Introduction

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Modern drama is considered to have originated in France. The first theatre in Europe to be written in the vernacular as opposed to Latin, medieval French theatre flourished around a millennium ago, at the time when *Le Jeu d'Adam* (*The Play of Adam*), the oldest complete European play to be preserved, was performed. Staged in churches, graveyards, town squares and taverns, theatre was integral to civic life in France. A thousand years later it is only a slight exaggeration to say that it is harder to get tickets for the Avignon Theatre Festival, one of the world's largest, than for the Rolling Stones' farewell tour. Not only during the festival season but throughout the year, theatres in France are full. In spite of predictions that first the radio, then television and then the Internet would kill theatre off, 'auditoriums are still full' in the words of Éric Ruf, director of the Comédie-Française, the world's oldest continually performing theatre company (see the interview with Éric Ruf in Chapter 20 in this volume).[1]

For a millennium theatre in France has had an impact well beyond its borders, providing the English language with the medieval word farce, the early modern word role, and the modern term mise-en-scène. The seventeenth-century author and actor-manager Molière, one of the world's most produced playwrights as Martial Poirson remarks in this volume (Chapter 5), is single-handedly responsible for launching European-style playwriting in North Africa, where he was known as 'Sidi Molière' (Fertat, 2013). His reach also stretched to the Middle East where, for example, he featured in the repertoire of Iran's first national theatre (Gaffary, 2008: 945). In the twentieth century the theories of the messianic performer and theorist Antonin Artaud transformed the course of theatre, profoundly impacting the work of the Living Theater, Patti Smith and Laurie Anderson in the United States, Marina Abramovic and Sarah Kane in Europe, Dieudonné Niangouna in Africa. For a millennium theatre has been central to cultural life in France; and theatre has been a significant French export.

This collection of essays seeks to testify both to the vital part theatre has played in French culture for over 1,000 years, and to the genders, ethnicities and classes that have had to wait in the wings of theatres, and of theatre criticism.

Theatrophilia

For nearly a millennium, theatre has constituted a pillar of French public life. This historical overview affords a glimpse of the near dizzying array of forms that theatre in France has taken, one that is brought into broader and sharper focus by the ensuing chapters.

As in other places around the world, the first theatrical performance in France evolved out of ritualistic or religious music, song, dance and narrative (Viala, 2005: 29). The dramaturg and scholar Bernard Faivre opens the encyclopaedic *Le Théâtre en France* by describing a scene that best reflects France's first theatre: 'Three bearded women slowly cross the nave of the church' (1992: 17–19).[2] This is the tenth century. The 'bearded women' are in fact three monks, each holding a palm frond and advancing towards a tomb in a church to meet a fourth monk, who plays an Angel. It is Easter. The men are enacting the *Visitatio sepulchri*, in which the Three Marys visit Jesus Christ's tomb from where, the Angel tells them by showing them it is empty, the Messiah is risen. As Faivre highlights, this liturgical drama included four characters. It contained stylized movements, as the Three Marys advanced slowly as if seeking something. It contained stage properties, namely the palm frond. In addition, the space was dramatized, given that the church nave represented Christ's tomb. Finally, and importantly, an audience, composed of the congregation, was present. The *Visitatio sepulchri* transformed a ritual enacted by officiants who, previously, would narrate a biblical story, into a theatrical event where scenes were acted out (Faivre, 1992: 20). By the end of the fourteenth century, explains Faivre, this single scene would be complemented by others from the Bible including the miracle of the Virgin's immaculate conception, or else by events from the lives of saints, thereby rendering the representation of time and space gradually more sophisticated. Increasingly, liturgical drama would solicit not only the audience's suspension of disbelief but also their emotional investment, as an affective complicity between performers and spectators developed (Faivre, 1992: 25). The scale of these performances accelerated, as discreet acts in churches evolved into large-scale events known as mysteries, the most high-profile being the passion, in which Christ's life and death would be staged. By the sixteenth century

mysteries were lavish and spectacular, cost vast fortunes, took up to a year to prepare, and lasted for days, even weeks.[3]

Emerging from the twelfth century onwards and in parallel with sacred drama, explains Faivre, profane forms of performance were also staged in churches. Notable among these were the 'fête de l'âne' (donkey festival) and 'fête des fous' (feast of fools) where, in a carnivalesque reversal of social hierarchy, mass would be performed in honour of a donkey; or the humble would be venerated (Faivre, 1992: 30). Whilst these performances were being staged in churches and graveyards, storytellers were hosted in town squares and taverns – buildings dedicated specifically to theatre rarely existed before the end of the sixteenth century. Given that most literary forms, including poems, songs and tales were predominantly oral, audiences would listen to professional storytellers, who usually sang, whilst simultaneously entertaining their audiences with dance, acrobatics and most notably juggling (Faivre, 1992: 38–46). Whereas the first juggler-storytellers were itinerant, princes and nobles began to employ them as official court minstrels. This was the case in Arras in the north-west, which in the thirteenth century was recognized as France's theatre capital (Faivre, 1992: 46). As storytellers became less and less itinerant over the course of the fourteenth century they developed their comedic and satirical monologues into dialogue, which gave shape to emergent farces, in other words to short narrative pieces containing gesture and mime, in which wives cheat on husbands, servants humiliate masters, or the faithful expose priests as corrupt hypocrites.[4] This period also saw the rise of *sotties*, which were short carnivalesque dramas that satirized social vice and political abuse, and were performed by troupes of 'Sots', or fools, mainly in educational colleges.[5]

The chapters in this volume begin when theatre first started to be performed in the vernacular rather than in Latin, at which point the various forms it took grew, multiplied and diversified even further. Until around the fourteenth century, performance had essentially comprised mysteries, passions, miracles (where a character placed in a critical situation is saved by the intervention of a saint[6]) and moralities (allegorical plays intended to teach the moral lesson of Good against Evil), as well as storytelling, ballads, farces, *sotties* and *dits* (short dramatic monologues), and combinations of these genres such as mystery-moralities or morality-farces.

With the introduction of the French language, performance evolved further. As Marie Bouhaïk-Gironès and Estelle Doudet, as well as Charlotte Bouteille and Tiphaine Karsenti state in their chapters in this volume, it is important to remember that French-language theatre itself was a multiple term, given that French was never limited to the borders of the

French kingdom, and was spoken in Switzerland and the Low Countries. Moreover, borders were constantly shifting, as France evolved as a political entity. Finally, before drawing generalized conclusions about a national 'French theatre', local and regional features must be taken into consideration. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, theatre from Paris would have differed considerably from that, for example, in Caen or Toulouse, not least linguistically. *Le Jeu d'Adam*, for example, was written in Anglo–Norman dialect. And theatre in urban centres would have been distinct from that in rural areas (Koopmans, 2008: 13–14). In this collection, therefore, the term 'theatre' must be appreciated according to its manifold manifestations; just as the term 'France' must be understood in a geographically expanded and unstable sense.

Bouteille and Karsenti, as well as Christian Biet in this volume (Chapter 2; Chapter 3) critique the assumption that the period preceding the celebrated Golden Age of theatre, presumed to start in the early decades of the seventeenth century, presented a dearth of activity. In the words of theatre specialist Jelle Koopmans, the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries witnessed 'an unprecedented boom' (2008: 11). Alongside the continued evolution of mysteries and miracles this period also saw the emergence of a modern secular theatre of individualized characters, often inspired by ancient heroes, who were expected to take responsibility for their actions rather than simply submit to divine predestination (Mazouer, 2006: 7). Bouhaïk-Gironès and Doudet remark in Chapter 1 in this volume that over 600 plays were written in Middle French between the 1430s and 1550s. Moreover, as Bouhaïk-Gironès states elsewhere (2012), even though the number of professional actors increased considerably over the course of the seventeenth century, with around 130 itinerant troupes registered by 1715, recent historiography has challenged the idea that theatre prior to this period was non-professional. Owing to the resources at their disposal and the frequency with which they played, the brotherhoods who performed mysteries and miracles can be considered to have been acting companies.

The period immediately following this era was dominated politically and socially by the Wars of Religion (1562–98) – a civil war in which Catholics and Protestants fought for religious and political dominance, drawing literally millions into the bloody conflict. For theatre historian Alain Viala, the fact that French communities were no longer unified by one religion and a single culture of mysteries, miracles and moralities, provided the dynamism that propelled what today is often celebrated as the Golden Age (2005: 45).[7] For his part, Biet in this volume (Chapter 3) believes that the hyperbole and bloodbath displayed on stage as a result of these wars thrust French theatre

into modernity in technical rather than ideological ways. Theatre-makers were now concerned less with the sacred and more with the aesthetic: how exactly can abject torture and violence be represented on stage? As well as producing masterpieces which are now central tenets of the French canon, the greats of this period, namely Jean Racine, Pierre Corneille and Molière, discussed in detail in the chapters by John D. Lyons, Poirson and Jan Clarke (Chapters 4–6 in this volume), participated in theatre's move into the first purpose-built structures. Inside, theatre was reserved for a social elite, and now divorced from 'the people' (Mazouer 2002: 411). Biet explains how even in the *parterre* – the area of the auditorium in front of the stage where audience members stood – tickets could cost two days' wages for an artisan (2016: 303). The high point of French theatre was also its most exclusive.

Despite the perception that theatre during this time was divided strictly into tragedy and comedy, these genres were joined by a variety of forms including courtly *ballet de cour* (dances designed to illustrate the harmony and unity of the nobility, which revolved around the monarch).[8] Moreover, beyond the three royally licensed theatres – at the time these were the Comédie-Française (which from 1680 onwards enjoyed the *privilège*, in other words a monopoly on text-based theatre which other theatres were prohibited from staging); the Théâtre-Italien which had had a permanent residence in Paris since 1640; and the Académie royale de musique, informally known as the Paris Opera – a wealth of theatre activity including comic opera, mime and circus developed in fairgrounds, (as Guy Spielmann describes in Chapter 8 in this volume). Between the 1670s and 1760s *foires*, or fairground theatres, which had evolved out of the juggling-storytelling as well as the farces of earlier centuries, and which now featured acrobatics, tightrope walking, animal and magic shows, operetta and sketches – some satirical – were extremely popular with enthusiasts from across Europe, as well as with all social classes who, in Viala's words, came to 'mix with the riffraff' (2005: 68).[9]

From around the 1710s to the end of the Ancien Régime *théâtre de société* (amateur performance), whose most famous 'star' was Louis XVI's wife Marie Antoinette, who would amuse herself by dressing up as a shepherdess, dominated French cultural life. Indeed, *théâtre de société* enabled women, largely prohibited from contributing as authors or directors to institutionalized theatres, to play an active role as theatre-makers. *Théâtres de société* occupied by far the largest portion of theatrical activity during the period: in Paris alone 160 were recorded (Corvin, 2008: 574) and the term 'theatromania' appropriately describes the era. Since these amateur dramatics were a domestic activity they evaded the attention of the powerful censorship bureau, and did not require the *privilège* in order to include spoken text.[10]

A century later amateur performance, known after the French Revolution as *théâtre d'amateurs*, counted among its famous participants André Antoine, whose Théâtre-Libre (founded in 1887) gave rise to naturalism (Hemmings, 1994: 4–5). From the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century amateur theatre was promoted and supported by political parties, trade unions, schools – particularly during the 1960s – and even faith-based institutions. Despite a decline in amateur theatre in the last decades of the twentieth century, today there are still over 1,700 amateur groups operating across France, under the umbrella of the Fédération nationale des compagnies de théâtre amateur et d'animation.

Théâtromanie was not restricted to France's borders and spread across its colonies, notably to the Caribbean where dramatic traditions imported from France were often combined with the performance contexts of the enslaved population (Leichman and Bénac-Giroux, 2021: 4–5). Specialist in Caribbean theatre Julia Prest's *Theatre in Saint-Domingue, 1764–1791*, an online database of performances in colonial Saint-Domingue – now Haiti – has enabled an appreciation of the impressive range of the repertoire in the early modern Caribbean.

The French Revolution's reaction to theatre, as Sanja Perovic's chapter charts (Chapter 9 in this volume), was dual. On the one hand, owing to theatre's associations with the Ancien Régime and its exclusivity, the revolutionaries mistrusted it. On the other, they saw plays as a tool with which to induct new citizens into the newfound democracy, and theatre became a utopian and didactic celebration of the virtues of the new Republic. Perovic notes that, thanks to the abolition of the *privilège* by the new National Assembly in 1791, all citizens could now enjoy the equal right to establish theatres and stage plays. During the revolutionary decade over 90,000 performances took place in Paris alone, where up to 35 new theatres were established. Across the country, another forty were also built. Rather than plays in the conventional sense, the National Assembly opted for what, Perovic remarks, might now be recognized as 'live art'. Inside theatre buildings, these were participatory events; outdoors, they took the form of vast 'fêtes': revolutionary festivals, which philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau had argued were morally healthier for the general public than stage plays. The Festival of the Federation (Fête de la Fédération), staged on 14 July 1790 to celebrate the first anniversary of the Revolution, included thousands of participants taking part as extras alongside political personalities such as Robespierre, in an event that took on the grandeur and scale of Roman pageantry or major medieval mysteries: against a backdrop of gigantic sets, the vast cast moved together to symphonic musical

compositions.[11] Whilst rupturing the monarchical history of court theatre with civic participation, revolutionary performance also further diversified France's rich tradition of live spectacle (see Bourdin and Loubinoux, 2004; and Poirson, 2008).

Despite the fact that the *privilège* was reimposed by Napoleon in 1806 (it was definitively lifted in 1864), restrictions could not stifle the growth of theatre. Whilst in the seventeenth century 2,000 plays had been recorded, during the eighteenth this number rose to 11,500 (Corvin, 2008: 573). Theatre continued to multiply both in terms of quantity, and variety. Just when the fully commercial *foires* were in decline, the fairground showman Jean-Baptiste Nicolet converted a hall on Paris' Boulevard du Temple into the Théâtre de la Gaîté, and indoor commercial theatre was born. According to F. W. J. Hemmings, theatre in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France represented 'to a greater degree probably than for any other nation, a unique focus of collective interest' (1994: 1). Until the end of the nineteenth century, declares Hemmings, no other form of entertainment, engaging the attention of every class of people throughout the length and breadth of the land, had arisen to challenge theatre's supremacy (1994: 1). To give an idea of the scale of this commercial industry, by the middle of the nineteenth century Parisian theatres staged a vertiginous array of genres examined in detail in chapters in this book by Roxane Martin (Chapter 10) and Florence Naugrette (Chapter 12), including the *drame* (which emphasizes the individual's moral responsibility in the face of tragic misfortune whilst incorporating comedic elements that ridicule vice, ending happily, as would a comedy, rather than a tragedy); romantic melodrama (a form deriving from French *pantomime*, with its exaggerated emotions and stock characters[12]), *féeries* (fantastical plays, also deriving from *pantomime*, which present a moral tale in which poignant stories are conveyed by typecast characters via dance and special effects), vaudeville (light comedies of loosely connected scenes including speech, song and dance), music hall, cabaret, puppet shows, magic, circus acrobatics, erotica and, towards the end of the century, avant-garde poetic theatre, performed in independent Left Bank venues. In the early twentieth century cabaret became a home for avant-garde performance and, as Cristina De Simone recounts in Chapter 13 in this volume, in the 1950s and 1960s cabaret theatres sprang up in bars, cellars and garages, where jazz made space for sound poetry. Not to be forgotten were colonial exhibitions, where objectified, exoticized and often maltreated people from the colonies were paraded both for the general public's delectation, and to highlight the vastness and dominance of the French Empire (Bancel *et al.*, 2008).

Hemmings cites an account published in 1888 by the journalist Pierre Giffard on the social impact of theatre in the nineteenth century. Giffard claims that out of a population of approximately 1,000,000 Parisians 500,000 attended a playhouse once a week, and around 1,000,000 tickets were sold every month, prices having fallen to a relatively affordable level, thereby massively democratizing the art. Giffard concluded, 'the population of Paris lives at the theatre, of the theatre, and by the theatre' (Hemmings, 1994: 1). Whilst Hemmings does not provide statistics for theatre-goers in the rest of France, he testifies that across the country the population was just as 'stagestruck', frequently travelling to the capital to visit shows.[13] Theatrophilia thus 'permeated the French nation over this long period of time' (Hemmings, 1994: 1).

By the end of the nineteenth century, when the commercial *boulevard* theatres were filled with bourgeois *drames* by Victorien Sardou or Alexandre Dumas the younger, or with comedies and vaudevilles by Eugène Labiche or Georges Feydeau, all of which flattered the lifestyles, family values and mores of the governing bourgeoisie, the art had come to be considered either the preserve of a privileged elite, or else a frivolous form of entertainment.[14] Moreover, the rise of competition among commercial theatres again pushed up ticket prices which, from the latter decades of the nineteenth century, had become as unaffordable to the general population as back in the seventeenth century. All this induced the theatre advocate Maurice Pottecher (1867–1960) to declare that French theatre was 'anaemic and corrupt' (quoted in Abirached, 1994: 25). A number of public figures opted to rescue theatre from itself by casting it as a public service, and in 1895 Pottecher founded the Théâtre du Peuple in Bussang in eastern France. His initial gesture towards a popular theatre, an idea first promoted by the French Revolution, was followed by the pioneering initiatives of stage director Firmin Gémier (1869–1933), who sought to bring theatre to the largest number of people; and of the influential writer Romain Rolland (1886–1944), who advocated for theatre to become 'a new art for a new world' (quoted in Rouyer, 1994: 274). France's first theatre for 'the masses', the Théâtre National Populaire (TNP), was founded in Paris in 1920. This vast 3,000-seat auditorium at the Palais du Trocadéro in Paris (rebuilt as the Palais de Chaillot in 1935) was inspired by the utopian socialist goal of the Université populaire, which upheld the humanist, progressist belief that education and the arts could be democratized by taking high culture to the inhabitants of working-class districts and provincial areas which had formerly been deprived of access. The intention was to make art, rather than products for consumption; to decentralize theatre

so that not only Parisians but citizens across the country could see high-quality productions; and to democratize access to this new popular theatre with subsidized prices, group tickets, amenable programme times, cheap cafeterias, and transportation. These policies were intended to enable 'a dramatic communion' between members of the French population, in the words of theatre theorist and former head of theatre at France's Ministry of Culture, Robert Abirached (1994: 26).

After the First World War, theatre was displaced by cinema as the form of entertainment for the masses (Hemmings, 1994: 4). However, with a significant boost from the state after the Second World War theatre rallied, and ticket sales increased twenty-fivefold, whereas cinema attendance rose by a multiple of only fifteen (Hobson, 1978: 5). Since then, despite repeated warnings over the course of the second half of the twentieth century of theatre's demise, the French industry has continued to be one of the largest and most vibrant in the world. To give just one example, in 2005, in a given evening one could choose from among 156 shows in Paris, whereas 2 decades earlier this number was 97 (Roques, 2008: 7). Given the competition from a massive profusion of other entertainments both within the home and across France – television streaming services and tourism being the most notable – it is surely impressive that theatres are, in the main, full. Moreover, rather than being eclipsed by new technologies, as Martin's and De Simone's chapters show, theatre has always been quick to embrace them, examples including the diorama in the nineteenth century and tape recorder in the twentieth. In the twenty-first century, as Ruf explains in his interview (Chapter 20 in this volume), streaming is being used to roll out live and recorded productions to millions of people beyond the 300,000 audience members per year who attend the Comédie-Française in person.

France has more international theatre festivals than any other country. These include one of the world's premier festivals in Avignon (1947–), as well as the Festival d'Automne in Paris (1971–); the Festival Mondial des théâtres de Marionettes in Charleville (1961–); the Festival des Francophonies in Limoges (1984–), which showcases companies, productions and authors form the French-speaking world, as discussed in Judith G. Miller's chapter in this volume; the Festival international de théâtre de rue in Aurillac (1986–), which hosts street performance; and Mimos, the international mime festival in Périgueux (1982–). To give an idea of the popularity of these festivals, in July every year 100,000 people attend around 250 shows in the official Avignon Theatre Festival alone, and the fringe, known as 'le off', founded by André Benedetto's Nouvelle Compagnie d'Avignon in 1947, offers another 1,000 shows (see Wallon 2016 and 2022).

In France's Caribbean territories, the Festival de Fort-de-France (1971–) in Martinique has enabled audiences to enjoy the works of world-famous artists including Jean-Marie Serreau and Ariane Mnouchkine from mainland France, or Wole Soyinka from Nigeria.

The definition of French theatre provided by the *Dictionnaire encyclopédique du théâtre* declares, 'France is undoubtedly the country where the theatrical fabric has never slackened, so to speak: each era, each literary school, each current of thought is punctuated by plays, which are often masterpieces' (Corvin, 2008: 571). Equally, Frank Evrard begins *Le Théâtre français du XX^e siècle* by writing, 'twentieth-century French theatre displays an astonishing richness and variety' (1995: 5). Sylvie Roques, for her part, starts *Théâtres d'aujourd'hui* by describing modern French theatre as 'a proliferation of different aesthetic forms, which indicates the effervescence of this medium' (2008: 5). The glittering display of genres treated across the pages of this volume demonstrates that these critics' claims to the exceptionalism of theatre in France are not without substance: mysteries, passions, miracles and moralities; storytelling, juggling and other *foire* performance; *sotties*, farces and comedy; neo-classical tragedy; nineteenth-century vaudeville, melodrama and *féerie*; naturalist drama; avant-garde performance; sound poetry; art installation and many other forms. Some of these are theatre *stricto sensu*, containing actors portraying fictional roles based on a playscript; others are performance in a far more expanded sense. Many are treated in this book.[15]

Theatre history would oversimplify the French story, were it to draw a linear trajectory from ecclesiastical liturgies to mysteries, from juggling to farce, from medieval miracles to neo-classical theatre (Koopmans, 2008: 11). As Biet's many writings highlight (for example, 2015), the boundaries between these perceived genres are porous, and periods, genres and subgenres have often been coeval, mutually influential and interpenetrating. His, and Bouteille and Karsenti's chapters in this volume illustrate how sixteenth-century tragedy constituted both a Renaissance inspired by the newly adopted Athenian models of tragedy and comedy, and a continuity of older French forms such as mysteries and farces. Biet also argues in his chapter in this volume, that theatre in the sixteenth century was highly influenced by spheres beyond the arts, including the pulpit, lawcourts and scaffold. For her part, Naugrette argues in her chapter that, far from constituting a radical or singular movement, nineteenth-century romantic theatre belongs in a genealogy linking back to neo-classical drama, and forward to late nineteenth-century naturalism and symbolism. Martin's chapter indicates how melodrama, the *féerie* and vaudeville were quintessentially hybrid genres, enabled during the French Revolution by the experimental merging

of text-based theatre with a whole range of physical performance techniques including stage combat, dance, music, mime, song and acrobatics. This fluidity between different arts, genres and disciplines, which has always existed in performance, and was enhanced even further by the acceleration of international cultural exchange throughout the twentieth century, has reached its end point today, as Carl Lavery and Rezvan Zandieh's chapter in this volume illustrates, by applying Artaud's theatre theories to installation art. It is thus fitting that one of the concluding interviews in this collection is with performance artist Phia Ménard, whose art wilfully transcends any boundaries that might be erected between theatre and other aspects of culture. A live artist who combines her circus training with contemporary choreography and conceptual art, Ménard encapsulates the continuities intrinsic in French theatre by providing a direct link with the first juggler-storytellers, whilst at the same time radically rupturing those associations.

French Theatre and the State

If French theatre is characterized by its tremendous quantity and variety, it is also defined by its relationship to the state. No other art in France has been so inextricably intertwined with the nation, and with those who govern it. French authorities have recognized theatre's public status, and have therefore supported, supervised and sanctioned it. As Hemmings states, 'theatre impinged on national life at every level, from the highest to the lowest, and those who steered the ship of state could not afford to neglect it' (1994: 1).

The first theatre in Middle French was patronized by wealthy members of the nobility such as René Duke of Anjou, who spent a handsome sum on mystery plays in the early sixteenth century, as Bouhaïk-Gironès and Doudet explain (Chapter 1 in this volume). In the fifteenth century the monarchy was increasingly uneasy about the fact that it might be targeted by farce, satire and comedy, and tried to marginalize these genres by accusing them of immoral excess and a propensity towards depicting gluttony, lust, infidelity and envy (Mazouer, 2002: 11). To this effect a parliamentary order of 1442 introduced a form of censorship, and in 1540 *sotties* were banned owing to their satirical nature, which on occasions did mock the royal family.[16] Religious theatre, too, came under a certain amount of control and legislation. In 1548 a ruling sought to regulate outdoor mysteries in Paris (Koopmans, 2012), although Bouhaïk-Gironès and Doudet note that they simply went indoors (Chapter 1 in this volume). At the conclusion of the Wars of Religion Henri IV declared, with the Edict of Nantes (1598), that religious sectarianism was not to be discussed, specifying that

theatre – which Biet, and Bouteille and Karsenti note in their chapters in this volume, had become increasingly militant – must make no mention of conflict. In a 'policy of oblivion or forgetting in the name of reconciliation and harmony, ordered by royal decree', playwrights, actors and authors were forbidden from evoking the history and memory of the wars (Biet, 2016: 295). In each century, thus, the state sought to control the stage.

In the mid-sixteenth century the Pléiade group of poets, including Pierre de Ronsard, Joachim du Bellay and playwrights like Étienne Jodelle, were backed by the monarchy in their efforts to elevate the French language to the 'noble' status of Latin. Via literature, French would be formalized and standardized across the entirety of the state, which would become not only linguistically, but also politically and socially unified, as well as nationally superior to its European neighbours (Mazouer, 2002: 12). This precipitated the relative demise of mysteries, miracles and farces, which had often been written and performed according to local or regional linguistic and theatrical traditions. Louis XIII's chief minister Cardinal Richelieu, the statesman most famously responsible for consolidating the French state under the sole rule of the monarchy, integrated literature, theatre, actors and companies into his political design. In theatre historian Charles Mazouer's words, 'nothing managed to disappear under the radar of his surveillance' (2006: 8). Notably, it was Richelieu who in the 1640s promoted the licensing system for troupes performing in public in Paris. By the 1670s this resulted in the prohibition in all Parisian theatres except the Comédie-Française of plays with text. The monarchy thereby now exerted linguistic and aesthetic control over playwriting by deeming which theatre could receive the *privilège* and which could not.

By controlling performance, the monarchy co-opted the arts in the celebration of its own hegemony. In an endeavour to bolster strength and prestige and to impose France's political might and influence across Europe, theatre became an integral part of the crown's arsenal (Canova-Green, Andrews and Wagner, 2013). In 1629 Louis XIII created France's first permanent theatre ensemble, the Comédiens du Roi, which took up residence in France's first formal theatre. Named the Hôtel de Bourgogne, it was within striking distance of the Louvre, the primary residence of the royal court until 1682, as Clarke notes in her chapter in this volume. Built in 1548 as a *jeu de paume* (court for real tennis), the Hôtel de Bourgogne was kitted out with seats and a stage, this kind of retrofitting being the most common way of creating indoor performance spaces at the time.

Illustrating how kings simultaneously smiled and frowned upon theatre, in 1641 Louis XIII signed a declaration enabling the official recognition of the

Comédiens du Roi, on the condition that they reform their morals; otherwise, they would be banned (Denisart, 1773: 434). His successor, Louis XIV, a theatre aficionado, granted a licence for the founding of the Académie royale de musique (1669); the Comédie-Française (1680), which amalgamated the Hôtel de Bourgogne troupe with the Théâtre Guénégaud players; and the Troupe italienne des Comédiens du Roi, known as the Comédie-Italienne (1681–97). Louis XIV granted the latter the right to perform in French as well as in Italian before arbitrarily shutting them down in 1697, another example of how theatre lay prey to the monarch's mood. Often forgotten is the Salle des machines (Hall of Machines), also named the Théâtre des Tuileries, built under Louis XIV between 1660 and 1662 by the architect Louis Le Vau. Situated in the Tuileries Palace next to the Louvre, it held an audience of no fewer than 4,000. Whilst it no longer exists its legacy lives on in every French-speaking theatre in the world in the words *cour* (stage left) and *jardin* (stage right), which literally indicated which side of the Salle des machines faced the courtyard, and which faced the garden.

These theatres simultaneously came under Louis XIV's protection and reciprocally bestowed lustre upon his reign, since theatre in France had 'acquired a veritable social status – a veritable dignity' (Mazouer, 2006: 8). Royal patronage also extended beyond the main Parisian theatres, since the Bourbons subsidized around 10 of the 200 or so travelling troupes.

Louis XVI, the last king to reign before the Revolution that deposed the monarchy, afforded prestige to theatre not only by subsidizing buildings and companies but, in 1784, by formalizing Europe's first acting school. Evolving out of the voice training offered to pupils at the École royale de chant run by the Académie royale de musique, the acting school is known today as the Conservatoire national supérieur d'art dramatique (CNSAD, National Conservatoire of Dramatic Art). To this day the CNSAD shares in the prestigious status of other elite higher education institutions such as the Conservatoire national supérieur de musique et de danse (National Conservatoire of Music and Dance), or the Beaux-arts (National School of Fine Art), and teachers have included Talma (Napoleon's favourite actor). The state and regional governments fully fund CNSAD students, along with those from a dozen other national acting schools, all of whom win places via extremely competitive entrance auditions.

The eighteenth century formalized not only actor-training but also theatre architecture, which had been evolving since the first dedicated theatre was built in 1689. Before this time court plays had been presented either on temporary stages, erected for example in the Palace at Versailles, or else

in adapted *jeux de paume*. Strangely for a country so enamoured with theatre, Renaissance France had no purpose-built buildings, unlike England which boasted the Globe or Swan, or northern Italy which had the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza. By the eighteenth century some of the most prominent designers were building theatres, considered to be the beating heart of modern urban planning. The French royal family who, throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, slotted themselves between various revolutionary republics and Napoleonic empires, illustrated their investment in theatre to the very end: the last ever king, Louis-Philippe (reigned 1830–48), authorized the construction of a number of theatres, amongst them the Théâtre-Historique (1847). He was, like many of his predecessors, a theatrophile, during his reign allegedly seeing over 750 shows staged either at his palaces or in one of the growing number of theatres. The relationship between France's monarchy and theatre was intimate and mutually valuable to the end, establishments and actors benefiting from patronage, and kings enhancing their reputations as cultural guides.

The Revolution overthrew both the Ancien Régime and its influence on theatre. As I have stated the revolutionaries abolished the *privilège*, meaning that commercial theatres were at liberty to produce plays with dialogue. In line with the Declaration of the Rights of Man (1789) and the proclamation of the freedom of expression, the Revolution also abolished censorship. In addition in 1789 the Assemblée constituante decreed full civil rights to members of the acting profession, who had previously been considered 'rogues' or 'prostitutes', and had been at the mercy of theatre managers.[17] With respect to authors, in 1777 an association of writers had been brought together by the playwright Beaumarchais to advocate for their right to a percentage of ticket profits, and in 1791 the National Assembly (in power from 1789 to 1791) formalized this syndicate by decree. In 1829 this formalized association of authors, the first of its kind in the world, was renamed the Société des auteurs et compositeurs dramatiques – SACD – a title it retains today (Besnier, 2017: 12). Whilst apparently maintaining theatre at arm's length the revolutionary government, like the monarchy, played a central role in its shaping both by supporting it and, eventually, by resuming control over it. For a brief period it appeared that state sanctioning had been renounced, but by 1793 it had crept back under the guise of protecting public order (Corvin, 2008: 266).

When Napoleon ended France's fledgeling democracy in 1804 by crowning himself emperor, he, too, sought to control theatre. Returning to pre-revolutionary high-handedness he reinstated the *privilège* via government licences that determined which plays of which genre and cast size were authorized in which theatres; and drastically restricted the

proliferation of commercial buildings (Hemmings, 1994: 3). In 1815 the Napoleonic dynasty was deposed and monarchy was restored, with the coronation of Louis XVIII. But little change was made to Napoleon's licensing system and censorship bureau. However, after the Revolution of 1848 and the founding of the Second Republic, the first elected president, Napoleon III, who subsequently also declared himself emperor (1852–70), definitively abolished the *privilège*. This, and the complete liberalization of theatre in 1871, led to a profusion of new theatres, all competing with one another according to a commercial momentum that continues today. Censorship, for its part, was finally abolished in 1905.

Progressively over the course of the twentieth century, the relationship between art and state was formalized further. During the interwar years the ideal of a theatre for the people, already mentioned in this Introduction, was unofficially rolled out across France by the inspirational and pioneering directors Jacques Copeau and Suzanne Bing (see Fleming, 2020) and their successors, the celebrated 'Cartel' (1927–39) of four directors: Gaston Baty, Charles Dullin, Louis Jouvet and Georges Pitoëff. Copeau, then the Cartel, were joined in their endeavours by other idealists including Jean-Marie Serreau (see Chapter 18 in this volume), Jean-Louis Barrault, and the TNP's visionary director (1951–63) Jean Vilar, who argued famously that theatre must be a school for society (1975: 173). They advocated for state support to be extended beyond the subsidies paid to the three main Parisian theatres, which were now the Comédie-Française, Paris Opera and Opéra comique.[18] Shortly before the Second World War the Popular Front left-wing coalition (1936–8) was the first government officially to declare theatre as a public service which bore educational benefits, and was hence deserving of state funding. It provided state support to the various attempts previously made by Rolland, Gémier, the Cartel and others to increase regional and working-class theatre audiences. Whilst the Popular Front fostered a significant number of young companies, they were in power all too briefly to transform their ideals into concrete support.

By the time of the Liberation in 1945, there was very little theatre left beyond Paris (Bradby, 1991: 7–15).[19] Municipal buildings did exist, but were deprived of any means with which to produce theatre and therefore almost exclusively staged touring shows from Paris. Consequently, the desire to decentralize and popularize theatre was enshrined in public policy. In 1947 Vilar, whose ideals were inspired by Copeau's publication *Le Théâtre populaire* (1941) as well as by the Cartel, was tasked with creating a festival in Avignon: the Avignon Theatre Festival. In 1950 he also took over the TNP, with the express mission to bring theatre to the 'people'. Famously he declared:

> Thank God, there are still some people for whom theatre is a basic food, like bread and wine […]. The TNP is first and foremost a public service. Just like gas, water and electricity. Another thing: deprive the public of Molière, Corneille, Shakespeare, and there's no doubt that the quality of their souls will be diminished […]. Our ambition is therefore clear: to share with as many people as possible what until now has been considered the preserve of an elite […]. If the role of our theatre, of our national theatre, is not to unite the members of an obviously divided society at all costs, nor is it theatre's duty to maintain its quarrels, to underscore its divisions (1975: 173).

During Vilar's mandate as artistic director (1951–63), a staggering five million spectators visited the TNP. Sonia Debeauvais, who served on Vilar's administrative team at the TNP as well as at the Avignon Theatre Festival, was key to establishing a relationship between the theatre and its audiences (see Debeauvais, 2019). Outside Paris, Centres dramatiques nationaux (CDNs), which today number nearly forty, were founded at the instigation of one of the few other women admitted to an executive role at the time, Jeanne Laurent. Working at the Ministry of National Education as director of Theatre and Music, she oversaw the establishment of theatres across the country from Saint-Étienne (1947) in the centre, to Toulouse (1949) in the south-west.[20] In league with communist local councils 'théâtres hors les murs' (extra-mural theatres) were built in the working-class *banlieues* surrounding Paris, for instance the Théâtre de la Commune (1961) founded by Gabriel Garran to the north-east of the city; or the Théâtre Gérard Philipe, rebranded the Théâtre populaire by Jacques Roussillon, in Saint-Denis to the north. In the words of contemporary theatre theorist Marie-Claude Hubert, 'a theatrical life that was previously almost non-existent' was brought to regions outside the heart of the capital (2008: 7).

With the founding in 1958 by Charles de Gaulle of the Fifth Republic, France's first Ministry of Culture was established. Its inaugural head, André Malraux, was committed to building what he called 'cathedrals of culture', known first as 'Maisons de la culture', then 'Centres d'action culturelle', across the length and breadth of France. Echoing Vilar, Malraux declared that just like education, culture would be a basic human right. In an endeavour to support live performance beyond the prestigious venues in Paris, between 1961 and 1971 more than a dozen such 'Maisons de la culture' were constructed, including in Le Havre (1961) and Rennes (1969) in the west, and Chalon-sur-Saône (1971) in the east.

Whilst Malraux's plans never fully materialized because money ran out and cheap theatre membership could no longer be subsidized, France today still boasts six national theatres: the Comédie-Française, Théâtre de l'Odéon (since 1971), Théâtre National de Strasbourg (since 1972), Théâtre

National de Chaillot (since 1975, now dedicated mainly to dance), Théâtre National de la Colline (since 1988) and Théâtre National de l'Opéra-Comique (since 2004). Artistic directorship of national theatres is a prestigious position, and appointments are made by the Ministry of Culture. In addition, France has nearly forty CDNs, all of which are recipients of generous national, regional and municipal subsidies. The national theatres and CDNs (all of which often produce shows that tour nationally); Maisons de la culture; Centres d'action culturelle; Centres de développement culturel (all 76 of which were renamed 'Scènes nationales' in 1992); 120 locally subsidized theatres; and 50 or so theatre festivals, are all subsidized by the Direction des théâtres et spectacles, which is part of the Ministry of Culture, as well as by regional and municipal governing bodies.[21] 'The result is that today no French town of any size goes without a municipal theatre or Maison de la culture', wrote David Bradby, who was the UK's leading specialist in French theatre (2002: 288). Indeed, Phia Ménard, whose interview concludes this volume, credits decentralization with the fact that she was able to access culture in the provincial town where she grew up, despite not coming from a particularly educated background.

Whilst the remit of this book is limited to mainland France it is important to note that in the 1970s and 1980s decentralization reached the French Caribbean, notably Martinique where the Office municipal d'action culturelle was founded in 1971 (later becoming the Service municipal d'action culturelle, or SERMAC). In the 1990s theatre was finally decentralized to Guadeloupe, with the founding of the Archipel theatre (see Lee, 2021).

Not only buildings and institutions but also artists receive generous financial support. In addition to centralized subsidies, over 1,000 independent companies (Wallon, 2016a), which have largely replaced the repertory troupes previously attached to theatres, can sign contracts with their host region or city, affording them time and security to develop ideas and practices.

France is one of the very few countries in the world (along with Belgium and Switzerland) to grant unemployment benefits to actors, stage technicians and other theatre-makers whilst they are in between jobs, in recognition of the fact that they are unlikely to work year round. To this end since 1968 France has afforded theatre employees the opportunity to become 'intermittents du spectacle', who receive benefits as long as they work a certain number of hours per year (Menger, 2008). Moreover, when students graduate from two of the national conservatoires they come under the aegis of the Jeune Théâtre National, meaning that for three years their salaries are subsidized by the government. Since they cost less to employers they are more likely to be cast than their counterparts who have attended less prestigious acting schools. This could be seen as further marginalization

of those who have not benefited from a privileged education, and who are likely to originate from less advantaged backgrounds.

In 1981 the newly elected socialist government of François Mitterrand and his minister of Culture, Jack Lang, increased government support for the arts by doubling grants between 1982 and 1986.[22] In 1993 the culture budget attained the symbolic figure of 1 per cent of national spending, an aspirational target since the Popular Front. Theatres today are often funded around one third by the central government and another two thirds by regional or local governments, although these proportions vary. The six national theatres receive 100 per cent state subsidies whilst the Scènes nationales receive 45 per cent and the smallest theatres just 20 per cent. Private theatres, mostly based in Paris, also receive state subsidies (Wallon, 2022a), whereas around 100 municipal theatres receive none. It is true that French theatre is increasingly prey to market economics, and that funding is offered mainly to theatre companies that can guarantee their financial viability, bringing Abirached to argue that by the start of the twenty-first century the state had started to disengage itself from theatre (Abirached, 2005). Nevertheless, with a population around the same size as the UK, French theatre receives double the government subsidies.

One might condemn France's investment in playwriting and theatre production in *la francophonie* – French-speaking parts of the world based mainly in France's former empire – for being an extension of a colonizing mission. Miller's chapter in this volume notes that, on the one hand state subsidies benefit France by promoting the international presence of the French language; on the other, a not negligible number of playwrights credit their careers to mentoring and financial assistance provided by the French government.

Not that economic support has always been unfailing. In Chapter 6 Clarke describes how even the Comédie-Française has encountered financial crises over its 350-year history. And in Chapter 17 Joanne Brueton notes that without a penny of funding the Théâtre de Babylone, founded by Serreau in the 1950s, enabled some of the most important playwrights to be staged including the now world-famous 'absurdists' like Eugène Ionesco and Samuel Beckett, as well as important voices from France's then colonies including Aimé Césaire and Kateb Yacine.

But these examples are perhaps the exception rather than the rule. In multiple ways and to various ends for over half a millennium theatre has been an inseparable part of the French monarchy, state, empire and post-colonial nation, all of which have censored, prohibited and banned, but also championed, theatre.

French Theatre and the World

In 1938 the proposal to ask the Cartel to run the Comédie-Française was blocked because a foreigner – one of its members, Pitoëff, was of Russian origin – could not possibly run the 'Maison de Molière', France's national theatre (Bradby and Delgado, 2002a: 3). This gesture towards exclusionary nationalism was vain. Whilst it is an integral component of the nation, French theatre is quintessentially international. Uniting northern and southern Europe, France also acts as a bridge between the European continent and Africa via the Mediterranean; and with its Atlantic coast France looks out towards North and South America. Perhaps owing to its geographical location, for centuries France has been an international crossroads of cultural traffic.

One might say that French theatre was unequivocally transnational at its incipience, since the *théâtre de foire* was associated with commercial activity and trade. Indeed, even dating back to late antiquity performers had come with merchants from across Europe and the Mediterranean, to France (Webb, 2009). With regard to written theatre, Normandy to the west, the Netherlands and Belgium to the north, the Swiss Confederation to the east and Provence in the south, all brought a variety of languages and aesthetics to bear on theatre in France.

'La langue de Molière' has come to be recognized as a synonym for the national language of France. Irony is not lost, however, on the fact that the high point of French 'national' theatre during the seventeenth-century neo-classical period was itself based on ancient Greek tragedy and comedy, terms which themselves had been familiar in France as early as the fourth century. In the sixteenth century these Athenian works, along with Aristotle's *Poetics* and Roman comedies, were translated into French or Italian, having a profound impact on the French Renaissance. In addition, Biet remarks that, whilst responding to the very French context of the political and social devastation wrought by the Wars of Religion, the 'drames sanglants' (theatre of blood) appearing at the end of the sixteenth century, which form the focus of his chapter in this volume, were highly influenced both by the Ancients, for instance the Roman playwright Seneca and by English and Spanish tragedies from the sixteenth century:

> early modern French tragedy appeared in the wake of its European counterparts:
>
> it was only when Italian tragedy managed to theorize horror as one of its constitutive components; when Elizabethan England started to perform and publish the works of Marlowe, Shakespeare and John Ford; when

> Spain, in the *corrals* and in the streets, became acquainted with the passion plays, the *autos sacramentales*, and the *comedias* of the Golden Age, most notably with Lope de Vega, Tirso de Molina and Calderón; when the first Dutch tragedies appeared in Amsterdam, Utrecht and The Hague and then, following the bloodshed of the sixteenth century, when the whole continent sought an outlet for such horror and terror, that French tragedy also began to partake in this violent movement. (Biet, 2019: 22)

Biet demonstrates elsewhere how the late sixteenth-century pastoral tradition was also influenced by trans-European precedents, notably Torquato Tasso and Giovanni Battista Guarini from Italy (2015: 209). Theatre in France has thus always existed as part of an international constellation of genres and styles.

It is well known that from 1658 Molière's company the Illustre Théâtre shared the Hôtel du Petit-Bourbon with the Italian commedia dell'arte company the Troupe de la Comédie-Italienne, hugely popular with Louis XIV as well as with his father Louis XIII. Their celebrated director Tiberio Fiorilli, known as Scaramouche, had an immense influence on the development of gesture and physicality in Molière's acting style and stage production; on French comedy more generally; and in the second half of the seventeenth century, on pantomime. Other aspects of Italian theatre also had a considerable impact in France: *ballets de cour* were an Italian import popularized in the 1580s by Baltazarini Di Belgioioso, who went by the name of Beaujoyeulx. In the eighteenth century, Italian architecture, with its end-on stage–auditorium arrangement and emphasis on a framed scenic illusion, as well as Italian theatre machinery, resulted in what in France is called the 'théâtre à l'italienne': proscenium arch theatre.

Throughout the nineteenth century the influence of Elizabethan playwrights including Shakespeare and Marlowe, as well as of German authors like Goethe and Schiller, played a central part in shaping the romantic dramas of Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas and others examined in Naugrette's chapter in this volume. And during the last decades of the nineteenth century and start of the twentieth, the Belgian symbolism of Maurice Maeterlinck garnered keen interest among avant-garde theatremakers, notably Alfred Jarry. The director responsible for staging Jarry, Aurélien Lugné-Poe, was for his part inspired by Scandinavian playwrights like Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg.

Firmin Gémier, already mentioned, was a committed advocate not only of theatre for the largest number of people, but also of internationalism. In 1926 he established the Société universelle du théâtre, which was officially supported by the League of Nations. With the express mission to unite theatre

professionals from across the world, it brought the iconic Russian director Vsevolod Meyerhold from Moscow. Copeau, too, responded to the internationalist spirit of the day, notably to the works of Swiss stage and lighting designer Adolphe Appia, theatre theorist, designer and director Edward Gordon Craig and Russian director Constantin Stanislavsky, all of whom had a profound influence on the art of stage production in which French makers of melodrama had already demonstrated an interest, as Martin's chapter in this volume shows. Inspired by Copeau, the Cartel produced not only classics but also contemporary international authors including Luigi Pirandello, Anton Chekhov and Eugene O'Neill. In 1957 the Théâtre Sarah-Bernhardt in Paris was renamed the Théâtre des Nations with the express aim of inviting ensembles and productions from across the world, to the delight of French audiences who were able to enjoy the Moscow Arts Theatre, Japanese Noh, Peking Opera, and National Theatre of Mali. In 1983 Mitterrand's government named the Théâtre National de l'Odéon the Théâtre de l'Europe and appointed the Italian director, committed Europeanist and Member of the European Parliament Giorgio Strehler, as its artistic director (Laera, 2017).[23] Strehler invited major European directors including Yuri Lyubimov from the then Soviet Union and Ingmar Bergman from Sweden (both in 1984) to present their distinctive styles, which in turn impacted acting and directing in France.[24] Strehler, who remained at the Odéon until 1990, was proceeded by the Catalan director Lluís Pasqual. In 1982 Lang and Abirached, both already mentioned, founded the Maison des cultures du monde which has been directed since that time by Chérif Khaznadar, and which promotes equitable international cultural exchange. Closer to today directors including the Swiss Christoph Marthaler and Spanish Angelika Lidell have been hugely popular amongst both French audiences and artists. Finally, the first ever professorship of theatre anthropology at the Collège de France – France's most eminent centre for postgraduate study and academic research – was offered in 1997 to the great experimental Polish theatre director Jerzy Grotowski. In certain respects, France's internationalist credentials are impeccable.

Paris' status, until the mid-twentieth century, as a metropolitan colonial centre, inevitably influenced its theatrical culture. Arguably the most internationally influential French theatre-maker and theorist, Antonin Artaud (see Chapter 14 in this volume) was inspired by practices and mythologies from across the world including the Balinese performance he saw at the 1931 Colonial Exhibition in Paris; and Mexican, Indian, Judaic and Iranian traditions. Paul Claudel's astonishing formal innovations originated both in French romanticism and from his contact with dramaturgies in East Asia, where he was posted as a diplomat. For instance, he wrote *Le Soulier de satin* (*The*

Satin Slipper) whilst stationed in Japan between 1921 and 1924. Performance traditions from across France's empire reshaped theatre when French artists went on 'voyages of discovery', and when colonized artists came to the metropolitan centre. In the 1950s and 1960s playwrights like Aimé Césaire from France's overseas Caribbean territory of Martinique and Kateb Yacine from Algeria, both discussed in Brueton's chapter in this volume, held a mirror to murderous colonial practices and discriminatory attitudes, confronting the Hexagon with its imperial past and racist present. Increasingly, migrant and post-migrant artists such as Dieudonné Niangouna, who works between France and the Democratic Republic of Congo, or the choreographer of Senegalese heritage Bintou Dembélé, are confronting French audiences with the atrocities committed during the nation's colonial past, and their fallout today.[25] Miller's chapter in this volume demonstrates this defiance in detail.

French theatre-makers voyaged to colonial empires, and playwrights and directors from across the globe travelled to, and settled in, Paris. France provided a haven for exiles fleeing the turbulence of twentieth-century politics, as well as for those seeking an avant-garde community of thinkers and makers. Gertrude Stein from the United States, Beckett from Ireland, Ionesco from Romania, Arthur Adamov, an Armenian from Russia, Fernando Arrabal from Spain, Copi from Argentina, Eduardo Manet from Cuba, Serge Rezvani from Iran, Georges Schéhadé from Lebanon and Tahar Ben Jelloun from Morocco, are just a few examples of the generations of artists whose residence in France has shaped the experimental playwriting which had already begun to emerge at the end of the nineteenth and start of the twentieth centuries with Jarry's *Ubu roi* (1896) and Guillaume Apollinaire's *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* (1917). With the help of these migrant theatre-makers who were writing in a second language, experimental playwriting consolidated into a new genre, *nouveau théâtre*. This second Golden Age, 'just as outstanding in French theatre as the neoclassical period' (Hubert, 2008: 371), demonstrated how Paris was a theatrical meeting place, as Marie-Claude Hubert describes it. The 'extraordinary effervescence' of this period was thanks, in part, to this confluence of foreign influences (2008: 12).

Not only has France hosted playwrights from across the world but it also has a very healthy translation industry, with the world's only theatre translation institution. The Maison Antoine Vitez, entirely supported by the Ministry of Culture, was based in Montpellier until 2010, then in Paris. It commissions the translation of fifteen foreign-language plays per year and hosts translator residencies, ensuring a steady flow of foreign plays into France.

Directing in France is just as internationalist as playwriting and the most influential foreign visitor was undoubtedly Bertolt Brecht, as Olivier

Neveux's chapter in this volume comprehensively demonstrates. Brecht had been discovered in France as early as 1930, but *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, shown at the Théâtre des Nations in 1954 and 1955 respectively, represented landmark moments. Brecht and the Berliner Ensemble's combination of art and Marxist engagement had a profound influence on directors, most notably Roger Planchon (see Kleber, 2021); as well as on theatre criticism: Roland Barthes, one of the original editors of the journal *Théâtre populaire* (1953–64), along with his colleagues Bernard Dort and Anne Ubersfeld, transformed theatre analysis by identifying theatre as an ideological activity with social and political meaning. Directors from both sides of the Berlin Wall such as Peter Stein and Klaus-Michael Grüber as well as post-reunification theatre-makers like Thomas Ostermeier, have continued to exert a profound influence on French theatre. From further east Polish director Tadeusz Kantor, like his German counterparts, was a frequent feature on France's festival circuits; and from their first visit in 1963 Grotowski's Theatre Laboratory was a huge influence on directing practices (Bradby and Sparks, 1998: xxiv). The fact that in France theatre direction is a distinct art form, as Christophe Triau's chapter in this volume illustrates, is in no small part thanks to the wealth of talent to which France has been exposed owing to the artists it has hosted from across the planet.

The import to France of transatlantic theatre has remained steady since the arrival in the 1960s of the United States companies Living Theater and Bread and Puppet Theatre, who provoked a rethinking of performance space: theatre could return to streets and marketplaces, where it had begun. US polymath Robert Wilson has also been a frequent fixture since he first brought *Deafman Glance* (1971) to the Festival international universitaire de Nancy – France's main international theatre festival (1963–83) founded by Lang, a committed internationalist – and other US companies like Elizabeth LeCompte's Wooster Group have enjoyed enduring popularity.[26] As for Latin America, from the 1970s onwards the Argentinian director Jorge Lavelli, and today the Brazilian director Christiane Jatahy, have brought to the stage international issues like totalitarianism, global justice and migration.

Theatre and performance traditions from beyond the Global North, which began to shape French theatre during the period of the French Empire, continued to hold sway after colonized nations gained independence. The British director Peter Brook, who moved to France in the 1970s, founded the Centre international de créations théâtrales and Ariane Mnouchkine created the Théâtre du Soleil, both of which imported traditions from Iran, Eastern Africa, India and elsewhere. Whereas these two directors, albeit

hugely successful, in some respects exoticized 'oriental' and other 'foreign' cultures, playwrights and directors from the Global South also represent themselves in France, as Brueton, Miller and Clare Finburgh Delijani's chapters in this volume demonstrate with reference to the Caribbean and North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa and Canada. It is important to note that the focus of this book is theatre staged in France, and theatre from the French-speaking world beyond France merits a volume in itself.

Conclusion: Looking Towards the Future

This Introduction began with the image of three bearded men playing the Three Marys. As Derval Conroy's and Clare Siviter and Emmanuela Wroth's chapters illustrate, from the seventeenth century women began to earn themselves a place in theatre not only as actresses, but also as patrons and authors. However, 1,000 years after the first theatrical appearance of the bearded men, men – primarily middle-class white men – still dominate theatre in France.[27] Staging activist interventions wearing false beards in order to call out male-dominated practices, the feminist action group La Barbe (The Beard) publicize the fact that in 2020 only two of the fourteen artistic directors of France's main theatres were women. Moreover, a number of institutions, including two national theatres, did not programme a single woman playwright that season despite the fact that one of them is a new writing venue.[28] Given that women comprise well over 50 per cent of theatre audiences, progress is still needed to address this gender gap.

Not that audiences fare much better in terms of inclusivity. Whilst women do tend to be well represented theatre critic Jean-Pierre Thibaudat wrote in 2012:

> every time I go to the theatre and observe the rest of the audience I notice that it is rarely made up of workers, employees, supermarket cashiers or the unemployed, but is overwhelmingly made up of French people who have few financial problems.
>
> But who pays the largest share of taxes in our country? The middle and working classes.
>
> It might sound a bit caricatured to say it but our cultural system is such that today it is the poor who pay for the leisure activities of the rich.[29]

In her interview Phia Ménard (Chapter 22 in this volume) remarks that even before the Covid-19 pandemic the number of audience members buying yearly subscriptions to a specified theatre had decreased considerably – at the end of the twentieth century an impressive 2 per cent of France's population had membership to a theatre (Donnat, 1998: 253). The

membership scheme tended to result in theatres programming according to their subscribers' preferences. Becoming a closed loop, this model provided financial security for an institution but did little to widen the range either of artists staged, or of spectators entering the building. The winding down of membership is potentially an opportunity to renew both programmes and audiences.

In recent years, representing as broad a demographic as possible both in the auditorium and on stage has become a priority. Hortense Archambault, artistic director (since 2015) of MC93 Bobigny, a Maison de la culture in a *banlieue* on the outskirts of Paris, has gone to great lengths not only to ensure parity between the male and female playwrights, directors and other artists programmed in her theatre, but also to engage the mainly working-class and post-migrant local population both as artists and as audience members. Equally, Claire Lasne-Darceuil, director of the CNSAD (2013–23) introduced an equality charter which states that all pupils must be treated with equity from the point of auditioning to when they graduate regardless of their social or geographical origins, physical appearance, health, disability, religion, ethnicity, perceived 'race', nationality, sexual identity or orientation, or gender.[30] Ending this section of the Introduction with this commitment to inclusion surely points to the increasing openness of theatre in France.

The Chapters

At the same time as contributing new and original knowledge and insights, each chapter in this collection introduces newcomers to the most significant periods, figures and works in the history of theatre in France. Any historian bears the near-crushing responsibility for what to include, and what to omit. This book makes no claim to encyclopaedic exhaustiveness and therefore provides recommendations for further or general reading at the end of each chapter. The aim of the volume is to pay attention to demographics typically marginalized either from theatre production or from theatre history, or from both. To this end chapters by or interviews with Lyons, Clarke, Conroy, Siviter and Wroth, De Simone, Ménard and Magali Mougel foreground the female and queer protagonists, actors, playwrights, performance artists and patrons without whom French theatre simply would not exist. Whether Madeleine Béjart, who co-founded the Illustre Théâtre with Molière; Rose Chéri who ran the Théâtre du Gymnase (1847–61) which was officially directed by her husband; or George Sand, who ran a theatre troupe in the village of Nohant, women have been marginalized or outright

banned from theatre-making, or else written out of theatre history.[31] In this volume, Clarke shows how women were key figures in the running of the Comédie-Française; Conroy recounts how they paid for and protected playwrights, notably women playwrights; De Simone describes how they assisted Artaud in developing his performance techniques and theories. Siviter and Wroth analyse how certain women actors from the nineteenth century negotiated the performance not only of their gender, but also of their disabilities, class, 'race' and religion. Theatre, class struggle and social justice are the driving forces of Neveux's examination of political and militant theatre in France; and popular theatre, attended by working-class audiences, forms the focus of Spielmann's, Martin's and Perovic's chapters. The influence of Jewish culture on French theatre is emphasized not only in Siviter and Wroth's chapter but also in De Simone's, which describes the Yiddish influences that Isidore Isou brought to French sound poetry; and in Lavery and Zandieh's, which engages with Boltanski's visual art, much of which presents his reflections on the Holocaust. Finally, chapters both by De Simone, Poirson, Neveux, Brueton, Miller and Finburgh Delijani emphasize the central contribution made to theatre by colonized subjects, and post-migrants from France's former colonies.

Both the ethics of this book and its openness to contributors' own academic styles place inclusivity at their heart: some chapters provide revisions of historical surveys, whilst others offer close studies of key theatre-makers.

In the first chapter, 'The Performing Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century France: The Making of Theatre', Bouhaïk-Gironès and Doudet counter the perception that 'French medieval theatre' might be either French, medieval or even theatre. Whereas theatre created from the seventeenth century onwards is termed 'modern', activity prior to this period is often portrayed as unsophisticated and non-professional. Bouhaïk-Gironès and Doudet argue for a new approach to the theatre that emerged between the mid-twelfth and mid-sixteenth centuries, which firstly testifies to its rich and varied nature. Second, they decentralize the geographical frame implied by 'French', recounting the French-speaking theatre activity taking place across France's borders. Finally, they describe the sophisticated processes of collaborative performance-making, rehearsal and stage production that evolved during this period, which gave rise to a whole new lexicon of terms for describing practices by playwrights, actors, producers and audience members, many of which are used in European languages to this day.

Bouteille and Karsenti's chapter, 'Drama during the Wars of Religion: A Contextual Approach', also challenges historiographical claims that the theatre created before the seventeenth century was a mere prelude to the

symphony of the neo-classical age. French-language plays written between 1550 and 1600 under the aegis of the Pléiade poets, who were charged with renewing the French language by looking back to classical Greek and Roman writings, form the focus of their study. Despite their classical credentials these plays are best understood not by categorizing them as 'humanist', but instead by situating them within the history within which they were written: the denominational split brought about by the Protestant Reformation of Christianity in Europe, which provoked a seismic upheaval and called into question representation on social, political, even cosmological levels. Whether Protestant or Catholic, explicitly militant or seemingly apolitical, literal or analogical, these plays were inevitably affected by this crisis, otherwise known as the Wars of Religion. Bouteille and Karsenti conclude that by returning to classical antiquity, Renaissance playwrights sought as much to garland their work with greater prestige as to innovate devices capable of recounting their anguished, conflicted, traumatic world.

Like Bouteille and Karsenti, Biet recentres pre-seventeenth-century theatre. In 'Drama before Standardization: The Theatre of Blood', he explains that ahead of the restrictions on theatrical representation imposed in the seventeenth century, sixteenth-century theatre was free to stage macabre spectacles of cruelty and bloody horror, convulsive emotions and transgressive acts. Like Bouteille and Karsenti, Biet is careful to locate the theatre he examines within the catastrophically destructive Wars of Religion. Whilst overt depictions of the war were banned by the Edict of Nantes, which was intended to avoid sectarianism, playwrights presented schism, chaos, politics of the state and abuse perpetrated by the monarchy via the detours of allegory, classical myth or foreign context. In Nicolas Chrétien des Croix's *Les Portugais infortunés* (*The Unfortunate Portuguese*, 1608) for example, the encounter between the Portuguese and the inhabitants of the land they colonize indirectly critiques France's own colonial politics of expansion and the use of religion to justify terror and abuse overseas. Like Bouhaïk-Gironès and Doudet, Biet argues that, far from being primitive or archaic, theatre from this period has much to teach us today about the representation in the arts and media of violence and atrocity.

With Lyons we arrive at the 'Golden Age' of the seventeenth century. In 'Neo-classical Tragedy: Listening to Women' Lyons examines some of the era's most canonical works: Corneille's *Le Cid* (1637) and *Rodogune* (1644–5), and Racine's *Britannicus* (1669) and *Phèdre* (1677), proposing that the decisive actions of these plays often hinge on what women can say, or do not say. This is far from surprising since these works are contemporaneous

with two important interrelated cultural developments in the public lives of women: increasingly, they hosted Parisian salons and gained importance in political, cultural and social spheres; and in a century that witnessed attempts to standardize and refine the French language, these salons run by women became virtual workshops for formulating the rules of discourse for a worldly, non-pedantic society. The position of women's voices in society, and the limits within which they could speak, thus informed Golden Age tragedies, argues Lyons. Tragedies from this period, perceived as the dramatic representation of the lives of kings, queens and princes, simultaneously display the sharp contrast between what women can say in public, what they conceal owing to the constraints on what they are allowed to say, and their awareness that what they say in public can have fatal consequences. These tragedies enable an appreciation of the aptness of Roland Barthes' assertion that language, more than death, is the core of the tragic.

Whilst Lyons focusses on the great tragedians of the seventeenth century, Poirson's 'Molière, a Man of the Stage?' foregrounds France's greatest writer of comedy and the most widely read, performed and translated French-language playwright in the world, Molière. Highlighting the myths that have thrived around this national treasure, Poirson notes that almost nothing is known about Molière's biography and history. Inseparable from the nation's narration of itself and of its status at the centre of colonial empire, Molière has been celebrated for his supposedly republican values, and his language – 'la langue de Molière' – has become foundational in France and exported, sometimes aggressively, across *la francophonie*, or the French-speaking world. Notably, Poirson provides insights into how Molière's language and œuvre fared in colonized *Indochine française*. With astonishing constancy and unparalleled resilience Molière has persisted in the French and international cultural subconscious for over four centuries.

Clarke's 'Theatres as Economic Concerns: Molière, the Hôtel Guénégaud and the Comédie-Française' examines the period of Molière and his contemporaries from the perspective of theatrical establishments. Focussing on three companies – Molière's Illustre Théâtre (1658–73), the Hôtel Guénégaud company (1673–80) and the Comédie-Française (from 1680 onwards) – Clarke highlights a number of interrelated factors: the prime importance of a theatre's location within the capital; financial structures ranging from royal patronage and ticket sales to concessions, for example, for the refreshment booth, as well as theatres' multiple expenditures, including rent, heating, transport and above all company members' pensions. Across the analysis Clarke illustrates how a theatre not only provided a living for company members and their employees but also

contributed to the livelihoods of myriad other associates, from the most skilled to the most humble, the majority of whom remain anonymous, whilst others have left only fleeting traces in contemporary documents.

For centuries in French theatre, women playwrights and directors were forced to peep from the wings. In the eighteenth century for example, they were permitted to write either light comedies or children's theatre, the Enlightenment having established a binary opposition between men and women, the latter relegated to the home. During a brief window in the seventeenth century, however, women enjoyed the possibility actively to contribute to theatre. Conroy's chapter, 'Seventeenth-Century Printed Theatre: Gender and Peritext', concludes the focus on the seventeenth century with a focus on women's contribution to theatre. Conroy argues that the numerous accompanying elements included in printed plays – peritexts – were key to the reader's reception. Concentrating on two of these, dedications and prefaces/addresses, and in the light of recent scholarship regarding theatre and female agency – women as protagonists, dramatists, readers, spectators, patrons – Conroy accounts for the vital role played by peritexts in the economy of exchange, patronage, criticism and creation which characterized the early modern theatre world. After an examination of Françoise Pascal's title pages, Conroy's chapter focusses on how dedications to women validated women's roles as cultural agents, creating spaces for the female reader–spectator–critic. Consideration is then given to prefaces by the women dramatists Françoise Pascal, Madame Ulrich, Catherine Bernard and Marie-Anne Barbier, and how they use these printed spaces to defend their work, their foray into the public space of playwriting, and more broadly their dramatic vision.

With Spielmann's chapter 'Non-Official Eighteenth-Century Stages: Censorship, Subversion and Entertainment' the collection shifts to eighteenth-century theatre, the common vision of which has focussed until recently on a limited number of neo-Aristotelian 'regular' dramas staged at the Comédie-Française and Théâtre-Italien. Spielmann accounts for the huge theatrical activity taking place in fairgrounds and domestic spaces during this period. Acrobatic entertainments at Parisian fairgrounds grew into fully fledged dramas, violating the *privilège* granted to the official troupes who pursued, in vain, every legal avenue to stop them. The Académie royale de musique's monopoly was also compromised when fairground entrepreneurs bought the right to stage musical plays, giving rise to the Opéra comique (fanciful shows influenced by commedia dell'arte). A further illustration of the circumvention of monopolies was afforded by amateur *théâtre de société*, already mentioned in this Introduction. Spielmann presents

a vast field, characterized by extreme diversity, although he argues that its allegedly subversive quality was more aesthetic, than political.

Perovic's chapter 'The Expanded Theatre of the French Revolution' treats one of the most significant events in French history, and an unprecedented period in theatre history. Whilst the Revolution is often overlooked as a 'dead period' in French theatre, Perovic describes the scale and ambition of this extraordinary era. Never before had so many newcomers been able to forge successful careers as writers, actors and directors. Artistic innovation peaked, as revolutionary performance was more akin to what today is termed performance art, than to the kind of repertory theatre that preceded or followed it. Covering some of the major events, influential figures and key texts of this extremely fertile period, Perovic shows how theatre addressed the questions key to revolutionary culture: who is the audience? Where is it located? Who speaks on its behalf, and in what (theatrical, artistic) language? She concludes by contrasting two utopian works – Louis Beffroy de Reigny's *Nicodème dans la lune, ou La Révolution pacifique* (*Nicodème Goes to the Moon, or the Peaceful Revolution*, 1790) and Sylvain Maréchal's *Le Jugement dernier des rois* (*The Last Judgement of Kings*, 1793) – with Beaumarchais' *La Mère coupable* (*The Guilty Mother*, 1792), an altogether more sombre assessment of the effects of revolution.

Like Spielmann's chapter, Martin's 'Nineteenth-Century Melodrama, Vaudeville and Entertainment: The Vitality and Richness of a Marginalized Theatre' emphasizes the energy of a wealth of theatrical forms which, marginalized by theatre historiography for decades, have been sites of innovation. Focussing on the particularly productive period of the long nineteenth century and on the dynamism of boulevard theatres, Martin draws her examples from vaudeville, melodrama, *féerie*, café concert, pantomime, operetta and music hall, and the flow between these different genres. Like Spielmann, Martin describes how these theatrical forms, which did not enjoy the *privilège* and could therefore not officially contain text and dialogue, overcame censorship through innovation. The chapter reveals the new approaches to storytelling and plot, set design and musical composition that emerged, and the new careers to which these innovations gave rise, notably that of stage director.

Siviter and Wroth begin their chapter 'New Approaches to Women Actors and Celebrity in Nineteenth-Century France' by establishing France's best-known women actors, Sarah Bernhardt and Rachel, as a barometer for the hypervisibility of French women performers' bodies. Siviter and Wroth explore two case studies that paved the way for the late nineteenth-century celebrity which Bernhardt and Rachel embodied:

the 'Bataille des dames' between Mademoiselle George and Mademoiselle Duchesnois at the start of the nineteenth century; and the Restoration rivalry between classicism and romanticism personified by Mademoiselle Mars and Marie Dorval. They focus on three particular sites: the women's physical presence and experience of their gendered bodies including their voices; their often sexualized fetishization in contemporary print; and their memorialization both in their autobiographies and in theatre history. Having analysed the roles of class, gender and sexuality, they return to the hypervisibility of Rachel and later Bernhardt, and the important questions these women's bodies raise regarding other marginalized identities, especially in relation to ethnicity and 'race'.

Naugrette's chapter 'Extended Romanticism in the Extended Nineteenth Century' examines the genesis and legacy of the nineteenth century's most celebrated movement, romanticism. Whereas romanticism is often susceptible to being cast at the opposite end of the spectrum to classicism, Naugrette argues that it took its cues from wherever it could find them: the noble classical and neo-classical genres of tragedy and comedy; opera and comic opera; the Elizabethans; bourgeois drama; and the popular genres described in Martin's chapter which included pantomime, the *féerie* and above all melodrama. Romantic theatre thus appeared in all registers from comic to tragic, realist to fantastical. Naugrette also dispels the myth that Victor Hugo and his best-known contemporaries Alexandre Dumas, Alfred de Vigny and Alfred de Musset, all consecrated by posterity, were romantic theatre's sole figureheads. She affords due credit to a host of other playwrights who contributed to the movement, notably women such as George Sand, Virginie Ancelot and Delphine de Girardin; and offers visibility to the actors and actresses who contributed to the success of romantic theatre not only by playing its characters but also by inspiring playwrights and by inventing new acting methods. Just as Naugrette begins by rejecting the opposition between romanticism and classicism, she ends by challenging the romanticism–naturalism binary. Finally, she concludes by positing that French romanticism, originating predominantly in the French Revolution's ethos of democratization, was also a nascent form of national popular theatre.

De Simone's chapter 'Poetry in Action, 1945–1968: From Antonin Artaud to Lettrism and the Domaine Poétique', catapults our collection into a twentieth century of avant-garde experimentation, and the radical revision of what might constitute theatre. Focussing on the post-war period De Simone describes how 'action poetry' and 'performance poetry', inspired by the historical avant-garde of the start of the century, positioned

orality, namely the physical act of utterance, centre stage. Artists including Artaud; non-professional actors such as Colette Thomas with whom he worked; movements like the Lettrists founded by Isidore Isou; and events like the Domaine poétique evenings staged by poets including Bernard Heidsieck, Henri Chopin, François Dufrêne and Brion Gysin had, until the 2010s, been relegated to historical oblivion. Now rehabilitated, they are considered, argues De Simone, as foundational figures and moments in modern and contemporary research-led experimental performance into the voice, the body and language.

In Lavery and Zandieh's chapter 'Performance and Installation Art: Re-turning to Artaud through Christian Boltanski' Artaud is afforded further examination. By adopting a hyphenated notion of a 're-turn', Lavery and Zandieh challenge a historiography that would describe Artaud's impact as being on the medium or discipline of theatre alone. Their 're-turn' is not predicated on restoring an originary Artaud, nor does it aim to provide yet another reading or interpretation of his artistic work. By proposing a particular mode of arranging bodies and objects in time and space Artaud's theatricality overspills its disciplinary enclosure and informs other artforms. Lavery and Zandieh posit Artaud as a performance theorist whose ideas allow for a unique take on the indeterminate borderline existing between theatre, conceptualism and installation art. To investigate that liminal fold, they place Artaud in dialogue with artist Christian Boltanski, whose relationship with theatre and performance they tease out.

Whilst Bouhaïk-Gironès and Doudet describe the nascent art of staging performance in the fourteenth century and Martin describes its rapid evolution in the nineteenth century, Triau's chapter, 'Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century Theatre Directing: Perception at Play' accounts for the state of the art of mise-en-scène in contemporary theatre. Triau explains how contemporary mise-en-scène is characterized by its marked refusal to construct immediately legible meaning or recognizable reference points. By analysing the works of four major directors – Claude Régy, François Tanguy and the Théâtre du Radeau, Joël Pommerat and Gisèle Vienne – Triau argues that stage direction tends to place audience members' sense of perception under pressure. The stage is transformed into a destabilizing space of uncertainty, dream, hallucination or fantasy, which questions and renews the audience's experience of perception, opening it out to other possibilities distinct from ordinary perception. In their very different ways these directors bring into play not only what is seen but how the audience sees: the frameworks and activity of perception both in the theatre, and in life.

Many chapters in this collection allude to the political contexts in which theatre is created. Neveux's 'Political Theatre in France (1954–2020): The Brechtian Ordinate' focusses on overtly political, often militant performance. Using as an impetus the German director, playwright and theoretician Bertolt Brecht's theories of epic theatre and Marxist dialectics, which have been by turns foundational and marginal in France, Neveux traces the relationship between theatre and politics over a period of more than half a century. Brecht and Brechtianism have offered opportunities to politicize theatre in France. However, in the last decades of the twentieth century the radical left lost its influence in the social field, and neo-liberalism appeared to have won out. Whilst Brecht's star might seem to have waned, examining the ways in which political theatre has transformed, evolved and modified in relation to, or in opposition to his ideas, affords the possibility, as Neveux suggests, to appreciate how protest performance might evolve in the future.

In 'Liberating Third World Theatre: Serreau, Kateb, Césaire, and Genet' Brueton turns the political spotlight specifically onto anti-colonial theatre. Examining and contesting the emergence of 'Third World theatre' in the mid-twentieth century Brueton traces how Jean-Marie Serreau, the director feted for his inaugural productions of absurdist plays by Ionesco and Beckett (as well by Brecht), sought to disrupt the Eurocentric nihilism of the post-war dramatic canon. Galvanized by Brecht's call for politically realist theatre, Serreau brought the anti-colonial drama unfolding throughout the empire to Parisian stages. Producing seminal works by the Algerian playwright Kateb Yacine, Martinican poet, playwright and politician Aimé Césaire and French iconoclast Jean Genet, Serreau pursued a radical new humanism that aimed to decentre the intellectual and artistic hegemony of the West. He envisaged a Third World theatre that would not only eschew the ghettoization of major Francophone playwrights but would also contest the very values of colonial humanism that had developed under France's Third Republic. Using Édouard Glissant's theory of opacity, Brueton compares Kateb's representation of the anti-colonial uprisings in Algeria in *Le Cadavre encerclé* (*The Encircled Corpse*, 1958); Genet's critique of French imperialism and Algerian neo-nationalism in *Les Paravents* (*The Screens*, 1966); and Césaire's tragic exposition of Congolese independence from Belgium in *Une Saison au Congo* (*A Season in the Congo*, 1967), to argue that they refuse forms of understanding where cultural difference is reduced to one decolonial agenda.

With Miller's chapter 'Francophone Theatre-Makers in France: Traumatizing the French Stage' the volume centres on theatre-makers who,

decades after decolonization, continue to confront France with its colonial past. Examining five prominent Afro-descendant artists creating theatre in contemporary France – Kossi Efoui, Koffi Kwahulé, Aristide Tarnagda, Gustave Akakpo and Marie NDiaye – Miller first interrogates the ambiguous concept of *francophonie* by considering the potential for ghettoizing work when it is produced in venues destined exclusively for theatre from the French-speaking world outside France. Referencing French sociologist and theatre specialist Sylvie Chalaye, a portrait of Black Francophone theatre emerges, in which Black playwrights capture the current malaise of people still defined by the dominant French gaze, the potency of which is only now beginning to diminish. In *Le Carrefour* (*The Crossroads*, 1990) Efoui conjures parables where puppet-like characters cannot think themselves outside the confining walls built by others. In *Jaz* (1998) Kwahulé places fragments of a personality ravished by a madman with Christ's eyes, in dialogue with each other. In *Façons d'aimer* (*Ways of Loving*, 2017) Tarnagda confronts self-exiled beings with a plethora of reasons for their alienation. In *La Véridique histoire du Petit Chaperon Rouge* (*The True Story of Little Red Riding Hood*, 2015) Akakpo takes Little Red Riding Hood on a voyage on which her consumerist parents want to sell her image. And in *Hilda* (1999) NDiaye places offstage the nonetheless omnipresent forces that fuel the perverse and destructive energy of characters on stage. Experimentation with voicing and characterization, collage, absent presence and fractured fairy tale plunges audiences into a universe of constant danger, whilst gesturing to the possibility of liberation through leaps of empathy and imagination.

The plays discussed in the final chapter, Finburgh Delijani's 'Migration in Modern and Contemporary Playwriting: Uprooting and Rerouting', represent a significant and growing strain of theatre that stages the central role played by migration and transnational, mobile identities not just in France, but across the world. Back in the 1980s historian Gérard Noiriel asked, in Pierre Nora's *Les Lieux de mémoire* (*Realms of Memory*), why immigration was not 'a legitimate object of national memory' despite the fact that from the late nineteenth century onwards France hosted more immigrants than any other European country, and proportionately more than the United States. Today around 30 per cent of France's population comprises either migrants from its former colonies or their post-migrant descendants, demonstrating the key significance of migration to French society and culture. Using Édouard Glissant's notion of 'relation identity', which expresses 'the conscious and contradictory experience of contacts among cultures' Finburgh Delijani demonstrates how the exiles, immigrants and refugees featuring in the plays she examines represent the

post-colonial diversity of the French nation. With analysis of Bernard-Marie Koltès' *Le Retour au desert* (*Return to the Desert*, 1988), Wajdi Mouawad's *Incendies* (*Scorched*, 2003) and Estelle Savasta's *Traversée* (*Going Through*, 2019), Finburgh Delijani exposes how characters illustrate the uprooting of belonging, legitimacy and identity by the often violent severance of migration and exile. However, the trauma that characters suffer – which cannot be underestimated – is counterbalanced by the relational, transnational, cosmopolitan citizens they are able to become. This chapter thus illustrates how the increasing number of plays in France treating migration, from Christiane Jatahy's Odyssey series (2018–19) to Patricia Allio's *Dispak' Dispac'h* (2023), have a precedence dating back to at least the 1980s.

These chapters are followed by interviews with the artistic director of France's foremost theatre; with one of the country's most important contemporary playwrights; and with one of its most innovative performance artists. In the first interview, the award-winning actor, director and scenographer Éric Ruf discusses his role since 2014 as *administrateur général* (artistic director) of the Comédie-Française. In discussion with Clare Siviter, Ruf offers readers a glimpse into the world's oldest continually performing troupe. He describes the legacy and symbolic weight for performers today of the building and its history, and how they negotiate innovations such as price reform and live streaming, when steeped in such tradition.

In conversation with her English translator Chris Campbell, playwright Magali Mougel broaches two main issues dominating theatre in France today. With regard to identity politics she remarks that theatre-makers from communities that have historically been minoritized owing to gender, ethnicity, 'race' or other protected characteristics, tend to prefer not only to write plays but also to direct and perform them, in order to have control over the images portrayed and, to ensure that discriminatory clichés do not creep back onstage. Mougel's reflections transition from representation to the material conditions of theatre-making as she describes a sector beyond the main national theatres, which is increasingly underfunded and where burnout for the part of artists, technicians and administrators is a real concern.

Finally, in conversation with Estel Baudou performance artist Phia Ménard offers insights into the key moments of the live performer's career, from her training days to her international success. Describing herself as 'undisciplined' she explains how her work challenges the categories of circus, dance and theatre, and in so doing pushes the boundaries of contemporary theatre. It is fitting to end this Introduction with Phia Ménard's

call for the invention of new formats and aesthetics, for the performance of 'strange things', for a form of agitation that 'feels like love'.

Recommended Reading

For an excellent account in English of all aspects of modern and contemporary French theatre, see 'France' in Don Rubin, Péter Nagy and Philippe Ryouer, eds., *The World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre: Europe* (1994).

Jacqueline de Jomaron's edited *Le Théâtre en France* (1992). This contains chapters by specialists in theatre from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century.

Michel Corvin's *Dictionnaire encyclopédique du théâtre* (2005). This contains entries on all aspects of French theatre and performance.

Alain Viala's *Histoire du théâtre* (2005). This provides a very concise account of the historical period covered by this collection.

Honoré Champion's multi-volume series *Le Théâtre en France* contains book-length historical studies on each period from the Middle Ages (Charles Mazouer, *Le Théatre français du Moyen Âge*, 2016) to the twenty-first century (David Bradby, *Le Théâtre en France de 1968 à 2000*, 2007).

Notes

1. For an exposé of how, since the Enlightenment, theatre has been framed as being under constant yet unfounded threat from other arts, see Goetschel (2022). The Covid-19 pandemic arguably posed the greatest threat to live performance in history. When establishments reopened after successive lockdowns, there was a marked decrease in attendance. See Sandrine Blanchard, 'Après le Covid-19, la fréquentation des théâtres, jugés trop chers, est en baisse', *Le Monde*, 29 July 2022, www.lemonde.fr/culture/article/2022/07/29/apres-le-covid-19-la-frequentation-des-theatres-juges-trop-chers-est-en-baisse_6136604_3246.html.
2. Unless otherwise stated, translations are mine.
3. The *Mystère de la passion*, staged in Valenciennes (1547) lasted twenty-five days.
4. The first recorded written farce is *La Farce de Maistre Pathelin* (1486). Anthologies of farces have been edited by Tissier (1984) and Faivre (1997, 1999).
5. Bouhaïk-Gironès, Koopmans and Laveant have co-edited two volumes of *sotties* (2014, 2022).
6. The most famous miracle is Rutebeuf's *Le Miracle de Théophile*, produced in Paris in around 1260.
7. As Bouhaïk-Gironès and Doudet's, as well as Conroy's chapters in this collection demonstrate, the advent of printing and dissemination of published playtexts also impacted on the evolution of theatre.
8. With the aim of quelling the fomenting revolts by the nobility, 377 *ballets de cour* were staged between 1611 and 1643 by Louis XIV, the self-professed Sun

King, who would often dress as the sun god Apollo and choreograph himself at the centre of the performances (Canova-Green, 2007: 40).

9. For anthologies of fairground plays see Lurcel (1983) and d'Auriac (2018).
10. Censorship had been introduced in 1701 with the nomination by the chief of Police of commissioner-examiners, who were to vet all plays before they were produced (Corvin, 2008: 266).
11. In his famous *Letter to M. d'Alembert* (1758), Rousseau (2004) argues that theatre has a reputation for corrupting morals since it disassociates the audience's emotions from the characters, who are represented on stage via theatrical illusion. Rousseau proposes festivals which, without the illusory representation of plot and character, can generate social cohesion. Rather than the modest and spontaneous celebrations of democracy recommended by Rousseau, revolutionary festivals tended to be ostentatious and at times luxurious affairs.
12. Not to be confused with British pantomime, the French form involves mime and developed in fairgrounds out of commedia dell'arte, when the Théâtre-Italien was no longer supported by royal patronage.
13. Hemmings notes that whilst Paris enjoyed cultural and political hegemony during the nineteenth century, theatre outside Paris, which was semi-commercial and subsidized by begrudging municipal authorities, struggled to survive (1994: 3).
14. The philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre writes:

> The bourgeoisie […] wants to impose its own image of man upon the theater, one that conforms to its own ideology, and not to have to seek for that image through the kind of world where individuals see each other or groups form judgments about each other, because then it would be challenged. (1976: 92).

15. For opera, see Le Blanc (2018); for dance theatre and puppet theatre, see Rouyer (1994); for street theatre, see Haedicke (2011) and Wallon (2007).
16. François I was displeased when, in a 1516 play, his mother Louise de Savoie was represented as Mère Sotte (Mother Fool) (Fragonard, 2009: 106).
17. For this decree and a vast anthology of other primary sources concerning areas ranging from theatre audiences to critics and costume, see Howarth, 1997.
18. The Paris Opera sold singing rights to the *foire* theatres, resulting in 1715 in the Opéra comique.
19. Owing to their desire to shift power away from Paris and their investment in youth movements, the Nazi-backed Vichy government paradoxically gave considerable support to both travelling and amateur companies during the war (Abirached, 1994: 27).
20. Bradby provides a comprehensive historical table of the foundation of CDNs and other state-subsidized theatres (2007, 673–93).
21. For an explanation of the administration of state-run theatres see www.culture.gouv.fr/Thematiques/Theatre-spectacles/Le-theatre-et-les-spectacles-en-France/Scenes-nationales.
22. For further information on Lang, a major influence on the subsidizing and internationalization of French theatre, see Lang (1968) and Martigny, Martin and Wallon (2021).

23. Under Strehler's initiative the journal *Théâtre en Europe* was founded (1984–8). In addition, the Institut international du théâtre published the French–English bilingual *Théâtre dans le monde* (1951–68).
24. For an extensive reflection on directing in France, see *Mises en scène du monde* (2005).
25. See the special issue of *Théâtre/Public* dedicated to Niangouna (Neveux and Niangouna, 2019); and an interview with Dembélé (2020).
26. The front cover of this volume, taken from Robert Wilson's production of Jean Genet's *Les Nègres* (*The Blacks*) at the Théâtre de l'Odéon (2014), encapsulates the three salient features of French theatre identified in this Introduction. Combining post-war avant-garde experimentalism with a politically engaged meditation on the construction of racist stereotypes, Genet's play testifies to French theatre's variety and versatility. Taking place at the Odéon, the production revisited the site on which pitched battles took place when Genet's *Les Paravents* (*The Screens*) was staged in 1966: French paratroopers who had served during the Algerian War of Independence, most famously Jean-Marie Le Pen, who subsequently became the first president of the French National Front party (1972–2011), objected vehemently to the play's attack on French colonialism and nationalism, and sought to prevent it from being performed. During the mass student-led protests of 1968, the same theatre was occupied, both events demonstrating the central political place held by theatre in France. Finally, the US director of the 2014 production of *Les Nègres*, whose career has been feted in France far more than in his home nation, assembled an African and African-diasporic cast from a host of countries, celebrating the internationalism of both the Odéon, and of French theatre more widely.
27. https://labarbelabarbe.org/. They based their protest on important findings by Reine Prat, who wrote a report on behalf of the Ministry of Culture which revealed the extent to which women were minoritized in theatre (Prat, 2006, 2009, 2021).
28. https://labarbelabarbe.org/La-saison-theatrale-2020-2021.
29. Jean-Pierre Thibaudat, 'Lettre ouverte au théâtre français (et à la gauche au pouvoir)', 2 July 2012, *Rue89*, http://blogs.rue89.com/balagan/2012/07/02/lettre-ouverte-au-theatre-francais-et-la-gauche-au-pouvoir-227858.
30. Charte égalité du Conservatoire national supérieur d'art dramatique' https://cnsad.psl.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Charte-egalite-2021-.pdf.
31. For studies of women theatre-makers in France, see Moss, 1987; Miller, 1989; Surel-Tupin, 1995; Evain, 2001; Beach, 2005; Féral, 2007; Thébaud, 2007; Johnstonn, 2014; Debeauvais, 2019.