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present

The Ladies Man

by Georges Feydeau
freely adapted from *Tailleur pour Dames*
by Charles Morey

March 3 - 22, 2009 • IRT Mainstage

ENRICHMENT GUIDE

edited by Richard J Roberts & Milicent Wright

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The Ladies Man

by Georges Feydeau
freely adapted from *Tailleur pour Dames* by Charles Morey

When a doctor who's old enough to know better stays out all night, he must prove to his young, pretty, suspicious wife that he's *not* having an affair. George Feydau, the king of the French farce, made his name with this fast-paced, ridiculous romp. Mistaken identities, misunderstandings, and coincidences pile on top each other as doors slam, beds revolve, and the audience laughs itself silly.

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Collisions & Collusions

by Janet Allen, Artistic Director

French farce is one of the most truly theatrical forms of theatre and one of the most delightful. Filled with silly misunderstandings that separate loved ones, luscious chase scenes, slamming doors, jealous tirades, gorgeous costumes, and eventually joyous reconciliations, these comedies were a staple of the European theatrical world for many decades. These are the kinds of plays that simply can't be reproduced in another medium: they are innately live, and elude transformation into film or video. But sadly, these plays are largely "lost in translation" in English—some of the reasons for which are outlined in author-director Charles Morey's note beginning on page 2. Consequently, the IRT has produced only two French farces in its 37-year history—*A Bird in the Hand* (1975) and *13 Rue de l'Amour* (1978), both by Feydeau.

It has taken us a long time to get back to this genre, and I'm delighted to have come across this lively and smart adaptation by fellow artistic director Chuck Morey. Chuck's sense of the style is spot-on, and his grasp of the mechanics of the farce form is impeccable. It's a highly technical style that demands immense rigor from actors as well as speed and technical virtuosity from actors, designers, and directors alike. Chuck did this adaptation himself, directed the world premiere at his own theatre in Salt Lake City, and is directing our production—all ensuring that this rigor will be well-honed for our audiences. "Comedy is hard; dying is easy" is an age-old actors' maxim, and it surely reflects this kind of high-flying comedic style.

Elaine Kilden and John Abajian in the IRT's 1975 production of Feydeau's A Bird in the Hand

We have been fortunate to gather a company of actors from around the world, including three who are reprising their roles from the world premiere production. Given the intensely physical nature of this work, they need stamina as well as invention. You'll see why when you witness the breakneck speed of this production!

In closing, I'd like to thank our director-adaptor, Chuck Morey, for creating such a savvy adaptation of Feydeau, and for taking time from his own theatre to spread the comedic froth around in Indiana and in upstate New York when our production transfers to Geva Theatre in Rochester after its IRT run. These kinds of collaborations between professionals encourage our industry to thrive by taking the best of the work of others, creating it anew, and bringing it to our audiences—in this case, for the sheer pleasure of an intensely theatrical joyride!

Finding Feydeau

by Charles Morey, Playwright & Director

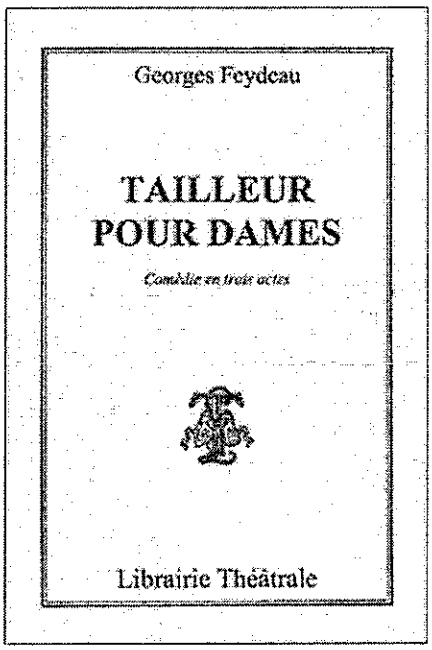
I love farce.

A few years ago, while casting about for a comedy or farce to round out a season, I re-read (or in some cases read for the first time) about a half a dozen Feydeau farces. I had twice directed Feydeau's *A Flea in Her Ear* which, to my mind, is the quintessential piece of that genre. And it seemed to me there must be another farce, out of the fifty plus plays he wrote, that was as funny or almost as funny as *Flea*. I didn't find one. Though they were all concocted from a similar list of ingredients, none worked quite so well and felt as effortless as *A Flea in Her Ear.*

Moreover, I found many of the English translations of Feydeau, even to my calloused and jaded soul, to border on the vulgar, and many turned Feydeau's charmingly French, turn-of-the-century, joyously racy humor into something that was obvious and coarse. Other translations were simply flat and dull. And neither approach was particularly funny.

So, some time later, still wishing I could find the right Feydeau, and having lost faith in his translators, I thought I would look to the source material. So I went to the Bibliotheque Nationale de France *Gallica* web-site where the *Théâtre Complet de Georges Feydeau* was available. But, there were better than fifty plays. In French. Late 19th century colloquial French. Printed with no differentiation between stage direction and dialogue. Daunting. (This is as good a time as any to enter the disclaimer in VERY LARGE PRINT as to my abilities *en Français*. I took a lot of French in high school and college and left it very firmly behind when I graduated. I never had any conversational French, but a modest reading fluency. A number of years ago now, I found myself in the business of adapting several 19th century French novels for the stage and it seemed like not a bad idea to try to bring my reading proficiency back a bit. I've done that, enough so that—with the help of a dictionary—I can make sense of what I read, but not a whole lot more.)

So I started browsing through *Le Théâtre Complet*, one hand on the mouse, one on my French-English dictionary. I began by eliminating all the full-length plays I had read in English and all the one-acts and monologues. Then, I eliminated all of the plays with particularly large casts. And after reading the first few scenes of a dozen or so, I downloaded three plays. And after struggling through all three, it seemed that *Tailleur pour Dames* (*The Ladies Dressmaker*) perhaps held the most promise.



Tailleur pour Dames had been Feydeau's first commercial success in Paris in 1886. It had ten characters, one of whom appeared in only one scene and was easily dispensable; two other roles might be combined, it seemed. But all the while, I still wondered if it was funny enough. And there must be a reason why I had never run across an English language translation of it. Probably because it wasn't funny enough.

At the same time, I began to wonder why, out of dozens upon dozens of Feydeau farces, only one, *A Flea in Her Ear*, was widely successful in English. Why not *13 Rue de L'Amour* (which the IRT produced in 1978), *Chemin de Fer, The Girl from Maxim's, Cat among the Pigeons, A Little Hotel on the Side*? These Feydeau farces are produced from time to time in English translation, but why is it only *A Flea in Her Ear* seems to have universal success and probably is produced five times as much In English as all the rest of Feydeau's enormous oeuvre put together? What is different about *Flea* than every other Feydeau I had ever read? All of them are wonderfully constructed farces. They have clever lines. They frequently re-use the same devices: a husband is caught—or about to be caught—by a spouse *in flagrante delicto* and is desperately attempting to escape detection; there is a foreigner who mangles the language, and frequently another character with a speech impediment who matches the foreigner for un-intelligibility. There are often gag props—a bed that revolves, disappears, or makes inappropriate noises, a chair that delivers electrical shocks—and there are always more doors than realistic architecture could ever accommodate. So what distinguishes *Flea* from all the rest?

The one thing that distinguishes *A Flea in Her Ear* from the rest of Feydeau is the fact that the protagonist, Chandebise, is not an adulterer, but is suspected of being such by his wife because he finds himself suddenly impotent and therefore she suspects he is expending his energies elsewhere. It struck me—not an original thought to be sure—that our American culture remains fundamentally puritanical. Audiences who are sitting in a theatre next to their neighbors are slightly uncomfortable about rooting for a protagonist who is an out-and-out adulterer and trying to hide that from his or her innocent or even not-so-innocent spouse. So, with *Flea*, American audiences relax, Chandebise's problem is not that he is a cheating husband, but he has an embarrassing problem, and Viagra has yet to be invented. He lies in order to cover up his sexual inadequacy and his embarrassment over his predicament. We all understand that! So, the audience relaxes. And then they can laugh at the *double-entendres*, the mistaken identities, the slamming doors, the revolving beds, because ultimately, the whole farce is based upon innocent misunderstandings.

Now in *Tailleur Pour Dames*, Feydeau's original play, Molineaux is in fact a cheating husband, or at least attempting to be so. He is the one chasing Suzanne and barely keeping one step ahead of Aubin, her husband, and Yvonne, his wife; never consummating his lust for Suzanne, but always trying. So, I thought, what if I take the premise from *Flea*—the innocent protagonist—and graft it on to *Tailleur pour Dames*? The plot and structure would remain essentially the same. I would have to re-write a few things, but not a particularly difficult task.

And then I thought: well, if I'm going to steal the concept of the innocent protagonist from a different Feydeau, why not steal a few other ideas as well. The speech impediment and the foreigner mangling the language became staples of Feydeau's comic repertoire long after *Tailleur Pour Dames*. What if he had discovered those devices ten years earlier? So Bassinet gained a lisp, and Aubin, who is a randy Frenchman in the original, became a jealous Prussian soldier.

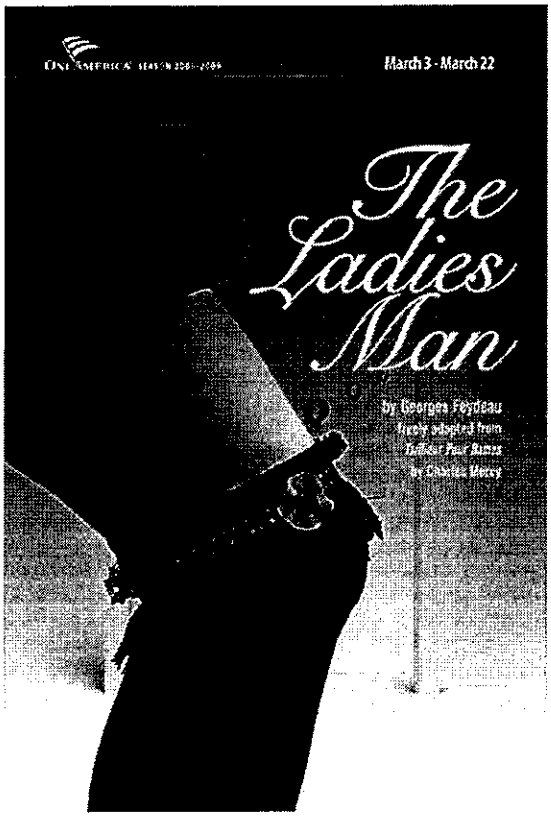
I started to translate. But the very first speech in the original, in which Etienne lays out all the exposition, is written as direct address to the audience. No matter which way I tried to turn it, how I tried to shape it, the speech felt very contrived, labored, old-fashioned. and un-workable. So, I thought: what if I invent a new character who can share the scene with Etienne to take care of this clumsy direct-address problem? Seemed like a good idea, but she had to have something else to do besides hit the expository ball back over the net to Etienne. Well, I thought, what if she takes over the function of one of the other female characters who appear in Feydeau's second act? That seemed like an excellent idea.. I added a character, but combined the functions of another character into the new character, so it was a wash. And Marie was born.

So, I started off, and through the first few scenes it all sailed along beautifully. Add a scene partner for Etienne, a lisp for Bassinet; make Molineaux innocent of any real wrong-doing. I altered the character of the mother-in-law to make her more of a problem for Molineaux, an enemy worthy of his formidable improvisational talents at deceit, and then gave her a manner perhaps more reminiscent of Oscar Wilde than Feydeau. I gave Suzanne the role of aggressor with Molineaux. I turned Aubin into a violently jealous and slightly dim Prussian officer who chewed up the language and then spat it out in faux German malaprops and comic enjambments.

Through the first act my scene structure held reasonably close to Feydeau's, but as I hit the end of the first act then cruised into the second, I began to realize the simple fact that farce is physics. Every small change I had made—and some of these changes were not so small—required larger and larger departures from the original as I moved through the text until, by the first third of Feydeau's second act, our Act II, Scene 1, I was in completely uncharted territory. I was like the highway engineer who is plotting a hundred mile roadway. If my siting was off by a few degrees, it wouldn't matter much over the first hundred yards, but over a hundred miles, the end point will end up a loooong way from the intended destination. But even though it was becoming

increasingly difficult to manipulate the plot, there were some incredible comedic opportunities opening themselves up: Madame Aigreville mistaking Aubin for Muh-Chan the dress-maker, Aubin mistaking Madame Aigreville for the Queen of Greenland, and all the military double entendres that marched through that open door.

I had to invent, in essence, a whole new second- and third-act plot structure. What I kept reminding myself throughout was Feydeau's first rule: whenever one character absolutely does not want to run into another character, that's the first person he should meet. And, rule #2: farce is Newtonian physics; for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. When one door slams, another has to open. Farce is, in fact, a little Newtonian universe. The logic has to be completely impeccable, the comedy coming from the fact that the premise upon which all the logic is built is slightly askew at the beginning. In this case, one little lie cascades logically into bigger and bigger lies, deceptions, and misunderstandings until the whole universe has to collapse upon itself.



One of the more difficult structural challenges was how to wrap the whole thing up. Feydeau just kind of ends it. I struggled with that for awhile. But I also had been troubled by a very early plot point which Feydeau very carefully sets up in Act One, but then never resolves. And that is the discovery of Suzanne's glove in Molineaux's pocket by Madame Aigreville. In the original, Feydeau never refers to the glove again. So, it seemed to me the perfect device to wrap up the plot. And it allowed me the opportunity to let Molineaux take his powers of deception, his verbal sleight of hand, to a level that is almost absurdist. The protagonist would blow up the plot with one big bomb constructed out of the same explosive material that had been used in small measures to inflate it over three acts.

So, the play began to morph from the moment I began it from "loose translation" into something that is really a very, very free adaptation.

Farce

by Charles Morey, Playwright & Director

> ***farce:*** *a comedy written for the stage or film which aims to entertain the audience by means of unlikely, extravagant, and improbable situations, disguise and mistaken identity, verbal humor of varying degrees of sophistication, which may include sexual innuendo and word play, and a fast-paced plot whose speed usually increases, culminating in an ending which often involves an elaborate chase scene. Farce is characterized by physical humor, the use of deliberate absurdity or nonsense, and broadly stylized performances.*

Sometimes you will hear someone say, "Feydeau invented French farce", which, of course, is patently untrue. This type of domestic comedy had been highly successful in mid-19th century France in the hands of Labiche and was practiced to some extent by Eugene Scribe and both Dumas *père* and *fils*. It derived directly from the 18th century work of Beaumarchais and Marivaux, which of course descends directly from Molière. In turn we find the roots of Molière in the *commedia dell'arte,* which grows out of the Roman plays of Plautus, the Greek plays of Aristophanes, and in all likelihood goes back all the way to the moment the first cave man stepped on the first banana peel.

So, no, Feydeau did not invent farce—or even French farce—but when we talk about French farce, it is Feydeau we think of, because he both distilled the form to its essence and heightened it to a level where it reaches beyond genre and begins to suggest something more. But more of that later....

You may have heard the probably apocryphal story—sometimes ascribed to Edmund Kean as well as several Barrymores—about the old actor on his death bed who is asked if dying is difficult, and of course the response is, "Dying is easy. Comedy is hard!" Well, if comedy is hard, farce is harder. Some have said: "Farce is the tragedy that happens to someone else."

I love farce, but I also have enormous respect for the form. I think it is ultimately the most difficult as well as the most fully theatrical of all forms. Its conventions are distinctly theatrical conventions, not literary ones; its traditions are oral traditions within the theatre community that are passed from actor to actor and generation to generation. Farce does not transfer well to other media; it demands live performance and a live audience. It also demands a level of craftsmanship in both the writing and the performance that is, in many ways, far more rigorous than any other form. It is absolutely unforgiving.

I also love farce because I believe that ultimately it can be an extremely rigorous art form intellectually. Inherent to all farce is the notion of a world so perfect in its logic, its rationality, its cause and effect, that the result can *only* be anarchy.

Farce presumes a world of fixed rules and perfect logic. Within that world, however, all is chaos, because these fixed rules operate with a savage disregard for the human beings whose actions have set the chain of events into motion. And those human beings are so utterly committed to the blindered pursuit of their individual objectives that they cannot step back far enough to see the machine operating, and either stop it or climb off it.

Written in 1960, Marc Camoletti's modern French farce Boeing Boeing *was a 2008 hit on Broadway with Mark Rylance, Christine Baranski, Gina Gershon, and Bradley Whitford.*

We respond to this, I think, because deep in the human heart is a desire to be part of a universe that is ordered, harmonious, humane, and ultimately logical. But this impulse is regularly subverted by the gnawing suspicion that the universe is in fact a place of utter chaos, total indifference, and unimaginable violence. And when these two ideas collide, we laugh. We release ourselves to a world which confirms our worst fears but always redeems itself by eventually resolving that one issue: the human error that set off the logical chain of events that threatened to destroy the world of the play.

There are four elements which are crucial to playing farce in general and this material specifically:

First of all, in all farce, the motivations which set the world into motion must be very, very strong, preferably primal. Greed, lust, fear, jealousy, revenge. These are all very strong farce motivators, and certainly the latter four all have their impact on the characters in *The Ladies Man*.

Two. The world must be perfectly logical. And that logic—the rules by which the world operates—must be made absolutely clear.

Three. The rules of cause and effect must operate with absolute mechanical precision. The logic of every situation and the physics of every physical gag must be impeccable. For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.

Four. The characters in a farce are utterly and completely committed to the completion of their objective to the exclusion of all else. They have blinders on.

The Ladies Man and *Tailleur pour Dames* rely principally on a farce device whose roots go back to the *commedia dell'arte* and Roman farce. It is a staple of many, if not most, of Feydeau's major plays, and he called it *qui pro quo*: literally, this for that. We know it as mistaken identity. Almost everyone in this play is at one time mistaken for someone else, and the comedy results from the expectations of one character for another, and those met or failed expectations escalate the complications of the plot exponentially.

When Feydeau was writing in *Belle Époque* France, he worked with one goal in mind: to have commercial success. His plays were not intended to be anything more than boulevard entertainments. From the vantage point of the early 21st century, however, the work and the form itself have taken on very different implications.

As I was trying to write the end of this play, in particular Molineaux's speech which ties up all the loose ends in one machine gun burst of logical illogic, I had something of an epiphany: "My god, I'm not imitating Feydeau anymore, I'm imitating Ionesco." And the penny dropped. Because not only did Feydeau foreshadow the absurdists, but in a sense he foreshadowed the 20th century itself: a world in which logic—the scientific logic of mechanization (industrialization, urbanization) and the pseudo-logic of social belief systems (capitalism, socialism, communism, fascism)—these logics, all carried to their logical extremes, created an illogic of horrific proportions. They continue to do so through this day, making farce in general and Feydeau's farces in particular a peculiarly apt metaphor for a century that has been dominated by the forced logic of *-isms* and *-izations*. The basic mechanism of farce is logic, carried out like some insane mathematical equation until it must break down under its own weight into absurdity.

As an old friend of mine would say, "But a funny, insane mathematical equation, right?" And that brings us right back to where we should be. My only real point in writing this play, Feydeau's only point in writing *Tailleur pour Dames,* and certainly the only point in putting the play on the stage or coming to see it, is to laugh as long and as loud as we can.

Georges Feydeau – A Man of the Theatre

Ernest Feydeau was a businessman and amateur poet whose friends included such eminent French literary figures as Flaubert, Beaudelaire, and Dumas *fils*. Ernest attempted to join their ranks with his 1858 novel *Fanny*, a popular sensation that portrayed the corrupt manners of Parisian society. After alienating his esteemed literary friends with his presumption that he was now their rival, the 45-year-old author parlayed his brief notoriety into marriage with Lodzia Zelewska, a young Polish beauty who was the talk of Paris. Their son, Georges-Léon-Jules-Marie Feydeau, was born in 1862 in Paris. Almost immediately, rumors began to fly that the boy's father was actually the Duc de Morny or even Napoleon III, rumors which years later his mother failed to dispel by stating, "How could you believe that such an intelligent child could be the son of that imbecile!" Young Georges was certainly aware of this gossip, which shines an interesting light on the dozens of comedies he would write about marital infidelity.

Ernest's friends the Goncourt brothers wrote this about the Feydeau home: "It is at the same time the apartment of a great courtesan and of a great schemer, something rich and shady which, from the wife's bed to the husband's study, smells like other people's money." Georges grew up surrounded by a constant parade of aristocrats, businessmen, and artists, and he wrote his first play at the age of seven. When he was ten years old, Georges took his latest play to Henri Meilhac, who wrote librettos for Offenbach's wildly popular operettas. Meilhac told him, "My child, your play is stupid. And it is theatrical. You will be a great man of the theatre."

Georges Feydeau at age 8, painted by Carolus-Duran, who later became his father-in-law.

After years at a military boarding school, Georges became a law clerk, but he spent his evenings backstage at the theatre. Verse monologues recited at parties were all the rage at that time in Paris, and Georges published his first when he was 18 years old. The doors to the most fashionable salons were opened to him, and he wrote nine more monologues, along with three one-act comedies, before he was drafted into the army in 1883. When he returned from the Army, he became secretary-general of the Theatre de la Renaissance—the director of which was a former school friend—and later a theatre critic for his stepfather's newspaper. In 1886 the Theatre de la Renaissance produced Feydeau's first full-length farce, *The Ladies' Dressmaker* (which the IRT is producing in

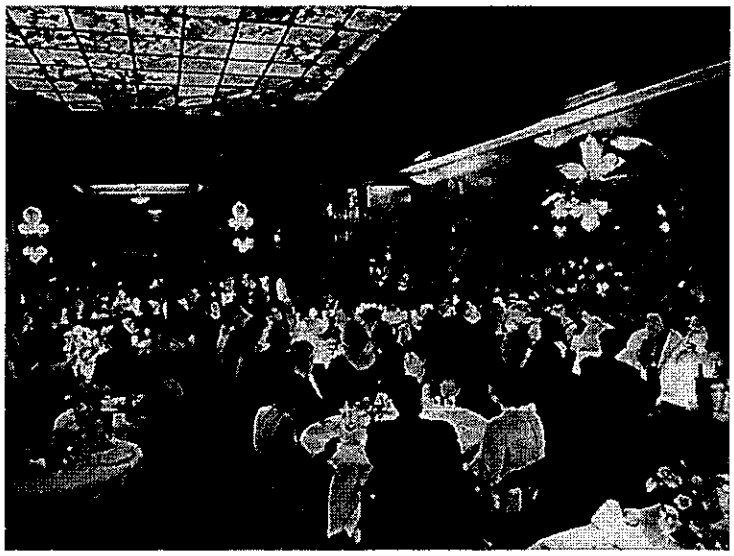
Charles Morey's adaptation called *The Ladies Man*). The play was a hit. That same year he married Marianne Carolus-Duran, the wealthy daughter of a famous painter. Together they had four children.

Like his father, Georges found fame to be fleeting, and his next half-dozen plays were flops. In 1890, he stopped writing and devoted two years to studying the great successes of the farce genre. He returned to the stage with *The Happy Hunter*, a solid success, and *Champignol in Spite of Himself*, a smash which ran for two years. The character of Champignol inspired an operetta, two novels, several sequels, and a hit tune sung in all the cafés. Feydeau was awarded the *Legion d'honneur*, France's highest honor, and continued to write hit after hit, more than 40 in all. His plays were instantly translated into several languages, and Feydeau was the toast of all Europe.

Feydeau's plays often revolved around the intersection between respectable society and the Parisian *demi-monde*, the extensive and lively half-world of courtesans and mistresses whom married men tried to hide from their wives. The plays are known for their witty dialogue and complex plots, with lots of comic misunderstandings and coincidences. The structure often calls for a series of unexpected meetings and carefully timed near-misses, usually involving a number of doors that get slammed a lot. Although the actions are often ridiculous and even irrational, they are always grounded in the reality of the situation and the characters' deeply felt desires. Often, an undercurrent of sadness and even cruelty lies beneath the hilarious surface. Some critics dismiss Feydeau's work as light entertainment; others see him as a precursor to Surrealism and the Dada Movement. Regardless, for the last century, his plays have been performed continuously and are still very popular today. His greatest success around the world was *The Girl from Maxim's* (1899), but his most popular play in England and America has been *A Flea in Her Ear* (1907). Although Feydeau did not invent the French farce, he was certainly the genre's greatest genius.

Feydeau was a tall, handsome, fashionably elegant man. Those who met him for the first time were often surprised that the world's most popular comic writer had something of a melancholy disposition. Polite and dignified, he rarely laughed; and although he craved society, he was actually rather shy. Small talk with strangers terrified him, and he generally avoided conversation. When he did speak, however, he was known for his clever and often cutting witticisms.

The playwright was also famous for his unconventional lifestyle. He slept until noon every day. Afternoons were spent rehearsing his latest play or writing the next one. Every evening he had a table reserved at Maxim's, the famous Parisian restaurant featured in the operetta *The Merry Widow* and the movie *Gigi* as well as in several of Feydeau's own plays. Sitting in a haze of cigar smoke with a bottle of champagne at his side (although he drank nothing but water), the playwright observed the comings and goings of Paris society: actors and actresses; gossipmongers and politicians; composers and writers; aristocrats and adventurers; married men and their mistresses. This was the world he immortalized in his hilarious and titillating plays.



This photograph was taken in 1966, so the clothing has changed, but the décor and the lively atmosphere at Maxim's have not changed since Feydeau was a nightly patron.

At two or three in the morning Feydeau would wander home through the quiet Paris streets. He was in no hurry; over the years, as his fame had grown, his marriage had deteriorated. While he gambled away increasingly large sums of money, his wife became a bitter spendthrift. Finally, in 1909, Feydeau left her and ensconced himself in the Hotel Terminus, where he lived surrounded by piles of books, paintings, and a collection of more than 200 perfume bottles. Now he stayed at Maxim's until four or five, then sat until dawn chatting with a newspaper seller near the Saint-Lazare train station.

Feydeau's plays reflected these changes. Gone were the complex plots and ridiculous coincidences; he began to write modest little one-acts focused on the tragicomic conflicts between warring husbands and wives. Humor shared the stage with more serious matters, and Feydeau's characters achieved new depths of psychological dimension. By 1916, however, the well had run dry, and the prolific playwright stopped writing. He and his wife finally divorced, and he spent the long nights obsessively rearranging his possessions. He spent time with women of questionable virtue and contracted syphilis. Not yet 50, he began to age rapidly and became moody and incoherent. Now convinced that Napoleon III was indeed his father, he began to plan his own coronation in the Tuileries. When his children placed him in a mental sanatorium, he imagined himself a cow and ate the grass in the garden. He died in 1921. It was a sadly ironic ending for the man who had made the world laugh.

—Richard J Roberts, Resident Dramaturg

Script Glossary

Page

1 **Bon jour**
French: good day

1 **ma petite**
French: my little one

1 **Mon dieu**
French: my god

6 **the Moulin rouge**
The Moulin Rouge is a cabaret opened in Paris in 1889. Close to Montmartre in the red-light district of Pigalle on Boulevard de Clichy in the 18th arrondissement, its roof features the facsimile of a red windmill (*moulin rouge*). When the Moulin Rouge opened its doors, French painter Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864-1901) was commissioned to produce a series of posters. Thereafter, the cabaret reserved a seat for him and displayed his paintings. Among the well-known works that he painted for the Moulin Rouge are depictions of the singer Yvette Guilbert and the dancers Louise Weber (known as La Goulue) and Jane Avril. The Moulin Rouge is best known as the birthplace of the can-can. Originally introduced as a seductive dance by the courtesans who operated from the site, the can-can dance review evolved into a form of entertainment of its own and led to the introduction of cabarets across Europe. Today the Moulin Rouge is a tourist destination, offering musical dance entertainment for adult visitors from around the world. Much of the romance of turn-of-the-century France is still present in the club's decor.

8 **lymphatic**
The lymphatic system in vertebrates is a network of conduits and all the structures dedicated to the circulation and production of lymphocytes, including the spleen, thymus, bone marrow, and the lymphoid tissue associated with the digestive system. The lymphatic system has three interrelated functions: It is responsible for the removal of interstitial fluid from tissues; it absorbs and transports fatty acids and fats to the circulatory system; and it transports antigens to the lymph nodes where an immune response is stimulated. Diseases and other problems of the lymphatic system can cause swelling and other symptoms. Problems with the system can impair the body's ability to fight infections.

16 **demurred**
took exception; objected

16 **Prussian**
Prussia attained its greatest importance in the 18th and 19th centuries. It became a great European power under the reign of Frederick the Great (1740–86). During the 1800s, Chancellor Otto von Bismarck pursued a policy of uniting the German principalities into a "Lesser Germany" which would exclude the Austrian Empire. The Kingdom of Prussia was the core of the unified North German Confederation formed in 1867, which became part of the German Empire or *Deutsches Reich* in 1871. Following World War I, Prussia became part of the Weimar Republic as a free state in 1919. Prussia as a state was abolished by the Nazis in 1934. Since then, the term's relevance has been limited to historical, geographical, or cultural usages. Many Prussians believed that "Prussian virtues" included perfect organization, discipline, sacrifice, rule of law, obedience to authority, frugality, punctuality, and diligence.

17 **Rue**
French: street

17 **Sans Souci**
French: without worry; carefree

18 **Medusa**
In Greek mythology, **Medusa** was a gorgon, a female monster. Medusa was originally a beautiful maiden, a priestess in Athena's temple; but when she made love to Poseidon in the temple, the enraged goddess transformed her beautiful hair to serpents and made her face so terrible to behold that the mere sight of it would turn a man to stone. She was beheaded by the hero Perseus, who thereafter used her head as a weapon until giving it to Athena to place on her shield. In Sigmund Freud's article "Medusa's Head," he characterized her as "the supreme talisman who provides the image of castration—associated in the child's mind with the discovery of maternal sexuality—and its denial."

18 **the Peloponesus**
The Peloponnese or Peloponnesus is a large peninsula in southern Greece, forming the part of the country south of the Gulf of Corinth.

18 **the Tuilleries**
The Tuilleries Garden in Paris is surrounded by the Louvre (to the east), the Seine (to the south), the Place de la Concorde (to the west) and the Rue de Rivoli (to the north). Further to the north lies the Place Vendôme. The garden covers about 63 acres and still closely follows a design laid out by landscape architect Andre Le Notre in 1664. His spacious formal garden plan drew out the perspective from the reflecting pools one to the other in an unbroken vista along a central axis.

25 **allegorical**
using fictional characters and events to describe some subject by suggestive resemblances; an extended metaphor, often religious

25 **pedagogical**
relating to the profession of teaching

25 **pastoral**
a literary work idealizing the rural life (especially the life of shepherds)

25 **alimentary**
of or providing nourishment

25 **septum**
anatomically, a dividing partition between two tissues or cavities

25 **au revoir**
French: until I see you again

27 **bourne**
an archaic term for a boundary

29 **Tours**
Tours is a city in central France, located on the lower reaches of the river Loire, about 140 miles southwest of Paris, between Orléans and the Atlantic coast. Touraine, the region around Tours, is known for its wines and the alleged perfection of its local spoken French.

30 **the Dordogne**
The Dordogne is a region of southwest France between the Loire valley and the High Pyrénées, named after the great river that runs through it. Castles, chateaux, and other important historical museums are scattered throughout a picturesque countryside dotted by the golden stone houses native to this region, as well as the ancient stone villages of Monpazier, Rocamadour, Domme and La Roque Gageac. The Dordogne has escaped much of the overdevelopment of some of France's other regions. Visitors from around the world flock to see the prehistoric caves of Lascaux, thought by many scholars to be the world's best.

39 **Lourdes**
Lourdes is a large town in the French Pyrenees. Roman Catholics believe that in 1858, Mary, the Mother of Jesus, appeared 18 times to a young girl, Bernadette Soubirous, at the Grotto of the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes. Originally a sleepy market town on the road to the spas of the Pyrenees, Lourdes has grown into the largest Marian pilgrimage centre in the world. Pilgrims often drink or bathe in the Lourdes water, which is believed by some to possess healing properties. An estimated 200 million people have visited the shrine since 1860, and the Roman Catholic Church has officially recognized 67 miracle healings.

42 **the Congo**
French Congo was the original French colony established in the present-day area of the Republic of the Congo, Gabon, and the Central African Republic. It began in 1880 as a protectorate. The plan to develop the colony was to grant massive concessions to some thirty French companies, giving them huge swaths of land on the promise they would be developed for the extraction of ivory, rubber, and timber. These operations often involved great brutality and the near enslavement of the locals. French Congo was temporarily divided between Gabon and Middle Congo in 1906, before being reunited as French Equatorial Africa in 1910.

48 **Wo ist meine frau?**
German: Where is my wife?

50 **in flagrente delicto**
Latin: in the blazing (progressing) offence; a legal term used to indicate that a criminal has been caught in the act of committing an offence; caught red-handed or caught in the act

51 **Guten Tag**
German: good day

51 **So, you see this scar, ja?**
In the German fencing tradition of the late 1800s, such a scar was considered a badge of honor.

51 **Shlager blade**
a German fencing sword

52 **dich**
German: you, yourself

52 **sieben und vierzig**
German: seven and forty (47)

52 **eine kleine**
German: a little

54 **Er ist nicht**
German: he is not

54 **Scheisse**
German: shit

55 **mit mir**
German: with me

55 **machen**
German: to make

55 **blatt**
German: blade

55 **Ich muss schlafen**
German: I must sleep

57 **"That's not exactly the word I was looking for. But they'd know it in Vienna."**
A reference to Sigmund Freud, who was based in Vienna, and his studies of human sexuality.

60 **sehr schlafrig**
German: very sleepy

60 **auf wiedersehen**
German: until I see you again

62 **du bist**
German: you are

62 **Ich verstehe**
German: I understand

63 **Tres declassé**
French: Very tacky; *déclassé* literally means, "reduced to lower social status than previously"

63 **dummkopf**
German: dummy

64 **tulle**
a fine (often starched) net used for veils or tutus or gowns

64 **silk**
a soft but strong fabric made from the fine threads produced by the silk worm

64 **organdy**
a sheer stiff muslin

65 **atelier**
French: studio; an artist's studio, or that of a fashion designer.

66 **grande**
French: big, large, grand

66 **faux pas**
French: literally, false step; a social blunder

67 **á la mode**
French: in the style; fashionable

69 **Greenland**
Greenland is the world's largest non-continental island, in the far northeast of North America, largely within the Arctic Circle. It represents some 97% of the area of the Kingdom of Denmark. The Danish territorial claim is rooted in the 10th-century explorations of the Vikings, though administrative power has changed hands several times over the centuries due to developments in Europe. Greenland was granted self-government effective in 1979, in effect making it a separate country with formal ties to Denmark. Greenland has the world's smallest population density. The native Greenlanders, or Kalaallit, are Inuit descendants of nomads from northern Canada.

69 **Gott in Himmel**
German: God in heaven

69 **Was ist los, hier**
German: What is going on here?

70 **verstehe warum**
German: understand why

71 **meine liebling**
German: my darling

71 **warren**
a series of connected underground tunnels occupied by rabbits

72 **bulwarks**
walls or embankments raised as defensive fortifications; ramparts

74 **drei**
German: three

74 **ein**
German: one

74 **zwei**
German: two

75 **Gut**
German: good

77 **Entschuldigen sie mich, bitte**
German: Excuse me, please

79 **raison d'être**
French: reason for being

81 **der Fatherland**
the nation of one's fathers, forefathers, or patriarchs

84 **Mon petite chou!**
French: literally, my little cabbage; a typical French endearment, such as darling or sweetheart

85 **minx**
a seductive woman who uses her sex appeal to exploit men

88 **Was Machst-du here?**
German: What are you doing here?

97 **concierge**
An employee who lives on the premises of an apartment building and serves as a general property caretaker. In 19th century apartment buildings, particularly in Paris, the concierge often had a small apartment on the ground floor and was able to monitor all comings and goings.

99 **Verstehst-Du?**
German: do you understand?

99 **Aber, jetzt**
German: but now

99 **Siebzig**
German: 70

99 **Strasse**
German: street

100 **pillar to post**
To be forced to go from one place to another in an unceremonious or fruitless manner, occasioning much frustration and anger in the process. There are various theories about the expression's origin. One theory suggests that the post was a whipping post and that *pillar* actually refers to the pillory. A criminal being punished would first be tied to the post to be whipped and then put in the pillory for public amusement. Another theory refers to the ancient game of tennis, which was originally played in indoor courts, presumably with pillars and posts holding the roof. A third possible source is suggested by the Dutch expression *van het kastje naar de muur gestuurd worden* ("to be sent from cupboard to wall"). Because cupboards are usually attached to walls, the expression evokes an image of not getting very far towards the resolution of a problem. As *cupboard* and *wall* are virtually equivalent in terms of their perceived position, so *pillar* and *post* similarly suggest two objects of similar kind that are likely to be close together.

100 **danke-schoen**
German: thank you

100 **vielen dank**
German: many thanks

102 **double entendre**
French: a figure of speech in which a spoken phrase can be understood in either of two ways. In most cases, the first meaning is presumed to be innocent and straightforward, while the second meaning is risqué, inappropriate, or at least ironic.

105 **arachnids**
a class of joint-legged invertebrate animals in the subphylum Chelicerata. Arachnids comprise over 100,000 named species, including spiders, scorpions, harvestmen, ticks, and mites.

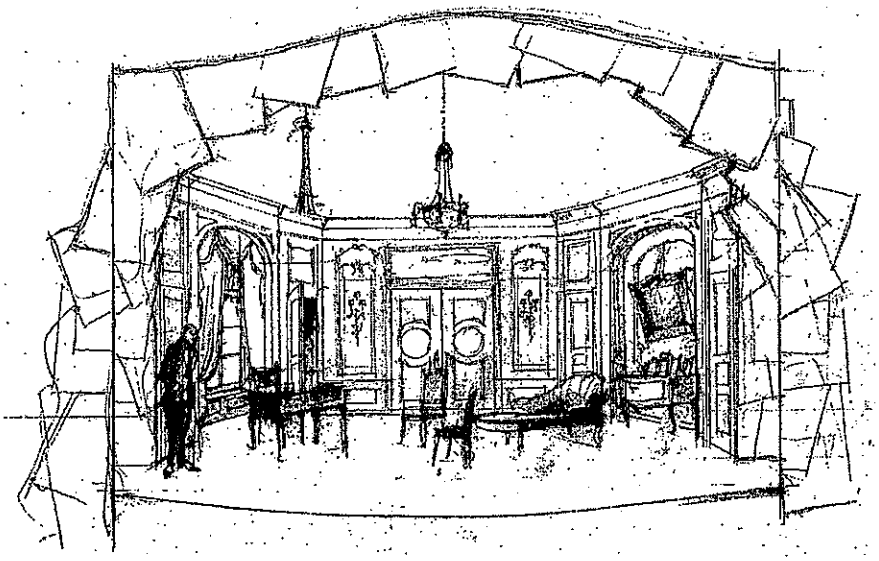
113 **Wohin gehen sie?**
German: Where are you going?

116 **schatz**
German: treasure, darling, sweetheart

119 **Detective Poirot**
Hercule Poirot is a fictional Belgian detective created by Agatha Christie. Along with Miss Marple, Poirot is one of Christie's most famous and long-lived characters, appearing in 33 novels and 51 short stories that were published between 1920 and 1975 and set in the same era.

Designer Notes

Bill Clarke
Scenic Designer
The first thing a set designer thinks on reading *The Ladies Man*? A classic farce! It requires an extraordinary amount of doors to offstage rooms, assumed passage between all of them, often with a window in the middle—in other words, charmingly devoid of architectural logic! The second thing: uh-oh, there are not one but *two* interiors, and they need to switch back and forth during a single act! But both need these ridiculously numerous doors.... In fact, both layouts are described as exactly the same, yet they need to look different. One is a respectable doctor's office in a bourgeois neighborhood, the other a louche dressmaker's shop in Montmartre. There must be a way to reuse the same walls, but change the effect by swapping out a few key elements: a shop display for a window, etc. Lastly, let's visually set the tone for this frothy romp by framing the action with a collage of turn-of-the-century postcards from Parisian marvels, both architectural and female, in all their hand-tinted Belle-Epoque glory.



Preliminary sketch by scenic designer Bill Clarke for Act 1.

Phil Monat
Lighting Designer
Lighting a farce is always a challenge for a lighting designer, even though the cue structure may seem at first to be simple. Due to the high comedic nature of the genre, very high light levels are most often called for, and that can be difficult to achieve without glare and eye fatigue. A close and effective collaboration with the scenic and costume designs is critical, ensuring that tone, texture, and color are balanced and pleasing. In addition, the lighting must (as always) be tied to the emotional line of the play, and the actors must look simply wonderful. I hope you enjoy our efforts.

Pamela Scofield
Costume Designer
The central idea in my approach to designing *The Ladies Man* is that farce must be grounded in reality. It should look delicious, yes, and be a lot of fun, and the envelope can and ought to be pushed; but if it doesn't grow out of real life, the audience is going to have hard work investing in the characters. So I spent a lot of time researching photographs from the period, as opposed to fashion plates and illustrations. I was especially helped by the work of Paul Nadar, who did a series of photographic portraits of the people in Proust's circle who inspired *A Remembrance of Things Past.* They are poignant, beautifully detailed depictions. And of course they are French! We were also intrigued by hand-tinted *fin de siècle* picture postcards of Parisian life. They are the source for my palette. Achieving these soft but vibrant colors meant using a lot of fabric layering, which also contributes a sense of frothiness. It has been a delight for me to dress these wonderfully written characters.

Renderings by costume designer Pamela Scofield for Dr. Molineaux (left) and Madame Aigreville (right).

Joe Payne
Sound Designer
The music for this production is mostly a compilation of Johann Sebastian Strauss polkas. Featured prominently is the "Tritsch-Trasch Polka" which has a light bounce, creating the perfect amount of frivolity and energy for a farce set in turn-of-the-century France. Since the Moulin Rouge and the bohemian lifestyle are referenced quite a bit, I couldn't resist adding Jacques Offenbach's "Galop Infernal" from *Orpheus in the Underworld,* more commonly known as the "Can-Can." I re-orchestrated it for accordion, as though an organ grinder's street organ was the mechanism behind our comical machine in Act II. It adds a wonderful sense of drive, innuendo, and dance to the incredibly funny chase sequence.

The *Belle Époque*

The time between the end of the Franco-Prussian War (1871) and the start of World War I (1918) was an era of unusual political stability in Europe. In France, this period eventually became known as the *Belle Époque* (beautiful era), a "golden age" for society, with peace, prosperity, scientific advancement, and a flowering of artistry. (The comparable era in the United States is called the "Gilded Age.")

Of course, such advances for the rich were not necessarily enjoyed by other classes, as the gap between wealth and poverty increased. The luxurious lives of the upper classes were in part made possible by cheap wages paid to those who provided society's labor. This was also an era of vast colonial expansion as the governments of Europe continued to dominate the peoples of other parts of the world, particularly in Africa. New inventions such as the automobile, the airplane, the phonograph, the telephone, and the cinema had a lasting impact on daily life. The field of bacteriology gave doctors new insights into the origins of illness, while scientists such as Albert Einstein and Niels Bohr began the work which would lead them to modern physics and expanding the known universe. The Nobel Prize was established in Sweden to honor these advancements in medicine, chemistry, physics, and physiology. The social sciences flourished with new discoveries in history, political science, and sociology. In Vienna, Sigmund Freud invented psychoanalysis, changing the way we think about the way we think.

It was the lifestyles of the rich and famous, however, that filled the gossip pages of the Paris newspapers. In the realm of horticulture, the elegant (and expensive) calla lily was all the rage; delicate, extravagant orchids reached a cult-like status. Fruits and vegetables were grown in massive new greenhouses, allowing those who could afford them to dine on their favorites out of season. Champagne production exploded as vintners refined the costly drink of rarified celebration. Fine restaurants such as Maxim's replaced palace dining rooms at the center of high society, as reservations for the creations of famous chefs such as César Ritz and Auguste Escoffier became more coveted than invitations from aristocrats. The idea of *haute couture* was born, as wealthy women ordered custom-made, one-of-a-kind garments from commercial fashion designers rather than personal dressmakers, and fashions began to shift in annual cycles. The new Opéra Garnier featured grand staircases and huge lobbies where high society paraded its furs and feathers, while daring bohemians and slumming bourgeoisie enjoyed the scandalous Can-Can in the cabarets of Montmartre.

Impressionism, the radical painting style of the mid-1800s, became widely accepted, and Expressionism defined the new avant-garde. Art Nouveau, with its curvaceous forms and nature-inspired motifs, dominated architecture and design. Theatres were packed with the shocking visions of Oscar Wilde's *Salome* and the sparkling melodies of Franz Lehár's *The Merry Widow* as well as the lively farces of Georges Feydeau. For those who could afford it, the *Belle Époque* was a delightful playground where no whim was too outrageous and no luxury too extravagant.

Resources

Books

Georges Feydeau by Leonard C. Pronko (1980)
from the World Dramatists series

Elegant Wits and Grand Horizontals by Cornelia Otis Skinner (1962)
a sparkling panorama of the people and events of Paris in the 1890s, the *Belle Époque*

The Proud Tower: A Portrait of the World Before the War, 1890-1914
by Barbara Tuchman(1966)
a collection of essays previously published in various periodicals; each chapter deals with a different country, theme, and time

The World 100 Years Ago: Paris by Burton Holmes (1998)
from a series of travel guides initially published in 1901

Website

http://paris1900.lartnouveau.com/
Paris during the *Belle Époque* as seen in postcards from the era, such as those used to frame the set in the IRT production of *The Ladies Man*

http://www.moulinrouge.fr/home-flash-gb.html
the website of the famous nightclub

http://www.maxims-de-paris.com/
the website of the famous restaurant

Films

Moulin Rouge (1952), a fictional account of French artist Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec

Gigi (1958), a musical about training to be a courtesan, with scenes set in Maxim's

Hotel Paradiso (1966), based on Feydeau's play

A Flea in Her Ear (1968), based on Feydeau's play

Noises Off (1992), based on Michael Frayn's play, a British backstage farce

Moulin Rouge (2001), a musical by Baz Luhrmann set in the legendary nightclub

Make 'Em Laugh (2009), a PBS series on American comedy

Discussion Questions

Look at some of the familiar and not-so-familiar rhetoric or figures of speech that occur in the play, such as alliteration, antonym, aside, assonance, burlesque, double entendre, homograph, homonym, innuendo, irony, malaprop, metaphor, metonymy, polysemy, pun, rhyme, satire, and synonym.

Before seeing the play, research the root of comedy and have a discussion about what is comedic. Talk about the different styles of comedy you know and the plays, movies, and television shows you have seen that are classified as comedies. What are the common elements? In what ways do they differ? Look at comedy through the ages. Why do you think comedians still revere Charlie Chaplin, the Stooges, Whoopie Goldberg, George Carlin, and Steve Martin? What do you think makes Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* one of the most produced plays in the world? *The Simpsons* and *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* are America's longest-running television comedies. What do they posses that have made them such favorites?

After seeing the play, discuss other contemporary comedies you have seen on TV or film or at the theatre that remind you of *The Ladies Man*. How do the character types from *The Ladies Man* still exist today in contemporary entertainment?

Compare and contrast *The Ladies Man* and with other famous comedies such as

Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* or *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
Moliere's *Tartuffe*
Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*
Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano*
Noel Coward's *Private Lives* or *Blithe Spirit*
Kaufman & Hart's *You Can't Take it With You*
Joseph Kesselring's *Arsenic and Old Lace*
Neil Simon's *The Odd Couple*
Michael Frayne's *Noises Off*

In your analysis, consider plot, setting, characters, mood, language, costumes, and staging, as well as style.

Sound is a key element in comedy: music and sound effects as well as the language choices of the playwright and the vocal choices of the actors. Discuss examples of these in the IRT's production of *The Ladies Man*. What sounds complemented or detracted from the production and why? In what ways did the sound support the mood of the characters and story?

Discuss the consequences of the telling of the lies in *The Ladies Man*. Relate your discussion to society's view of lying today. Debate if there is ever a good reason for telling a lie. Cite both secular and sacred views on the consequences of lying. In our view of lying, do such factors as age, gender, race, or situation make a difference?

The set could be considered another character in the play. Why and how?

Humor is often said to have an element of cruelty. Why do we laugh when bad things happen to people in comedies (or sometimes in real life)?

Feydeau's comedies focus on the challenges humans find in attempting to control their impulses. How has this tension between doing what one wants to do and doing what is considered socially acceptable played itself out across world history? How does this tension manifest itself today in politics, religion, the arts, and the media?

Tension between husbands and their mothers in law is a stock comic device. What is it about this relationship that seems to lead to humorous conflict?

Writing Projects

Go online to our website *www.irtlive.com* and write a review of *The Ladies Man* on our Facebook link. A well-rounded review includes your opinion of the theatrical aspects—scenery, lights, costumes, sound, direction, acting—as well as your impressions of the script and the impact the story and/or themes and the overall production had on you. How did you feel at the end of the play? Did you notice the reactions of the audience as a whole? Would you recommend this play to others? Why or why not?

A small white lie and the escalating attempts to cover it up are at the center of the story in *The Ladies Man*. Write a short story around a lie and its consequences. It could be comedic or tragic.

Many great stories, books, and films have been freely translated and adapted from other cultures, such as Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* from *La Belle et Le Bête*. (Visit *http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/beauty.html* for the story and more information.) If you are a foreign language student, past or present, pull out your dictionary and try translating and adapting a small section of a book, folktale, or play. Keep in mind your audience and society's current attitudes. Think about changing when and/or where the story is set, or the gender of a character.

During Feydeau's time, the monologue was a popular theatrical genre performed at parties. Create a character and write a monologue. As you write, ask yourself such questions as: Who is my character talking to and why? What is our relationship? How long have we known each other? What are my character's likes and dislikes? What are my character's dreams and fears? What does my character want right now?

Activities

Research France's impact and contribution to American history and culture. What aspects of your everyday life can be attributed to the French? What is America's current cultural, political, and economic relationship with France?

—

The scandalous reputation of the Moulin Rouge elicits big reactions from the characters in *The Ladies Man,* affecting their emotions and their actions beyond its geographic significance. The list below offers other famous locations that have significance in our lives, our history, and our hearts.

Working in small groups, divide the list, research the locations, and share your findings with the larger group.

Alternatively, write each of these places (and more) on small pieces of paper and throw them into a hat. The teacher pulls one out, and the groups, working as teams, buzz-in to answer what is the significance of that location.

Ford's Theatre
Wrigley Field
The Steps of the Lincoln Memorial
The Alamo
The Mississippi River
Wounded Knee
The Apollo Theater
Jerusalem
Auschwitz
Ellis Island
The French Quarter
The Cotton Club
The Moon
Route 66
Market Square Arena
The Houston Astrodome
The Lorraine Motel in Memphis
Radio City Music Hall

—

A language activity from *Grammar Wars* by Tom Ready:

Liar's Club

Setup:

Four players of one team go to the front and stand shoulder-to-shoulder facing the other team. Each is given a card with the same word printed; the word has a root, and a prefix and/or suffix. Each of the four cards has the dictionary definition of the word. One card, however, has a star (some marking) showing that this player is to use the real definition. The others must make up reasonable definitions based on the word parts that are not the real definition.

Process:

The facilitator pronounces the word to the opposing team who listens to the standing team players present their version of the word's meaning. They guess which definition is correct.

Scoring:

Points go to the opposing team for correct guesses. Points go to the standing team for each guess that is incorrect. One with the most points wins.

Jeu de Mots – Word Game

The Ladies Man is filled with French words and phrases
(see the Script Glossary beginning on page 12).

Match the following commonly used French terms with their definitions.
For extra points, try to figure out the literal meaning of the original French term.

1. _____ *à la carte*
2. _____ *avant-garde*
3. _____ *bon appétit*
4. _____ *café-au-lait*
5. _____ *carte blanche*
6. _____ *coup de grâce*
7. _____ *cul-de-sac*
8. _____ *esprit de corps*
9. _____ *fait accompli*
10. _____ *femme fatale*
11. _____ *haute couture*
12. _____ *hors d'euvre*
13. _____ *joie de vivre*
14. _____ *laissez-faire*
15. _____ *maitre d'*
16. _____ *nom de plume*
17. _____ *nouveau riche*
18. _____ *pas de deux*
19. _____ *petit fours*
20. _____ ***r**éspondez **s**'il-**v**ous-**p**laît*
21. _____ *savoir-faire*
22. _____ *soupe du jour*
23. _____ *tête-à-tête*
24. _____ *trompe-l'oeil*

A. an irreversible deed
B. an author's pseudonym
C. complete freedom or authority to act
D. a policy of non-interference
E. request for response to an invitation
F. a dangerously seductive woman
G. a ballet dance for only two people
H. those with recently acquired wealth
I. a style of realistic, detailed painting
J. radically new or original
K. a small, individual frosted cake
L. a private conversation for two people
M. equal parts coffee and hot milk
N. the soup of the day
O. a street with only one way in or out
P. appetizer
Q. items listed individually on a menu
R. polished behavior in social situations
S. the blow that kills
T. exuberant enjoyment of life
U. headwaiter or host
V. enjoy your meal
W. one-of-a-kind designer clothing
X. pride uniting the members of a group