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## Actors, playwrights and lawyers : the contribution of notarial documents to seventeenth-century French theatre history.<sup>1</sup>

First of all, I would like to thank the Trustees for kindly inviting me to talk about my research in the archives. Actually, I hesitated a little before accepting the invitation, as I wasn't sure whether the rather pernickety work that I've been engaged on would lend itself properly to such an occasion. But then I recalled the great value that Klaus himself always attached to carefully establishing fact, and to distinguishing between fact and hypothesis. So, here I am . . .

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As this lecture is about legal matters, I ought to begin by pointing out – in pseudo-legalistic fashion – that my title needs a couple of 'get-out' clauses. It is in fact the first half of the seventeenth century, before the reign of Louis XIV, that I have been working on. Secondly, the word *lawyers* probably has the wrong connotations here in Britain; as my sub-title suggests, it is notaries that I have in mind.

The *notaires* will be my starting point today: those officials who draw up and attest documents, giving them legal status. As anyone who has bought a property in France will certainly know, whereas English solicitors (like French *avocats*) act on behalf of their clients, the French *notaires* represent the state. In seventeenth-century legal documents, a commonly found opening formula is: 'Par devant les notaires gardenottes du Roy notre sire'.<sup>2</sup> The notaries were the king's record-keepers.

There were nearly a hundred notaries' practices (*études de notaires*) in Paris in the first half of the seventeenth century, and they were kept very busy, for in the age of Corneille and Molière all sorts of agreements and transactions were drawn up and authenticated by the notary. Not only major matters such as the sale or purchase of property, marriage contracts, wills, and inventories after death; but also leases for dwelling houses and commercial properties (such as theatres), sales contracts (for example, between actors and dramatists, or dramatists and publishers), acts of society (*actes d'association*) binding together a group of individuals in a common pursuit (such as a company of actors), deeds of apprenticeship, acts of obligation for the granting of a loan, acts of quittance for repayment, and all manner of other agreements, promises, protests, declarations, summonses and procurations. So much more of the life of that period is chronicled in the notaries' papers than I suspect would emerge from our modern solicitors' records. Which of course makes those

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<sup>1</sup> The text of the Lecture is followed by an Appendix of supporting documents, which appears below at pp. 15-30 and which readers may wish to view on-screen simultaneously.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, the lease reproduced in Appendix V, p. 20.

papers a valuable source for historians – and indeed a doubly valuable one, because historians are rarely able to draw on Parisian parish registers, most of which were destroyed during the Commune of 1871.

Now, the value of notarial sources for some aspects of French theatre history had already been recognized by a few scholars in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Among them, two names stand out for the early seventeenth century.<sup>3</sup> One is Eudore Soulié, whose 1863 book was mainly concerned with documents relating to Molière; but Soulié also discovered, among one *notaire*'s records, an important and extensive inventory, drawn up in 1639, of titles and legal papers from the previous two hundred or so years regarding the Hôtel de Bourgogne, which was the first purpose-built theatre in Paris. The other name is that of the Dutchman Jan Fransen, whose important article in 1927 revealed his discovery in a different notarial office of over forty leases for the Bourgogne, granted between 1606 and 1635 to actors whose identities were in many cases recorded. This pioneering work by Soulié and Fransen was carried out in very difficult conditions: special permission had to be sought from the notaries currently in charge of the *études* in order to examine their archives and copy out or publish anything of interest.

Happily, those conditions were changed – and research much facilitated – by a law passed by the French government in 1928, which set up the Minutier central des notaires de Paris, a central archive for the minutes (or records) of the Parisian notaries. This law required that all *minutes* dating back more than a hundred years should be deposited in the Minutier. This central archive was to be housed in the Hôtel de Rohan, in the Marais, on the rue Vieille-du-Temple, from where it is still administered, though researchers now consult its *actes* in the nearby reading room for the Archives nationales, of which the Minutier central forms part.

Of course, the Minutier cannot claim to have every single *acte* drawn up over the four hundred years or so spanned by its holdings. Few of the *notaires* will have kept their ancient records in ideal conditions for conservation, and many documents have been destroyed by damp, mould, rats, mice and paperworms. Consequently, there are often gaps in the early periods, sometimes for a full term or semester, sometimes for a whole sequence of years. Nevertheless, a huge number did survive. Already in 1948, the Minutier central was being hailed as ‘le plus grand minutier du monde’; recently, its holdings have been estimated at more than twenty million documents, requiring twenty kilometers of shelving.<sup>4</sup> And within that vast archive is to be found a considerable amount of information for historians of the French theatre.

Naturally, the creation of the Minutier soon stimulated research in that field. For the early seventeenth century, the outstanding name is that of Madame Deierkauf-Holsboer. In 1947, she brought out a biography of the actor-playwright Alexandre Hardy, which was also a study of the acting companies of his time, based on forty-two notarial documents that she published and interpreted. Later, she published histories of the two major seventeenth-century Paris playhouses, the Théâtre du Marais and the Hôtel de Bourgogne, similarly based on dozens of previously unknown *actes notariés*.

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<sup>3</sup> For bibliographical details of major contributions to seventeenth-century theatre history based on notarial sources and which preceded my own work, see Appendix I, p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix IV, p. 18.

These two histories are indebted, however, not only to Deierkauf-Holsboer's own discoveries, but also to those deriving from an important project initiated in 1948 by the Société d'histoire littéraire de la France. This project involved curators at the Archives nationales carrying out a systematic *dépouillement* (i.e. a 'trawling') of the notarial archives, with the aim of identifying and summarizing those documents which related to seventeenth-century literary and theatrical history. Two important books resulted from this project in the 1960s, both collaborative works bearing the name of one of the Minutier's curators, Madeleine Jurgens: a study of Molière, his family and colleagues, based on scores of previously unknown records; and a volume containing summaries of all the notaries' papers which related to literary history in the years 1650-1700. The latter is a vital biographical source for many playwrights, and it also includes seventy-four pages of *actes* – many previously unknown – pertaining to actors.

This systematic trawl would continue until the early 1980s when Madame Jurgens retired. After the second half of the seventeenth century, attention had turned to the first. A large pile of folders was filled with synopses – the Archives' term is *analyses* – of the documents located. More than four hundred of these synopses concerned actors and theatre proprietors, an even greater number authors and literary figures. I first became aware of these inventories around 1980, when I was allowed to consult the *analyses* and to use a few of them for articles that I was preparing at that time. But, although I quickly realized the significance of much of this material, I initially held back: the *analyses* were not in the public domain, and I had been told that everything was to be published 'imminently'. However, the promised volumes never appeared. After the retirement of Madame Jurgens, the Archives lacked staff with the specialist knowledge to complete that particular project. To cut a very long story short, those were the circumstances in which, as I did research again at the Minutier in the 1990s, the collaborative projects were devised which would make all the material relating to the theatre in the period 1600-1649 available in my two books brought out by the Archives nationales, *Le Théâtre professionnel à Paris* and *Écrivains de théâtre*.<sup>5</sup> These two works publish (albeit mainly in summary form) all the Parisian notaries' papers on the theatre, and they discuss the new light that the considerable number of hitherto unknown documents cast, respectively, on the actors and theatre proprietors, and on the playwrights.

Today I would like to look at a few of those notarial papers, dealing first with the actors and then with the dramatists. What I hope to convey is some of the interest and importance of these documents, and to that end I have selected some of the most significant of them and the most appropriate for 'case study'. For anyone in today's audience who happens to be already familiar with my published work, I should add that I am also proposing to go beyond what has been printed by outlining (for both actors and dramatists) some areas that are still in need of further enquiry.

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<sup>5</sup> Full bibliographical details of these two volumes, as well as of my articles based on notarial sources, are given in Appendix II, p. 16.

For the professional theatre, we now possess a total of 458 Parisian notarial documents, of which around three hundred (i.e. two-thirds) had never previously been published.

Some documents are concerned with the financial affairs of theatre proprietors, but the great majority relate to the actors themselves. Naturally, their individual value varies greatly from one document to another. Many are like tiny jigsaw pieces to be fitted into a large, incomplete picture of a troupe's activity or of an actor's biography. However, sometimes there are large pieces, or we find that several small pieces fit together to provide a sizeable portion of the overall picture. Often, the new pieces will cause us to review and amend the image we had earlier of that overall picture; and in some cases they will sketch in details of a new picture whose existence we had not suspected.

Let's have a look at a couple of the larger pieces that came to light.

My first 'case-study'<sup>6</sup> is a lease for the Hôtel de Bourgogne theatre: one that its proprietors, a guild called the Confrérie de la Passion, granted on 9 July 1629, for the months of October and November of that year, to Alexandre Hardy and actors of the Prince of Orange's troupe. This is an extremely valuable document from several points of view.

First of all, it is important for our perception of the role of the actor-dramatist Alexandre Hardy, France's first (and very prolific) professional playwright, who in 1629 had been writing for some thirty-odd years. Now, we already knew that by 1627 Hardy had ended his association with the company which had been performing most regularly at the Hôtel de Bourgogne during the 1620s, the company directed by the tragedian Bellerose and the farce-actor Gros-Guillaume. Historians had assumed that, in breaking with those employers, Hardy had exiled himself from the centre of French theatrical life during his last years before his death in 1632. However, far from being marginalized, the 1629 lease shows Hardy to be working for the major rivals of his former employers, for a troupe led by the famous Charles Le Noir, which was to perform at the Bourgogne towards the end of 1629. This lease therefore causes us radically to reassess Hardy's role towards the end of his life, as well as a number of theories that have been based on the dates at which his plays were assumed to have ceased being performed at the Hôtel de Bourgogne.

Secondly, this lease helps us to establish the origins of the Marais company. (The company is known by that name because from late 1629 or early 1630 it performed at various temporary locations in the Marais district of Paris before establishing itself permanently there in 1634.) This is the troupe which first premiered all of Pierre Corneille's early plays, including his greatest triumph, *Le Cid*. But it is a company whose origins had remained shrouded in mystery. The generally prevailing view has been that in 1629 the Prince of Orange's company, wearied by their battle to supplant Bellerose, Gros-Guillaume and their colleagues at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, had left Paris definitively, to be replaced by new arrivals under the direction of Le Noir and the great Montdory. However, the details provided by the 1629 lease, supplemented by a patchwork of data derived from other notarial documents (i.e. the

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<sup>6</sup> See Appendix V, pp. 19-20.

tiny pieces in the jig-saw puzzle), allow us to deduce that it was in fact the Prince of Orange's troupe which evolved into the Marais company.

Thirdly, the dates for which Le Noir and his colleagues hired the Hôtel de Bourgogne correspond with those which have been very feasibly assigned to – and almost universally accepted for – the first performance of Corneille's first play, *Mélite*. It had always been thought that *Mélite* was premiered by Le Noir's company somewhere in the Marais district towards the end of 1629. However, we learn from the 9 July 1629 lease that during October and November of that year the actors in question were to be performing at the Hôtel de Bourgogne. Here, I think, is to be found the key to Corneille's own hitherto mysterious reference to not one, but two, early runs of his comedy: the first, brief and none-too-successful (which I deduce to have been at the Bourgogne); the second (in the Marais), a great triumph which established the company's reputation. My further hunch is that between those two runs the great actor Montdory rejoined the company, but it would take too much of our time today to set out all the circumstantial evidence,<sup>7</sup> so I'll pass on . . .

My second 'case-study'<sup>8</sup> is another lease involving the Marais troupe. Thanks to Deierkauf-Holsboer's researches, we already knew the names and locations of some of the converted tennis courts (*jeux de paume*) in which these actors performed for various periods from 1630 onwards : the Bertault (impasse Beaubourg), La Sphère (rue Vieille-du-Temple), La Fontaine (rue Michel-Le-Comte), and finally the Jeu de Paume des Marestz (rue Vieille-du-Temple). Now, a lease of 29 April 1631 provides information about yet another *jeu de paume* that they hired, with the intention of converting it into a theatre and performing there for four years. The length of the lease is no doubt an indication of the success that the company had already obtained at the Bertault – a success also reflected in this document by the fact that these actors, like their rivals at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, now call themselves *comédiens du roi*. This is the earliest indication we have that the king's patronage had replaced that of Frederick-Henry of Nassau, Prince of Orange.

However, one of the principal reasons why this lease is so important is that it provides a complete list of the Marais company's personnel. When set beside earlier and later documents, it allows us to track the membership of what emerges as a relatively stable troupe, and in doing so to identify – for the first time, and with a high degree of certainty – the actors who originally performed Corneille's early plays.<sup>9</sup>

Equally important, however, is that this unusually lengthy document gives a very detailed description of the building work that the actors wished to be carried out in order to convert the tennis court into a theatre. I shall pick out just two features: one is reminiscent of the Hôtel de Bourgogne theatre, the other contrasts with it.

The similarity concerns the existence of an upper as well as a lower stage. The Bourgogne theatre had a small, narrow stage suspended above the large main stage. Our 1631 contract similarly mentions a 'petit plancher de bon bois pour faire

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<sup>7</sup> The question is discussed in the last article cited in Appendix II, p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> See Appendix VI, pp. 21-22.

<sup>9</sup> For his first comedy, *Mélite*, I provide an annotated cast-list in Appendix XII, p. 30.

descendre des machines'. This is the first such mention for the Marais company and proves that the actors wished to use such an installation from the early 1630s. It thus bears out the close study of Mairet's *Les Galanteries du duc d'Ossone* by Philip Tomlinson, who found that the comedy, first performed by the Marais company in 1633, presupposed the existence, and frequent use, of a second stage.<sup>10</sup>

The major difference between the Hôtel de Bourgogne and the theatre to be built at the tennis court on the rue du Temple lies in the number of boxes (*loges*) planned for the latter. At the Bourgogne there were a dozen at most, whereas for the 1631 conversion the contract envisages many more: twenty-seven or (depending on one's interpretation) perhaps as many as thirty. So, while the Bourgogne was essentially a theatre designed for the popular public in the pit (*parterre*), and would remain so until it was modernized in 1647, we can see that already in the early 1630s the Marais company was wishing to design a building which would accommodate the nobles and the wealthy. This is a further indication that the latter were increasingly being drawn to the fashionable pursuit of theatregoing.

I should add that the Marais company never actually got to perform in the *jeu de paume* on the rue du Temple. The proprietor's financial problems prevented him from honouring the deal, so eventually the actors had their money returned. Nevertheless, the survival of the lease is important: it has already proved a boon for historians of theatre architecture, as is illustrated, for example, by two recently published conference papers by John Golder and Jan Clarke, who explore questions relating to the *loges* and the amphitheatre.<sup>11</sup>

Those two leases of 1629 and 1631 are among the most important documents appearing in *Le Théâtre professionnel à Paris*. However, by themselves they cannot give a true indication of the sheer range of data that the fund of notarial documents provides. Let me, therefore, try briefly to compensate and to convey a small flavour of that range and variety.

Several of the *actes* reveal the unexpected intensity of theatrical activity in Paris during the early years of the seventeenth century, and the remarkable profusion of troupes present there following the decision taken in 1597 by the Confrérie de la Passion to hire out the Hôtel de Bourgogne.

Many of them also afford glimpses into the everyday lives of these early professional companies, and particularly into their struggles: their debts and financial difficulties, leading to the sale of belongings such as costumes and jewelry, or the seizure of their scenery when the rent was not paid, the brevity of their associations, the need for companies to join together as one, or to agree to share a stage on alternate days.

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<sup>10</sup> Philip Tomlinson, 'Towards a new realism: the contemporary staging of Jean Mairet's *Les Galanteries du duc d'Ossone*', in *En Marge du classicisme: Essays on the French Theatre from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, edited by Alan Howe and Richard Waller, Liverpool University Press, 1987, pp. 65-93 (pp. 86-87).

<sup>11</sup> See Appendix III, p. 17.

But, alongside the struggles, they also reveal the optimism and solidarity of certain individuals, who stick together, constantly return to Paris, and take on pupils and apprentices; and they identify a number of early patrons of the professional stage, who provided vital financial backing in the form of loans or of debt repayments. Then, as we move into the 1620s and 1630s, they show the stability that the surviving companies gradually achieve, and the prosperity of certain actors, who can afford to purchase nice properties in the country and rent desirable apartments in Paris.

The documents also provide details of the terms of collaboration between actors and musicians, and between the actors and their dramatist (who often received a fixed sum, though we learn that on occasion Hardy was given a share of the company's profits, a practice which had previously been associated exclusively with the second half of the century).

These documents highlight too the dangers of the profession. We find an actor suffering physical and verbal injury from a lawyer's clerk in 1611, the wives of two actors (perhaps themselves actresses) raped in 1616, Charles Le Noir murdered in 1637. Even on the stage the actors were not safe : in 1611 one was struck and injured by another during a performance at the Hôtel de Bourgogne.

Among this plethora of details, the documents provide information about the reconstruction and design of the theatres, including the eventual modernization of the Hôtel de Bourgogne. They afford us a glimpse of royal intervention in theatrical life, not only in 1634 and 1642 when we already knew that Louis XIII ordered several members of the successful Marais company to transfer to the Bourgogne, but also as early as 1614, when one troupe of actors, in spite of their valid lease, were obliged to give up the Bourgogne to another company 'par ordre exprès de Sa Majesté' (that is, by order of the Regent, Marie de Médicis, as Louis XIII was only thirteen at the time). In addition, on another level altogether, they tell us about the existence of refreshment sellers, who were granted concessions at the Hôtel de Bourgogne for the sale of fruit, bread, wine and macaroons.

Above all, however, they provide a wealth of biographical data for scores of major and minor actors. Among early examples, let me mention just two: Valleran Le Conte, an outstanding and influential actor-director, who is found to be still active in Paris in 1615 whereas theatre historians had thought him dead several years earlier; and Georges Buffequin, known as Maître Georges, set designer at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, who is discovered to have brought to his job first-hand experience of the stage, for a precious act of society reveals that he was an actor-director early in his career. These notarial papers also allow us to deduce the identities of, among others, the actor and burlesque author Bruscombille, the actor-playwright Desfontaines, the 1630s actress Mademoiselle La Fleur, who turns out to be Jeanne Buffequin, daughter of Maître Georges and third wife of the farce actor Gros-Guillaume. Furthermore, they reveal that the actor whom theatre historians had called Pierre Renaud Petitjean, and who they thought was born in 1595 and remained active until shortly before his death 81 years later, was in fact two actors with shorter careers, Pierre Petitjean and his son Renaud. (It's the son who, towards the end of his career, was orator and manager at the Marais).

The documents cast light, too, on the existence of numerous acting couples, on the professional consequences of marital quarrels and estrangement, on the creation of whole ‘dynasties’ of acting families, on connections between those families.

Finally, it is not just the French actors they tell us about. A good number of notarial papers relate to Italian companies, who (as is well known) played a prominent role in Paris theatrical life at various times in the seventeenth century. For example, there is ample evidence of close relations and collaboration between Valleran Le Conte and Italian actors, which could, one assumes, have had consequences for the imitation in French productions of the acting style of the Italian *commedia dell’arte*. Later, the practitioners of that art are shown to be playing in Paris in 1641, at a time when they had been thought to be absent, which allows for a possibility which had previously been denied: namely that the young Molière, whose own comedy would owe so much to the Italians, had been able to see them perform during a formative period of his life.

Five other documents also reveal the presence in Paris, in 1646, of an English company.<sup>12</sup> This discovery came as a huge surprise, because theatre historians had believed that English players were absent from the French capital between 1604 and 1707. These *actes* disclose that on 19 July 1646 an Englishman called Samuel Speede and his presumably French wife, Anne André, hired the Jeu de Paume de Becquet, at Saint-Germain-des-Prés (in the rue de Vaugirard), for a period of six months. It is unclear whether Speede was an actor-manager or an impresario; but English legal documents and pamphlets allow us to identify the company he represented as that of the Prince of Wales, the future Charles II. Following the defeat of the royalist army at Oxford in 1646, Charles had fled to France, where in June he joined his mother, Henrietta-Maria, daughter of the French king Henri IV. For a time, Paris would become a centre for royalist exiles. An anti-royalist pamphlet of November 1646 supplements the evidence of the French notarial papers by stating that the English theatre audience in Paris was ‘so poor [...] that they were not able to maintain the charges of the Stage’, so that the company was soon ‘for want of pay dissolved’.

The financial problems of the Prince of Wales’s company were probably exacerbated by the very substantial fee charged for the rental of the Becquet : seven *livres* per day, the equivalent of 2,555 *livres* per annum. This was considerably more than the 1900 *livres* a year that Molière and his colleagues agreed to pay only three years earlier, for a *jeu de paume* in the very same district of Saint-Germain-des-Prés; and it was more even than the 2400 *livres* annual rental that, in 1647, French actors would pay for the newly renovated Hôtel de Bourgogne. Another case, some may be thinking, of ‘the English ripped off in Paris’!

The lease of 19 July records that Speede and his wife were lodged by the Petits Comédiens des Marais. This was the familiar title of the Marais company, led at that time by the actor called Floridor. Speede was thus granted hospitality by one of the few French actors known to have visited London: Floridor had performed here in 1635 – at the Cockpit in Whitehall, and then in Drury Lane – and he had enjoyed the patronage of Queen Henrietta-Maria. His reception seems to have been much better than that afforded a French company at the Blackfriars six years earlier, which was

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<sup>12</sup> See Appendix VIII, p. 25.



reportedly ‘hissed, hooted and peppin-pelted’ by an audience scandalized to see actresses appearing on the stage.

Finally, on the actors, I would like to draw attention to two matters for which the notarial documents provide much data but which, I would suggest, need further investigation. They concern actresses, and the organization of the acting companies.

Let us take the second point first. Deierkauf-Holsboer maintained that ‘chaque troupe avait un chef’. Now, the *chef* or manager has been assumed to be (a) the actor who habitually represented all of his colleagues or a number of inexperienced actors; or (b) the actor whose name appears first in the list of performers, since in the notarial documents these lists are normally hierarchical; or (c) the one who received the largest share of the company’s profits, on account not only of his experience and expertise but also of his expenses and responsibilities.

Someone who certainly fulfills all of these criteria at the beginning of the century is Valleran Le Conte. References are made to ‘sa compagnie’, and he is the one who takes on apprentices, obtains costumes and sets, arranges transport for provincial tours, and incurs debts on behalf of his company. The notarial documents also assign some of these functions to several later actors, including Montdory, Bellerose, Floridor and of course Molière, who were all undoubtedly *chefs de troupe*.

Nevertheless, the question arises of whether the actors normally and readily accepted the authority of a so-called manager. Was Valleran an archetype or an exception? Some historians have pointed to the ‘democratic’ organization of the acting companies and have cited the evidence of Chappuzeau, who wrote of their ‘Gouvernement Republicain’ and recorded that the actors ‘n’admettent point de Supérieur ; ils veulent tous estre égaux’.<sup>13</sup> Chappuzeau’s *Théâtre françois* was written in the second half of the century; but had the situation really changed? In the first half, several documents stipulate that all decisions about the plays to be performed or about the admission of new members shall be taken by all the actors together, as a democratic body: ‘qu’ilz adviseront bon estre par ensemble’, ‘du consentement commung de tous’, are recurrent formulae.

The democratic ideal seems to be taken even further in one *acte*, dating from 1618.<sup>14</sup> This is the contract of society of Jean Gassot’s company. Here, not only do we find the usual stipulation about the ‘consentement mutuel de tous’, but also an unusual clause: ‘et seront les roolles, pour estudier et apprendre, départiz et distribuez par celluy d’entre eux qui au plus de voix sera esleu pour ce faire’. Deierkauf-Holsboer has written that in the seventeenth century it was normally the company manager who assigned the parts among the actors; but here, in Jean Gassot’s company, the person who does that is elected to the task by a majority of his colleagues. In other words, the company manager was not necessarily the artistic director. Indeed, in Gassot’s company there seems to be no overall artistic direction, for another clause stipulates that each actor ‘sera tenu se vestir, habiller et équiper à sa volonté et selon qu’il conviendra[,] à ses despens’.

<sup>13</sup> Samuel Chappuzeau, *Le Théâtre françois*, ed. Georges Monval, Paris: Bonnassies, 1875, p. 102.

<sup>14</sup> See Appendix VII, pp. 23-24.

Another interesting detail in the 1618 document brings me to my second point, concerning the actresses. Jean Gassot is accompanied by his daughter Nicole, ‘aged thirteen or thereabouts’. Despite her youth, Nicole probably was not confined to children’s roles; for the astonishing thing we learn here is that at thirteen years old she already had sufficient talent and prestige to be allocated a whole share in the company’s profits, as well as a full voice in their decisions.

The case of Nicole Gassot (who would go on to achieve great fame as Mademoiselle Bellerose) is exceptional. However, amongst her contemporaries there were several other accomplished actresses. If this were not so, how can we explain why, at a time when actresses were rarely named in the leases and acts of society, certain of their number (such as Rachel Trépeau, Marie Venière and her sister Colombe) figure among the whole-share members of the companies? That is another question which, like company managers versus democratic organization, requires further investigation.

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I now turn – at last, and more briefly – to the *écrivains de théâtre*, a term which I interpret very broadly as applying to all those authors who wrote plays, even if some of them were better known for other literary genres. Altogether, for this category we now have 173 notary documents (many previously unpublished), relating to twenty-five playwrights.

They afford a rich source of information concerning, on the one hand, the careers of the dramatists and, on the other, the publication of their works. Amongst the biographical data, we discover where writers lived, the positions they held, details of their financial dealings and their sources of revenue. We learn, too, of Scarron’s relationship with his family, of Tristan L’Hermite’s with his patrons, of Hardy’s with his actors. For several dramatists, these notarial papers are in fact our principal biographical sources. As for the information about publishing, it comes from two types of contract that are well represented among these *minutes*: those between an author and a publisher (twenty-seven of which have survived), and those between two or more publishers (of which we possess twelve). These thirty-nine agreements involve seventeen of the twenty-five authors concerned; and it is these publication-related contracts that I shall draw on for my ‘case studies’.

The first concerns Jean de Rotrou’s tragi-comedy *Cléagénor et Doristée*.<sup>15</sup> Two editions of the play were published by Antoine de Sommaville: the first, anonymously, in 1634; the second, with many textual changes and now carrying the dramatist’s name, preface and dedication, in 1635. In the anonymous edition, Sommaville claimed to have been handed the manuscript by someone of unknown identity. However, theatre historians have maintained that this person was none other than Rotrou himself. Deierkauf-Holsboer believed that this was a case of a professional playwright in dispute with the actors who bought his plays, wishing for better terms from them, and engaging in an act of rebellion by handing his manuscript to a publisher without the actors’ permission – an infringement of normal contractual

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<sup>15</sup> See Appendix IX, p. 26.

obligations because, once printed, a play would enter the public domain and the author's employers (i.e. the actors) would be deprived of their exclusive rights over it. However, this neat theory is disproved by an agreement on 5 December 1634 between Rotrou, Sommaville and the latter's publisher-colleague Toussaint Quinet. This document shows beyond any doubt whatsoever that the playwright had not authorized the anonymous edition of his play, and that he had brought court cases about it against Sommaville and Quinet. By the terms of the 5 December agreement, in exchange for a rather handsome fee, Rotrou authorized the publisher to bring out a new edition of his play – now called simply *La Doristée* – from a newly corrected copy that he would provide. Crucially, therefore, we discover that the first authorized edition of the play was the 1635 one, and not (as had been believed) the 1634. I should add that these findings were passed on to the editor of the fifth volume of Rotrou's *Théâtre complet* (published by STFM) in time for them to be taken into account in establishing the base-text for the critical edition of *La Doristée*.<sup>16</sup>

My second example<sup>17</sup> is, in my opinion, the most important notarial document to have come to light on the dramatists. It concerns Pierre Corneille's most renowned masterpiece, *Le Cid*. It was already known that on 21 January 1637, within three or four weeks of the stage première of that tragi-comedy, the publisher-bookseller Augustin Courbé had obtained a royal *privilège* for the publication of *Le Cid* and three earlier comedies by Corneille. (A *privilège* fulfilled the needs of censorship and also provided a form of copyright for a fixed period – in this case, the exceptionally long period of twenty years.) It was also known that in order to publish these plays Courbé had entered into association with a fellow merchant bookseller (*marchand libraire*), François Targa, under the terms of an unspecified notarial contract 'passé entr'eux par devant les Notaires du Chastelet de Paris'. That deed of transfer came to light in the Minutier central. Dated 10 March 1637, it is a vital document for publishing history and for the material bibliography of Corneille's works. It discloses that Courbé transferred half of his rights in the January *privilège* to Targa; but it also reveals that the two publishers' collaboration did not follow the normal pattern. Instead of each taking responsibility for two plays, each took care of half of each of the four plays. Thus, *Le Cid* and the three comedies were each printed in two different printshops, and the different compositing styles of the two can be seen clearly from close examination of the early quartos. Alain Riffaud has been able to identify the printers involved: in a recent article, he shows that François Targa commissioned his brother Pierre, while Courbé used the printer Nicolas Gasse, a careless fellow whose slipshod work introduced a large number of errors into the gatherings confided to him.<sup>18</sup>

Alongside other valuable information, the transfer deed shows that in March 1637 the publishers already envisaged producing a small-format edition of *Le Cid*. In the seventeenth century, the situation was somewhat analogous to our own hardback/paperback conventions: from the late 1620s, plays were normally first issued in the more handsome and expensive quarto format; then the most successful would be

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<sup>16</sup> Jean de Rotrou, *Théâtre complet V : L'Hypochondriaque, Amélie, La Doristée*, edited by Hélène Baby, Paris: Société des Textes Français Modernes, 2002.

<sup>17</sup> See Appendix X, pp. 27-28.

<sup>18</sup> Details of Alain Riffaud's article on *Le Cid* are given in Appendix III, p. 17.

reprinted in the smaller, cheaper duodecimo format. In the few years after the stage triumph of *Le Cid*, there were four quarto editions of that play: two in 1637, one in 1639, and one in 1644. There were also two duodecimo editions; but their dates were not given on the title-pages or in a publishers' colophon (i.e. they contained no record of the *achevé d'imprimer*). One duodecimo was published by Courbé and Targa, the other by Courbé and Pierre Le Petit. Now, in the 1940s, a study of the patterns of variants in the quarto and duodecimo editions led Maurice Cauchie to conclude that the Courbé/Le Petit duodecimo was the earlier, and the Courbé/Targa one the later. And this order, together with the dates proposed by Cauchie – of 1645 for the Courbé/Le Petit, and 1646 for the Courbé/Targa – were subsequently accepted unconditionally by eminent Cornelian scholars who brought out scholarly, 'scientific' editions of *Le Cid*.<sup>19</sup>

However, a second deed of transfer for *Le Cid* and the three comedies, signed by Targa's widow and Le Petit, clearly demonstrates that François Targa died before March 1643, whereas literary historians (confusing him with his brother) had previously thought he lived until the 1650s. So, on the basis of this correction and the reference to a small-format edition in the 1637 transfer deed, it is possible (a) to deduce that the Courbé/Targa duodecimo preceded the Courbé/Le Petit, (b) to assign new probable dates to them, and (c) to show that the sequence of quartos and duodecimos was different to what had previously been believed.<sup>20</sup> What, crucially, this demonstrates is that the sequence of variants from one edition of *Le Cid* to the next was less 'logical' and rectilinear than had generally been believed; and it requires the whole question of the evolution of the text of Corneille's great masterpiece to be re-examined, as well as the issue of which changes may have been due to the author and which to his printers.

If I have dwelt rather long on the case of Corneille, it is partly because of his outstanding importance as an author; but it is also in order to show into what vital areas of textual study these apparently dry contracts between *marchands libraires* can sometimes lead us.

I come at last to my final document.<sup>21</sup> After *Le Cid*, Corneille would grow frustrated with the mediocre work of Parisian printers: from *Le Menteur* onwards, he would supervise the printing of his works in his home town of Rouen. 'Imprimé à Rouen et se vend à Paris' is a legend found on many a Cornelian title-page. Now, it had previously been thought that Corneille was exceptional among dramatists of the time for his interventionist approach. However, the notarial documents show that he certainly was not unique: in the mid-1640s, Tristan L'Hermite was similarly taking in hand the publication of several of his works, including one of his plays, *La Mort d'Osman*. Nor was Corneille the first to act in this way, as we see from the contract of 31 May 1633, between the poet-cum-dramatist Boisrobert and the publisher Quinet,

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<sup>19</sup> For the presumed order and dates of the early editions of *Le Cid*, see the lists given towards the end of Appendix X (p. 28). Those proposed by Cauchie and most subsequent editors appear there as 'Version A'.

<sup>20</sup> Our deductions about the sequence and likely dates of these early editions appear as 'Version B' in Appendix X, p. 28.

<sup>21</sup> See Appendix XI, p. 29.

concerning Boisrobert's first play, *Pyrandre et Lisimène ou l'Heureuse Tromperie*. Although Quinet's name would appear as the publisher on the title-page of the first quarto, the contract tells us that it was the author himself who had made all the arrangements to have his tragi-comedy printed, and that he was to hand over 1500 completed copies of his work to Quinet, whose role on this occasion was thus confined to stockist, distributor and bookseller.

Remarkably, whereas Corneille did not undertake such a scheme until after the triumph of *Le Cid*, in 1633 Boisrobert was only a débutant dramatist. His boldness can be partly explained by his being Richelieu's great favourite, by the material comfort he enjoyed, and by the literary prestige that his verses had already acquired. However, his confidence must surely also tell us something we would not otherwise have known: that the play's stage-run had been a success. Also indicative of this success is the play's print-run of 1500 copies, which at that time was at the top end of the scale for literary texts, which ranged from 1000 to 1500 copies, with the average at 1300.

Finally, a brief word about some overarching issues. Some of the data published in *Écrivains de théâtre* that we've been looking at is germane to a subject which has inspired much scholarly interest in recent years, namely that of the emerging status of the author during the seventeenth century. I'll mention just three aspects of the subject which it wasn't possible to explore thoroughly in a book designed to offer separate, self-contained chapters on each of the twenty-five dramatists treated. These are just three from no doubt a much larger number of areas for further enquiry.

(1) The first, I've just touched upon: it concerns the nature and degree of the authors' involvement in the publication of their texts.

(2) Secondly, what remuneration did the dramatists receive? Here I'm thinking not so much of gifts from wealthy patrons or sums received from the actors, but rather the fees paid to playwrights by the *marchands libraires* who published their work. We might expect these fees to reflect the success of an individual author's work, and to indicate the status of the individual (or even of the Author, understood generically). Several documents do indeed give figures, and it is possible to trace a rough progression from the 15 *livres* a play that Hardy was receiving in 1625 to several sums of between 150 and 250 *livres* per play paid to his successors a decade or so later, when the theatre had become much more prestigious. However, some documents quote sums far in excess of these figures. This is understandable in the case of Rotrou's *Doristée* and Boisrobert's *Pyrandre*, where the fees would have included sums for compensation or for printing costs. However, the reasons for other large sums (of 400, even 600 *livres*) are not always as obvious. Were other exceptional factors involved? We do not know. Which raises a doubt about whether we can be confident of taking the figures quoted at face value. This brings me to my third (and last) point . . .

(3) Did the fees paid include the cost of obtaining a *privilège*? As the notarial documents show, Corneille was by no means the first or only dramatist to obtain a *privilège* for his own work, as had long been claimed. It happened quite regularly among his contemporaries. But what was the advantage for them, and what did it cost

them to do this? More information is needed on this point. Fortunately, help may be at hand. Recently, shortly after *Écrivains de théâtre* came out, I became aware of yet another unpublished inventory locked away in a cupboard at the Minutier central. It relates to printers and publishers. Alain Riffaud and I have carried out some preliminary investigations together. Amongst a few new documents on dramatists, it contains a contract for the publication of Chillac's sequel to *Le Cid*. From this we learn that the royal *privilège* for nine years cost his publisher 90 *livres* to obtain. So, when Benserade similarly obtained a *privilège* for nine years for his tragedy *Cléopâtre* and then received a fee of 150 *livres* from his publisher, are we now to deduce that 90 *livres* out of that total were for the transfer of the *privilège*, and only 60 *livres* (rather than the full 150) for the manuscript of the play? It is unnecessary to spell out how this impacts upon the question of the evolving status of the author.

Although it is too soon to be sure, I do hope that some answers to these sorts of questions will be provided by a detailed study of the neglected archive in the cupboard at the Hôtel de Rohan. All I can say for the moment is: 'Watch this space'.

***The Appendix follows on pages 15-30***

## APPENDIX

### NOTARIAL DOCUMENTS AND OTHER MATERIAL REFERRED TO IN THE LECTURE<sup>22</sup>

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#### I

#### **Bibliography (1) : Selected earlier works on 17th-century theatre history, based on Parisian notarial documents**

Soulié (Eudore), *Recherches sur Molière et sur sa famille*, Paris: Hachette, 1863

Fransen (J.), 'Documents inédits sur l'Hôtel de Bourgogne', *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 34 (1927), 321-55

Deierkauf-Holsboer (S. Wilma), 'Vie d'Alexandre Hardy, poète du roi', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 91 (1947), 328-404. New edition, revised and expanded : *Vie d'Alexandre Hardy, poète du roi, 1572-1632 : 47 documents inédits*, Paris: Nizet, 1972

Deierkauf-Holsboer (S. Wilma), *Le Théâtre du Marais*, 2 vols., Paris: Nizet, 1954-58

Jurgens (Madeleine) & Fleury (Marie-Antoinette), *Documents du Minutier central concernant l'histoire littéraire (1650-1700)*, Paris: PUF, 1960

Jurgens (Madeleine) & Maxfield-Miller (Elizabeth), *Cent ans de recherches sur Molière, sur sa famille et sur les comédiens de sa troupe*, Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1963

Deierkauf-Holsboer (S. Wilma), *Le Théâtre de l'Hôtel de Bourgogne*, 2 vols., Paris: Nizet, 1968-70

Mongrédién (Georges) & Robert (Jean), *Les Comédiens français du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle : dictionnaire biographique [...], d'après des documents inédits*, 3rd edition, revised and expanded, Paris: CNRS, 1981

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<sup>22</sup> This Appendix presents, in slightly modified form, material from a leaflet handed out to the audience attending the original Lecture. Several photographs of signatures and other images have been retained here.

## II

**Bibliography (2) : Books & articles on theatre history  
by Alan Howe, based on notarial documents**

*Le Théâtre professionnel à Paris, 1600-1649 : documents du Minutier central des notaires de Paris* (foreward by Philippe Bélaval and preface by Jean Mesnard), Paris: Centre historique des Archives nationales, 2000, xvi + 453 pp.

*Écrivains de théâtre, 1600-1649 : documents du Minutier central des notaires de Paris* (based on synopses by Madeleine Jurgens; foreward by Gérard Ermisse and preface by Jean Mesnard), Paris: Centre historique des Archives nationales, 2005, xiii + 340 pp.

‘Couples de comédiens au début du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle : le cas de Nicolas Gasteau et Rachel Trépeau’, *Revue d'histoire du théâtre*, 33 (1981), 17-25

‘Bruscambille, qui était-il ?’, *XVII<sup>e</sup> Siècle*, 38 (1986), 390-96

‘Alexandre Hardy and the French theatre in 1615 : the evidence of two archival documents’, *Seventeenth-Century French Studies*, 9 (1987), 26-34

‘La place de la tragédie dans le répertoire des comédiens français à la fin du XVI<sup>e</sup> et au début du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle’, *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, 59 (1997), 283-303

‘La publication des œuvres de Pierre Corneille (1637-1649) : sept documents inédits’, *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 98 (1998), 17-41

‘La troupe du Marais et la première de *Mélite* (1629-1631) : trois documents inédits’, *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 35 (1998), 279-94

‘English Actors in Paris during the Civil Wars: Samuel Speede and the Prince of Wales's company’, *The Seventeenth Century*, 14 (1999), 130-42

‘Du nouveau sur les *Vers héroïques*, *L'Office de la Sainte Vierge* et *La Mort de Chrispe* : trois documents inédits’, *Cahiers Tristan L'Hermite*, 24 (2002), 38-52

‘Sur la publication des œuvres de Rotrou : quatre documents notariés’, *Seventeenth-Century French Studies*, 25 (2003), 129-43

‘Alexandre Hardy et les comédiens français à Angers au début du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle’, *Seventeenth-Century French Studies*, 28 (2006), 33-48

‘Corneille et ses premiers comédiens’, *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 106 (2006), 519-42



### III

#### **Bibliography (3) : Some recent publications on 17th-century theatre history**

(The items listed below draw on *Le Théâtre professionnel* and *Écrivains de théâtre*)

*Le Mémoire de Mahelot : mémoire pour la décoration des pièces qui se représentent par les Comédiens du Roi*, édition critique établie et commentée par Pierre Pasquier, Paris: Champion, 2005

Riffaud (Alain), *Le Théâtre imprimé, 1630-1650*, Le Mans: Matière à dire, 2006

Bayard (Marc), 'Les faiseurs d'artifices : Georges Buffequin et les artistes de l'éphémère à l'époque de Richelieu', *XVII<sup>e</sup> Siècle*, 58, no. 230 (2006), 151-64

Golder (John), 'A l'instart et conformément ... au jeu de paume du Marestz : ce que l'Hôtel de Bourgogne devait au théâtre du Marais en 1647', in *Les Lieux du spectacle dans l'Europe du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Actes du colloque du Centre de recherches sur le XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle européen, Bordeaux III, 11-13 mars 2004, ed. Charles Mazouer, Tübingen: Narr, 2006, pp. 87-101

Clarke (Jan), 'Un théâtre qui n'a jamais existé : le tripot dans la rue du Temple', in *Les Lieux du spectacle dans l'Europe du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle...*, ed. Ch. Mazouer, Tübingen: Narr, 2006, pp. 103-17

Riffaud (Alain), 'L'impression du *Cid* (1637-1648)', *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 106 (2006), 543-70



The farce actor Gros-Guillaume (Robert Guérin) at the Hôtel de Bourgogne in 1633, from an engraving by Abraham Bosse

## IV

## Le Minutier central des notaires de Paris

*Le Minutier central des notaires de Paris* a été créé à la suite de la loi du 14 mars 1928 qui disposa que les minutes anciennes des notaires du département de la Seine seraient accueillies aux Archives nationales. Le nouveau service fut inauguré le 28 mai 1932 dans les communs de l'hôtel de Rohan. Lors d'une cérémonie organisée le 21 décembre 1948 pour marquer le vingtième anniversaire du Minutier, Charles Braibant, directeur des Archives de France, pouvait célébrer « le plus grand minutier du monde ». Le Minutier central possède aujourd'hui la quasi totalité des actes conservés jusqu'aux années 1900 pour les 122 études que comptait alors la capitale.

Ce n'est pas sans raison que le législateur a décidé que les minutes des notaires parisiens seraient conservées dans un établissement d'envergure nationale. Les fonds du Minutier central forment un ensemble d'une richesse exceptionnelle, caractérisé par l'ampleur de la période concernée – qui couvre plus de quatre siècles (fin XV<sup>e</sup>-début XX<sup>e</sup>) – et l'abondance des documents rassemblés, dont quelques chiffres donnent la mesure : vingt millions de minutes et 3 000 répertoires, 170 000 liasses et registres, 20 kilomètres linéaires de rayonnages !

L'essentiel de la documentation fournie par les actes notariés conservés au Minutier central intéresse Paris, sa banlieue et la région parisienne. Si l'on veut vraiment connaître **le Parisien** des siècles passés, inconnu ou célèbre, c'est au Minutier central qu'il faut venir faire des recherches. On y apprendra tout, ou presque, sur ses origines géographiques et sociales, ses alliances, sa descendance, son cadre de vie, ses activités professionnelles, sa fortune, ses goûts artistiques et littéraires... Les minutes permettent aussi d'en savoir plus sur **les Parisiens** : comportements sociaux, métiers et corporations, foi et croyances..., et sur **la ville** elle-même : topographie, habitat et architecture urbaine, activités commerciales, structures professionnelles des différents quartiers...

En raison du privilège dont bénéficiaient sous l'Ancien Régime les notaires de Paris – qui pouvaient instrumenter dans tout le royaume –, mais aussi du centralisme institutionnel et économique de la France et du rayonnement culturel et artistique de la capitale, l'intérêt des fonds du Minutier central va bien au-delà de l'activité sociale et économique de Paris et de sa région. Les actes des notaires parisiens fournissent un apport documentaire de grande valeur aux travaux relatifs à l'histoire du droit, des institutions, de l'économie, de la littérature et des arts... et peuvent servir de sources à bien d'autres thèmes d'étude.

On comprend pourquoi les chercheurs sont si nombreux à venir interroger cette « merveilleuse machine à naviguer parmi les siècles » (Eric Orsenna, *Discours de réception à l'Académie française*, 17 juin 1999).

Françoise Mosser  
conservateur général chargé du Minutier central

## V

**Lease for the Hôtel de Bourgogne theatre,  
granted to the Prince of Orange's company**

**9 July 1629**

Arch. nat., Min. centr., X, 68 bis  
Transcription in *Le Théâtre professionnel*, pp. 375-76

**Synopsis**

Lease granted by the dean, former dean, masters and governors of the Confrérie de la Passion, for the months of October and November following, to Alexandre Hardy, Charles Le Noir, Claude de Villiers, Louis de La Barre and their associates, actors of the Prince of Orange's company, for the Hôtel de Bourgogne theatre, with the exception of the boxes ('loges') customarily reserved by the lessors, subject to a monthly rental of 210 *livres*.

**Transcription of first page of the document (reproduced below, p. 20)**

Par devant les notaires gardenottes du Roy notre sire au Chastelet de Paris soubzsignez furent présents [names of the officers of the Confrérie de la Passion (8 lines)], lesquels de leurs bons grez recogneurent et confessèrent avoir baillé et délaissé à tiltre de loyer et pris d'argent, durant les mois d'octobre et novembre prochainement venant, et promectent èsdits noms pendant ledit temps garentir et faire jouir à Allexandre Hardy, Charles Lenoir, Claude de Villiers et Louis de La Barre, à ce présens, preneurs et retenant audit tiltre pour ledit temps, tant pour eulx que pour leurs compaignons et associez, commédiens ordinaires du Prince d'Orengé, la grande salle, loges et théâtres de la maison de l'hostel de Bourgongne à Paris, appartenant à ladite confrairie, à la réservation faite par lesdits bailleurs des loges qu'ils ont accoustumé de réserver, an laquelle réserve lesdits preneurs ne pourront avoir ne prendre aucune chose. Ce bail fait à ladicte réserve et outre [moiennant la somme de deux cent dix livres de loier pour chacun desdits deux mois ... ]



## VI

**Lease for a tennis court in the Marais district****29 April 1631**

Arch. nat., Min. centr., CV, 598

Transcription in *Le Théâtre professionnel*, pp. 377-83**Synopsis**

Lease for four years, beginning on Saint Martin's day (i.e. 11 November), granted by Horace Morel, 'Commissaire Général des Feux et Artifices de France', residing in the Rue du Temple, to François Mestivier, called La France, Charles Le Noir, Guillaume Desgilberts, sieur de Montdory, Claude Deschamps, sieur de Villiers, André Boyron, called Baron, and Pierre Marcoureau, called Beaulieu, acting in their own names, and also de Villiers and Le Noir on behalf of Marguerite Béguin and Élisabeth Mestivier, their wives, all King's players ('comédiens du roi'), for a tennis court ('jeu de paume'), together with a small house and its small garden, all situated in the Rue du Temple, opposite the Rue Chapon, to serve for the performance of their plays ('pièces et comédies'), subject to an annual rental of 1,400 *livres*. Morel undertakes to carry out at his own expense all the work necessary to convert his property into a theatre, in exchange for which undertaking the lessees agree to advance him the sum of 1,200 *livres*. (*There follow quittances dated 31 May 1631 and 12 August 1632, concerning the payment and reimbursement of the sum of 1,200 livres.*)



Interior of a tennis court, beginning of the 17th century. It was estimated that there were around 200 *jeux de paume* (sometimes called *tripots*) in Paris at that time.

*Following page : Reproduction of the first page of the lease of 29 April 1631*



## VII

**Contract of association for Jean Gassot's company****5 March 1618**

Arch. nat., Min. centr., VI, 296

Transcription in *Le Théâtre professionnel*, pp. 364-65**Synopsis**

Association for two years, beginning at Easter, between Jean Gassot – who also represents Thomas Truffot and Nicole Gassot, his daughter, aged thirteen years or thereabouts – , Guillaume Desgilberts, Jean Gellée, Nicolas Girard and Jacques Richard, actors, to perform comedies, tragedies, pastorals and other plays, in Paris and elsewhere, subject to a fine of 300 *livres* in the case of withdrawal.

**Transcription**

Furent présens en leurs personnes Jehan Gassot, acteur en comédies, estant de présent en ceste ville de Paris, logé rue de la Huchette, enseigne du Daulphin, tant pour luy que pour, an son nom, soy faisant fort et stipullant pour Thomas Truffot, aussy comédien, et Nicolle Gassot, sa fille, agée de treize ans ou environ, Guillaume Degilbert, Jehan Gellée, Nicolas Girard et Jacques Richard, tous comédiens, logez de présent à Paris, rue de la Callende en la maison du Plat d'estain, lesquelz comparans ont vollontairement recognu et confessé eux estre associez et associent par ces présentes pour deux ans, commenceans au jour de Pasques prochain venant, pour représenter ensemblement jeux, comédies, tragédies, pastorales et aultres actions de théâtre, tant en ceste ville de Paris que ailleurs, pour laquelle représentation chacun desdictz comparans sera tenu se vestir, habiller et équiper à sa vollonté et selon qu'il conviendra à ses despens ; et seront les roolles, pour estudier et apprendre, départiz et distribuez par celluy d'entre eux qui au plus de voix sera esleu pour ce faire. Seront tous les fraiz, tant de théâtre, orneman d'icelluy, loyer des lieux qu'ilz occuperont, fraiz de voiture et conduite de leur train et bagage, supportez et payez par la masse. Ne pourra aulcun estre admis en ladite association sy ce n'est du consentement mutuel de tous lesdits comparans ; aucun desquelz ne pourra se départir ny séparer de la présente société pour quelque cause que ce soit, sinon en payant par luy auparavant à ladite société, pour ceux qui



demoureront en icelle, la somme de trois cens livres, au payement de laquelle somme demoureront ses habitz et hardes et meubles obligez, ensemble son corps. Et où aulcun desdits associez mouvoit querelle et débat en ladite société ou fist acte préjudiciable à icelle, soit à l'occasion de ses moeurs libertines ou mauvaises, sera au jugement des aultres associez mulcté de telle amande et peyne qu'ilz arbitreront, laquelle peyne sera payée sans débat par ledict associé mulcté. Après que tous les frais commungs de ladite société auront esté pris sur ladite masse, le surplus des deniers qu'ilz auront gaignez à leur exercice seront partiz entre lesdits sept associez également, chacun par septième partye sans plus grande prétention de salaire par aucun d'eux. A l'entretènement de laquelle présente association lesdits comparans se sont obligez et obligent chacun en droit soy, corps et biens. Car ainsy etc., promettans etc., obligeans selon et ainsy que dessus est dict, renonçans etc. Faict et passé ès estudes des notaires soubzsignez, l'an six cens et dix-huict, le cinquiesme jour de mars, et ont signé :

J. Gassot, Desgilbertz, Gellée, Girard, Richard,  
Janot, Parque (*notaires*)

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### The actors Montdory and Mademoiselle Bellerose

Guillaume Desgilberts is the famous actor Montdory (born in 1594), though he does not use that professional name in 1618. This contract provides the only mention of his activities between 1612, when he was a half-share actor in one of Valleran's troupes, and 1622, when he belonged to the Prince of Orange's company. He would go on to achieve great fame with the Marais company in the 1630s, and was regarded as the best actor of his day.

Nicole Gassot is the future wife of the actors Mathias Mélier and Bellerose (Pierre Le Messier). Known as Mlle Bellerose, she would become one of the most admired members of the Hôtel de Bourgogne company between 1630 and 1660. This document gives an indication of her date of birth, and establishes that she was the sister – and not the aunt, as was frequently claimed – of Molière's colleague, Philibert Gassot, called Du Croisy.

The contract thus reveals that, in 1618, these two future pillars of the rival theatrical companies were learning their art side by side. The mention of tragedies is fairly rare in the repertoires of the professional actors of the time; this is the genre in which Mlle Bellerose and Montdory were to excel.



## VIII

### Lease of Becquet tennis court to Samuel Speede

19 July 1646

Arch. nat., Min. centr., XCVIII, 158  
Transcription in *Le Théâtre professionnel*, pp. 399-401

#### Synopsis

Lease for six months, beginning on 20 July, granted by Robert de La Fosse, master tennis-court keeper, residing in the Rue de Vaugirard, at Saint-Germain-des-Prés, to Samuel Speede, esquire, and to Anne André, his wife, residing with the Petits Comédiens du Marais, for the tennis court called Becquet, including a furnished room on the first floor, subject to payment of seven *livres* per day.

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Four other notarial documents concerning Samuel Speede :

19 July 1646. – Contract between Speede and his wife and the master joiner Jean Duplessis, for conversion of the Becquet into a theatre, with work to begin the following day (XCVIII, 158).

24 August 1646. – Promise by Speede and his wife to pay the stage designer Denis Buffequin a weekly sum of 20 *livres* for sets and decorations, that he undertakes to complete by the following Monday (XCVIII, 158).

20 October 1646. – Account rendered by Robert de La Fosse to Speede and his wife, for rental of the Becquet. Speede and Anne André agree to vacate the premises by Wednesday 24 October, to restore them to their original condition, and to pay the sum due, in guarantee of which they hand over to La Fosse a number of costumes (XCVIII, 159).

23 October 1647. – Agreement between Speede and his wife and the master joiner Jean Duplessis, for immediate removal of the theatre instalations at the Becquet. Duplessis agrees to reconstruct the theatre in the house of a Monsieur Cordon [= Gordon ?] in the rue de Bourbon (XCVIII, 159).

## IX

**Agreement concerning the publication  
of Rotrou's tragi-comedy *Cléagénor et Doristée***

**5 December 1634**

Arch. nat., Min. centr., LXVI, 70  
Transcription in *Écrivains de théâtre*, pp. 249-51

### Synopsis

Transaction between Jean de Rotrou, lawyer at the Parlement de Paris, residing in the Rue du Petit-Lion, and, on the other part, Antoine de Sommaville and Toussaint Quinet, merchant booksellers, residing respectively in the Rue de la Pelleterie and the Rue de la Vieille-Draperie, putting an end to the dispute which had brought them in opposition before the Chamber of Requests of the Hôtel du Roi. The booksellers had purchased from a person whose name was unknown to them a manuscript entitled *Cléagénor et Doristée*, for which they had obtained a *privilege*; they had printed this work and put it on sale, but Rotrou had objected, stating that they had no right to sell a manuscript which had been pilfered and stolen ('mal pris et desrobé') from him. The two parties settle their differences subject to the payment of a sum of 300 *livres* to Rotrou, who consents to the two booksellers printing his play anew from a copy which will be corrected in the author's own hand; Rotrou also surrenders to them all rights over his play.

The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. The top signature is 'Rotrou J.' and the bottom signature is 'A. de Sommaville'. Both are written in a cursive, historical style.

*Signatures of Rotrou and Sommaville*

## X

**Deed of transfer for half of the *privilège* for *Le Cid*****10 March 1637**

Arch. nat., Min. centr., VIII, 646 (Rés. 329)  
 Transcription in *Écrivains de théâtre*, pp. 257-58

**Synopsis**

Transfer by Augustin Courbé, merchant bookseller, residing in the Rue des Sept-Voies, to François Targa, also a merchant bookseller, residing in the Rue Saint-Victor, of half the *privilège* granted by royal letters patent on 21 January for the publication of the comedies *La Galerie du Palais*, *La Place royale* and *La Suivante*, and for a tragi-comedy entitled *Le Cid*, all four composed by 'le sieur Corneille'. Each will print half of each play, with the costs shared ; each will receive for sale an equal number of the printed plays. If either's half sells out, he may obtain further unbound copies from his associate at the following prices : 14 *solz* for each of the comedies, and 20 *solz* for *Le Cid*, whether in a quarto edition or some smaller format ('aultre petit volume').

**Extracts**

[...] ce présent transport faict moyennant les charges, clauses et condicions qui ensuivent, c'est à sçavoir les lesdites pièces cy-dessus désignées seront imprimées, sçavoir la moicthyé de chacunes d'icelles pièces par ledit Courbé et l'aultre moicthyé aussy de chacunes desdictes pièces par ledit Targa. Et sy l'un d'eulx en imprimoit quelques feuilles de plus que sa dicte moicthyé, en sera compté ensemble entre eulx au prix accoustumé entre personnes de leur condition [...]. A esté convenu que lors que lesdictes partyes auront faict travailler à l'impression desdites pièces, celles qui seront imprimées seront toutes partagées entre elles esgallement pour les débitter comme bon leur semblera, et celluy qui aura plutost vendu sa moicthyé pourra, sy bon luy semble, en prendre de son compagnon aux pris cy-après déclarez, sçavoir *La Gallerye du Pallais*, *La Place Royale* et *La Suivante* à raison de quatorze solz pour pièce en blans,<sup>23</sup> et pour le *Cid*, tant in-quarto que aultre petit volume, à raison de vingt solz pour pièce aussy en blans [...]

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<sup>23</sup> en blans: en blanc (unbound).

### Later transfer of the *privilège*

31 March 1643. – Sale by Madeleine Julliot, widow of François Targa, merchant bookseller, residing in the Rue Saint-Victor, to Pierre Le Petit, merchant bookseller, residing in the Rue Gervais-Laurent, of the books housed in her late husband's shop and stockroom, and of the half of the *privilège* for *Le Cid* and three comedies by Corneille that François Targa had obtained from Augustin Courbé on 10 March 1637. This sale is made in exchange for a sum of 700 *livres*, of which 300 are for the *privilège* and another 120 for 200 copies of *Le Cid*. (XXIX, 180)

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### Presumed order & dates of the early editions of *Le Cid*

#### Version A (Cauchie and subsequent editors)

1637-A	4°	Courbé & Targa	
1637-B	4°	Courbé & Targa	
1639	4°	Courbé & Targa	
1644	4°	Courbé, veuve Camusat & Le Petit	
[1645]	12°	Courbé & Le Petit	*
[1646]	12°	Courbé & Targa	**

#### Version B (AH)

1637-A	4°	Courbé & Targa	
1637-B	4°	Courbé & Targa	
[1637]	12°	Courbé & Targa	**
1639	4°	Courbé & Targa	
1644	4°	Courbé, veuve Camusat & Le Petit	
[1644-45]	12°	Courbé & Le Petit	*

*(It is also possible that the duodecimo published by Courbé & Targa preceded, rather than followed, 1637-B)*

## XI

### **Contract for the sale of Boisrobert's *Pyrandre et Lisimène ou l'Heureuse Tromperie***

**31 May 1633**

Arch. nat., Min. centr., XLV, 56  
Transcription in *Écrivains de théâtre*, p. 247-48

#### Synopsis

Arrangement between François de Métel, sieur de Boisrobert, residing in the Rue Saint-Honoré, and Toussaint Quinet, bookseller, residing in the Rue de la Vieille-Draperie, for the sale of the tragi-comedy *L'Heureuse Tromperie*, of which Boisrobert undertakes to deliver 1,500 complete and perfect copies within twelve days, together with the *privilège* which had been granted to him for that work. This agreement is subject to the payment to Boisrobert of a sum of 400 *livres*, of which he has already received 200 *livres*, the 200 outstanding being payable by Quinet within six months of the author having handed over the printed copies.

#### Extract

[...] confesse avoir promis et promet à honorable homme Thoussaintz Quinet, libraire à Paris [...], de luy fournir et livrer dans douze jours prochains ung livre intitulé *L'Heureuze Tromperye*, tragi-commédie dudict sieur de Boisrobert, avec quinze cens exemplaires entiers et parfaicts et le privillège que ledict sieur de Boisrobert a de faire imprimer ladicte pièce, moyennant la somme de quatre cens livres tournois [...]

*Signatures of  
Boisrobert and Quinet*

The image shows two handwritten signatures in dark ink on a light-colored background. The top signature is highly stylized and appears to read 'F. de Métel'. The bottom signature is more legible and reads 'Toussaint Quinet'.

## XII

### Original cast of Pierre Corneille's comedy *Mélite*

**Mélite**  
(or Cloris)      Mlle Le Noir (Élizabeth Mestivier)  
Wife of Charles Le Noir ; ‘une aussy jolie petite personne qu’on pust trouver’ (Tallemant des Réaux, *Historiettes*) ; ‘[ses] petites douceurs et gaillardises [...] la rendent agréable à tout le monde’ (*Testament de feu Gaultier-Garguille*).

**Cloris**  
(or Mélite)      Mlle de Villiers (Marguerite Béguin)  
Wife of Claude Deschamps ; played Chimène in première of *Le Cid*.

**Éraste**  
Montdory (Guillaume des Gilberts)  
Best actor of his time ; ‘il croyoit quasy estre ce qu’il représentoit’ (Tallemant) ; ‘les *égarements* du genre de ceux de ce personnage étaient son affaire’ (E. Cottier, biographer of Montdory) ; his empassioned style of acting ‘estoit plus propre à faire un héros qu’un amant’ (Tallemant).

Montdory may not have acted Éraste until the 1630 re-run, in which case the part would have been played by one of the actors below.

*Roles of Tircis, Philandre, Lisis & Cliton played by four of the following :*

**Charles Le Noir**

Experienced actor-manager, ‘judicieux en [son] métier’ and known for his ‘gravité’ (according to *Testament de feu Gaultier-Garguille*).

**De Villiers (Claude Deschamps)**

Actor-playwright, born in 1600 or 1601, played minor comic roles.

**Louis de La Barre (or his replacement, Baron the elder)**

Baron (André Boyron) played lovers (& princes, heroes)

**Beaulieu (Pierre Marcoureau)**

**La France (François Mestivier), father of Mlle Le Noir**

**Nourrice**      *played by one of the male actors above, or by:*

Isabelle Frin, wife of François Mestivier