Jean-Claude Grumberg is one of the major writers of the contemporary French theater. He was born in Paris in 1939, to immigrant Jewish parents. His father was deported during the Occupation and never returned. His mother worked as a seamstress to support the family, and Jean-Claude started his working life as an apprentice tailor. He became an actor and began to write for the stage in the mid-1960s. Grumberg belongs to a post-World War II generation of Jewish playwrights who, unlike their French-Jewish predecessors of the pre-war era, do openly declare their hybrid French-Jewish identity and do feel free to discuss the Holocaust in their work.1 The treatment of the Jewish experience during World War II on stage by French-Jewish writers emerged only after Arthur Miller’s *Incident at Vichy* was approved for production in France in 1964. Overall, the chapter of the Occupation discomforted the post-war government and subtle pressures were exerted to muffle the subject. These loosened only after the watershed events of May 1968, when conservative ideals were questioned and came under fire. The uproar surrounding the Touvier case (1972–1973), contributed greatly to a serious public discourse about France and the Holocaust.2 At first, it proved somewhat easier to treat the events of the war in film than

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1 The three plays of Jean-Claude Grumberg, *Dreyfus* (1974), *L’Atelier* (*The Workshop, 1979*), *Zone Libre* (*The Free Zone [Vichy France] 1990*), are treated today as a trilogy historically providing a perspective before, during and immediately following World War II. The later French Jewish plays of Grumberg, *Maman Revient Pauvre Orphelin,* (*Mama’s Coming Back Poor Orphan, 1994*), and *Vers Toi Terre Promise* (*On the Way to the Promised Land, 2006*), are angled on memory looking back at the consequences of the Holocaust upon the Jewish individual and community rather than strictly located in the given time and place. Both later plays in tone, structure and perspective further develop a level of irony and humor to sharpen the contrast between the present and the past in order to make the audience more receptive to the play and then sensitive to their own responses.

2 Paul Touvier, a former official of the French *Milice,* was convicted of killing of seven Jewish hostages near Lyons on 29 June 1944. He was the first French citizen to be convicted of perpetrating crimes against humanity.
on the stage. Marcel Orphuls’ 1971 documentary, *Le Chagrin et la Pitié* (The Sorrow and the Pity) and Louis Malles’s *Lacombe, Lucien* (1973), dared to show that collaboration did take place in France, and that it actually led to the killing of Jews. All this paved the way for Jacques Kraemer’s successful Holocaust play, *Les Histoires d’Oncle Jacob* (The Tales of Uncle Jacob, 1976). It should be noted that although this highly commended play was written in France, its action is set in Lodz, creating a distancing effect which must have made the difficult story more palatable to a French audience.

Figure 7.1  Jean-Claude Grumberg. Photo by Frédéric Nauczyciel. Courtesy of the photographer.