

**Des Courtes Lignes de Courteline**  
**By Georges Courteline**  
**Melbourne French Theatre**  
**La Maison de Maitre, 203-205 Canning St Carlton, season ended**

THE work of French satirist Georges Courteline (1858-1929) is rarely performed in the English-speaking world. Translations are hard to come by. This adaptation of four short comic sketches, performed in French with English surtitles, attempts to reclaim the dramatist's wit for modern audiences.

Beyond the frisson of stage French and some droll buffoonery, it doesn't have much to recommend it. Bureaucracy was a recurrent target of Courteline's pen. In *Monsieur Badin*, a malingering public servant (Eddy K. Fatha) engages in a game of cat and mouse with his boss (Michael Bula) over work attendance.

Badin never bothers turning up, but he never runs out of excuses either.

In contrast, *Une lettre chargee* has a female postal worker (Helene Kalma) wreaking revenge on a boorish pen-pusher (Bula). The man has come to collect a registered letter, doesn't recognise the lady behind the counter from social occasions, and reveals he has the hots for her sister. Unluckily for him, he hasn't brought his ID.

The remaining shorts also feature battles of the sexes: *L'Extra-Lucide*, in which a gullible husband seeks a clairvoyant's help to find his missing wife (after she went out to buy onions and never returned); and *Avant et Apres*, which satirises the behaviour of men and women before and after sex.

It might have been better to attempt to periodise these works. Modernising the text into contemporary French idiom without altering the sexual politics seems odd, not to mention chauvinistic.

Cameron Woodhead The Age 21 December 2011