



# **Voltaire and the Theatre of the Eighteenth Century (Contributions in Drama and Theatre Studies,)**

*Marvin A. Carlson*

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Born in the final years of the seventeenth century, and dying a decade before the beginning of the French Revolution, Voltaire was a quintessential figure of the eighteenth century, so much so that this era is sometimes called the Age of Voltaire. At a time when French culture dominated Europe, Voltaire dominated French culture. His influence was broad and powerful, and he made major contributions to almost every sphere of intellectual activity, including the sciences, trade and commerce, politics, and especially the arts. Despite the astonishing range of his literary activities, the theatre occupied a central position in his life from the beginning of his career to its close. His first and last literary triumphs were plays, the first written when he was only 17, the last completed when he was 84. He created a total of 56, and there was rarely a time in his life when he was not working on a theatrical script. At the end of his career, his works were produced more frequently on the French stage than those of any other serious dramatist and served as models for aspiring young playwrights throughout Europe.

Written by a leading authority on French theatre and culture in the eighteenth century, this book traces the theatrical career of Voltaire from his college days through his final works. The most influential dramatist of the period, he successfully wrote in a number of genres, including tragedy, comedy, opera, comic opera, and court spectacle. His theatrical biography involves all aspects of acting and staging in amateur and society theatre as well as on major professional stages and performances at court. His extended visits to England and Germany are covered in chapters that also provide an introduction to the theatre in those countries, and his international interests and correspondence provide insights into the eighteenth century theatre in places such as Italy, Russia, and Denmark. Due to his literally life-long concern with the theatre, his dominance in this art, and his reputation and involvement with the theatre outside France, Voltaire's theatrical biography is also in large measure a chronicle of the European stage of the eighteenth century.

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