

Bettencourt Boulevard ou une histoire de France

by Michel Vinaver
directed by
Christian Schiaretti



spectacle TNP création

A play in 30 pieces

From Thursday 19 November
to Saturday 19 December 2015
Grand théâtre, salle Roger-Planchon

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Bettencourt Boulevard ou une histoire de France

by Michel Vinaver, directed by Christian Schiaretti

Running time: circa 2½ hours

Featuring

Francine Bergé — Liliane Bettencourt, Eugène Schueller's daughter, Françoise's mother

Stéphane Bernard — Pascal Bonnefoy, André Bettencourt's butler

Clément Carabédian — Commentator

Jérôme Deschamps — Patrice de Maistre, Liliane Bettencourt's financial advisor

Philippe Dusigne — André Bettencourt, Liliane's husband and Françoise's father, former cabinet minister; phantom

Didier Flamand — François-Marie Banier

Christine Gagnieux — Françoise Bettencourt Meyers, Liliane and André Bettencourt's daughter

Damien Gouy — Neuropsychiatrist; phantom

Clémence Longy — Dominique Gaspard, Liliane Bettencourt's chambermaid

Élizabeth Macocco — Claire Thibout, Liliane Bettencourt's accountant

Clément Morinière — Éric Woerth, Budget Minister, mayor of Chantilly, chairman of *Premier Cercle*

Nathalie Ortega — Florence Woerth, wife of Éric Woerth

Gaston Richard — Nicolas Sarkozy

Juliette Rizoud — Joëlle Lebon, Liliane Bettencourt's chambermaid

Julien Tiphaine — Lindsay Owens-Jones, L'Oréal CEO

With participation of :

Bruno Abraham-Kremer — voice of Rabbi Robert Meyers

Michel Aumont — voice of Eugène Schueller, founder of l'Oréal

Dimitri Mager and **Pierre Pietri** — dancers

Pauline Noblecourt — dramaturgy

Thibaut Welchlin — stage design and costumes

Quentin Sirjacq — music design

Julia Grand — light design

Romain Marietti — hair styling, makeup in partnership with Make Up For Ever

Clément Carabédian — assistant to the director

Marius Müller — intern to the director

Recorded musicians:

Antoine Berjeaut — trumpet

Jeffrey Boudreaux et **Fabrice Moreau** — drums

Youen Cadiou et **Simon Tailleu** — contrabass

Jean-Brice Godet — clarinet

with kind participation of flautist

Thierry Neuranter

Sets and costumes produced in the TNP studios.

Production Théâtre National Populaire

***Bettencourt Boulevard*, whose theme is drawn from a hotly topical issue, dons the eternal components of legends and myths as it moves along. In ancient Greece playwrights often brought in a god or goddess to close a play. In the case of what is known as the Bettencourt affair, the uncertain close will be brought about by the workings of the court system assisted by medical expertise.**

What interests Michel Vinaver is its present and also its past, its roots in the previous 100 years of French history and its repercussions wherein intimate, political and economic facets intermingle indissolubly. Comedy crops up incessantly, on equal footing with tragedy in this gripping saga's run of episodes: men and women in the headlines, heard on the air or seen on TV, strut the boards — somewhat like in the era of Shakespeare when he observed: all the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players.

Which side of the stage are we on ?

L'Arche Éditeur

A Great Theater of the World

What strikes me immediately is the extent to which Michel Vinaver's play sets all of his work into perspective, and the extent to which it restores body and soul to the development of a Great Theater of the world wherein all are represented, with a peculiar laugh at the end.

As is often the case with this author whom I know well, the financial and family imbroglio plays on mythological themes. First, there's the archetypal image of Mother and Daughter and, by extension, that of the Labyrinth; beyond that: a stranger in the house. There's also a hint of Dionysus in this photographer.

Developing staging centered on the single heliocentric figure of Liliane Bettencourt amounts to courting the symbolic and fantasy dimension of the character: ogress, Olympian goddess. On the other hand, refocusing on her daughter, an only child no less, involves entering into a conflictual dimension. Here the presence of two indispensable ancestors is warranted: the deported-hero rabbi and the brilliant extreme right-leaning chemist. To punctuate the triggering of this collision, The Commentator opens the play and starts right out by reminding us that Françoise Bettencourt has two children: Jean-Victor and Nicolas. The genealogical perspective means that he can summon the two antagonistic ancestral figures who acquire substance through the play.

Finally, it should not be forgotten that it is exactly when Liliane Bettencourt starts thinking about adopting François-Marie Banier that her daughter's reaction crystallizes. Clytemnestra? Electra?

The characters move through a kind of Olympus whose quietude resides atop a deep, near-bottomless financial base. Such abysses allow for access to all desires. I have to find some way to represent this Olympus to demonstrate how this continent — whose original power derives from commerce, with its adjustments to the turbulences of post-1940s French history — slowly transmuted into financial capitalism, leading to the reign of silence and anonymity.

This "place", unbeknownst to simple mortals, is riddled today by investigative journalism and seems to be frontally assaulted by modern tools capturing and recording everything that's enacted, everything that's said behind its weighty portals. Suddenly, pieces of this reality collide with people's everyday lives and we grow aware that the social ladder is higher than we imagined, and that this story is full of curiously-talkative ghosts. This awareness is the crux of theater. As long as it judges no one and takes great pains to expose facts, it can but gain in universality.

Christian Schiaretti

Yet everything in this affair is of interest...

A rip. A breach.

The breach which tore into our current events, via this story, the Bettencourt affair...

And the way it just seemed to go on and on, three years running, with its daily ration of disclosures and perplexity, perpetually renewed...

That's already something.

This window opening wide onto the most concealed part of our society, opening very intimately onto its functioning patterns — right there where those who have plenty of money rub shoulders with those who want plenty of it... people at the acme of political power and financial power... people at the top of their very honored professions — medical, legal, police and, sure, artistic too...— and the humble masses serving the 'great' ones: chambermaids, butlers, stewards, accountants and others.

Window opening onto the race for honors, along the diverse and varied pathways of corruption taken by some, each for his own reasons, either to get somewhere, or because it's hard to resist temptation, or because nobody need be harmed in the process... Hard version, soft version.

Money, thus, and its effects. But equally present deep down in this story: hate alongside love, expressed in extremes.

A plenitude of themes, legions of characters, intensity of feelings.

It was more than tempting for a playwright to open this window.

But it has dangers too. First, the danger of indiscretion. These people are real people, and it would have been vain to hide their identities. They would have been too recognizable with fake names or other shams.

At any event, my intent is not to condemn anyone. Nor to disapprove of a character. If my stagecraft has a trademark, it's the fact that it never bears judgment nor promotes bias. It allows one to see and hear. And always with a touch of sympathy.

But there could also be the danger of over-interpreting, of abusively instilling meaning, even if only due to editing. And with such a plethora of material, how should one choose what to keep and what to drop? Might not this selection process mean that the author leans more heavily on certain elements

for their degree of interest? Yet everything in this affair is of interest. And especially the inextricable combination of the extraordinary and the most commonplace things. Usually, in reality, it's the 'commonplace' which interests me most ...

Another danger could be that of lengthiness.

I did not want a long play.

So, there was no choice but to jump right in without asking all these questions. Without an outline. Without prior structuring. Without referencing the piles of clippings accumulated over the course of the past three years. While trusting in the incubation process of which I had become the vessel.

However, there was a triggering effect which grew from the confrontation of the two family stocks: that of Liliane Bettencourt, whose father founded L'Oréal and who was an activist with La Cagoule, and that of her son-in-law Jean-Pierre Meyers, whose rabbi grandfather perished at Auschwitz. A confrontation which furnished tragic foundations to this story.

Nonetheless this does not keep humor from being the very essence of the play.

Bettencourt Boulevard ou une histoire de France. What is there in a title and why such a title? "Boulevard" because the affair is the widest and liveliest of all boulevards, with so many types of vehicles swarming every whichway. "Ou une histoire de France" because this is — oh surprise! — what the play relates — a story of France since the end of the 19th century until today. A closer look also shows that my title is an admiring tip-of-the-hat to Billy Wilder and his masterpiece *Sunset Boulevard*...

The play is composed of thirty pieces, like adjacent pebbles cast on a beach. I had already drafted nearly half the play and knew that Christian Schiaretti was passing through Paris. I wanted to see what his first reaction might be since he had already directed two of my plays, *Les Coréens* (in a Comédie de Reims/Comédie Française co-production), and *Par-dessus bord* (in its complete version, at the TNP and then right here at La Colline). He simply listened to me read him a mere half of what was written, and without knowing what might come next — I didn't know either — Christian said that he'd take the play for his upcoming season, with no further ado.

Presentation by Michel Vinaver at La Colline – Théâtre National, May 5, 2015

Edwy Plenel: “ Michel Vinaver transcends the Bettencourt ” affair”

With *Bettencourt Boulevard ou une histoire de France*, the playwright Michel Vinaver tackles a case well known to Médiapart readership. Above and beyond its ephemeral anecdotes, this play, with its heroes who are real people from the affair, settles a spotlight on the lasting scandal at its crux: money and politics. Michel Vinaver has not yet said his piece. It might have been thought that this major narrator of our times had finished his life's work. At over 87 years of age, the playwright has completed eight volumes of *Théâtre complet* (Actes Sud and L'Arche, 2002-2005). This book gives life to History, big History, which flows subterraneanly through the banal humanity which he appears to relate, the humanity of the ordinary or the everyday. His theater is a complete theater, encompassing the 1955 play *Les Coréens* opening onto the cold war threatening to deteriorate into a third world war, and *11 septembre 2001*, a work written under the shock of the event whose shadow still darkens the present of the world. His theater always closed with the yet unfinished “war on terrorism” which came to replace this cold war in the imperial imagination of the new century.

From now on *Bettencourt Boulevard* has become part of this heritage. It was just published this week by L'Arche and discretely experimented with this spring during actors training held at the Maison Jacques Copeau (see the local press for more information; read about the training led by Jean-Louis Hourdin and Ivan Grinberg). This delightful play transcends the affair whose unveiling in summer 2010 marked a turning point in Sarkozy's presidency, actually the start of his fall, and resonates like a postscript to Vinaver's works. This is therefore a story/history of France, echoing what Antoine Vitez had grasped early on when he presented another of Vinaver's plays, *L'Emission de television*, at Paris' Théâtre de l'Odéon in 1989, a play anticipating the era of reality TV.

He wrote: “Vinaver confuses us with everyday life. ‘The theater of everyday life, a theater of everyday life’: this vulgar expression has been used to qualify his work. But no, he's fooling us. It's not a question of everyday life; it's History with a capital H. It's just that he knows how to extract its essence by watching people live.”

Through sixty years of creativity, Vinaver has not forgotten nor overlooked anything which was or anything which still is at the heart of our immediate history: the democratic crisis, the Algerian war, May 68, unemployment, factories, television, workshops,

offices, strikes, one-upmanship, capital, competition, work, neighborhoods, crimes, catastrophes, terrorism, current events... In a final fireworks display, *Bettencourt Boulevard* hammers it home by whipping our most recent and distressing news to a frenzy: the affairs or scandals, this upside-down world where politics and ambition intermingle in an obsession with power. Affairs, and the obscenity suddenly revealed therein. Etymologically, obscene is that which is off scene, is hidden from view.

Bettencourt Boulevard is a “play in thirty pieces” as its author notes. The first of these thirty scenes opens with the confrontation of two voices from beyond the grave, voices of two great-grandfathers (maternal and paternal) of Liliane Bettencourt's grandsons, Jean-Victor and Nicolas Meyers. Voice of Eugène Schueller, the father of Liliane, chemist and founder of L'Oréal, an extreme-right financier in the pre-war period, dreaming of a new Europe rid of Jews, Bolsheviks and Freemasons. Voice of rabbi Robert Meyers, grandfather of the husband of her only daughter Françoise, arrested under the Vichy regime with his wife Suzanne, both deported in the Feb. 12, 1943 convoy and gassed at Auschwitz. From the start, by imposing this long tragic sequence looming over all the other characters who are “men and women in the headlines”, Michel Vinaver warns us that the history in question here — although woven from immediate current events — extends beyond the legal and media affair which is its raw material.

Here the subject is France and its shady areas, as amplified by the hundreds of small facts interwoven in the Bettencourt affair, these implausible truths where reality often seems to exceed fiction. A history of France therefore, or rather a counter-history of France with its bruised memories, fraudulent glories, dilapidated wealth, avid oligarchs, unscrupulous politics... Not to mention its troubled citizens whose alarm detours through a revolted domesticity. Next, after the duet by these two opposing specters, the chemist and the rabbi, a slew of other characters arrive on scene. Except for a nameless commentator (this narrator who could very well have been a Médiapart journalist) and a generic neuropsychiatrist (whose role emphasizes the legal challenges of medical expertise in qualifying the ‘abuse of a state of weakness’ concerning Liliane Bettencourt), all the other characters are real. So in addition to Liliane, there are: André, her late husband; their daughter Françoise Bettencourt Meyers; the photographer François-Marie Banier,

her rival with her mother; and other household staff on hand, chambermaids, accountant and the butler through whom the entire scandal erupts, via secret recordings made by him. Likewise, Lindsay Owen-Jones, CEO of L'Oréal at the time, is also on the scene, as is financial advisor Patrice de Maistre, the Budget Minister Eric Woerth and his wife Florence and, last of all, Nicolas Sarkozy, then President of the French Republic. As always with Vinaver, since the play is woven from public materials derived from current events, the individuals play their own roles. At the same time, in this "cut and paste" so particular to Vinaver — working with fragments, piecing bits together, assembling sentences, bursts of voices, etc. — he lets them exist, without attempting to prove or accuse. He is not the judge, just a simple narrator. And this is how, through the magic of the tale, reality is sublimated into myth, seeking the tragic eternity just below the surface of the news.

Benjamin's raconteur and Wilder's movies

In these low times would we dare to censor myth and tragedy? Since Vinaver did not deprive himself of any public information available, the only thing missing would be for some of his characters to strive to embody obscenity while trying to remove bothersome reality from the limelight. It's doubtful that they would attempt this in spite of these prosecuting attorneys who, like legal Tartuffes, obliged Médiapart to censor the butler's recordings in 2013, the same recordings without which the scandal would never have broken and the inherent offenses would never have come to light. At any rate, Vinaver and his publisher protected themselves against this eventuality, wielding this preventive weapon which destroys ridicule: irony. As stated in the prologue: "This play, whose theme is drawn from a hotly topical issue, dons the eternal components of legends and myths as it moves along. In ancient Greece playwrights often brought in a god or goddess to close a play. In the case of what is known as the Bettencourt affair, the uncertain close will be brought about by the workings of the court system assisted by medical expertise.

What interests Michel Vinaver is its present and also its past, its roots in the previous 100 years of French history and its repercussions wherein intimate, political and economic facets intermingle indissolubly. Comedy crops up incessantly, on equal footing with tragedy in this gripping saga's run of episodes: men and women in the headlines, heard on the air or seen on TV, strut the boards — somewhat like in the era of Shakespeare when he observed: all the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players.

Which side of the stage are we on?"

For Vinaver, politics has always been a question. The readers or playgoers must search for answers themselves. *Bettencourt Boulevard* is no exception to this, ending on this query fired at the audience by the entire troupe's chorus: "What does theater have to do with this story? That is the question."

The playwright himself stated in a personal interview: "For me, writing is an attempt to see things a little more clearly. It means 'questioning' reality, especially so-called political reality. You might say that doing this is a political action. Yes, that's exactly right. So..." There's nothing more political, in the moral and 'principal' sense of the term, than this theater which can query and question, shift and jostle, rather than pedantically enunciate principles and sententiously preachify.

It is in this sense that Michel Vinaver is a "raconteur" or storyteller as defined by Walter Benjamin. In a 1936 text (publ. Circé) the latter settled on this endangered figure to raise an alarm about the decline of storytelling in our industrial and merchant modernity where one no longer takes time to listen. Where, in this ceaseless maelstrom, today deletes yesterday before being deleted in turn by tomorrow. The raconteur is the one who preserves an actual experience by communicating it without explaining it. He relates what took place, the sequencing of facts, the course of events, the remarks of the protagonists, but leaves readers or listeners free to imagine the scene to their fancy. This is exactly how Vinaver proceeds: relating, telling, stating, as precisely and reliably as possible but without imposing any logics whatsoever concerning the story on his audience. However, this reserve is like a demand: far from leaving his audiences at rest, Vinaver the raconteur puts the question to them. His suspension points are like a summons: and you, what do you make of this story? What will you conclude? That's why we are so impatient to see this *Bettencourt Boulevard* on stage, since it is perhaps the major work dealing with our democratic crisis. For us journalists, we the artisans of small but true facts, it's also a lovely reward: to see our news briefs immediately sublimated into full-length accounts, beyond the present which gave them substance, approaching as close as possible to the myth which will outlive them. From this point of view, with *Bettencourt Boulevard* Michel Vinaver's theater can teach a thing or two to French cinema, so cautious, so shy and so unadventurous when our sensitive topics are at cause. While American cinema persists in seizing this improbable truth which journalistic investigations give rise to, its hexagonal counterpart often remains on the sidelines, contributing to our democratic depression by hesitating to promote this upsetting reality as a national tale, a reality — which because it does indeed create upset — is something that frees, educates and awakens us.

We would love to believe that this is the exact

subliminal message in Vinaver's choice of title for his play. *Bettencourt Boulevard* truly does echo *Sunset Boulevard*, an American film noir released in 1950, in which older faded silent-movie stars and several Hollywood mondaines play their own roles. The film's commentator is a dead person whose cadaver is found floating in a pool in the film's opening scene. Before moving on, perhaps Vinaver had contemplated this other dead body, bobbing in the waters of the Gulf of Morbihan: the lawyer Olivier Metzner who was at the center of the Bettencourt affair before disappearing without warning in March 2013?

Through its boldness and vitality, *Bettencourt Boulevard* turns our silences and caution on their head. The raconteur Vinaver gives us a wake-up call by asking us what we will do with all of that, this imbroglio of lies, hypocrisy and cecity enrooted in money. Indeed, since its Greek origins, tragedy has always existed as the cousin of democracy. Vinaver's direction is a gift, a way of braving obscenity, of facing up to what harms us, of growing while warding off fear and shame.

Médiapart – September 3, 2014

Michel Vinaver: “The Bettencourt affair is a crash”

Comments recorded by Brigitte Salino

At age 87, Michel Vinaver has given us a marvelous play, *Bettencourt Boulevard ou une histoire de France* which portrays the main protagonists of the most noteworthy political-financial affair of the most noteworthy political-financial affair of Nicolas Sarkozy’s presidency. The ex-head of state is depicted here under his own name, as are Patrice de Maistre, François-Marie Banier, Claire Thibout, Eric Woerth, Lindsay Owen-Jones... and, of course, Liliane Bettencourt and her daughter, Françoise Bettencourt Meyers.

The tone is lively, biting, reflexive. Michel Vinaver spoke about it when his play was published by Arche last September 3. It will open the 2015-2016 season at the Théâtre National Populaire in Villeurbanne, directed by Christian Schiaretti.

When and how did you decide to write a play about the “Bettencourt affair”?

I was struck by the charm of this affair from its start, and I amassed everything I could read about it. But I had the feeling that I couldn’t write a play on the subject, on the one hand because I didn’t feel capable of it, and on the other hand because the material was too huge, too copious, too interesting. Little by little the concept took shape and I wrote the play between August 2013 and January 2014. It draws on my memory of the affair. I did not go back to my sources except, from time to time, to check an element or a quote. From the very first I felt free to not follow the timeline. And I worked as if under a spell.

How could the Bettencourt affair have “charm”?

The charm is linked to the feeling that this affair contains all the elements of a myth, which has grown richer and fuller over the course of time, since four years passed between the time the facts occurred and my writing about them. For a playwright, this myth represents an invaluable privilege: it means that the story does not need to be explained, since everyone is familiar with it.

Did you have a specific objective when you began working on it?

No, not on the face of it. I dove into the material, wondering whether I’d be able to do anything with it. With hindsight I tell myself that my aim is to showcase something that’s so well known that it’s not possible to actually have a nourishing picture of it. This is because I believe that there is something extraordinarily rich in this affair: it doesn’t just thrust us into the current events of our times; it throws us into historical depths dating back about one hundred years.

From this point of view, you jump right into the facts: in the opening scenes, you portray Robert Myers, a rabbi who died at Auschwitz, and whose grandson married Françoise Bettencourt; and Eugène Schueller, the father of Liliane Bettencourt, who wrote: “We’re going to give to the Jews remaining in France a severe status which will keep them from polluting our race”...

This is verbatim. But the very same Schueller also said, at the beginning of the play: “We can make mistakes; I’ve often made mistakes”. He explains that he gave money to the Résistance and helped hide Jews, which is true. There are two giants at the roots to this story. Eugène Schueller was a genius, both in inventing as well as in advertising. As for Robert Meyers, he is a hero, a leading figure. There is an enormous gap separating these two men although I never saw this as a conflict between positive and negative. My play does not attempt to judge or denounce. It’s rather an insight into our society through this story.

Why did you call your play *Bettencourt Boulevard*?

The title occurred to me not in connection with théâtre de boulevard (= light comedy) but because of *Sunset Boulevard*, Billy Wilder’s film. In this movie there is a very old lady, played by Gloria Swanson, a butler, played by Erich von Stroheim, and a commentator whose voice is heard at the start

and whom we later recognize as the voice of the drowned man at the bottom of the swimming pool. I wanted to pay homage to this film. In addition, the Bettencourt affair is a large boulevard, due to the great number of people, events and discourse which play a part in it.

Since you mentioned people, was it clear to you from the start that the protagonists would play under their own names?

—
The alternative would have been to cover up, or to find equivalents. This affair is so public per se that if I covered it up, there'd be a guessing game going on — “Oh! That's so-and-so...” — which would have interfered with how the play was seen and heard. Because of the affair's renown, it was possible to move right into identification.

There are many extremely precise facts in the play. But others are invented, right?

—
Yes. Inventions slip into the play, like the quick spa therapy, Eric Woerth's gift to his wife Florence after she'd been dismissed by Patrice de Maistre, or the Chanel socks which Liliane Bettencourt gives François-Marie Banier. From this point of view, the play can be considered to be a fiction work bolstered by the reality of the affair.

What interests me is the link between *Bettencourt Boulevard* and certain of my previous plays such as *L'Ordinaire* which examines the relationship between the rich and their servants, or *11 septembre* which deals with a crash.

In a way, we might say that the Bettencourt affair is

a crash. A crash of what? Of the system, of order, of everything which demands respect, such as power, justice, medicine...

What lesson, if there is one, can be drawn from this affair?

—
It's up to all readers or playgoers to ask themselves the question and to find the answer. As an author I am not a lesson-giver. I try to embrace all the elements and to incite those readers or theatergoers who receive them to think about what might be ranked as admissible or abominable, about things where we might say: “All right, let that be” and about what is putrid decay.

Will you be sending the play to Liliane Bettencourt?

—
I've been debating that, but I haven't yet decided.

Are you expecting any reactions?

—
Vinaver confuses us with everyday life. ‘The theater of everyday life, a theater of everyday life’, this vulgar expression has been used to qualify his work. But no, he's fooling us. It's not a question of everyday life; it's History with a capital H. It's just that he knows how to extract its essence by watching people live.

Le Monde — September 2014

Michel Vinaver: biographical elements

Taken from an interview with Fabienne Darge

In April 1941 my family and I left France following the first Vichy anti-Jewish laws forbidding Jews to work. My father was an antique dealer and had made friends with a very young monarch, Farouk, at the shop he kept with his uncle “A la vieille Russie” (= In Old Russia). In 1940 an envoy of the king of Egypt came to our house and said: “We advise you to leave France, to flee. We can help you out.” This is how we were able to obtain our visas.

It's the Russian side which pervaded. My parents belonged completely to Russian emigration circles. As for Jewishness, it was totally absent. My family neither practiced nor believed, and had no connection to Jewishness as a religion or as an identity. I didn't know that I was Jewish. I learned this because of Vichy. I actually didn't feel Russian either, even if we spoke the language at home. I felt French.

In New York I went school at the lycée français. At the start, I was reticent about America. I didn't feel good about this situation where I'd left my homeland; I had a kind of mental block. Yet I “unblocked” at the university, where I got my Bachelor of Arts degree in a single year. These studies, centered around English and American literature, especially poetry, were what made me love America. I discovered and met T.S. Eliot whose *The Waste Land* I translated under the title *La Terre vague*. Even today this poem remains of utmost importance for me.

In New York I met Albert Camus. I'd read in the paper that he was coming through New York and I tracked him down, literally. I had endless admiration for him, for *The Stranger* and *The Myth of Sisyphus*. I told him that I was studying the comic angle of his works and that caught his attention, since no one ever took that tangent to broach his writing. This became the start of a long relationship: he encouraged me to write, served as my reader at Gallimard, and helped publish my first novel, and then my second.

What drew us together, very intimately, was the theme of the stranger: the fact of not belonging. Being reticent and not rebellious — I've never been a rebellious man. It is this incapacity to generally conform that affects Meursault in *The Stranger*.

At the end of the 1940s, the question of a writer's commitment was absolutely essential. However, for me a writer “commits” in other ways than just through an ideological affiliation, a political project or even a fight.

I am a writer who works directly on the history of his era. This is linked to this incapacity that I have and which my first novel, *Lautaupe*, deals with: not being able to belong, to always feel like a stranger, reticent, even regarding things that I feel closest to. It's a kind of below-the-conscience conscientious objection, meaning that we are not part of things.

This is why, when I returned to France in 1947 I did not incorporate, either, with this or that segment of French society, including that of writers and intellectuals. I enrolled at the Sorbonne where I extensively studied sociology with Georges Gurvitch and which I loved, especially discovering Marcel Mauss and his *Essai sur le don*. I also looked for a job. I was taken on at Gillette and was appointed as the French subsidiary's chief administrative officer, due to a misunderstanding... It was an encounter with Gabriel Monnet, one of the major figures of French theater decentralization, that incited me to write my first play in 1955, *Aujourd'hui ou les Coréens*, which takes place during the Korean War.

What happened first is that *Les Coréens*, staged in 1956 in Lyon by Roger Planchon and then in Paris by Jean-Marie Serreau, received extensive, relatively favorable reviews, even if the play was despised by the right wing as well as dyed-in-the-wool Brechtians. But at least there was some buzz from the reviewers and the audience, whereas there had been none for my two novels. With *Les Coréens* I had the feeling that my work — without being engagé or mannered — had come into its own.

The fundamental factor was Roland Barthes, who defended the play against his own Brechtian friends. This gave me a certain legitimacy and encouraged me to write a second play: *Les Huissiers*, which interwove political issues with an economic problem inspired by my Gillette experience. While working on this second play, I understood that I'd found my field with playwriting: a field where I would no longer have to be enslaved by narration. I believe that I'm a commentator at heart. I need to record things, to not lose touch with passing things, with things that come to pass. What Barthes said stands uncorrected, until *11 septembre 2001* wherein we hear equally well the voices of the terrorists and that of George W. Bush or the “little” employees of the World Trade Center. There are no accusations in the play. As a matter of fact,

this is what bothered many, this is what was misinterpreted: even if there are no accusations this does not mean that I remain indifferent or neutral. It is not that there's no point of view – this simply does not exist, the non-point-of-view. But the point of view takes shape and crystallizes as the play unfolds, at the same time as the work itself. It is not preliminary; it is not brought about by a position of control from above.

To write means to present in what is real, and the "real" is political and streaked with the fact that we are in our cities, in the world. Thus arrives a point in time when orientations grow more finely tuned, and mine was unvarying: even in my most intimate writings there is always this choice to be on the side of the little guy against the big, the weak against the strong. This can be seen as a political position, but it is well on this side of any ideological formulation whatsoever.

What I learned from my professional business job was the extent to which economics impacts people's intimacy, without their necessarily knowing it, without their realizing it. This is where my type of writing intervenes, like ornamental tracery. Because of this tracery, in a single molecule of dialogue there may be economic, amorous and conflictual elements, whether with the boss or anyone else. This type of polyphonic writing is one way to meet this desire to be part of the "real". Obviously we do not realize this, we think that the world is neatly organized in various chapters. But perhaps, originating from this strangeness which is the tracery, theater may allow viewers to catch onto this particular reality.

Le Monde2 — January, 2009

Christian Schiaretti

In 1991 he was appointed director of the Comédie de Reims which he led for 11 years. His aim was to produce a repertoire of both classical and modern plays: Corneille, but also surrealist theatre and the *Ahmed* cycle by the philosopher Alain Badiou, commissioned by the Comédie de Reims. His collaboration with the poet Jean-Pierre Siméon gave birth to *Stabat Mater Furiosa* and *Le Petit Ordinaire*. In 1988, along with the poet he founded *Les Langagières* in Reims. Since 2002 he has been the director of the TNP-Villeurbanne where he produced *Mother Courage* by Brecht (Georges Lerminier prize 2002), *Joan* based on Péguy's *Joan of Arc*, *Death and the Ploughman* by Johannes von Saaz, *The Three penny Opera* by Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill, *Father* by August Strindberg, *The Annunciation to Mary* by Paul Claudel, *Ervart or the Last Days of Friedrich Nietzsche* by Hervé Blutsch, *Coriolanus* by Shakespeare (Georges Lerminier prize 2007, Prix du Brigadier 2008, Molière award for best producer, and for best public theatre production 2009).

He continued his work on Brecht in fall 2007, with Jean-Claude Malgoire and Nada Strancar, presenting: *Nada Strancar chante Brecht/Dessau*.

In March 2008 he made news with his production *Par-dessus bord* by Michel Vinager, performed for the first time in France in its full-length version. For this work he won the Grand Prix du Syndicat de la Critique for the best show of 2008. In September 2009 his creation of Jean-Pierre Siméon's *Philoctète* (variations on Sophocles) at the Odéon-Théâtre de l'Europe marked Laurent Terzieff's return to the Odéon.

After presenting Paul Claudel's *La Messe là-bas* featuring Didier Sandre at the Théâtre les Gémeaux in Sceaux in November 2010 he took on three major works from 17th century Spanish repertory. Three plays in a cycle called *Le Siècle d'or* — *Don Quichotte* by Miguel de Cervantes, *La Célestine* by Fernando de Rojas, *Don Juan* by Tirso de Molina — were presented alternately at the TNP and reproduced at the Théâtre Nanterre-Amandiers.

It was likewise in 2010 when he went back to *La Jeanne de Delteil*, after Joseph Delteil's novel, with Juliette Rizoud playing the title role. This production has been on tour ever since.

In May 2011 Christian Schiaretti was able to return to Strindberg with the creation of the diptych *Mademoiselle Julie* and *Créanciers* at La Colline-Théâtre national. Meanwhile, the ambitious project of *Graal Théâtre* by Florence Delay and Jacques Roubaud started up in June 2011. This consisted of staging the legend of the Holy Grail until end 2014, with the first five plays: *Joseph d'Armathie*, *Merlin l'Enchanteur*, *Gauvain et le Chevalier Vert*, *Perceval le Gallois*, *Lancelot du Lac* merging the companies and resources of both the TNP and the TNS.

By 2011, after four seasons off-site or in the Petit Théâtre (opened in 2009), the Grand Théâtre opened its doors November 11 – guided by a new architectural configuration and new artistic outlook – with Victor Hugo's *Rhuy Blas*.

In the fall of 2012, Christian Schiaretti once again put contemporary history to the question with *Mai, juin, juillet* by Denis Guénoun, a play that also ran at the 2014 Festival d'Avignon.

For the 2013 centenary of the birth of Aimé Césaire, Schiaretti paid tribute to this great poet by creating *Une Saison au Congo* on tour at Théâtre Les Gémeaux in Sceaux and in Fort-de-France, Martinique. The 2014 Prix Georges-Lerminier was bestowed on this production by the Syndicat Professionnel de la Critique.

In a spirit of cross-fertilization, Christian Schiaretti worked with Robin Renucci and Les Tréteaux de France to create theatrical forms adapted to théâtre de tréteaux (literally: trestle-board theater) and to touring. Three plays grew out of this preparation: a version of *Rhuy Blas* (2012), *L'École des femmes* (2013) and *La Leçon* (2014).

Schiaretti returned to Shakespeare in January 2014 with *Le Roi Lear* starring Serge Merlin in the title role. The play was created at the TNP and ran at the Théâtre de la Ville in Paris and Bateau Feu in Dunkerque for the reopening of the scène nationale there.

Directing operas

Pelléas et Mélisande by Claude Debussy, 2015 and 1996

Castor et Pollux by Jean-Philippe Rameau, 2014

Jules César by George Frederick Handel, 2011

La Créole by Jacques Offenbach, 2009

La Tosca by Giacomo Puccini, 2008

Le Barbier de Séville by Giovanni Paisiello and Gioachino Rossini, 2005

Eugène Onéguine by Piotr Ilitch Tchaïkovski, 2003

L'Échelle de soie by Gioachino Rossini, 2001

Ariane à Naxos by Richard Strauss, 2001

Hänsel et Gretel, an opera for children by Engelbert Humperdinck, 1998

Madame Butterfly by Giacomo Puccini, 1997

Teaching at the École Nationale Supérieure des Arts et Techniques du Théâtre

Because he cares greatly about furthering education, Christian Schiaretti brought about a close partnership with the ENSATT school on his arrival in Lyon.

In particular, at ENSATT he directed *Utopia* in 2003, adapted from Aristophanes; *L'Épaule indifférente et la Bouche malade* by Roger Vitrac, in 2004. In 2006, he directed *Le Projet Maeterlinck* (*Les Aveugles, Intérieur, La Mort de Tintagiles*) with the 65th graduating class. In 2007, working with the 66th year he directed *Les Visionnaires* by Jean Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin. In 2009, *Hippolyte et La Troade* by Robert Garnier was likewise staged with the 68th class.

Today he co-heads the staging department of this school.

Christian Schiaretti is chairman of Les Amis de Jacques Copeau. He also presided the Association pour un Centre Culturel de Rencontre à Brangues and chaired the SYNDEAC from 1994 to 1996.

Informations pratiques

The TNP

8 Place Lazare-Goujon
69627 Villeurbanne cedex
04 78 03 30 30
www.tnp-villeurbanne.com

Getting to the TNP

Via TCL, public transportation

By subway: metro line A, to the Gratte-Ciel stop

By bus: line C3 to Paul-Verlaine stop; lines 27, 69 and C26 to Mairie de Villeurbanne stop

By car: take the cours Emile-Zola as far as the Gratte-Ciel district, follow signs to Hôtel de Ville.

Or take the périphérique ring road, exiting at "Villeurbanne Cusset / Gratte-Ciel".

Performance schedule

November 2015 — Thursday 19, Friday 20 ,
Saturday 21, Tuesday 24, Wednesday 25,
Thursday 26, Friday 27, Saturday 28 at 8:00 p.m.
Sundays 22, 29  at 3:30 p.m.

December 2015 — Tuesday 1, Wednesday 2,
Thursday 3, Friday 4, Saturday 5, Wednesday 9,
Thursday 10  , Friday 11, Saturday 12,
Tuesday 15, Wednesday 16, Thursday 17, Friday 18,
Saturday 19 at 8:00 p.m.
Sundays 6, 13   at 3:30 p.m.

 Prélude,  Audiodescription,  Théâtrémôme (for children)
 Post-performance encounters

On tour

From January 20 to February 14, 2016
La Colline – Théâtre national, Paris

From March 8 to 11, 2016
Comédie, Reims



Le Monde

