

## Great Art Has No Nationality: How Ives Adapts

By Daniel Ciba

### Abstract

David Ives's adaptation of Mark Twain's unperformed play *Is He Dead?* recovers a slice of Twain's popular Americana, which would have remained lost in the archives without Ives's skill as a contemporary playwright. Since its Broadway premiere in 2007, Ives's new version has been performed at many different types of theaters across the United States. What is it about Ives's revisions that turned a script that had never received a single performance for over a hundred years into a commercially viable play? By examining Ives's additions, revisions, and deletions, I propose that Ives constructs nationality by supplanting historical context with commercialized American stereotypes and disruptions. This form of erasure, by which Ives deletes the reality of foreign identity, limits his constructions of characters to cartoonish reductions of nationality. After examining how Ives adapts nationality in *Is He Dead?*, I consider the adaptation of nationality in his translaptations of three French comedies: *A Flea in her Ear* (2006), *The School for Lies* (2011), and *The Heir Apparent* (2011). Although Ives adapts nationality differently based on the different needs of each play, he consistently relies on the reduction of foreignness to stereotype while updating the language and humor with Americanized references.

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Contemporary playwright David Ives calls his process of adaptation “*translaptation*,” a portmanteau of translation and adaptation. For an interview for National Public Radio in 2010, Ives only hints at this process: “I took the fundamental structure of the play. But I embellished here and there, I cut when I needed to, I added things” (Siegel). As he has developed this process, the description has also evolved. In “Getting to Know David Ives,” part of the promotional materials for a production of *The School for Lies* at the Chicago Shakespeare Theater, David Ives elaborates on this process in a more meaningful way than his offhand remarks in other interviews:

Ives often translates and/or adapts older works, describing his process as ‘*translaptation*’—an attempt to ‘look for the play underneath the words’ and to draw parallels between a play’s historical context and today... [Ives continues:] ‘It’s my job to bring to an adaptation the energy of a playwright working on a new play. As far as I’m concerned, I’ve simply done the comic work on *The Misanthrope* that Molière himself might have done had he lived another 350 years. I also fixed his plot...’ (“Getting to Know David Ives”)

Ives’s description suggests that this process bridges the past with the present, a fairly standard approach for American adaptations of classical works.

As of yet, few scholars seem interested in questioning how Ives performs adaptations, updating both well-known and obscure classics for

American audiences.<sup>1</sup> In the original script for *Is He Dead?*, Mark Twain captures a common sentiment of his period, which describes the translation of art from one culture to another: “Great art, supreme art, has no nationality” (*Is He Dead* 21). The notion that art transcends national identity would have been a familiar concept for a nineteenth century American audience.<sup>2</sup> However, it is clear that Ives not only agrees with Twain’s concept, but, in his plays, he manipulates nationality in such a way that merits further exploration. When Ives adapts, he consistently relies on the erasure of the complexity of nationality by injecting American stereotypes that simplify and rewrite nationality to achieve comic effect.

In this article, I question how Ives adapts nationality in his plays. A closer examination of Ives's adaptations as both process and product reveals that, when creating an adaptation, he makes similar decisions regarding how he reconfigures the nationality of his characters.<sup>3</sup> In the 1990s, Ives's style of playwriting was labeled postmodern, but as this term is now outdated, a different approach could be helpful to examine what was once considered anachronistic pastiche.<sup>4</sup> I assert that Ives’s adaptation of nationality is a process which merits questioning because of the potential for erasure. When he highlights aspects of nationality, he emphasizes broad, cartoonish stereotypes, erasing any foreign identity that could be considered real. When his Americanized versions of nationality overshadow the realer contexts of nationality in his sources,

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1 Aside from a few interviews and publicity materials for productions, there is not much scholarly research about Ives as a playwright. The reason for this may be because of the commercial appeal of his translations or the disinterest of theater scholars in conducting research about contemporary comedies.

2 “It is true that art has no nationality; that good art is in no deep sense foreign” (“The Old Cabinet”).

3 Linda Hutcheon begins her study of adaptation theory by exploring “a doubled definition of adaptation as a product (as extensive, particular transcoding) and as a process (as creative reinterpretation and palimpsestic intertextuality)” (23).

4 As my focus is how Ives adapts nationality, I neither argue nor disagree with labelling Ives’s translations as postmodern. For information on Ives as postmodern see: John Louis DiGaetani, *A search for a postmodern theatre: interviews with contemporary playwrights*. For more information about how postmodernism is considered outdated see: Alan Kirby, “The Death of Postmodernism and Beyond.”

Ives erases aspects of character, location and plot. This process, which results in the erasure of the realer aspects of nationality, privileges the reduction of nationality to consumable stereotypes. How Ives adapts nationality reveals his expectations for American audiences to be unable to appreciate foreign nationalities beyond Ives's exaggerated cartoons.

In order to interrogate Ives's adaptation of nationality, I will first draw from dramaturgical research that I conducted for the Tufts University production of *Is He Dead*, directed by Laurence Senelick in 2015, identifying differences between Twain's and Ives's scripts. Then, I will compare this model with Ives's *The School for Lies* (2011), *A Flea in Her Ear* (2006), and *The Heir Apparent* (2011). There are many consistencies across these plays in how Ives adapts nationality. Through these comparisons, I will show that Ives's assumptions about fixing these plots lead him to supplant foreign nationalities with Americanized cartoonish replacements. Of course, updated references and euphemisms are a natural part of adaptation. The question, that can only be a matter of opinion, is whether Ives goes too far.

Twain's play, based on an earlier short story, is a fictional account of the French painter, Millet written during an extended visit to Europe. The story for Twain's plot involves an invented plot in which Jean-Francois Millet, famous for his paintings of peasant figures, decides to fake his own death to achieve commercial success and cross-dresses as his twin sister, an eccentric widow.<sup>5</sup> Twain eventually deemed the play as bad, and many scholars agreed with him, until Shelley Fisher Fiskin found the manuscript in the archives and commissioned Ives to adapt the play for a Broadway production in 2007.<sup>6</sup> In the original there are four pupils from

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<sup>5</sup> The text of the short story has been reprinted several times. Twain, *The complete short stories of Mark Twain*, 307-314.

<sup>6</sup> When Twain sent the original manuscript to Bram Stoker, he never heard a response.<sup>6</sup> Fearing that he would never write a play that could be performed, Twain eventually told his financial adviser Henry H.

diverse backgrounds: a Spaniard named Alfonso, a Turk named Mohammed, an Indian affectionately called Juggernaut Jamboree, and a Chinaman named for the statesman Li-Hung Chang (Twain, *Is He Dead?* 26). The characters that populate Twain's sprawling crowd scenes include the Wool King of Australia, the Scottish Ferguson, the English Everest, and many others. Chang's exaggerated dialect serves as an example how Twain's construction of nationality might seem potentially offensive for contemporary audiences: "Me makee alle buy—Englishman, Ilishman, Mellican-man—makee alle buy. No buy, say 'Go helly.'" (Twain, *Is He Dead?* 26). Twain also ends his play with a celebration that Chicago calls "The grand International Musical Mosaic:"

Artists and pupils and several musicians from the theater orchestra snatch out instruments that have been concealed under the chairs, and begin to play, with zeal—but only the orchestra men play tunes—and each a different tune—a bugle (Marseillaise Hymn); a fife (Yankee Doodle); violoncello or bass viol (God save the Queen); hand-organ (Die Wacht am Rhein). (Twain, *Is He Dead?* 143)

Twain emphasizes the diversity of nationalities which he would have observed firsthand in Europe while he was writing *Is He Dead?*

When Ives set out to adapt the script, which had never achieved a single performance before or after Twain's death, he employed a unique blend of American history and contemporary humor. In so doing, Ives made a simpler, more feasible, and more contemporarily relevant script. One group of major deletions is Twain's overpopulated crowd scenes, when, at times, more than twenty actors would be needed to get the sense of bustle and chaos suggested by the stage directions.<sup>7</sup> Instead, Ives

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Rogers to "Put *Is He Dead?* in the fire" (Emerson 238). Fishkin also includes her speculations on why the play was never staged: Twain, *Is He Dead*, 201-204.

<sup>7</sup> Ives cuts most of the scene where several buyers fight over Millet's painting, because he does not have enough actors (Twain, *Is He Dead?* 66-76).

bundles characters — four old ladies are reduced to two and the English art patrons who could number in the dozens are condensed to the character Basil Thorpe. The decision to reduce cast size from multitudes to eleven could also be related to the smaller casts of regional theaters.

Ives reduces this pool of nationalities, which include Millet's colleagues and pupils, to only three of Twain's original characters: Chicago, Dutchy, and O'Shaughnessy, who are American, German, and Irish, respectively. To replace the erasure of Twain's more diverse nationalities of the other colleagues and pupils, Ives injects additional humor about these much safer nationalities. Although Twain already stressed Dutchy's German nationality with a dialect, Ives adds more jokes about "German paradox" and bratwursts (Ives & Twain 29, 30). Ives also beefs up O'Shaughnessy's Irish nationality, with such phrases as "Top o' the day" and "the hills of Ireland."<sup>8</sup> Consequently, Ives reshapes the two most foreign characters in *Is He Dead?* with humor that results in safer, more comical stereotypes.

Ives also adds more overtly recognizable markers of nationality to several of the secondary French characters. Ives recrafts the French Reporter, whom he renames Claude Rivière, as an exaggeration of French humor. Rivière speaks with French vocabulary—"excusez-moi," "This *désastre*, this *tragédie*, this *catastrophe*," and "Mon dieu." Even Rivière's name and his newspaper *Le Figaro* becomes jokes, mocking French stereotypes (Ives & Twain 33-35). In the second act, Cecile, a secondary character in Twain's text, impersonates a male inspector named LeFaux in Ives's version, taking on a character akin to Inspector Clouseau from the *Pink Panther* films. Ives's reliance on French stereotypes to add humor to secondary characters draws attention to the nationality of certain

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<sup>8</sup> O'Shaughnessy also comments on his many relatives, which include his "blind Uncle Shamus" and his "feminyne" cousin Dennis (Ives & Twain 21, 31, 40, 51).

characters in ways that Twain does not.<sup>9</sup> The emphasis of French accents for certain secondary characters seems at odds with the rest of the “French” characters, such as Millet, Marie, Leroux, André, and others, who do not have any recognizable markers of nationality, accent or otherwise. Additions such as “Closer than a Congressman and a barrel of pork,” a thoroughly American line that Ives gives to Millet, suggest Ives’s general supposition that American companies will decide to perform lines without any notable accent – that is to say, with nondescript American accents (Ives & Twain 46).

In addition, Ives adds more European references by injecting jokes about art. Added references of painters and movements firmly place the action in Europe: Rembrandt, Michelangelo, Rafael, Impressionism, and the *Mona Lisa*, not to mention specific gags about Millet’s *The Gleaners*, *The Angelus*, and *The Sowers* (Ives & Twain 13, 15, 24, 30, 36, 67). Ives’s European additions, although humorous because of their recognizable nature, update but also dilute Twain’s construction of nationality. When Ives adapts Dutchy’s story about the King of France visiting the fake corpse of Millet, he includes onstage roles for the Emperor of Russia and the Sultan of Turkey (Ives & Twain 119-120). But Ives chooses not to give these characters any lines, focusing entirely on the French king, only distinguishing these foreign characters with a single stage direction: “KING, EMPEROR, and SULTAN enter, all thickly bearded and in voluminous robes” (Ives & Twain 74). These two nonspeaking characters seem notable for their silence. When Ives has the chance to explicitly explore foreignness, he avoids it.

What Ives chooses to keep, to delete, and to add reveals not only his preferences as a playwright, but the preferences of contemporary audiences. In addition to eliminating the diverse nationality of Twain’s

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<sup>9</sup> At one point, the Widow remarks “Even for a Frenchman this is excessive!” (Ives & Twain 77).

characters, Ives creates structural changes to emphasize the play's comic genre: severely editing Millet's protracted suicide attempt, adding a marriage proposal at the end of the first act, and pairing off the characters at the end of the second (Ives & Twain, 24, 52, 85. Twain, *Is He Dead*, 42-43). Ives caters to a generalized commercial audience, restructuring plot, character, and dialogue to simplify the complexity and ambiguity of the original. Twain's script will likely never be performed, because contemporary theaters have no reason to return to a script that Ives has simplified for commercial audiences.<sup>10</sup> While trying to carry out Twain's intentions 97 years after his death, Ives's additions to *Is He Dead?* simplify nationality to the extent that these more recognizable, stereotypical contexts overwhelm Twain's comparatively diverse construction of nationality.

In contrast to the drastic re-envisioning of *Is He Dead?*, Ives's translaptation of *A Flea in Her Ear* contains no major alterations to plot or character. Georges Feydeau's most popular farce, which Ives adapted for a production at the Chicago Shakespeare Theatre in 2006, has been translated numerous times into English.<sup>11</sup> Feydeau's play has become an exemplar of farce because it includes many hallmarks of the genre: sets with multiple doors (for slamming), sexual innuendo, and hijinks stemming from mistaken identity.<sup>12</sup> As Feydeau's conception of form is closer to Ives's, Ives does very little with the structure other than transpose the humor.

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10 To date, there have been no productions of Twain's script. Since its original Broadway production, Playscripts lists that Ives's adaptation has had 370 productions by high school, university, community, and regional theaters. ("*Is He Dead?*")

11 In 1966, John Mortimer translated this popular farce for the Old Vic and Laurence Senelick staged his translation for the Loeb Drama Center in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

12 For more on the multiple definitions of farce see Bernel's *Farce: A history from Aristophanes to Woody Allen*.



The plot for both source and adaptation centers on the strained marriage of Victor and Raymonde Chandebise, both of whom end up involved in romantic encounters at the seedy Frisky Puss Hotel. Much of the confusion arises from a bellboy named Poche, who is the spitting image of Chandebise, a device ensured for every production as Feydeau arranges his action so that the same actor can play both roles.<sup>13</sup> Comparing the texts line by line, the only major difference is length as Ives keeps the action of each scene remarkably similar to his source. In the first scene between Raymonde and her friend Lucienne, Ives deletes or significantly reduces thirty-six of the one hundred and twenty two spoken lines.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, I would argue that Ives revises *The School for Lies, Is He Dead?*, and *The Heir Apparent* to be more like *A Flea in Her Ear* than their source texts.

The most apparent manipulation of nationality in *A Flea in her Ear* is Ives's decision to keep the hotel guest an Englishman named Rugby. Many English translations make the character a German or a Viennese so that humor about misunderstanding foreign languages retains a parallel context, but Ives has Rugby speak English to other characters at the hotel, who also speak English. The hotel manager Ferrailon acknowledges the conceit that both actors imagine a language barrier: "It's amazing this fixation he's got about speaking English. Don't I speak to him in good plain French?" (Ives & Feydeau 38). Unlike the very clear distinction represented by the two languages in Feydeau's text, Ives comically accentuates the lack of clear language barriers: "For I am happy to profit by your ignorance of our glorious French tongue to tell you exactly what I think. *You are an ASS*"

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13 Ives does not alter that the scene of recognition between Chandebise and Poche takes place offstage (Ives & Feydeau 85).

14 This is indicative of Ives's cutting; he reduces the length of the play by at least one-fourth. Georges Feydeau, *La Puce à l'oreille* (Paris: Éditions du Béliet, 1986), 33-49. Ives and Feydeau, *A Flea in Her Ear*, 13-16.

(Ives & Feydeau 38). As the difference in language here is being imagined by the actors, it also must be imagined by the audience. While this manipulation could be construed as a means of making this moment funnier, it also results in an unnecessary complication that accentuates how shallow Ives's constructions of nationality seem in comparison to Feydeau's less self-conscious identities.

While Ives complicates the language barrier, he also alters the two clearest examples of nationality in Feydeau's text: the English Rugby and the Spanish Homenides. Additions to Rugby include "bloody," "rightyo," and "'ullo"—phrases that denote a Cockney accent absent from Feydeau's Rugby. Ives's translaptation of Homenides's mixture of Spanish and broken French results in off-color puns (Ives & Feydeau 42, 50). For example, he continually calls Chandebise, "Monsieur Chandebitch" (Ives & Feydeau 29). When Chandebise asks Homenides about his wife, Homenides responds, "She tell me she is going to take my behind first." (Ives & Feydeau 30). Ives's revisions both add to the general tone of Feydeau's dirty humor as well as demonstrate simplified markers of nationality, which replace the less pronounced construction of English and Spanish nationality of Feydeau's characters.

As Ives updates Feydeau's text, he also supplants Feydeau's language to make way for his contemporary jokes.<sup>15</sup> However, by keeping the play's original setting—Paris 1900—Ives continually pushes the boundary between what might register as a period language and his updated contemporary interjections:

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15 As the language is more modern than the setting, it is unsurprising that directors who use Ives's translaptation choose to update the period; the Constellation Theatre set their production in the 1920s (Wren).

RAYMONDE. That's quite enough, monsieur. I won't be needing the bed.

FERRAILLON. I see (*Muttering:*) Whips and chains, I suppose. (Ives & Feydeau 43)

Ives also updates Feydeau's sexual innuendoes, using contemporary references such as "bone-dry" and "up to the job" (Ives & Feydeau (14, 23). At points, Ives feels the need to over-clarify the situation:

CHANDEBISE. I was beside myself is all.

FINACHE. Quite literally. (Ives & Feydeau 79)

Naturally, Chandebise was not literally beside himself onstage as the same actor plays both Chandebise and Poche, but Ives's joke hints to Feydeau's use of mistaken identity. These updates do not rely so much on parallels with the historical context, but with clarifying Feydeau's humor clearly for American audiences. Ives's construction of nationality in *A Flea in Her Ear* suggests that American audiences need to be spoon-fed comedy. Although an early example of translaptation, Ives's *A Flea in her Ear* contains the seeds of the process of translaptation in *The School for Lies* and *The Heir Apparent*.

In a much more extreme fashion, Ives allows contemporary contexts to dominate the construction of nationality in his re-imagining of *The Misanthrope*, which he renames *The School for Lies*.<sup>16</sup> In Molière's popular comedy, a misanthropic nobleman named Alceste falls in love with the deceptive Célimène despite her foppish friends, her habit for gossiping, and the general enjoyment she derives from partaking in the slanderous nature of court. In both the translaptation and the original, Célimène's deceitful nature presents a problem for the misanthropic main character, whom Ives renames Frank.

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<sup>16</sup> For an account of how acting these roles may have shifted since Molière's period see Roger W. Herzel, "Much Depends on the Acting: The Original Cast of *Le Misanthrope*."

While gesturing towards the original, Ives restructures the plot and alters the characters in a much more extreme fashion than his previous translaptations. During the prologue, Ives immediately distances himself from the play's origins.<sup>17</sup> While telling the audience to turn off their cell phones in rhyming couplets, the actor playing Philinte remarks on the difference between the adaptation and its source:

A masterpiece from comedy's top mensch!  
Too bad for us he left the play in French...  
Well, as I say, Molière has packed his tent  
And our producers gave him two percent—  
So screw Molière, we'll do our own damn version!

In English, thank you, for your full immersion. (Ives & Molière 7)

From the beginning, Ives calls attention to the English language spoken by his characters, in opposition to the French source. Throughout the translaptation, Ives relies on American references while simultaneously drawing attention to the “French” characters, creating a self-conscious humor as part of the construction of nationality.

As Ives translapts Molière's poetry, he retains the setting of the original: “Paris, 1666” (Ives & Molière 5). Whereas Molière had no need to remind his audience that the action was located in France, Ives mentions France repeatedly, exaggerating the nationality of the characters. To frame the judicial squabbles of Molière's France for contemporary audiences, Ives emphasizes the location as one of corruption:

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<sup>17</sup> Richard Wilbur's translation from 1965 serves as interesting counterpoint to Ives. Wilbur, an American poet who has translated French plays by Molière, Corneille, and Racine, does not emphasize French identity. He incorporates contemporary idioms for sense and humor, but does not intentionally use anachronisms, as Ives does, to update the foreign characters for American audiences.

FRANK. Who'd want to sue me?

CLINTANDER. Sir, they're suing all Paris!

There's not a man of woman not in court

For slander. This town teems!

FRANK. With sewers?

CLINTANDER. With tort. (Ives & Molière 10-11)

Ives's construction of France creates a one-sided nationality based on deception; Ives's France is literally "a School for Lies" (Ives & Molière 13). When the prudish Arsinoé tries to enlist Frank's help, she stresses the problems with the country: "Welcome to Sodom, sir. Our country needs you" (Ives & Molière 76). Ives's depiction of France relies on the characters' abandonment of truth and reason, based on the disintegration of morality. In opposition, Molière's critique of France is more directed against the faults of the specific individuals, not a unilateral condemnation of French society as a whole.

Ives's critique of France is further complicated by how he alters his main character. At the beginning of the play, Ives's Frank, whose moniker denotes a connection to honesty and is a fun play on 'Francophile,' returns from an extended trip to England, where he has picked up the habit of telling the truth.<sup>18</sup> When Oronte sues Frank for being frank about his terrible poetry, Frank directs his anger not at the individual litigant but at France: "Only in France could rights become invalid/Because some asswipe wrote a crappy ballad" (Ives & Molière 37). In the final moments of Ives's play, Frank reveals that he is Célimène's former husband Alceste, whom she believed had died at sea.<sup>19</sup> With the addition of Frank's

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18 After his exposure to the foreign concept of truth in England, Frank denigrates France saying, "this country agitates my bile" (Ives & Molière 15).

19 As Molière was often criticized for his loose endings, Ives crafts his finale neatly with appropriate couplings. "His [Molière's] Misanthrope, in my opinion, is the most complete character, and withal the most singular, that ever appeared on the theatre. But the contrivance of his comedies is always defective in something, and his plots are never handsomely unraveled" (Rapin 269).

mistaken identity, Ives crafts this character in order to delineate differences between the construction of English and French nationality.<sup>20</sup>

As Ives exaggerates French deceit in opposition to British truth, he relies on references that sound much like a critique of America. Adding a considerable amount of scatological humor as well as a multitude of swear words, Ives's language is considerably coarser than Molière's. Lines such as "You'd trust a fecophile to judge your roses" and "Women packed ass to tit like shish kebab" do not parallel historical context at all (Ives & Molière 23, 93). When Frank expresses his disgust for "French" society, he says:

Our daughters dress like whores, our sons are rude.

These kids can't scratch their own initials, dude!

And all our chat, our heliumated high-talk!

Fat fucks in flip-flops blocking up the sidewalk! (Ives & Molière 15)

As Frank explains his love for Célimène, he draws from references completely foreign to seventeenth century France:

I can't explain it. She exalts my soul.

She's single malt. She's rain. She's rock-and-roll. (Ives & Molière 66)

Although rain and single malt existed when Molière was writing, "rock-and-roll" certainly did not. Ives also replaces the gossip of Célimène's social circle with parodies of rap music. In this scene, Célimène performs a dumb jock, a ditzzy blond, and finally an exaggerated impersonation of Frank.<sup>21</sup> The language in Ives's play is fueled by anachronistic, contemporary American humor connected more to a sketch on *Saturday Night Live* than the poetry of Molière. Although Ives's impulses to emphasize the negatives of French nationality and interject colloquial American language may seem a means of updating outdated humor, I

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20 In response to Frank's shock at how quickly he falls in love, Philinte responds: "Forget your dawdling Anglo-Saxon dance./ Love happens in an eyblink here in France" (Ives & Molière 37).

21 CÉLIMÈNE. My name is D., yo, I'm so friggin' cool.

Sorry I'm wet, I just came from the pool (Ives & Molière 28).

suggest that they overwhelm and confuse the nationality of the characters. Taken as a whole, the imaginary 17<sup>th</sup> century France that Ives constructs is a collection of all that he deems bad about contemporary America.<sup>22</sup>

In Ives's version of *Le Légataire Universal*, which he entitles *The Heir Apparent*, Ives more clearly demonstrates the oppositional pulls of foreign stereotype and American language. The choice of Jean-François Regnard's play is obscure enough that Ives does not have to compete as much with his source material since there have been so few English translations.<sup>23</sup> In his introductory essay to the published text, Ives describes the evolution of comedy: "One can draw a straight line from *Légataire* to Feydeau's middle-class nightmares, and straight from there, or should I say down from there to TV sitcoms" (Ives & Regnard vi). This passage not only reveals Ives's interest in the adaptation of the comedic genre over time, but also implies how contemporary audiences, more familiar with sitcoms than Regnard, are lower in both culture and class. As with *Is He Dead?*, *The School for Lies*, and *A Flea in Her Ear*, Ives's attempts to update the text result mainly in European stereotypes injected with American anachronisms.

Regnard's general plot suits Ives, allowing him to rely on old tricks that have already served him well. The young hero Eraste schemes to inherit his uncle Geronte's fortune with the help of two servants, Crispin and Lisette. When Geronte wants to marry Eraste's intended Isabelle, Eraste convinces her mother, Madame Argante, to let Isabelle marry Eraste as long as Eraste receives the inheritance. In order to disinherit the

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22 At one point, Frank lambastes the decorum of French society as "The handbook for a cringing quorum/ Of sterile, puerile, swan-eating, canary-/Sucking non-entities..." which culminates in a critique of "artisanal sushi." (Ives & Molière 14).

23 Stark Young's translation for the University of Texas in 1912 is very literal, rewritten in prose, and filled with many American idioms (Regnard & Young).

remaining heirs so Eraste gets the entire inheritance all to himself, Crispin dresses up as two distant relatives and then finally Geronte himself—an excuse to add mistaken identity.<sup>24</sup> Although Ives keeps the general outline of the plot, he drastically changes the characters and structure, which results in the manipulation of nationality consistent with his other translaptations.

In a similar fashion to *The School for Lies*, Ives retains French nationality only when it serves his comedic purposes. He accentuates French money and surnames, and retains Regnard’s setting: “Paris, the house of Geronte, Spring 1708” (Ives & Regnard xvii). Twice during the text, Ives interrupts the action with short phrases entirely in French:

ISABELLE. But wait a sec. I *am* French!

ERASTE. So am I.

ERASTE & ISABELLE. (*abruptly in a French film*)

*Ah, mon amour!*

ISABELLE. *Je t’aime!*

ERASTE. *Je t’aime.*

ISABELLE. *La lune!*

ERASTE. *Le soir!*

ISABELLE. *Mais quoi?*

ERASTE. *Mais toi!*

ISABELLE. *Tu m’aimes?*

ERASTE. *Quand même!*

ISABELLE. *Au ‘voir!*

(Ives & Regnard 31-32)

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24 Gifford Phillips Orwen covers Regnard’s life and literary works, documenting his popularity in France (Orwen).



Entirely invented by Ives, these “French films” illustrate the stability of the French stereotype that Ives inserts which replaces Regnard’s subtler construction of French nationality.

Ives also rewrites Regnard's use of mistaken identity to incorporate contemporary American stereotypes. In Regnard’s text, the first relative that Crispin impersonates is an insolent gentleman from Normandy; the second is a niece obsessed with the cultural phenomenon of engaging in judicial processes (Regnard 391-394). As both of these French contexts do not have easy transpositions for American audiences, Ives inserts two recognizably American stereotypes. For the first relative, Ives lampoons a familiar caricature of Americana by having Crispin play a frontiersman, dressed in a coonskin cap, named Daniel:

But this were fun. May-be we'll make it annyul!

You ever wanna visit-- Come on, Daniel.

And damn the man who stops me or impedes me!

If anybody asks, America needs me!” (Ives & Regnard 39)

Ives also reimagines the second relative, Niece Julie, as a pig farmer. In the original, only Crispin cross-dresses. To escalate the humor, Ives includes three Niece Julies: first Crispin, then Isabelle as a second, and finally Eraste enters as a third Niece Julie leading a live pig on a leash.<sup>25</sup> Using these tropes of American hicks that have more to do with *Hee-Haw* than Regnard, Ives’s revisions of these two characters do not parallel historical context as much as they transpose American nationality onto the French characters.<sup>26</sup>

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25 The revision of this scene echoes a scene from Michael Frayn's British farce *Noises Off*, where three actors enter playing the same character (Frayn 144-145).

26 “Each week millions of Americans gather around their sets to watch this combination [“The Beverly Hillbillies,” “Green Acres,” and “Hee Haw”] which has to be the most intensive effort ever exerted by a nation to belittle, demean, and otherwise destroy a minority people within its boundaries... America is allowed to continue laughing at this minority group because on this, America agrees: hillbilly ain’t beautiful” (Branscome 25).

Once more, Ives balances the stereotyping of nationality with a significant amount of anachronistic humor. Ives surrounds Geronte's old age with humor about bodily functions:

GERONTE. Then you can thank the twenty stinking movements  
 Induced by her to keep me from my grave  
 A stream of ordure thick enough to pave  
 A road from Paris to the far Crimea.

ERASTE. But otherwise, how...

GERONTE. Diarrhea! Diarrhea!

(Ives & Regnard 9)

References to soccer moms and Frigidaires appear so out of place that Ives is clearly aware that the audience would disconnect the characters from their intended setting (Ives & Regnard 25). In addition, the language is continually at a distance from eighteenth century France:

LISETTE. I have to buy this show or have to hike it?  
 Must swig your Kool-aid any way you spike it?  
 Must sing your song no matter how you mike it?

(Ives & Regnard 23)

Ives's integration of contemporary American language distances the audience from the history of the play, a recurring reminder that the play is a twentieth century construction.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Translaptation could also be considered metatheatrical in some aspects. Ives's penchant for reminding the audience that the performance is a construction grows more and more evident with each new translaptation. Although less overt than the metatheatricality of Pirandello, Stoppard, or Evreinov, Ives's metatheatricality centers on what Thumiger critiques about characters' awareness of their own theatricality (Thumiger).

The distance between the assumed setting and the language builds so much that, by the end, even the characters forget where they are.

MADAME ARGANTE. Well, I'll no more be slave to money's chains.

But do what mere humanity ordains!

SOCIALISM!

GERONTE. Eulalie...

MADAME ARGANTE. SOCIALISM NOW!

GERONTE. This is America! (*Corrects himself*) France! You'll start a row!

ISABELLE. Amazing Mom! Your character's been inverted!

MADAME ARGANTE. Today, I've been alchemically converted.

(Ives & Regnard 96)

Undoubtedly, Ives's humor distances his characters from the historical context of the source. By questioning the constructions of his characters, Ives creates an imaginary setting in which the characters cannot tell whether they are French or American, past or present, and at some points male or female. Although Ives's updated references may be funnier to American audiences, Ives contemporizes the language so much that American nationality dominates the French nationalities of the characters.

In *Is He Dead?*, *A Flea in Her Ear*, *The School for Lies*, and *The Heir Apparent*, Ives constructs a paradox concerning nationality. On one hand, he emphasizes a false construction of foreign identities. On the other, he interjects American references and language. Combined together, this process of translaptation reduces the potential for nationality into recognizable American stereotypes that intentionally separate the characters from any sense of real, historical location. How Ives adapts nationality is deemed comical because nationality is continually simplified into a series of recognizable jokes.

In order to appeal to American audiences, this process results in the dominance of Americanized references. Rather than make connections between historical contexts and contemporary correspondents, I assert that translaptation does the opposite. Although these jokes may be funny, Ives's consistent Americanization of the French sources does much more than merely update the text. Instead of balancing the past and the present, Ives seems more interested in creating an imaginary time and place where he can construct nationality however he wishes.

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