

His life:

The Life and Death of Georges Feydeau

1862: Born in Paris on December 8 to writer and scholar Ernest Feydeau and Lodzia Zelewska.

1882: Wrote his first play, *Par la fenêtre (Through the Window)*.

1883: After a brief stint in the French military, wrote two one-act plays, *Amour et piano (Love and Piano)* and *Gibier de potence (Gallows-Bird)*. Both received critical praise but were not popular with audiences.

1886: Wrote *Tailleur pour dames (Ladies' Dressmaker)*, his first theatrical success.

1889: Married Marie-Anne Carolus-Duran, the daughter of a wealthy portrait painter.

1890: While supported by his father-in-law, took a two-year hiatus from writing to study the works of other successful playwrights, particularly those who wrote farce.

1892: Wrote *Champignol malgré lui (Champignol in Spite of Himself)* and *Monsieur chasse! (Monsieur Has Gone Hunting)*, establishing himself as the most popular playwright of the boulevard theatre.

1894: Wrote *L'Hôtel du libre échange (Paradise Hotel)*

1899: Wrote *La dame de chez Maxim (The Lady from Maxim's)*, which some critics consider to be his best play.

1907: Wrote *La puce à l'oreille (A Flea in Her Ear)*, the Feydeau play that is most performed in America.

1909: Left his wife and moved to the Hôtel Terminus, where he lived alone for 10 years.

1914: Wrote his final full-length play, *Je ne trompe pas mon mari (Don't Cheat on My Husband)*.

1916: Divorced his wife, after which he completed only five additional short plays, for a total of 39 published works.

1919: Contracted syphilis, which led to mental illness and a necessary move to a sanatorium.

1921: Died at age 58.

Feydeau is buried in Montmartre Cemetery in Paris

Script for Georges Feydeau

Dono

On Dec 5 of 1862 Georges Feydeau was born in Paris to Ernest Feydeau, a well-known writer and scholar, and Lodzia Zelewska! Though there is no proof, many sources say that he was rumored to be the biological son of Napoleon III. At the age of six his father took him to see a play. When he returned home, he quickly went to his room to write his own play. His father was so impressed that he asked the governess to not bother him with his daily studies because he had already written a whole play! Georges quickly found that this was a good way to put off his academic studies.

Landon

Feydeau writings started as salon comedies, short scenes or monologues, that would sometimes be performed by Feydeau himself. According to many accounts he was not a good actor by any means. He almost gave up playwriting to be an Actor at the Theatre du Vaudeville to pay his bills. But instead, a friend lent him the money, he went gambling, and won. So he did not become an Actor at the Vaudeville.

Dono

Feydeau's first professional play was called *Love and Piano*. Though it was short, it demonstrated the mistaken identity that would consume his works for years to come. However, his first major success was in 1886 entitled *Tailleur pour Dames*, or *A Gown for His Mistress*, or *Love by The Bolt*. Many different titles, depending on the translator.

READING FROM LOVE BY THE BOLT

Scene number one

Bassinet

Ah, my friend. I've just had quite a shock. I'm on the trail of my wife, you know. Someone said there was a Madame Bassinet living near here and I...

Molineaux

Yes, yes! Tell me about it later.

Bassinet

No! Listen. (To Suzanne) You too, Madame. I have no secrets. Of course, it was not she, but a perfect stranger. I said to her... I said, "I beg your pardon, Madame, I was looking for a

lady.” For some reason she was insulted. She said, “Whatever would you do with a lady?” Can you imagine? I don’t understand.

Aigreville

(Entering suddenly) Ah! This must be the place.

Moulineaux

Good God! The battle-ax... here?

Suzanne

Another one! It’s a convention!

Aigreville

(Sees Bassinet) I’ve come to see the apartment.

Bassinot

(Rises to meet Aigreville) But I told you. It’s already rented.

Aigreville

Rented? But that is not what you told me. (She spots Moulineaux, who has been trying to avoid being seen) Moulineaux!

Moulineaux

(Amiably) In the flesh, dear mother.

Aigreville

(She has seen Suzanne) And who are you, may I ask? (To Moulineaux) What is she doing here? I have a right to know.

Moulineaux

But, my dear mother...

Aigreville

(Interrupting) So, you refuse to answer. Then don’t be surprised if I have my suspicions... which I do!

Moulineaux

What? (With aplomb, indicating Suzanne) She lives here... and she is my patient! Aigreville registers doubt) Is that not so, my dear? (Suzanne turns quickly towards Aigreville, gives her a quick nod and turns back)

Aigreville

(Realizing her faux pas) Of course, of course. I never doubted it, dear lady.

Suzanne

(Playing the hostess) And now, to whom do I have the honor...

Aigreville

My dear, do forgive me... I was looking for...

Suzanne

Yes, well. I can spare this much...(Gives her a few coins)

Aigreville

(Flabbergasted) She gives me money?

Molineaux

(Enjoying himself) Yes, well, surely you've taken money in other... houses.

Bassinet

(Aside) Well, how about that? The old bag has a sideline. (He laughs lecherously)

Aigreville

(Giving him the coins) I was not looking for money, I was looking for a house...that is, an apartment. (Moulineaux, chuckling, is about to pocket the coins; Suzanne indicates the money is hers; Moulineaux returns the coins)

Suzanne

Well? (Indicates to Moulineaux that he should introduce Aigreville)

Moulineaux

(To Suzanne) Must I? (Suzanne vigorously gestures that he must indeed) Madame Aigreville, my mother-in-law. (To Aigreville) Madame Aubin, Madame Suzanne Aubin.

Aigreville

(Acknowledging the introduction) My son-in-law, he takes care of you?

Suzanne

Not as much as he like to! That is, yes, he does; and my husband too.

Aigreville

I'm glad he's treating you both. What does your husband have?

Suzanne

Not much! (Starts to giggle)

Moulineaux

(Jumping in) He has a terrible skin condition - uh - rhinoceroso doloroso - brought on by pregnancy...

Aigreville

Pregnancy? Her husband?

Moulineaux

Not his, hers!

Aigreville

(To Suzanne) You are a mother, then?

Suzanne

(Shocked) Certainly not.

Aigreville

What? Not his... not hers... then...

Molineaux

(Quickly) It was really quite extraordinary. It was written up all in the journals. Her husband imagined the whole thing. He actually thought he was pregnant. Of course, when he found out he was not... well, you know... the terrible shock... the emotional strain... well, his blood pressure shot up and up and behold, rhinoceroso doloroso --- third stage!

Aigreville

Third stage? How perfectly dreadful!

Molineaux

Yes! Well, now if you'll just leave me to my patient...

Aigreville

Of course. I was just going. If my daughter comes, tell her I was here, will you?

Molineaux

(Walking her to the door) Certainly, dear mother. (He goes to embrace her and sees Aubin in the hall) (Aside) Oh my God, the husband. (He drags Aigreville back into the room)

Aigreville

What are you doing? Let me go! Let me go, I say! You are a beast!

Molineaux

No, no! This way dear, Mama. (Leading her towards Down Right door) (To Suzanne) It's your husband... he's coming up the stairs! He's back!

Suzanne

(In a flurry) Good Heavens! What to do?

Aigreville

What's wrong? Who is it?

Moulineaux

(Frantic) Nothing, nothing. Another patient! Terrible condition! You mustn't see. You can't look at him. Go in there with Madame. (He pushes them both to the doorway Down Right)

Bassinet

(Who has been enjoying the whole incredible scene) Shall I go in there, too?

Moulineaux

No, no! You stay here and talk to this gentleman... He will ask for Monseieur LeHots. That's me! (Bassinet laughs hysterically) Now listen to me. Tell him I'm busy... tell him anything... tell him I'm in a conference with the... with the queen of Sheba or whatever... Anything you wish... as long as I don't have to see him. (He's scurries into the room Down Right)

Bassinet

Another bore, eh? I know about bores. I'll handle him.

Aubin

(Bursting in) I'm back! Is Monsieur LeHots here?

Bassinet

(Who has had his back to Aubin) He's not available. (Turns to Aubin)

Aubin

Oh, the doctor! (Referring to Bassinet)

Bassinet

You, the doctor! You know then? Why did you ask for Monsieur LeHots?

Aubin

I was not expecting to see you. Are you taking care of Monsieur?

Bassinet

Only because he takes care of me.

Aubin

Surely, your services are not free!

Bassinet

(Aside) What is he talking about?

Aubin

What's wrong with Monsieur?

Bassinet

Oh, you noticed it too. Personally, I think he's demented... or over-sexed. I'm not sure which.

Aubin

Really? What did you recommend?

Bassinet

Cold showers! In either case, that's the only remedy!

Aubin

Speaking of remedies...while I have you here... My blood does not circulate properly. I have frequent nosebleeds... and...

Bassinet

Really? How messy!

Aubin

I mentioned this to your butler and...

Bassinet

My butler? (Aside) I don't have a butler. Is he crazy, too?

Aubin

Yes, And he gave me very strange advice.

Bassinet

Why would you seek medical advice from a butler? (Not waiting for an answer)
Personally, I believe in massage.

Aubin

I tried that. It didn't help

Bassinet

You obviously did it wrong. You must choose a big, burly masseur. Then you get him to undress, lie on a table and you massage him vigorously - as hard as you can - for an hour. If your blood still does not circulate, you need a transfusion.

Aubin

I see! I was doing it backwards! Thank you! I'll try it.

Dono

After this successful play, the author experienced several flops. His next seven plays were considered "half-successes". SO what does he decide to do, Landon?

Landon

He decides to take a break! In 1890 Feydeau decides to go study the writers who had succeeded before him in Farce and Vaudeville.

Dono

As you do. So in 1892, after he studies under these writers, he has two NEW plays! *Monsieur Chasse*, or *The Happy Hunter*, and *Champignol in Spite of Himself*. He submitted both to the Palais-Royal but they only accepted *The Happy Hunter*. In fact, they advised Feydeau to...how do I put this nicely..

Landon

Destroy *Champignol* immediately, burn it to ashes, throw the ashes into the ocean, then set the ocean on fire too.

Dono

They did not like it. But he was happy, I mean they accepted one of his plays. But this other theatre, which was about to close its doors forever (due to a series of failed plays) picked up *Champignol*! It was actually more successful than *The Happy Hunter* and for about sixteen years he would write a new play every year or two and would quickly become a very popular playwright in France and abroad.

Landon

Didn't he get married before that?

Dono

Well, yes. But, honestly, it wasn't that important. It was said that Feydeau's plays mirrored his own marriage, which was not a good one.

Landon

In 1896 he wrote *An Absolute Turkey*. This is about halfway in his career. Not chronological, but when it comes to the number of plays. He wrote large amount towards the beginning of his career, and fewer as he aged.

READING FROM ABSOLUTE TURKEY

Scene number two

Redillon

I'm so sorry. He's an old retainer. Part of the family. His mother was Papa's wet nurse. So we are milk rather than blood relations.

Armandine

Really.

Redillon

He's sort of a wet uncle.

Armandine

He's much more familiar with you than you are with him.

Redillon

Well, so I should think. He was present at my birth. I wasn't at his.(Yawning) Oh Lord, I'm so tired.(He stretches out on the sofa)

Armandine

Oh, my poor Earnest. Not exactly a record holder, are you?(She goes over to him)

Redillon

I didn't know we were trying for a medal.

Armandine

(Embracing R) You'll do all the same.(She kisses him) My kisses seem to bore you!

Redillon

(without conviction) No!

Armandine

(Sitting down) Yes, they do. Already.

Redillon

No, no. But, look, after all...(imploringly) Let's have a rest!

Armandine

Ah, that's typical! Men! They're only keen the night before.

Redillon

Or two days later!

Armandine

(Looking at a watercolor on the wall) This is nice. Does this house belong to you?

Redillon

That? That's a capitol in Rome.

Armandine

I thought Rome was the capital. Oh! Darling!(She embraces him)

Scene number three

Gerome

Not again! I beg you, madam, have pity.

Armandine

Do you think there's something wrong with him?

Gerome

Just look at him!

Redillon

I'm going to throw you out you know!

Gerome

I don't care. I won't go. Here, drink this.(G breaks an egg into a glass of wine)

Redillon

Oh no.

Gerome

Drink it!

Redillon

Oh! Really! I need the patients of assent!(He takes the glass)

Armandine

What is that?

Gerome

An egg.

Armandine

What?

Gerome

An and egg in port wine.(In a low voice) For pity's sake, madam, remember that he's still a child.
He's only 32.

Redillon

What are you whispering about?

Gerome

Nothing, nothing, nothing.

Armandine

(Teasing) We have our own little secrets.

Gerome

Nothing to do with you!

Redillon

(He drinks down the egg) Excuse me! Has anyone called?

Gerome

Oh yes. First there was Pluplu.

Armandine

Pluplu's been here?

Gerome

Yes. She was very insistent.

Redillon

What did you say?

Gerome

That you got your mother here. She wanted to wait, so I told her that when you got your mother here, she usually stayed three or four days.

Armandine

Well done. Thank you.

Gerome

And then Monsieur Mondor arrived.

Armandine

Mondor Wait now, Mondor Mondor...

Redillon

No, no, you wouldn't know him. He's too old for it!

Armandine

Ah!

Redillon

He's an antique dealer. His shop's in a flat across the Landing. So sometimes, if he has a bargain...

Gerome

He's got something new to show you. A very rare piece he said. Chastity belt

Redillon

Ah! Is that all?

Gerome

That's all.(The doorbell rings) Don't move, I'll go.

Redillon

I have no intention of going. If it's a lady, I'm not here.

Gerome

No need to tell me that!(He exits)

Armandine

Yes, we are not here! It might be pluplu again and there'd be a scene. Not for me... I don't like violence.(she runs towards the bedroom)

Redillon

Where are you going?

Armandine

I must get dressed. And if it is her. Goodbye! I'm off!

Scene number four

Gerome voice

No madam, he's not at home! Yes, I'm quite sure.(Putting his Head around the door) It's another one. Get lost!

Redillon

Let's go.(They exit to the bedroom)

Gerome

(Opening the door) There, madam, see for yourself, if you don't believe me.

Lucienne

(entering) Nobody!

Gerome

I tell you he isn't here.

Lucienne

Indeed! Say it's Madam Vatin who wishes to speak to him.

Gerome

Madam Vatin! The wife of Monsieur Vatin? The friend he visits so often?

Lucienne

Exactly.

Gerome

Oh, then that's quite different! I beg your pardon, madam. I took you for tart!

Lucienne

Eh?

Gerome

(Shouting at the bedroom door) Ernest! It's Madam Vatelín!

Redillon voice

What did you say?

Gerome

It's Madam Vatelín!(To L) Here he is.

Redillon

(Rushing in, now in his dressing gown) It's not possible! You! Here. In my home! How?

Lucienne

Does that surprise you? Ah well... Me too!

Redillon

(to G) Tell the person in there that I'm sorry I won't be back because some important business has come up.(Lowering his voice) Make up what you like. And once she's finished dressing, show her out.

Gerome

Understood.(He knocks on the bedroom door)

Armandine Voice

Don't come!

Gerome

Right you are!(He goes in)

Scene number five

Redillon

You! You, here!

Lucienne

Yes me!... You must of heard?

Redillon

No!

Lucienne

What! While as I'm here, you should be able to guess.

Redillon

What?

Lucienne

Last night I caught my husband in "In flagrante delicto". Committing adultery.

Redillon

No!... My God! So you've come here to make love with me!

Lucienne

I always keep my word!(R realizes the implications)

Redillon

Ah! Lucienne! I'm so happy! Do whatever you like with me! Take me! I'm yours!

Lucienne

No, excuse me. I should be saying that to you.

Redillon

Yeah that's what I meant.

Dono

In 1899 he wrote his most famous play, *The Girl from Maxim's*. Maxim's was a....restaurant? Like imagine Red Lobster but with more prostitutes. Kings and other visiting royalty would come here to "wine and dine" and to be entertained by the most sought after and expensive courtesans.

Landon

Donovan...watch your language. There are children present.

Dono

Well, it is thought that it was AT Maxim's that Feydeau observed all of the bed-swapping antics that he wrote about in his plays.

Landon

In this play, he uses more comedy of manners, as opposed to his usual mistaken identity. This kept audiences interested in his plays. Also, it had a fully functional prop called the "Ecstatic Chair".

Dono

So, basically he uses this actual "Ecstatic Chair" that this Professor Moutier invented. But Moutier got upset because "the silly use of his invention discredited him as the inventor". So Feydeau changed the name of the chair and the inventor in the play. But he still got sued.

Landon

But 10 years later, in 1909, he leaves his wife. They don't get divorced for another 7 years, but he leaves to go stay at Hotel Terminus for another 10 years. All alone. Just him and a bunch of really expensive paintings and perfume.

Dono

He only writes five more plays in his lifetime. One of which we will read from now.

READING FROM TOOTH AND CONSEQUENCES

Vildamour

Aaaay! Aaa-aaa-aaaay!

Follbraguet

It's all right. All right... Just a little more now. Open wide.

Vildamour

Aaa-aaa-aaaay!

Follbraguet

Drilling away. Don't even think about it. Try and think of something pleasant.

Vildamour

Grunting through the gag, just barely comprehensible. Gak-ee-vee fuh oo kuh fay! ("That's easy for you to say!")

Follbraguet

Keep your head still. Please... Now open wide... It doesn't hurt a bit. Believe me.

Vildamour

Louder. Aaaaaay!

Follbraguet

You'll see. When it's going to hurt, I'll tell you. Don't worry. *He stops and changes the burr on the drill.*

Vildamour

As before. Frankf uh waw! A kahnk waik! ("Thank a lot! I can't wait!")

Follbraguet

All right now. Open wide... Good. Now just relax. This time it's going to hurt a little.

Vildamour

Terrified. Haaa?

Follbraguet

See? I'm not trying to fool you... (Vildamour *desperately shakes his head from side to side.*)
Please! Keep your head still! I told you...

Vildamour

Worn out. Ho gik... Ho gik uh ngi-ik! Fuh gaw fake, ho gik! ("Hold it... Hold it a minute! For God's sake, hold it!")

Follbraguet

Just a little more now. We're almost finished. It's nothing... nothing at all...

Vildamour

Aw gnaw! Ngaw fuh oo! Oo kahnk fee ik, gang ik ("Oh no! Not for you! You can't feel it, damn it!")

Follbraguet

Mechanically agreeing. Yes, that's right... I know...

Vildamour

Ik feev ngike oor gri-i froo ngy graign! Froo ngy haw gaw-gi! ("It feels like you're drilling through my brain! Through my whole body!")

Follbraguet

I know... I know...

Vildamour

Gaw-ga koo-fake! A gnike kuh gek ngy hangv aw guh fung-uv-uh-gikf hoo ing-veng-kug ik! ("Goddamn toothache! I'd like to get my hands on the son of a bitch who invented it!")

Follbraguet

I know...

Vildamour

A hag wung uh kuh-koo uh eev uh-gaw, guh ik wuv nguhsing ike gif! ("I had one a couple of years ago, but it was nothing like this!")

Follbraguet

Yes, I know... (*About to begin drilling again.*) All right now, open wide.

Vildamour

Fuh gaw fake! Ngaw guh gri uh-geng! ("For God's sake! Not the drill again!")

Follbraguet

Just once more. A little touch for good measure. (*Drilling.*) See? You can hardly feel it, now can you?

Vildamour

Aaaaaaaay!

Follbraguet

Still drilling over Vildamour's groans. It's got to be done if you want to save the tooth... Open... Open wide... There! That's not so terrible, is it? Every day like this for a week, and I bet you'd get to like it.

Vildamour

With a desperate look, even louder. Aaaaaay! Aaaaaay! Aaaaaaaay!

Follbraguet

Don't worry, I'm only joking!... All right, there we are. All finished... *(He keeps on drilling.)* All finished...

Vildamour

Aaaaay!

Follbraguet

There!

He finally stops

Vildamour

Starting to get up, sighing. Ah!

Follbraguet

Pushing him back down. Not yet. I'm not through.

He lights a little alcohol burner

Vildamour

Aghast. Oo keek fay-ing "Aw fi-if, aw fi-if," guh oo ngo fkok! (You keep saying 'All finished, all finished,' but you don't stop!")

Follbraguet

Heating a rubber bulb over the flame. This won't hurt. Just a little hot air... Now open up nice and wide. *(Vildamour winces with each jet.)* See?

Vildamour

Ugh! Af aw-fi! (That's awful!)

He begins to close his mouth

Follbraguet

Quickly. No, no! Open! Open! Don't close until I tell you! *(He prepares a cotton swap, dips it into a vial of liquid, and plugs it up into the tooth.)* Fine! That wasn't so bad, now was it? *(He undoes the rubber gag, removes the saliva-pump, and hands Vildamour a small glass of mouthwash.)*
Spit out!

Vildamour

Rinsing his mouth a few times. Whew! I wouldn't want to go through that again!

Follbraguet

Moving to his desk. Don't be silly. It's all in the mind. It only hurts if you let yourself think so... Well now, we'll leave the medication in for a day or two. Then you'll come back and we'll put in the filling. *(Flipping through his appointment book.)* Let's see what my appointments look like...Hmmm...How about the day after tomorrow? Say five o'clock? Are you free?

Vildamour

Day after tomorrow? Five o'clock?...No...no, there's this man I have to see...

Follbraguet

Well then... *(About to look for another time.)* How about...

Vildamour

Never mind. That's all right... He's coming to collect a bill. He can go whistle for it!

Follbraguet

Oh? If you're sure... *(Jotting down the appointment)* February the eleventh, five o'clock, Monsieur Vildamour. There! You won't forget...

Vildamour

Me? Forget an appointment? Never!...Look, if I remembered when somebody's coming to collect a bill... *(He pauses.)* Five o'clock, the eleventh... *(He pauses again, putting his hand to his cheek.)* You know, Doctor, this tooth is still killing me.

Follbraguet

Waiting for him to leave, indifferently. Right, right...

Vildamour

I mean, it hurts like the devil.

Follbraguet

Nodding. Right...

Vildamour

It really does.

Follbraguet

Right, right...

Vildamour

A little piqued at Follbraguet's apparent lack of concern. But it's killing me, Doctor. Is that all you can say?

Follbraguet

That's all I can say because it's perfectly normal. After all that drilling... It takes time to settle. Give it about fifteen minutes. It should start to let up.

Vildamour

Aha?

Follbraguet

Ringing for the butler bell as he speaks. Of course, if you keep having trouble, don't hesitate to come back. I'll manage to fit you in.

Vildamour

Thank you, Doctor. I appreciate that. There aren't many like you, believe me. It's like I always tell my friends: "My dentist is a prince. He's one of a kind!... And painless? Absolutely painless!"

Follbraguet

Flattered. And what do your friends say to that?

Vildamour

They usually say: "So is mine."

Follbraguet

Taken aback. Oh? Well..

LANDON

Three years after this last play was written, 1919, he contracts syphilis and quickly loses his mental abilities. He is confined to a sanatorium and never leaves until his death in 1921.

Dono

During his time in the sanatorium, sometimes he would say that he himself was Napoleon III. Though this is a sad note to end on, in such a short life, only 58 years, Feydeau made many people laugh!

Landon

Some thought of him as the best French writer of comedy since Moliere!

Dono

And he was a forerunner of Absurdist Theatre! End of Presentation.

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