

A NEW HISTORY OF THEATRE IN FRANCE

Theatre in France was the first in Europe to be written in the vernacular as opposed to Latin. It has provided the English language with the medieval word *farce*, the early modern word *role*, and the modern term *mise-en-scène*. Molière is single-handedly responsible for launching European-style playwriting in North Africa. Today, it is only a slight exaggeration to say that it is harder to get tickets for Avignon, one of the world's largest theatre festivals, than for the Rolling Stones' farewell tour. Containing chapters by globally eminent theatre experts, many of whom will be read in English for the first time, this collaborative history testifies to the central part theatre has played for over 1,000 years in both French culture and world culture. Crucially, too, it places centre stage the genders, ethnicities and classes that have had to wait in the wings of theatres, and of theatre criticism.

CLARE FINBURGH DELIJANI is the recipient of a Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship (2023–6) and is one of the leading specialists in theatre and performance from the French-speaking world. She is currently writing a history of post-colonial theatre in France from the 1950s to the present.

CHRISTIAN BIET was Professor of theatre and performance at Paris Nanterre University, and Visiting Professor at New York University. Beginning his career as a specialist in the seventeenth-century French golden age, he diversified into areas including performance studies and theatre from East Asia.

A NEW HISTORY OF THEATRE IN FRANCE

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For Christian Biet (1952–2020), with thanks and affection.

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fait sa légende (2022); and co-editor of *M comme Molière: dictionnaire* (with Jean-Pierre Aubrit, 2022).

ÉRIC RUF has been Artistic Director of the Comédie-Française since 2014. An actor for stage and screen, director and scenographer, he first joined the Comédie-Française in 1993, playing in classics such as Molière's *Dom Juan* and *L'Avare* (*The Miser*) and Victor Hugo's *Ruy Blas* and *Lucrèce Borgia*. In 2007 he received a Molière award for Best Supporting Actor for his performance as Christian in *Cyrano de Bergerac*. In addition to his feted acting career, he has designed sets for productions at the Comédie-Française such as the *Cyrano* in which he also starred.

CLARE SIVITER is Assistant Professor in French theatre and performance at the University of Bristol. Her publications include *Tragedy and Nation in the Age of Napoleon* (2020, shortlisted for the R. Gapper Prize) and the co-edited volumes *Un Engagement en vers et contre tous: servir les révolutions, rejouer leurs mémoires, 1789–1848* (with Jérémy Decot, 2021) and *Celebrity across the Channel, 1750–1850* (with Anaïs Pédrón, 2021). In 2022 she became a BBC/AHRC New Generation Thinker, a Franco-British Young Leader, and a patron of the France Alumni-UK network. She is Fellow of the Royal Historical Society and Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy.

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REZVAN ZANDIEH is Associate Lecturer at the University of Sorbonne Nouvelle and the University of Artois. Her publications focus on queer and feminist gender politics, performativity, aesthetics and the body in French and Iranian theatre and performance. She is currently working on a book about the relationship between the body and power in contemporary queer and feminist performance, to be published by Presses universitaires de Rennes.

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Christian Biet is everywhere in this book. In its shape, texture and energy. Before Christian died unexpectedly in July 2020, leaving an immense community of scholars, friends and family bereft, he was central to mapping the dazzling constellation of intellectuals who have contributed to this collection.

Christian Biet was Professor of the History and Aesthetics of Theatre at Paris Nanterre University, where he contributed comprehensively and crucially to the institutional legitimization of the relatively new discipline of theatre studies until his retirement which, with cruel timing, was due to begin the very day he died. It was thus logical that I should invite Christian to co-edit *A New History of Theatre in France*. Across the Channel, across continents, across institutions and generations, Christian created a network of collaborators, many of whom feature in this book. It is indelibly marked of course by Christian's scholarship, but also by his openness, largesse, almost fanatical desire to work with others, his politically committed belief in internationalism and the confidence he placed implicitly in colleagues.

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Over the past decade or so, French theatre studies have lost three titans: David Bradby (1942–2011), Christian Biet (1952–2020) and Alain Viala (1947–2021). This book is dedicated to their memory and, significantly, to their commitment to nurturing increasingly inclusive generations of new scholars.

Whilst creating this book I lost one co-editor, but gained twenty-three. Leading authorities in their fields, each contributor to this collection generously peer-reviewed chapters by others writing in their historical period, thereby sharing expertise and enabling patterns in the carpet across the chapters to be discerned with greater clarity. In ardent opposition to the competitive individualism instilled by neo-liberal university systems, Christian's ethics of friendship and care were unstinting. The conviviality and support that contributors have offered both me and each other, is a tribute to Christian's own unfailing bigheartedness and ubiquitous thoughtfulness.

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Notes on the Text

Where the linguistic value of original French quotations is integral to a chapter's argument, it is maintained alongside the English translation. Otherwise, quotations are included in English only, in the interests of concision.

Unless otherwise stated, dates refer to the first publication of a play. If the play has not been published, dates refer to its first production.

The references for original manuscripts are given in-text and omitted from the bibliography.

Recommendations for further reading are provided at the end of each chapter.