ed. René Pomeau (Paris, 1965), pp. 108–34. See also Hans Ludwig Scheel,

himself against the charges of having written a grossly immoral play by turning the tables on his critics and showing how every major character had a moral lesson to teach the public. He protested a little too much about the innocence of the countess, particularly since he had already mentioned in the same preface his plans for a third play in the cycle, *La mère coupable* (the guilty mother being the countess, after she has had a child by Cherubino). Perhaps he felt justified claiming her innocence, because in successive versions of *Le mariage de Figaro* he toned down some of the more suggestive passages pertaining to the countess, so that in the final version she is merely ambiguous. On the subject of Cherubino he asks: "Is it the person of the page or the conscience of the count that torments the latter every time I condemn them to meet?" He answers the question in a very moral fashion. "Even the man of absolute power, once he has embarked on a wicked course of action, can be tripped up by the least important being, by the person who most fears getting in his way." He reveals Marcellina's youthful sin of indiscretion, the one that thirty years earlier led to the birth of Figaro, he says, not to debase her or the female gender, but to point out the really guilty person, her vile and irresponsible seducer, Bartolo. Beaumarchais was a feminist, one of the first. He condemns all vile seducers of women, and most especially the count, who is the worst because of his very great temporal powers. The whole play focuses ultimately on teaching the count a lesson he will not forget, just after teaching another of the same kind to Figaro.

The metaphor of instruction looms large in the Figaro cycle. At the end of the first play, the count, after throwing off his cloak and revealing the magnificent costume of a Spanish grandee, makes a very mean remark about teaching old Bartolo a lesson. No! replies his bride-to-be, the young Rosina: her overflowing heart has no room for vengeance (already a sign of trouble ahead for this pair). Figaro would teach the count to dance to his tunes in "Se vuol ballare, Signor Contino," and to end the same act Figaro gives Cherubino superb instruction on the military life ahead of him in "Non più andrai, farfallone amoroso." The lessons do not stop there.

Beaumarchais took infinite pains with details of staging and costuming in his plays. He devised an exact prescription for every character's costume, which was printed along with the *dramatis personae* at the beginning. The count, for example, is instructed to appear in Spanish court costume but with hunting boots in the first two acts, after which he dons an even more gala costume. Beaumarchais turned to one of the leading Parisian artists and illustrators, Jacques-Philippe-Joseph de Saint-Quentin, to procure suitable vignettes with which to adorn the first edition of *La folle journée*, brought out in early 1785 at Kehl, across the French border from Strasbourg. Born in 1738, Saint-Quentin was a pupil of Boucher and won the first prize from the Royal Academy of Painting in 1762 (ten years after Fragonard, an-

"*Le mariage de Figaro* von Beaumarchais und das Libretto der *Nozze di Figaro* von Lorenzo da Ponte," *Musikforschung* 28 (1975): 156-72.

other of Boucher's pupils). His drawings, one for each of the five acts of the play, were engraved for publication by various artists. They help to recreate the atmosphere of the first production in 1784, and they are still suggestive as to staging. We reproduce all five from the excellently preserved copy of the first edition, now rare, in Harvard College Library; in the absence of any iconographic evidence concerning the first production of the opera, these engravings are invaluable.

The choice for act 1 fell on the chair scene (Fig. 7). A dashing young count lifts the robe from the chair to reveal Cherubino. He wears the specified hunting boots that reach mid-calf and the costume of a Spanish grandee. Spanish court dress, which remained about two hundred years behind the times (with obvious symbolic implications for political fashions as well), was very like Elizabethan male finery: neck ruff, plumed hat, puffed trunk hose, tights, sash, and cape. Susanna, raising her hands in shocked horror at the discovery, wears a low-cut gown and headgear as prescribed by the playwright. Basilio, expressing shocked delight at the situation, is clad as a cleric in dark garb. Cherubino looks like a miniature version of the count. The style of the room is plain and almost without adornment, as befits an antechamber. An elegant Louis XV chair in the foreground lends a counteraccent to all the gesticulations.

The boudoir of the countess in act 2 has decorations above the bed and the dressing room door, from which Susanna emerges to the surprise of both the count and his wife (Fig. 8). Susanna has lost her headgear here, but in another illustration showing Mademoiselle Contat (who created the role) at the identical spot in act 2, scene 17, she wears a hat.⁹ The guitar with which Susanna accompanied Cherubino's Romance sung to the countess (the *canzonetta*, No. 11 in the opera) rests on the chair in the right foreground, and the open window reminds us of how the page escaped. More clearly visible here is the sash around the count's waist. The time would seem to be close to midday because of the lighting.

Act 3 is illustrated by the trial scene, depicted in a magnificent room with ornate columns (Fig. 9). The shadows have lengthened, corresponding to the mid- to late-afternoon time. Count Almaviva, more splendidly dressed than ever, presides from the raised dais. Figaro, in plebeian costume of breeches, weskit, kerchief, and sash, has a loose hair bag that anticipates the revolutionary caps that will be worn by the sans-culottes a few years later. He confronts Doctor Bartolo across the room in one of the funniest scenes of the play as they argue over the wording of his promise to marry Marcellina, who stands to the left of Bartolo. A stuttering magistrate adds to the hilarity.

For act 4, Beaumarchais calls for a gallery illuminated by candelabra and *lustres*. Saint-Quentin does not show these, nor does he otherwise account for the source of his light (Fig. 10). The dancing has begun in the background, while the count places a bridal hat and veil on Susanna, who is showing even more décolletage.

9. In Howard C. Rice, Jr., *Thomas Jefferson's Paris* (Princeton, N.J., 1976), Fig. 101.



7 The Chair scene

FIGURES 7-II
 Saint-Quentin: Five vignettes from
Le mariage de Figaro



8 The Closet scene

The countess sits behind them, apparently intent on the words of the duet sung by two maidens with flowers in their hair. They sing the praises of the count for delivering the young bride into the hands of her husband "chaste and pure." Figaro looks on with Marcellina behind him. The room makes a potent statement about the triumph of the neoclassical style in Paris. Aguas-Frescas outside Seville would not have been nearly so advanced or up-to-date.



9 The Trial scene

Evening has come, and the action moves to a spot in the garden under the chestnut trees (turned into pines by Da Ponte) where there are two small pavilions (Fig. 11). Saint-Quentin (and Beaumarchais?) had no real choice here except to depict the *dénouement*—the moment of truth when the count recognizes in the person kneeling before him his wife disguised as Susanna. Figaro kneels next to her. To the count's left are Marcellina and the real Susanna, flanked by Antonio



10 The Ball scene

and, behind him, Bartolo. The magistrate and the many other characters of *Le mariage de Figaro* crowd around to witness the final lesson of "la folle journée."

The role of the countess in the opera shows the most divergence from its counterpart in the play. Of great moment was the decision by Mozart and Da Ponte to withhold her from act 1 (where she appears for an instant in the play to plead for Cherubino) so as to introduce her at the beginning of act 2 with a soliloquy,



II The Dénouement

"Porgi, amor, qualche ristoro." This fervent and ever-so-moving plea to love had its parallels in Italian opera, notably in the solo scene for the young Rosina in Paisiello's *Barbiere*.¹⁰ As we shall see, it had resonances as well with another type of music in Mozart's vast oeuvre, as did her soliloquy in act 3, "Dove sono i bei

¹⁰. As argued in Chapter 8.

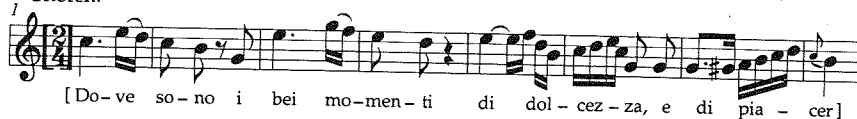
EXAMPLE 6.1A-B.

A: *Figaro*, Sketch for No. 20

B: *Figaro*, No. 20

A

Sketch:



B

Ob. I



Andante sostenuto

9 V. I

V. II

SOLO

A - gnus De - i, a - gnus De - i, qui tol - lis pec-

pizz.

Bassi

14

ca - ta, pec - ca - ta mun - di.

arco

EXAMPLE 6.2. Mass in C
(Coronation Mass), K. 317,
Agnus Dei

momenti," for which there is also no model in the play. The troubles Mozart took to conquer the seemingly simple melody of "Dove sono" are apparent in a surviving melodic sketch, given here just above the final version (Ex. 6.1A-B). It is possible that Da Ponte's words are lacking in the sketch because he was not even asked to supply them until Mozart got the melody the way he wanted it. In the sketch, Mozart seems to be fighting against the obvious: the natural inclination to rise from the third to the fifth degree, after having risen from the first to the third. The result is a too-great emphasis on the tone E. Did Mozart resist his final solution at first out of a realization that he had already written something very similar to it, a

EXAMPLE 6.3. Missa solemnis,

K. 337, Agnus Dei

Andante sostenuto

5 SOLO

A - gnus De-i, qui tol - lis pec - ca - ta

Bassi pizz.

rise through the third to the fifth with instrumental linkings between the vocal utterances in his "Coronation" Mass of 1779 (K. 317; Ex. 6.2)? The sacred context in which he first conceived this idea cannot help but color our conception of the countess and of the seriousness of her plight. What is true of "Dove sono" is no less true of "Porgi, amor," the opening melodic motif of which may be found set by Mozart to sacred words many times over.¹¹ One particular example, in his last complete mass, the Missa solemnis in C of 1780 (K. 337), even sets the motif in E-flat, as a refreshing oasis of relief coming after the brightness of C major, and accompanied by prominent solo winds (Ex. 6.3). It is no wonder, then, that both soliloquies of the countess exude an aura of fervor that is close to prayer: both melodic incipits had been used by Mozart for real prayers.

APPENDIX

Le nozze di Figaro

Da Ponte's Preface to the Italian Libretto¹²

Il tempo prescritto dall'uso alle drammatiche rappresentazioni, un certo dato numero di personaggi comunemente praticato nelle medesime; ed alcune altre prudenti viste, e convenienze dovute ai costumi, al loco, e agli spettatori, furono le cagioni per cui non ho fatto una traduzione di quella eccellente comedia, ma una imitazione piuttosto, o vogliamo dire un estratto.

Per questo sono stato costretto a ridurre à undici attori i sedici che la compongono, due de' quali si possono eseguire da uno stesso soggetto, e ad omettere,

11. Examples in which Mozart began with a rise from 5 to 8 over tonic harmony followed by a 4-3 melodic sigh over dominant harmony include the following: "Sancta Maria ora pro nobis" in Litaniae Laurentianae BVM, K. 109, of 1771; "Dona nobis pacem" in the Missa brevis, K. 194, of 1774; and the opening Kyrie of the Missa brevis, K. 275, of 1777.

12. Our Italian text comes from the original libretto in the Library of Congress. The citation of it in Deutsch, *Dokumente*, p. 239, drops one entire line of text, an error not rectified in the *Addenda and Corrigenda* that came out in 1978.

oltre un intiero atto di quella, molte graziosissime scene, e molti bei motti, e saletti ond'è sparsa, in loco di che ho dovuto sostituire canzonette, arie, cori ed altri pensieri, e parole di musica suscettibili, cose che dalla sola poesia, e non mai dalla prosa si somministrano. Ad onta però di tutto lo studio, e di tutta la diligenza e cura avuta dal maestro di capella, e da me per esser brevi, l'opera non sarà delle più corte che si sieno esposte sul nostro teatro, al che speriamo che basti di scusa la varietà delle file onde è tessuta l'azione di questo dramma, la vastità e grandezza del medesimo, la molteplicità de' pezzi musicali, che si son dovuti fare, per non tener di soverchio oziosi gli attori, per scemare la noia e monotonia dei lunghi recitativi, per esprimere tratto tratto con diversi colori le diverse passioni che vi campeggiano, e il desiderio nostro particolarmente di offerire un quasi nuovo genere di spettacolo ad un pubblico di gusto sì raffinato, e di sì giudizio intendimento.

Il Poeta

The time prescribed by usage in music dramas, a certain number of characters practiced in the same, and other prudent considerations and expedencies arising from the customs, the place, and the spectators were the reasons why I have not simply translated this excellent comedy, but rather made an imitation, or better put, an extract.

For this reason I was forced to reduce sixteen actors to eleven, two of which can be played by the same person, and to omit, besides an entire act, many most graceful scenes and many bons mots and pungent witticisms with which the play is strewn, in place of which I had to substitute canzonette, arias, choruses, and other inventions, and words susceptible to music, things provided only by poetry, never by prose. In spite of all this study, diligence, and care taken by the composer and by me to be brief, the opera will still not be the shortest one ever put on in our theater, for which we hope that excuse enough will be found in the variety of threads with which the action of this drama is woven, the vastness and greatness of the same, and the multiplicity of musical numbers that had to be made, in order not to allow excessive idleness to the actors, and to avoid the annoyance and monotony of long recitatives, and to express step by step with diverse colors the diverse passions that rival each other, and to carry out our desire of offering a quasi-novel genre of spectacle to a public of such refined taste and such just understanding.

The Poet