It is a great pleasure to report on the wonderful nineteenth season of L’Avant-Scène that ended very recently with the performance of Les Fourberies de Scapin by Molière in the Common Room of Rockefeller College. The semester was filled with memorable performances and exciting events marking the week-long visit by French actor and director Clément Hervieu-Léger. Students from the classes of 2022 and 2021 confirmed their great talents while visiting exchange students from France and seniors from the great class of 2020 excelled on our stage offering exquisite performances.
The season started with the eighth annual edition of *Seuls en Scène*, Princeton French Theater Festival, that took place between Thursday, September 19 and Saturday, September 28, 2019. It offered six shows (each one of them performed twice) and one staged-reading. Large audiences joined the events; nearly 1000 tickets were sold.

We brought to campus 24 French artists. Students, alumni, faculty, staff, Princeton community members, and professionals from New York made the majority of our audience.

Continuing with the tradition of using various venues on campus for the festival, we presented *La loi des prodiges* by François de Brauer and *Qui a tué mon père* by Edouard Louis, directed and performed by Stanislas Nordey, in the Matthews Acting Studio of 185 Nassau Street, *Avignon à vie* in the Hearst Dance Theater, *Le Désordre du discours* in McCosh Hall 10, *Le Marteau et la faucille* as well as *blablabla* and *Radio Live* in the Wallace Theater.

During this new edition of *Seuls en Scène*, our partnerships with the Lewis Center for the Arts, Cultural Services of the French Embassy and French Institute Alliance Française kept on growing. The Lewis Center staff offered great help and support for our visiting artists who felt very welcome and eager to collaborate with their American counterparts. The
Cultural Services of the French Embassy generously helped present the performances of *Le Désordre du discours*, *Le Marteau et la faucille* and *Radio Live*. After visiting Princeton for the US premiere of *Radio Live*, the company presented another performance of the show at the French Institute Alliance Française Crossing the Line Festival of New York. Following their run in Princeton, Julien Gosselin’s company presented two additional performances of *Le Marteau et la faucille* at Usine-C in Montréal, Canada. We were very pleased to collaborate with FIAF and Usine-C Montréal. Equally enjoyable were the partnerships with the French and Theater Departments of Rutgers University and Harvard University who visited the festival with students.

This year we also started a partnership with Festival d’Automne in Paris, created in 1972 and in its 48th year. By welcoming two shows of the 2019 lineup (*Radio Live* & *Le désordre du discours*) and inviting featured artists of the 2018 and 2017 editions of the festival, we initiated a unique collaboration with the renowned French festival. We look forward to continuing the partnership in 2020 and beyond. Our goal is to invite stellar smaller-scale productions of Festival d’Automne on an annual basis.

*Le Désordre du discours*, based on Michel Foucault’s inaugural lecture at Collège de France and directed by Fanny de Chaillé opened the festival. It started the festival on a high and intellectual note, and marked the return of Fanny de Chaillé to *Seuls en Scène* (*Gonzo Conférence* 2018). Guillaume Brailliart offered an outstanding performance as Michel Foucault reenacting the famous lecture. The festival opening weekend continued with *Le Marteau et la faucille* written by Don DeLillo and directed by Julien Gosselin. In recent years, Gosselin has emerged as one of the most talented directors of his generation. We were thrilled to invite him for the first time at Princeton and for the very first time in the United States to present his work. His actor, Joseph Drouet thrilled audiences with his electric and subtle performance of an incarcerated hedge fund manager. Another major director made his US debut during our opening weekend: Stanislas Nordey, a celebrated and indefatigable theater artist, who directed and performed his stage adaptation of *Qui a tué mon père* by Edouard Louis, considered as the new enfant terrible of the French literary scene. It was a tour de force performance by Nordey who captivated the audience and took us all the way in the Northern region of Edouard Louis. A staged reading of *Avignon à vie* by Pascal Rambert featuring Nordey and Rambert in the Hearst Dance Theater of the Lewis Center for the Arts.
capped the outstanding weekend. We were also very fortunate to propose a public conversation between French journalist and essayist Laure Adler, Julien Gosselin and Pascal Rambert during the weekend.

The second week of the festival offered another series of exciting events! We presented a show ideal for children and their parents: *blablabla* by Joris Lacoste and directed by Emmanuelle Lafon. The week continued on a light and comic note with *La loi des prodiges* written and directed by the very talented François de Brauer. *Radio Live* by Aurélie Charon, Caroline Gillet and Amélie Bonnin capped the festival with two performances the same day at the Wallace Theater. The show, modeled after a radio program, brought together on stage guest foreign activists and Princeton students. The featured personal stories of resilience and courage moved and uplifted audience members. We couldn’t have hoped for a more uplifting ending for the festival.

Spectators praised all the offerings of the festival; especially *Le Marteau et la faucille* by Don DeLillo, *Qui a tué mon père* by Edouard Louis, and *La Loi des prodiges* by François de Brauer as well as *Radio Live*. Audience members enjoyed the opportunity to meet artists at the end of some performances. L’Avant-Scène and Program in Theater students met our guest artists in intimate settings such as rehearsals or class sessions.
As always the festival helped launch our season and start it on a high note. Once more it celebrated the spirit of partnership between various departments and centers. The list of sponsors and contributors has continued to grow and we were very pleased that this year’s festival emphasized a particularly diverse group of artists. The Department of French and Italian, Lewis Center for the Arts, Provost Office, Council of the Humanities, Departments of Art and Archaeology, Comparative and Program in Contemporary European Politics and Society as well as Rockefeller College, Cultural Services of the French Embassy and Institut français provided key support to make this eighth edition of the festival a great success.
While the events of *Seuls en Scène* were unfolding, L’Avant-Scène students were already at work for the first two productions of the year: *Le Pays lointain* by Jean-Luc Lagarce scheduled for mid-October 2019, and *Le Mariage de Figaro* by Beaumarchais for late November 2019.

*Le Pays lointain* is Jean-Luc Lagarce’s testament play. We follow Louis as he returns home to announce his upcoming death to his family. The four hour forty minutes play both takes place in the present and the past and presents several challenges for actors. Lagarce is well known for his particular style of writing with long chunks of repetitive texts. We presented a shorter version of the play, just under two hours. Rehearsals started right at the beginning of the semester. Junior Nick Shashkini 21 played the lead role and was joined on stage by seniors Jianing Zhao 20 and Jane Sul 20, juniors James Facon 21 and Jason Qu 21, as well as graduate student Elyssa Schaeffer and newcomers Meigan Clark 22, Isabelle Chen, a newly arrived graduate student in the Department of French and Italian, and Benjamin Lemoine a Visiting Scholar at the Institute for Advanced Studies from Paris.

Students made impressive effort not only to master the text by Lagarce and its many intricacies but also to enter the world of the play. It took them a few weeks to get in the characters. Once they better understood the structures of the play, they were able to unleash all their talents and create an emotional version of the play. They worked very hard towards the end of the rehearsal process and enjoyed guidance by Clément Herview-Léger from the Comédie-Française who was visiting us as Short-Term Fellow in the Council of the Humanities. Clément had recently directed *Le Pays lointain* with his company, La Compagnie des Petits Champs, and he offered students unparalleled advice and encouragements.

We performed *Le Pays lointain* three times from October 17, 2019 until October 19. Spectators praised the students’ performances and efforts and enjoyed discovering this
monument in contemporary French theater. We had, in the past, performed, on two occasions, *Juste la fin du monde* a shorter play by Lagarce. *Juste la fin du monde* tells a similar story, featuring the exact same central characters and is built around the same topics. Producing the full version of the play offered new exciting challenges for the troupe and strengthened our commitment to present contemporary classics.

While students in the cast of *Le Pays lointain* were hard at work in rehearsals in late September/early October, the cast of *Le Mariage de Figaro* was already at work. Rehearsals for the second major production of the semester started at around the same time as those for *Le Pays lointain*. Finalizing the cast for the production took just a few days. French exchange student Romi Khoneisser joined the main cast to play Suzanne alongside French concentrator Michael Smilek 20, Peter Foster 21, and Anna Vinitsky 21; respectively playing the lead roles of Figaro, Le Comte & La Comtesse. Freshmen Gavin LaPlace 23 and Morgan Teman 23 entered the troupe at the very beginning of the semester and joined the cast of *Figaro* for their very first roles in L'Avant-Scène. Marie-Irene Igelmann (a doctoral exchange student in the Department of French and Italian), senior Andres Irribara Ramirez 20 and Flora Champy, Assistant Professor in the Department of French and Italian, as well as Théo Barbaro, a French exchange student attending Rutgers University, and Alexander Deland 21 complemented the cast.

It was important to start work on *Le Mariage de Figaro* early as this is one of the most difficult plays in the canon. Nearly three hours long, the play features longer than usual acts. The second act has for instance a total of 24 scenes! This is the second time that L'Avant-Scène has taken on the challenge of putting on *Le Mariage de Figaro*, Beaumachais’ eternal
masterpiece that directly inspired Mozart to write the famous opera. It was a treat to direct the play again, more than 8 years after the first mise-en-scène, and use a new setting to produce it: the Art Museum. The Art Museum where L’Avant-Scène performs at least one play every year always proves to be a fantastic backdrop for our classical productions. Ahead of the rehearsal process, in the summer of 2019, it was a joy to envision how the play could function in the Art Museum.

The cast excelled during the rehearsal process that intensified once the production of Le Pays lointain ended in late October. Students made impressive and steady progress; the first two acts were entirely blocked before fall break and everyone enjoyed pushing the envelope in the play after the holidays. Students continued working very hard on their text; Michael Smilek 20 mastered his long speeches and put particular efforts in mastering Figaro’s monologue in Act V. One of the challenges of the play are its group scenes; when everyone is speaking at once. If this is done well, the production thrives. Students put much effort to excel in these group scenes and proved very successful during the public performances! To keep the production under three hours, we cut some parts of the text in the fifth act.
All the efforts culminated in a memorable weekend of theater at the Princeton University Art Museum on November 22 and 23, 2019. Students enrolled in advanced courses offered by the Department of French and Italian, reading the play as part of their curriculum attended the production with their professors. FRE/THR 211 French Theater Workshop students also attended the play so as to learn from their advanced peers in the troupe. Audience members raved about the students’ performances. The Art Museum staff offered once again an unparalleled and warm welcome, supporting the technical needs of the production and offering us an opening reception. We treasure our 12 year partnership with the Art Museum and are most grateful for the opportunities that they give us.

We are also very grateful for the support of Sophie Orloff and Corine André-Hessig from the Princeton francophone community who helped tremendously with our elements of props and costumes, providing students with exquisite garments and props that enabled them to further create and enter the universe of the play. Our community friends Maryam and Emmanuel Simon were kind enough to have their twin sons participate in the production and make an entrance late in the night in Act IV.
Another highlight of the semester was the visit of Clément Hervieu-Léger as Short-Term Belknap Fellow in the Council of Humanities and French and Italian. Hervieu-Léger is an actor and a director who has been a member of the Comédie-Française for the past 14 years. There he has directed his fellow troupe members in critically acclaimed plays. He has also created his own independent theater company La Compagnie de Petits Champs. La Compagnie des Petits Champs has enabled Clément to direct stellar productions of the great classics. Hervieu-Léger had come twice to Princeton as a guest artist of Seuls en Scène before joining us for a short week in early October 2019. He had visited in 2013, to perform L’Épreuve by Marivaux with his company, and later in 2014 to come create Répertoire a tailor-made production for Princeton’s French theater festival. We were thrilled to welcome Clément again.

During the week of his visit, Clément taught and attended course sessions and rehearsals of FRE/THR 211, taking a particular interest in telling students more about the Comédie-Française nowadays and its everlasting traditions. He also attended rehearsals of L’Avant-Scène’s productions of Le Pays lointain and Le Mariage de Figaro, and shared meals with students to better know them. Clément distilled invaluable advice to L’Avant-Scène thespians in their respective productions. He encouraged the cast of Le Pays lointain to continue the beautiful work and keep up their efforts (the week of his visit was a week
before the plays’ performances) and reminded the cast of *Le Mariage de Figaro* of the importance of the group scenes. According to Clément, they give the real savor of the play. His presence was fantastic for students who felt encouraged by his good advice and support.

Two public events also marked Clément’s visit: a screening of *Le Misanthrope* at the Princeton Garden Theater and a Conversation on French theater today. *Le Misanthrope* was a sold-out event at the Garden theater on a magnificent early fall evening. The following Q&A revealed Hervieu-Léger’s detailed and researched vision of the play. The Conversation was a rare and illuminating event that candidly presented the state of the French stages these days. We are very thankful to Clément for these enlightening moments in his company and the support he gave to the students at critical moments during our productions.

In early November, when rehearsals for *Le Mariage de Figaro* were intensifying, L’Avant-Scène started working on its third and final production of the season, the popular *Les Fourberies de Scapin* by Molière scheduled for early December 2019. Jivahn Moradian 20, who had captivated our audiences in *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* and *Un fil à la patte* took on the lead role of Scapin. With Nicholas Sashkini (who had just starred in *Le Pays lointain*) Moradian led a cast composed of Gavin LaPlace 23, Morgan Teman 23, Michael Smilek 20, Jason Qu 21, Nathnael Mengistie 22, Jane Sul 20, and Swas Goel from the community. Students did an incredible work getting ready for the play in barely four weeks (three weeks
after fall break and one week after Thanksgiving break). Their efforts culminated in a superbly energetic and festive performance on Friday, December 6, in the Rockefeller College Common Room, home of most of our rehearsals during the academic year.

It’s always a pleasure to direct students in a comedy by Molière. They are always eager to act in one of his great plays and hone their acting skills thanks to his repertory. We laughed a lot during the rehearsal process and couldn’t wait to present the show in public just in time for the holidays. As it is often the case with a play by Molière, it drew many spectators and families from the community.

Jivahn Moradian must be particularly complimented for his outstanding work as Scapin in the production. He led the cast with great talent and energy. He took on the challenge of playing the physical lead role with utmost enthusiasm! A true troupe leader, Moradian surpassed himself and offered his very best performance in L’Avant-Scène. Like
Jivahn Moradian 20, Jianing Zhao 20, Jane Sul 20 and Michael Smilek 20 will soon graduate. The performance of Scaping was dedicated to them. Together, they performed in a total number of 14 plays! They will be missed by their fellow troupe members and their director.

The troupe pursued one other project in the second part of the fall semester. We were invited to read a newly translated play at Caribbean Theater Action, or Actions Caribéennes Théâtrales (ACT). ACT provides a cultural dialogue between the United States and the Francophone Caribbean. Through six contemporary plays by emerging or established Caribbean writers from Haiti, Martinique and Guadeloupe, ACT aims to raise awareness and recognition of Francophone Caribbean Theatre using English language translations, publications, and stage readings. By exploring passion, desire, and the collective experience of trauma and loss after natural disaster; by denouncing social, racial, and gender violence; and by staging real drama life and leading crime investigation, Caribbean dramatists tells us the stories and history of Caribbean people. Engaged in a creative and innovative mixing of languages (French and Creole), they put forward a politically engaged theatre while renewing drama aesthetics.
The six selected plays were presented in New York at the Martin E. Segal Theater Center, translated into English on December 2nd and 3rd, 2019. An anthology published by the Segal Center will be printed during Spring 2020. A group of our students read *The Day My Father Killed Me / Le jour où mon père m’a tué* written by Magali Solignat & Charlotte Boimare (Guadeloupe) in a translation by Amelia Parenteau. Based on a true story of a singer who murdered his son in Guadeloupe. Devised as a documentary theatre work, the play offers a diverse narrative account of the crime and the violence in contemporary Caribbean society.

Students enrolled in FRE/THR 211 enjoyed a great semester of theater. 19 undergraduates joined the class this fall. They worked on two scenes during the semester: one classical scene that they rehearsed throughout the semester, and one contemporary scene that they worked on independently and in class. The semester started on a high note for them as they attended three of the seven plays featured at the festival. Subsequently they read some the plays put on by L’Avant-Scène and attended the performances as a class. On December 10, 2019, at the Whitman College Class of 1970 Theater they presented their works during *Fragments XIX: A Student Recital of Scenes from Classical French Theater*.

It was an exceptional cohort of students in the class this semester. Students both excelled in their classical and contemporary scenes. Their progress and enthusiasm were constant. Most of them were novices in acting and enjoyed discovering a new craft while improving their language skills and gaining in confidence at speaking French.
This fall semester, we also enjoyed the day visits on campus of Marie Collin, Artistic Director of Festival d’Automne in Paris, Pierre Gendronneau, Director of Productions at Festival d’Automne in Paris, Catherine Marnas, Artistic Director of TNBA, Théâtre National Aquitaine Bordeaux, and Courtney Geraghty, Artistic Director of FIAF, French Institute Alliance Française, in New York.

L’Avant-Scène Le Mariage de Figaro November 2019

The performance of L’Avant-Scène FRE-THR 211 students concluded a new extraordinary season for L’Avant-Scène. We couldn’t have hoped for a better semester at the very end L’Avant-Scène second decade at Princeton; a crucial decade for the program that kept on growing steadily. With 22 active members in the troupe, L’Avant-Scène remained very large and almost produced an event every other week. As its director is on leave in the spring of 2020 to research and visit the world’s most engaging contemporary theater festivals, the season has officially ended in January 2020. There will be much to look forward to in the new 2020-2021 academic year. L’Avant-Scène will host a new short-time visitor: French actress Audrey Bonnet. It will produce the ninth edition of Seuls en Scène featuring an exceptional lineup of events and continue its new partnership with the prestigious Festival d’Automne in Paris. To continue to highlight the many talents of its student actors, it will
present On ne badine pas avec l'amour by Musset, and Le Malade imaginaire by Molière as well as a new contemporary play in the spring of 2021.

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