The French novelist and dramatist Pierre Carlet de Chamblain de Marivaux (1688-1763) created a complex and eminently personal style, indicating the gradual transition in France from 17th-century neoclassic art to an introspective art of individual sentiment and experience.

Born in Paris, the son of a royal mint official whose bourgeois origins fringed on those of the lesser nobility, Pierre Carlet de Marivaux spent his childhood in the provinces and returned to the capital in 1710. While ostensibly though rather fitfully studying law, he was already immersed in literary efforts, composing first satires and then serious imitations of extravagant adventure novels. Little is known about his private life, except that he married in 1717, fathered a daughter 2 years later, and never remarried after his wife's death in 1723.

The year 1720 was doubly significant for Marivaux: he was financially ruined in the collapse of the Law Bank, and he saw his first dramatic work produced, *L'Amour et la vérité*, a dismal failure in its own right. Undaunted, he struggled to earn a living writing for newspapers, even launching the ephemeral *Spectateur français* (1722). Meanwhile, an unsuccessful stage encounter with the heroism and classical verse required by the Théâtre Français (*Annibal*, a tragedy in five acts, 1720) convinced him that his fantasy *Arlequin poli par l'amour* (*Robin, Bachelor of Love*), well handled by the Théâtre Italien that same year, and marked the real domain of his dramatic talent. This "minor" genre of irregular prose comedy, although it earned him the disdain of contemporary arbiters such as Voltaire, was to promise survival and eventual glory to a talent ranked second in France only to that of Molière.

Among 30 pieces written for the stage, Marivaux's most important comedies remain *La Surprise de l'amour* (1722), *La Double inconstance* (1722; *Double Infidelity*), *Le leu de l'amour et du hasard* (1730; *The Game of Love and Chance*), and *Les Fausses confidences* (1737; *Sylvia Hears a Secret*). Departing from the farcical inspiration of Molière but holding to the conventional figures provided by his best interpreters, the Italian players, Marivaux sought to mingle fantasy with a graceful portrayal of amorous sentiment. His eternal subject is the nascent sentiment of love, its arduous avowal, the blind simplicity of its disguises, and the drastic involvements required by this world
for the pursuit of happiness. Love, in Marivaux's sometimes precious dialogue analyses, is forever that "surprise" generously assured to youthful pride and purity of heart.

Although scarcely a year passed at the height of Marivaux's career without at least one successful comedy in production, he was never able to attain real celebrity in his own time, a fact due largely to current prejudice in favor of the neoclassic heroic genre, tragedy. Destined to announce preferred genres of the future, Marivaux was important in the evolution of narrative as well as dramatic art: his two unfinished novels, *La Vie de Marianne* (1731-1741; *The Life of Marianne*) and *Le paysan parvenu* (1735-1736), remain signal efforts in the long fight of that other "minor" genre to attain recognition. Although admitted to the French Academy in 1742, Marivaux outlived the uncertain literary renown he had won. Producing little over the final 20 years of his life, he died in relative poverty.