

A Flea in Her Ear



BY GEORGES FEYDEAU
TRANSLATED BY
DOUGLAS JOHNSON

CONTENTS

2. WORDS TO THE WISE

3. WHO'S WHO

4. WHAT'S THE STORY

6. BIO & BEYOND

7. SHOP TALK

8. ART IN THE BELLE EPOQUE

9. READ MORE ABOUT IT

10. Q & A

MAJOR SPONSOR: MONSANTO FUND
STUDY GUIDES ARE SUPPORTED BY
A GENEROUS GRANT FROM CITIMORTGAGE

Words to the Wise

Salon—Chandebise is not receiving guests in a beauty parlor. This use of salon refers to an elegant apartment or living room.

Supped—To sup is to dine or eat, which gives us the term “supper.”

Ovaries—Finache makes fun of Etienne without his knowing it by telling him that the pain he is having is probably caused by his ovaries, a reproductive organ that only women have.

Droll—Someone who is droll is marked by an odd and usually humorous personality.

Idiosyncrasies—Etienne is full of idiosyncrasies, or behaviors which make him unique or peculiar.

Hale and hearty—This is Finache’s way of reporting that de Histangua is in perfect health.

Furlongs—Raymonde uses this measurement term, equal to 220 yards, in a figurative sense, meaning that she has accomplished a great deal.

Communicable—Finache jokes that he has caught Etienne’s foolishness because it is communicable, or able to be spread from person to person, like a cold.

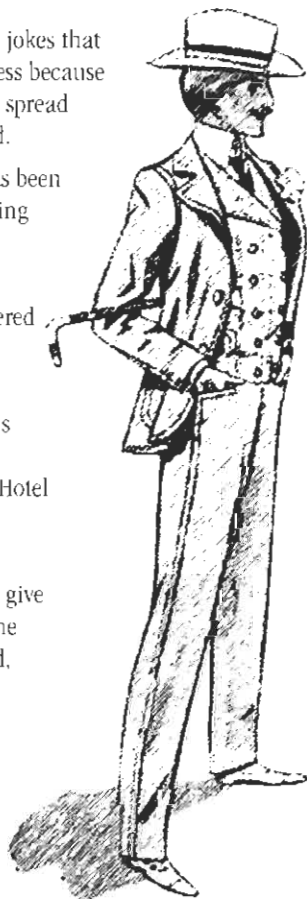
Fawned over—Tournel has been fawning over Raymonde, or making romantic gestures towards her.

By happen-stance—Raymonde claims to have discovered Chandebise’s unfaithfulness by happenstance, or by accident.

Abattoir—In the French, this term means slaughterhouse, so Raymonde uses it to say that the Hotel Belle Epoque is a place where marriages are destroyed.

Mollusk—Ferrailon will not give Raymonde any information, so she describes him as this hard-shelled, difficult to open sea creature.

Tryst—Lucienne proposes to arrange a fake tryst or lover’s meeting to catch Chandebise in the act.



Demosthenes—Lucienne and Raymonde joke about Camille’s speech impediment by likening him to this great Greek orator.

Tepid—The ladies’ first attempt at writing the fake love letter is a bit tepid, or lukewarm.

Torrid—The effect that they want the letter to create is passionate or torrid.

Au Contraire—This French phrase means “on the contrary.”

Comedie Francaise—Finache tells Camille that with his new palate, he will speak so clearly that he could be a performer at this theatre.

Mewling—Chandebise uses this term for crying like a baby.

Besotted—Chandebise believes that the “mystery woman” is madly in love with him, or besotted.

Bruited—Tournel uses this term to say that he may have heard the name of the Hotel Belle Epoque mentioned before.

Casanova—Chandebise quickly realizes that Tournel is a much more likely lover, or Casanova, than he is.

Calimari—Tournel jokes that one of his previous lovers tried to poison herself by eating a bad plate of this appetizer prepared from squid.

Bon bon—Tournel considers the mystery woman to be a tasty treat and refers to her as this candy.

Cyclops—Camille does not appreciate Tournel’s abrasive treatment and likens him to this dumb giant from Greek mythology.

Fidelity—By the end of the play, practically everyone’s faithfulness or fidelity has been called into question.

Cuckold—Homenides’ worst fear is to be a cuckold, or a husband whose wife is unfaithful to him.

Synonymous—As he does with so many words, Homenides mangles this term meaning, “identical to” and substitutes it for anonymous, meaning, “unknown.”

Alabaster—Camille says that talking to Tournel is like talking to this hard mineral; he doesn’t listen at all.



Mon capitain—Olympe uses this French phrase for “my captain” to address Ferrailleon.

Noblesse oblige—With this phrase, Olympe reminds Ferrailleon that as a superior to Eugenie, he has an obligation to a higher standard.

Trollop, strumpet—Ferrailleon shames Eugenie by using these names for immoral women on her.

Pox—Dressed as a sick old man, Olympe frightens away nosy spouses by saying that she has this terrible disease.

Imbecile—Ferrailleon calls Poche an idiot, or an imbecile.

Cretin—This is another way in which Ferrailleon insults Poche, calling him crude and unrefined.

Ruse—Tournel and Raymonde believe that Chandebise is playing a trick or a ruse on them when they run into Poche.

Sot—When Ferrailleon finds Poche with a bottle of alcohol in his hand, he calls him a drunk or a sot.

Ugly mug—Ferrailleon isn't talking about a coffee cup when he uses this phrase. He is referring to Poche's face.

Parched—Raymonde is extremely thirsty or parched.

Boingo-boingo—Poche reports that everyone in the hotel has gone crazy, or boingo-boingo.

Ruckus—Ferrailleon demands to know what all of the noise or ruckus in the hotel is.

Livery—Chandebise is forced into Poche's livery, or uniform.

Embalmed—Raymonde claims that Poche is embalmed, because he has had enough alcohol to preserve his body.

Delerium tremens—Finache predicts that Poche will soon go through this withdrawal phase common in alcoholics.

Apoplexy—Poche makes a joke by using this term for a medical stroke to say that he has had a huge stroke of luck.

Stuffed shirts—Poche refers to Etienne as someone of an upper class, or a stuffed shirt.

“In Fragrante de crisco”—This is Homenides' version of the phrase “flagrante delicto,” meaning “caught in the act.”

Othello—Lucienne likens her situation to this Shakespearean play in which Othello kills his own wife because he believes she has been unfaithful.

Who's Who

Camille Chandebise (kam EEF / chande BEE), Victor-Emmanuel's speech-impaired cousin and secretary, leads a double life.

Antoinette (an twan ETT) is the cook for the Chandebise household who enjoys spice in her love life as well as her kitchen.

Etienne (et ee ENN) is Victor-Emmanuel's valet and Antoinette's gullible husband.

Dr. Finache (fee NOSH) is the discrete doctor for Victor-Emmanuel's life insurance company.

Lucienne de Histangua (loose ee ENN / daees TON gwa) is a close friend of Raymonde's and her partner in mischief.

Raymonde Chandebise (ray MAWND / chande BEE) is Victor-Emmanuel's suspicious wife.

Victor-Emmanuel Chandebise (VEEK tore / ay man WELL / chande BEE) is a faithfully wedded life insurance director whose marriage has lost its spark.

Romain Tournel (roh MAN / tour NELL) is a friend and business associate of Victor's and quite the lady's man.

Don Homenides de Histangua (dawn / oh MEN ee des / daees TON gwa) is the hot-tempered Spanish husband of Lucienne.

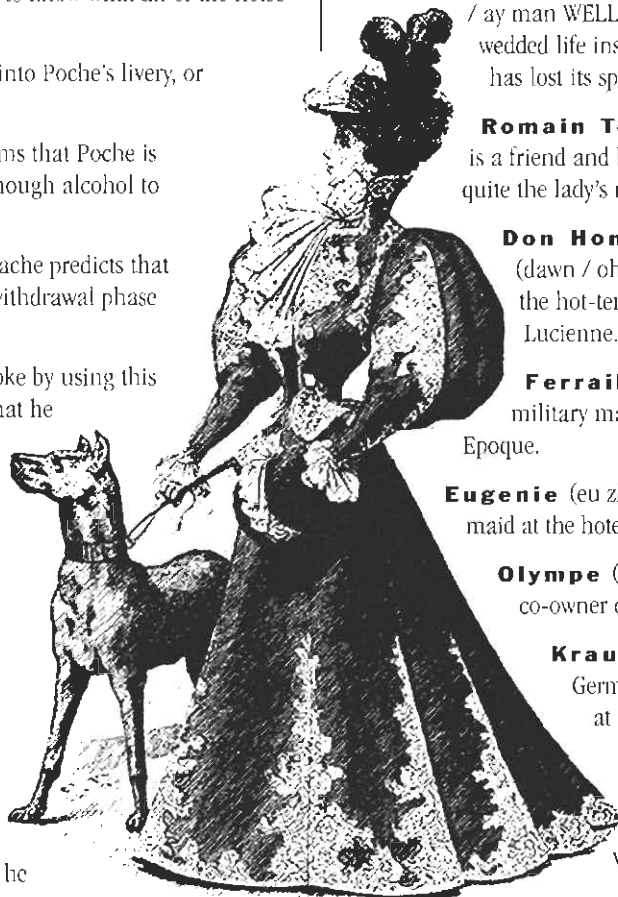
Ferrailleon (fair eye OAN) is a retired military man who now runs the Hotel Belle Epoque.

Eugenie (eu zhen EE) is the pretty but witless maid at the hotel.

Olympe (oh LAMP) is Ferrailleon's wife and co-owner of the hotel.

Krause (KROWS-uh) is a lonely German hoping to find companionship at the Hotel Belle Epoque.

Poche (POASH) is the porter at the hotel who bears a remarkable resemblance to Victor-Emmanuel.



What's the Story?

ACT I

Feydeau's non-stop romp through 1910 bourgeois Paris opens in the home of Victor-Emmanuel Chandebise, a successful life insurance executive. Chandebise's household is made up of his wife, Raymonde; his cousin and secretary, Camille; his valet, Etienne and Etienne's wife, the cook, Antoinette. The situation is off-kilter from the very beginning, when Antoinette and Camille narrowly escape being discovered in an extra-marital embrace by Etienne and the company doctor, Finache. Finache comes to the house to speak to Chandebise about an exam he has performed on one of Chandebise's potential clients, Don Carlos Homenides de Histangua. While the doctor waits, he meets de Histangua's wife, Lucienne, who is a friend of Raymonde's and is waiting for her return. Finache decides to visit a nearby patient until Chandebise arrives home and while Etienne shows him to the door, Lucienne has a confusing run-in with Camille. Camille has a cleft palate and consequently is not understood by most people. When he tries to speak to Lucienne, she believes that he is speaking in a foreign language. Unfortunately for Camille, this is only the first of many frustrating conversations to follow.

Finally, Raymonde arrives and explains to Lucienne that she has "a flea in her ear"—she suspects that Chandebise is being unfaithful to her because he is not as amorous as he once was. She confesses that she had even considered having an affair herself, "if only to have something to worry about." She says that she wants to deceive her husband, "but if he deceives me—that's going too far." Lucienne protests that Raymonde has no proof of Chandebise's deceit, but Raymonde produces a pair of her husband's suspenders that arrived in the mail this morning from The Hotel Belle Epoque. Lucienne tries to persuade her friend simply to ask Chandebise for an explanation, but Raymonde wants his head on a platter. Under pressure, Lucienne recalls a plot from a play she once saw, and the downward spiral begins. With Raymonde dictating and Lucienne writing, the two women concoct a fake love letter from an anonymous woman who claims to have fallen in love with Chandebise at the Palais-Royal and wants to meet him at the Hotel Belle Epoque at five o'clock. They douse the letter in perfume and send it to Chandebise as a trap. They plan to go to the hotel at five, and if Chandebise responds to the letter, they will have definite proof of his disloyalty.

As they finish plotting, Chandebise arrives home with his friend and business associate, Romain Tournel. When

Chandebise leaves the room to attend to some business with Camille, Tournel makes advances toward Raymonde. She rejects him though, explaining that now that her husband is having an affair, she is not interested in having one of her own. Tournel is confused and leaves to speak with Chandebise. Meanwhile, Dr. Finache returns and brings with him a surprise for Camille—a silver palate which will allow him to speak clearly. The doctor also asks Camille whether or not he has taken his advice and visited the Hotel Belle Epoque. Not wanting anyone in the household to know about his other life, Camille reluctantly admits that he has indeed visited the hotel and thoroughly enjoyed it.

As Camille leaves the room, Chandebise enters to meet with Finache, who tells him that de Histangua is in "first class shape." Chandebise, however, is not. He confides in Finache that lately, he has not been able to be as passionate as he would like with his wife. Finache assures him that he simply needs to talk to Raymonde and everything will be fine. He also checks to see that Chandebise is wearing the new suspenders that he prescribed for his posture. Victor-Emmanuel says that he is wearing them, even though they are uncomfortable because he gave all of his other suspenders to Camille. Before Finache leaves, Etienne arrives with a letter—"the" letter—for Chandebise. After reading it, Chandebise gathers Tournel and Finache and shows it to them. Together, they reach the conclusion that the mystery woman

must actually be in love with Tournel, who attended the theatre with Chandebise and is much more of a ladies' man. They reason that she must have assumed that he was Chandebise because he was seated in his box, and Tournel agrees to keep the date on Chandebise's behalf. Chandebise insists on keeping the letter though, as a boon to his ego.

De Histangua arrives to speak to Chandebise about the insurance policy and while the two are talking, Chandebise brags to his client about the suggestive letter that he received. When de Histangua sees the letter, he recognizes the handwriting as his wife's and becomes enraged. Chandebise tries to calm him, but de Histangua is determined to kill Tournel who has gone to keep the date. De Histangua locks Chandebise in a closet and leaves for the hotel. Camille finds Chandebise in the closet and after hearing the story tries to warn Tournel when he returns for his briefcase. Camille does not have his palate in his mouth though, so Tournel cannot understand him and goes to meet his secret admirer.



ACT II

At the Hotel Belle Epoque, Ferrailon the owner, is gearing up for another full night of business. He plies his staff with orders, priding himself on running an elegant establishment, and not "some kind of shady place." The personnel includes his wife, Olympe; the bellhop, Poche (who happens to look exactly like Victor-Emmanuel); and the witless maid, Eugenie. Ferrailon values discretion above everything else. In fact, one of the rooms in the Hotel is arranged so that the bed sits on a revolving platform. If there is a raid or a suspicious spouse arrives, the person in the bed can press a button, and the bed will revolve out of sight. In its place arrives an identical looking bed complete with Olympe disguised as a sick old man. This elaborate ploy has probably protected many not-so-innocent patrons.

As Ferrailon is completing his final inspection of the rooms, Olympe remembers that earlier she received a telegram from "Monsieur Chandebise" requesting a room for five o'clock. Moments later, Poche arrives with another telegram from "Chandebise" instructing them to admit whomever comes in his name. Assuming that the telegram is from Camille, they reserve for him the same room that he occupied last time. With these arrangements complete, they are prepared for an evening of business, and one of the first customers is Dr. Finache. He arrives alone but gives instructions to notify him as soon as someone asks for him. As he leaves for his room, Raymonde arrives wearing a heavy veil so that no one—including her husband—will recognize her. She asks for Monsieur Chandebise's room, and Ferrailon shows her to it. She has barely settled herself in the room when Tournel appears and also requests Chandebise's room. Following the instructions to admit anyone who comes in Chandebise's name, Ferrailon escorts Tournel to the room where Raymonde is waiting. Tournel is expecting an admiring stranger and Raymonde is expecting to catch her husband being unfaithful. So they are quite surprised to find each other. After some initial confusion, they each tell their half of the story: Tournel explains that he is there in Chandebise's place, and Raymonde explains that the letter was a fake.

Tournel takes this as a sign that he and Raymonde should be together after all, but she is not convinced and resists his advances. In an effort to ring for help, she presses the button that makes the bed revolve and finds herself in another room. Tournel is startled to find Olympe in the bed and frantically looks for Raymonde. While trying to find her way back to her own room, Raymonde sees Poche and mistakes him for Victor-Emmanuel. Guilt gets the better of her, and she assumes that he must be here to catch her with Tournel. She returns to the room to warn Tournel, but Poche arrives shortly after her and sends them both into a panic. Raymonde and Tournel plead their innocence to Poche, believing that he is Victor-Emmanuel, but he has no idea who they are or what they mean. He leaves to carry wood up from

the basement and while doing so meets Camille coming up the stairs with Antoinette. Camille also thinks that Poche is Victor-Emmanuel and runs into Olympe's room to hide. He sits on the bed and soon finds himself revolving into Tournel's room. This startles Raymonde and Tournel, and they dash out of the room.

While they are trying to make their way out of the hotel, they run into Etienne, who has been sent by Victor-Emmanuel to warn Tournel about de Histangua. They take another route and Etienne accidentally hears Antoinette's voice and realizes that she is being unfaithful to him. She also hears him and tries to hide. Meanwhile, Lucienne, following Raymonde's instructions, arrives and asks for Chandebise's room. She finds no one there and returns to the lobby, where Victor-Emmanuel has just entered. He warns her that her husband knows about the letter that she wrote and plans to kill both her and Tournel. No sooner than he says this, de Histangua himself arrives and begins terrorizing the entire hotel. To make matters worse, Ferrailon finds Victor-Emmanuel and believing that he is Poche, abuses him until he agrees to work and forces him to put on the porter's uniform that Poche has discarded.

ACT III

Antoinette manages to escape from the Hotel and returns to the house before anyone else. Etienne follows closely on her heels though and plans to catch her in her deceit, but he is foiled when the gateman assures him that she has been at home all day. He cannot dwell on this because Raymonde and Tournel arrive moments later, having just fled the hotel themselves. Lucienne also returns and while they are exchanging versions of what happened at the hotel, Poche appears drunk at the front door, asking for Monsieur Chandebise. Etienne mistakes him for Victor-Emmanuel and thinks that he has lost his mind. Finache arrives and after examining Poche, declares him an alcoholic. However, everyone, including Finache, believes that Poche is actually Chandebise. So they dress him in Victor-Emmanuel's pajamas and put him to bed.

The situation becomes even more complicated when Camille returns, followed by Victor-Emmanuel. Camille sees Poche in one room and Victor-Emmanuel in another and thinks that he has gone mad. Before he can sort out the matter, Ferrailon arrives looking for Poche and accidentally grabs Chandebise instead. To complete the insanity, de Histangua joins the crowd, with pistol in hand. Lucienne tells him the truth about the letter and calms him before anyone is hurt, but Poche jumps out the window to escape Ferrailon. When Ferrailon sees Chandebise inside the house moments later, he cannot understand how Poche could have gotten inside and changed clothes so quickly. Finally, the entire group works together, with each person contributing his own portion of the story until the complete tale is unraveled and Chandebise pledges to kill the "flea" in his wife's ear that very night.



Bio & Beyond

By James Mills

Born in Paris on December 8, 1862 (some claim 1863), to Ernest Feydeau, a renowned writer and scholar, and Lodzia Zelewska or Slewaska, a Polish woman, Feydeau was rumored to really be the son of the duke of Morny or Napoleon III.



The young man was exposed to the theatre in a city which, at the turn of the century, was the intellectual and artistic capital of the western world. He began by writing drawing room monologues; and after his first work, *Through the Window* (*Par la fenêtre*, 1882), written at age twenty, he composed *Love and Piano* (*Amour et piano*, 1883) and *Gallows-Bird* (*Gibier de potence*, 1883), two single-act plays which received *un succès d'estime* (praise from critics, but poor sales). His first major theatrical success was a three-act work titled, *Fitting for Ladies* (*Tailleur pour dames*, 1886), which he wrote at age twenty-four. This was followed by failures and only partial successes. Meanwhile, he married the daughter of Carolus-Duran, a well-known portrait painter, who was quite rich and who took care of Feydeau's immediate money problems.

Feydeau stopped writing in 1890 in order to study authors who had succeeded in farce, including Eugène Labiche, Henri Meilhac, and Alfred Hennequin. The result was *Champignol in Spite of Himself* (*Champignol malgré lui*, 1892) and *Monsieur Has Gone Hunting* (*Monsieur chasse!*, 1892), the first of which became a major success at the Nouveautés after having been rejected by the Palais-Royal. His career continued to blossom as he became the most popular playwright of the boulevard theatre and a great success abroad as well. Sometimes his plays were performed in foreign language translation before they were performed in France. While some consider *The Lady from Maxim's* (*La Dame de chez Maxim*, 1899) to be his greatest success, *A Flea in Her Ear* (*La Puce à l'oreille*, 1907) went on to become his most popular play in English-speaking countries.

Feydeau had somewhat of an existentialist view of an absurd universe where men and women confront a hostile world in which the innocent suffer with no hope of comic resolution. His work had an undercurrent of pessimism, with many of the characters bringing suffering upon themselves by their affectation, their over-ambition, and their romantic and idealistic notions. Norman Shapiro has suggested that, "the playwright, like a master puppeteer, assumes a god-like role,

creating around his helpless characters a universe of seeming absurdity in which their efforts to resist their destiny are frantic but fruitless," and that Feydeau's theatre is "eminently cruel," and his characters "are often the victims of relentless whimsy which delights in recreating, in a comical dramatic fiction, the absurdity and inexplicability of real life."

Peter Glenville argues that Feydeau's plays concentrate on the appetites and follies of the average human being caught in a net devised by his or her own foolishness, that virtue does not triumph, and that the dramatist "is not interested in what people should be, or even, on occasion, aspire to be, but rather with what they almost inevitably, and amusingly, are." He also points out that every detail is logical and plausible and engineered by the characters themselves. Richard Hayes contends that "the world of Feydeau is alien to the ethical, romantic [spectator]...for it is a world indifferent to sentiment or morality or psychological nuance." His characters are ordinary people who are aggressive and, at times, cruel. While his plays are known for their nonsense, fantasy, and bedroom farce, they are also known for their sense of madness and their geometric precision.

In 1909, Feydeau left his wife, Marianne, to spend the next ten years in the Hôtel Terminus, where he surrounded himself with his paintings, his books, and some 250 perfumes. His later works were better, and often emphasized domestic themes. He divorced his wife in 1916 after an unhappy marriage that is perhaps reflected in his last five short plays (1908–1916) where the wife is a vixen of the sort who persecutes her husband almost to the point of madness.

As his work evolved, he continued to adhere strictly to an immaculate construction and geometry and a preoccupation with mechanical form and verbal wit and titillation, a combination that Hayes calls the "mathematics of theater." He likewise moved toward more verisimilitude and a more intense and almost savage comic vision.

In 1941, his play, *Madam's Late Mother* (*Feu la mère de madame*), entered the repertory of the Comédie-Française, soon to be followed by some of his other plays, thus establishing him as a modern "classic." Some have seen in Feydeau a precursor of Dadaism, surrealism, and the absurd. Perhaps Shapiro best sums up his contributions when he speaks of the grandeur that is to be found in Feydeau's compositions in spite of their levity and seeming triviality, and in his ultimate canonical designation of the dramatist as "the Bach of his genre."

Excerpted from *Insights*, 1994.

Shop Talk

The standard arc for Feydeau plays sees Act I introduce the characters in their ordinary, familiar environment. Then Act II shifts them to a foreign and usually disconcerting surrounding, and Act III returns them to their initial world with residue of the exotic Act II location trailing after them. *A Flea in Her Ear* is no exception, and the design team for The Rep's production has taken a very creative approach to infusing the set, lights and costumes with this same kind of dramatic movement. Scenic Designer James Wolk, Costume Designer Elizabeth Covey and Lighting Designer Dennis Parichy are collaborating to take the residents of the Chandebise household on the roller coaster ride of their lives.

Act I of the play opens in the salon of the upscale Paris apartment of Victor-Emmanuel Chandebise. At this period in Paris, luxury apartments were quickly overtaking multi-story houses as the most popular style of residence, so naturally the Chandebise's occupy a second story high-rise. The model of taste and propriety, the home is furnished almost exclusively in shades of white, cream and gold, reflecting the refined, uneventful lives of its



Homenides de Histangua costumes. Act I, left; and Act II.

owners. The set is soothingly symmetrical, with an archway that Wolk cleverly modeled after Feydeau's trademark mustache, presiding over the scene. Upstage, unobtrusive outlines of Paris landmarks, such as the Eiffel Tower and the Arc de Triomphe, reinforce the locale. The costumes take up this same color scheme, with all of the characters clad in various shades of white or off-white. However, each character's garment sports just a hint of color. For example, Raymonde's dress is primarily white, but it is accented with red trim. She also carries a red handbag and wears red gloves. Just as Feydeau uses the opening scenes to lay the groundwork for the mayhem that will ensue in the second act, Covey is using these traces of signature color to foreshadow the uncharacteristic behavior that these individuals will exhibit in the coming act.

Through a wacky chain reaction, Act II takes all of the characters to the Hotel Belle Epoque. All of them are shocked by what they find there—and with good reason. In stark contrast to the pristine whiteness of the Chandebise apartment, the tawdry Hotel is bursting with color. These are not tranquil pastels either. The docile creams and golds of Act I are replaced with vibrant pinks and purples, and the restful balance of the salon is supplanted by asymmetry and the alluring curves of Art Nouveau architecture, giving a visual representation of the emotional loop de loop on which the characters find themselves. Parichy adds to this effect by rigging the previously ordinary upstage Paris scenes with carnivalesque chaser lights. Completing this transformation to the seamier side of the City of Lights are the costumes. All of the action of the play occurs in a single day, so the Act II garments are identical to those worn in Act I, with one small exception. The color pattern is perfectly reversed. Raymonde's previously white dress with red accents is now red with white accents, and her accessories have also turned crimson, showing the Hotel and its madness overtaking these characters.

One by one, these victims of momentum escape from the Hotel and in the third act return to what should be the familiar comfort of the apartment. However, they are unable to leave the insanity behind them. Though the salon is as serene as ever, they are not, as they remain in their flamboyant colors from Act II. In the same way that Feydeau ratchets the dramatic pace of the final act one notch higher, the designers take their plan to the ultimate level by setting the wildly dressed characters against the white or nearly white backdrop of the apartment. This design concept brings just the right blend of fun and folly to the production and serves as an ideal compliment to Feydeau's dramatic impetus.

ACT II

At the Hotel Belle Epoque, Ferrailon the owner, is gearing up for another full night of business. He plies his staff with orders, priding himself on running an elegant establishment, and not "some kind of shady place." The personnel includes his wife, Olympe; the bellhop, Poche (who happens to look exactly like Victor-Emmanuel); and the witless maid, Eugenie. Ferrailon values discretion above everything else. In fact, one of the rooms in the Hotel is arranged so that the bed sits on a revolving platform. If there is a raid or a suspicious spouse arrives, the person in the bed can press a button, and the bed will revolve out of sight. In its place arrives an identical looking bed complete with Olympe disguised as a sick old man. This elaborate ploy has probably protected many not-so-innocent patrons.

As Ferrailon is completing his final inspection of the rooms, Olympe remembers that earlier she received a telegram from "Monsieur Chandebise" requesting a room for five o'clock. Moments later, Poche arrives with another telegram from "Chandebise" instructing them to admit whomever comes in his name. Assuming that the telegram is from Camille, they reserve for him the same room that he occupied last time. With these arrangements complete, they are prepared for an evening of business, and one of the first customers is Dr. Finache. He arrives alone but gives instructions to notify him as soon as someone asks for him. As he leaves for his room, Raymonde arrives wearing a heavy veil so that no one—including her husband—will recognize her. She asks for Monsieur Chandebise's room, and Ferrailon shows her to it. She has barely settled herself in the room when Tournel appears and also requests Chandebise's room. Following the instructions to admit anyone who comes in Chandebise's name, Ferrailon escorts Tournel to the room where Raymonde is waiting. Tournel is expecting an admiring stranger and Raymonde is expecting to catch her husband being unfaithful. So they are quite surprised to find each other. After some initial confusion, they each tell their half of the story: Tournel explains that he is there in Chandebise's place, and Raymonde explains that the letter was a fake.

Tournel takes this as a sign that he and Raymonde should be together after all, but she is not convinced and resists his advances. In an effort to ring for help, she presses the button that makes the bed revolve and finds herself in another room. Tournel is startled to find Olympe in the bed and frantically looks for Raymonde. While trying to find her way back to her own room, Raymonde sees Poche and mistakes him for Victor-Emmanuel. Guilt gets the better of her, and she assumes that he must be here to catch her with Tournel. She returns to the room to warn Tournel, but Poche arrives shortly after her and sends them both into a panic. Raymonde and Tournel plead their innocence to Poche, believing that he is Victor-Emmanuel, but he has no idea who they are or what they mean. He leaves to carry wood up from

the basement and while doing so meets Camille coming up the stairs with Antoinette. Camille also thinks that Poche is Victor-Emmanuel and runs into Olympe's room to hide. He sits on the bed and soon finds himself revolving into Tournel's room. This startles Raymonde and Tournel, and they dash out of the room.

While they are trying to make their way out of the hotel, they run into Etienne, who has been sent by Victor-Emmanuel to warn Tournel about de Histangua. They take another route and Etienne accidentally hears Antoinette's voice and realizes that she is being unfaithful to him. She also hears him and tries to hide. Meanwhile, Lucienne, following Raymonde's instructions, arrives and asks for Chandebise's room. She finds no one there and returns to the lobby, where Victor-Emmanuel has just entered. He warns her that her husband knows about the letter that she wrote and plans to kill both her and Tournel. No sooner than he says this, de Histangua himself arrives and begins terrorizing the entire hotel. To make matters worse, Ferrailon finds Victor-Emmanuel and believing that he is Poche, abuses him until he agrees to work and forces him to put on the porter's uniform that Poche has discarded.

ACT III

Antoinette manages to escape from the Hotel and returns to the house before anyone else. Etienne follows closely on her heels though and plans to catch her in her deceit, but he is foiled when the gateman assures him that she has been at home all day. He cannot dwell on this because Raymonde and Tournel arrive moments later, having just fled the hotel themselves. Lucienne also returns and while they are exchanging versions of what happened at the hotel, Poche appears drunk at the front door,

asking for Monsieur Chandebise. Etienne mistakes him for Victor-Emmanuel and thinks that he has lost his mind. Finache arrives and after examining Poche, declares him an alcoholic. However, everyone, including Finache, believes that Poche is actually Chandebise. So they dress him in Victor-Emmanuel's pajamas and put him to bed.

The situation becomes even more complicated when Camille returns, followed by Victor-Emmanuel. Camille sees Poche in one room and Victor-Emmanuel in another and thinks that he has gone mad. Before he can sort out the matter, Ferrailon arrives looking for Poche and accidentally grabs Chandebise instead. To complete the insanity, de Histangua joins the crowd, with pistol in hand. Lucienne tells him the truth about the letter and calms him before anyone is hurt, but Poche jumps out the window to escape Ferrailon. When Ferrailon sees Chandebise inside the house moments later, he cannot understand how Poche could have gotten inside and changed clothes so quickly. Finally, the entire group works together, with each person contributing his own portion of the story until the complete tale is unraveled and Chandebise pledges to kill the "flea" in his wife's ear that very night.





Fernand Leger, Seated Woman 1913

abstract components of a subject rather than a realistic likeness.

Influenced by the tribal art of Oceania and Africa, early cubism analyzed subjects by the geometric solids that comprised them and translated these forms onto the canvas. The style was, in large part, a reaction to the traditional sentimental painting seen in the late 19th century and a revolt against the formlessness and emphasis on light and color common in impressionism. As a result, early cubists worked to eliminate what they

perceived to be simple, naturalistic, and emotional effects by using color only in subdued tones such as grays, browns, greens, and yellows, and frequently their works were in monochrome. This movement reiterated Paris' status as a trendsetter in the cultural world as it launched the beginning of abstract and nonobjective art.

One other major artistic movement that was very heavily informed by the period was Futurism. Originated by Italian F.T. Marinetti, who trained in Paris and wrote in French, futurism enthusiastically embraced modernity, particularly the idea of the machine and speed. Its artists attempted to encapsulate the speed and mechanization of contemporary life by depicting several successive actions of a subject at the same time. The result resembled somewhat a stroboscopic photograph or a high-speed series of photographs printed on a single plate. This movement had an extensive, but brief influence, finding its way into poetry, drama and even politics.



Jacques-Henri Lartigue, Car Trip, Papa at 80 km an hour 1913

It is remarkable

that in a span of thirty-five years, a single city could

give birth to, nurture and sustain all of these radically different art forms. Such a concentration of vigorous creative energy is truly rare. It is no wonder then, that historians would remark on the beauty of this time and pay tribute to it with the moniker, *La Belle Epoque*.

Read More About It

We encourage you to examine these topics in-depth by exploring the following books, Web sites and videos.

Georges Feydeau by Manuel A. Esteban. Twayne Publishers, 1983. Esteban balances biography with text analysis to provide a better understanding of the playwright.

Georges Feydeau by Leonard C. Pronko. Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1975. This volume instills a great appreciation for the intricate mechanical construction of Feydeau's plays.

A Flea in Her Rear, or Ants in Her Pants and other Vintage French Farces by

Norman R. Shopira. Applause Books, 1994. One of the leading Feydeau scholars of today, Shopira casts an entertaining critical light on the master's work.

Renoir, Paris and the Belle Epoque by Karin Sagner-Duchling. Examine this classic artist's role in the explosion of creativity centered around Paris.

Art Nouveau: Spirit of the Belle Epoque by Susan A. Sternau. Learn more about this artistic style that still influences today's jewelry and home furnishings.

Paris, Capital of Europe: From the Revolution to the Belle Epoque by Johannes Willms. Holmes & Meier, 1997. Discover the history behind the

people and artistic and philosophical movements that placed Paris at the center of the world.

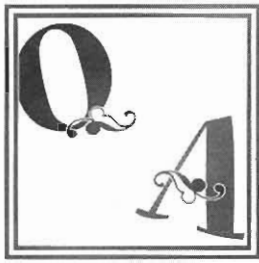
Age of Opulence: The Belle Epoque in the Paris Herald, 1890-1914 by Hebe Dorsey. Abrams, 1986. For an authentic sense of the time period, explore this book that features actual stories and images from the *Paris Herald*, the essential paper for Americans living abroad at the turn of the century.

Pleasures of the Belle Epoque: Entertainment and Festivity in Turn-of-the-century France by Charles Rearick. Yale, 1985. To gain a better understanding of how and why this culture gained its reputation for indulgence, explore this well-illustrated selection.

<http://facweb.furman.edu/~pecay/f26/projects/belleepoque/lifestyles.htm#cafe-concerts> Although this is a French language site, even those who don't speak the language can benefit from the images of the fashion and trends of the period. The site focuses on clothing, the bicycling craze and Paris' cafes.

<http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~a-prabert/paris1.htm> This site provides a taste of the times with excellent images of the 1900 World's Fair in Paris.

A Flea in Her Ear by Georges Feydeau; screenplay by John Mortimer; directed by Jacques Charan, 1968. This film version of the play stars Rex Harrison as Victor-Emmanuel/Poche and Rosemary Harris as the suspicious wife.



These questions and activities are designed to help students anticipate the performance and then to build on their impressions and interpretations after attending the theatre. The activities and questions are divided into **“Before the Performance”** and **“After the Performance”** categories. While most of the exercises provide specific instructions, please feel free to adapt these activities to accommodate your own teaching strategies and curricular needs. To assist you in incorporating these materials into your existing curriculum, we have provided the numbers of some of the corresponding Missouri Knowledge Standards and Illinois Learning Standards.

Communication Arts

Before the Performance

1 Malapropisms are words or phrases that are distorted or misused, usually unintentionally, and result in humorous misunderstandings. The term was born out of R. B.

Sheridan’s 1775 play *The Rivals*, which featured a character named Mrs. Malaprop, who repeatedly misused words. Often, malapropisms involve the use of a word sounding similar to the one intended but very out of place in the context. For example, at one point Mrs. Malaprop says:

“I have interceded another letter from the fellow.” What she intended to say was, “I have intercepted another letter from the fellow.” The two words sound similar but have extremely different meanings. While these slips of the tongue happen accidentally in real life, playwrights and authors have realized the comedic value of this tool and may place them in the

mouths of their characters to provide entertainment or to make a statement about the character. Feydeau gives one of his characters in *A Flea in Her Ear*, Homenides de Histangua, multiple malapropisms. In the balloons are a few of his lines from the play. In each sentence, try to find the malapropism and decide what you believe the correct word or phrase should be. Then listen for these lines and others like them in the performance. (MO: CA1, CA2, CA5, CA7, FA2, FA3 IL: 1, 2, 4, 5, 25)

2 Although Georges Feydeau is widely regarded as one of the finest farceurs in dramatic history, he by no means invented the form. It began as an interlude between the acts of French Medieval religious drama and was relatively

unsophisticated. By the 17th century though, Moliere had developed it into a full-length play format and filled it with biting irony and social criticism. Another 100 years saw the French writer Beaumarchais introduce his classic farce character Figaro (of opera fame), but royal censors were threatened by the social commentary contained in these humorous works. Scribe, Meilhac, Labiche and Feydeau dominated the 19th and early 20th centuries and crafted the form into the “well-made play.”

Following World War I, farce accentuated the absurdity of life and manifested itself in American comedians such as Buster Keaton, Charlie Chaplin and the Marx Brothers. In the 1950s and 60s Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco built on this absurdity and ushered in the darker side of farce. Today, farce and its descendents remain alive in the work of Michael Frayn and Alan Ayckbourn. To become better acquainted with this style of

theatre, find the following plays in the library: *The Miser*, by Moliere and *Noises Off*, by Michael Frayn. Read both of these plays and based on your reading, compare and contrast the works in the following categories: Sources of main conflict (Does it involve a clash of ideas or events?); Use of language (What language tools are used to provide comedy—put downs, verbal blunders, etc); Characterization (Are characters simply good and bad types or are they more complex?); Resolution (Is the conclusion complete and satisfying or open-ended?). Format your findings in a chart and create a third column for *A Flea in Her Ear*. Then save your chart for use after the performance. (MO: CA1, CA2, CA4, CA7, FA2, FA3 IL: 1, 2, 3, 5, 25)

“Where is it that I may kill them...that I may dance on their corpses.”

“Perhaps she prefers to remain synonymous, eh?”

“The lady from the Palais-Royal, she was not my espouse, she was yours.”

“Whoever gets the bullet, he is the dead one. In my country, this is how we drool.”

“I do not wish your murder. I am not, after all, a cabbage.”

“No, Mousseyour, no. He will most surely return.”

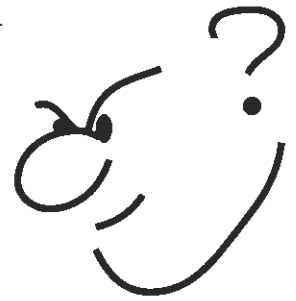
“More rather is it the dignity of my wife and mattress.”

After the Performance

3 Based on the performance of *A Flea in Her Ear* that you saw at The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, complete the final column of your chart from Communication Arts activity #2. Discuss with your classmates the differences and similarities that you found among these three versions of farce. (MO: CA1, CA2, CA4, CA5, CA6, FA2, FA3 IL: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 25)

4 In his essay, "Farce," critic Eric Bentley writes, "farce is... notorious for its love of violent images." Considering The Rep's production of *A Flea in Her Ear*, how would you respond to this statement? How many violent situations can you recall from the play? Was the violence verbal, physical or both? Try to remember how those scenes affected you? Did you feel that the characters involved were actually threatened, or was their misfortune humorous? What do you think the writer, in this case, Feydeau, might have been trying to convey through this extensive use of violence? In a group of no more than five, discuss the above questions. (MO: CA1, CA2, CA5, CA6, CA7, FA3, FA5 IL: 1, 2, 4, 5, 27)

5 The action in *A Flea in Her Ear* is fast and furious and the plot lines are complex, particularly in Acts II and III. Fortunately, Feydeau provides plenty of background information to help us keep everything straight as an audience, even if the characters can't. Three of the primary techniques he uses to do this are soliloquies, asides and dialogue. In a soliloquy, a single character may discuss a situation alone, clarifying plot details for the audience. In an aside, a character will momentarily break the action of a scene to comment on it. This is usually done directly to the audience and is another way of establishing a situation. Dialogue is the most common means of giving background information and uses a conversation among two or more characters to reveal or review plot. Think about the performance that you saw at The Rep. List as many examples of soliloquies, asides, and information revealing dialogue as you can remember. How helpful did you find these devices as an audience member? (MO: CA1, CA2, CA4, CA5, FA2, FA3 IL: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 25)



Fine Arts

Before the Performance

1 Read the article, "Art in the Belle Epoque" in your study guide. Notice that many of the posters and other works of the Art Nouveau movement served practical or decorative purposes as much as they were considered great works of art. What do you believe was the relationship among art, decoration and advertising during this time period? Are these different today than they were at the beginning of the twentieth century? Do we have a contemporary art movement that is comparable to the posters of Mucha by sharing both a commercial and an artistic function? Find a current art form that you feel meets this description and select at least five visual examples that demonstrate these dual roles. Using these examples, create a poster, PowerPoint



presentation or other visual display and present it to your classmates. Include in your presentation an explanation of this art form's use in our culture. (MO: FA1, FA2, FA3, FA4, FA5, CA1, CA3, CA4, CA5, CA6 IL: 1, 2, 4, 5, 25, 26, 27)

2 Sigmund Freud's exploration of the subconscious was uncharted territory at the turn of the century and had wide-reaching effects on society. Research the basic

psychological theories of Freud and choose one of the artists mentioned in "Art in the Belle Epoque" for further research. In what ways does the work of your artist of choice reflect Freudian psychology? How does your artist address or portray the irrational, the subconscious or the dream state? Choose 3 examples of artwork to support your argument and discuss these questions in an essay of at least 800 words. (MO: FA2, FA3, FA4, FA5, CA1, CA3, CA4 IL: 1, 2, 3, 5, 25, 27)



3 Although the artists of the Art Nouveau movement were from many different countries and expressed their ideas in many different ways, they were all seeking a common means of reacting to their modern society. In many ways, they were trying to create an international style that was uniquely modern. Is there a particular movement today, in either the visual or performing arts, that projects an international identity? Do our arts in the United States have a national style that is distinct from other countries? Discuss these ideas in a group of no more than five. Share your initial reactions to the questions with one another, then assign each member of your group a different art form to research for current trends. After you have completed your research, meet again to see how, or if, your opinions have changed. (MO: FA2, FA3, FA4, FA5, CA1, CA3, CA6 IL: 1, 2, 4, 5, 25, 27)

After the Performance

4 Feydeau was obsessed with details and insisted that his plays be rehearsed for at least three months in order to guarantee that every scene ran perfectly. At The Rep, our actors have only four weeks of rehearsal, and yet they have had to contend with many of the same problems faced by Feydeau's original casts. The plot and subplots of the play are very complex, the pacing is extremely fast and the personal stakes for each character are quite high. While the performance that you saw was fluid and hopefully very funny, it required a tremendous amount of time and effort. To give you a sense of just how intense the rehearsal for even a short scene may be, find an acting partner and someone who is willing to direct you in the scene below. This is the scene in which Homenides discovers what he believes to be his wife's unfaithfulness. After you have rehearsed, present your work for the class. Then discuss what you felt were the greatest challenges of the scene. (MO: FA1, FA2, FA3, CA1, CA2, CA5, CA6 IL: 1, 2, 4, 5, 25, 26)

CHANDEBISE What?

HOMENIDES: Caramba! hija de la perra que te pario!

CHANDEBISE What on earth is the matter?

HOMENIDES: This is the scripture of my espouse!

CHANDEBISE Your wife's what?

HOMENIDES: Wretch of a pig! (*Grabbing Chandebise*) Thief! Snake! Assassin!

CHANDEBISE No no no nonononononoo!

(*Holding Chandebise by the throat, Homenides fishes for his gun in the back of his pants.*)

HOMENIDES: My bulldog! Where is my bulldog!

CHANDEBISE He's got a dog in there?

HOMENIDES: (*Pulling the gun*) Ah! Here we are.

CHANDEBISE Now, wait just a moment!

HOMENIDES: So! My wife, he writes to you! So now, I kill you.

CHANDEBISE Certainly not! Certainly not! First of all, how can you be sure that it is your wife? All women write the same lately!

HOMENIDES: Have no doubts . . . I know it! Now, I kill you.

CHANDEBISE (*White knuckle terror*) But . . . but it wasn't me! It was Tournel!

HOMENIDES: Tournel? The man of letters? Bueno. Now, I kill him!

CHANDEBISE What!! But no! See here . . . since he hasn't left, I'll stop him. And everything will be fine!

HOMENIDES: I forbid you do this! I witch that it be *consumme*, and then . . . I kill them.

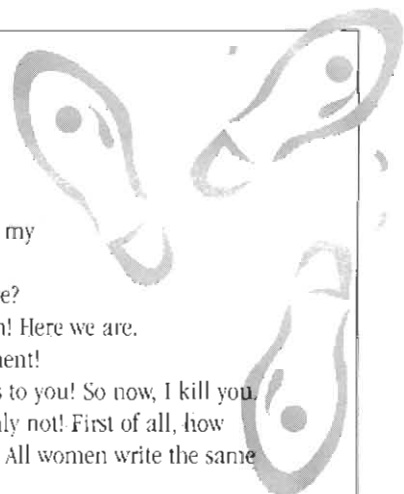
CHANDEBISE My God, Histangua . . .

HOMENIDES: Silencio! I hear the voices of my wife. Go in here.

CHANDEBISE Histangua, my dear friend!

HOMENIDES: Si. I am your dear friend; but I will shoot you like a dog. Now, go. Or . . . I kill you.

CHANDEBISE (*Leaping through the doorway.*) No! No! (*Homenides locks the door.*)



Social Studies

Before the Performance

1 What comparisons can be drawn between the end of the nineteenth and the end of the twentieth century? How have our responses to technology changed? Are we more or less likely to be controlled by technology than the people of the Belle Epoque? Discuss these questions in a group of no more than five. Try to think of specific examples of the role that technology plays in your own life. (MO: SS2, SS6, SS7, CA1, CA6 IL: 1, 2, 4, 5, 16, 18)

2 How do we perceive something as "modern?" Which art works shown in this study guide still look modern today? Which do not? How could people living around the turn of the 20th century have associated such disparate forms with modernity? Create a

collage that portrays what you believe exemplifies modern America. (MO: SS2, SS6, SS7, CA1, CA3, CA5, FA1 IL: 1, 2, 5, 16, 18, 26)

After the Performance

3 The fidelity of almost every character in the play is called into question, but by the end of Act III, all has been forgiven, and all of the original couples restored. Research social history of the time period to see how accurately Feydeau portrayed marriage and male and female roles. Using this information, imagine that you are the 1910 version of Dear Abby and you receive a letter from Raymonde asking for advice in her



situation. Write a response to her letter, outlining what her responsibilities as a wife are and how she should proceed. Remember to base your advice in the social customs and expectations of 1910, not 2002. (MO: SS2, SS6, SS7, CA1, CA3, CA4, CA5 IL: 1, 2, 3, 5, 16, 18)

4 Communication plays a major role in this play. Research to learn what technological advances were being made in 1910 and create an advertising page for a period newspaper that promotes ten of the latest products to hit the market. What impact do you think new inventions like the telephone might have had on Feydeau's perception of communication? (MO: SS2, SS4, SS7, CA1, CA3, CA4, FA1 IL: 1, 2, 3, 5, 16)1