



The Game of Chess: by Carlo Goldoni

Simon Thomas

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In 2011, the National Theatre in London produced a version of *The Servant of Two Masters* under the title *One Man, Two Guvnors*. It became a smash hit on both sides of the Atlantic and introduced a whole new audience to the work of Carlo Goldoni. Goldoni (1707-1793) was one of the most prolific playwrights who ever lived, having written over 250 works during a career of nearly 50 years. He's best-known outside Italy for some of his earliest comedies, including *The Servant of Two Masters* and *The Venetian Twins*, farces based on the traditions of *commedia dell'arte* but we have to look to his mature works for the truly Goldonian comedy. There's a wealth of subtlety and insight in these beautifully constructed and astutely observed studies of everyday life in 18th Century Italy (and, at the end of his career, France). *The Game of Chess* is a translation of Carlo Goldoni's penultimate play, *Le Bourru bienfaisant*, written in French in 1771, when he was living in exile in Paris. Goldoni (1707-1793) idolized Molière and desperately wanted to have a success at the Comédie-Française, the so-called *maison de Molière*. With *Le Bourru bienfaisant*, he fulfilled his wish, although he was not so lucky with his final comedy, *L'avare fastueux*, a poorer piece, which got a less positive reception. What he did with both these two final plays was build the plot around an oxymoronic central character. The original title of the play translates as "The Beneficent Boor." The boor of the title is Monsieur GÉronte, an ill-tempered old gentleman with a heart of gold, whose greatest pleasure in life is to manipulate the pieces in his chess game.

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