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Edited by Donald Roy

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Romantic and Revolutionary theatre, 1789–1860

Taking as notional parameters the upheaval of the French Revolution and the events leading up to the unification of Italy, this volume charts a period of political and social turbulence in Europe and its reflection in theatrical life. Apart from considering external factors such as censorship and legal sanctions on theatrical activity, this collection of documents examines the effects of prevailing operational conditions on the internal organization of companies, their repertoire, acting, stage presentation, playhouse architecture and the relationship with audiences. Also covered are technical advances in stage machinery, scenography and lighting, the changing position of the playwright and the continuing importance of various street entertainments, particularly in Italy, where dramatic theatre remained the poor relation of operatic theatre and itinerant acting troupes still constituted the norm. The 460 documents, many of them illustrated, have been drawn from sources in Britain, France and Italy and have been annotated, and translated where appropriate.

The book will be of value to researchers and students of drama or theatre studies and will appeal to all those interested in the history of European theatre.

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Editor's preface

At the risk of appearing editorially 'Euro sceptic', it has been decided to group all documents in this volume discretely by country as well as by category. Whilst instructive parallels may certainly be drawn between the respective theatrical experiences of Britain, France and Italy during the period, so many discrepancies need to be taken into account, political and social no less than cultural in nature, that this arrangement seemed the most logical; one that may also afford inquisitive readers a pleasurable opportunity to trace common themes and national variations for themselves.

For similar reasons, the chronological parameters of the volume are intentionally somewhat elastic. Theatre practice has always evolved at different tempos in different societies and, within such domestic rhythms, does not necessarily subscribe to any broader sociopolitical calendar. Besides, organically theatrical factors may come into play, which are no respecters of timescales in the outside world. The year 1789 represents a meaningful landmark for France, as does 1860 for Italy, but neither date has a comparable resonance in the context of events on this English side of the Channel. Hence, although the bulk of the documents collected here fall within these titular limits, others have been included that illuminate the period from without.

The major difficulty shared by all the contributors to the volume has been to determine what to omit. Such was the expansion in publishing, notably in topical and journalistic publishing, over these years that there is a profuse abundance of documentation to select from, and many choice items have had to be excluded through sheer lack of space, often all the more painfully so for having already been lovingly translated. What remains will still, it is hoped, constitute an adequately rich and varied harvest.

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General editors' preface

In appointing appropriately qualified editors for all the volumes in this documentary history it has been our aim to provide a comprehensive collection of primary source materials for teachers and students on which their own critical appraisal of theatrical history and dramatic literature may safely be grounded.

Each volume presents primary source documents in English, or in English translation, relating to actors and acting, dramatic theory and criticism, theatre architecture, stage censorship, settings, costumes and audiences. Editors have, in general, confined their selection to documentary material in the strict sense (statutes, proclamations, inscriptions, contracts, working drawings, play-bills, prints, account books, etc.), but exceptions have been made in instances where prologues, epilogues, excerpts from play-texts and private correspondence provide additional contemporary documentation based on an author's authority or that of eye-witnesses to particular performances and significant theatrical events.

Unfamiliar documents have been preferred to familiar ones, short ones to long ones; and among long ones recourse has been taken to excerpting for inclusion all passages which either oblige quotation by right of their own intrinsic importance or lead directly to a clearer understanding of other documents. In every instance, however, we have aimed to provide readers not only with the exact source and location of the original document, but with complementary lists of similar documents and of secondary sources offering previously printed transcripts.

Each volume is equipped with an introductory essay, and in some cases introductory sections to each chapter, designed to provide readers with the appropriate social background – religious, political, economic and aesthetic – as context for the documents selected; it also contains briefer linking commentaries on particular groups of documents and concludes with an extensive bibliography.

Within this general presentational framework, individual volumes will vary considerably in their format – greater emphasis having to be placed, for example, on documents of control in one volume than in another, or with dramatic theory and criticism figuring less prominently in some volumes than in others – if each volume is to be an accurate reflection of the widely divergent interests and concerns of

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different European countries at different stages of their historical development, and the equally sharp differences in the nature and quality of the surviving documents volume by volume.

Glynne Wickham (Chairman)
Bristol University, 1997

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Except where stated otherwise, all translations of documents written in French or Italian have been made by the authors of those sections. Punctuation has occasionally been modified in the interests of clarity.