ETHICS AND POLITICS IN THE THEATRE OF HÉLÈNE CIXOUS

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Thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

July 2017

Abstract

This thesis explores ethics and politics in Hélène Cixous's theatre, and shows that rich and complex analyses of ethical and political questions lie at the heart of Cixous's plays. Although they regularly attract large audiences, her plays remain relatively understudied. This thesis therefore contributes towards closing a significant gap in Cixous scholarship and in scholarship of recent French theatre.

Chapter One establishes definitions of ethics and politics, outlines some of Cixous's major ethical and political concerns, and describes her relationship to theatre. Chapter Two examines Cixous's portrayal of writers and artists and how they negotiate their various ethical and political duties. Cixous stages the creation of new communities in several plays, and Chapter Three of this thesis draws out the key ethical and political stakes that Cixous shows to be present in this process. Theatre practitioners have often used the stage to provide a moral education, and Chapter Four argues that Cixous uses her plays both to critique existing and historical moral codes and to give her audience a new form of moral education. In an early essay on the theatre, 'Aller à la mer', Cixous critiques the ways in which sacrifice of women has been an important part of the theatre canon; Chapter Five examines the role of sacrifice in Cixous's own theatre. Finally, Chapter Six makes the case that Cixous's plays are an exciting new type of political theatre.

Acknowledgements

My greatest debt is to my supervisors, Professor Judith Still and Professor Rosemary Chapman, who could not have been more supportive or more generous with their time. I am grateful for all of their intelligent guidance, careful reading of my work, and critical feedback.

I am grateful to the Arts and Humanities Research Council for their generous funding, which allowed me to complete this project. My research has also benefitted greatly from travel grants provided by the University of Nottingham School of Cultures, Languages, and Area Studies and the Society for French Studies.

I have been lucky to be part of a vibrant and friendly community at the University of Nottingham. I would like to thank Adam Horsley, Isha Pearce, and Emma Humphries in particular for their proof-reading of my manuscript, and Ben Taylor for helping me to track down some Russian sources. I have enjoyed so many conversations with Melanie Bhend, Ewa Szypula, Sam Matuszewski, Sam Wilkinson, Sarah Tang and others, all of whom have helped to clarify my thinking and introduce me to new ideas. Thanks to Heather Mabon for letting me stay with her in Paris. My thanks also go to staff in the Department of French at the University of Nottingham, past and present, for their insightful feedback on papers that I presented to the department.

The last couple of years have been very difficult for everyone in my family, and I would like to thank my dad, Robert Williams, and my partner, Paul Holmes in particular for the kindness, patience, and practical and emotional support that allowed me to complete this thesis.

Note

When alternative spellings of names used in this thesis exist in French and English, I use the standard English variant unless citing a French source or referring to a character who takes the French version of the name. For example, I will discuss the playwright Aeschylus but refer to the character Eschyle, who appears in *La Ville Parjure ou le réveil des Erinyes*.

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Chapter One: Context and Definitions for Ethics and Politics in Hélène Cixous's Theatre

This thesis will explore how Hélène Cixous analyses and intervenes in ethical and political questions in her theatre. Although, at least in the Anglophone world, Cixous is best known as a critic, literary theorist, and novelist, her rich body of theatre work offers fertile ground for examining her deconstruction of a range of vital and urgent ethical issues and political concerns. Her plays return repeatedly to tragedies of recent history, including the *affaire du sang contaminé*, the rise of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, the violence of partition in India, and the censorship of writers in Stalinist Russia. What is particularly valuable about Cixous's approach to all of these subjects is that she consistently locates the key ethical issues that are at stake whilst exposing the political calculations that are made. The result is a powerful form of theatre that develops its audience's critical senses, and shows that questions of right and wrong, justice and injustice, duty and betrayal, are not abstract or irrelevant, but alive in the contemporary political scene and in the everyday.

The political value of Cixous's work has always been hotly contested amongst her readers. Early critics of Cixous in Britain and America, who had read the essay 'Le Rire de la Méduse', which was anthologised in *New French Feminisms* and remains her most widely read text in Anglo-American academia, tended to read Cixous's work as concerned primarily with issues of style and aesthetics, approaching politics rarely, and generally only in an abstract sense. Anu Aneja is quite typical of this sort of response when she states that Cixous favours the 'poetic over the political' whilst conceding that 'to accuse Cixous

of being completely apolitical would be like saying that the poetic does not interfere or interact with the political'.[1] Toril Moi, to take another example, talks disparagingly about Cixous's 'romanticized vision of the female body as the site of women's writing'.[2] Even the influential *New French Feminisms*, whose editors were broadly supportive of Cixous's writing, includes 'The Laugh of the Medusa' ['Le Rire de la Méduse'] in its list of 'Utopias' and not amongst its 'Manifestos', and describes Cixous's prose as 'esoteric'.[3] Later critics have sought to redress this balance, pointing out that *écriture féminine* is a revolutionary political praxis. Susan Sellers, for example summarises the goals of *écriture féminine* in this way: 'through such transformations [in the field of writing], feminine writing will enable corresponding changes in our social and political systems';[4] in other words, the practice of *écriture féminine* should be revolutionary. Verena Andermatt Conley states clearly 'Cixous's concerns are political', although adding 'but textually political', which means political agents reading and writing 'in order to displace the operating concepts of femininity in major discourses governing (Western) society'.[5]

Despite this valuable work there has often been a tendency to position Cixous narrowly as a critical theorist (particularly by critics in English departments,

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[1] Anu Aneja, 'The Medusa's Slip: Hélène Cixous and the Underpinnings of *Ecriture Féminine*', in *Hélène Cixous: Critical Impressions*, ed. by Lee A. Jacobus and Regina Barreca (Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach Publishers, 1999), pp. 57-74 (p. 64).

[2]Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 1985), p. 97.

[3] See Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, 'Introduction III', in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. and intro. by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (Amherst: University of Massachussetts Press, 1980), p. 37.

[4] Susan Sellers, *Hélène Cixous: Authorship, Autobiography and Love* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), p. 5.

[5] Verena Andermatt Conley, *Hélène Cixous: Writing the Feminine*, expanded edn (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), p. 5.

who read a limited number of her essays) or as a novelist, in the French context, as Morag Shiach points out.[6] Both Cixous's political significance and her writing in other genres have been overlooked. More recently, scholars have tended to take a more holistic approach to Cixous's work (one notable recent example is Mairéad Hanrahan's *Cixous's Semi-Fictions*), but it is still the case that Cixous's theatre in particular is often relegated to a secondary position, receiving only limited critical attention (Julia Dobson, whose 2002 book *Hélène Cixous and the Theatre: The Scene of Writing* dealt uniquely with Cixous's theatre, is the most prominent exception here). Often, critical responses to Cixous's theatre have come from scholars who are more interested in the work of her collaborators, and so have focused on questions of staging.[7] Those who do write about the politics of Cixous's theatre have often found it wanting, either simplistic and naïve or dangerously misguided. Martha Walker, for instance, although she praises the ways in which *La Ville Parjure* is able to communicate the urgency of the problem of the AIDS epidemic, is concerned about the gender politics in the play which features strong female characters standing up to a largely male establishment: 'For audiences in the 1990s, such a shockingly obvious dichotomy between the good women and the bad men might smack of the outdated essentialist feminism of the 1970s with which Cixous is associated';[8] the recurrent accusation that Cixous's feminism is 'essentialist', which feeds into the understanding of her politics altogether as socially and

[6] Morag Shiach, *Hélène Cixous: A Politics of Writing* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 1-2.
[7] Adrian Kiernander, Roger-Daniel Bensky, and Françoise Quillet are amongst those critics who have discussed Cixous's theatre writing but only as a vehicle for the innovation of the directors who interest them.
[8] Martha Walker, 'Rehabilitating Feminist Politics and Political Theatre: Hélène Cixous's *La Ville Parjure ou le réveil des Erinyes* at the Théâtre du Soleil', *Modern and Contemporary France*, 9.4 (2001), 495-509 (p. 502).

politically conservative, is based largely on a misreading of the language that Cixous uses about the body and the call to write the body. In this thesis, I will argue that Cixous's plays offer important analyses of a number of vital ethical and political questions, and show that what has sometimes been thought of as the political naivety of some of these works can in many cases be understood as a strategy to encourage the audience to engage critically with key issues.

The range of political and ethical questions that Cixous investigates in her plays is broad, and includes questions of power, identity, justice,[9] medical ethics, and hospitality, amongst others. In this thesis, I focus on four important questions, all of which reveal the various tensions and affinities between ethics and politics and also show how Cixous's writing has been influenced by the experience of writing for the theatre. In Chapter Two, I consider Cixous's portrayal of artists, and the particular ethical and political duties that they owe to their work, to society, and to their friends and family. I examine a range of issues related to the establishment of new communities in Chapter Three. These include the key questions of whether the establishment of a new community can be an effective response to problems in wider society, and the ethics and politics of deciding who can be included or excluded from the community. In Chapter Four I explore how theatre's dual role as both a provider of moral education and a site from which forms of moral education can be critiqued is challenged and affirmed in two of Cixous's plays. Cixous's 1977 essay 'Aller à la mer' exposed the vital role that the sacrifice of women plays in the established European theatrical

[9] I discussed these questions in my master's dissertation. See Martina Williams, 'Aspects of Ethics in Four Plays by Hélène Cixous' (unpublished master's dissertation, University of Nottingham, 2012). <http://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/id/eprint/13069> [accessed 14 January 2016]. My thesis pursues lines of enquiry first raised there.

canon.[10] In Chapter Five, I consider the role of sacrifice in Cixous's own theatre, and examine the extent to which the critique in 'Aller à la mer' is reflected her plays.

In this chapter, I offer a definition of ethics, politics, and the distinction between the two terms (a question which recurs throughout the thesis) before moving on to focus on Cixous, giving a brief overview of her life and career, focusing largely on a description of *écriture féminine*, the writing and reading practice for which she is best known. I go on to talk specifically about Cixous's writing practice when she writes for the theatre, giving an overview of what she says about the theatre in her published essays and interviews and paying attention to the influence of other theatre writers and practitioners, and of the directors with whom Cixous collaborates, on her work. I also outline the extent of her theatre work to date, before justifying the choice of plays in my corpus. A review of the critical literature on Cixous's theatre, and an explanation of my methodology follow, before I outline the shape of my thesis.

Defining Ethics and Politics

Cixous associates politics with compromise and negotiation. Ethics, by contrast, is a relationship of absolute responsibility. These precise definitions of the terms are distinct from the ways in which politics and ethics are often discussed in

[10] Hélène Cixous, 'Aller à la mer', *Le Monde*, 28 April 1977, p. 19. <http://www.lemonde.fr/acces-restreint/archives/article/1977/04/28/6b6d679d696c71c5946e6a6761996d_2857679_1819218.html> [accessed 21 October 2016].

quotidian contexts. In everyday speech, ethics and politics are often (although not in all traditions or circumstances) distinguished according to the criteria of scale. In broad terms, ethics has often been lined up with individual interactions and relationships; affairs of the state and the public sphere more generally have been seen as the realm of the political. The implications for the question of sexual difference here are evident; the *homme politique* stands in opposition to the mother/virgin who protects the morality of the home, and it is quite clear who is more vital to the survival of the nation. Cixous's work has always troubled this distinction in a revolutionary way: her writing practice aimed at shaking up the public realm and unpicking the binary distinction between the public and the private in order to allow women (and women's writing) space within the public sphere from which they had been excluded.

Morality is often used more or less interchangeably with ethics, though it is generally distinguished from politics. The terms ethics and morals are used to describe a wide range of issues, from urgent and high-stakes questions of right and wrong treatment of others (which might be to do with avoiding cruelty and pain), to questions of what is right and wrong behaviour according to a code that is socially and historically specific (including for instance problems of how it is acceptable to dress, or which words are unacceptable to use). I associate ethics with questions of our relationship to the other, and morals with a code of behaviour. Whilst any number of issues – including questions of sexual behaviour, respect, or property rights, for instance – show the porousness of this border, the distinction can nevertheless be a useful tool for thinking about this variety of problems.

Although ethics and politics are central to Cixous's thought and writing, she has only rarely discussed them in explicit terms. Brigitte Weltman-Aron is one critic who has tracked Cixous's references to politics in her work, concluding with Verena Andermatt Conley that when Cixous is asked to comment on politics in her work, she always replies in ways that tie poetry and politics together in 'a formulation that insists on the necessity of apprehending one through the other'.[11] In other words, Cixous refers critics back to the necessity of reading her work closely whenever they ask about her politics. Cixous gives a similar account of the relationship of politics to her writing in an interview which she gave with Bernadette Fort, 'Theatre, History, Ethics: An Interview with Hélène Cixous on "The Perjured City, or the Awakening of the Furies".[12]

> There is no political or ethical rupture among my activities, but my fiction and my plays are two worlds or two continents with completely different formal and aesthetic laws. As for teaching and what is called 'sexual politics' in each of my two worlds, my thinking goes roughly as follows:
>
> I have never sought to write works that were thematically explicit or in the form of a feminist proclamation. But when I write poetico-philosophical fiction, I am consciously *and* unconsciously weaving a textuality that carries the marks, the traces of the playfulness, the game of sexual difference. This happens more in the syntax, the poetics, in amphibology, in the

[11] Brigitte Weltman-Aron, *Algerian Imprints: Ethical Space in the Work of Assia Djebar and Hélène Cixous* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), p. 114.
[12] Bernadette Fort, 'Theater, History, Ethics: An Interview with Hélène Cixous on "The Perjured City, or the Awakening of the Furies", *New Literary History*, 28.3 (1997), 425-56 (p. 452) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20057427> [accessed 22 October 2016].

> versatility of grammatical genders, in all the fluctuating resources of language, than in a 'feminist discourse'.
>
> As for the theater, for me it is the opening of a 'Worldwide Political Scene', which forms the material of my very numerous characters. (Fort, 'Theatre, History', p. 427)

Cixous is describing the role of politics in her work, the place that the politics of sexual difference, in particular, holds in her writing, and the differences that she finds between her writing for the theatre and her writing elsewhere. Several useful indications of how to approach politics and ethics in her theatre can be taken from the account that she gives here. First, the affirmation that politics is present in her work on the fundamental level of how she deploys language suggests why it is difficult to find an explicit definition of the terms politics and ethics in her work, whilst reaffirming the importance of close reading as a strategy for approaching her texts. Second, her denial that there is a 'rupture' with her fiction and her theatre at least on the level of their ethics and politics, suggests that this approach is vital in the theatre too. Finally, that Cixous is careful to mention the ethics as well as the politics of her activities at the outset here indicates how the two are often interwoven in her writing. As Weltman-Aron argues, Cixous's works show the necessity of a 'dual approach' to ethics and politics (*Algerian Imprints*, p. 165).

The distinction and relationship between ethics and politics has been thought of in a range of ways at different times and in different traditions. One key classical thinker whose writing on the difference between ethics and politics is still

influential in European and American thought is Aristotle.[13] In his *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle defines the good as 'that at which all things aim',[14] and explains that there is 'a good' associated with every art or science, the good of medicine being health, the good of strategy victory, and 'in any other sphere something else' (*Nicomachean Ethics*, I. 7). The ethical good is 'some end of the things we do, which we desire for its own sake (everything else being desired for the sake of this)' (*Nicomachean Ethics*, I. 2). For Aristotle, this good is happiness, defined as 'activity of soul in accordance with virtue, and if there are more than one virtue, in accordance with the best and most complete' (*Nicomachean Ethics*, I. 7). For Aristotle, politics is important largely because it can help the individual to achieve this ethical good: Aristotle argues that it is easier for men to practice virtue in a good state that is governed by good laws (*Nicomachean Ethics*, X. 9).

Cixous examines the emphasis on activity that underlies this understanding of ethics and what it is to be good, and shows that activity is systematically associated with men in classical writings (and in the later European traditions that draw influence from them), whilst women are thought of as passive, soft, and sexually available – or mad and dangerous.[15] By insisting on a particular form of male-identified activity, Aristotle's model of the good excludes significant groups of people (women and slaves being the largest and most

[13] For instance, Martha Nussbaum engages with Aristotle throughout her work. See amongst others Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).
[14] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. by W.D. Ross <http://classics.mit.edu//Aristotle/nicomachaen.html> [accessed 9 February 2013], Book I Chapter 1. Internet Classics Archive ebook.
[15] One particularly striking form of this critique comes when Cixous satirically adopts the voice of a classical hero who is addressing women whom he both desires and fears. See Hélène Cixous, 'Sorties', in *La Jeune née*, by Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1975), pp. 114-246 (p. 123).

obvious) from the possibility of living ethically. When Cixous talks about ethics, she is interested in relationships with others and not with individual virtue or happiness. Nor does she, as Aristotle does, link politics tightly to the organisation of the state.

Cixous in this way challenges and deconstructs some classical models of ethics and politics, but many other traditions of thought on ethics and politics play less obvious roles in her work. Religious thinkers on ethics make few appearances in Cixous's writing, although she engages with a number of key stories from Judeo-Christian mythology.[16] Her detailed close-readings of these texts expose their difficulties and contradictions, and suggest some of the potential pitfalls of attempts to adhere to a religious model of ethics. Clearer than Cixous's rejection of religious models of ethics, though, is her critique of attempts to take a utilitarian approach to ethics. This critique is perhaps articulated best in the play *La Ville Parjure*, where attempts to concentrate on the greater good are repeatedly cast as political rather than ethical, linked explicitly to concern for the safety of the self rather than concern for the other, and also shown to be inadequate as a response to the tragedy at the heart of the play.[17] Utilitarian models of ethics are often read and taught against and in conversation with the work of Immanuel Kant and later Kantian scholars. Kant has not been a significant interlocutor for Cixous, as he has been for many of her contemporaries. She does, however, highlight the disparaging way in which Kant has discussed women's use of language (*La Jeune née*, pp. 200-1).

[16] For instance, she analyses the story of Abraham and Isaac. I discuss this in Chapter Two and Chapter Five. Cixous is concerned with the story in 'Conversation avec l'âne: Ecrire aveugle', in *L'Amour du loup et autres remords* (Paris: Galilée, 2003), pp. 79-105.
[17] I discuss this in detail in Chapter Five.

Elsewhere, she also interrogates the question of (moral) law and the complex mechanism according to which it isolates individuals whilst insisting on individuality when she analyses the Kafka short story 'Devant la loi'.[18]

Cixous has engaged most consistently and clearly with more recent thinkers on ethics and politics, Derrida and Levinas. Derrida has dealt extensively with questions of ethics and politics in his work, and he is a frequent reference for Cixous, who also collaborated with him in writing a number of texts. Although he is perhaps a less apparent interlocutor for Cixous, Levinas was an important influence for Derrida, who published *Adieu à Emmanuel Lévinas* shortly after that thinker's death.[19] Some critics have suggested more direct links between Levinas's thought on ethics and Cixous's. For example, Weltman-Aron frequently calls on Levinas in her discussions of ethics in Cixous's writing on Algeria.[20] Merle A. Williams and Stephan Polatinsky also use Levinas's thought extensively in their analysis of what they term 'poethics' in Cixous's novel *Manne aux Mandelstams aux Mandelas*.[21] Cixous discusses Levinas explicitly in a 2006 essay, 'Ce qui a l'air de quoi'.[22] The essay looks at the distinction between subject and object, paying attention to the question of who is the

[18] See Hélène Cixous, 'Extreme Fidelity', in *Writing Differences: Readings from the Seminar of Hélène Cixous*, ed. by Susan Sellers (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1988), pp. 9-36 (pp. 16-7), *Readings: Poetics of Blanchot, Joyce, Kafka, Kleist, Lispector and Tsvetayeva*, ed. and trans. by Verena Andermatt Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), pp. 14-19, and *La Jeune née*, pp. 189-90.

[19] Jacques Derrida, *Adieu à Emmanuel Lévinas* (Paris: Galilée, 1997).

[20] For instance, in her discussion of Cixous's 'Lettre à Zohra Drif', Weltman-Aron draws on how Levinas differentiates between speaking *for* the Other and speaking *to* the Other. See *Algerian Imprints*, p. 127. Weltman-Aron analyses Hélène Cixous, 'Lettre à Zohra Drif', *Lectora*, 7 (2001), 183-188 <http://www.raco.cat/index.php/Lectora/article/view/205438> [accessed 7 February 2017].

[21] Merle A. Williams and Stephan Polatinsky, 'Hélène Cixous' *Manna*: The Face of Suffering and the Poethics of Border-Crossing', *English Studies in Africa*, 52.2 (2009), 63-76 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00138390903444156>.

[22] Hélène Cixous, 'Ce qui a l'air de quoi', *MLN*, 121.4 (2006), 828-49 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4490743> [accessed 7 December 2015].

subject of ethical laws, and who can be offered their protection. Of particular interest to Cixous in this essay is 'la méditation levinassienne sur la loi: Tu ne tueras point' ('Ce qui', p. 844). Following Derrida's critique of this formulation of the ethical law in 'Il faut bien manger', a conversation with Jean-Luc Nancy,[23] Cixous suggests that it 'supposait, comme complément d'objet, l'homme', which effectively 'accordait à l'homme la liberté et le droit, la franchise donc de tuer tout autre que "l'homme" défini humanistement' ('Ce qui', p. 844). This question of inclusion and exclusion is an important one to Cixous, and is central to her reflections on community in her 1985 play *L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk, roi du Cambodge* and the 2009 production *Les Naufragés du Fol Espoir*, as well as her reflections on the treatment of women in the theatre in her 1977 essay 'Aller à la mer'.[24] Equally significant for my attempt to define ethics, though, is the attitude that Cixous takes towards Levinas here. Although she emphatically rejects the implied exclusions that exist within Levinas's formulation of the ethical law, Cixous seems to accept both this fundamental prohibition against killing and the assumption (common to Levinas and a number of ethical systems) that this prohibition is the primary ethical law. Indeed, Cixous's written discussions of ethical and political questions contain a number of positive (if not always explicit) engagements with Levinas's work. This is most obvious in her discussions of the place of the other.

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[23] Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy, "Il faut bien manger" ou le calcul du sujet', in *Points de suspension. Entretiens* ed. by Elisabeth Weber (Paris: Galilée, 1992), 269-301.
[24] Hélène Cixous, 'Aller à la mer', *Le Monde*, 28 April 1977, p. 19. <http://www.lemonde.fr/acces-restreint/archives/article/1977/04/28/6b6d679d696c71c5946e6a6761996d_2857679_1819218.html> [accessed 21 October 2016].

Simon Critchley has discussed Levinas's writing on the place of the other:

> The entirety of [Levinas's] philosophy can be summarized in the simple words 'Après vous, monsieur', that is, by everyday and quite banal acts of civility, hospitality, kindness, and politeness that have perhaps received too little attention from philosophers. It is such acts that Levinas qualifies with the adjective 'ethical'.[25]

As Derrida suggests, although this 'après vous' might reveal itself in everyday acts in the way that Critchley describes above, these gestures are actually the signs of a more profound engagement. The 'après vous':

> Ne veut pas seulement dire un genre de 'Passez devant moi, devant la porte de l'ascenseur', etc., ça veut dire: 'je viens après vous' et je ne viens à moi-même, à ma responsabilité d'ego en quelque sorte, que depuis l'autre. L'autre est là avant moi et je reçois de l'ordre de l'autre qui me précède. C'est la situation devant l'autre et non seulement il passe devant moi, il doit passer devant moi, mais il est là avant moi. Donc je dis: 'Après vous' c'est ma première adresse à l'autre comme autre. [26]

What Levinas's 'après vous' in fact describes is the relationship that defines ethics, a relationship with the other in which the other has absolute priority. Whereas thinkers have often assumed that the self constructs groups of others,

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[25] Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p. 287.
[26] Jacques Derrida, Neuvième Séance, 27 Février 2002, of *Séminaire: La Bête et le souverain, Volume I (2001-2002)* (Paris: Galilée, 2008), pp. 315-335 (pp. 319-20).

Levinas claims that it is 'la responsabilité pour autrui, qui, dans son avènement éthique est incessible, à laquelle on ne se dérobe pas et qui, ainsi, est principe d'individuation absolue'.[27] For Levinas, the self is called into existence by an encounter with an other for whom the self must be infinitely responsible. Responsibility here means responding to the other, and to all of the demands made by the other. It is in this way that, as he argues 'La philosophie première est une éthique' (*Ethique et infini*, p. 71). The first thought encountered by any subject is on ethics, and it is only through realising the ethical relationship in which they stand with others that individuals may become subjects at all.

Cixous has criticised the way in which the distinction between self and other has traditionally been constructed in Western thought:

> Et je sais déjà tout de la 'réalité' qui étaie la marche de l'Histoire: tout repose, à travers les siècles, sur la distinction entre le Propre, le mien, donc le bien, et ce qui le limite: or ce qui menace mon-bien (le bien n'étant donc jamais que ce qui est bon-pour moi) c'est l'*autre*. Qu'est-ce que c'est l' 'Autre' ? S'il est vraiment 'l'autre', alors on n'a rien à dire, ce n'est pas théorisable. *L'autre* m'échappe. Il est ailleurs, dehors: autre absolument. Il ne se pose pas. Mais bien sûr, dans l'Histoire, ce qu'on appelle 'autre' c'est une altérité qui se pose, qui entre dans le cercle dialectique, qui est l'autre dans le rapport hiérarchisé où c'est le même qui règne, nomme, définit, attribue, 'son' autre. (Cixous, *La Jeune née*, p. 129)

[27] Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethique et infini* (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1984), p. 75. For an example of a thinker who describes how the self constructs others (and is constructed by them in a way that is very different to the mechanism that Levinas describes), see Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième sexe I: Les faits et les mythes* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1986), p. 16.

History, Cixous argues, has been built upon a distinction made between, first of all, the self and the 'Propre', the things and attributes possessed by the self, which define the limits of what can be seen as good, and secondly the other. This other is constructed as an impoverished mirror image of the self, and Cixous's writing repeatedly highlights the cruelties and injustices that this process necessitates and excuses.

Hospitality is one key to a better ethical response to the other. According to Derrida's reading of Levinas, a properly ethical relationship of responsibility between a subject and an other would require a subject to give this other a welcome that was 'démesurée': the subject would have to '*recevoir* d'Autrui au-delà de la capacité du Moi' (Levinas quoted by Derrida in *Adieu à Emmanuel Lévinas*, p. 55). Cixous's hospitality to others is at the heart of her writing practice; as Elsa Laflamme indicates, Cixous's texts are characterised by 'ouverture à l'autre comme à soi', and offer welcome to other poets, thinkers, and writers.[28] Significantly, though, Cixous's texts are not indiscriminately welcoming. Instead they offer space to a wide but finite range of writers with whom Cixous feels an affinity. Although it has revolutionary potential, the complete ethical welcome of 'Autrui' is also dangerous (and impossible) since we can in no way know the other or ask if they are friend or enemy before welcoming them. As Judith Still suggests, taken to its absolute conclusion, a

[28] Elsa Laflamme, 'Hélène Cixous et le génie spectral', *L'Esprit Créateur*, 55.2 (2015), 131-141 (p. 135) <dx.doi.org/10.1353/esp.2015.0030>. Cixous also describes the value of this openness in *La jeune née*, where she praises *écriture féminine* which 'laisse parler l'autre langue à mille langues' (*La Jeune née*, p. 162).

properly ethical welcome would entail the possibility of giving over to the other all of those resources that allow you to welcome them, or even to exist.[29]

Ethics is a relationship of absolute responsibility to the other, in which the other's priority is recognised immediately, without question of the risk to the self. This form of ethical relationship is fundamental to our existence, and we can begin to think and to communicate only when we encounter the other and in that moment grasp the potential for an ethical relationship. However, the majority of our relationships are not ethical but based on some accepted moral code, and are characterised by political negotiation and compromise; the self generally makes calculations about risk and personal safety in ways that are not permitted by the absolute relationships of ethics. What Cixous's plays show is that it is possible for the absolute relationship of ethics to exist as a guide or as a critical vantage point from which the compromises and negotiations that form the political become really visible and can be critiqued.[30]

Cixous's Life and Career

As I have suggested, it is possible to track an interest in ethical and political questions throughout Cixous's career, and this interest is often accompanied by or clarified with stories taken from her own personal history. Hanrahan has shown that when Cixous uses 'autobiographical' details, 'she transforms them, freely changing even such "factual" elements as dates of birth, with the result

[29] Judith Still, *Derrida and Hospitality: Theory and Practice* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 9.
[30] Levinas makes a similar point when he describes the relationship between politics and ethics: 'la politique doit pouvoir en effet toujours être contrôlée et critiquée à partir de l'éthique' (Levinas, *Ethique et infini*, p. 75).

that the limit between the autobiographical and the fictional remains totally undecidable' (Hanrahan, *Semi-Fictions*, p. 8). If Cixous's personal history is not, then, used in a straightforward way, it is nevertheless significant. Hélène Cixous was born in 1937 in Oran, Algeria. Her father, a French Jewish doctor, died when Cixous was young, after which Cixous's German Jewish mother, Eve, retrained as a midwife.[31] It is particularly noteworthy, I think, that in 'La venue à l'écriture', when Cixous discusses the importance of her origins, she is quick to tie them to ethical and political concerns:

> J'ai eu la 'chance' de faire mes premiers pas en plein brasier entre deux holocaustes, parmi, au sein même du racisme, avoir trois ans en 1940, être juive, une partie de moi dans les camps de concentration, une partie de moi dans les 'colonies'. (Cixous, 'La venue', p. 24)

Although we might more readily associate Cixous's experiences of growing up in a French-German-Jewish household in Algeria during World War II with the homonymous French/English pair *hasard*/hazard, Cixous calls it a *chance*, a possibility, but also something that is lucky and fortunate, in quotation marks that could be tentative or ironically distancing. She imagines herself as a child treading a borderline, touched by the Holocaust of the European Jewish population, as well as the 'holocaust' of the experience of the colonised people in French Algeria, and imagines that she has some experience of both of these forms of suffering. Indeed, associating these events with the moments at which

[31] Some of these biographical details are discussed in *La Jeune née*, pp. 128-9. Frédéric Regard also gives a good overview of Cixous's biography in 'AA!', the essay that introduces Hélène Cixous's, *Le Rire de la Méduse et autres ironies*, pp. 9-22. Cixous's novel *Les Rêveries de la femme sauvage: Scènes primitives* (Paris: Galilée, 2000) discusses the autofictional narrator's mother's work as a midwife.

she took her first steps, Cixous suggests that they are formative moments for her. Her first response to tragedy was ethical, she feels that she experiences those events herself, she responds to suffering with empathy. I will show that, later in Cixous's theatre work, she begins to address contemporary tragedy, rather than tragedy in the context of childhood memory, and that her response is also political, as the actions of those who try to negotiate a solution to tragic events are celebrated.

Cixous came to France in 1955. One significant meeting that took place shortly after Cixous came to France was with Derrida. Cixous has described that moment several times:

> Tout a été ordonné pour moi lorsque je l'ai nonvu la première des premières fois. Ce qui s'est inscrit dans ce qui m'est devenu par la suite une sorte de légende – c'est-à-dire quelque chose de lisible – c'est que je l'ai nonvu: je n'ai fait que l'entendre. C'était un accident extraordinaire. J'avais dix-huit ans. C'était à la Sorbonne, il passait un oral d'agrégation, j'étais très loin au fond d'un amphi, je ne 'voyais' que son dos. Je ne voyais que sa voix. Il parlait de ce qui m'intéresse éternellement: la pensée de la mort. Je n'ai été saisie par rien d'autre que par sa tout autre langue si puissamment vivante pensant la pensée de la mort. Ce fut pour moi l'ouverture de la pensée et de la littérature.[32]

[32]Aliette Armel, 'Du mot à la vie: un dialogue entre Jacques Derrida et Hélène Cixous', *Magazine littéraire*, 430 (2004), 22-9 <http://www.magazine-litteraire.com/du-mot-%C3%A0-la-vie-un-dialogue-entre-jacques-derrida-et-h%C3%A9l%C3%A8ne-cixous> [accessed 10 February 2017].

The tone of admiration and of closeness struck here is characteristic of Cixous's discussions of her relationship with Derrida, and their work can often be usefully read together. Indeed, here Cixous claims that Derrida was the 'opening of thought and literature', that the moment of not seeing him (a one-sided meeting, remembered by Cixous and not by Derrida, that took place through voice and language, with bodily presence (she saw his back) but without sight) was the moment at which she learned to think and to read.

Cixous's doctoral thesis, which she completed in 1968, was called *L'Exil de James Joyce ou l'Art du remplacement*. Cixous's interest in avant-garde writing practices, and the ethical and political question of those who are marginalised or exiled from society remained a consistent feature of her work. In another important moment in her career, Cixous was influential in establishing the Université de Vincennes in 1969, alongside a number of other French critical thinkers, including Jean-François Lyotard, Gilles Deleuze, and Michel Foucault. What is significant about this is it suggests that Cixous was actively involved in creating and supporting new communities of politically engaged individuals before she began working for the theatre.

Écriture féminine

In 1967, shortly before completing her doctoral thesis, Cixous wrote her first prose fiction work, *Le Prénom de Dieu*, and it was followed in 1969 by *Dedans*, which won the Prix Médicis.[33] Cixous remains a prolific writer of fiction, and

[33] See Hélène Cixous, *Le Prénom de Dieu* (Paris: Grasset, 1967) and *Dedans* (Paris: des femmes, 1986 [1969]).

has authored around a book per year since she began writing. Nevertheless, in the Anglophone world, Cixous is best known for her theories of reading and writing, and particularly the concept of *écriture féminine*, which is most clearly set out in three key essays written in the 1970s: 'Le Rire de la Méduse', a campaigning text and call to arms for women writers, 'Sorties', which repeats some of the material of 'Le Rire', but elaborates and expands on that work, and 'La venue à l'écriture', in which she explores what prompted her to write.[34] As Morag Shiach has pointed out, *écriture féminine* should not be understood as a label that can be attached to certain types of writing, but is rather a 'writing practice' (Shiach, *Politics of Writing*, p. 10). This writing practice cannot be clearly defined, Cixous claims:

> Impossible de *définir* une pratique féminine de l'écriture, d'une impossibilité qui se maintiendra car on ne pourra jamais *théoriser* cette pratique, l'enfermer, la coder, ce qui ne signifie pas qu'elle n'existe pas. Mais elle excédera toujours le discours que régit le système phallocentrique; elle a et aura lieu ailleurs que dans les territoires subordonnés à la domination philosophique-théorique. ('Le Rire', pp. 50-1)

Rather, some characteristics of feminine writing are suggested through highly subjective and poetic descriptions of *how* Cixous writes and through pointing to other authors whom she believes to practice feminine writing (Cixous, 'Le Rire', p. 43). The term *écriture féminine* is thus slippery and deliberately difficult to abstract from the literary works to which it refers.

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[34] Susan Sellers, 'Introduction', *Hélène Cixous Reader*, ed. by Susan Sellers (London: Routledge, 1994), xxvi-xxxiv (p. xxix).

What Cixous does make clear, however, is the context that provides her with the impulse to read and write as she does. Cixous begins the essay 'Sorties' by describing the system of 'phallogocentrism', which is characterised by the division of the world into sets of hierarchized binary pairs, where the underprivileged term (women, in the case of the binary pair *homme/femme*) only exists as a contrast to the privileged term, allowing the privileged term to be defined in opposition to the underprivileged. All of the writing produced within this system, Cixous argues, is sexually marked, which is to say, is marked as belonging to one of two 'libidinal economies', different relationships to desire and repression.[35] Most writing is marked as masculine, and very few examples exist of writing that is marked as having been written from within a feminine economy (Cixous, 'Le Rire', pp. 42-3). Briefly, within the masculine economy, desire is driven by lack, scarcity, and the assumption of finite resources, whereas the feminine economy celebrates excess and what is limitless. Although it is currently easier for women to have access to a masculine economy than for men to have access to a feminine economy, both empirically sexed men and empirically sexed women have the potential to be bisexual where to be 'bisexual' is to have access to both masculine and feminine libidinal economies without equating the two or effacing the differences between them (Cixous, *La Jeune née*, pp. 155-6). This distinction between the feminine economy and female sexed bodies is, I would argue, central to an understanding of Cixous's approach to writing, if only because it offers a response to those who, when they

[35] Toril Moi, discusses libidinal economies and the ways in which they are different to what she terms 'empirically sexed bodies' in *Sexual/Textual Politics*, p. 108.

hear Cixous's demands for women to write their bodies, ask with Ann Rosalind Jones, 'if we argue for an innate, precultural femininity, where does that position (though in *content* it obviously diverges from masculinist dogma) leave us in relation to earlier theories about women's "nature"?'[36] According to Cixous's approach to the feminine it is possible, for example, for Jean Genet to be a key example of a writer who practices *écriture féminine* (Cixous, 'Le Rire', p. 43).

Écriture féminine can best be understood as a political practice that seeks to subvert and to shake up the dominant phallogocentric economy through the introduction of those new, undervalued, mad, or threatening ways of desiring, writing, and thinking that are associated with the 'feminine' within the dominant system (after all, she says, 'il faut que la femme s'écrive' (Cixous, 'Le Rire', p. 37)). Cixous suggests that it is dangerous to create writing that is sexually marked as feminine:

> Tu es, toi aussi, juifemme, menue, diminutive, souris parmi le peuple des souris, assignée à la crainte du grand méchant chat. A la diaspora de tes désirs; aux déserts intimes. Et si tu grandis, ton désert grandit aussi. Si tu sors du trou, le monde te fait savoir qu'il n'y a pas de place entre ses états pour ton espèce. (Cixous, 'La venue', p. 15)

A number of interesting questions are opened up by Cixous's discussion of the position of women here, particularly in her invocation of the state of exile, of Jewishness, and use of animal imagery. What is clear is that Cixous's writing

[36] Ann Rosalind Jones, 'Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of "L'Écriture Féminine", *Feminist Studies*, 7.2 (1981) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3177523> [accessed 6 August 2012], 247-63 (p. 255).

practice is designed to bring the feminine out of the domestic space and into a wider world where its intrusion is not welcome and where it is believed that there is no space for it. Betsy Wing's translation of the title of Cixous's essay, 'Sorties', as 'Sorties: Out and Out, Attacks/Ways Out/Forays' already suggests something of the danger and excitement portrayed above; 'out and out' hints at the joyful excess that characterises the feminine economy, and 'forays' carries the sense of a military attack. Marking *écriture feminine* as a 'way out', Wing positions Cixous's writing practice as both an individual (ethical) response to the dominant economy, an absolute personal refusal to be bound by its demands, and a wider and more political response, designed to indicate something of how massive social change can be achieved. It should be noted that, unlike the English 'exit', with the French *sortir*, to go out, the focus is not so much on the space that the exiter is leaving, but on the place to which they are going; a temporal focus on the future as well as a spatial focus on the elsewhere.[37] I argue that many of the political and ethical concerns that inform the practice of *écriture féminine* are also relevant to her plays, although in her plays Cixous ties these concerns to contemporary world events and does not always have the same focus on questions of reading and writing.

The plays and my corpus

In the 1970s, at the same time as she was publishing the essays in which she discussed *écriture féminine*, Cixous began writing for the theatre. Since that

[37] I have talked in greater depth about Cixous's discussions of *écriture féminine* in 'Sorties' in my chapter 'Looking Again at *La jeune née*: Feminine Poets in Hélène Cixous's *Voile Noire Voile Blanche*', in *French Feminisms 1975 and After: New Readings, New Texts* (Peter Lang: forthcoming).

time, she has written or co-created some seventeen plays, operas, and radio plays, which have enjoyed large audiences: the majority of her plays have been produced by the Théâtre du Soleil, whose productions regularly have more than 50,000 spectators over the course of a run in Paris as well as a tour (Cixous's plays have been produced in South America, North America, Asia, Australia, and in European countries outside of France).[38] Cixous's work has also had a wide audience within France, having been produced in Paris (with the Théâtre du Soleil), Lille (with Daniel Mesguich), Avignon (at the annual theatre festival) and Lyon (in the context of the *Festival sens interdits*).

The first of Cixous's plays to appear in print was the unperformed work *La Pupille*, which was published by the Cahiers Renaud-Barrault in 1972.[39] In the mid-1970s, Cixous was approached by the director Simone Benmussa, who had read Cixous's novel *Portrait du Soleil*, and who felt that there was 'already' something theatrical in the structure of that novel, and who wanted to turn it into a play.[40] *Portrait de Dora*, which featured video clips filmed by Marguerite Duras, as well as the on-stage action, is a powerful critique of Freud's handling of the case of the young hysteric woman patient whom he named Dora and whose history he published as a 'Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of

[38] *Les Naufragés du Fol Espoir* was performed in Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Porto Alegre, Santiago, Vienna, Edinburgh and Tai Pei (See The Théâtre du Soleil website, '*Les Naufragés du Fol Espoir*' <http://www.theatre-du-soleil.fr/thsol/nos-spectacles-et-nos-films/nos-spectacles/les-naufrages-du-fol-espoir-2010/> [accessed 11 August 2016]. Details of spectator numbers not available). *Tambours sur la digue* was performed in Tokyo, Montreal, Seoul, and Sydney, and attracted 150,000 spectators (see The Théâtre du Soleil website, 'Tambours sur la digue' <http://www.theatre-du-soleil.fr/thsol/nos-spectacles-et-nos-films/nos-spectacles/tambours-sur-la-digue-1999,161/> [accessed 11 August 2016]).
[39] Hélène Cixous, *La Pupille* (Paris: Cahiers Renaud-Barrault, 1972).
[40] See Eric Prenowitz, 'On Theatre: An Interview with Hélène Cixous', in Hélène Cixous, *The Selected Plays of Hélène Cixous*, ed. and intro. by Eric Prenowitz (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 1-24 (p. 1). I discuss this meeting further in my section on Simone Benmussa, below.

Hysteria'.[41] It is probably the most popular of Cixous's plays, amongst critics and scholars. In 1977 Cixous's novel *La* was adapted for the stage by Viviane Théophilidès, and performed at the Avignon theatre festival as *L'Arrivante*.[42] In 1978 there was the first performance of *Nom d'Œdipe: chant du corps interdit* at the Avignon theatre festival.[43] This opera retells the Oedipus myth, but shifts its focus to concentrate on the story of Jocasta, the mother/lover in the story.

In 1982, two plays for radio written by Cixous had their first performances. *Je me suis arrêtée à un mètre de Jérusalem et c'était le paradis* was performed on France Culture as part of their 'Théâtre Ouvert' series, and *Amour d'une délicatesse* was broadcast on Radio Suisse. A stage play, *La Prise de l'école du Madhubaï*, was first performed a year later. This work reimagined the story of Phoolan Devi, a young Indian woman who left rural poverty in the Uttar Pradesh to become the leader of a group of bandits. In Cixous's version of the story, she ends up agreeing to be arrested in return for a government commitment to invest in education for women in her village.[44] In 1985 came the premiere of the first of many collaborations between Cixous and the experimental Parisian theatre group the Théâtre du Soleil, *L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom*

[41] Hélène Cixous, *Portrait de Dora*, in *Théâtre* (Paris: des femmes, 1986). The play was revived in 2007 in Taipei by the Puppet and its Double Theatre, with a script translated with Cixous's approval into Chinese, using puppets rather than human actors. See Puppet and its Double Theatre, 'Portrait of Dora' <http://www.puppetx2.com.tw/english/A5_e.html> [accessed 30 September 2016].
[42] Eric Prenowitz includes this play in his list of premières of Cixous plays (see *Selected Plays of Hélène Cixous*, pp. 223-4), but according to the Bibliothèque nationale de France, it was Viviane Théophilidès, the director of *L'Arrivante*, who also wrote the script. See the entry on *L'Arrivante* in the Bibliothèque nationale de France general catalogue <http://data.bnf.fr/39497151/l_arrivante_spectacle_1977/> [accessed 30 September 2015].
[43] Hélène Cixous, *Le Nom d'Œdipe, chant du corps interdit* (Paris: des femmes, 1978).
[44] Hélène Cixous, *La Prise de l'école du Madhubaï*, (Paris: Avant Scène Théâtre, 1984). Later republished in *Théâtre*.

Sihanouk, roi du Cambodge.[45] This ambitious play describes more than twenty years of Cambodian history, beginning with the abdication of its King, Norodom Sihanouk, and ending with the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, which put an end to the rule of the Khmer Rouge. Eric Prenowitz and Ashley Thompson emphasise the political dimension of the play when they characterise it as:

> A political commentary and a call to critical arms, exposing the nexus of international and interpersonal complicities in the build-up to the Khmer Rouge genocide, as epic global struggles play out in the microcosm of a small 'unaligned' country.[46]

Sihanouk was followed in 1987 by *L'Indiade ou l'Inde de leurs rêves*, another collaboration with the Théâtre du Soleil, this time focussing on the story of Indian independence, and the violence that accompanied partition.[47]

In 1991 Cixous's play *On ne part pas, on ne revient pas*, which tells the story of a woman deciding whether to leave her husband after the death of her son was given a public reading at La Métaphore, Théâtre national de Lille, directed by Daniel Mesguich.[48] Mesguich also directed Cixous's next play, *L'Histoire*

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[45] Hélène Cixous, *L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk, roi du Cambodge* (Paris: Éditions Théâtrales, 2010).
[46] Eric Prenowitz and Ashley Thompson, 'Cambodia's Trials: Theatre, Justice, and History Unfinished', in *Contemporary Southeast Asian Performance: Transnational Perspectives*, ed. by Laura Noszlopy and Matthew Isaac Cohen (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010).
[47] Hélène Cixous, *L'Indiade ou l'Inde de leurs rêves et quelques écrits sur le théâtre* (Paris: Théâtre du Soleil, 1987).
[48] Hélène Cixous, *On ne part pas, on ne revient pas* (Paris: des femmes, 1991).

(qu'on ne connaîtra jamais),[49] a complex story in which Snorri Sturlusun, a fictionalised version of a real thirteenth-century Icelandic poet, is sent to live with and chronicle the histories of the fictional characters whom he has created.[50] This play ran from the fourth to the 18th of June at La Métaphore, before being performed in Montpellier and Paris.[51]Another play from 1994, *Voile Noire Voile Blanche*, also centres on a real poet, this time Anna Akhmatova, who struggles to publish her work and to survive and protect her friends under Soviet rule.[52] This play was never performed in France, but was toured by the feminist theatre group the Sphinx theatre company in the UK. The third of the plays written by Cixous to have its premiere in 1994 was *La Ville parjure ou le réveil des Erinyes*, a response to the *affaire du sang contaminé*, the scandal during which, in the mid-1980s 1,350 haemophiliac patients were infected with HIV as a result of French failure to recognise that their blood stocks could be contaminated by the virus.[53] *La Ville Parjure* centres on the calls for justice of a mother grieving for her two haemophiliac children, and also features the Erinyes, ancient female spirits of justice who are central to

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[49] After *On ne part pas, on ne revient pas*, Cixous translated Aeschylus's play *The Eumenides*, which was performed by the Théâtre du Soleil in 1992, as well as contributing to the programme notes for the other plays in the *Atrides* cycle performed by the Théâtre du Soleil between 1990 and 1992. See Aeschylus, *Les Euménides*, trans. and intro. by Hélène Cixous, notes by Pierre Judet de la Combe (Paris: Théâtre du Soleil, 1992).

[50] Hélène Cixous *L'Histoire (qu'on ne connaîtra jamais)* (Paris: des femmes, 1994).

[51]See the entry on *L'Histoire (qu'on ne connaîtra jamais)* in the general catalogue of the Bibliothèque national de France <http://data.bnf.fr/42427734/l_histoire__qu_on_ne_connaitra_jamais__spectacle_1994/> [accessed 9 December 2015]

[52] Hélène Cixous, *Voile Noire Voile Blanche/Black Sail White Sail*, trans. by Catherine A.F. MacGillivray, in *New Literary History*, 25.2 (1994), 222-354. The original French text was published in parallel to the translation on facing pages.

[53] I discuss the scandal in detail in Chapter Four. The figure of 1,350 infected haemophiliac patients is cited in Pierre Bienvault, 'Trente ans après, la mémoire des victims du sang contaminé', *La Croix*, 19 November 2014 <http://www.la-croix.com/Actualite/France/Trente-ans-apres-la-memoire-des-victimes-du-sang-contamine-2014-11-19-1239582> [accessed 10 February 2017].

Aeschylus's *The Eumenides*.[54] In 1999, the Théâtre du Soleil produced another of Cixous's plays, *Tambours sur la digue*, which was set in an imagined Asian country, threatened by flooding, and featured actors dressed as puppets playing the parts of human characters.[55]

In 2000, the Théâtre de la Tempête, a theatre company housed just opposite the Théâtre du Soleil produced Cixous's *Ail! Il ne faut pas le dire*, but no script was published, and no recording was made of the performances. In 2001, *Rouen, la trentième nuit de mai 31* was written as a radio play, produced with Théâtre Ouvert for France Culture, and was performed at the Avignon theatre festival later that year.[56] Daniel Mesguich attempted to revive the play in 2013, but the intended performances were all cancelled.[57] In 2010, *Les Naufragés du Fol Espoir*, a play co-written by Cixous with the Théâtre du Soleil, which details the lives of a group of filmmakers who, in 1914, are trying to film a version of the 1909 Jules Verne novel *Les Naufragés du Jonathon*, was first performed.[58] Daniel Mesguich directed Cixous's 2011 play *La Fiancée aux yeux bandés ou Amelait*, a variation on the story of Hamlet, at the Espace Pierre Cardin.[59] Most recently, Cixous collaborated with the Théâtre du Soleil on *Une chambre en*

[54] Hélène Cixous, *La Ville parjure ou le réveil des Erinyes* (Paris: Éditions Théâtrales, 2010).
[55] Hélène Cixous, *Tambours sur la digue* (Paris: Théâtre du Soleil, 1999).
[56] See the website of Théâtre Ouvert, entry on Hélène Cixous <http://theatre-ouvert-archives.com/parcours-auteurs/h%C3%A9l%C3%A8ne-cixous> [accessed 1 October 2016].
[57] See the website of the Théâtre National Populaire at Villeurbaine, < http://www.tnp-villeurbanne.com/manifestation/rouen-la-trentieme-nuit-de-mai31> [accessed 1 October 2016].
[58] Hélène Cixous, *Les Naufragés du Fol Espoir: (Aurores)* (Paris: Théâtre du Soleil, 2010).
[59] Hélène Cixous, *La Fiancée aux yeux bandés ou Amelait*, online video recording, YouTube, 26 June 2011 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qNNTQ09JNlA > [accessed 2 October 2016].

Inde, another *création collective*, which premiered at the Cartoucherie on the 5th of November 2016.[60]

From these seventeen works for the theatre, I selected eight to study in detail. Limiting the corpus in this way will allow me do the type of close reading that will bring out complexity of the ethical and political thought explored in the plays. Chapter Two will focus on *Voile noire voile blanche* and *L'Histoire (qu'on ne connaîtra jamais)*, and in Chapter Three I will look at *L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk, roi du Cambodge* and *Les Naufragés du Fol Espoir*. In Chapter Four I discuss *Portrait de Dora* and *La Ville Parjure ou le réveil des Erinyes*, and finally in Chapter Five I write on *L'Indiade ou l'Inde de leurs rêves* and *Tambours sur la digue*. The selection was informed by two main criteria: first, I chose only plays where a published play text was available, and second I chose only works written for and performed on the stage. The first criterion stemmed from practical considerations, the need to have a text available to study. The second criterion stemmed from one of my key questions, that of how the relationships between playwright, director, actors, and audience inform and shape the ethics and politics visible in Cixous's plays; this meant that I focused only on the plays that received a professional stage (not radio) production. *La Prise de l'école du Madhubaï*, which ran for a month at the Théâtre de l'Europe was the only one of Cixous's plays to meet these two criteria that was not finally included in my corpus. Its central themes of self-sacrifice and political activism would have

[60] A press release giving details of performances is available the Théâtre du Soleil website, 'Première le 5 novembre 2016' <http://www.theatre-du-soleil.fr/thsol/nos-actualites/une-chambre-en-inde/article/premiere-le-26-octobre-2016> [accessed 12 October 2016]. It is not yet clear whether a play text will be published.

made it a good fit to be read alongside *Indiade* and *Tambours* in my final chapter, but I chose to exclude it in order to maintain consistency in the number of plays studied in each of the chapters of my thesis.

Literature Review

Whilst a great deal of critical attention has been paid to Cixous's critical essays and to her prose fiction, the body of theatre work that has just been outlined is relatively understudied. The literature dealing with Cixous's plays can broadly be sorted into four categories: texts concerned with the directors or theatre groups with whom Cixous has collaborated; texts dealing with Cixous's plays in the context of works about French theatre more generally; chapters or sections on Cixous's plays within work about Cixous's thought or works; and texts dealing solely with her plays (either individually or as a whole corpus of work).

It is notable that the great majority of works on Cixous's theatre have been written by Anglo-American critics. Cixous's plays have received attention in the French press, but relatively few French scholars have written on her theatre work. One important French language work is *Hélène Cixous: croisées d'une œuvre*, the proceedings of a 1998 colloquium at Cerisy-la-Salle, which contains a number of interesting contributions on Cixous's theatre; Marie-Claire Ropars Wuilleumier's 'Une *Verfremdung* non-brechtienne' is particularly relevant to the scope of my study, which will also consider how Cixous's model of using the theatre for ethical and political purposes may be related to other models of ethics and politics in the theatre. Generally, though, much of the French

discussion of Cixous's theatre comes in the context of studies that concentrate primarily on the directors with whom Cixous collaborates. Françoise Quillet and Béatrice Picon-Vallin work on the Théâtre du Soleil and approach Cixous's work from this perspective: Quillet has published on the relationship between the Théâtre du Soleil and Asia, and Picon-Vallin has charted the history of the Théâtre du Soleil.[61] Roger-Daniel Bensky's *Cixous/Mesguich: Reprises d'amour*, a volume of rehearsal notes and interviews relating to *L'Histoire (qu'on ne connaîtra jamais)*, includes some analysis of the play's text, although the main focus of the book is Daniel Mesguich's staging decisions and rehearsal methods.[62] There have also been some English language texts that focus on the directors with whom Cixous has collaborated. *Benmussa Directs* is a slim volume which includes translations of *Portrait of Dora* and Benmussa's play *The Curious Life of Albert Nobbs*, accompanied by the director's discussion of her approach to the theatre, and features only limited discussion of Cixous's script.[63] Judith Graves Miller, who has worked extensively on Ariane Mnouchkine, has published analyses of Cixous's plays, including for example a 2011 article on *Les Naufragés du Fol Espoir*.[64]

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[61] See Françoise Quillet, *L'Orient au Théâtre du Soleil* (Paris: Harmattan, 1999), and Béatrice Picon-Vallin, interview of Ariane Mnouchkine and Hélène Cixous, 'L'Orient au Théâtre du Soleil: le pays imaginaire, les sources concrètes, le travail original'(2004), <http://www.theatre-du-soleil.fr/thsol/sources-orientales/des-traditions-orientales-a-la/l-influence-de-l-orient-au-theatre/l-orient-au-theatre-du-soleil-le?lang=fr> [accessed 2 October 2016] (n.p.).

[62] Roger-Daniel Bensky, *Cixous-Mesguich, reprises d'amour: journal de bord de L'histoire (qu'on ne connaîtra jamais)* (Paris: A.G. Nizet, 1994).

[63] Simone Benmussa and Hélène Cixous, *Benmussa Directs*, trans. by Anita Burrows and Barbara Wright (London: J. Calder, 1979).

[64]Judith G. Miller 'Mad Hope: *Les Naufragés du Fol Espoir*', *Theater*, 41.2 (2011), 120-33 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1215/01610775-2010-037>.

Examples of more general works on theatre that discuss Cixous include *Feminine Focus: The New Women Playwrights*, a volume edited by Enoch Brater, which has chapters on Cixous's collaborators Simone Benmussa and Ariane Mnouchkine, as well as one chapter on *Portrait de Dora*, but it does not address any of Cixous's other theatre works.[65] Mary Noonan's recent *Echo's Voice*, which includes one chapter on Cixous's plays, does draw out some of the political implications of Cixous's use of voice, particularly in her early plays, but Noonan's main focus is to identify what is innovative about this use of voice, linking that to similar forms of experimentation that she has identified in the theatres of Marguerite Duras, Nathalie Sarraute and Noëlle Renaude, and not to engage with Cixous's ethics and politics.[66] Like the works that discuss Cixous's work with individual directors, these texts usefully place Cixous's work in its theatrical context, but give only a brief discussion of individual plays and tend to concentrate more strongly on issues of staging and performance than on the play text.[67]

The breadth of Cixous's writing project means that it is generally necessary to focus only on one aspect within it; often, this means that critics focus on the more abundant prose fiction. Although Mairéad Hanrahan has written about Cixous's theatre elsewhere, her recent *Cixous's Semi-Fictions* is an excellent

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[65] *Feminine Focus: The New Women Playwrights*, ed. by Enoch Brater (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).
[66] Mary Noonan, *Echo's Voice: The Theatres of Sarraute, Duras, Cixous and Renaude* (Oxford: Legenda, 2014).
[67] See David Bradby, *Modern French Drama 1940-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Adrian Kiernander, 'The Orient, the Feminine: The Use of Interculturalism by the Théâtre du Soleil', in *Gender in Performance: The Presentation of Difference in the Performing Arts*, ed. by Laurence Senelick (Hanover, New Hampshire: The University Press of New England, 1992), 183-92, and 'The Théâtre du Soleil: Part Two. The Road to Cambodia', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 2.7 (1986), 203-12; *Collaborative Theatre: The Théâtre du Soleil Sourcebook*, ed. by David Williams (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

example of a book that gives an eloquent justification of the decision to select Cixous's prose fiction for in-depth analysis.[68] Morag Shiach's book *Hélène Cixous: A Politics of Writing* (1991) is particularly interesting in its attempt to broaden the reach of Cixous's thought, opening up the wider political implications of her writing project, and Shiach's Chapter Four on theatre, which is only a part of a book that is much greater in scope, leaves only limited space for an in-depth discussion of the plays, and also only engages with the plays written before 1988.

Julia Dobson's *Hélène Cixous and the Theatre: The Scene of Writing* (2002) is the only book-length study to deal uniquely with Cixous's theatre, and has been particularly helpful in the preparation of this thesis.[69] The book is strong in its analysis of the plays as indications of the development of Cixous's writing project, but does not focus on the ethical questions that I believe to be central to Cixous's drama, and also does not examine Cixous's most recent plays. Eric Prenowitz has also done a great deal of work on Cixous's theatre, but his focus has tended to be on making the plays available in English translation.[70]

Whilst Dobson and other critics have published more detailed studies of individual plays, some of which have addressed ethical questions, Cixous's early plays, and particularly *Portrait de Dora*, have received far more attention

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[68] Particularly useful in preparing my Chapter Four on moral education was her 'Cixous's *Portrait de Dora*: The Play of Whose Voice?', *The Modern Language Review*, 93.1 (1998), 48-58.

[69] Julia Dobson, *Hélène Cixous and the Theatre: The Scene of Writing* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2002).

[70] Prenowitz's *Selected Plays of Hélène Cixous* does have a short introductory essay, and he has published elsewhere critical essays dealing with individual plays. There is an interesting discussion of *Ville parjure* in his 'Dialectics of Another Litter: Found(er)ing Democracy', *OLR*, 24 (2002), 113-31.

than her later plays, which are still little studied.[71] Ashley Thompson, who completed her doctorate under Cixous's supervision, is notable in the context of studies of single plays, since she has taken particular interest in Cixous's play *Sihanouk*, and was responsible, with others, for bringing about the École Phare Ponleu Selpak productions of that play in 2011 and 2013.[72] There has also been some interest in *La Ville Parjure*, particularly in relation to the question of justice; Susan Ayres considered this from a legal perspective in the *New York Law Review*,[73] Brigitte Weltman-Aron discussed questions of justice in the context of her argument around political betrayal in the play,[74] and Irma Erlingsdóttir has written interestingly on the role of forgiveness in the play.[75] These studies of particular plays, although they may provide valuable analyses of individual works, rarely draw any comparisons between Cixous's plays, and only a few of them concentrate on questions of ethics or politics.

The corpus of critical works whose main focus is Cixous's theatre is, then, relatively small, and none of the texts so far published have focused on ethical and political questions in more than one work, although ethics and politics have been discussed in relation to individual plays and in the context of Cixous's

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[71] For instance Julia Dobson, 'Cixous's Theatre and the Dramatic Returns of the Dead', in *Redefining the Real: the Fantastic in Contemporary French and Francophone Women's Writing*, ed. by Margaret-Anne Hutton, Modern French Identities, 81 (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 173-85, and the articles on Cixous's theatre published in *Hélène Cixous: Croisées d'une œuvre*, ed. by Mireille Calle-Gruber (Paris: Galilée, 2000).

[72] See for example Ashley Thompson, 'Terrible but Unfinished: Stories of History', *New Literary History*, 37.1 (2006), 197-215 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20057936> [accessed 24 October 2016].

[73] Susan Ayres, 'Hélène Cixous's *The Perjured City*: nonprosecution alternatives to collective violence', *New York City Law Review*, 9.1 (2005-2006), 1-30.

[74] Brigitte Weltman-Aron, 'Political Betrayal: Hélène Cixous's *The Perjured City*', *CR: The New Centennial Review* 12.3 (2012), 67–89.

[75] Irma Erlingsdóttir, 'The Politics of Justice and the French Blood Affair in Hélène Cixous's *The Perjured City*', *Paragraph*, 38.3 (2015), 369-85 <http://dx.doi.org/10.3366/para.2015.0173>.

writing project as a whole. My study therefore begins to fill a significant gap in Cixous scholarship.

Cixous's Theatrical Influences

As I have suggested, much of Cixous's writing practice is closely intertwined with her complex readings of the work of the writers, poets and artists whom she admires. However, whilst Cixous's novels, essays, and discussions of her prose writing practice in her seminars and in her media appearances are all always deeply intertextual, drawing on a wide web of references made familiar by repeated use (Clarice Lispector, Jean Genet, Jacques Derrida, Marcel Proust and James Joyce, amongst others, all reappear for Cixous), Cixous gives far fewer indications of the writers who have been influential for her in the development of her theatre. It is normally Genet's prose fiction that features heavily in Cixous's discussions of writing, and Cixous does not make reference to Genet's work in interviews or essays where she discusses the theatre. Samuel Beckett has been a far less frequent interlocutor for Cixous, but he was the subject of her 2007 text *Le Voisin de zéro: Sam Beckett*. In that book, Cixous draws on examples from both Beckett's theatre (most often *En attendant Godot*) and his prose work. She describes how, when Beckett writes, 'la distinction entre texte et hors-texte, voix et hors-voix, dit et non-dit, spectacle et discours, il la met au piquet, au coin. Il l'annule. Le hors-cadre entre sur la scène'.[76] The distinction between *spectacle* and *discours*, what is shown and what is written, disappears along with other divisions as the distinction between on- and off-

[76] Hélène Cixous, *Le Voisin de zéro: Sam Beckett* (Paris: Galilée, 2007), p. 23.

stage breaks down. Cixous analyses the effectiveness of Beckett's eloquent silences here, but her own work is very different to his sparse drama.

Cixous's theatre seems in fact to be closer to Brecht's 'epic' theatre, impressive in scale, and capable of arousing a desire for political action in the audience through the representation of history. A number of critics have pointed to this similarity, but Cixous insists that 'Je n'ai aucun rapport à Brecht'.[77] The difference lies largely in the use of *Verfremdungseffekte*, tactics proposed by Brecht whereby the audience is made aware of the artificiality of the theatrical scene and the distance that exists between the actor and the character being played. The *Verfremdungseffekte* prevent the audience from consuming the play unthinkingly as a comforting and impressive spectacle. They are obliged to engage their critical faculties to co-produce the play and to discover the historical forces that are shown to be behind the play's events and the character's actions.[78] This is not to suggest that the Brechtian theatre-goer should not enjoy the play that they are seeing (indeed, Brecht emphasises the importance of pleasure), but that their enjoyment should be of a type that allows for reflection.[79] In 'Aller à la mer', Cixous is explicit in her declaration that, in a feminised theatre space there should be 'Pas de "distanciation"'; rather there should be a 'scène-corps' which 'n'hésitera pas à approcher, approcher à (se) mettre en danger, mais de vie'. Cixous's phrasing here nods to the concerns

[77] Marie-Claire Ropars, 'Hélène Cixous: L'auteur entre texte et théâtre', *Hors cadre*, 8, 'L'état de l'auteur' (1990), 33-65 (p. 51).
[78] See Bradby, *Modern French Drama*, pp. 98-9, and Joe Kelleher, *Theatre & Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 60.
[79] Brecht discusses the 'weaker' and 'stronger' pleasures that theatre can create in his 'Short Organum for the Theatre', in *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. by John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), pp. 179-205 (p. 181).

around the body that inform *écriture féminine*. Marie-Claire Ropars Wuilleumier has suggested that it is possible to identify a '*Verfremdung* non-brechtienne' within Cixous's theatre, where the audience's response would be 'ni: ce n'est pas moi, ni: ç'aurait pu être moi', leaving the audience with neither the comfort of knowing themselves to be distant from the scene on stage, or the comfort of a cathartic imaginary identification with a character.[80] Whilst Cixous and Mnouchkine both stress that the Théâtre du Soleil actor fully becomes the character that they play,[81] the actor becomes a uniquely theatrical being and not a naturalistic approximation of a person, and therefore the audience is not encouraged to relate to them in exactly the way that Brecht was criticising. Cixous's histories are epic in scale, spanning long time-periods and involving a large number of actors. Nevertheless, as will be demonstrated, they are works in which the personal and the political are inseparable and where history is not reduced to either the play of abstract forces or the actions of great men.

Cixous does discuss the influence of certain other playwrights on her theatre writing. Her statements in an interview with Béatrice Picon-Vallin are typical of her discussion of these influences:

> Il y a trois traditions qui s'entrecroisent. D'abord la tradition Shakespearienne, c'est-à-dire l'exploration du monde des passions, où il faut du texte. Puis la tradition du Nô, d'Eschyle, où il y a une certaine économie de la parole, où celle-ci est plus ténue. Et enfin, il y a des retours vers la

[80] Marie-Claire Ropars Wuilleumier, 'Une *Verfremdung* non brechtienne', in *Croisées d'une œuvre*, ed. by Mireille Calle-Gruber, 447-51 (p. 449).
[81] See Hélène Cixous, 'Qui es-tu?', in *L'Indiade*, 267-78.

> création collective, où c'est le langage du corps qui domine.
> (Picon-Vallin, 'Orient au Théâtre du Soleil, n.p.)

Cixous is talking about the impact on her own work of a wide range of dramatists whose style and outlook she sees as being typified by the authors that she mentions specifically. Thus Cixous writes several wide-ranging history plays, Shakespearean in scope, claims that the precise and succinct writing style of Aeschylus and the Nô theatre tradition have influenced the style of the dialogue that she produces, and finally points to the influence of the tradition of collective theatre creation, in which the body is of key importance.

The influence of the Greek tragedians is evident throughout Cixous's work, and is obvious not only in her writing style, but also in the content of her plays. Aeschylus is foremost amongst the tragedians whom Cixous admires, and her play *La Ville parjure* includes a character named Eschyle, who is employed as the guardian of a cemetery and who acts to protect those wishing to make an ethical stand against the machinations of the city, as well as to ensure that those who have died as part of political struggles are remembered. (The names of Etty Hillesum and Steve Biko are written on the walls of the cemetery.) Alongside economy of language, then, Aeschylus seems to represent for Cixous the way in which memory and writing are intertwined, and are politicised practices.

It is not Aeschylus but Shakespeare whom Cixous cites as her first influence, however, and in her interview with Bernadette Fort, Cixous goes on to discuss Shakespeare further, arguing that he was one of her earliest and most important influences:

> I suckled the theatre at Shakespeare's breast. (No, don't jump: Shakespeare himself as Tiresias often played with the slippages of sexual difference.) I lived all my childhood in his stories, in his boats, under his tempests. His works passed into my memory, into my language, so long ago that I could no more de-Shakespearize myself than I could chase dreams from my nights or forget Kafka or Kleist. I do not write 'in a Shakespearean mode', but, rather, in a constant dialogue with him and all his characters. (Fort, 'Theatre, History', p. 452)

In an Anglophone context, taking Shakespeare as a point of departure and guiding force in theatre writing might be understood as a conservative statement, given the importance for many contemporary British schools and culture industries of a particular version of Shakespeare, who celebrates and is celebrated as part of patriotic Englishness, and who holds up for praise a bucolic idyll and the maintenance of order and the political status quo. However, there is a long history of different readings of Shakespeare. For example, Peter Brook's experimental stagings of Shakespeare at the Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord were part of his project to investigate new ways in which actor and spectator might relate,[82] and performances of *The Tempest* in postcolonial settings have often been used as a way of appropriating and manipulating the legacy of the metropolitan power. Identifying Shakespeare as a major influence, Cixous is also, significantly, distancing herself from the French theatre

[82] See David Williams, '"Towards an art of memory": Peter Brook, a foreigner in Paris', David Bradby and Maria M. Delgado, eds, *The Paris Jigsaw: Internationalism and the City's Stages* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002), 37-52.

tradition; elsewhere she claims that one difference between her own approach to theatre and Mesguich's is that Mesguich 'is more steeped in, more shaped by the French tradition, the French language, whether Racine or Claudel' (Prenowitz, 'On Theatre', p. 6).

Rather than Racine, who observed strictly the demands of the dramatic unities, or Claudel, whose work reflected his own conservative Catholic views, Cixous prefers to take inspiration from Shakespeare, in whose writing she seems to find echoes of *écriture féminine*. The image of suckling is one that Cixous often associates with reading and writing – she takes maternity as a central part of *écriture féminine* – and the suggestion is that Shakespeare approaches Cixous's ideal writer, moving like Tiresias between the masculine and the feminine, and able to offer generous maternity by suckling Cixous. Whilst Shakespeare has become a fundamental structuring force for her, she holds back from suggesting that, as a result, she writes 'in a Shakespearian mode', after Shakespeare or in the attempt to emulate Shakespeare. Rather, she claims to write 'in a constant dialogue' with Shakespeare and his characters, moving towards his work, taking certain references from it, but creating work that is distinctively her own.

Later in the interview, Cixous expands on her explanation of what exactly she has taken from Shakespeare's theatre.

> All the dreams of power and of evasion have the same images. What I owe to Shakespeare is the ladder, the elementary lesson of height. In his plays, there is not a roughneck soldier, nor a little gardener, nor a thief or a

> gravedigger who does not make the richness of the English language resonate. Shakespeare debases no one. It is a question of respect for the audience and for the Theater to avoid all vulgarity, and all compromise with realistic platitude. The Theater ought to be sumptuous in its language. My gallows birds have François Villon for a friend. This is why I always mix vegetable merchants with poets. This does not mean that I use a 'dressed up' language; my merchants speak a familiar language, but one which has been embroidered around the cuffs. (Fort, 'Theatre, History', p. 453)

The Shakespearean influence on Cixous's plays comes through in a number of ways in the form of her plays, briefly: the dialogue is poetic and does not attempt to be naturalistic; characters often describe their emotions or motivations in soliloquy (and during these soliloquys there is an assumed pact of trust between the audience and the character, who will not lie to them even if they are duplicitous elsewhere); and the plays often feature characters from the whole spectrum of social class, all of whom share a similarly poetic style of speech.

The final influence cited by Cixous is that of Nô theatre. This influence is evident in Cixous's collaborations with the Théâtre du Soleil. Cixous has stated that her openness to Asian influence is a factor in the success of her collaboration with the Théâtre du Soleil, since 'Ariane needs to be Asian, and what she wanted was an author who could write something Asian for her, because Asia has always been the cradle of all her images, of all her references' (Prenowitz, 'On Theatre', p. 12). The Théâtre du Soleil have drawn on a range

of Asian theatre styles; *Bunraku* (Japanese puppet theatre) and *Samnol nori* (Korean drumming) have also been incorporated into their productions.[83]

However, some critics have found the ways in which these Asian influences have been used to be clumsy, and Cixous and Mnouchkine have been criticised for the ways in which they, as Westerners,[84] portray non-European countries. Dobson, for instance, is wary of the representations of India and Cambodia which 'employ many of the structures of Orientalist discourse' (Dobson, *Scene of* Writing, pp. 101-2). Without agreeing that Dobson's concerns are entirely justified, it is possible to understand something of their basis. Edward W. Said has described how the Orient (any number of non-European countries, the differences between them being minimalised if not obliterated in the European imagination) plays a decisive part in structuring the way that the Occident is able to think about itself,[85] and he argues that therefore, 'for a European or American studying the Orient there can be no disclaiming the main circumstances of *his* actuality: that he comes up against the Orient as a European or American first, as an individual second' (Said, *Orientalism*, p. 11). The ways in which Cixous and Mnouchkine are able to think and write about the Orient will be coloured by the fact that they are European, but as Said goes on to argue, their response will not be 'mechanically determined' by their circumstances, although like all writers they are 'in the history of their societies', and are

[83] Ariane Mnouchkine discusses Bunraku theatre in *Au théâtre, au cinéma, au féminin*, ed. by Mireille Calle-Gruber (Paris: Harmattan, 2001), p. 19.
[84] Although Cixous was born in Algeria, her mother was German and her father French. She has written about her pain at her inability to find acceptance in her country of birth, a problem compounded by the anti-Semitism that meant that she was not fully accepted into the French community in Algeria either (see Cixous's, *Les rêveries de la femme sauvage*).
[85] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p. 1.

'shaped by that history'.[86] It is important to be alert to the impact that the history of French society will have on the ways in which Cixous and Mnouchkine portray Asia, but it does not follow that their work must simply be an example of Orientalist discourse.

Critics have variously seen Cixous's representations of Asia as naive and unwarranted praise (when she presents India, in particular, as a space where love can finally play a part in politics) and offensive (some took issue with the 'cruel' and 'untrustworthy' Asian characters who control action in *Tambours sur la digue*).[87] These criticisms perhaps miss the heart of the issue. Homi K. Bhabha argues that 'the point of intervention [in colonial discourse] should shift from the ready recognition of images as positive or negative, to an understanding of the *processes of subjectification* made possible (and plausible) through stereotypical discourse'.[88] The implication seems to be that it would not be useful to praise Cixous's plays for presenting Asia as generally better than Europe (since such a presentation would simply be reverse ethnocentrism) any more than it is acceptable to repeat negative stereotypes of nations. The author or playwright could take from Bhabha's comments an urgent duty to assess the potentially damaging political consequences of the discourses that they use and repeat when discussing non-European countries. In an interview with Sellers in which she describes her struggle to write on the most horrific parts of history, Cixous claims that the question of 'how can we talk about it? Can we talk about

[86] Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. xxiv.
[87] See for example Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei, 'Review of *Tambours sur la digue*', *Asian Theatre Journal*, 191 (2002), 255-7, and Rustom Bharucha, 'When "Eternal India" meets the YPO', *Third Text*, 11.39 (1997), 39-58 (p. 47) <dx.doi.org/10.1080/09528829708576671>.
[88] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 67.

it? Who has the right to talk about it? What form must our talking about it take?' is 'a question which has haunted me' (Sellers, *Writing Differences*, p. 152). Cixous does not write naïvely and her writing on Cambodia comes at the end of a process of reflection on the potential and limits of writing. In asking 'Who has the right to talk about it?' Cixous demonstrates that she is very much aware that her position and background have a profound impact on her writing, that the way that her play will be positioned within a discourse is absolutely inseparable from her own circumstances. Ultimately, she decides that it is possible for her to write on a foreign horror even if she may only do so by 'inscribing the question, signifying our impotence, our obligation, our memory of what is happening' (Sellers, *Writing Differences*, p. 153). This sense of an 'obligation' to write on trauma, not to ignore it simply because we cannot fully grasp it, is deeply felt by Cixous.

Such an obligation may be implied in Gayatri Spivak's declaration that faced with 'the "true" subaltern group, whose identity is its difference' it is not an adequate response for the intellectual to declare this group 'unrepresentable' and able to 'know and speak itself'. For Spivak 'the intellectual's solution is not to abstain from representation'.[89] Similarly, Said has argued that to claim that 'only formerly colonial subjects can understand colonial experience' is dangerously anti-intellectual and may ultimately 'absolve and forgive ignorance and demagogy' on the part of the West (Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 35). In Said's view, it is not only the West that stands to gain from its attempts to

[89] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the subaltern speak?', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1988), 271-315 (p. 285).

portray the East, but potentially also the Orient. He claims that 'it is often the case that you can be known by others in different ways than you know yourself, and that valuable insights might be generated accordingly'.[90] If the East has first been allowed to portray itself, and if the Occident is not taken to be the single definitive authority on the Orient, then some value may be gained from western accounts of the East (Said, 'Orientalism Revisited', p. 206). What is suggested here is that it is important to attempt to portray the Orient, but that great care should be taken in such portrayals. Cixous is aware of the responsibility of this representation, and states that 'one thing we who have escaped the camps can do is to make the effort to turn our thoughts towards those who are in captivity. The other thing is to try to find a language that corresponds to the reality of the camps' (Sellers, *Writing Differences*, p. 152), where the refugee camps in Cambodia become also the death camps of the Holocaust, signs of terrible historical suffering. Writing on trauma is an act of compassion that is possible for a writer, but only carefully, in a certain language.[91] Cixous is not, in the way that Said criticises, encouraging 'the truism that if the Orient could represent itself, it would; since it cannot, the representation does the job, for the West, and *faute de mieux*, for the poor Orient', (Said, *Orientalism*, p. 21) but rather writing as an attempt at understanding and love.

Key Collaborators

[90] Edward W. Said, 'Orientalism Reconsidered', in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002), 198-215 (p. 206).
[91] I discuss the responsibility to write or not write about trauma in further detail in my Chapter Two (on the artist's ethical duties).

Perhaps the most important influences on Cixous's theatre work, however, are not playwrights but rather the directors and theatre groups with whom she has collaborated. Four of Cixous's collaborators are important for the plays analysed in this thesis: the directors Simone Benmussa and Daniel Mesguich, and the theatre groups the Théâtre du Soleil and the Sphinx Theatre Company.

Simone Benmussa

The first director with whom Cixous collaborated was Simone Benmussa (1931-2001), who is probably best known for having written the play *La Vie singulière d'Albert Nobbs*, an adaptation of George Moore's short story *Albert Nobbs*, the story of a cross-dressing woman living in nineteenth-century Paris.[92] Cixous describes how the two began their collaboration:

> One day Simone Benmussa, who was the assistant playwright and administrator for Jean-Louis Barrault at the Théâtre d'Orsay, and who read my books, told me that in one of my books of fiction called *Portrait du soleil*, she saw a play. I saw nothing at all. I saw a fiction. And she literally told me 'But look hard', as if I had to lean over a river, 'and you will see there is a play in there'. What Simone Benmussa had sensed was a diffuse theatricality in my text which is certainly related to the presence of voices in what I write. ('On Theatre', p. 1)

This meeting is significant in part because it was the first time that Cixous worked with a theatre director. Cixous later claims that, whilst she can write

[92] The play was published by *des femmes*, the feminist press that was for many years Cixous's publisher, in 1977.

prose texts only for herself, she is only able to write for the theatre if the work has been commissioned, if she knows that it will be staged.[93] The encounter with Benmussa, then, provides a push that Cixous needed in order to begin to write for the theatre. It is also particularly interesting because of the concerns that were central to the type of theatre that Benmussa created. An engaged director, Benmussa was interested in questions of gender and also in experimentations with form. It has been suggested that Cixous moves away from the focus on questions of sexual difference that marks much of her work when she writes for the theatre – and Cixous encourages this reading of her work when she states that 'Le théâtre n'est pas la scène de la jouissance sexuelle […] Au théâtre c'est le cœur qui chante […] Le cœur humain n'a pas de sexe'[94] – but, as I argue, many of those concerns do recur throughout Cixous's plays. This is obvious for example in the staging of a woman freedom fighter in *La Prise de l'école du Madhubaï*, in the portrayal of female friendship in *Sihanouk*, and perhaps most clearly in *Portrait de Dora*, the play produced by Cixous and Benmussa, which is concerned with showing the ways in which the feminine and women's desire have been ignored, manipulated, or stigmatised within the discourse of psychoanalysis.

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[93] Interviewed by *Hors Cadre* magazine, Cixous states that 'Mais tout ce que j'ai écrit pour le théâtre, ça a toujours été à la demande, je n'ai pas été chercher le théâtre, ne serait-ce que parce que je ne vois même pas comment on peut faire' (Ropars, 'Hélène Cixous: L'auteur entre texte et théâtre', p. 44). This is perhaps only partly true: Cixous's first published play, *La Pupille* was not written for a particular director, and (perhaps as a result of having been created without consultation with a theatre practitioner) it contains rapid changes in set and complex special effects that would be difficult to stage (one character has a penis that grows to six foot in length and chases the main protagonists across the stage as they witness various scenes of the horror of twentieth-century history). Thus, although *La Pupille* is presented as a play, it would be difficult and expensive to stage, and so should be considered as an example of closet theatre. Cixous acknowledges this in the interview 'On Theatre' with Eric Prenowitz: 'I did not think that *The Pupil* had a properly theatrical destiny, that it would ever be produced' ('On Theatre', p. 1).

[94] Hélène Cixous, 'L'Incarnation', in *L'Indiade ou l'Inde de leurs rêves* (Paris: Théâtre du Soleil, 1987), 260-6 (p. 265-6).

The Théâtre du Soleil

Perhaps the most significant influence on Cixous's theatre has been her ongoing collaboration with the Théâtre du Soleil. The Théâtre du Soleil is an innovative and politically engaged theatre group based in The Cartoucherie, a former munitions factory located in the Bois de Vincennes, for Bradby a 'distant and unfashionable suburb of Paris' (Bradby, *Modern French Drama*, p. 191). This site has been, according to David Williams, important for the company's development (Williams, *Sourcebook*, p. xiii). The Cartoucherie's large space is flexible and can be redesigned to suit the needs of each new show and several theatre companies have now moved into other buildings on the site, giving an atmosphere of creative community. As Bradby points out, the design of the theatre space is 'open' and emphasises 'the importance of [the audience's] presence and their participation in the creation of the whole experience'.[95]

Started by a group of students in 1964 the Théâtre du Soleil is now one of France's most critically acclaimed theatre groups (its work has been praised by David Bradby as some of the most 'exciting and influential' to have emerged in France since 1960 (Bradby, *Modern French Drama*, p. 191)), and receives a larger public subsidy than any other private company. The Théâtre du Soleil was fifty years old in 2014, and it began as 'Le Théâtre du Soleil, Sociéte

[95] David Bradby, 'Cultural Politics and Theatrical Practice in the History of the Théâtre du Soleil', *The Paris Jigsaw: Internationalism and the City's Stages*, ed. by David Bradby and Maria M. Delgado, pp. 113-131 (p. 114).

Coopérative Ouvrière de Production', its commitment to working collectively here inscribed in the very name of the group.[96] Their beginnings as a workers' cooperative (or as a group that aimed to emulate workers' cooperatives) is still present in their working methods. Although Ariane Mnouchkine, as the company's creative director, is the 'administrative heart and director of the company',[97] the Théâtre du Soleil generally works to avoid hierarchical group structures (Dobson, *Scene of Writing*, p. 66). On a creative level, this means the refusal of the 'star system': although some actors, like Georges Bigot or Juliana Carneiro da Cunha have appeared in key roles in several of the Théâtre du Soleil's productions, their plays are never built as vehicles for the most famous actors, and the publicity around the plays is never based around the participation of any one actor.

The Théâtre du Soleil's dedication to cooperative principles also means that many of their plays were written collectively.[98] Some of the group's most famous early works, including the 1969 play *Les Clowns*, and the 1970 play about the French Revolution, *1789*, are credited as 'création collective', and one of their most recent plays, *Les Naufragés du Fol Espoir*, which I discuss in Chapter Three, is described as a 'création collective, mi-écrite by Hélène Cixous'; although Cixous provided much of the text, other parts emerged during rehearsal. Even in the plays credited as having been written by Cixous alone, the subject and sometimes the plot of the play is mapped out in conversations

[96] Adrian Kiernander, 'The Théâtre du Soleil Part One: a Brief History of the Company', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 2.7 (1986), 195-203 (p. 195).
[97] Ann-Marie Picard, '*L'Indiade:* Ariane's and Hélène's Conjugate dreams', *Modern Drama*, 32.1 (1989), 24-38 (p. 24).
[98] For more on the Théâtre du Soleil's methods of collective creation, see Béatrice Picon-Vallin 'La création collective au Théâtre du Soleil', *L'avant-scène Théâtre*, 1284 (2010) 86-97.

between Cixous and Mnouchkine, Cixous revises and rewrites the text after watching the play being rehearsed.[99] On a practical level, the troupe's cooperative ethos means that the everyday, mundane work of running the theatre, including cleaning, cooking, and taking tickets, is shared by all of the members of the troupe.

Cixous has explained the influence that the Theâtre du Soleil has had on her work in an interview with Eric Prenowitz:

> I have to say to begin with that the trunk and roots [of my theatre] are the Théâtre du Soleil. This is not to suggest that what I do outside the Théâtre du Soleil is only branches, but that the apprenticeship, the vitality, the sap, the nourishment come to me from the Théâtre du Soleil. […] I must add, being as they say the house author, that the Théâtre du Soleil represents the *sources*, but also the school. (Prenowitz, 'On Theatre', p. 6)

The Théâtre du Soleil is a company that nourishes and encourages further work for the theatre, and their influence extends to all of Cixous's theatrical output. The Théâtre du Soleil also significantly provide Cixous with a theatre education. In addition to the practical elements of this education, Cixous praises Mnouchkine for having introduced her to significant areas of thought on the theatre, and in an interview that they conducted together, thanks Mnouchkine for having made her read 'des choses que je n'avais jamais ouvertes, et qui

[99] In the essay 'Apparitions', for example, Cixous describes how she rewrote *Ville Parjure* after Mnouchkine cast the character Eschyle as a woman. See Cixous, 'Apparitions', in *Ville parjure*, pp. 211-23 (p. 212).

t'étaient très familières, comme les écrits de Jouvet ou Copeau. C'est toi qui m'a initiée à ces textes' (Picon-Vallin, 'Orient au Soleil'). The Théâtre du Soleil's website provides a bibliography of 'Maîtres et œuvres fondatrices' the writers and works on theatre that have been the most important in the development of their theatre.

This list is diverse and includes significant twentieth-century theorists of the theatre such as Brecht, Meyerhold, Artaud and Copeau.[100] Although these thinkers have diverse approaches to the theatre, they have in common a revalorisation of popular theatre forms such as puppet theatre, a rejection of the nineteenth-century naturalistic theatre style that aimed to portray well-rounded characters with believable psychological motivation in realistic situations, and a belief in theatre's capacity to be an engine for social and political change which, as suggested above, is related to the belief that theatre has an ethical function. The Théâtre du Soleil shares these concerns and engages actively in the related search for a new theatrical language which would be an adequate medium for social change and would also be specifically of the theatre, not an attempt to mimic the gestural and spoken or written language of the everyday (Bradby, *Modern French Drama*, p. 194).

[100] Théâtre du Soleil, 'Maîtres et œuvres fondatrices: bibliographie' <http://www.theatre-du-soleil.fr/thsol/a-propos-du-theatre-du-soleil/le-theatre-du-soleil/maitres-et-oeuvres-fondatrices?lang=fr> [accessed 2 October 2016]. See also David Williams, 'A Grain of Sand in the Works: Continuity and Change at the Théâtre du Soleil', in *Collaborative Theatre: The Théâtre du Soleil Sourcebook*, ed. by David Williams, pp. x-xviii, (p. xi).

Daniel Mesguich

Whilst it is her collaboration with the Théâtre du Soleil that has been the most fruitful of Cixous's theatre writing partnerships, Daniel Mesguich has also been involved in a number of her projects, directing *L'Histoire (qu'on ne connaîtra jamais)* and *La fiancée aux yeux bandés*, as well as readings of *Rouen, la trentième nuit de mai 31* and *On ne part pas, on ne revient pas*. Like Cixous, Mesguich was born in Algeria and came to France as a teenager. Extremely prolific (another characteristic he shares with Cixous) Mesguich has directed over 100 plays and operas, has appeared as an actor in plays and films, was artistic director at La Métaphore in Lille, and has taught acting at his own theatre school (Le Théâtre – École du Miroir, established in 1974) as well as in a number of other prestigious institutions, including the Conservatoire national supérieur d'art dramatique, and the École Normale Supérieure.[101]

Cixous has described her relationship with Mesguich in an interview with Eric Prenowitz:

> My friendship with Daniel is different from the friendship that links me with Ariane, but it is very familiar, I would say fraternal. I use the word fraternal on purpose, because there are cultural, literary, intellectual connivances and complicities between us, it is perfectly overdetermined. So I address plays to him which are like letters. ('On Theatre', p. 6)

[101] For a more detailed biography of Daniel Mesguich, see Danielmesguich.com, 'biographie' <http://www.danielmesguich.com/4.aspx> [accessed 2 October 2016].

The word ‘fraternal’, which echoes the *fraternité* written into the French republic, can be politically charged, as Derrida, amongst other critics has argued,[102] and certainly Cixous’s advised use of the word here is striking, particularly given her early concern in ‘Aller à la mer’ for the position of women in theatre; women and their sorority are amongst those who face exclusion through the celebration of brotherhood. Here, Cixous insists that she has entered into a fraternal relationship of affection guaranteed by similarity with Mesguich, and she goes on to explain that their similarities are all related to fascination with language:

> And so when I write a letter to Daniel in a sense I write in my-kind-of-French, that is, in poetic French, going back along the path or the course of a grand verbal, linguistic French tradition. Because I know he is a man of letters of that language, as you would say a Chinese man of letters. He knows all its tricks, all its stratagems and all its strangenesses, all its foreignnesses. So in his direction I give free reign to a certain writing which in general I keep for my fiction writing and which is relatively uncommon under the great roof of the theatre. (Prenowitz, ‘On Theatre’, pp. 6-7)

Cixous likens her plays to letters written to individual directors, and claims that the plays that she writes for Mesguich are close to her prose writing, and unusual

[102] Derrida states it clearly in *Voyous*, where he paraphrases earlier work in *Politiques de l’amitié*, and says ‘Fraternalisme, confrérie, communauté, confraternelle et fraternisante, on y privilégie a la fois l’autorité masculine du frère (qui est aussi un fils, un mari, un père), le généalogique, le familial, la naissance, l’autochtonie et la nation’. See Jacques Derrida, *Voyous* (Paris: Galilée, 2003), p. 87.

in the theatre. These plays are, then, quite unlike the plays that Cixous writes for the Théâtre du Soleil, which are, Cixous always claims, moulded by the specific practical and economic (in all senses of the word) demands of the theatre. When she writes for Mesguich, whose primary interest is language, Cixous is free to explore how the density and playfulness of the language that she employs in her prose works might transfer more directly to the stage.

Sphinx Theatre Company

Voile Noire Voile Blanche, one of the plays that I will be discussing in Chapter Two, is the only one of Cixous's plays to have been performed in English but never in French. The Sphinx Theatre Company, formerly the Women's Theatre Group, is a small but well-established all-women touring theatre group, formed in 1973 and still based in North London. Cixous was contacted by the Sphinx Theatre Company, asking for permission to produce *Black Sail White Sail* (it is not clear how Sue Parrish, the group's artistic director, came across Cixous's script, but it is certain that the impetus for producing the play came from the Sphinx Theatre Company).[103] An English translation of *Voile Noire Voile Blanche* by Catherine A.F. MacGillivray was published in *New Literary History* in spring 1994, but Sphinx found that translation unsuitable for its needs and finally commissioned Donald Watson to adapt MacGillivray's translation for the stage. Cixous was not heavily involved in this adaptation, and she seems only to have checked the first two scenes of the play. Cixous seems to have taken this attitude to the play's production as well; she expresses some concern

[103]There is extensive correspondence between Cixous and the Sphinx Theatre Company in the Sphinx Theatre Company Archives. London, Victoria and Albert Museum Theatre and Performance Archives at Blythe House, GB 71 THM/322.

that the actress chosen to play Akhmatova should be 'great and subtle enough to measure up with Akhmatova',[104] but does not seem to have attended rehearsals or auditions and, after a letter in which she cites obligations at the Théâtre du Soleil that will not allow her to be more involved in the production, Cixous stops writing to Sue Parrish personally, and begins to correspond through representatives at the Société des Auteurs et Compositeurs Dramatiques. As well as chasing royalty payments, the SACD ask for press cuttings and programme notes from the play on Cixous's behalf, suggesting that she has had very little involvement in preparing and promoting the play (although she does give an interview with *The Guardian* in autumn 1994).

Cixous on Theatre

Critics writing on Cixous's theatre are quick to point out the significant differences between Cixous's densely poetical fiction texts and her theatre, which can be characterised by its concentration on the relations between characters rather than on their inner lives, its presentation of clearly defined characters, its greater organisation and more easily definable plots, and its concern for history and current affairs. Cixous states that 'le théâtre ne se prête pas au tissage poétique ne serait-ce que parce qu'il lui faut une densité, une rapidité qui lui interdit le développement poétique. Inversement, il permet des effets analytiques et dramatiques'.[105] Elsewhere, critics have pointed to

[104] Correspondence in the Sphinx Theatre Company archives, dated 10th July, presumably 1993. The original note is in English.
[105] See Françoise van Rossum-Guyon, 'Poésie e(s)t politique: Entretiens avec Hélène Cixous', in Françoise van Rossum-Guyon, *Le cœur critique: Butor, Simon, Kristeva, Cixous* (Amsterdam and Atlanta, Georgia: Rodopi, 1997), pp. 197-247 (p. 231).

practical concerns for what it is possible to present on stage, (Ropars, 'Texte et théâtre', p. 33), to Cixous's desire to expand the scope of her writing,[106] or to a move away from the concerns of the project of *écriture féminine* (Dobson, *Scene of Writing*, p. 55).

Yet despite the differences in Cixous's writing for different genres, as I will demonstrate in this thesis, the ethical themes and concerns that mark her theatre can also be found elsewhere in her work. Moreover, theatrical imagery has long been a feature of Cixous's descriptions of her writing process, as Pamela Turner and Julia Dobson have pointed out.[107] Thus in Cixous's 'School of the Dead', she maintains that writing is an attempt to 'unearth' a primitive picture which takes 'the theatrical form of a scene' because it obliges 'us', writer and reader, to become its 'audience'. Writing is the experience of translating into words an episode that you have not participated in, but have seen from some distance.[108]

If references to the theatre crop up in Cixous's descriptions of her prose writing practice, she has spent comparatively little time talking about how she writes for the theatre. However, in addition to what can be understood about Cixous's theatre writing from reading the plays themselves, and from the references elsewhere, Cixous has written a small number of essays about the theatre, including 'Aller à la mer', which was published in *Le Monde* in 1977, the essay

[106] Susan Sellers, 'Conversations with Hélène Cixous and members of the Centre d'Études Féminines', in *Writing Differences: Readings from the seminar of Hélène Cixous*, ed. by Susan Sellers, pp. 141-54 (p. 153).
[107] See Pamela A. Turner, 'Hélène Cixous: A Space Between – Women and (Their) Language', in *Hélène Cixous: Critical Impressions*, ed. by Lee A. Jacobus and Regina Barreca, pp. 187-200; Dobson, *Scene of Writing*, p. 10.
[108] Hélène Cixous 'The School of the Dead', in *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 3-53 (p. 10).

'De la scène de l'Inconscient à la scène de l'histoire: chemin d'une écriture', published as part of the proceedings of the first international colloquium on Hélène Cixous in 1987,[109] four essays written and published alongside *Indiade*, and the short essays included in the programme notes and published with the other plays written by Cixous for the Théâtre du Soleil. Cixous has also discussed writing for the theatre in some interviews, including most notably; the interview with Bernadette Fort on theatre, history, and ethics; a long interview with Eric Prenowitz, included at the beginning of his *Selected Plays*; and an interview with *Hors Cadre* magazine, entitled 'L'auteur entre texte et théâtre'.

'Aller à la mer', came out in 1977, after the first production of her play *Portrait de Dora*. The essay is primarily an attack on the treatment of women in the existing theatrical canon, and a call for a new type of woman spectator, who would go to the theatre politically, paying attention to the violent exclusion of women from the stage and refusing to mirror it by her own self-exclusion from public spaces. In a later essay written for the Théâtre du Soleil and published with *Indiade*, Cixous also considers the role of the audience:

> J'ai besoin du ciel pour que le théâtre soit. Et que la scène terrestre se mire dans la scène céleste. Nuages, ciel, soleil du cœur humain.
> Ce n'est pas seulement une métaphore. C'est aussi une définition: le théâtre est l'espace où l'être humain s'éprouve comme un atome du cosmos, comme une minute du Temps,

[109] Hélène Cixous, 'De la scène de l'inconscient à la scène de l'Histoire: chemin d'une écriture', in *Hélène Cixous: chemins d'une écriture*, ed. by Françoise van Rossum-Guyon and Myriam Díaz-Diocaretz (Saint-Denis: Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 1990), pp. 15-34.

> comme une question dans le multimillénaire dialogue des hommes avec les Dieux, comme un des milliards de 'pourquoi' lancés depuis le mystère de la question parlante en direction du Mystère sans forme, de la Cause sans corps. (*Indiade*, pp. 247-8)

Members of the audience in this description are separate individuals (single atoms, minutes, or questions) but they are attached to others (atoms make up molecules, one minute runs into another, questions are part of a dialogue). Cixous defines theatre here as a space in which individuals experience a profound change in perspective; as members of a theatre audience, we do not focus on ourselves, but rather realise that we are a small part of a much vaster system. This understanding of what it means to be a member of an audience seems to inform the epic quality of the work that Cixous produces with the Théâtre du Soleil.

Cixous has discussed the role of the epic in theatre in the interview with Eric Prenowitz that is included in his anthology of her plays. In that discussion, the epic seems to be related to an almost utopian quality in the theatre:

> It is no longer the world as it is; it is the world's world, it is the world par excellence. And it is a world that is a figure. It is entirely transfigured. It is true that in a certain way the theatre as world, the theatre-world exists virtually in the great epics. This is why it was not absolutely impossible for me, because I am someone who has always frequented the epic, it is my childhood imagination, my place of childhood. The Bible is extremely theatrical; nearly all the great stories

> of the Bible could be staged. (Prenowitz, 'On Theatre', p. 4)

Here, Cixous is stating that the theatre should not reflect the world as it is, but rather should show the world as a 'figure', symbol or metaphor. It is notable that the example that she gives of her understanding of what is epic is the Bible, first because references to biblical stories or characters recur elsewhere in Cixous's prose work, and second because it associates the epic with specifically ethical themes.[110] In Cixous's own theatre, the epic translates as the use of historical events to discuss grand ethical or political questions, such that the play that stages the partition of India is preceded by an essay that talks about the value of love and of difference.[111]

For Mara Negrón Marrero, the key question addressed by Cixous's theatre is that of 'comment la poésie peut-elle caresser tendrement l'Histoire'.[112] Theatre is a space in which, for Cixous, history has 'sa figure humaine', destiny (Cixous, 'De la scène', p. 28). History in the theatre can be presented as 'combat d'âmes, de désirs, de corps et de sang' (Negrón Marrero, p. 210); in theatre where history is channelled through the bodies of the actor, the political may be allowed to become physical and personal. Echoes can be heard here of the concerns of *écriture féminine*, and indeed in 'Le Rire de la Méduse' Cixous called explicitly for a history that would be feminine and combine the personal with the political

[110] The story of Abraham is one which interests Cixous particularly, and I analyse her account of that story in Chapter Five, on sacrifice.
[111] The programme notes for *Indiade* had the title 'Si vous permettez, je vais vous parler d'amour'. See *Indiade*, pp. 11-17.
[112] Mara Negrón Marrero, 'Comment faire pour écrire l'histoire poétiquement ou comment faire pour ne pas oublier', in *Chemins d'une écriture*, ed. by Françoise von Rossum-Guyon and Myriam Diaz-Diocaretz, pp. 205-212 (p. 205).

and the national (Cixous, ‘Le Rire’, p. 49). Without denying that history is constantly present as a motivating or background element in all of her works (see Cixous, ‘Guardian of language’ p. 84), Cixous claims that it is in the theatre that she has found the most appropriate medium for dealing explicitly with history.

Another key part of Cixous’s approach to the theatre is the way she thinks of the importance of the actor, of their body and their relationship to the characters that they play. Cixous discusses actors in her essay ‘L’Incarnation’, which was published alongside the play text of *Indiade.* Cixous claims to be quoting Zeami approvingly when she says that actors should ‘devenir le lieu propice à l’invité’ (*Indiade*, p. 260). Actors’ bodies are, then, spaces which must be open to the other, albeit to the invited other, and in this way they seem to resemble the ideal bodies described by Cixous in her allusions to *écriture féminine*, where she praised women’s bodies for the openness to the other that feeds into and from the capacity to become pregnant and give birth (in ‘La venue’, Cixous says ‘je ne barre pas, je ne ferme pas mes terres, mes sens, l’espace charnel qui s’étend derrière mes yeux: je me laisse traverser, imprégner, affecter’ (Cixous, ‘La venue’, p. 57)). Hospitality, and particularly questions of the limits that must be placed on hospitality, is a charged ethical question (some would argue, the key ethical question) and as such it is interesting that Cixous links acting so strongly to these questions. It is clear from Cixous’s writing on theatre that she finds within its demands and its traditions much that reflects or is reminiscent of the political and ethical thought that dominates her work elsewhere.

My Approach

I have been guided in part by Cixous's own approach to the theatre when deciding the approach best suited for this thesis. Discussing Shakespeare, Cixous talks about how theatre might be read:

> It is true that my own experience is that Shakespeare survives because of the poetry. I have always read Shakespeare passionately, as if I were attending a performance. (Fort, 'Theatre, History', p. 451)

Whilst Cixous clearly marks a distinction between theatre and prose whenever she discusses her writing, and although she speaks with great admiration about the work of the directors and actors with whom she collaborates, her statements here suggest that her enjoyment of the theatre is still driven by her love of the language or the poetry of the plays that she reads or watches. She seems to associate attending a performance with 'passion', intense emotional or visceral reactions, and to suggest both that there is normally a marked difference between the experience of reading a text and the experience of attending a performance, but also that it is possible to break down this distinction, and to read a text as if it were a performance.

Cixous's own plays are rarely performed. The plays that she writes with the Théâtre du Soleil enjoy long runs, but then are not performed again by that theatre group, and are rarely taken up by other groups. One exception to this is *Sihanouk*, which was revived at the instigation of Ashley Thompson, a former

doctoral student of Cixous who went on to work on Cambodian art and theatre. In 2011, young actors from the École des Arts Phare Ponleu Selpak, all of whom were 'les descendants des victimes des Khmers rouges' performed a shortened version of Cixous's original script, translated into Cambodian.[113] The Théâtre du Soleil have also recorded some of their plays. *La Ville Parjure*, *Tambours sur la digue*, and *Les Naufragés du Fol Espoir* are all available on DVD, whilst the Bibliothèque nationale de France holds copies of a recording of *Indiade* and recordings of the plays made by Cixous for the radio. In the case of plays where no recording exists, it is possible to reconstruct some aspects of the staging through contemporary photographs, accounts of the performance in reviews, and copies of rehearsal notes.

Analysis of Cixous's play texts forms the major focus of this thesis, although I will also draw on material relating to performances of the plays. I chose to structure each of my chapters around a single one of these themes, and to select for analysis those plays that best illustrated that theme and lent themselves well to careful close reading. I avoid a chronological approach, because I do not want to suggest that there is a clear line of development in terms of content, language or approach, through Cixous's work for the theatre. Rather, I want to suggest that the same questions continue to appear throughout her work as a playwright,

[113] The École des Arts Phare Ponleu Selpak has its origins as a series of workshops for the residents of the Site 2 refugee camp on the Thai border. Now situated in Anchanh village, close to Battambang. For more, see 'L'École des Arts Phare Ponleu Selpak', article in the *dossier pédagogique* made available by the Théâtre des Célestins to accompany the 2011 production of *Sihanouk*, < http://www.sensinterdits.org/index.php/Menu-thematique/Sens-Interdits-2011/Les-spectacles/L-Histoire-terrible-mais-inachevee-de-Norodom-Sihanouk-roi-du-Cambodge> [accessed 30 October 2016] (p. 10).

and she often approaches them with similar ambiguous and open responses that reveal the complexity of the issues at stake.

The Shape of the Thesis

Chapter Two will build on my discussions of these questions of how to write by exploring how Cixous presents the poet characters in *Voile Noire Voile Blanche* and *L'Histoire (qu'on ne connaîtra jamais*), the only two plays in Cixous's theatrical output to have poets as central characters. I will argue that in her plays, Cixous is chiefly concerned with examining how poets might negotiate and intervene in their contemporary society, and that this debate centres on what the proper *content* of the poems should be; this is something of a departure from the descriptions that Cixous gives of her writing practice in her essays – where the central question is *how* to write and not *what* to write – and reflects Cixous's use of real historical figures and political crises in many of her plays. I argue that these plays show that poetry, like theatre, can only be produced through the support and collaboration of groups of individuals.

The focus of Chapter Three is not on small groups of engaged artists, but rather on the impulse to create larger new communities in response to perceived ethical and political failings in the old community. In *L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk, Roi du Cambodge*, and *Les Naufragés du Fol Espoir: (Aurores)*, two plays that show the creation of new communities, I am interested in the ways in which Cixous shows these communities to be founded on a series of exclusions and on self-isolation. Both of the communities that

Cixous shows being formed in this way finally self-destruct, unable to escape the prejudices that informed behaviour in the old world.

Chapter Four will focus on Cixous's attempts to use theatre to reveal and challenge these prejudices through her portrayal of moral (rather than ethical) education in *La Ville Parjure ou le réveil des Erinyes* and *Portrait de Dora*. I argue that Cixous is critical of the attempts to use the spectacles of psychoanalytic treatment in *Dora* and legal trial in *La Ville Parjure* as the means for providing moral education. Cixous is more hopeful about the potential of theatre, though, which has the capacity to reveal the ethical and political stakes at play in the everyday.

In Chapter Five I am concerned with the theme of sacrifice in *L'Indiade ou l'Inde de leurs rêves* and *Tambours sur la digue,* a play set in an unnamed Asian country, both of which feature characters who sacrifice themselves in order to save their communities. In her 1977 essay 'Aller à la mer', Cixous argues that many plays in the theatrical canon feature the sacrifice of women. I argue that she, too, makes use of sacrifice in her plays, but that she attempts to reappropriate it as a politically active gesture.

In Chapter Six, my conclusion, I argue that all of Cixous's plays centre on some gesture of rebellion, but that ultimately all of these gestures fail and that in this way, Cixous denies the audience the cathartic comfort of seeing successful change in the theatre in the hope that this will increase the chances that they will take action in the real world. I will draw on the arguments that I have made in

the five earlier chapters to show that Cixous is always interested in characters who take a strong ethical stance, but that ultimately the plays are always on the side of negotiated, political action. This division between what is admirable on the stage and what is desirable or possible outside of the theatre is key to understanding the reciprocal ways in which Cixous's politics and ethics, and her work for the theatre, have all impacted on each other.

Chapter Two: The Ethics of Creating Art in *L'Histoire (qu'on ne connaîtra jamais)* and *Voile noire voile blanche*

In 1994, Cixous published two plays which, in different ways, are powerful examinations of the ethics and politics of writing and creating art: *L'Histoire (qu'on ne connaîtra jamais)*, directed by Daniel Mesguich at the Théâtre de la Ville in Lille, and *Voile Noire Voile Blanche*, directed by Sarah Parrish and produced and toured by the Sphinx women's theatre company in the UK. Several of Cixous's plays feature central characters who might be considered to be 'artists' in some way; Sihanouk wishes to write the history of Cambodia in poetry, and in *Tambours sur la digue*, the drummers who give the play its title use music as a flood warning, but *L'Histoire* and *Voile* are unique amongst Cixous's works for the theatre in having as their central characters people who earn their living through their art and who describe themselves artists. As such, these plays are Cixous's clearest articulations in the theatre of the vital ethical and political questions that she believes that the artist generally, and the writer specifically, must face, most of which centre on the issue of how a writer may respond ethically to their difficult political situation. This chapter will identify how this issue is addressed by different artists (mainly writers, but one weaver) in Cixous's plays, drawing comparisons with the ways in which she approaches similar questions in her essays.

L'Histoire (qu'on ne connaîtra jamais) centres on a character based on the real twelfth-century poet Snorri Sturluson. It is not clear what Cixous has read of Snorri Sturluson's life, but a number of modern biographies exist, and his *Prose Edda* and *Hiemskringla* (story of the Norwegian Kings) are widely available in

English and French. Parts of Snorri's biography are also related in the *Sturlunga Saga*, the story of his family. Cixous inserts her character Snorri into a world populated by the characters he had described in 'The Treasure of the Niflungs', part of his own *Prose Edda*. The characters from this story – the noble hero, Sigfrid, as well as Hagen and Gunther, the scheming heads of the Burgundian royal family, the sister of Hagen and Gunther, Kriemhild, who fools Sigfrid into loving her, and Brunhild the Valkyrie who loved Sigfrid and whom Sigfrid loved, but who finally marries Gunther – are probably more familiar from the German epic poem, the *Nibelungenlied*, used by Richard Wagner as the source for his *Ring Cycle* operas. Cixous has rarely spoken about *L'Histoire* and its source texts, but in an interview with Susan Sellers in 2007, she touches on the subject briefly:

> As for Wagner: he has built his operas on the canvas he borrowed from the Eddas – they are like Homer, like *Crime and Punishment*, except more fantastic because it's the northern mythology, which I adore. It's the most extraordinary, the craziest. I do love Wagner, but I don't for reasons which I can't account for include Wagner in my writing. Perhaps I will. I am certainly touched by a number of his themes, his arias.[1]

The sentiment is echoed in a transcript of the *Glass Ceiling* conference in 1992, where Cixous describes her admiration for German epic poems: 'I was reading the *Niebelungen*…not Wagner's *Niebelungen*, but the epic, the German epic…it's one of the most beautiful epics in the world, really'.[2] Cixous's play

[1] See Susan Sellers, 'We Must Hand our Inheritance On: Interview with Hélene Cixous', in *White Ink*, pp. 148-54 (p. 149). The interview was originally conducted in English.
[2] Transcript of morning session of *Glass Ceiling*, p.16. Accessed in Sphinx Theatre archives, in the Victoria and Albert Museum Theatre and Performance Collection.

takes up the story some years after the events described in 'The Treasure of the Niflungs', and describes how Snorri is sent by his father and a group of gods and ghosts of warrior heroes,[3] to the court of Gunther and Brunhild, to watch and to write about the royal visit of Kriemhild and Sigfrid.

Voile Noire Voile Blanche, first performed the same year, is also a powerful examination of the ethics and politics of writing. Set in the USSR and covering the period from 1953 (the year of Stalin's death) to 1960, the play centres on the daily lives of three women; the celebrated poet Anna Akhmatova, and her close friends Lydia Chukovskaya and Nadejda Mandelstam, both of whom are also writers. Cixous has long been interested in this generation of Russian poets. She discussed Akhmatova in her unpublished 1985-1986 seminars,[4] talked about Nadejda and her husband Ossip Mandelstam in her novel *Manne aux Mandelstams aux Mandelas*,[5] and has also written about Marina Tsvetaeva in 'Poetry, Passion, and History: Marina Tsvetayeva'.[6] Some details included in *Voile* suggest that Cixous's main sources for information on Akhmatova's life when writing *Voile* were Lydia Chukovskaya's journals, and the two volumes of Nadejda Mandelstam's diaries.[7] The play documents Akhmatova,

[3] See *L'Histoire*, pp. 10-12. The Égal du Très Haut declares that 'nous sommes tes morts avec tes dieux que tu as entièrement négligés, tu vois ton père Sturla Thorardson, le borgne, et bien des morts qui te paraissent connus' (p. 10). When Snorri addresses the group collectively, he calls them the 'Nobles Très-Hauts' (p. 12).

[4] According to Catherine A. F. MacGillivray in her 'Translator's Note to *Voile Noire Voile Blanche*', *New Literary History*, 25.2, (1994), 219-22 (p. 220).

[5] See Hélène Cixous, *Manne aux Mandelstams aux Mandelas* (Paris: des femmes, 1988).

[6] In Hélène Cixous, *Readings: Poetics of Blanchot, Joyce, Kafka, Kleist, Lispector and Tsvetayeva*, ed. and trans. by Verena Andermatt Conley, pp. 110-51.

[7] See Lydia Chukovskaya, *The Akhmatova Journals: Volume 1* (1938-1941), trans. by Milena Michalski and Sylva Rubashova, poetry trans by Peter Norman (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1994), and Nadezhda Mandelstam, *Hope Against Hope: A Memoir*, trans. by Max Hayward, and with Introduction by Clarence Brown (London: Collins, 1971), and *Hope Abandoned*, trans. by Max Hayward (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976). Nadejda Mandelstam's books were smuggled out of the Soviet Union and first published in English in 1970 (New York: Atheneum). They were published in French in 3 volumes as *Contre tout espoir*, trans. by Maya

Mandelstam, and Chukovskaya's attempts to secure publishers for Akhmatova's work. It also portrays the difficult relationship that Akhmatova has with her neighbour, Pauline, who is possibly a police informant, and shows Akhmatova petitioning the authorities for the release of her son, Lev Gumilev, imprisoned in Siberia on trumped-up charges. In this chapter, I draw out the points of similarity between the approaches taken to writing by Cixous, by Snorri the medieval poet in the fantastic setting, and by Akhmatova the twentieth-century poet, facing everyday hardships in an oppressive regime.

One of the most pressing issues for the writers in Cixous's plays is that of their social position and reputation, and of how that might be used to make ethical and political interventions in society; I look at this question particularly in relation to Anna Akhmatova. I then address an issue that is vital for Cixous, her theatre collaborators, and her characters: how to negotiate the various official and unofficial censors that they encounter. I look at the different networks of friends and allies that the writer-characters build up to allow them to write and distribute their texts. The key issue at stake in *Voile* is that of what and how (it is permissible) to write. The main battles centre on writing that expresses or records suffering; themes that, I show, are ethically valuable for their ability to elicit compassion, but also throw up considerable ethical concerns or problems when the desire to record pain is coupled with a writing practice that includes

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Minoustchine (Paris: Gallimard, 1972-1975). Both the English and French translations of the title play on Nadejda's name, which means 'hope' in Russian. Various other Russian writers have also written about their relationships with Anna Akhmatova. Many of these recollections are brought together in *Anna Akhmatova and her Circle*, ed. by Konstantin Polivanov, trans. by Patricia Beriozkina (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1994), which Cixous would not have been able to access when writing the play, although she might have read some of the texts included.

theft, as it is for the writers in these plays. I go on to examine the practices of the writers and artists who feature in these plays, focussing on the ways in which key motifs in Cixous's descriptions of her own writing practice (particularly theft and maternity) are taken on and redeployed in the plays. I demonstrate that, in her plays, Cixous has reused and manipulated important elements of her descriptions of her own writing practice in interesting ways. I argue that what is constant and unique between Cixous's descriptions of writing in different genres is the focus on the question of the place of the other at the moment of artistic creation.

The writer's place in society

Both of the writers whom Cixous stages in her plays are acutely aware of the social position that is afforded them by their profession. In *L'Histoire*, Snorri Sturluson is ordered by a group of gods and ghosts to write them a bloody myth, but he is initially reluctant, because 'j'ai à finir un grand récit pour mon maître norvégien'. Snorri has a respected position as 'le conseiller du Grand Norvège. Et de plus l'historien de ce roi' (*L'Histoire*, pp. 12-13), and to maintain it he must continue to write what is asked of him by that king. Although Snorri's writing wins him political influence, the implication is that he prefers to use it to bolster his position within a political hierarchy that has already been designed. Rather than seeking to alter or challenge that hierarchy, he produces work that flatters the king and there is no suggestion that his writing has earned him a place as a moral or ethical leader.

Anna Akhmatova manipulates her public image and uses her social position as a writer in very different ways in *Voile*. Akhmatova is concerned with the moral leadership that writers may provide, and she works against the political system at certain moments. This is particularly evident in the final scene of *Voile*, where she addresses the audience directly, an approach which is quite unusual in Cixous's theatre, although it is also used in the final scene of *La Ville Parjure*.[8] The direct address distances the audience from the on-stage action, reminds them of their own (privileged) position in a different time, and leaves them with an ethical duty of care towards the now-dead poets. Akhmatova states:

> Et dites-moi, vous qui vivez plus tard, savez-vous qui fut vraiment Mandelstam? Akhmatova? Et Pasternak? Goumilev? Tabidzé? Tsvetaeva?
>
> Savez-vous qui d'entre nous fut loyal, qui fut trahi, qui fut traître, qui vit s'ouvrir les portes d'air?[9] Cela se voit-il plus tard dans nos poèmes? (*Voile*, p. 350)

Her immediate concern here is that the poets are remembered as individuals, their names are passed down and their lives understood. Akhmatova asks if her future imagined reader/audience knows who was a traitor and who was loyal, in other words, who had recognised ethical duties towards friends, country, and poetry, and who had ignored them. For Akhmatova, the poems that are remembered in the future should provide a legible record of the ethical and political choices that the poets made in response to their duties. The character

[8] Dobson compares the two moments in *Scene of Writing*, p. 137.
[9] The image of 'portes d'air' is taken from later in the play, where Nadejda Mandelstam recounts the beliefs of a group of peasants who thought that once in a generation the gates of heaven would briefly open and that, if they jumped they might reach paradise (*Voile*, p. 346).

and biography of the poets, which can be reduced to the sum of the ethical and political decisions that they made, are inseparable from their work.

The combination of poetic and personal identity that occurs in the final scene of *Voile* is not an invention of Cixous's Akhmatova, but is typical of the poet Akhmatova's cultural context. Alexandra Harrington argues that:

> The Symbolist poets, who dominated the Russian literary scene when Akhmatova's career began, emphasized the Romantic idea of the indivisibility of literary biography from personal biography, thus deliberately blurring the boundaries between life and art. Akhmatova inherited this notion, carefully creating herself and her public image by inventing appropriate personalities.[10]

Harrington claims that the persona(e) that Akhmatova presents to the world is/are a deliberately designed. From earlier artistic movements Akhmatova inherits a desire to blur 'the boundaries between life and art' which, Harrington suggests, means turning her own life into an art work as much as it means inserting experiences from her everyday life into her poetry. Beth Holmgren argues that, particularly in the Russian context, it was assumed (by the authorities) that writers saw it as their role to provide moral leadership:

> In nineteenth-century Russia such authors [as Nikolai Chernyshevskii and Lev Tolstoi] had functioned as spiritual

[10] Alexandra Harrington, *The Poetry of Anna Akhmatova: Living in Different Mirrors* (London: Anthem Press, 2006), pp. 12-13.

> and moral leaders beyond government control. In the Stalinist state writers were always suspected of harbouring this ambition, and once 'proven guilty', they were demoted further to the status of criminal. [11]

The writers' supposed wish to become 'spiritual and moral leaders beyond government control' is framed through the references to the 'spiritual' and 'moral' fields as an ethical desire. Nevertheless, it is understood as a political threat by the government and is dealt with by political means: the arrest and, often, execution of the writers. The writer both introduces a new, and perhaps conflicting, belief system into the state, and also operates 'beyond government control', posing a threat precisely because they are placing themselves outside of the political arena. Akhmatova, then, in her work as in her life, is a poet-character, created in the context of an assumption that the poet's role is immediately an ethical one.

In Cixous's play, Akhmatova is a doubly invented character: she is the playwright's interpretation, half a century later, of a poet's projection of a particular poetic identity, and precisely a poetic identity that is connected to an ideal of a writer's moral and ethical leadership. Cixous stages a character who, despite her quotidian worries, already exists largely as (self-made) myth. Her model author character encounters the same ethical questions about writing that Cixous claimed to find significant in her own writing practice, as I will go on to argue.

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[11] Beth Holmgren, *Women's Works in Stalin's Time: On Lidiia Chukovskaia and Nadezhda Mandelstam* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 8.

Negotiating the censors

The first and perhaps most pressing ethical and political question that the writer faces in Cixous's plays and essays is how to negotiate censorship. As well as Mandelstam, Akhmatova and Tsvetayeva, Cixous has been interested in a number of different writers who experienced extreme forms of state censorship in their lifetime, including notably Etty Hillesum and Fyodor Dostoyevsky. However, as Ian Fleishman points out in his analysis of *Souffles*, censorship can take many forms, including 'difficulties in publishing, the institutions of good taste, the variety of censorship that the conscious mind exerts against the logic of the dream, and, perhaps most importantly, the censorship of the female body'.[12] In 'La Venue', Cixous describes the barriers that for a long time kept her from writing:

> Quant à mon gardien intérieur – que je n'appelais pas surmoi à l'époque – il était plus rapide et précis que tous les autres: il me jetait la pierre avant que tous les autres – parents, maîtres contemporains prudents, soumis, rangés – tous les non-fous et les antisouris – aient eu le temps de tirer. 'The fastest gun', c'était moi. Heureusement! Ma honte réglait mon compte sans scandale. J'étais 'sauvée'. ('La venue', p. 19)

The issue here is censorship by an interior guardian (a pointed choice of a masculine noun), who ensures that the woman remains within the limits that society (and its 'maîtres') have lain down for her. There is no need for any

[12] Ian Thomas Fleishman, '"Ce qui est coupé repousse": Jean Genet, Hélène Cixous, The Wound, and the Poetics of Omission', *French Studies*, 69.2 (2015), 190-204 (p. 201) <dx.doi.org/10.1093/fs/knu300>.

censorship, or even censure, by other members of society since a woman's internalised shame makes acting outside of their limits almost unthinkable. Much of Cixous's early writing is explicitly positioned as an attempt to make writing thinkable for women, despite the risks that women writers face.

In her plays, Cixous focuses on established writers: she is less interested in the internal censorship that prevents people (women) from ever writing, and instead addresses the influence of censorship through social pressure and the law. For Anna Akhmatova, the rules over what may be written are laid down by the government and enforced by a bureaucracy and a secret police force. Using these apparatus, the state can subject any stage of Akhmatova's writing to tight controls: they limit her freedom to write by listening in on her conversations with friends, watching her movements and searching her apartment; prevent publication by controlling all of the publishing houses; and threaten to arrest, imprisonment, or even execute her. The rules that Akhmatova must negotiate to satisfy these censors are at the same time strict, opaque, and subject to change according to the moods or impulses of members of the Soviet leadership. In *L'Histoire*, the abstract social forces that police writing in Cixous's essays have taken form as Snorri's father, the gods, and the ghosts of heroes. These figures represent different forms of pressure that weigh on the artist: economic forces (the gods and ghosts are or were Snorri's patrons), the weight of tradition (the ghost of his father is present), and contemporary social pressure (the ghosts include dead war-heroes, the people most honoured within Snorri's contemporary society). In Cixous's essays, the interior guardian, shame, ensures her complete silence without a need for any exterior powers to make any explicit

demands or pronouncements about what could and could not be written. In *L'Histoire* the gods and ghosts are by contrast very clear about exactly what sort of story is allowable, insisting on the inclusion of traditional elements: 'sang', 'un traître', and 'un écartèlement' (*L'Histoire*, p. 81). They make it clear that the writer is at risk of immediate physical harm should he ignore their desires and refuse to reflect the violent socio-political norms of his society in his writing. Censorship, which in Cixous's descriptions of her own writing practice was an interior feeling of the controlling power of shame, is rewritten in these plays as something clear, precise, and immediate.

When Cixous describes *écriture féminine*, she imagines a form of writing that would allow or form an escape from dominant discourse and its censorship. In *Voile*, Cixous shows that the ideal of escape through writing can be very difficult, both ethically and politically, particularly in the context of the censorship that Akhmatova is subject to, where she runs an immediate risk of imprisonment.[13] Nadejda and Akhmatova imagine Akhmatova's poetry sharing the fate of a writer:

> NADEJDA
> Mais peut-être le livre sortira-t-il tout d'un coup, comme un évadé?
> AKHMATOVA
> Aussitôt dans la pâleur d'une aube on l'arrêtera et on le fusillera le soir-même. Comme on a effacé de l'air russe la voix de Goumilev, mon premier mari. (*Voile*, p. 324)

[13] Documents released after the collapse of the USSR reveal that Akhmatova was very nearly arrested. See Harrington, *Different Mirrors*, p. 17.

If Akhmatova's writing is published, its escape from the censors will be a prison breakout where writing will have the illicitly gained freedom of the already condemned. Nadejda Mandelstam explains that, once she had succeeded in distributing her husband Ossip's poems, 'I ceased to be afraid: now it was impossible for them to be destroyed and, like a human being, wiped from the face of the earth' (Mandelstam, 'Akhmatova', p. 105). The image that Nadejda uses is again of the poetry being like the prisoner of the Russian state, but she points to her fear that Ossip's poetry would share her fate if she were arrested and executed. Ossip's poetry is therefore distributed to ensure its safety, whereas Akhmatova's is kept hidden for the same reason. As an escapee, an outlaw, the writing does not have the right to circulate and may be arrested at dawn, as soon as it leaves, and executed almost immediately. The fact that the poem circulates without official permission, rather than any consequence stemming from this publication, is what is perceived as a threat by the Soviet government. Akhmatova's fight for publication is an act of defiance in itself, then, even if Akhmatova is, as she believes, fighting for something ephemeral (the poem will soon be destroyed, shot down).

Harrington argues that, for the censoring authorities of the USSR,

> Lyric poetry was fundamentally suspect owing to its emphasis on the personal and the private and, from as early as 1918 party critics had begun to take issue with 'bourgeois aesthetics', deeming relatively apolitical, unengaged poets

> like Akhmatova as irrelevant to the new era. (Harrington, *Different Mirrors*, p. 16)

Harrington claims that Leon Trotsky was particularly dismissive of Akhmatova's work, which he felt was too much concerned with what he termed 'female problems' (Harrington, *Different Mirrors*, p. 16). It seems to have been assumed that these 'female problems', which were questions of the 'personal and the private', must have nothing to do with the political class struggle that characterised the new era. The concern then does not seem to be that these works will constitute an *active* threat to the Soviet regime, but rather that they do not play any positive role in helping the Soviet government to create or maintain a 'new era' and so, by default, are 'bourgeois'. They pose a threat insofar as they are *anti*-revolutionary, a category that comes to define any activity not taking place in the service of revolution narrowly defined as the political agenda of the government of the USSR.

Cixous's Akhmatova faces the same assessment of her work, and the impact is clear as she moves between reluctance to publish and an intense desire to see her work read by her fellow Russians. Akhmatova's reluctance to publish stems from fears for her own safety and for the safety of her friends and family. Although they are well founded, Akhmatova still admonishes herself for allowing her fears to guide her actions: 'pourquoi aurais-je refusé de publier? Quelle naïve, quelle folle tu fais, rêveuse d'autrefois!' (*Voile*, p. 278). Once more, Cixous seems to be drawing on Anna Akhmatova's autobiographical writings, where she describes her distress after the publication of her early poetry, writing about herself in the third person: '"to avoid becoming upset",

[she] hid under sofa cushions the magazines where [her poems] were first printed'.[14] In *Voile*, Cixous's Akhmatova describes her earlier reluctance to publish as madness, naivety or a dream, not an appropriate response to the conditions in which she is working, but rather a concern 'd'autrefois', of and from another time. The Soviet government painted Akhmatova and her work as out of touch with the new society being created by the revolution: Cixous's Akhmatova here admits that at least some of her concerns are indeed no longer relevant; her reluctance to publish seems ridiculous to her. Dismissing timidity about publication in this way, is not the same as denying that ethical and political concerns should be weighed up before a decision to publish, but rather an affirmation that she is living in a climate where publishing is the only strong ethical choice. When Cixous's inspiration, the Russian Akhmatova, was told that she would not be published in Russia, she claims that she experienced her 'death as a citizen' ('Akhmatova on Akhmatova', p. 46). Leaving aside the question of whether Akhmatova was interpreting her inability to publish as a sign of the sort of official displeasure that might have led to her death as an individual, Akhmatova is making a strong statement about a writer's place in society. Discussing Akhmatova's generation of writers, Cixous, says 'deported because of a poem, they become citizens of the nation of poetry', suggesting that even the violence of enforced exile, which Cixous by no means ignores, can lead to some new associations and allegiances.[15] The historical Akhmatova, by contrast, is concerned only with her citizenship of the material state of Russia, which for her is tied up with her position as a published writer.

[14] See Anna Akhmatova, 'Akhmatova on Akhmatova', in *Anna Akhmatova and her Circle*, ed. by Konstantin Polivanov, pp. 2-50 (p. 12).
[15] See Dominique Lecoq 'Against the Emotion of History: Interview with Hélène Cixous', trans. by Jessica Benson, in Susan Sellers, ed., *White Ink*, pp. 88-94 (p. 89).

In Cixous's play, Akhmatova struggles to fulfil this duty, and has a troubled relationship with the National Union of Writers. The Writer's Union are not, as the name might suggest, a group to support and unify Russia's poets, but representatives of the regime's control and censorship, powerful weapons in the state's war on the poet, who aim to ensure that any poetry that they allow to be published will not constitute a political threat to the government. It is a model that works on the basis that it is the content of the poetry, rather than the fact of publishing at all, that constitutes a threat to the regime. Akhmatova complains that the censors' choices of poems for her anthology gives a false account of her concerns:

> Tenez, Regardez. Voilà leur choix. Ils ont supprimé tous les poèmes qui chantent mon amour pour la Russie. Ne parlons pas de Londres, ni de Paris. Je ne sais pas ce qui se passe à Tachkent, et encore moins en Sibérie. Qui suis-je? La contemporaine de Narcisse. Le monde passe derrière mon dos et je ne me retourne pas. Et il n'y avait pas un seul inédit. En 1940, prise d'un étourdissement, je tombe dans mon miroir et disparais. Ainsi Akhmatova, c'était ça, diront les lecteurs dégoûtés! Cette hystérique, cette femme couverte d'amants adultères. (*Voile*, p. 324)

In Cixous's play, poems about love or about self-reflection, those subjects that, Harrington shows, had been deemed 'irrelevant to the new era' by the censors, may now be permitted, since neither the censors nor Akhmatova herself seem to believe that these forms of poetry constitute a political threat to the

authorities. The censors have instead banned any poems that speak of place. References to Paris or London, the destinations that Soviet citizens may have in mind if they were to attempt a physical, rather than literary, escape are completely banned. Akhmatova is also not allowed to reveal or allude to the realities of life in Tashkent, (the town where she and many other poets were evacuated during the war and ironically enjoyed greater freedom to write and to publish than at any other point during Soviet rule), nor of Siberia, perhaps unsurprisingly, since the Soviet government maintained secrecy around the prison camps in which Akhmatova's son was imprisoned. Even Akhmatova's continued use of a lyric form and personal register in the poems that '*chantent* mon *amour* pour la Russie' (my emphasis) have not rendered the content sufficiently apolitical for the censors. Akhmatova is to write poetry that avoids taking any points of reference from contemporary reality, and which provides 'escapism' insofar as it might allow the reader to ignore or to forget their everyday life. Crucially, though, this is not to be the sort of literary escape that Cixous imagines, which is intended to open up paths towards new modes of thinking and living.

Perhaps concerned that poets have the capacity to become moral leaders, the censoring authorities in *Voile* also take steps to discredit Akhmatova personally, dismissing her as vain, 'la contemporaine de Narcisse'. When it is related to the story of Narcissus, Akhmatova's tendency towards self-reflection becomes a characteristic that precludes her from making observations about the world around her. The censors neutralise the threat that the artist might lead change in Russia by attempting to create a public image of Akhmatova as a poet who

would have no interest in doing any such thing. The censors' approach, it seems, is to associate Akhmatova with the sins assumed to be endemic to women: madness ('*hystérique*'), unchecked, unlawful, sexual pleasure (with her '*amants adultères*'), and narcissism, generally painted as a feminine characteristic although Narcissus, of course, was a man. The accusation is doubly ironic since, Cixous claims, the consequence of the phallogocentric economy on women has been 'un anti-narcissisme! Un narcissisme qui ne s'aime qu'à se faire aimer pour ce qu'on n'a pas! Ils ont fabriqué l'infâme logique de l'anti-amour' (*La Jeune née*, p. 125). The same economy that punishes women for loving themselves too much has also made it impossible for a woman to feel any true affection for herself; she is loveable only for her attractiveness to men, which means her difference to men, understood as her lack of a penis. Whereas Cixous's tactics are to reappropriate and celebrate hysteria and *jouissance*, Akhmatova is more straightforward in her response to the censors' (supposed?) accusations, clearly intended as insults or slights to her work. Akhmatova denies the validity of those accusations and angrily denounces the censors' attempts to use her femininity as an excuse to ignore, silence, or dismiss the commentary on Russian society and everyday life that sits alongside the 'personal and the private' in her poetry.

Writing to express or record pain

Although the censors attempt to prevent writers from discussing everyday life in poetry, in *Voile* poetry is used to record or to express the suffering of individual poets and Russian citizens. Nadejda Mandelstam asserts that the ability to create beauty in response to pain is central to the identity of the poet:

'Qu'est-ce qu'un poète? La douleur lui arrache des larmes d'or' (*Voile*, p. 290). The first quality that is essential for the artist is their capacity for emotion. The poet must cry in response to pain, perhaps their own or perhaps the pain of others around them: Nadejda's comments are ambiguous; in Akhmatova's celebrated poem 'Requiem', for instance, her own suffering is joined with that of a number of other mothers whose children had been arrested as political prisoners. For the poet, this intense emotion expresses itself as golden tear-poems (Akhmatova and Nadejda also argue about a poem with the title 'Une Larme'). In the context of a totalitarian Russia in which not only dissent but also dissatisfaction were harshly silenced, this romantic image of the beautiful suffering of the artist takes on positive ethical potential. Akhmatova's golden tears make her pain visible, understandable and accessible to others. The ethical decisions that poets in *Voile* make when they decide to describe pain are particularly relevant to Cixous's own writing practice. Sarah Cooper has argued that, when Cixous wrote about the lives of the Mandelas and the Mandelstams, 'the ethical wager for the writing self [in *Manne aux Mandelstams aux Mandelas*] is how to write about these experiences without making them her own; she must bear witness to her own disappearance in order to give a voice to the specificity of the other':[16] in *Voile* and *L'Histoire*, Cixous shows authors who struggle with precisely this balancing act. Whilst the ethical stakes of writing about pain are high, then, the political value of this sort of work is also clear: with her plays about the Khmer Rouge and the *affaire du sang contaminé*, Cixous affirms the power of art to draw attention to overlooked trauma.

[16] Sarah Cooper, 'The Ethics of Rewriting the Loss of Exile in *Manne aux Mandelstams aux Mandelas*', *Paragraph*, 23.3 (2000), 311–323 (p. 311) <www.jstor.org/stable/43263610> [accessed 16 January 2017].

It is nevertheless true that an ethical and political risk is run when the ugliness of suffering is lost, replaced with a type of beauty that may make pain seem to be at best acceptable and at worst, necessary. One influential examination of these issues in the theatre context is Brecht's commentary on Aristotelian notions of catharsis in 'Short Organum': 'the catharsis of which Aristotle writes – cleansing by fear and pity, or from fear and pity – is a purification which is performed not only in a pleasurable way, but precisely for the purpose of pleasure' (*Brecht On Theatre*, p. 181). There are a number of significant differences between Brecht's discussion of the relationship between pain and art and Nadejda's: Brecht's focus is on the audience rather than the writer, he writes about pleasure rather than beauty, he is concerned with theatre and not poetry and finally, most importantly, he offers an explicit warning against the dangers of using art to transform pain. According to Brecht's reading of Aristotle, the actor's role is to render the painful pleasurable (as the poet renders it beautiful, for Nadejda), with the result, for Brecht, that the audience is 'cleansed' of their own painful emotions, experiencing them briefly and artificially in the theatre so that they do not have to live them outside. Catharsis in this way contributes to the maintenance of social order, ensuring that the theatre-going citizen can live a life of moderation at home. With pain rendered beautiful within the limited and controlled sphere of art, the citizen need not experience it as brutal outside of that sphere, or be motivated to fight violently against it. Thus, according to Brecht's reading, Arisotelian catharsis is politically conservative and ethically dangerous, since it encourages the audience ultimately to do nothing about the pain around them. The censors'

reaction to Akhmatova's work suggests that, although she is attempting to salvage something beautiful from pain, and does not make explicit calls for revolution in her poetry, her poems hardly serve to maintain the status quo in the way that Brecht imagines. Likewise, although Cixous makes pleasurable theatre from contemporary tragedies, she always works to encourage her audience to take the compassionate attitude learned in the theatre out to the streets.[17]

One striking representation of the importance of poetry as an expression of suffering in *Voile* comes in the context of the difficult relationship between Akhmatova and her working class neighbour, Pauline. The 1994 stage production of *Voile* made the division between Pauline and Akhmatova clear through costume. Akhmatova and her friends wore floral dresses in cool blues, greens and purples, tying them visually to Russia's cold natural landscape and to the highly decorated styles of dress and home furnishings popular in western Europe in the nineteenth century. Pauline, by contrast, was dressed in rough (patriotic) red wool, matching the colour of the tatty curtain that hung between the two women's rooms, which represented both the intrusion of the state into the home (which it subdivided into smaller blocks) and, since it allows Pauline to eavesdrop at several points in the play, the possibility of surveillance for Akhmatova.[18] The differences in costume were eloquent reminders of their differences in social class, attitude towards Europe, and attitude towards the

[17] For a longer discussion of Cixous's non-cathartic rendering of beautiful pain in the theatre, see Chapter Five, Problems of Sacrifice in *Tambours sur la digue* and *Indiade*, as well as my discussion of *Ville Parjure* in Chapter Four, Moral Education in *Portrait de Dora* and *Ville Parjure*.

[18] A number of unattributed photographs of the set are in the Sphinx Theatre Company archives.

Soviet government. This division persists although both women have suffered the loss of their husband at the hands of the state. Pauline chastises Akhmatova for being openly emotional in response to the losses that she suffers: 'vous n'êtes pas la seule. Moi aussi on m'a convoqué mon homme. Moi aussi le calvaire je le bois jusqu'à la lie. Et moi qui me console? Qui me mouche?' (*Voile*, p.284). Pauline admits that she suffers, making a biblical allusion to 'le calvaire' to suggest hyperbolically both the extent of her pain and her accepting, uncomplaining attitude towards it. Her caustic tone suggests that she is taking some satisfaction in taunting her apparently helpless neighbour. Combined with contempt for Akhmatova's behaviour is jealousy of Akhmatova's ability to maintain close friendships. Pauline does not have close friends and, under a regime where informing on friends and neighbours was commonplace and well rewarded by the government, having a group of trustworthy friends is portrayed by her as a luxury. Pauline turns her jealousy into contempt, making the desire for consolation or sympathy, or even to share pain, a sign of weakness.

Later, when some affection seems to develop between the two women, Pauline reads Akhmatova's poem 'Un rêve':

> Un rêve:
> 'Mon escalier est noir. Il manque au monde sa lune de 30 watts.
> Je suis morte.
> Je pense: quand j'étais vivante l'attente me rongeait les poumons. Je suis morte et l'attente ronge le silence.
> Mon escalier est noir. Un encrier sans encre. S'il venait à passer et ne me trouvait pas?

> Allumez, crié-je! C'est un rêve. Mais qui ne finit pas'.
> Je n'ai rien compris. C'est un rêve ça? J'ai l'impression pourtant qu'il me fait de la peine. (*Voile*, p.338)

Akhmatova's poem centres on the pain that she feels at the loss of her son but, perhaps significantly, takes as its starting point an everyday irritation—the loss of the lightbulbs in the communal hallway– that was shared with Pauline (even if Pauline was in fact the one guilty of taking the lightbulbs to sell on the black market).[19] When Pauline reads the poem, emotion precedes conscious comprehension, and so there is an emotional impact even when she does not understand. Akhmatova has inspired Pauline to feel in sympathy with her but, unlike the duped sympathetic spectator whom Brecht wished to awaken, there is some evidence that Pauline may become less satisfied with her own position as a result of her empathy. When Akhmatova eagerly seizes on a letter from Siberia, from her son, Pauline says bitterly: 'Alors il est encore là-bas? Vous avez de la chance. Le mien ne m'écrit pas' (*Voile*, p. 344). The desire to contextualise Akhmatova's pain, to reject any attempts to make the poet's suffering unique or superlative, has been a prominent part of Pauline's interactions with Akhmatova throughout the play. It is only here, however, shortly after reading Akhmatova's poem describing the pain she feels as a mother to an absent son, that Pauline makes reference to her own lost son and admits her regret and jealousy, rather than disguising them behind her proud

[19] Kornei Chukovsky (the father of Lydia Chukovskaya) describes finding the hallway dark when he went to visit Akhmatova – thefts of this kind, or failures to maintain buildings properly, seem to have been common in the USSR (Kornei Chukovsky, 'From my Diary', in *Anna Akhmatova and her Circle*, ed. by Konstantin Polivanonv, pp. 92-100 (p. 94)).

stoicism. Reading Akhmatova's poem could be the first step towards critique and resistance to the state, for Pauline.

In an Oxford Amnesty lecture given in 1992, Cixous claimed that the most important lesson taught by poetry is that 'in times of injustice, the "subject" of pain is not me, but you. Your pain makes my own more bitter and more generous'.[20] Certainly this movement can be seen in Pauline's reaction to reading Akhmatova's poem: as well as speaking openly about her emotions, she begins to treat Akhmatova with greater kindness, giving her tea after she has had an argument with Chukovskaya and offering to help her to find a suit for her son when he is released. Photographs in the Sphinx Theatre company archives suggest that in the stage production Pauline even danced when she heard the news that Akhmatova's son was returning home, indicating some genuine happiness. These are not quite the same as the examples of the material help between friends that I will discuss later, since Pauline profits from the exchanges – financially, in the case of the suit, and in the case of the tea, gaining an opportunity to boast of her prowess in procuring black market goods – but they do at least show some concern for the comfort of her neighbour. Through her portrayal of the relationship between Pauline and Akhmatova in *Voile*, Cixous suggests that writing to express pain can be a useful political gesture that creates a degree of solidarity and cooperation between people suffering under oppressive regimes.

[20] Hélène Cixous, 'We Who Are Free, Are We Free?', trans. by Chris Miller, *Critical Inquiry* 19.2 (1993), 201–219 (p. 206). I have not been able to find a French version of the text, which was originally given as an Oxford Amnesty Lecture in 1992.

Creating distribution networks

The clandestine ways in which Ahkmotava is obliged to write and distribute her texts in order to avoid the censors, however, lead to other ethical and political issues. Akhmatova insists that Lydia Chukovskaya take on the demanding role of safeguard for her poetry, remembering the verses that the worried poet does not wish to write on paper that could incriminate her. At one point Chukovskaya rebukes Akhmatova for making these demands:

> Ecrivez vos poèmes, Anna Andreievna, je vous en prie. Notez-les et délivrez-moi. Je veux vivre sans trembler pour vos vers plus que pour ma propre fille. Et sans user mes yeux à relire vos traductions quand je n'ai pas fini les miennes. Et laissez-moi pleurer mes morts avec mes propres mots. (*Voile*, p. 308)

In her journals, the real historical Lydia Chukovskaya described how Akhmatova would pass her verses to memorise:

> Suddenly, in mid-conversation, she would fall silent and, signalling to me with her eyes at the ceiling and walls, she would get a scrap of paper and a pencil; then she would loudly say something very mundane: 'Would you like some tea?' or 'You're very tanned', then she would cover the scrap in hurried handwriting and pass it to me. I would read the poems and, having memorized them, would hand them back to her in silence. 'How early autumn came this year',

> Anna Andreevna would say loudly and, striking a match would burn the paper over an ashtray.
> It was a ritual: hands, match, ashtray – a beautiful and mournful ritual. (*Journals*, p. 6)

Akhmatova's practical fears of surveillance are evident from the warning, communicative glances at her surroundings and from her habit of covering the noise of her actions with 'mundane' phrases, everyday speech that is put to use to disguise and protect the poetry happening illicitly below. The set of repeated gestures accompanying the memorisation of the poetry are also a 'beautiful and mournful ritual', and memorising the poetry becomes like a religious act of faith and devotion to the poet, to the verses, and also, through what is 'mournful' in the ritual, to the poets and the possibilities for different poetry that are lost to Akhmatova and her contemporaries. The moment of burning the verses, the moment at which, practically, Chukovskaya's memory of the verse becomes its sole record, seems to make the verse and Chukovskaya's duty towards it both sacred.

Watching *Voile*, the audience is drawn in to the intimate circle of the poet and her clandestine distribution network through their glimpse into Akhmatova's domestic life, as it is staged by Cixous. Like Lydia Chukovskaya, the play's audience receive the literary product as spoken words that then live a fragile existence in their memories, perhaps to be treasured and passed on. This is, however, the limit of the similarities between Cixous's audience and Lydia Chukovskaya. Potentially subversive theatre performances were possible in Soviet Russia, but they were relatively rare and difficult to organise, particularly

in large cities, where surveillance was tighter.[21] The decision to discuss the ethics of secrecy and censorship in the public forum of the theatre in 1990s Britain can therefore make for an uneasy juxtaposition that underlines the audience's privilege whilst reminding them of its fragility and of their responsibilities. Even in the Twenty-first Century where debates around internet surveillance, privacy and censorship are once again key political questions, the stakes are not on the same scale as those that Akhmatova must calculate. Their relative privilege leaves the audience with an even greater responsibility to listen to the demands of Akhmatova and Nadejda at the end of the play, and remember the poetry and the poets of the USSR (*Voile*, p. 350). In choosing to focus on the clandestine distribution of poetry, Cixous presents theatre as one of a number of possible spaces in which engagement with the ethics and politics of writing is possible and encourages deeper consideration of the different forms that engagement might take in literature.

In *Women's Works in Stalin's Time*, Beth Holmgren describes how methods and rituals for the circulation of texts, such as those described by Chukovskaya and Akhmatova became commonplace, and suggests the impact that they had on reader and writer:

> These desperate, ingenious modes of production and preservation complicated and intensified the relationship

[21] Mark Zaitsev tracks the history of censorship of Soviet theatre until 1975, and notes that the weight of censorship during the late Stalinist period meant that the theatre-going public of Moscow were writing Russian theatre's eulogy by the early 1950s, but that this sort of censorship was not applied equally to theatres in the non-Russian republics, which were distant from 'the seat of power' traditionally enjoyed 'greater freedom of expression' than Muscovite theatres. See Mark Zaitsev, 'Soviet Theatre Censorship', *TDR*, 19.2 (1975), 119-28 (pp. 120, 125).

> between writer and reader. Given the terrible penalties involved, their interaction resembled nothing so much as a conspiracy. The writer put the reader at the same risk he or she had assumed in creating; both had to rely on mutual trust and maintain a fervent belief in the high value of uncensored art. Yet because responsibility for the text was shared, the reader was empowered as well as endangered. He or she became, in effect, a joint owner of a manuscript, even a joint archive for memorized texts. In a few cases, regrettably, this joint responsibility and ownership deviated into a kind of embezzlement when unscrupulous readers sold the materials entrusted to them. More often however, this writer-reader collaboration resulted in a dispersion of creative authority and an intriguing confusion of literary roles. (Holmgren, *Women's Works*, p. 8)

More than a reaction to censorship or a significant ritual, in Holmgren's description these methods for circulating texts become a 'conspiracy', suggesting deliberate and considered breaking of the law that brings with it some revolutionary potential or intent. Writer and reader are drawn closely together, practically, since the nature of these clandestine networks of readership meant that every reader had to have some personal connection to the author or to a member of their circle, which expanded each time that a reader is added. The most hopeful readings of this sort of network could argue that they are close to the sort of positive community of affection and shared interest (here, as Holmgren has it, a shared 'fervent belief in the high value of uncensored art')

the creation of which, I will argue, is posited by Cixous as one potential form that an ethical response to injustice could take.[22]

These collaborative methods of creating, recording, and distributing texts are not new but, as Elsie Mundal shows, were common in thirteenth-century Scandinavia where Snorri Sturluson was writing (a connection that the historical Anna Akhmatova also seems to have made, and Nadejda Mandelstam records that she would refer with black humour to 'the advantage of our pre-Gutenberg epoch' (Mandelstam, 'Akhmatova', p. 105)). In medieval Iceland, one dictating author, having collected material from different oral or perhaps written sources, would recite a text to several scribes, who would note down his words and perhaps add their own emphases, expanding on the areas that they felt to be of particular interest.[23] This writing practice confuses the question of authorship or ownership of texts, particularly since it means that a number of conflicting versions of a text might have equally valid claims to authenticity. However, medieval modes of collective authorship were not primarily a means of democratising the ownership of the text, fostering a community with readers, or resisting oppression (although they might unintentionally have had this impact); first of all, they stemmed from the technologies available at the time (any reproduction of a text would have to be done by hand) and the concentration of literacy to small classes of people and particular locations (overwhelmingly, priests or scholars in universities or monasteries). Russian women poets'

[22] See particularly, Chapter Three, although I begin to discuss the friendship and community of the three women in *Voile* at the end of this chapter.
[23] Elsie Mundal, 'Modes of Authorship and Types of Text in Old Norse Culture', in *Modes of Authorship in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Slavica Rankoć (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2012), pp. 211-26 (p. 224).

distribution methods and networks are not politically radical in themselves, then, but they are potentially subversive insofar as they constitute a rejection of other available means of publication. The mechanical reproduction and large scale distribution of texts by a single author is a system which, *Voile* shows, lends itself well to the exercise of state control and censorship, since the single, identifiable author might be the target of surveillance and intimidation, and the relatively large companies required to publish and distribute texts are dependent on government approval to function.

In her account of her relationship with Akhmatova, the historical Nadejda Mandelstam describes how the process of memorising poetry (Ossip's or Akhmatova's) was some comfort whilst she was facing the possibility of arrest: 'the important thing was to know [the poems] by heart. If I forgot them, what would be left for me in a prison camp?' (Mandelstam, 'Akhmatova', p. 127). Having memorised the poetry she could never be completely without resources, wherever she might be taken. Holmgren's description of the practice likewise highlights the positive potential of these forms of distribution to leave the reader/repository 'empowered', able to take advantage of 'a dispersion of creative authority' to feel a new sense of ownership of the text. Cixous's Chukovskaya, on the other hand, frequently calls attention to the dangers that she faces in her role. Besides the threat of arrest, Chukovskaya is afraid that Akhmatova's poetry might take away her ability to 'pleurer mes morts avec mes propres mots' (*Voile*, p. 308). Chukovskaya feels colonised by Akhmatova's words, which crowd out her own responses to emotional pain rather than, as they did for Pauline, opening up new possibilities for response. Holmgren

suggested that the new methods of circulating texts created 'an intriguing confusion of literary roles'. Cixous's play suggests that a hierarchy is already established between these roles, and those who protect or circulate verses risk becoming only vessels for that verse, no longer capable of spontaneous creativity. Chukovskaya's fears are particularly interesting given Chukovskaya's own position as a writer and in the context of Cixous's own writing practice, in which allusion and citation serve to make her writing richer and deeper.

The historical Akhmatova's introduction to her 'Requiem' cycle of poems is also significant for its praise of the practice of using other people's expressions of pain in poetry:

> I should like to call you all by name,
> But they have lost the lists…
>
> I have woven for them a great shroud
> Out of the poor words I overheard them speak.
>
> I remember them always and everywhere,
> And if they shut my tormented mouth,
>
> Through which a hundred million of my people cry,
> Let them remember me also…[24]

[24] Anna Akhmatova, 'Epilogue' to 'Requiem', in *Anna Akhmatova, Selected Poems*, trans. by D.M Thomas, foreword by Carol Ann Duffy (London: Vintage, 2009), 87-96 (pp. 95-6).

This epilogue is addressed to the other women who waited in line with Akhmatova in front of the Three Crosses prison, where her son Lev Gumilev was interned. Unable to identify the women who were with her by name (because a shadowy 'they' have lost the lists, a threat of erasure or an act of bureaucratic incompetence), Akhmatova has made their own 'poor' words into a poetic monument, weaving a shroud of them, sewing them into a beautiful device for mourning. Early in Cixous's play, Chukovskaya describes her hopes for the publication of Akhmatova's work: 'vous verrez: quand sera publiée l'œuvre d'Akhmatova, ses poèmes comme des larmes brûlantes tomberont sur vos poitrines glacées et ce sera la fin de l'hiver dans vos pensées' (*Voile*, p. 238). The hot, immediate pain expressed in Akhmatova's poetry is experienced through the chest, heart, of the listener, and serves to thaw their thoughts, releasing them from a winter that could be apathy, silence, or suffering. Addressing her comments to an undefined 'vous', Chukovskaya imagines that the whole of Russia might be the audience for Akhmatova's beautiful suffering, which may become the source of a revolution led by emotions. The words that Cixous gives to Chukovskaya here reflect the sentiment that is at play in Akhmatova's poem, where the words of the few hundred women who waited in front of the prison, passed through the 'tormented' mouth of the poet, become the cries of 'a hundred million of my people'. In her autobiographical prose, the writer who was born Anna Gorenko talks about her maternal grandmother 'the Tatar princess Akhmatova (whose surname I took as my pen name, having no idea that I wanted to be a Russian poet)—was descended from Genghis Khan' ('Akhmatova on Akhmatova', p. 6). For all that she claims to have had no (conscious) desire to become a national poet of Russia, Akhmatova has clearly

worked, from the beginning of her career, to tie her poetry to a long Tatar (Russian ethnic minority) history, stretching back to Genghis Khan. Later dubbed 'Anna of all the Russias' by Marina Tsvetayeva, Akhmatova sets herself up as the mouthpiece of a suffering Russia.

Writing and weaving

There seem to be some parallels between Akhmatova's practice when she brings together the voices and experiences of different women into a poetic account of loss, and Snorri Sturluson's work as a historian. Gabriel Turville-Petre argues that the value of the historical Snorri Sturluson's work lies in his ability to bring together conflicting stories, removing inconsistencies to produce a single, coherent narrative; Dobson has pointed out that the production of a 'closed narrative' is also the ultimate (if unrealisable) goal of Cixous's Snorri (*Scene of Writing*, p. 130).[25] Snorri is not unique in this attitude towards writing; the medieval author was a 'bricoleur' who aimed to create a 'true' narrative by bringing together information from oral or written sources.[26] In *L'Histoire*, the account that Snorri gives of the love story between Brunhild, Kriemhild, Sigfrid, and Gunther ends 'dit le Récit/ À moins qu'il y ait un Récit pour dire le contraire'; he cannot give the audience any further information because what he has already recounted 'c'est tout ce qu'on m'a dit' (*L'Histoire*, p. 24). Snorri does not portray himself as the originator or creator of the story that he is telling. Rather, he claims to be transmitting what he has learnt from immediate oral

[25] Gabriel Turville-Petre, *Origins of Icelandic Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), pp. 224-5.
[26] Michael C. Drout, "I am Large, I Contain Multitudes": The Medieval Author in Mimetic Terms', in Slavica Ranković, ed., *Modes of Authorship in the Middle Ages*, pp. 30-51 (pp. 34-5).

sources – ‘ce qu’on m’a dit’ – and also from an established (literary) tradition – *le Récit*. He does however acknowledge his work as editor and curator of this tradition when he admits that there may be a ‘Récit’ that would tell the opposite story, but which he has not related here. In ‘Requiem’, Akhmatova also creates a single narrative out of diverse stories when she makes her own experiences emblematic of the experiences of all of the women who queue in front of the prison, as she is invited to do by one woman in the queue who approaches her to ask ‘Can you describe this?’, to which Akhmatova replies ‘Yes, I can’ (‘Requiem’, p. 87).[27] Although both writers bring stories together into new writing, their different approaches to this process are highly indicative of their understanding of the political function and ethical duties of the artist. Snorri is a historian whose patron is the king, and he works to create the single, officially sanctioned, historical narrative. Akhmatova’s ‘Requiem’ is a challenge to the official state narrative that denies that people are wrongfully arrested. Snorri’s synthesis is intended to hide differences and disagreements in his sources, whereas Akhmatova makes a virtue of the fact that her work draws on a range of different, subjective experiences, which she ‘weaves’ together to make something coherent and beautiful that does not have to erase the individual tone of its different threads.

The historical Akhmatova’s description of writing ‘Requiem’ as a form of weaving (‘I have woven for them a great shroud’, she says of the women who queue with her) is particularly notable because a link between writing and weaving is significant in *L’Histoire* as well: at the beginning of the play, Edda

[27] Cixous also cites this story in ‘De la scène’, p. 23.

has already woven a tapestry (fore)telling the story that Snorri is attempting to write. These plays are not the only places where Cixous has linked writing and weaving: in 'De la scène de l'Inconscient à la scène de l'Histoire', for example Cixous states that 'mes textes sont des tapiserries, qui se tissent de manière horizontale' ('De la scène', p. 31). The link between the two forms of artistic endeavour is underlined in Mesguich's staging of the *L'Histoire* where, as Dobson describes, there is 'a consistent visual notation of cloth and fabric to signify narrative' (*Scene of Writing*, p.133). In response to Snorri's desire to know the secrets of the story of Kriemhild and Brunhild, Edda replies that she has them: 'Tout est déjà tissé. Tout dans ma tapisserie. Tu veux que je te montre?' (*L'Histoire*, p. 95). For Roger-Daniel Bensky, this offer is '*obscène*':

> Ce sont les deux '*vieux*' de la pièce qui seront obscènes ; Sturla, laquais des deux, veut '*du sang*'; Edda la pythonisse veut '*montrer sa tapisserie*'. Mais l'obscénité est dans la voix, non pas dans les gestes burlesques. Edda, **dit Daniel**, aura, pour tenter d'intéresser Snorri, '*une pudeur de vieille pute*'. (En fait, Edda est moitié putain antique, moitié scarabée. Mais elle nous réserve une surprise de taille pour la fin). (*Cixous/Mesguich*, p. 53)

The sexuality that Bensky reads in this offer suggests a connection between tapestry and (female) genitals that is particularly appropriate to Cixous, who in *La jeune née* offered this warning to those who uphold the phallogocentric system 'qu'ils tremblent, les prêtres, on va leur *montrer* nos sextes !' (*La Jeune née*, p. 125). Despite the *pudeur* that Mesguich attributes to Edda, the action of showing (Cixous italicizes the verb) genitals/writing to these men is claimed in

her speech as a forceful, joyful act of defiance in a system that silences women largely by ignoring their discourse. Edda's desire to show Snorri her sexte is read by Bensky as '*obscène*', by semantic and homonymous association off-scene, something not fit to be put on the stage.[28] Although Bensky insists that Judeo-Christian images and mythology are important for understanding Mesguich's production of *L'Histoire*, his argument here does not seem to posit Edda as a Biblical prostitute – she is no Mary Magdalene, eager to be redeemed – but rather claims that Edda is a woman who is perversely (despite her age, ugliness, and smell) still certain of her own attractiveness, and eager if not obliged to proclaim it to others. This old woman's creation, her tapestry, is as *obscène* as her sexuality, neither of which are considered to be of interest by the male characters (or male commentator).

Cixous has elsewhere used the image of weaving to describe feminine writing, when she describes the different reactions of her family to the death of her father:

> Et alors qu'advint-il de la famille ? Chacun fit un geste pour saturer l'abîme. Ma mère devint sage-femme. Mon frère est presque sage-femme, il est pédiatre. Chacun de nous s'affaira autour du processus de mise au monde. Moi je me mis à tisser le temps. Une année sans livre, cela ne m'est jamais arrivé, une année sans tissu de vie (Cixous, 'Conversation avec l'âne', p. 98).

[28] Although Rosette C. Lamont has linked Edda to the tradition of the *Commedia dell'arte*, giving her a powerful on-stage lineage. See Rosette C. Lamont, 'Ariane Mnouchkine/Hélene Cixous: The Meeting of Two Chimaeras', in *Hélène Cixous: Critical Impressions*, ed. by Lee A. Jacobus and Regina Barreca, pp. 225-46 (p. 243).

Writing is a way of weaving time, creating it out of pre-existing strands, a process that is also a birth of sorts; it is what Cixous does whilst her mother and brother become midwives, and weaving is anyway women's work. The book that Cixous creates becomes 'tissu de vie', woven out of her life, but also living tissue, living flesh. Weaving-writing is a creative, corporeal action. Read alongside Bensky's affirmations of the obscenity of women's bodies and women's creativity, the political value of this sort of fleshy weaving becomes evident.

Despite the pride that she has taken in her tapestry, Edda later proposes its destruction:

> EDDA: Méchante, moi?! Vous me faites tort!
> Mais si je pouvais d'un mot arrêter le fleuve Fatalité,
> Je crierais: Paix! Paix!
> Essaie de couper l'eau avec une épée!
> Vous croyez que j'aime la mort?
> SNORRI: Alors grand-mère, cesse de nous décourager
> Rien n'est décidé. Les mauvais hiers sont passés.
> À nous de galoper demain du bon côté.
> EDDA: C'est bon! Prenez ma tapisserie, coupez les fils,
> Détruisez-la, repartez à zéro. Faites comme si la mémoire
> n'existait pas. (*L'Histoire*, pp. 115-16)

These words are to some extent ironic, and after Snorri and Barout do leave to attempt to change the course of events at the castle, she dismisses them as 'ces

fous' and 'les enfants' (close to the labels that Akhmatova feared for herself after the censors altered her work), whose hopes for social change are naïve or mad, and predicts that, after the attempt at intervention 'Alors nous verrons si ce sera honte sur moi ou honte sur toi! /A toi de jouer! Espérons! / Moi aussi je rêve de liberté' (*L'Histoire*, p. 117). Her position here is again somewhat paradoxical: she would like to have the freedom to act and to bring peace, but she believes strongly that the story's events are predetermined, and she will be vindicated only when the story ends with the death that she fears. Edda is disparaging about the possibility that the course of fate could be halted 'd'un mot', that writing or language could so simply change the world, that the author has this position of power. Significantly, Edda realises that creating peace will necessitate the destruction of her own artistic creation, her tapestry, which has earlier been shown to hold predictions of future events, but here appears as a memory. There is something threatening in her description of the destruction of the tapestry, of Snorri cutting its threads, an action which, for the Norse divine weavers of time the Norns meant the death of the mortal whose thread they cut. Her tapestry has been the preserver of memory, and so of the proper order of things, and so its destruction might be considered a politically revolutionary act, apart from the fact that the replacement narrative will come not from the challenging figure of Edda, but from Snorri, who is elsewhere employed as an official court historian. Lamont has suggested that amnesia is a 'malady' in the play, dangerous to the characters because it prevents them from acting, but the complete amnesia that Edda is advocating here is presented as a vital

precondition for changing fate.[29] Peace means the end of a cycle of revenge which, seemingly, can only be achieved by the erasure of the sources of past grievances.

Stealing texts

In much of Cixous's writing about writing, the link between writing and stealing is more prominent than the image of writing as weaving. Whereas elsewhere in Cixous's work, she has tended to suggest that literary and linguistic *vol* can be a valuable politically subversive gesture, in the plays the picture is not immediately as positive. In *Voile*, the first account of a theft of language comes when Akhmatova recites the poem 'Une Larme':

> AKHMATOVA: Vous vous souvenez de mon poème: 'Une Larme'?
> NADEJDA: Non.
> AKHMATOVA: 'C'était comme si j'étais suspendue à mes propres cils, et mûrissant et grossissant…' Vous vous souvenez?
> NADEJDA: Et jouant tous les rôles de la pièce, jusqu'à ce que l'on m'écrase'. Je me souviens très bien de ce poème. Mais il n'est pas de vous, il est d'Ossip.[30]

[29] See Rosette C. Lamont 'Review of *L'Histoire (qu'on ne connaîtra jamais)*', *World Literature Today*, 69.2 (1995), 322-3 (p. 322).
[30] *Voile*, p. 258. This poem seems to have been an invention of Cixous's, and I have not been able to find it being attributed to either Mandelstam or Akhmatova. I am grateful to Benjamin A. Taylor for his invaluable help in looking through Russian sources.

The women have a lengthy argument about the author of the poem, and finally Akhmatova concedes that it is possible that it was Ossip who wrote it. Having memorised many of Ossip Mandelstam's poems, Akhmatova finds that she can no longer differentiate between her own verses and those written by her dear friend. It appears, though, that she neither feels stifled nor silenced by the words, as Chukovskaya does, nor feels that they have allowed her to access new understandings of her emotions, as was the case for Pauline. Rather, Akhmatova's own, existing, pain, which she knows and has written about elsewhere, is here mapped on to somebody else's words, which match her own emotions so closely that Akhmatova does not realise that the transfer is taking place. The confusion suggests the closeness of Mandelstam and Akhmatova, who have suffered through similar experiences as writers in the USSR (although with the vital difference that Mandelstam was arrested and executed), and have faced them with a similar attitude. Yet these two similar sets of experiences of pain are not interchangeable, as Nadejda Mandelstam's bitter reproaches to Akhmatova clearly show. The confusion surrounding the 'Tear' poem suggests the shortcomings of the ways in which Akhmatova expresses a nation's pain in her poetry: as Nadejda Mandelstam's anger demonstrates, Akhmatova's appropriation of the language of others may be resented by those who have suffered.

Holmgren claimed that, in the USSR, the author who had to rely on individuals to memorise and distribute their poetry had to be wary of 'a kind of embezzlement when unscrupulous readers sold the materials entrusted to them' (*Women's Works,* p. 8) Although what is at stake for Akhmatova and Nadejda

is the 'ownership' of the pain that led to the poem (rather than any financial rights to the poem), the idea of *jouissance*, in the legal sense of the 'libre disposition de quelque chose' does come into play (*jouissance* often interests Cixous, although elsewhere she generally uses it in the sense of sexual pleasure). Akhmatova might be permitted to 'enjoy' free use of Mandelstam's poetry, even to express her own emotions through means of his verse, but a problem arises in the moment at which she claims it as her own, effectively excluding Nadejda and Nadejda's experience. There is also an implicit warning to the audience here; both Nadejda and Akhmatova remember Ossip Mandelstam reciting the poem, and so it is clear that a performer's body is not enough to guard against this type of appropriation. Cixous reminds her audience that they are open to both the risks and the benefits of identifying closely with other people's expressions of pain, but rather than working to prevent forms of identification between audience, actor, and character (Brecht's response to identification) Cixous prefers to draw attention to their potential ethical, emotional, and political costs and benefits, presenting a moral dilemma rather than an aesthetic law.

In *L'Histoire* when Barout, the rabbi and an outsider to the court, is suspected of stealing Snorri's manuscript, the consequences are more dramatic. The two men had formed a friendship based on their similarity; both had arrived as outsiders to the court where the play takes place, both are interested in telling the story of Brunhild and Kriemhild (*L'Histoire*, p. 25), and Greta dismisses

both as ‘menteurs’ (*L’Histoire*, p. 26).[31] Despite their complicity, when Snorri finds that his manuscripts are missing, he is quick to suspect Barout of having taken the texts that are ‘mes organes, mon cœur, mon cerveau’ (ibid., p. 147). Snorri imagines that his writing is of his body but, unlike Cixous’s bodily writing which she describes using metaphors of pregnancy and lactation that suggest that her writing is both of her body and independent from it, here the language of the body is used to suggest Snorri’s absolute ownership of his text and his right to defend it with violent force. Without pausing to interrogate Barout, who is burning papers, Snorri ‘se jette sur Barout et le frappe’ (ibid., p. 147). The blows that he delivers here are fatal, and when Snorri discovers that the papers that the rabbi has been burning are not his manuscripts it is already too late for him to reverse his actions. As he lies dying, Barout delivers his last words to Snorri and to the audience:

> BAROUT: Quel dommage! Nous aurions pu faire quelque chose de beau ensemble!!
> Pour moi c’est fini! Écoute encore: J’ai vu Hagen –
> SNORRI: Ça m’est égal! Pardonne-moi! oh je suis impardonnable!
> BAROUT: Dans ton livre, n’oublie pas Barout
> (*il meurt*)
> SNORRI: T’oublier? O ami, tu m’es devenu inoubliable!
> Comment ai-je pu frapper?! D’où venait la colère? le poignard?

[31] Angry at the story that Barout and Snorri are telling about the supposed early love affair between Brunhild and Sigfrid, Greta states that ‘Tous les juifs sont menteurs, et les poètes aussi’ (*L’Histoire*, p. 26): Cixous also associates Jewishness with (feminine) writing in ‘Sorties’, where she coins the terme *juifemme* (Cixous, *La Jeune née*, p. 187).

> Ce n'est pas ma faute! Je ne peux pas faire une chose pareille! Non! C'est mon père! Ah! Quelle horreur! (*L'Histoire*, p. 148)

Barout reacts to Snorri's violence with sadness and regret; he is not angry and is still determined to help his killer. In this way, Barout may be understood as one in a line of Cixous's 'saintly' characters, who are unwavering in their non-violence, whatever the personal cost.[32] Barout thinks of his death as sad because of the loss of his friendship of Snorri and of what they could have achieved together, and does not express his physical pain, nor any fear of dying. His selflessness and his acceptance of the violence of which he is a victim would certainly seem to be ethically praiseworthy (unlike Pauline in *Voile*, Barout does not channel or transfigure his own suffering into the ill-treatment of others), and his continued concentration on positive changes that he could have made in the world, a politically useful characteristic. In his death, Barout is transfigured from Snorri's amiable companion into a noble, wronged, unforgettable hero, although an obvious ethical and political question here is whether a system of values that requires this sort of reaction to violence is just. In *L'Histoire*, the injustice of Barout's death is evident, but ultimately the brief incident does not constitute an in-depth critique of a politics of non-violence, but rather functions as an allegory for the potential for violence that might come with an attempt to retain complete control over a text.

[32] I am thinking particularly of Gandhi in *Indiade* or the Mother in *Ville Parjure*. For discussion of saintly self-sacrifice in Cixous's plays, see Chapter Five on sacrifice.

Writing death

When Cixous discusses the role of death in her own writing in 'La Venue à l'écriture', the emphasis is on mourning and not violence:

> J'ai d'abord écrit en vérité pour barrer la mort. A cause d'un mort. La plus cruelle, celle qui ne fait grâce de rien, l'irréparable. Il s'agit de ceci: tu meurs pendant que je ne suis pas là. Pendant qu'Iseut n'est pas là, Tristan se tourne vers le mur et il se meurt. Ce qui se passe entre ce corps et ce mur, ce qui ne se passe pas, me transperce de douleur, me fait écrire (Cixous, 'La Venue, pp. 12-13).

As it does for Snorri, death gives Cixous a creative impetus.[33] She writes because of the pain that her father's death has caused her, but with the knowledge that this harm is 'irréparable'; she will not efface the pain by catharsis or by denial. Instead, she hopes to 'barrer la mort', erect a written barricade against it. Whereas it is traditionally imagined that the author writes to assure his own immortality, here writing against death is related to the pain of the loss of a loved other – for Cixous it is the loss of her father although, with her references to the Wagnerian couple of Tristan and Isolde, she links writing to the death of any loved one, and not the father in particular.

[33] For futher analysis of Cixous's relationship to death in her writing, see for example Susan Sellers, '"Writing is learning to die": Hélène Cixous and the School of the Dead', *OLR*, 24 (2002), 97-111.

Snorri, by contrast, is motivated by self-pity and his own new position as murderer to act differently after the death of Barout. He does not gain the sort of openness to other discourses that is typical of Cixous's language; rather than listen to Barout's final words, he cuts them short with his demand for pardon and his lament that he is unpardonable (which may be read as a rejection of the father to whom he attributes the crime when he says 'c'est mon père', as self-pity or, more charitably, as recognition of the brutality of his crime). Denied this final chance to make a difference in the narrative of Kriemhild and Brunhild, Barout becomes unforgettable only as a victim of Snorri's unmotivated violence. Cixous's portrayal of Barout's death might be understood as a comment on the position of victims in history. Barout's death, and particularly the silencing of his final words by his (now) regretful killer, point to wider ethical and political issues for the writing of history. Cixous suggests how the enforced silence of victims can allow them to be easily ignored, or if they are remembered to be primarily the objects of pity, characterised by their weakness.

The audience is invited to have some measure of pity for Snorri, who seems to feel genuine sadness for the death of his friend and for the role that he played in it; in certain (particularly, religious) models of ethics, this ability to recognise and to repent for a crime is valued above all. Yet Snorri is quick to attempt to find ways to deny or to diminish his personal responsibility for the crime, and when he finds that Barout has died, he shouts out 'Ce n'est pas ma faute! Je ne peux pas faire une chose pareille! Non! C'est mon père! Ah! Quelle horreur!'. In a reversal of the movement of original sin, the crimes of Snorri are visited on

his father who in *L'Histoire* is the representative of a long and bloody (masculine) tradition that requires death in storytelling. In the moment when he kills Barout, Snorri has become too much like the father whom he has attempted to reject throughout the play, and his recognition of this contributes to the disgust that he feels for his actions. Referring to his usually peaceful nature, Snorri conveniently forgets the distress that he felt at losing the manuscripts that were his organs. The author-character's speech transforms an incident that was the violent expression of Snorri's jealous protectiveness over his creation into the instant of the defeat of the god-ghosts' bloody modes of storytelling.

Writing and maternity

Another key figure in Cixous's descriptions of *écriture féminine*, and one closely related to the argument over the 'Tear' poem, where the two women both declare themselves the 'mère' of the poem (and Nadejda Mandelstam declares her husband to be its 'père', an interesting sexed distinction in the context of Cixous's model of writing) is the connection of writing and maternity. A particularly striking example of literary motherhood in the plays, and one which links it directly to a potential for political change, is the old woman Edda in *L'Histoire*. In an angry aside to the audience, the invisible Edda describes her understanding of her position in the story in relation to its other characters:

> Tous sont partis?
> On m'écrase? On m'abandonne?
> Tous des crapules.

> Accidents, maladies, paralysies
> Je ferai venir les armées de fourmis
> Ils croient que je n'existe plus
> Parce qu'on ne me voit plus ?
> Comme si l'on pouvait complètement anéantir
> La mère des secrets !
> Reine, je l'étais déjà au commencement du monde, dans le lointain passé
> Je le serai encore quand depuis cent millions d'années vous, vous serez totalement morts et oubliés.
> J'ai du bon poison
> J'ai de la bonne farine
> J'irai m'asseoir sur leurs sièges
> Et je pisserai, je tisserai, je souillerai
> Ils vont me sentir passer
> Et repasser. (*L'Histoire*, p. 93)

Edda is 'la mère des secrets', their origin, who has nurtured them and carried them in her body, but who cannot possess them (once 'possessed', heard and understood, a secret no longer exists as a secret). Cixous's maternal places a great deal of emphasis on closeness, and Edda begins here with anger at having been left alone. She is highly sensitive to this personal slight against her which figures as physical injury ('on m'écrase') and emotional cruelty ('on m'abandonne'), and moreover reacts to it by cursing those who have hurt her – she is far from being the weak or passive mother figure that a masculine-dominated tradition has created. This difference is reflected in the casting of the character of Edda. Played by a young, bald, man in Daniel Mesguich's production, the elderly female character Edda's bald head could recall a number of social practices, including the shaving of the heads of monks in a number of

religious traditions as a mark of religious devotion, or the shaving of the heads of women accused of forbidden forms of sex (as in the punishment of women accused of having had sexual relationships with occupying German forces in France at the end of World War Two) – as such her baldness simultaneously evokes purity and deviance and also suggests masculine markers of ageing (male pattern baldness) and/or a range of illnesses that result in the loss of hair. Importantly, though, the still-transgressive use of a male body to portray a female character shows that the potential for motherhood coexists with the potential for access to both male and female economies.

Edda can be related to the Erinyes, the mythical Greek Furies who feature in Cixous's 1999 play *La Ville Parjure*, and like them she brings the potential for both plenty and destruction since, as she tells us with her sing-song refrain 'J'ai du bon poison/ J'ai de la bonne farine'. The link between the two sets of characters is partly visual – they are old women, and appear with heavy make-up and strange dark clothing on stage. Like the Erinyes, Edda has seen her powers diminished over time, but whilst she is bitterly aware that she is now viewed as an anachronistic irrelevance, she remains certain that she will regain her former prominence and ultimately outlive even the memories of the people around her. Yet Edda does not imagine herself creating a new order, but rather hopes to usurp the positions of power held by current leaders, altering them with her body: 'J'irai m'asseoir sur leurs sieges/Et je pisserai, je tisserai, je souillerai'. Like an animal (Rosette C. Lamont described Edda as 'reptilian' in her review of the performance, whilst the Erinyes are traditionally figured as

dogs), Edda will use her urine to mark out her territory.[34] This old woman is simultaneously god and animal, straddling both of the limits normally placed on the human. She refuses the conventional limits on behaviour imposed by the idea of the disgusting, and will stain the seats of power with her own bodily fluids, debasing and mocking them. Yet she also describes her actions as a form of weaving, indicating that she does not aim solely to usurp the positions of the old elite, but is engaged in something creative. These activities will allow Edda to be recognised by those who have now abandoned her, she believes, although she will not become visible, and instead 'Ils vont me sentir passer/ Et repasser'.[35] Edda's presence will be 'sensed' not through sight but largely through smell.[36] Claire Oboussier has talked about Kant's distinction between what he terms mechanical and chemical senses, and shows that mechanical senses (like sight) are privileged in the hierarchy over the chemical (such as smell), and so Edda's focus on smell here is not only indicative of the embrace of that which is potentially disgusting in the bodily that she shares with the Erinyes (she is happily a smelly old woman),[37] but also part of her wider strategy

[34] Lamont, 'Review', p. 322. The other animals in this speech are the 'armées de fourmis' that Edda threatens the characters who leave her with. It seems likely that there is an implicit reference to Derrida's text 'Fourmis', which was based on his contribution to a 1990 colloquium at the Centre d'études Féminines de l'Université Paris-VIII, where Cixous was also a participant. In the text, Derrida is concerned with questions of sexual difference; Edda's 'armée de fourmis' is made up of insects each one of which is 'l'aventure de la lecture et de l'interprétation', and 'fourmille de mille et mille sens, de mille et une images, de mille et une sexes'. An extract of 'Fourmis' is reprinted in Hélène Cixous and Mireille Calle-Gruber, *Photos de racines* (Paris: des femmes, 1994), pp. 123-8 (p. 123).

[35] 'Repasser' here suggests both repetition, Edda's constancy, and also, though anachronistically, the domestic scene, of ironing. This fits with the images of sewing that I have briefly suggested above, but to which I will be returning in greater detail.

[36] Jonathon Gil Harris has also discussed Cixous's treatment of the senses, arguing that she favours touch over sight, and linking this to her desire to bring together self and other. See Jonathon Gil Harris, *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), pp. 150-1.

[37] At the beginning of *The Eumenides*, the play that Cixous translated for the Théâtre du Soleil, Apollo's priestess describes the Erinyes from whom she is fleeing: 'Elles sont noires, et dégoûtantes en tout./ Elles ronflent avec des râles informes/ Et de leurs yeux suintent des gouttes détestables' (Aeschylus, *Les Eumenides*, p. 19). The Erinyes are disgusting, snore in a way that

in this speech, where she is generally making a vocal challenge (perhaps a type of *sortie*) to accepted hierarchies.[38]

Akhmatova is a very different type of mother to Edda. She is generous towards her son, and marks the moments at which his return seems likely by making attempts to provide for him materially, for instance buying him a suit from her neighbour Pauline, who has good contacts on the black market (*Voile*, p. 348). Akhmatova displays more concern for the material comfort of her son than she does for her own material comfort, and the practical work of getting the suit for him, quite different from her normal poetic occupation, is a demonstration of her love for him. This practical generosity is not entirely tied to the biological relationship of motherhood for Akhmatova in this play. She reminds Nadejda that, when the Mandelstams faced persecution by the Soviet authorities, it was only Akhmatova who would visit them and that, moreover, 'même ma paire de souliers de Tachkent, l'unique, n'ai-je pas eu envie et besoin de vous la donner à vous, Nadejda, afin que vous sautiez l'hiver d'un pied magique? Celle que m'avait confectionnée un admirateur cordonnier' (*Voile*, pp. 260-2). To support her friend, Akhmatova has deprived herself of material comfort, and also of something made for her by an admirer, intended (although not necessarily taken) as a love-token. The boots are an expensive and necessary item, particularly in the Russian winter, and were often difficult to obtain.[39] Although

is both comic and unfeminine, and are also threatening, having drops of blood oozing from their eyes.

[38] Claire Oboussier, 'Synaesthesia in Cixous and Barthes', in Diana Knight and Judith Still, eds., *Women and Representation*, (Nottingham: Women in French Occasional Papers, 1995), pp. 115-31 (p. 125).

[39] Lydia Chukovskaya describes how Akhmatova went to some lengths to recover a pair of boots for her son when she heard that he might be coming home, suggesting that, additionally, boots had become quite scarce (Chukovskaya, *Journal*, p. 31).

the gift of the suit and the gift of the shoes appear similar, the gift of the boots is used many years later as a proof of the loyalty that Nadejda must owe her friend in return, whilst the preparations for Lev's arrival are carried out with only the joy of his safe return in mind. Generosity might be extended to friends as well as children but, just as in traditional models of motherhood, it is only with her biological child that Akhmatova's generosity is uncalculated.

Generosity is not the only way of thinking about motherhood that is important in *Voile*. Akhmatova's thieving writing practice in 'Requiem', Cixous argues, is also motherly:

> In the front of the prisons, the miracle of compassion is accomplished: if Akhmatova, mother among mothers, writes with the mothers' meagre words, then the mothers are also poets among poets. And anyone, man or woman, who contemplates the crucifixion becomes a mother. ('We Who Are Free', p. 208)

The experience of queueing for her son has made Akhmatova a 'mother among mothers'; not an optimum or ideal mother but one woman in a group or community of others who share similar suffering.

Akhmatova and the mothers who are with her are on one level responding to an ethical duty of care that comes with parenthood, but significantly, groups of women have successfully repurposed this sort of maternal vigil elsewhere in the world as a political action, a form of protest – the most prominent example being

the Argentine Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, who have visited that square every Thursday since April 1977, to protest against the disappearances of their sons at the hands of the military government. The women walk in pairs around the square, since gatherings of more than three people were illegal when the protest movement began, and they all wear matching white headscarves. Their political gesture relies on theatre, and they create a spectacle that focuses international attention on the repressive practices against which they protest. The mothers have become a prominent pressure group, and their work was significant in pushing the government to admit to their crimes and to begin the identification of the remains of the victims. In Akhmatova's case, it takes the poem 'Requiem' to turn the meeting of these bereaved mothers into a protest that might hope eventually to change government practices.

In a short prose paragraph before the 'Dedication' of the poem, Akhmatova describes what prompted her to write it:

> In the fearful years of the Yezhov terror I spent seventeen months in prison queues in Leningrad. One day somebody 'identified' me. Beside me, in the queue, there was a woman with blue lips. She had, of course, never heard of me; but she suddenly came out of that trance so common to us all and whispered in my ear (everybody spoke in whispers there): 'Can you describe this?' And I said: 'Yes, I can.' And then something like the shadow of a smile crossed what had once been her face. (Akhmatova, 'Requiem', p. 87)

The moment of contact is beneficial to both women, bringing them out of their 'trance', their dazed indifference, and replacing it with, on Akhmatova's part, a determination to write this experience. When the woman's vigil, which had been tolerated by the authorities, is turned into poetry by Akhmatova, it becomes a quiet gesture of defiance, like the protest of the mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, and a refusal to allow the disappearance of the loved one.

In a parallel instant of identification in *Voile*, Cixous shows Akhmatova having a chance encounter with a woman from the prison queue:

> BABOUCHKA: (*A Akhmatova*) Ecoutez, venez ici, asseyez-vous. Je vous ai tout de suite reconnue.
> AKHMATOVA: Reconnue? Babouchka? (*Elle s'assied*)
> BABOUCHKA: Les cheveux blancs, les joues tannées, on les a bien mérités. A force et à peine on se ressemble. Moi j'étais le no. 217. (*Voile,* p. 316)

Although the play's narrative suggests that this scene takes place in a railway station, in the stage production there was only one set, dressed as Akhmatova's cramped flat. Akhmatova is recognised as a mother, as a woman who queued, and not as a poet – there is no mention of 'Requiem' in her exchange with this elderly woman, no suggestion that the instant of recognition is related to the role that Akhmatova has played in preserving their suffering. Rather, the Babouchka offers Akhmatova kindness, inviting her to sit down, on the basis of a shared suffering, marked on both of their bodies in their white hair and weather-beaten cheeks. Akhmatova may have made all of these mothers and grandmothers

poets, able to take their places amongst poets as their words have been woven into her shroud of verse, but what matters more, here, is that both queued, and suffered together in waiting for their sons. Introducing herself not by name but by the number that marked her place in the queue and indicated the place that she held in the hierarchy defined by the prison authorities, the Babouchka positions herself as just one person from a crowd with a shared experience, no more important than the others, and also indicates the extent of the Soviet government's arbitrary arrests, which touched hundreds of families. In her reading of 'Requiem', Cixous has given all of the women in the queue the position of mother and (therefore) poet, but in such a way as to, again, suggest a significant departure from the types of maternity that Cixous criticised in 'Sorties' (the motherliness forged outside the prison is open to both men and women and is not dependent on displaying socially recognised 'maternal' characteristics) and a biological maternity dependent on having physically given birth to a child (since some of those in the queue might have been waiting for father, brother, husband, lover, or friend). Rather, this long period of waiting is reminiscent of Cixous's descriptions of pregnancy: the women are patient, allow themselves to be guided by prison procedure, but they do not lose themselves completely in it; they remember their own pain. All of this, for the Akhmatova of Cixous's play, at least, happens in the expectation of her son's release, a clichéd stand-in for a (re)birth. This type of mother's potential to be a powerful politically disruptive figure is linked to an ethical duty of care that is traditionally maternal, but in Cixous's play is neither passive nor confined to the domestic sphere.

Writing and responsibility

In ‘We Who Are Free’, Cixous likens Akhmatova’s response to the woman in the queue to Abraham’s response to God as he was leading his son up Mount Moriah, and so to a Biblical tradition of ethics that is based around duty and responsibility:

> It was not Akhmatova, it was Poetry in person that gave the answer: ‘I can’. ‘I can’ has already become ‘I must’. It is a ‘here I am’. This ‘I must’ is also a right, and the right comes from seventeen months spent queueing in front of the prisons of Leningrad. (Cixous, ‘We Who Are Free’, p.207)

The same reference to Abraham recurs in *L’Histoire*, where Snorri initially responds to the gods’ interpellation with the short phrase ‘me voilà’ (*L’Histoire*, p. 10). Derrida has analysed the ethical significance of Abraham’s ‘here I am’ response to God:

> L’éthique peut donc être destinée à irresponsabiliser. Il faudrait parfois en refuser la tentation, c’est-à-dire la pente ou la facilité, au nom d’une responsabilité qui n’a pas de compte à calculer – ou à rendre à l’homme, à l’humain, à la famille, à la société, aux semblables, aux nôtres. Une telle responsabilité garde son secret, elle ne peut ni ne doit se présenter. Farouchement jalousement, elle refuse l’auto-présentation devant la violence qui consiste à demander des comptes et des justifications, à exiger la comparution devant la loi des hommes. Elle décline l’autobiographie qui est toujours autojustification, *égodicée*. Abraham *se*

> *présente* certes, mais devant Dieu, le Dieu unique, jaloux, secret, le Dieu à qui il dit 'me voici'. Mais pour cela, il doit renoncer à la fidélité aux siens, et c'est un parjure, ou refuser de se présenter devant les hommes. Il ne leur parle plus. Voilà du moins ce qui donne à penser le sacrifice d'Isaac (il en irait autrement pour le héros tragique, Agamemnon par exemple).[40]

In the story of Abraham, Derrida identifies a profound tension between the duties that Abraham has to his family and to others around him and the absolute responsibility that Abraham owes to God. This absolute responsibility will be manifested in the sacrifice of Abraham's beloved son Isaac, a gesture that cannot be justified or discussed: this exclusion of the possibility of communication with his '*semblables*' is a necessary part of Abraham's responsibility. The sacrifice will be outside of the laws and logic of human interactions and to attempt to give an *account* of the gesture of sacrifice would do violence to that gesture – an ethical response requires that Abraham give without counting the cost.[41] When Abraham presents himself before God with the words 'me voici', he accepts the responsibility of the unpresentable act and, unable to renounce his loyalty to his family (the love he feels for Isaac being central to the gesture of sacrifice), Abraham agrees that he will no longer present himself before man. Presenting oneself to an Abrahamic God, then, is a gesture of self-isolation. God might finally reject Abraham's sacrifice, and present a

[40] Jacques Derrida, *Donner la mort* (Paris: Galilée, 1999), p. 90.
[41] My emphasis on the word account was intended to draw attention to the double (financial and narrative) meanings of that word, a play that exists in the French as well, between *conte* and *conter*.

suitable substitute, but this proof of love can only come once Abraham has demonstrated his absolute willingness to respond to his duty.

Unlike Abraham on Mount Moriah, Snorri is not facing a single, omniscient, omnipotent god, but a group of gods and ghosts who, in Mesguich's *mise-en-scène* are dressed as mobsters, and rely on violence to impose their will. When the gods attempt to persuade (and finally oblige) Snorri to write their story for them, they do so through direct reference to the duties that they assume the writer to have, or that they assume Snorri to believe the writer to have. Reminding him of the gruesome fates that befall some gifted poets in the *Edda* – 'Je connais le cas d'un poète qui a eu les yeux crevés par un corbeau affamé'; 'Je connais le cas d'un poète qui a eu les mains écrasées sous un rocher' – they add, menacingly, 'Un poète a des responsabilités' (*L'Histoire*, p. 14). These threats open up a complex web of associations with poet figures in myth. The story of the poet and the crow recalls Oðin, whom Rasmus Anderson, in his notes to the *Prose Edda* describes as having 'two ravens, to whom he had taught the speech of man; and they flew far and wide through the land, and brought him the news […] He taught all these arts in runes and songs'.[42] The birds represent the possibility of communication, and the pedagogical function of poetry. Cixous has also discussed the significance of a section in James Joyce's *Ulysses*, where Stephen Dedalus's aunt threatens that eagles will eat his eyes if he does not apologise for hiding under the table. Cixous explains that 'A tremendous ambivalence is put in place. The law that horrifies him also gives

[42] Rasmus B. Anderson, 'The Historical Odin', in Snorri Sturluson, *The Prose Edda*, ed. and with notes by Rasmus B. Anderson (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1901), pp. 222-39 (p. 235) <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/18947> [accessed 24 October 2016]. Project Gutenberg ebook.

him pleasure. The name of the law frightens, but "apologise" has a nice sound' (Cixous, *Readings*, p. 7). The poetically-expressed threat from the eagle or crow both opens up opportunities for pleasure and calls the poet to obey the law. The oedipal scene may also be read here, where the hero's self-blinding (self-castration) is the result of his recognition of his own guilt. The image of the rock that crushes the poet's hands (and so their principal means of writing and of touching) recalls Prometheus, punished for his hubris and reclaimed in romantic literature (and by Nietzsche) as praiseworthy in his active attempts to improve Man's situation. The gods' threats cast Snorri as a similarly ambiguous character.

Whereas Abraham's god demands limitless responsibility, Snorri is called only to present himself before the gods as a writer (a position he already has), and to accept their commission. The 'me voilà' with which Snorri has presented himself before the gods does not signify his acceptance of their authority, nor of his responsibility towards them. Unlike Abraham, for Snorri accepting his responsibilities does not mean separation from his *semblables*. Snorri refuses isolation, working with Barout and then Edda in his attempts to alter the story. He does not hide his acceptance of his responsibilities but, holding a large quill in Daniel Mesguich's *mise-en-scène*, makes his position as a writer central to the way in which he presents himself on stage.

Significantly, whereas Akhmatova feels responsibility to some abstract principle of poetry, Snorri is chiefly concerned with his responsibilities towards those who have supported him, financially and politically. His responsibilities

are linked to his social position – as a nobleman, he owes obedience and respect to the king – and are also economic, in the financial sense of the term – he has been paid for his work. Snorri may be understood to be responding to ethical duties to keep to his word (an assumed promise to write the Norwegian history) and the political necessity of honouring his debts (incurred through Hákon's patronage, which made the thirteenth-century Snorri quite wealthy).[43] Snorri the writer is not held up to a higher moral or political standard than any other person who has enjoyed Hákon's patronage. The gods' reference to his 'responsabilités' as a poet, which they place in opposition to these responsibilities towards Hákon, have little impact on Snorri: it takes physical threat, and a self-interested desire to avoid pain, to convince him to tell the story that the gods want. The case of Snorri shows that writing need not place the poet politically in opposition to the ruling elite, and that writers may not always feel that they have a particular duty to challenge or question that elite.

In Akhmatova's case, accepting her responsibility to write and publish means suffering not for her but for her son. Alexandra Harrington argues that, when Lev Gumilev was arrested for the third time 'his only crime was being the son of Gumilev and Akhmatova'. For Lev as for Isaac, the parent's dedication (to God or to Poetry) has condemned him to being the victim of violence although he is, vitally, innocent (Harrington, *Different Mirrors*, p. 18). Lev's guilt, then, in the eyes of the Soviets at least, is visited on him as a result of the actions of

[43] For an account of the wealth that Snorri accumulates as a result of his work as a poet in the Norwegian court, see Kari Ellen Gade, 'Poetry and it changing importance in Medieval Icelandic Culture', in *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, ed. by Margaret Clunies Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 61-95 (p. 85). There does not seem to be direct evidence in the play that Cixous's Snorri is also this wealthy.

his mother (and father). Despite the genuine love that, Chukovskaya testifies, Akhmatova feels for her son (*Journals,* pp. 131-2), she seems unable to mitigate any of the consequences that her loyalty to poetry have had for him. In *Voile*, Akhmatova reproaches herself for this:

> On m'avait demandé de nouveaux vers anciens. Je le savais, je le savais. Et si je n'avais pas fait cela, Liova serait ici. Ne discutez pas, je le sais. Je n'ai pas pu renoncer à mon propre *Requiem*. (p. 344)

The commanding 'Ne discutez pas' suggest that Akhmatova's friends attempt to interrupt her here, that they feel that she is unjustified in blaming herself for her son's continued absence. Akhmatova, however, is insistent in her claims that she knew what was being asked of her by the censors, but was unable to give up 'mon propre *Requiem*', the 'Mass for the repose of the souls of the dead' (*OED*) that is 'hers' both in the sense that she has written it, and in the sense that it is a memorial for her own suffering. Her loyalty to this act of poetic mourning has eclipsed that which she feels towards Lev, who prompted it, but although Akhmatova is angry at herself for this expression of her priorities, she does portray it as inevitable: she was *unable* to renounce her poem. The responsibility that she feels towards poetry is absolute.

Unlike Isaac, however, Lev is unwilling to be made a sacrifice, and he challenges his mother in a bitter letter, which Akhmatova reads to her friends:

> AKHMATOVA: Voilà ce qu'il me dit: 'je ne suis plus qu'un caillou vêtu d'un haillon. Un ver de terre sanguinolent sans langue, sans mère. Pourquoi ne me sauves-tu pas? […] Et il me dit 'et maintenant il paraît que tu vas publier. Encore te faire remarquer. J'en ai assez de payer pour toi! Tu aimes mieux tes poèmes que ton fils'. (*Voile*, p. 274)

Natalia Roskino's written reminiscences of Akhmatova show that this suggestion that Akhmatova might have cruelly overlooked her son was already common in Akhmatova's own lifetime: 'she endured much for her son, while her detractors called her a bad mother. But she would never have fought so hard for herself!'[44] Roskino's essay further suggests that there were genuine difficulties in the relationship between Akhmatova and her son: 'in the end the lack of understanding between them so destroyed their relationship that they ceased to see each other altogether' ('Good-Bye Again', p. 188). Roskino attributes the breakdown in their relationship to a mutual 'lack of understanding', but in Cixous's version of the story, the issue is definitely Lev's resentment of his mother and her behaviour whilst he was in prison. His experiences in Siberia have left Lev a 'caillou', he claims, in material hardship, dressed only in rags and therefore cold in both the unfeeling and in the physical senses of the term, inhuman and not even animal. He is 'sans langue', without the privilege of speaking that his mother draws pleasure and social position from, and also 'sans mère'; he has renounced the mother who was unable to renounce her poem for him. Lev's bitterness and experiences of material

[44] Natalia Roskino, 'Good-Bye Again', in *Anna Akhmatova and her Circle*, ed. by Konstantin Polivanov, pp. 162-98 (p. 173).

hardship are particularly significant for the ways in which they highlight how the absolute ethical relationship (here between Akhmatova and her poem) does not always fit comfortably into a complex life with its numerous responsibilities and relationships.

Conclusion

In these plays Cixous analyses the ethical and political responsibilities that the artist faces, a question that has been important for her throughout her career. Amongst the most pressing of these issues are first, how can the writer discuss pain and mourning in ways that are responsible and respectful to all those involved?, second, to what extent does the writer have a duty to intervene in contemporary politics?, and third, does the writer's duty to write and publish potentially challenging material mean that he or she must also accept all forms of risk to them and those they love? The plays underline the urgency of these questions, and constantly expose the high stakes involved in artistic creation. Cixous's examination of these issues also reveals the complexity of the boundary between ethics and politics; the way in which writers write about their private lives and relationships to loved ones can become a profound political statement, and political dissent and protest is often shown to be related to and rooted in an ethical duty of care to others.

One other striking element of the approach that Cixous takes to these questions in *L'Histoire* and *Voile* is the sustained emphasis on the relationships with others that make possible the moment of writing (which are brought to the fore

even although both of these plays appear to centre on the writing practice of a single poet). This focus can be linked to Cixous's decision to write for the theatre, which first of all leads her to more collaborative ways of working and which also, structurally and because of the established theatre tradition, often tends to favour investigations of interpersonal relationships over introspection. Thus, although Snorri and Akhmatova are poets, working in a genre generally understood today as the preserve of the solitary, introspective writer (and *Voile* reveals both the prevalence and the danger of this understanding of a poet's interests), both, finally, are shown to write with others in concrete ways that seem to owe as much to Cixous's experiences of the theatre as to her descriptions of writing elsewhere. In my next chapter, I move away from looking at these small groups and networks of friends to consider the more radical gesture of the creation of a new community in response to (perceived) ethical and political problems in existing societies.

Chapter Three: New Communities in *L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk, Roi du Cambodge*, and *Les Naufragés du Fol Espoir*

A number of important ethical and political issues are at play in the questions of how to build communities, and of how communities should relate to each other. Amongst these are questions of hospitality, exclusion, difference (which relate to how we define our community and draw the line between self/*semblable*/autre), and issues around the limits on our duty to engage politically with wider society. Many of these problems are important elsewhere in Cixous's work as well as in the theatre; there are particularly interesting investigations of precisely these questions in Cixous's semi-autobiographical accounts of her early life in Algeria, for instance.[1] However, her engagement with the ethics and politics of building and participating in communities has been particularly prominent in her work for the theatre. This is perhaps because when Cixous describes the pleasures of writing for the theatre, she often ties them to its community. Theatre is described as 'le palais d'autrui', in Cixous's essay 'L'Incarnation': she claims that theatre is given life by the desires of the actors and the audience, as well as by the dramatist's desire to provoke desire in the audience and in the actors, directors, and technicians involved in the creation of the play (Cixous, 'L'Incarnation', p. 260). Cixous's most explicit association of theatre and community comes in 'L'auteur entre texte et théâtre',

[1] I am thinking of Cixous's account of her family's marginal position in relation to both French society and Arabic society in *Les rêveries de la femme sauvage*, for example.

a long interview given with *Hors Cadre* magazine in 1990, in which Cixous explains that, when writing for the theatre:

> Il y a aussi l'expérience commune de cette espèce de bateau extraordinaire qu'est un théâtre, avec toute la troupe qui travaille. Mais là aussi c'est spécifique au Théâtre du Soleil; c'est quelque chose d'heureux, ça pourrait ne pas l'être. C'est une aventure collective et on en a peu, c'est aussi une métaphore, parce que dans cet univers où soixante personnes travaillent il y a tout. Soixante personnes c'est déjà une société, avec tout ce qui peut se produire dans une société: l'amour, la guerre, la cause à défendre. Je la métaphorise. Je la métaphorise comme une armée de chevaliers qui défend une certaine cause, quelque chose de tout à fait noble, donc en soi ça représente quelque chose de plus que le théâtre.
>
> La récompense de l'écriture théâtrale est dans ce moment où ça devient tout un peuple qui travaille. (Ropars, 'Auteur entre texte et théâtre', p. 63)

In her translation of the interview, Lucy Garnier chooses to translate 'tout un peuple' by the English phrase 'a whole community'; Garnier's phrase successfully avoids the notions of ethnic or national sameness that would be carried in the English 'a whole people', whilst rendering the sense of common aims, interests and actions that Cixous emphasises in the section cited and throughout the interview (Ropars, 'Text and Theatre', p. 121).[2] In this final sentence, the pleasure that Cixous gains from writing for the theatre is

[2] Marie-Claire Ropars, 'Hélène Cixous: The Author Between Text and Theatre. A 1990 interview with *Hors Cadre*', trans. by Lucy Garnier, in *White Ink: Interviews on Sex, Text and Politics*, ed. by Susan Sellers, pp. 97-123 (p. 121).

particularly identified with the pleasures of working together within a community towards a common goal.

This sense of the importance of community extends to the content of many of Cixous's plays. *La Ville Parjure*, for example, describes a mother who joins with a community of half-dead outsiders living in a cemetery on the edge of a town and how, together, they attempt to challenge the laws and conventions of that town. *Tambours sur la digue* centres on a corrupt ruler who must decide which of the different communities in his kingdom he will destroy in order to save the others, and shows the attempts of individuals and small groups of people to save those communities. In this chapter, I have chosen to focus on the two plays within Cixous's dramatic œuvre that show the whole lifecycle of a community, from birth to destruction: the first play that Cixous produced for the Théâtre du Soleil, 1985's *L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk, roi du Cambodge* (hereafter *Sihanouk*), and the 2009 *création collective*, *Les Naufragés du Fol Espoir (Aurores)* (hereafter *Naufragés*). These plays lend themselves well to a discussion of the ethical and political significance of community in Cixous's theatre in three main ways. First, in their portrayal of the real material impact on individuals of decisions around where to draw the boundaries of the community, where this takes the form of the question of who is to be excluded from, or included in, the community. Second, in the ways that these plays suggest the risk that is associated with the creation of the new community, particularly where that community is created in the context of a complex web of relations with existing communities, and not in

isolation. Finally, through the issue of the limitations of community as a hopeful model of potential ways for individuals to relate and to interact.

Sihanouk describes a twenty-four year period of Cambodian history, beginning just before the abdication of King Norodom Sihanouk and his election as president, and ending with the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia. The play stages the coup that established a pro-American republic in Cambodia in place of Sihanouk's monarchist presidency, portrays the civil war following which this republican government was replaced by the Khmer Rouge, and finally shows some of the horror suffered by the Cambodian people under the Government of Democratic Kampuchea. This tumultuous period in Cambodia's history is approached largely through an account of the history of King Norodom Sihanouk's political and diplomatic career and personal story, although it also considers the impact of the historical events on the stories of two lower-middle class women, the vegetable seller and mother of a member of the Khmer Rouge, Khieu Samnol, and the fish seller and Vietnamese immigrant, Mme Lamné.[3]

[3] Sihanouk abdicated and became president of Cambodia in 1955 and was ousted in a coup of 1970. The Khmer Rouge came to power in 1975, and the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia took place in 1979. Cixous's play does not explicitly mention these dates, and moreover is not always faithful to the chronology of events in Cambodian history. Notably, whereas Suramarit appears as a ghost in the whole of *Sihanouk*, in reality he did not die until 1960, well after Sihanouk's abdication. One ethical consideration around the tone of the play was that Cixous and Mnouchkine were dealing with a live subject in Norodom Sihanouk, who attended one performance and wrote to the Théatre du Soleil afterwards to give his impressions of the performance, concluding 'Si Hélène Cixous a fait de moi un roi-poète, je dois avouer que je préfère à tout la musique légère, le jazz, Duke Ellington, Edith Piaf, et Yves Montand. J'ai beaucoup compose de Tangos… Et j'ai aussi étudié la tragédie grecque: j'y ai appris et compris (tout bouddhiste que je suis) que les dieux nous gouvernaient. Alors j'aimerais simplement qu'on dise à ma mort "Sihanouk était vaincu d'avance mais il a fait son devoir"'. Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France Arts du Spectacle, Théâtre du Soleil archives, 4-COL-153 (311).

Les Naufragés du Fol Expoir deals simultaneously with two stories, the first of which is set on the eve of the First World War and concerns a group of left-wing ideologically committed filmmakers led by the brother and sister team of Jean and Gabrielle La Palette. The filmmakers have left a large film studio and moved into the attic of a *cabaret* (restaurant, bar, and vaudeville theatre) named the *Fol Espoir*, where they will make a film to entertain and educate the people. The film that they are making is a very loose adaptation of the Jules Verne novel known in different versions as *En Magellanie* (1999) and *Les Naufragés du Jonathon* (1909).[4] The film made in *Naufragés* follows a group of hopeful new migrants or colonists who find themselves shipwrecked on a remote island on the farthest tip of South America, where they find the mysterious anarchist Jean Salvatore, who saves them from drowning. Excited by the possibilities of this island, which they consider to be empty despite its established Native American population, the group decide to found a new settlement there. However, the discovery of gold on the island leads to the death by exposure or violence of most of the hopeful new *Hostiens*, and those who remain alive after the ill-fated gold-rush leave to seek a more barren, more isolated, island where they may live peacefully. The movement between the two levels of narrative is effected

[4] The first, heavily edited and revised, version of the text appeared in 1909 as *Les Naufragés du Jonathon*. A second version appeared in 1999 as *En Magellanie*, and is more loyal to Jules Verne's original manuscript. See Jules Verne and Michel Verne, *Les Naufragés du 'Jonathon'* (Paris: Hetzel, 1909); Jules Verne, *En Magellanie*, with notes and introduction by Oliver Dumas (Paris: Gallimard, 1999). Cixous has attributed the choice of a Jules Verne text as the inspiration for this play to a chance find at a book stall in a Paris market (Cixous, 'Une Sensation de phare', Théâtre du Soleil website <http://www.theatre-du-soleil.fr/thsol/nos-spectacles-et-nos-films/nos-spectacles/les-naufrages-du-fol-espoir/une-sensation-de-phare-helene?lang=fr> [accessed 2 October 2016]). The choice may also have been of personal importance for Ariane Mnouchkine, whose father, Alexandre Mnouchkine (1908-1993), was a film producer who worked on the 1965 film *Les Tribulations d'un Chinois en Chine*. Inspired by the Jules Verne novel of the same name and starring Jean-Paul Belmondo, the film was a commercial success. See David Shipman, 'Obituary of Alexandre Mnouchkine', *The Independent*, 7th April 1993 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituary-alexandre-mnouchkine-1453830.html> [accessed 2 October 2016].

neatly in Mnouchkine's production: when an episode from the film is to be filmed, the actors playing in the filmed scene take centre stage, whilst the rest of the filmmakers cluster at the edges of the stage, busily manipulating props, lighting, and technical equipment. Black surtitle boards come down from the ceiling, and the dialogue of the film's actors is projected onto them in white writing with a stylised border in one of the *mise-en-scène*'s many borrowings from silent film. During these scenes, the fleeting gestures and glances that pass between the filmmakers on the side-lines, generally intent on their work, indicate something of their relationships, which we learn about more clearly when 'cut!' is called and we see the filmmakers interact in the attic but out of character, discussing their day's work on the film and also reflecting on the increasingly worrying news from France and the rest of Europe.

Several examples of communities may be identified in the plays. The two most interesting communities in *Naufragés* are the one formed by the filmmakers, who are more or less united by their political beliefs and artistic aims,[5] and second the completely new community that the *naufragés* attempt to found on the île Hoste. Many examples of community are to be found in *Sihanouk*, but I will chiefly be concerned with three of them. The first is that of Cambodia as ruled by Sihanouk, who stresses the bonds of affection at the heart of his nation and also suggests the communal unity of his subjects. After a brief period of nationalist government, a new community is established by the Khmer Rouge. This new regime aims to erase the bonds of affection between individual family

[5] Eve Urban has called these filmmakers a 'utopian community'. See Eve Urban, 'Reification and Modern Drama: an Analysis, a Critique, and a Manifesto', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 32 (2016), 256-68 (p. 265) <http://dx.doi.org10.1017/S0266464X16000233>.

members, lovers, or friends, and to replace them with affection for the entire community and belief in the possibility of the creation of a better future world. In practice, the play shows that the Khmer Rouge expect these forms of affection and faith to translate into loyalty to the military government. Finally, the group of four women, Mom Savay, Queen Kossomak, Khieu Samnol, and Mme Lamné, form a strong friendship in the play and work together as a small community.[6] I have chosen very different types of groups of individuals as examples of community: a group of colleagues, in the case of the filmmakers in *Naufragés*, a nascent town settlement or colonial outpost, for the *naufragés* of *Naufragés*'s film, a nation, in the first two examples of communities in *Sihanouk*, and a group of four friends, in my final example. Yet since, as I will argue, the definition of community is at its heart a question of the type of bonds or relationships that link individuals and not a question of scale, these different groups can usefully be compared as communities. This is particularly true in the theatre: in a space where sixty people represent the entire universe, useful conclusions about the ways in which communities of any size should function may well be drawn from the interactions of four women.[7]

After discussing the meaning of community, particularly in the context of Cixous's work with the Théâtre du Soleil, the rest of my chapter goes on to address two key questions involved in the creation of new communities. The first is that of whom to allow into a new community, which I treat as a question

[6] Dobson calls them an 'inclusive group' that provides a 'vision of alternative social structures' (Dobson, *Scene of Writing*, p. 86).
[7] In her interview with Marie-Claire Ropars, 'L'Auteur entre texte et théâtre', Cixous calls the 60 members of the Théâtre du Soleil 'cet univers'. I cite her full response earlier in this chapter.

of how to deal with difference. The second question that I consider in this chapter is that of isolation, and of how positive or threatening communication between different communities may be. This is related to the issue of colonialist politics in both plays.

What is a Community?

A dictionary definition might usefully point to the possible ways in which the word community can be used. The *Oxford English Dictionary* associates nine meanings with 'community':

> 1. A group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common
> 1.1. A group of people living together and practising common ownership:
> 1.2. A particular area or place considered together with its inhabitants
> 1.3. A body of nations or states unified by common interests
> 1.4. (**the community**) The people of a district or country considered collectively, especially in the context of social values and responsibilities
> 1.5. [AS MODIFIER] Denoting a worker or resource designed to serve the people of a particular area
> 2. [MASS NOUN] The condition of sharing or having certain attitudes and interests in common
> 2.1. [IN SINGULAR] A similarity or identity
> 2.2. Joint ownership or liability

> 3. *Ecology* A group of interdependent plants or animals growing or living together in natural conditions or occupying a specified habitat.[8]

What links these definitions is the notion of holding something 'in common', or of sharing something. Specifically, the definitions highlight shared 'characteristic[s]', 'ownership', 'social values', '[social] responsibilities', 'attitudes', 'interests', 'identity', and 'area[s] or place[s]' as the potential basis for community. In broad terms, four apparently different types of community are indicated by this dictionary definition, and may be distinguished according to what it is that is held in common by that community: identity, a place where they live, financial commitments, or interests, attitudes, and responsibilities.

Cixous's discussions of theatre and her discussions of community are often closely intertwined, and the Théâtre du Soleil demonstrates some of the ways in which the different aspects of community identified in this dictionary definition coexist for a single group. The success of the Théâtre du Soleil is predicated upon the group's shared 'interests', 'attitudes', and 'social values' which are evident in their plays particularly when, as with *Naufragés*, the play is a 'création collective'. The group's shared aesthetic and artistic values are also always obvious, and David Williams calls the group's 'ongoing determination to privilege formal innovation, theatricality, and a notion of theatre as social practice' the mission or unifying strand that can be found in all of the Théâtre du Soleil's productions (Williams, 'Grain of Sand', p. xi). The group also has

[8] Adapted from 'Community', in *The Oxford English Dictionary* <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/community> [accessed 2 October 2016].

some shared financial interests (the dictionary refers to shared ownership and to shared liability as part of a definition of community): all members are paid equally, and all accept that they may not be paid at all if they run short of the funds needed to support their long rehearsal periods.

As they do for the Théâtre du Soleil, shared projects link all of the communities that I have identified in the plays. In *Naufragés* the filmmakers, much like the Théâtre du Soleil, have a shared artistic project; some of the first critical responses to the play have concentrated on drawing parallels between its group of filmmakers and the Théâtre du Soleil. Discussing *Naufragés*, Judith G. Miller argues that 'this work of remembering and conversing executes a major autobiographical gesture' for the Théâtre du Soleil (Miller, 'Mad Hope', p. 120). The castaways that the filmmakers portray share the project of creating a settlement on the île Hoste. In *Sihanouk*, the *Sihanoukistes* have a shared desire to maintain a neutral (in international politics) Buddhist and monarchist Cambodia, whilst the Khmer Rouge want to gain control of Cambodia in order to create a society that will be closer to that imagined as perfect in their understanding of Maoist communism. The community of the four women share the project of survival, and work together to fulfil their own material needs and also for the maintenance of Cambodian culture: in the final emotional scene of the play, as Lamné leaves for exile, she is told to keep alive the Cambodian language, which the women believe functions as 'notre survie, notre mémoire et notre fierté'.[9] It is worth noting that the role of 'guardian of language' (a

[9] There are interesting ties here to the ethics of the role of the artist, which I have discussed in Chapter Two.

phrase that Cixous has also used to describe the writers whom she admires)[10] falls to the Vietnamese Catholic Lamné, whose national identity and religious beliefs coexist with her membership of the community bound together by a shared project. Language is not the only privileged space in which Cambodian culture may survive, however, and Lamné is also told that 'il faut sauver notre danse'; a cultural heritage that is physical and significantly, given Cixous's insistence on the close relationship between theatre and community, linked to performance.

Who is to be Allowed into the New Community?

Lamné's position as a key figure in her community suggests what is particularly valuable and powerful about building a community around a shared project. Formed in this way, community is based on action rather than characteristics (such as national or religious identity) and tied to something that is in a process of change. The result is that its boundaries are flexible and potentially open to a variety of people, provided that they share the values and aims that inform the project. Cixous's plays show that there is a gap between the open and inclusive ways of forming communities that she favours, and the historical reality of how communities have been defined in the past. Derrida's discussion of the *démocratie à venir* (which is echoed in *Naufragés* by Jean Salvatore's stated

[10] Kathleen O'Grady, 'Guardian of Language: Interview with Hélène Cixous', trans. by Eric Prenowitz, in *White Ink*, ed. by Susan Sellers, pp. 81-7, (p. 85). The original interview was published in *Womens Education des femmes* (Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women) 12.4 (1996), 8-10, but is missing from the archives of the newsletter <http://en.copian.ca/litweb/other/cclow/newslet/archive.htm> [accessed 3 October 2016].

belief that ‘nous pourrions formuler la société *à venir*’, (*Naufragés*, p. 131)) approaches the issue as a set of questions around the notion of similarity:

> La question de la *démocratie à venir* pourrait prendre, entre autres formes, celle-ci: qu’est-ce que ‘vivre ensemble’? Et surtout: ‘qu’est-ce qu’un semblable?’, ‘un semblable comme homme, comme voisin, comme concitoyen, comme congénère, comme prochain’, etc.? Ou encore: doit-on ne vivre ensemble qu’avec un semblable? (Derrida, *Voyous*, p. 31)

Cixous’s plays describe two different possible responses to these questions. First, she shows how some of the older communities that she criticises draw strict distinctions between *semblables* and non-*semblables*, particularly along lines of class and race (with sexual difference ostensibly ignored). Those judged not to be similar enough are ignored or, in some cases, exterminated by the rest of the community. Second, Cixous describes the formation of new and more hopeful types of community, where membership is dependent on provisional consensus rather than identity (the presumed answer to the question ‘doit-on ne vivre ensemble qu’avec un semblable’ is ‘non’). The question of who is to be allowed into any new community is related to, but separate from, the issue of how to define community. A community is a group of people who share a project, a definition which means that communities have the potential to be endlessly inclusive; in reality, though, communities have always used a range of different criteria to determine who may or may not participate in their shared project. The fictional and semi-fictional communities in Cixous’s plays are no different.

One of the most striking moments of inclusion/exclusion from a community on the basis of similarity takes place in *Naufragés*, where only those who pass a state-sanctioned medical examination are allowed on board the *Fol Espoir*, which was bound to take them to a new life in Australia before it was wrecked in the île Hoste. The Paoli family, called only 'la mère', 'le père' and 'le fils' in the text, are refused entry to the ship following their medical examinations. The doctor who performs the exam has the same dual role as Freud had in Cixous's earlier play, *Portrait de Dora*: he is both a carer who would attempt diagnosis and cure and the arbiter of socially-defined moral values. This becomes clear after Paoli fils asks the doctor whether cremation is legal in Australia. Mishearing 'incinération' as 'érection', the doctor takes exaggerated delight in the son's question, sending up both the restrictive sexual mores of the time and the psychoanalytic revolution that was about to take place in Europe (Dora's interest in sex was of course received quite differently). When the doctor hears that the son is not interested in sex, but that on the contrary he wants to 'lutte[r] pour la liberté de choisir ma dissolution', hinting at both political engagement and a preoccupation with death, the doctor orders that the family be refused entry to the ship (*Naufragés*, pp. 53-5). There are some indications that Paoli fils may be suffering from paranoia and delusions; he makes the enigmatic declaration that 'le pape communique autrement' (*Naufragés*, p. 54), but this could equally be understood as an unorthodox religious belief and anyway the doctor's tone has already turned from excitement to suspicion by then. The play suggests that the doctor's behaviour is dictated by the nature of Paoli fils's preoccupation above all. In the doctor's excited questioning, which suggests that he was hoping to gain vicarious sexual pleasure from hearing titillating

details of a young man's sexual dysfunction, there is some suggestion that, had the 'dissolution' for which Paoli fils wished to fight been dissolution in the sense of debauchery (comprehensible and perhaps shared by the doctor), the family would have been allowed aboard.

In some ways, Paoli fils and Jean Salvatore are analogous characters. Both have unorthodox political and religious views that prompt them to (attempt to) leave Europe and seek greater freedom in the new world. Yet there are striking differences in the ways in which they are treated in the play. Although Paoli fils's radical and firmly held belief in the value of cremation is one that it would be far easier to accommodate within existing social systems than Jean Salvatore's need to live on land not claimed by any nation state and belief that all property should be held in common (*Naufragés*, p. 132), the young man's fixation on a single issue is madness (and a source of comedy in the play's film), whilst Jean Salvatore's commitment to wider social change make him an admirable revolutionary, at least in the eyes of the filmmakers in *Naufragés*. In part, the difference is related to the nature of their beliefs: Paoli fils's views, although less disruptive, are simply more foreign than Jean Salvatore's, which were shared by a number of prominent radical thinkers in the nineteenth century. Significantly, though, class also divides the characters. Jean Salvatore is an aristocrat, albeit one who has given up much of his privilege; Paoli fils comes from a family of shopkeepers who risk poverty if they cannot emigrate (*Naufragés*, p. 55). Jules Verne's novel made much of the Kaw-djer's natural noble qualities (for example, when Verne says that, to imagine the Kaw-djer 'qu'on imagine un saint Vincent de Paul doublé d'un Lassalle, car le Kaw-djer

était un être de bonté' (Verne, *En Magellanie*, p. 143)) which, it is implied elsewhere, relate to his aristocratic background and education. Although the filmmakers, as socialists, might be wary of some of the assumptions that Verne makes, they too give Jean Salvatore qualities of 'nobility' and authority (he is, after all, played by the film's director). Paoli fils, by contrast, is a figure of fun who is consistently interrupted or silenced during his interview with the doctor. The family are excluded from the boat and the opportunities it represents (ironically, the old community's rejection of Paoli fils manifests as determination to keep him within the borders of their nation state) and lack the financial means to make another attempt. What the play suggests is that, in many communities, a highly educated elite have the power to determine who is included or excluded (in this case, it is a doctor, but judges or civil servants, for instance, may play the same role) with the result that, for members of the working class, relatively minor deviations from accepted thought or actions can lead to their total exclusion.

Even more significant in the issue of exclusion is the question of race. The île Hoste as portrayed in *Naufragés* has an established population of native South Americans, named in the play as Alakaluf.[11] Jules Verne's novel *En Magellanie* describes the region of the Magellan straits as 'un domaine indépendant, où vivaient, errantes ou sédentaires, les diverses tribus des Indiens Yacanas' (Verne, *En Magellanie*, p. 80). There are no permanent settlements of Indians

[11] The name *Fuégien* seems to derive from the phrase '*Terre de Feu*' or, in Spanish, *Tiero del Fuego*, an alternative name for the Magellan straits. Alakaluf is another name for the Kawesqar people, one of the groups of Native Americans living in that area of South America. Verne's word *Yacana* seems to be a distortion of Yagan, the name of a group of Native Americans who lived to the south of the Alakaluf.

on the islands that the Kaw-djer chooses for his home, but the Indians come there regularly to hunt or fish, and have some more regular settlements in the area (Verne, *En Magellanie*, pp. 37, 85). In the play, the Alakaluf appear first in a scene where a mother, daughter, and son are threatened by figures representing the typical dangers posed to the Native American population by westerners in South America (*Naufragés*, pp. 86-97). The first of these western figures is McLellan, a bounty hunter who seeks to kill this family in order to claim the reward that he will be given when he hands in their ears to Argentine or Chilean authorities, in both a parodic reversal of the Western fear of Indian cannibals and head-hunters and an accurate representation of contemporary practice in some areas.[12] The family are then approached by a group of missionary nuns who, although they act to protect the Alakaluf from the head-hunters, are then determined to civilise and convert the family's young daughter, to force her into European clothing that Jean Salvatore declares to be inappropriate – though it is not immediately clear that his assertion that they will make Anju unwell should genuinely be treated as a concern, or if it is rather

[12] The practice was certainly common in California, during its gold rush. See John Rawls's comments, 'Native Americans in the Gold Rush', *PBS*, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/goldrush/sfeature/natives_03.html> [accessed 2 October 2016]. This is not the only example of real historical detail in the play; there were really missionaries near to, although not on, the île Hoste, in the town of Ushuaia, (see Duncan Campbell 'Anglican Missionary Endeavour in Tierra del Fuego (1832-1916) Historical Review' < http://patbrit.org/eng/sams/main.htm> [accessed 2 October 2016]). The make-up of the hopeful emigrants of the *Fol Espoir* mirrors the demographics of real emigrants from Europe in the nineteenth century, and it is true that many hopeful new utopian communities were established in European colonies in the period. Nineteenth-century North and South America saw several gold rushes whose impact on the local environment was destructive. Finally, the character of Jean Salvatore was modelled on a real Austro-Hungarian archduke, whose story would have been well-known in the early twentieth century. See 'La disparition de l'archiduc Jean Salvator', *Alain Decaux raconte*, ORTF 2, 19 October 1970. Online video recording, *Institut national audiovisuel* <http://www.ina.fr/video/CPF86600823> [accessed 2 October 2016]). The use of history here may owe something to Jules Verne, whose novels for young people were often explicitly pedagogical. Cixous's own use of history in *Sihanouk* is quite different; she explicitly takes a real historical figure and moment and creates a fictional story from them, whereas in *Naufragés*, the ostensible fiction is littered with moments of historical accuracy.

a function of his admiration for the way of life of the Alakaluf, the 'noble savages' whom he protects.[13] The nuns want to 'faire une chrétienne' of the young Alakaluf girl, compensating her for the loss of her family and her freedom with the promise of improved living conditions, with plenty to eat (*Naufragés*, p. 91). These threatening figures represent starkly contrasting attitudes towards the inclusion or exclusion of Native Americans in or from the colonised nation. Either the Alakaluf must be completely removed, killed so that there will never be the risk that they will attempt to enter the community, or they must be included on the coloniser's terms, obliged to abandon their own cultural heritage and to adopt that of the foreign power. Even if the Alakaluf choose the second option, however, their integration into the western or Christian community is different to the ways in which ethnic Europeans are integrated into these communities. Thus, as the Alakaluf mother is attempting to communicate with the nuns to bargain for the return of her daughter, and despite the missionaries' outraged assurances that they saw no threat in her behaviour, McLellan is able to shoot the Indian woman on the pretext that he believed that she was about to attack the nuns. The incongruity of a scene in which a Native American woman speaks with two white women, whose assumed innocence is underlined in this instance by the fact that the westerners also happen to be nuns, immediately introduces the possibility of guilt and a

[13] However, European clothing was made from fabrics that were not waterproof, and so which did not offer as much protection from the cold as the seal blubber that was traditionally used by Native American people in the area. See Ricardo Arnt 'Os índios do fim do mundo' *Revista Planeta*, October 2012 <http://revistaplaneta.terra.com.br/secao/cultura/os-indios-do-fim-do-mundo> [accessed 2 October 2016].

crime (at least in the eyes of McLellan, here representative of colonial morality), and as such puts the life of the Native American woman in danger.[14]

In the novel *En Magellanie*, and particularly in the film made in *Naufragés*, the filmmakers find the potential for a more positive model of a Western attitude towards the inclusion or exclusion of indigenous populations into new colonial communities in the Jean Salvatore/Kaw-djer figure, although the play's audience might take a different view. Salvatore claims to love the Alakaluf, and so when the *naufragés* begin writing their new constitution by declaring the île Hoste empty, erasing the Alakaluf, Jean Salvatore angrily reminds them that:

> Vous n'êtes pas les premier Hostiens! Les premiers hommes ici, depuis des millénaires sont les Indiens Alakaluf. Ils ne sont plus que cinquante-quatre familles, mais moi vivant ils resteront les maîtres de leur île. (*Naufragés*, p. 128)

The presence and importance of the Alakaluf is asserted here, but at the same time made dependent upon the power and protection of Jean Salvatore. In this respect the play departs from the novel, in which the Kaw-djer is shown visiting Native American settlements in Magellania in order to provide them with practical medical aid, but where he does not undertake to protect them. Indeed, when Indians native to Patagonia and not Magellania arrive on the island, enticed by rumours of the colony's increasing wealth to launch a series of raids

[14] This danger has not disappeared today, as is testified by the 2012 case of the shooting of Trayvon Martin, who was considered suspicious simply because he was a young black man walking through a largely white and wealthy area.

upon it, the Kaw-djer is the first to order a bloody war. This war will serve the dual purpose of unifying the Hostien population as a fighting force and removing the foreign threat (*Naufragés du Jonathon*, Troisième Partie, Chapitre IX). In another echo of genuine colonial practice, in *En Magellanie* (although not in *Naufragés*) the Native American population of the colonised area is conclusively divided into the 'good', peaceful and primitive natives, here the 'Pêcherois' with whom the Kaw-djer enjoys good relations, and the dangerous and hostile population, the 'Patagons' against whom violence can be sanctioned (*En Magellanie*, p. 88). John Dawe argues that the Native American people of Chile performed the sort of banditry practised by the Patagons in *En Magellanie* as a form of resistance to European settlement of their continent when open revolt had as examples of community failed, which means that the classification of the Patagons as 'bad' natives is also a classification as 'bad' of those people who refuse passively to accept colonial rule.[15] A similar division is made in *Sihanouk* between the 'good' Vietnamese population, who integrate into Cambodian society, and the 'bad' Vietnamese immigrant population, who maintain their own culture and ideas.

The film in the play *Naufragés* does not repeat this simple good/bad division, but rather complicates it through the depiction of Jean Salvatore's relationship with Yuras, which also suggests a number of the difficulties of colonial attitudes towards Native American populations. The relationship is difficult to classify,

[15] John Dawe, 'Indigenous Rebellion in Chile: Araucanía, 1850-83', in *Indigenous Revolts in Chiapas and the Andean Highlands*, ed. by Kevin Gosner and Arij Ouweneel (Amsterdam: CEDLA, 1996), pp. 151-82 (pp. 171, 178-9) <http://www.cedla.uva.nl/50_publications/pdf/OnlineArchive/77IndigenousRevolts/pp-150-182-John_Dawe.pdf> [accessed 2 October 2016]. *Centre for Latin American Research and Documentation* ebook.

played as somewhere between father and son and sexual partners in a reflection of nineteenth-century portrayals of Native Americans as both exotic erotic objects and naïfs in need of paternalistic protection by more advanced, sophisticated western societies. Yuras is neither good nor bad but rather an innocent, easily corrupted by his contact with Europeans. When Yuras first encounters the wealthy capitalist Emile, one of the *naufragés*, he is immediately enchanted by the promises of wealth and alcoholic intoxication that are held out to him (*Naufragés*, pp. 123-4). It is often argued that the introduction of vice (perhaps in the form of easily available alcohol) to naïve Indian populations by Europeans was one means by which colonisers maintained control over local populations; Emile's actions reflect this sort of discourse in *Naufragés*. In *En Magellanie*, by contrast, it is the European population whose access to alcohol must be controlled; when the young Alakaluf Indian boy Halg marries a Canadian girl, he saves her from the abuse that she has suffered at the hands of her drunken father (*En Magellanie*, p. 300). In the filmmakers' version of the story, designed as a denunciation of capitalism, the only intoxication to which the working class white immigrants fall prey is an all-consuming desire for gold. The non-European Yuras is left as the only character who is doubly susceptible to temptation; the innocence that he has as a result of his ethnic origin leaves him with little capacity for self-control.

The final factor that complicates any attempt to use a good/bad division between immigrants to decide who should be integrated into the community is the recognition in *Naufragés* that the Native American populations may not want to be included within the new immigrant community at all. This is evident in the

first meeting between the nuns and the Alakaluf mother and child (where the mother wishes to take her daughter away with her rather than see her raised by missionaries), but it is also a significant factor in Yuras's relationship with Salvatore. As the attempt to build a new community on île Hoste breaks down and those *naufragés* who have not died as the result of the gold rush try to leave the island, Jean Salvatore jealously demands that Yuras must join them. Yuras protests bitterly that 'je ne veux pas partir' (*Naufragés*, p. 143), but nevertheless follows Salvatore and paddles him and the remaining *naufragés* away from Hoste in the final scene of the play. Yuras is included but is there under duress and as a servant or second-class citizen; this final tableau suggests the ambiguity of the position of those who are not *semblable* within a community.

In *Sihanouk* nationality has a stronger bearing on the question of inclusion and exclusion than race. Early in the play, in discussion with his father, Sihanouk draws a distinction between two types of Vietnamese immigrant in his country:

> En vérité, il y a toujours les cinq cent mille [Vietnamiens] qui vivent et commercent parmi nous comme de ton vivant, mais de ceux-là, nous n'avons rien à craindre. Ce qui a un peu changé, c'est leur nombre aux frontières. Là, je ne sais pas exactement. Ils vont et viennent comme des oiseaux nocturnes que l'on ne voit jamais mais dont on devine les mouvements dans le noir. Ceux-là, ce sont les communistes. (*Sihanouk*, p. 38)

Those who are welcome in Cambodia are those who are already settled there, immigrants like Lamné. As a fish-seller, she both lives and does business in the country, as Sihanouk suggests is characteristic of the good immigrant. Lamné

is completely assimilated into Cambodian culture and under the Khmer Rouge regime, where she is separated from her old neighbours and most of those who know of her background, Lamné is able to pass convincingly as Cambodian, calling the Cambodian Khieu Samnol her sister, and reciting along with the rest of the population the injunctions to kill the Vietnamese that the Khmer Rouge have made an important part of their re-education programme (*Sihanouk*, pp. 327, 323). Given Lamné's immigrant status, the scene at the end of the play, where she is left with the duty to continue Cambodian culture, is not simply a mark of the inclusiveness of a Cambodian culture which would celebrate the cultural fluency of people not born in the country, although on some level that is what is happening. More significantly, the scene's concern is also to praise immigrants who embrace the culture of their host country. Despite the physical threats that she has faced during the numerous xenophobic riots that took place in Phnom Penh under the nationalist regime, and also despite the hardships and renewed mortal threats against her as a Vietnamese immigrant that she endures under the Khmer Rouge, Lamné retains a love for Cambodia so great that she appears as the ideal choice of cultural envoy for that country.

Sihanouk contrasts the good immigrant, as characterised by Lamné, to the transitory Vietnamese population, who are a potential threat to Cambodia. They are targeted as the potential source of dangerous, foreign, political ideals, which must exclude them from the Cambodian community much as the French education and Paris-learned Maoism of the Khmer Rouge must exclude them from the circle of those whom Sihanouk wishes to use his royal authority to help in the first scene (*Sihanouk*, p. 30). The attitudes of the Americans, who wish to

bomb Cambodia in order to reach the transitory Vietnamese population who live on Cambodia's borders, give some justification for Sihanouk's fear of the more visible Vietnamese population of Cambodia (*Sihanouk*, pp. 81-9). Generally, though, Sihanouk's negative judgement of this second group of Vietnamese immigrants, who have come to Cambodia fleeing the horrors of the war in their own country, suggests both reluctance to tolerate difference in the Cambodian community and also the limits of his sympathy, which will not extend to those people who are putting at risk the Cambodian community, however unwillingly they may be doing so. In this regard, Sihanouk's attitude towards difference is in sharp contrast to his mother's, as is evident in Kossomak's relationship with Khieu Samnol and Lamné. When the queen encounters the two women hiding in her palace, their need for shelter and the severity of the threat that they would face outside are enough to persuade her to allow them to remain in a gallery which is, after all, little frequented (*Sihanouk*, pp. 116-19).

Yet the question of how to define nationality in Cambodia is more complex than it may sometimes appear. In the play's opening scene, Sihanouk looks across at the people who have gathered to demand his help, and at the play's audience, and declares them 'mon paysage favori' (*Sihanouk*, p. 21). This phrase hints at a confusion between the *land* and the *people* of Cambodia which persists throughout the play. This confusion causes Sihanouk to declare, in an echo of Louis XIV's (apocryphal) 'L'état c'est moi', that 'je ne peux plus m'arrêter d'être le Cambodge' (*Sihanouk* p. 148). It is perhaps because the population and the land that they inhabit are interwoven in this close way for Sihanouk that he

says of his country's rural population 'Ce paysan ne peut pas se déraciner. C'est un arbre millénaire. Mais votre beau-frère, lui, au volant de sa Mercedes n'a qu'à aller planter sa raffinerie plus loin' (*Sihanouk*, p. 27). The Mercedes functions as a symbol of both luxury and corruption in the play. When the ghost of Hou Youn, speaking in verse, wants to denounce the corruption of Ieng Sary he describes him as 'Cet homme corpulent qui, dans une Mercedes noire,/ Traverse en souriant le pauvre peuple hagard' (*Sihanouk*, p. 279), highlighting how Ieng Sary has usurped the position of the privileged, foreign-influenced aristocracy that he claimed to seek to overthrow. Sihanouk's political naivety is particularly evident in his apparent praise and protection of his peasant population. He casts them as part of an ancient and unchanging world, excluding them from the modern era that brings with it demands for mobility, but also the promise of international trade and exchange, and the promise of improved standards of living. To be part of the community of Cambodia is to have some kind of ill-defined but profound and inescapable connection to its landscape.

However, this does not mean that Sihanouk's borders are completely closed to foreigners. In his *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson describes how he believes monarchy to function:

> Kingship organizes everything around a high centre. Its legitimacy derives from divinity, not from populations, who, after all, are subjects, not citizens. In the modern conception, state sovereignty is fully, flatly, and evenly operative over each square centimetre of a legally demarcated territory. But in the older imagining, where states were defined by centres, borders were porous and

> indistinct, and sovereignties faded imperceptibly into one another. Hence, paradoxically enough, the ease with which pre-modern empires and kingdoms were able to sustain their rule over immensely heterogeneous, and often not even contiguous, populations for long periods of time.[16]

Sihanouk's model of monarchy is in some ways similar to the one described by Anderson. As in the monarchist state that Anderson describes, Cambodia's borders are porous, and although Sihanouk may criticise the transitory Vietnamese population in Cambodia, in practice he tends to turn a blind eye to their incursions on his territory. This may be because the arms that the Americans have supplied are inadequate (*Sihanouk*, p. 62), because Sihanouk surrendered to pressure from China, which wishes to protect its sometime ally Vietnam (*Sihanouk*, p. 154), or perhaps it could be a tacit gesture of ethical welcome to the refugees. These refugees are not however welcomed as part of the community, even if they are welcomed onto territory recognised as Cambodian. Far from the centre of power as defined by the king (who is, perhaps narcissistically, more interested in events that are happening in his immediate area than he is in policing his borders), the refugees and their Cambodian-born neighbours are marginal to the community that Sihanouk creates. Thus, the population at the border is portrayed as being more fickle in its devotion to Sihanouk than those living closer to Phnom Penh, as Sihanouk observes when he takes a tour of his border country only to find that the peasants there no longer believe themselves to be Cambodian and have replaced shrines to Sihanouk with pictures of Hô Chí Minh (*Sihanouk*, p. 92). *Sihanouk* suggests

[16] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London and New York: Verso, 2006), p. 19.

that a degree of indeterminacy (or perhaps even indifference) around the question of who can be included within the new community can have some ethical value, although it renders the community inherently unstable and thus difficult politically.

Although membership of the monarchist Cambodian community is determined by proximity to King Sihanouk, the question of whether Sihanouk is himself a member of the community remains complex. Like the king that Anderson describes, Sihanouk was, or believed himself to be, a god in the eyes of his people (the historical Norodom Sihanouk was quoted as saying of his people 'They continue to believe I am a god-king').[17] His divine right to rule is not conferred by an external god, but rather stems from his status as a god. A legitimate question could be whether it is possible to include both humans and gods (or animals, for instance), within the same community, but Cixous ducks this in her play, making her Sihanouk very human. Talking to his father (depicted on stage in the Phare Ponleu Selpak production as boasting a little, still slightly in awe of the older male role model), Sihanouk declares that 'On ne peut pas aujourd'hui être à la fois dieu et roi/ Je reste dieu, naturellement, mais je deviens en plus chef de parti' (*Sihanouk*, p. 40). Sihanouk's god-like status is weighed up against his other sources of power, and the possibility that he might abandon it is countenanced. Rather than remain as god-king, however, Sihanouk chooses to abdicate to become president and prince of Cambodia. In *Sihanouk*, unlike in the systems that Anderson is describing, the leader draws

[17] See Kay Johnson, 'Cambodia's Mercurial Former King, Norodom Sihanouk, Dies at 89', *Time*, October 15 2012 < http://world.time.com/2012/10/15/cambodias-mercurial-former-king-norodom-sihanouk-dead-at-89/> [accessed 7 October 2016].

his legitimacy from both god and the consensus and will of the population. At the beginning of *Sihanouk,* Cixous describes a Cambodia in which the 'pre-modern' model that Anderson is describing sits alongside a measure of democracy. In this mixed system, the centralised government believes that the community is to a large degree unified by the affection that all members feel toward the king, which is also the source of Sihanouk's power. Cixous's play does little to challenge the assumption made by many of its central characters that Sihanouk is beloved; indeed two dedicated monarchists, Khieu Samnol and Mme Lamné, are the play's representatives of popular opinion. Similarly, later in the play, the Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese both agree with Sihanouk's judgement that he is held in high regard by the Cambodian population, and so agree to form strategic alliances with him. The bonds of affection that exist between Sihanouk and the population of Cambodia are therefore what allows Sihanouk to return to Cambodia, and open up the potential that he may (re-)join (a new?) Cambodian community.

After the coup, Sihanouk's supposed popularity also contributes to his exclusion from the community of Cambodia. A scene in which, as the king is inspecting a canal construction site, a young boy runs up to him and begins to confess to his awful living conditions and to ask for salvation, is used to suggest Sihanouk's potential as a figure of opposition to the Khmer Rouge regime (*Sihanouk*, pp. 307-13). Following this scene, the king, who refuses to endorse the policies of the Khmer Rouge completely, is held as a political prisoner by the Khmer Rouge. In prison, Sihanouk demands to see his 'enfants', and for the first time it is made explicit that he wishes to see his natural children and not

only the population of Cambodia, who refer to him as ‘monseigneur Papa’, and whom he has often addressed as his ‘enfants’ in the play (*Sihanouk*, p. 330). It is only when Sihanouk has reached the point of madness that these familial terms cease to be used metaphorically; elsewhere in the play, they have been used by Sihanouk and others to indicate the emotional bonds of community. Although a community may be imagined to be like a family, this scene indicates that, even when individuals are excluded or included within a community on the basis of bonds of affection, the two institutions are qualitatively different.

In Cixous’s most positive versions of community, affection is characteristic of many of the relationships between the community members but significantly it is not the central criteria for inclusion or exclusion from the community. This leads to communities that are less centralised than the community that Sihanouk imagined (which was dependent on the vertical relationship between the king and his subjects, rather than horizontal relationships between all of the members of the community) and significantly are also potentially more tolerant of difference (the community can include those you dislike, disagree with, or fear). In *Naufragés*, for example, the community is created when Anna calls out ‘Nous sommes en train d’établir un Contrat Social! Le rêve de Rousseau réalisé!’ (*Naufragés*, p. 123). In *Du contrat social*, Rousseau explains that

> Si donc on écarte du pacte social ce qui n’est pas de son essence, on trouvera qu’il se réduit aux termes suivants: ‘Chacun de nous met en commun sa personne et toute sa puissance sous la suprême direction de la volonté générale;

> et nous recevons encore chaque membre comme partie indivisible du tout.[18]

Becoming a member of a community means that an individual's person and capabilities become the common property of all members of the community. The gesture of agreeing to have person and powers held in common by the community instates the individual as a member of the community and part of the *volonté générale*, indivisible from it.

What is particularly exciting about the staged creation of new communities is that this moment of complete consensus, which founds the community, is not imagined or mythological ('le rêve de Rousseau') but tangibly played out on stage. For Cixous this type of immediacy is one of the keys to the value of theatre:

> Il y a toujours le moment d'hésitation, et de tentation: et si je tuais ? Et si je me trompais? Et si j'étais un monstre? Et si j'étais aveugle? Ce moment nous est donné au Théâtre, c'est l'instant tragique où tout pourrait être changé. Ne plus arriver. Cet instant arrive aussi dans nos vies. Et il nous faut, le Théâtre nous le rappelle, être d'une vigilance extrême pour ne pas le rater.[19]

Cixous's more positive models of communities are inclusive of all those who agree to the social pact that founds the community; this consent is the only criteria for inclusion. For this reason, the foundation of a new community is

[18] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 'Du contrat social', in *Du contrat social* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1962 [1762]), pp. 235-336 (p. 244).
[19] Hélène Cixous, 'Le lieu du Crime, le lieu du Pardon', in *Indiade*, pp. 253-9 (p. 258).

always one of the fragile moments of possibility and risk that Cixous finds best expressed in the theatre. The individual gives their person and all of their skills and qualities to the community, whilst Cixous's inclusive communities take the uncalculated risk of welcoming the new member on the sole basis of their desire to join: the gesture is ethical on both sides.

It is not the case, however, that this mutual ethical gesture takes place in all instances where a new community is formed. In *Sihanouk*, for example, Hou Youn, portrayed throughout the play as a sympathetic member of the Khmer Rouge leadership (he is called 'le gentil' by Khieu Samnol, who hates the 'hommes-tigres' with whom her son associates (*Sihanouk*, p. 56)), is killed as a result of his resistance to policies that he saw as creating human misery. The Khmer Rouge demand absolute consensus, which they achieve through violence. Hou Youn maintains an ethical relationship towards the Khmer Rouge, but their attitude towards him is always political, and his death is the result of a calculation of the risk that he might pose in the future. The incident indicates the dangers that exist when the absolute relationship to community that is demanded by the social pact in its strongest form is coupled with the conviction that everyone within a community must be *semblable*.

Although it contains this warning about risks of joining a new community, *Sihanouk* also includes a positive model of an inclusive community formed by four women, Khieu Samnol, Mme Lamné, Queen Kossomak and Mom Savay. Dobson claims that the 'central function' of these women in the play is 'the constitution of an exemplary microcosm of open and non-hierarchical

approaches to difference' (*Scene of Writing*, p. 85). She describes the group of women as including 'differences of class, politics, nationality, religion and language' (*Scene of Writing*, p. 85). In other words, the criteria that have defined the boundaries of other communities in the plays do not prevent these women from forming their own community. The differences in class are the first to become evident, as Samnol and Lamné appear as supplicants to the two aristocratic women, all the while expressing their admiration for their lavish surroundings. In offering hospitality to Lamné and Samnol, Kossomak and Savay begin by performing the same sort of noble charity and grace that Sihanouk aims to convey when he finds in favour of the peasants who come to him with their complaints in the opening scene of the play. It is when the two aristocratic women go further and listen to the advice of the two lower-class women that the particularity of their approach to difference becomes clear (*Sihanouk*, pp. 118-19). Kossomak and Savay are willing to enter into reciprocal relationships with these lower class women, where the king expected that generosity could only be one way, born of a vertical relationship. The different nationalities and religions of the women are mentioned explicitly, although at the same time it is made clear that Lamné is well-integrated into Cambodian society, and that she shares with the other women a spiritual belief in Samnol's ability to bring back the dead, despite her Catholicism.[20] The differences in the women's mother tongues are inevitably glossed over in Cixous's play, where the speech of all of the characters is rendered in French, but at no point does any character appear to have difficulty understanding Lamné. The 2011 and 2013

[20] The women are justified in holding this belief in this play, which features a number of ghost characters, although these ghosts do seem only to be visible to those who already believe in them: Suramarit is unseen when he is able to access Sihanouk's prison in the final scene of the play, for instance.

Phare Ponleu Selpak productions of the play could have made more of the language difference by giving Lamné a strong Vietnamese accent, in a deviation from the erasure of linguistic difference in the French version of the play, but in the French performances at least this would have had little impact since few members of the audience would be familiar with the Cambodian language. Cixous does mitigate some of the major points of difference between the characters, but they do remain prominent within the script and in the staging, where the women are dressed differently and speak in different tones and registers.

Where the women are indeed profoundly similar is in the shared attitudes, values, and goals, which inform the shared project at the heart of their community: material and cultural survival. Notably, the community is free of many of the jealousies and resentments that characterise more hierarchical groupings. This is somewhat surprising in the friendship of Savay and Kossomak, who were King Suramarit's lover and wife respectively. Sihanouk's claim that Savay and Kossomak have become close due to their shared grief at Suramarit's death seems laughable given that the two women never discuss the former king: their conversations are all of the present and strategies for the future. The friendship of these two women in particular offers a gently mocking response to masculine assumptions that competition for men defines women's relationships.[21] It is perhaps more important for their shared project, however,

[21] Luce Irigaray lampoons this tendency in 'Des marchandises entre elles', where she looks at Freud's discussions of female homosexuality and concludes that, in the system that he describes (where women are exchange objects) 'Les marchandises ne peuvent entrer en relations que sous le regard de leurs "gardiens". Pas question qu'elles aillent seules au "marché", qu'elles jouent de leur valeur entre elles, qu'elles se parlent, se désirent, sans le contrôle de sujets vendeurs-acheteurs-consommateurs. Et leurs apports doivent être de rivalité dans l'intérêt des

that the women also share admiration and respect for Sihanouk, and all wish for a return to monarchy. This political belief informs their project of ensuring survival for Cambodia: the Cambodia that they would like to see continue is one of ancient tradition, peace, literature, and performance.[22] The real historical Sihanouk likewise cared deeply about preserving and promoting Cambodia's cultural heritage, and chose a son who was a dancer to follow him as King of Cambodia.[23] The community of women in *Sihanouk* shows that important differences in origin or background can coexist within a cohesive community when there is a shared project and shared attitudes and values.

However, Cixous's presentation of the community of women is not entirely positive. As Dobson points out, the revolutionary potential of their community should not be overstated (Dobson, *Scene of Writing*, pp. 85-6): although it might manifest as an overwhelming concern with the arts, the women's dedication to Cambodia's monarchy is nevertheless deeply conservative. Moreover, the women's actions have limited impact on any person outside of this close-knit group, and even when they collectively murder the local *kamaphibal* responsible for their mistreatment after they are expelled from Phnom Penh, the act functions as catharsis and not resistance. The beginning of the downfall of the Khmer Rouge immediately follows the murder of the *kamaphibal* in the

commerçants' (Luce Irigaray, 'Des marchandises entre elles', in *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1977), pp. 187-93 (pp. 192-3).

[22] This is what Lamné is instructed to export when she leaves Cambodia.

[23] See Elizabeth Becker and Seth Mydans, 'Norodom Sihanouk, Cambodian Leader Through Shifting Allegiances, Dies at 89', *New York Times*, 14 October 2012 <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/15/world/asia/norodom-sihanouk-cambodian-leader-through-shifting-allegiances-dies-at-89.html?_r=0> [accessed 23 October 2016], and Sebastian Berger, 'Fairytale ending for ballet dancing prince', *The Telegraph*, 30 October 2014 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/cambodia/1475429/Fairytale-ending-for-ballet-dancing-prince.html> [accessed 23 October 2016].

play's narrative, but it is made clear that this downfall has been precipitated by the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia and not widespread internal revolt. There seems to be more value to be found in what this community suggests about ethics than in its politics. The four women furnish a good model of how an ethical community may function; they all take the ethical risk of joining together as a community, they are endlessly supportive of one another, and they do partially succeed in their project to maintain Cambodia's culture (the play itself, particularly when performed in Cambodian, can function as a guarantee of this success for its audience). However, they are less successful as a model for how a community may become an effective political force in the way that the Théâtre du Soleil or Anna Akhmatova and her friends in *Voile* sometimes are.

Isolation and building new communities

The politics and ethics of a community are not restricted to its internal workings but also importantly relate to how that community interacts with wider society. A number of the communities identified in *Naufragés* hover between engagement with and isolation from the wider world, in a way that is also characteristic of the Théâtre du Soleil. The first important question centres on where the group is located geographically and how physically accessible it is to a large audience. The Théâtre du Soleil's base at the Cartoucherie, in a former munitions factory surrounded by a woods, is quite separate from Paris and indeed from much of commercial life (the site is shared by a number of other theatre companies and a stables, and backs on to a children's play area). The Théâtre du Soleil audience are removed from everyday life physically in the hope that this will render them more open to being removed from it emotionally

and conceptually when the group attempt to open up new modes of thinking or radically different approaches to ethics and politics in their plays. In practice, the success of this approach may well depend on the extent to which the audience are already convinced by elements of the Théâtre du Soleil's project. The Théâtre du Soleil do also work hard to ensure that the degree of physical isolation that is an important part of their project does not result in those who are in other cities, or who are in Paris but unable to pay for transport, for example, being excluded from their theatre. Many of the Théâtre du Soleil's productions have toured, and when they are on at the Cartoucherie there is a free bus service from the nearest metro station to the theatre for its audience. Mnouchkine has also campaigned hard to have the cartoucherie site rezoned, so that Parisian audiences would be able to use their normal travel cards to reach the theatre when the free bus is not running, reducing their transport costs.[24] The Théâtre du Soleil aims to remain distinct but connected to the rest of society, geographically, and when the communities in the plays decide on their level of geographic isolation, it is likewise indicative of their politics. A second concern for the Théâtre du Soleil and its political engagement, which I also address in relation to moral education, relates to the type of artistic products that they create, and whether they draw a wide audience or, on the contrary, tend to limit the audience, isolating the group from much of the population. The different communities in these plays likewise indicate the extent to which they want to engage with or isolate themselves from wider society by their philosophies and the means by which they communicate them.

[24] See André Balbo, 'Ariane Mnouchkine: comme la RATP au coin du bois...', *evous*, 27 June 2010 <http://www.evous.fr/Ariane-Mnouchkine-comme-la-RATP-au,1125740.html> [accessed 17 January 2017].

In terms of their geographic situation, the group of filmmakers of *Naufragés* have their studio in the attic of a cabaret which, like the boat that is shipwrecked in their film, is named the *Fol Espoir*. Like the Théâtre du Soleil, they choose to position themselves alongside other creative communities. This conjunction is perhaps unsurprising since, before the introduction of sound, films were rarely shown on their own and appeared more often alongside vaudeville performances or other forms of musical entertainment.[25] It was this association with cabaret and other popular forms of entertainment, such as the fairground, that meant that early film was seen as being unsuitable for the respectable middle classes at the turn of the twentieth century, but by the same token had the potential to be the perfect vehicle for a group of artists ideologically dedicated to raising the consciousness of the working classes.[26] Working above the cabaret, the filmmakers of the *Fol Espoir* enjoy an immediate connection with their audience, who can be heard at several points making noise in the cabaret below as the film is made.[27] The film will be consumed in the same place as it is produced, and in this way it takes on some of the urgency of theatre. Although there are practical downsides to their location above the cabaret (the filmmakers call angrily for a door to be closed when 'on entend trop la musique du restaurant' (*Naufragés*, pp. 25, 35, 76)), this proximity to a vibrant, working

[25] Graeme Turner, *Film as Social Practice*, 2nd edn (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 11.
[26] Ian Christie, *The Last Machine: Early Cinema and the Birth of the Modern World* (London: BBC Educational Developments, 1994), p. 12. Graeme Turner argues that this perception of cinema as working class was less pronounced or non-existent in France, but this is perhaps not important given that the focus of the filmmakers in *Naufragés* is very much on Europe as a whole (Turner, *Film as Social Practice*, p. 27).
[27] Eve Urban praises the '"togetherness" of the artists and restaurant workers, turned film-makers and actors', which she claims 'enables them to complete their ambitious project against the threat of the impending catastrophe of the war' (Urban, 'Reification and Modern Drama', p. 265).

class audience prepared to listen to the film's political message does seem to outweigh them.

Their position in the attic above the cabaret also has the benefit of giving the filmmakers metonymically a connection to French society beyond their audience. The cabaret is also ultimately the filmmakers' source of information on events in the outside world. Yet, in a couple of slapstick scenes, the waitress who brings up the Jean Jaurès's socialist-leaning newspaper *L'Humanité* is obliged to chase different members of the group around the stage before they will take it from her (*Naufragés*, pp. 47, 58).[28] The actors' desire for isolation (prompted perhaps by knowing that the only news will be bleak) is here coupled with eventual recognition of the possibility of isolation. This recognition is put off by the filmmakers at several points: earlier in the play, Tomasso wants to discuss the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, but Jean La Palette silences him, saying 'Tommaso, tu ne vas pas recommencer, laisse-moi tomber l'Allemagne! Nous avons un film à faire et je veux tourner la séquence de la fuite de Rachel' (*Naufragés*, p. 29). The situation in Austria or Germany must be left to one side; it is a distraction from the really urgent work of filming the scene 'qui doit dénoncer […] ces capitalistes sans cœur, qui exploitent leurs femmes et leurs ouvriers' (*Naufragés*, p. 33). The geo-political situation interrupts the artistic process at the same time as it also interrupts the wider struggle against the 'capitalistes sans cœur', although this distinction between

[28] Cixous has talked about the value that she finds in the name of the newspaper in'Volées de l'humanité', which also discusses Jean Jaurès and his politics. See Hélène Cixous, 'Volées d'humanité', Bruno Clément and Marta Segarra, eds, *Rêver croire penser: autour d'Hélène Cixous* (Paris: Campagne Première, 2010) pp. 15-37.

the ‘wider struggle’ and the ‘artistic process’ may not make sense for some engaged artists. The ultimate political struggle is the fight to bring the proletariat to consciousness, since it is with that class that the potential for revolution lies: the First World War features as a distraction (*Naufragés*, p. 59). This stance could seem callous in the light of the number of casualties that were to occur in the war, and certainly Jean La Palette’s belief in the greater importance of the filmmakers’ particular artistic endeavour appears somewhat narcissistic. However, as the play is prefaced with the voices of the actors, sent from the trenches, and so begins with evidence of the futility of their attempts to ignore the war and to avoid it by re-education of the proletariat, these attempts appear moving and admirable, even if not politically effective.

It is in part in order to maintain these types of connections that Jean La Palette has chosen to work at the cabaret rather than at the large studio Pathé,[29] where he would have had a larger budget and better technical facilities, as he explains before they begin filming:

> Quand j’ai claqué la porte chez Pathé, j’avais juré que je ferais ce film sur ce roman de notre grand Jules Verne, envers et contre tous, avec tous ceux qui voudraient le faire avec moi... avec des bouilles, avec des chômeurs, avec des travailleurs! (*Naufragés*, p. 25)

The phrase ‘notre grand Jules Verne’ appears strange, in part because Verne is not usually strongly associated with the left-wing politics of the film troupe, but

[29] Until World War One, Pathé was the world’s largest film producer, supplying 40% of the films watched in the UK (Turner, *Film as Social Practice*, p. 14).

also because although they are based in France they are an international group, and moreover Verne is often excluded from the canon of great literature (Unwin, *Journeys in Writing*, pp. 1-2). Just like when, in the play's film, two Austro-Hungarian Archdukes praise a speech by Victor Hugo which looked forward to a United States of Europe with Paris as its capital (*Naufragés*, p. 22), here there is a celebration of a form of inclusion which ultimately means an international embrace of French culture. It could equally be that the 'notre' refers to the community of filmmakers. Jules Verne's novels had provided early filmmakers with rich source material: *Voyage dans la lune* famously became a Georges Méliès film in 1902, and before 1914 there had been film versions of, amongst others, *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, *Round the World in 80 days* and *Michael Strogoff*, which was filmed three times. Neither the source text nor the story chosen by the filmmakers are particularly unusual in the context of early film; Christie suggests that some of the first vogues in cinema were for films that depicted journeys (*Last Machine*, p. 18).

As well as bringing closer ties to audiences, the filmmakers' decision to become independent from major studios also allows them to experiment with new working practices. This may be seen in the new technologies that the filmmakers joyfully develop (see *Naufragés*, pp. 113-14), but is more significantly represented by the use of non-professional actors, which La Palette highlighted as one of his major aims as a filmmaker. On the one hand, La Palette's use of these actors is a clear attempt to engage with the wider society; he draws the working class into his performance quite literally, and more significantly gives his wider audience the opportunity to see their *semblables* on screen, making a

strong statement that neither the creation nor the enjoyment of art are intended to exist in isolation from everyday life. However, the difficulties and failures of the practice are as relevant to the question of isolation as the director's intentions. Whilst Marguerite, formerly a cleaner, fits easily into her role as celebrated opera-singer Rachel, Vassili, the Russian set-painter, is repeatedly judged incapable of capturing what Jean and Gabrielle La Palette believe to be the essential part of the character whom they have chosen as 'l'ouvrier' of their film (*Naufragés*, p. 35-9). Ironically, it is portraying the worker that demands the most work from the actor, in this case a Russian artist who repeatedly fails in his attempts to become a member of the proletariat. There is a message here about the dangers of having a rarefied art world, separate from working people, as well as perhaps a satirical comment on the failings of the Soviet state established by the Bolshevik revolution, just four years after the play's main action takes place.

Naufragés also suggests that attempts to insert an overt political message into the film are problematic. The directors want to film a scene that includes a rape in a denunciation of the mistreatment of women by the bourgeois, capitalist husbands who necessarily hold power over them, but it breaks down because of the evident attraction between Marguerite and Schubert, the two actors chosen to play in the scene (*Naufragés*, pp. 29-34). One feminist response to this could be to welcome that the failure of the rape scene means that sexual violence is not used as a detail in a subplot or, worse, for covert titillation of the audience. Even leaving aside this concern, the failure of the scene is important because it acts as a warning to creative communities not to gloss over all of the

complexities of emotional life for the sake of a political message, and not to assume that the ethics of personal relationships can be made secondary to the politics of attempting to create social change. In a later scene, despite Jean La Palette's repeated instructions that the conclusion of a treaty between Argentina and Chile should be 'politique', portraying the seriousness diplomatic work, the scene descends into knockabout humour, and was staged using the iconography of Charlie Chaplin's film *The Gold Rush*: a nod to the work of that other early committed left-wing filmmaker.[30] The play shows that the use of non-professional actors has an impact on the work that is more important than the director had imagined. These actors change the work for the better, making it more nuanced by forcing it to pay attention to emotional complexity and by making allusions to other films. The play suggests that it is important to draw new actors into the theatre (the Théâtre du Soleil holds what it calls an *École Nomade* to train new actors)[31] but also shows that it is vital to recognise that the engagement is not all one-way; new members of the community do not fit quietly into the existing mould but alter it in often positive ways, with the result that this form of engagement is both a risk and an opportunity.

The filmmakers choose to reject isolation, at least partially, by moving to the attic of the cabaret. The *naufragés* of the play are forced into relative isolation when they are shipwrecked on the île Hoste, one of a number of islands at the

[30] *Naufragés*, pp. 75-81. The staging of this scene was particularly reminiscent of the scene towards the end of *The Gold Rush* where Chaplin fights a rival gold-seeker in his small mountainside hut. See *The Gold Rush*, dir. by Charlie Chaplin (United Artists, 1926).
[31] The project and its aims are outlined at the Théâtre du Soleil website, 'L'École Nomade du Théâtre du Soleil', 12 May 2015 <http://www.theatre-du-soleil.fr/thsol/nos-actualites/l-ecole-nomade/article/l-ecole-nomade-du-theatre-du?lang=fr> [accessed 20 October 2016].

extreme south of South America, which are remote from any large settlements.[32] A comic scene between Queen Victoria and Darwin introduces the island, not specifically or by name but, in an echo of the well-known anarchist slogan 'ni dieu, ni maître' (also taken up by Verne's Kaw-djer), only as one of 'des milliers d'îles sans maître' of 'La Magellanie', and the probable site of the death of Jean Salvatore, a relative of the Queen. It is this potential association with European power that mean that these islands are of interest; without it they are simply nameless islands somewhere 'au large des îles Falklands', which have by contrast acquired a name and an identity as British possessions, even if they are at 'vingt mille lieues de Londres' (*Naufragés*, pp. 62-6). A similar logic can be found in *Sihanouk*, where the USA, which like the UK in *Naufragés* takes the role of the dominant (colonial) world power, is shown only to take an interest in Cambodia because of its proximity to Vietnam, the country which is its real concern (*Sihanouk*, pp. 37, 84).

Louis Marin argues that the utopian space[33] must be cut off from relations with the rest of the globe:

[32] *En Magellanie* describes the establishment of two new ports, Punta Arenas and Ushaia by the Argentine and Chilean governments respectively, but these towns too are only newly built and reaching them takes Karroly, the Indian companion of the Kaw-djer, several weeks by boat. See *Naufragés du Jonathon*, where Karroly leaves the island on the 20th March and does not return from Punta Arenas until the 15th April (Deuxième Partie, Chapters I and III).

[33] In an interview with the collective blog *La Brèche*, Mnouchkine described *Naufragés* as 'un spectacle d'expérience' rather than 'un spectacle de dénonciation'. She goes on to explain that she chose to show an experiment in creating a new society rather than a straightforward critique of existing society because 'en ce moment, je pense qu'on a plus besoin d'utopie'. See *La Brèche*, 'Ariane Mnouchkine et la lueur obstinée du soleil', *La Brèche*, 16 March 2010 <http://www.theatre-du-soleil.fr/thsol/nos-spectacles-et-nos-films/nos-spectacles/les-naufrages-du-fol-espoir-2010/article/ariane-mnouchkine-et-la-lueur?lang=fr> [accessed 16 January 2017].

> La séparation d'avec 'la société', la constitution d'un 'autre monde' n'est-elle pas la marque primitive de l'utopie? Entrer en état d'indépendence par rapport à la culture ambiante, se mettre dans une position désimpliquée des institutions et des lois existantes, circonscrire un lieu séparé bénéficiant d'une sorte d'extériorialité, se determiner par ses exigences propres dans une autosuffisance totale, autant de traits qui conviennent […] à l'utopie.[34]

From the outset, the utopia of the île Hoste will not have this separation from the rest of the world. As I demonstrated above, even before the *naufragés* land, the île Hoste already exists on the geo-political stage, if only vaguely. Equally, whereas in his *Utopia*, Thomas More described a society that had been evolving in isolation for centuries, these first-generation immigrants have brought with them all of the baggage of the old world. Asked to design a new constitution for the island, the new community's first instinct is to look to the political theories of nineteenth-century Europe. Jean Salvatore rejects the suggestion that the new state will be communist, saying 'non. Vous peignez le siècle qui s'achève. Mais nous, nous venons après. Nous pourrions écrire la suite' (*Naufragés*, p. 131). His comments are sadly hopeful and loaded with irony for an audience aware that, as *Sihanouk* shows, precisely the tensions between the conflicting systems of communism and capitalism will come to define twentieth-century history in often violent ways. In Jean Salvatore's speech, separation from the old world becomes both temporal and spatial. The île Hoste is defined as coming 'après', being further into the future than the societies of Europe and having already

[34] Louis Marin, *Utopiques: jeux d'espaces* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1973), p. 19.

overcome Europe's 'lutte des classes'. The *naufragés* reject this vision, and the suffragist Emelyne Jones responds to him with a dismissive 'Et vous croyez ça possible!' (*Naufragés*, p. 131). Île Hoste will be connected to the Old World on both an imaginary and a practical level, since one of the first projects proposed by the capitalists is the creation of a new port which will allow for the import of luxury goods to the island (*Naufragés*, p. 122). In this way, connection to the rest of the world figures as openness to commercial relationships and a threat to the utopian project.

Openness is one key characteristic of the island, as is suggested by its name, which the audience are reminded of when île Hoste becomes part of a territorial dispute between Argentina and Chile. Jules Verne's novel stresses the commercial tensions underlying this dispute: both nations are establishing colonies in the area, and will require trading partners (*En Magellanie*, pp. 242-3). In *Naufragés*, the dispute between these two nations is only resolved when British imperialism threatens both powers' claims to the island, forcing a solution:

> L'Argentine aurait la rive Nord du canal de Beagle, la rive
> Sud irait au Chili, qui héritait ainsi de l'île Hoste.
> L'île Hoste, retenez bien ce nom. (*Naufragés*, p. 80)

This decisive command to remember the name of the île Hoste comes as one of the title boards that punctuate the play's film. In *Naufragés*, the title boards serve the practical functions of explaining the action of the film within the play and helping the audience easily to differentiate between the different levels of

narration, as well as providing a link to the aesthetic of silent cinema and a visual allusion to Brecht's theatre (which used title boards to place his plays' action into their wider social context). In this particular instance, they instruct the audience to consider the name of the island in an example of the type of close reading that is important to Cixous when she describes her reading and writing project. The name of the île Hoste, a real island in Patagonia and the setting for Verne's novel, describes its function in the play, which is one of welcome to the *naufragés*. Yet the welcome that they receive is only partial, and the island is shown to be quite inhospitable, in both senses of the words, because of the harsh, windy, and bitterly cold conditions that the *naufragés* experience, and which are made so evident in the *mise-en-scène* that features a stage covered in copious amounts of fake snow and actors bent double as they fight against wind provided by other actors holding an electric fan. This is in some contrast to the presentation of the island in Verne's novel, which stresses the mildness of the island's climate, although it does admit that the *naufragés* would be obliged to remain in their huts over winter (*En Magellanie*, p. 218).

The *Hoste* of Cixous's play is therefore not entirely hospitable and nor are the *naufragés* invited guests in any normal sense, since they arrive by chance, and their *Hoste* cannot evict them. It is more accurate, perhaps, to describe them as parasites. In *De l'hospitalité,* Derrida considers the distinction between parasite and guest:

> Comment distinguer entre un hôte (*guest*) et un parasite ? En principe, la différence est stricte, mais il faut pour cela un droit; il faut soumettre l'hospitalité, l'accueil, la

> bienvenue offerte à une juridiction stricte et limitative. Tout arrivant n'est pas reçu comme hôte s'il ne bénéficie pas du droit à l'hospitalité ou du droit d'asile, etc.[35]

Unlike the parasite, the guest is invited and has a (legal) right to enter the host's property, and behaves according to certain rules once there. The *naufragés* appear to have a right to stay in the île Hoste according to international law: the island is empty of permanent settlement, and they are given leave to remain by the Chilean government that has claimed sovereignty of the area (*En Magellanie*, p. 242). Yet the settlers do not always treat their island host with respect. Whereas the Native American populations portrayed in *En Magellanie* have left the island's resources intact despite frequent hunting and fishing expeditions, the first thoughts of some of the *naufragés* are of how they will plunder the island for its natural resources, in a way that is reminiscent of the fascination with 'la conquête de la nature par l'industrie' that Pierre Macherey identifies as the explicit '*thème général*' of Jules Verne's novels.[36]

There is an eco-political message here about the value of keeping some spaces intact through isolation from Europe. *Naufragés* never portrays a community sufficiently well-established to begin this exploitation, but in both *Les Naufragés du Jonathon* and *En Magellanie*, the settlers who begin logging, farming, hunting or fishing enterprises on the island are treated with admiration, so long as their own industry has contributed to their success (*En Magellanie*,

[35] Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle, *De l'hospitalité: Anne Dufourmantelle invite Jacques Derrida à répondre* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1997), p. 57.
[36] Pierre Macherey, *Pour une théorie de la production littéraire* (Paris: Maspero, 1974), p. 190; *Naufragés*, pp. 120-2.

pp. 295-6, *Les Naufragés du Jonathon*, Deuxième Partie, Chapitre VII). Yet, as Andrew Martin has pointed out, 'nearly all Verne's islands have a volcano'; there is always the potential that nature will destroy all that technology has created, as it does in *L'Île mystérieuse*. Even in those islands that do not have volcanoes, such as the île Hoste, 'events nevertheless occur in accordance with a volcanic logic', whereby a build-up of tensions may cause total destruction at an unpredictable moment.[37] In other words, once isolated islands are drawn into a western economic system through contact with settlers, in most of Verne's novels their destruction is inevitable. In *Naufragés*, the tensions that build are human and not geographic. The reduced ending of the play is precipitated by the outbreak of World War One, but within the narrative of the film that the filmmakers are creating, the failure properly to establish a new community comes as the result of the discovery of gold on the island (*Naufragés*, pp. 139-44). Both a critique of the influence of capitalism and a more old-fashioned criticism of the sin of greed may be read in this portrayal of the destructive power of gold. Thus, for example, Emile Gautrain calls himself 'Le Roi Midas' in the scene in which he uses gold dust to tempt Yuras to join him. Relating the early twentieth-century capitalists to the mythical king who chose wealth over human contact, the filmmakers present Gautrain's complicity with and ability to profit from the system of capitalism as an individual moral choice in a way that perhaps undermines their critique of capitalism as a system that determines the limits of an individual's freedom to act. Nevertheless, it creates a more engaging human drama and refuses to allow any abdication of responsibility on

[37] Andrew Martin, *The Mask of the Prophet: The Extraordinary Fictions of Jules Verne* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 145.

the part of those who exploit others for financial gain. Without the protection from these and similar threats afforded by its almost complete isolation, the island must be abandoned and its burgeoning community disbanded.

In *Sihanouk*, the costs of engagement or isolation are in general human and not environmental. One key ethico-political question it addresses relates to the profound differences between attempts to isolate an entire community, and attempts to isolate an individual (or indeed, an individual's attempts to isolate themselves). Whilst a community's attempts at self-isolation may be positively motivated, as for instance when the filmmakers demand semi-isolation in order to create their work, or when Jean Salvatore attempts to create a community that will escape the constraints of European nation states, the desire for personal isolation always figures negatively in the plays. Thus, although Jean Salvatore will leave the île Hoste for a more remote island, unlike the Kaw-djer of *Les Naufragés du Jonathon*, he will do so accompanied by others. In *Sihanouk*, the critique of individual isolation can be seen in the contrasting figures of Sihanouk and Khieu Samphan, the Khmer Rouge second in command. The callousness of the Khmer Rouge leader is first indicated by his willingness to cut off all ties with his mother without warning and to go into hiding, leaving her to believe that he is dead (*Sihanouk*, p. 80). Pol Pot's character is revealed when, after a meeting with fellow members of the Khmer Rouge he declares 'Je les hais tous', referring to both his companions and the rest of Cambodian society (*Sihanouk*, p. 34); any feeling of community with those who share his revolutionary values is apparently feigned as Pol Pot strives to remain isolated despite his ostensible membership of a community of revolutionaries. By contrast, Sihanouk's

relations with his family, and particularly his father, are very close. This relationship with Suramarit provides Sihanouk with a link to his ancestors, and therefore to the authority by which he rules Cambodia, but it is affectionate humour that actually characterises their relationship, which is so strong that it has survived the father's death. Likewise, although they rarely appear on stage together, Sihanouk and his mother display mutual concern for one another. Cixous's plays associate a desire to isolate oneself completely, either from a community or from a family, with ethically wrong behaviour, although a whole community's isolation from other communities might be politically valuable in some cases.

For Sihanouk, ethical duties and relationships extend outside of his immediate community. Perhaps Sihanouk's most admirable ethical action is his decision to attend Hô Chí Minh's funeral, despite the tensions that persisted between the two leaders during Hô's lifetime, and the political problems that he is facing at home (*Sihanouk*, pp. 95-6). This moment figures in the play not as the result of a desire to escape home problems but rather as a gesture that positively affirms that ethical duties exist outside of the dictates of political expediency. Moreover, the gesture shows that ethical duties to others are not negated by an individual's membership of a community, however isolated that community may be; even in cases where two communities are at war, individuals may still engage with individuals from the other community, and follow their ethical duties towards them.

Yet the most important question in the play is the political one of how relationships with other communities should be managed. In *Sihanouk*, unlike *Naufragés*, this is not related to the presence within the community of ideas and systems (such as love of gold or capitalism) which are perceived as coming from or driving links with other communities: these are more importantly questions about exclusion and inclusion. *Sihanouk*'s Cambodia is portrayed as being a community caught in a web of different and sometimes conflicting international relations which bring with them conflicting limits on the Cambodian government's freedom to act. The limits that the US wish to place on Cambodia are what creates the irony when, describing his diplomatic mission in Phnom Penh, the US ambassador McClintock tells Kissinger that 'Toute stratégie qui se contenterait d'actions trop diplomatiques échouerait. On ne les séduira pas. J'avais établi une batterie de deux cent sept idées-force pour les amener au monde libre par la persuasion' (*Sihanouk*, p. 81). The phrase 'monde libre' is used in McClintock's vocabulary as a synonym for those countries falling under the influence of the United States, which are of course not 'libre' to leave that sphere of influence. The play does not simply condemn the Americans in this regard; Russia and China are both considered to be ultimately responsible for the behaviour of the Vietnamese, and it is China that engineers Sihanouk's alliance with the Khmer Rouge, and also ensures that even the Cambodia of the nationalists practices a foreign policy not entirely hostile to the Vietnamese (*Sihanouk*, pp. 102-3, 154, 158). The case of Cambodia therefore highlights the dangers of close or unconsidered engagement with a wider 'community of

nations' (to cite a phrase common in contemporary diplomatic communications).[38]

One other significant consequence of this engagement-entanglement is that it is not clear whether various Cambodian governments may be held ethically responsible for all of their actions. Although Sihanouk may have offered limited sanctuary to the Vietnamese on his borders, it seems unjust to offer him praise for this action taken only after the politically and militarily supported demands of the Chinese. Similarly, he may not deserve the blame for allowing the American air force to use his airspace to pursue a bloody bombing campaign along his borders with Vietnam. Sihanouk's Cambodia, then, finds itself in a semi-colonial relationship with the superpowers that influence it. With little freedom to make its own foreign policy (and with even internal policy under scrutiny, as is suggested by the presence of the US ambassador in the scenes of theatrical policy-making that open the play) Cambodia often appears as a supplicant to larger powers, dependent on them for military aid and also, eventually, for internal peace (see *Sihanouk*, pp. 140, 231). The Khmer Rouge and Lon Nol's nationalists both, unlike Sihanouk, refuse to attempt to balance between conflicting engagements but rather ally themselves completely with one or other international party, with the result that, initially at least, they gain different freedoms. The nationalists enjoy a significant amount of military aid and greater military freedom to attack their enemies thanks to their alliance with the USA, whilst the Khmer Rouge who govern a country where all US personnel

[38] Although conservative critics, in particular, have been damning about Barack Obama's use of the phrase in a speech about a nuclear deal with Iran. See George F. Will, 'Is There a "Community of Nations"?', *Newsweek*, 4 November 2009 <http://europe.newsweek.com/will-there-community-nations-77409?rm=eu> [accessed 20 October 2016].

have been evacuated, are relatively free from any international surveillance when they undertake their radical and horrific reorganisation of their country. Ultimately, though, these freedoms prove short-lived and both of these regimes fall to foreign invasions by the Vietnamese and their backers, at least in part as a result of their attempts to isolate themselves from the influence of major superpowers.

The relationship between Cambodia and the former colonial power, France, is equally complex. Sihanouk is keen to stress the long tradition of monarchy in Cambodia, and takes advice from his father and his ancestors (*Sihanouk*, pp. 35-42), but he does admit that the Cambodian monarchy as it stands today is also in part a French creation: he laments that 'mon malheur a été d'être choisi par les Français pour monter sur le trône' (*Sihanouk*, p. 148). Equally, although Sihanouk derides the Khmer Rouge for having received their education in France (*Sihanouk*, p. 30), when he is threatened he looks to France as a beacon of safety (*Sihanouk*, p. 159, amongst others). This last tendency is not restricted to the king, and when the community of women are considering places where Lamné could search for refuge after leaving Cambodia, the final advice that Khieu Samnol calls out to her is 'Je voulais vous dire: si vous pouviez aller à Paris! A Paris de France!' (*Sihanouk*, p. 355). The impact of this remark is twofold: first, it suggests to the audience that, in some sense, the Cambodia that Lamné represents, which is made up of the remnants of Cambodian culture, has arrived and been welcomed in France, in the Cartoucherie, and is being played out before them. Second, the remark functions as a bitter comment on France's immigration policy, which may not provide Lamné with the welcome that her

adoptive sister assumes that she has earned a right to through suffering. Such a sentiment would not be surprising in this play, given the Théâtre du Soleil's history of activism on the issue of migrants' rights.[39] Like *Naufragés*, the play shows that communities take a risk whenever they engage with other communities, and suggests that these engagements must be carefully managed and defined. However, most strikingly in the Phare Ponleu Selpak production of Sihanouk, in Cambodian and with Cambodian actors, the play suggests that engagement between communities might be an ethical duty as well as a political necessity.

Conclusion

In both plays, the creation of new communities is plagued by risk. Ultimately, communities which are founded around the project of the creation of a new utopian society, like the community of the Khmer Rouge and the settlers of the île Hoste, all disintegrate, and their failure is bloody. Communities that are smaller in scale, or with a less far-reaching project (like the community of filmmakers in *Naufragés* or the community of women in *Sihanouk*) seem to

[39] I am thinking particularly of an incident in 1996 where around 300 people who were *sans-papiers* were housed in the Cartoucherie. See David Dufresne and Dominique Simonnot, 'Saint-Bernard se retrouve à la Cartoucherie, Des dizaines d'organisations appellent à manifester demain pour les sans-papiers', *Libération*, 27 August 1996 <http://www.liberation.fr/france/1996/08/27/saint-bernard-se-retrouve-a-la-cartoucherie-des-dizaines-d-organisations-appellent-a-manifester-dema_178819> [accessed 22 October 2016]. The Théâtre du Soleil's 2003 play, *Le Dernier Caravansérail (Odysées)*, was written using the testimony of, amongst others, migrants living in the Sangatte refugee camp. A recent production by the Théâtre Aftaab, *La Ronde de nuit*, which was produced in cooperation with the Théâtre du Soleil and performed at the Cartoucherie, highlighted the difficulties faced by Afghan immigrants in France. Cixous wrote a short essay 'Non! Le Premier mot de théatre' for the play's programme notes. See Hélène Cixous, 'Non! Le Premier mot de théatre', Théâtre du Soleil website, 3 February 2013 <http://www.theatre-du-soleil.fr/thsol/dans-nos-nefs/article/la-ronde-de-nuit-titre-provisoire> [accessed 2 October 2016].

have a greater likelihood of success, although they will not be safe from loss. The filmmakers do make their film, even if we know from the beginning of the play that not all members of the community will, ultimately, survive World War One. The community of women do succeed in saving some of Cambodian culture when Lamné leaves the country, although perhaps the greatest marker of their success is that they remain a community despite most of the members of that community becoming ghosts: they have created a type of community that can accommodate even the greatest differences. Indeed, the plays suggest that the communities that are the most tolerant of difference, which have the most flexible criteria for inclusion, are the most successful. The exclusive communities created by a succession of revolutionary governments in Cambodia, and by European society in *Naufragés*, are all shown to be violent and corrupt. However, this is not the only criteria that is shown to govern the success of a community. The plays suggest that successful communities must be politically strategic in their attitudes towards engagement with other communities and wider society, and strike a balance between isolation, which can be a useful protective measure but is ultimately impossible, in many cases, and engagement, which is always a risk but which is also an ethical duty in a number of cases. One of the key ways in which the Théâtre du Soleil (Cixous's major model for a creative, engaged community) relates to the question of isolation or engagement is through its attempts at providing moral education for its audience.

Chapter Four: Moral Education in *Portrait de Dora* and *La Ville Parjure ou le réveil des Erinyes*

Morality is a term that is often used interchangeably with ethics, but which I wish to distinguish from both ethics and politics. I have argued that ethics should be defined as a relationship of absolute responsibility to the other. This relationship is perhaps most easily understood in opposition to politics: whereas politics involves negotiating between different (often conflicting) responsibilities, an ethical stance requires that the subject's response to the other is in no way calculated. Ethically, the self must respond to the other without counting the potential cost to itself or to any third party. I use the term 'moral', by contrast, to describe a socially-defined code of good or right thoughts, beliefs, or behaviour. As I have defined them, ethics and politics have to do with qualities of relationships, and neither of them would be reducible to a code or set of rules that define what to value or how to behave, although they have sometimes been thought of in this way – in certain religious contexts, for instance. A moral code is socially defined, and different codes exist in different contexts. Challenges to moral codes might be political (negotiated attempts to improve relationships between a number of individuals, perhaps stemming from a critique of the status quo and its treatment of, for instance, women, working class people, or minorities), or ethical (stemming from an absolute responsibility to an other). Moral education is the attempt to teach the pupil to know what the moral code demands of them and to act in accordance with that code, and it occurs in the domestic and in the public spheres.

In this chapter, my focus will be on moral education. I begin by defining moral education, and go on to examine particular examples in Cixous's 1976 play *Portrait de Dora* and *La Ville Parjure ou le réveil des Erinyes*, from 1994.[1] Both of these plays are rewritings of real historical events (Freud's analysis of Dora, the *affaire du sang contaminé*), and I suggest how the particular circumstances of the events that inspired the plays, and the contexts in which the plays were first written and watched, inform the ways in which Cixous critiques and provides moral education in them. I go on to discuss Cixous's critical examination of moral education in the plays, beginning by looking at the position of the governess in *Portrait de Dora*, arguing that Cixous's examination of her role within the family constitutes a critique of the ways in which moral education was provided in the Austria that Dora grew up in. I then discuss the moral education given (or perhaps not given) to doctors in *La Ville Parjure*, and suggest that Cixous is suspicious of tightly-worded moral codes that may conversely have the effect of allowing individuals to ignore ethical duties. I argue that both *Portrait de Dora* and *La Ville Parjure* show that spectacles of forbidden or praiseworthy behaviours are important in all forms of moral education, and link this to the role that theatre, more generally, might play in moral education. The most valuable contribution that these plays make to the audience's moral education, however, is that both act to reframe the

[1] *Portrait de Dora* was first performed at the Theâtre d'Orsay in 1976, but it has been taken up in a number of other versions. It was for instance performed at the Theatre at New End in Hampstead in 1976, again directed by Benmussa, and recently the Taiwanese Puppet and its Double Theatre performed a version that included live actors and puppets. *La Ville Parjure ou le réveil des Erinyes* was performed at the Cartoucherie in 1994, and then toured Liège, Recklinghausen, Vienna, and was also performed at the Festival d'Avignon. In total, 51, 200 people saw the play.

stories that they stage and to bring out their ethical and political importance; this is what I demonstrate in the final part of this chapter.

Two of Cixous's plays, *Portrait de Dora* and *La Ville Parjure* centre on moral education. Portrait *de Dora* stages Freud's psychoanalysis of a young patient suffering from hysterical symptoms, Dora, a case he later wrote up in his 'Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria ('Dora')'.[2] The moral education here is particularly focussed on Dora's sexual behaviour. Hannah S. Decker describes the 'dualities' and 'hypocrisies' that marked the moral code governing young women's sexuality in turn of the century Vienna: a pose of 'public innocence' was required from young women, whose parents must aim to 'minimize the eventuality that a sexual thought might enter her consciousness', but at the same time there was an expectation of 'private enlightenment', where young women should have some 'sexual knowledge' by their late teens, and welcome (if not succumb to) flirtation with men.[3] This double standard suggests that underlying the official moral code prohibiting any sexual behaviour for these women was a social demand that women express heterosexual desire.[4] I will argue that, in Cixous's play, Freud's psychoanalysis of Dora is a form of moral education that aims to teach Dora to recognise and to conform to this double bind that forms a significant part of her city's moral code. When I analyse *La Ville Parjure,* I move away from the domestic scene, although not

[2] Sigmund Freud, 'Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria ('Dora')', in *Case Histories I,* ed. by Angela Richards, trans. and with introduction by James Strachey (Harmondsworth: Penguin Freud Library, 1977), pp. 29-164.
[3] Hannah S. Decker, *Freud, Dora, and Vienna 1900* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), pp. 73-6.
[4] See particularly my discussion of Dora's relationship with Frau K. in the section 'Spectacles of prohibited behaviours', where I draw on Adrienne Rich's work on compulsory heterosexuality.

away from the medical. Ariane Mnouchkine told Maria Shevstova that her desire to stage a play which took the *affaire du sang contaminé* as its starting point was linked to a critique of contemporary education: 'je pense que l'histoire du sang, ce crime me paraît être absolument la métaphore de notre société, cest-à-dire, ce vers quoi elle va, vers quoi va l'éducation de nos dirigeants'.[5] In my analysis of the play, I focus on the example of the Hippocratic Oath, taken by doctors as part of their professional training, and intended or touted by the city's elite as their officially sanctioned moral education. My main focus will be on the tribunal at the heart of the play, where the Mother attempts to bring to justice X1 and X2, the killers of her two young children. Her attempts to oblige these men to recognise their crimes can be understood as a form of moral re-education: she hopes to teach them to conform to the moral code of the cemetery where she now lives, outside of the city that had shaped their morals. These plays offer strikingly different examinations of the potential of moral education.

The plays have in common that, like most of Cixous's plays, they are inspired by or stage a true story. In *Portrait de Dora* Cixous interweaves dream sequences of her own invention with (often misattributed, cut or repeated) quotations from Freud's 'Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria ("Dora")' to question psychoanalytic discourse and the ways in which (through that discourse) female subjectivity is constructed. Freud's case study centred on a patient who was suffering from hysterical symptoms. The eighteen-year-old Dora came to Freud towards the end of 1900, although Freud mistakenly dates

[5] Maria Shevstova, '*La Ville Parjure*: un théâtre qui parle aux citoyens: entretien avec Ariane Mnouchkine', *Alternatives théâtrales*, 48 (1995), 69-73 (p. 70).

the beginning of the analysis to 1899, an error repeated in *Portrait de Dora* by the voice of the play (*Portrait de Dora*, p. 62). As James Strachey points out, this redating of the analysis means that Dora's refusal of further treatment comes in January of 1900, and marks the beginning of the new century.[6] When she entered analysis, Dora was suffering from symptoms that included aphonia (an inability to produce voice), dyspnoea (shortness of breath), a limp in one leg, dizzy and fainting spells, and a phobia of walking past men and women when they were deep in conversation together; she had also left a suicide note for her parents to find, and was suffering from depression. In his report of the case history, Freud finds that he is broadly in agreement with Dora in her analysis of her family situation.[7] Dora's father, Herr B., has long been estranged from Dora's mother, who suffers from what Freud terms 'housewife's psychosis', obsessional cleaning that renders life difficult for the rest of her family. When Dora enters analysis, Herr B. has for some time been having a love affair with a family friend, Frau K. Herr K., her husband, tolerates the affair because, in exchange, Herr B. allows him to make advances to his daughter, Dora.[8] After analysis of two of Dora's dreams, Freud concludes that Dora is hiding an unconscious love for Herr K. and for her father. When Freud comes

[6] See James Strachey's 'Introduction' to the 'Fragment', p. 34.

[7] For Christa Stevens, *Portrait de Soleil* (the novel that preceded *Portrait de Dora*) is both of a portrait of Dora and 'a portrait *by* Dora', since 'by escaping from the close embrace and controlling eye of her nearest and dearest, she draws at the same time a fine picture of them and their lies, blowing up the system of the social and sexual conventions upon which they rely'. See Christa Stevens, 'Hélène Cixous and the Need of Portraying: on *Portrait du Soleil*', in *Hélène Cixous: Critical Impressions*, ed. by Lee A. Jacobus and Regina Barreca, pp. 201-24 (pp. 203-4).

[8] This is established in the first section of Freud's case history, 'The Clinical Picture', pp. 44-98. See particularly pp. 49-50 for the description of Dora's relationship to her mother and father, p. 58 where her symptoms are described, and p. 66: 'I could not in general dispute Dora's characterization of her father; and there was one particular respect in which it was easy to see that her reproaches were justified. When she was feeling embittered, she used to be overcome by the idea that she had been handed over to Herr K. as the price of his tolerating the relations between her father and his wife'.

to write up the case history some time after the analysis, he also points out Dora's homosexual love for Frau K., and regrets that 'Dora's analysis came to an end before it could throw any light on this side of her mental life' ('Fragment', p. 95). After three months of treatment, Dora abruptly leaves analysis; Freud concludes that Dora must have transferred some of her love feelings for Herr K. onto him, and that his failure to recognise this early enough was to blame for the failure of the analysis. Six months after leaving analysis, Dora visits Freud briefly to tell him that she had confronted the Ks with their behaviour, and that she had seen Herr K. run over in the street. Freud reports this meeting in his case history, but Dora does not re-enter analysis with him. The action of Cixous's play ends with the narrating voice of the play telling the audience about this final encounter, but it is possible to trace more of Dora's story. Towards the end of her life, Dora underwent psychoanalysis again, this time with Felix Deutsch. Deutsch wrote up the encounter after Dora's death, revealing that her symptoms had never gone away and that, additionally, she had developed aspects of the 'housewife's neurosis' that her mother had experienced.[9]

In Cixous's staging of the story, she chooses to retain the name 'Dora', chosen by Freud as a pseudonym for his patient, Ida Bauer. In *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, Freud remembers how, when he was obliged to find a pseudonym for Ida, 'one name and only one occurred to me', Dora.

[9] See Felix Deutsch, 'A Footnote to Freud's "Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria"', in *In Dora's Case: Freud, Hysteria, Feminism*, ed. by Claire Kahane and Charles Bernheimer (London: Virago, 1985), pp. 35-43. Deutsch concludes that '[Dora's] death from a cancer of the colon, which was diagnosed too late for a successful operation, seemed a blessing to those who were close to her. She had been, as my informant phrased it, "one of the most repulsive hysterics" he had ever met' (p. 43).

Significantly, Dora was also the alias used by a nursemaid employed by Freud's sister; the nursemaid's name was Rosa, but since this was also Freud's sister's name, the nursemaid was obliged to use the name Dora.[10] Through his choice of name, Freud associates Dora with Rosa, the servant, an example of 'tit-for-tat' revenge for Dora's decision to leave her analysis abruptly, according to Suzanne Gearhart, and according to Maria Ramas an unconscious recognition that 'servitude was a metaphor for femininity', and the expression of his wish that 'Ida Bauer make her peace with servitude'.[11] The work of a nursemaid or governess is traditionally (and certainly was in turn of the century Vienna) a feminine form of service, and Dora had, at times, acted as a carer to the K. children. Indeed, Freud claims 'a common interest in the children had from the first been a bond between Herr K. and Dora' (Freud, 'Fragment', p. 69), and Herr K. seduces his children's paid governess, too. In Cixous's play, it is Mme K. who remarks to Dora that 'tu as une attitude si maternelle envers mes enfants!' (*Portrait de Dora*, p. 93); the promise of children is an important tool for Cixous's Mme K. in her attempts to convince Dora to accept heterosexuality, and not to resolve to remain a virgin. The assumption that a desire for children would precede any sexual attraction for this eighteen-year-old is unfamiliar today, and suggests how demands on women's bodies have shifted.

What is particularly significant in Freud's choice of name is not only that Ida could be associated with the nursemaid Rosa through shared experiences of

[10] See Sigmund Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, ed. by James Strachey and trans. by Alan Tyson (Harmondsworth: Penguin Freud Library, 1975), pp. 301-2.
[11] See Suzanne Gearhart, 'The Scene of Psychoanalysis: The Unanswered Questions of Dora', in *In Dora's Case*, ed. by Claire Kahane and Charles Bernheimer, pp. 105-127 (p. 121), and Maria Ramas, 'Freud's Dora, Dora's Hysteria', in *In Dora's Case*, ed. by Claire Kahane and Charles Bernheimer, pp. 149-80 (p. 176).

women's work and motherly caring – Dora would not be the only name that would have this association for Freud – but that the name Dora is used by the nursemaid only when she is working. 'Dora' is not a constant identity for Rosa but a role she plays, and the same is true for Ida Bauer. The lives and experiences of Ida and Rosa are connected to but distant from the Dora characters that both play, and neither woman has had a free hand in shaping their 'Dora' persona. Rosa must conform to her employer's expectations, and 'Dora', the hysterical patient whom Freud describes in his case history, has been shaped by Freud's interpretations and analyses, which are themselves informed by his experience, his desire for knowledge, and his care for his patients, as well as by his irritation, jealousy and professional ambitions. Cixous chooses to retain the name of Dora when she writes her play, insisting on the fact that she is engaging with Freud's written case history and not with the real life of a young woman who would have no right of reply. As Ann Wilson has it, 'Dora is really Freud's Dora as Cixous's Dora is clearly a construct mediated not only by Cixous's textual practices but by Freud's'.[12] Cixous's decision to retain the name Dora is above all an ethical gesture of respect towards Ida Bauer, which maintains and affirms that Ida had a life outside of her analysis by Freud and her afterlife as a putative feminine heroine. Freud's sister's decision to rename her maid may be read as an attempt to maintain or assert control over the young woman who worked for her, but when Cixous performs a similar gesture and uses the name Dora she renounces any claim to control over the story of the real young woman Ida Bauer.

[12] Ann Wilson 'History and Hysteria: Writing the Body in *Portait of Dora* and *Signs of life'*, *Modern Drama*, 32.1 (1989), 73-88 (p. 81).

La Ville Parjure shares a fascination with memorable female characters and their use of language, and also draws on a scandalous medical case, this time *l'affaire du sang contaminé*, to examine wider ethical and political questions – here, the main focuses are on justice and on how to teach responsibility.[13] The journalist Anne-Marie Casteret first brought the *affaire du sang contaminé* to public attention in 1991 with an article in the magazine *L'Évenement du jeudi*, which was followed in 1992 by the book *L'Affaire du sang*.[14] Casteret showed that the heads of the Paris blood transfusion service, the CNTS (the largest blood transfusion centre in France, and one which had close links to many regional centres) repeatedly ignored warnings about the safety of their blood products. Haemophiliacs in Paris received blood products made from blood taken from between 4,000 and 5,000 donors, and by June 1985 it was known that 100% of these products were infected with HIV. Nevertheless, in internal memos cited by Casteret, the heads of the blood service ordered that 'la distribution des produits non chauffés [not treated to remove risk of HIV infection] reste la procédure normale tant qu'ils sont en stock' (*Affaire du sang*, p. 167), and later 'les concentrés non chauffés doivent être utilisés jusqu'à épuisement des stocks' (*Affaire du sang*, p. 169). Although it had long been thought that heating blood

[13] There was a parallel situation in the UK, where 'almost all' haemophiliacs were infected with HIV or Hepatitis C through contaminated blood products. Individuals were infected between the 1970s and the mid-1990s but in the UK, unlike in France, enquiries into the scandal are only just taking place, some twenty years later. Diana Johnson, Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Haemophilia and Contaminated Blood has called on the Prime Minister to apologise in Diana Johnson, 'Those Affected by the UK's Contaminated Blood Scandal Deserve an Apology form the Prime Minister', *The New Statesman*, 14 January 2015 <http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2015/01/those-affected-uk-s-contaminated-blood-scandal-deserve-apology-prime-minister> [accessed 2 October 2016].

[14] Anne-Marie Casteret, *L'Affaire du sang* (Paris: Découverte, 1992). See pp. 74-5 on initial concerns about effectiveness of heating blood, pp. 107-8 for the financial negotiations over heating blood, p.138 on the decision to delay testing of donors, and p. 148 for the estimate that 100% of blood stocks were infected.

would eliminate risk of infection with Hepatitis C or HIV, the CNTS were reluctant to import heated blood products, and delayed the introduction of heating for blood products they collected. The two concerns here were confirming the efficacy of heating blood products as a way to prevent HIV infection, and negotiating a better price with the German company from whom the CNTS were buying blood heating technology. The CNTS were also slow to screen out high-risk donors and to begin to test donated blood for HIV, as they were reluctant to import an expensive American HIV test in large numbers whilst a French test was being developed, and worried that the introduction of HIV screening would conversely attract high-risk donors unable to access HIV testing in other ways. In 1992, the heads of the CNTS were tried and convicted for the crime of merchandising fraud, and both received four-year sentences. A higher court later found that the two men should have faced the more serious charge of poisoning. As a result, the financial settlement that the pair had to pay was increased, but there was no change to their custodial sentences (Ayres, 'nonprosecution alternatives', p. 4).

Casteret's book is one significant source text for *La Ville Parjure*, and at the end of the cast list for the original performance of *La Ville Parjure*, included in the published text of *La Ville Parjure* and in the original programme, there is a short note, 'nous remercions Anne-Marie Casteret pour son livre *L'Affaire du sang* qui nous a été très précieux' (*Ville Parjure*, p. 234). There are references to and partial quotations of Casteret's book in Cixous's play.[15] Several different

[15] Casteret describes a messenger from the Ministry of Health as 'le messager du Roi' (*Affaire du sang*, p. 165), and an old king rules over Cixous's city; Cixous's account of Madame Lion's repeated attempts to warn the authorities of the dangers of the blood they were distributing are similar to Casteret's descriptions of Yvette Sultan's efforts (see Casteret, *Affaire du sang*, pp,

memos quoted by Casteret in her book become a 'circulaire', read by Madame Lion to the council of doctors: 'tous nos sangs sont contaminés. Alors que faire? Si l'on arrête la distribution, les conséquences seront très graves. La distribution des produits reste donc la procédure normale jusqu'à épuisement des stocks' (*Ville Parjure*¸ p. 142-3). By combining several memos, Cixous simplifies the timeline of the development of the *affaire*, and creates a single piece of evidence that is more damning for the accused. The same process of simplification is evident in the play's portrayal of the motives behind the crimes. Whereas Casteret's book shows a range of factors feeding into the crimes, including misplaced national pride (in the purity of French blood), genuine practical concerns (proper testing for new procedures, accidentally attracting high-risk donors) and financial motivations, in Cixous's play, the scandal is rewritten as a conflict between the political and the ethical. The Mother and her demand for justice, and for the Hippocratic oath to be taken in its strongest sense, represent the ethical. All of the factors identified by Casteret are grouped together as political concerns and in *La Ville Parjure*, the financial concerns stand in metonymically for all of them – only the Queen's offer to create a charitable fund to help others suffering from haemophilia (*Ville Parjure*, p.167) complicates the picture that emerges of the financial-political as purely avaricious.

This is not to characterise *La Ville Parjure* as a simplistic play. At least three main sources can be identified for *La Ville Parjure*. I have already discussed

77-8, which describes her first demand for heated blood, or see *Affaire du sang* p. 92, where Sultan and her colleagues phone the CNTS 'à plusieurs reprises', or as Cixous has it 'j'ai téléphoné dix fois par jour dix jours de suite' (*Ville Parjure*, p.145). I discuss the links between Sultan and Madame Lion in the section 'Spectacles of prohibited and permitted behaviour').

l'affaire du sang contaminé as retold by Casteret. A second source is Cairo's 'City of the Dead' cemetery, which Cixous recognises as one inspiration for *La Ville Parjure*, and describes as 'a very large parallel city to Cairo' and 'a striking image of what happens to the homeless in our society, and where the rejected find hospitality' (Fort, 'Theatre, History', p. 443). The cemetery's position as a parallel town that is in some ways analogous to the city but which is also separate from it and functions according to different rules (according to which hospitality is valued more highly), is central to the cemetery's role as a site for moral education.[16] A third and particularly important source for the play is Aeschylus's *Oresteia*. Aeschylus/Eschyle appears as a character in *La Ville Parjure*, as do the Furies, the three canine old women and incarnations of vengeance and justice who track Orestes after he has killed his mother and speak in favour of mothers at Orestes's trial. In bringing together these three sources, Cixous works against a political tendency to exclude any discussion of ethical notions such as justice from discussions of contemporary tragedies, and also to view instances of injustice as separate and isolated from one another.

What emerges from this conjunction is a play that is relatively clear on the levels of plot and language, which makes strong use of humour, appeals to the audience's pity, and stages threats of physical violence to create a grand and engaging spectacle. Cixous's aim in *La Ville Parjure* is to teach her audience to

[16] For Cixous, the city is also a place of tension and conflict; she states that 'The city space is crisscrossed with pleasures and hostilities. Especially hostilities. The first cities in literature are cities under siege'. See Hélène Cixous, 'The Book as One of Its Own Characters', *New Literary History*, 33.3 (2002) 403-34 (p. 415) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20057734> [accessed 16 January 2017]. In *La Ville Parjure*, the eponymous town is under siege by the Mother and her followers, but the alternative town that they create in the cemetery is also beseiged by the right-wing Forzza and his followers.

practice new, ethical ways of thinking which will necessitate a rejection of political calculation. The distinction between the two modes of relating and thinking is clearly marked out for the audience through the spatial division between the (political) city and the (ethical) cemetery. The Théâtre du Soleil audience is brought outside of their city context, to the Cartoucherie, to watch a gathering that also takes place on the margins of a city in a space charged with revolutionary potential. The play uses elements of the mythical alongside simple language to encourage the audience to suspend their impulse to calculate and think politically. At the end of the short essay 'Nos mauvais sangs', written for the programme notes to *Ville Parjure,* Cixous reminds us that 'ceci n'est pas une fable' (*Ville Parjure*, p.207). It is the tension between the appearance of fable or fairy story running through Cixous's play and the reality of the events that inspired it that holds the key to the play's potential to provide a moral education.

Cixous's audience are invited to support the Mother completely, at least whilst they are in the privileged and separated space of the theatre. The Mother is eloquent, and her interactions with her sons (who are played by puppets when they appear to her on stage) are moving, particularly as they come against the background of mostly unnamed and undifferentiated characters – X1 and X2, the lawyers, the doctors, the chorus, and even the Furies. The Mother is therefore the obvious recipient of the audience's sympathy; although Madame Lion, the Queen, or Eschyle also have some claim to this sympathy or respect, they are relatively minor characters. The Mother is not an example to emulate in a traditional sense, since she is implicated in the deaths of her supporters as

a result of her ethical refusal to enter into any political negotiations. Rather, our association with her teaches us that it is possible to think about contemporary tragedy with a focus on the human suffering at the heart of the crime (an ethical concern in the context of her relationship with her sons) rather than the question of how to navigate its aftermath (a political calculation), if only within certain, privileged spaces like the theatre.

Whilst *Ville Parjure* offers a challenge to dominant political discourse by presenting an alternative way of thinking, *Portrait de Dora* does so by investigating and breaking down that discourse. Freud's account of Dora's analysis is a 'fragment' insofar as it is only a partial analysis of her case (she leaves treatment early), and only a partial account of the analysis that did take place (selected and edited to be suitable for publication, based on notes written after the psychoanalytic sessions).[17] Cixous's play further fragments the account, mixing quotations from Freud's account with her own text, attributing lines taken from Freud's account to different characters, repeating lines and scenes, and using video to stage conflicting accounts of the same scene simultaneously. In *Portrait de Dora*, Cixous does not offer a single counternarrative to Freud's account of Dora, but rather seeks to create gaps and contradictions in Freud's story by interrogating his analyses and assumptions, which are often indistinguishable in the 'Fragment' from Dora's reported speech. Simone Benmussa explains that, during the creation of the play:

[17] Discussing the 'technical difficulties' of writing up the case history, Freud writes 'The difficulties are very considerable when the physician has to conduct six or eight psychotherapeutic treatments of the sort in a day, and cannot make notes during the actual session with the patient for fear of shaking the patient's confidence and of disturbing his own view of the material under observation. Indeed, I have not yet succeeded in solving the problem of how to record for publication the history of a treatment of long duration' ('Fragment', p. 38).

> The problems occurred haphazard, unchosen, in no sort of order: where were we to place the voids that corresponded to the visual silences, how were we to disorientate the spectator's gaze from what seemed real, how light the dream to make *it* appear real, and not a romantic or poetic illusion. (Benmussa, *Benmussa Directs*, p. 10)

Benmussa's staging performs the work of the hysterical patient's conscious mind, repressing and disguising memory and substituting realistic dreamed or imagined sequences. The audience is left in Freud's position, with a good deal of analytic work to do. The sort of careful, close attention demanded of audiences here can be understood as an ethical gesture (one of care and generosity to the other), as well as a significant political gesture (allowing for critical thought, challenging dominant forms of discourse). The ethical and political stakes of reading and analysis are also at the heart of Cixous's widely read discussions of *écriture féminine*, many of which were written at the same time as *Portrait de Dora*.

The tensions and coincidences between ethics and politics are brought centre stage in the questions addressed by both of these plays. Dora's history might be seen as the perfect illustration of the feminist motto 'the personal is political': her illness can be traced back to the intimate scene of family and lovers, but what that scene reveals is the social and economic system of exchange into which all women are obliged to enter, on pain of illness. As Catherine Clément points out in her analysis of Claude Lévi-Strauss's work (in 'La Coupable', her

opening section to *La Jeune née*, the book she co-authored with Cixous) it is this system of exchange that founds and guarantees our social order – which is dependent on exchanged women as its means of (re-) production (*La Jeune née*, pp. 16-22). When Irigaray responds to Lévi-Strauss, she shows that the use of women (rather than men, who are biologically equally vital for the reproduction of the species) as objects for exchange is based on the supposed rarity of desirable women, an assumption that relies on the masculine beliefs first, that all men are equally attractive and second that polygamy is natural only for men, both assumptions that inform Dora's family scene and Freud's psychoanalysis. Freud's treatment (which amounts to a moral education) of Dora was on the one hand based on a doctor's duty of care and designed to reduce or eradicate his patient's painful symptoms. It was also a political gesture prompted when Dora's real suffering risked exposing the silent and invisible contradictions of her family scene and the system of exchange that underpinned it in ways that might have subverted or disrupted the smooth running of that system.

In *Ville Parjure*, there is likewise a mixture of the domestic and the public, as a mother's grief for the deaths of her children leads to a tribunal that involves medical authorities and the political establishment. The Mother has a commitment to her sons that is uncalculated and ethical: she does not hope to improve material circumstances for her sons, who are dead, and she refuses all of the pragmatic political compromises that she is offered despite the risks associated with this refusal. Her ethical commitment to finding justice for her dead sons is expressed in her attempt to provide a new form of moral education for the doctors X1 and X2. This moral education will succeed in giving her sons

justice if it convinces the doctors X1 and X2 to accept responsibility for their crimes, something that the flawed moral education they have received inside the city has left them unable to do. When the moral education fails to do this, and moreover leads indirectly to the deaths of the Mother and her followers, it displaces the responsibility for political change onto the audience. The play's final scene, an epilogue where the Mother speaks to the audience from Heaven, makes this clear: 'Notre pièce est finie. Mais la vôtre commence./ À votre tour obstinez-vous à vouloir que le juste/ Advienne justement' (*Ville Parjure*, p. 202).

Providing a critique of moral education

Both *Ville Parjure* and *Portrait de Dora* combine a critique of flawed or inadequate moral education with an attempt to provide a new form of politically radical moral education, which would be informed by some ethical responsibility. In *Portrait de Dora*¸ it is the critique of moral education that is at first most evident. In turn of the century Vienna, as it is today, the majority of a child's moral education would have been provided in the home, either by a child's family or, particularly in bourgeois families, perhaps by hired governesses or nurses. For young children, this would have been true for both girls and boys, but as young men reached adolescence they may have received more of their moral education from sources outside of the family circle, tutors or perhaps schoolteachers, whilst governesses often continued to be important figures in the lives of young women almost until adulthood. In *Portrait de Dora* as in Freud's case history, Dora's family and the Ks employ governesses.

According to Freud's case history, Dora's governess was a 'well-read' woman, who held what Freud cryptically termed 'advanced views'. The governess was abruptly fired by the family after Dora took an intense dislike to her, suspecting that the governess was really only paying attention to her as a means to getting closer to her father (Freud, 'Fragment', p. 68). Dora reports to Freud that the K's governess, who appears to hate Herr K., was in fact seduced by him only to be quickly abandoned ('Fragment', p.146-7). These governesses play important parts in Dora's story.

Kathryn Hughes explains that the role played by governesses in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was not the same as the role of contemporary schoolteachers:

> Chosen as much for her moral as for her intellectual qualities, the governess was responsible for the total welfare of her young charges. While she was competent to instruct in a wide range of academic subjects, her main task was to provide the round-the-clock moral and social supervision that her employer was unable to supply. Far from being a mere teacher or instructress, her role had often been that of moral guide and sympathetic older friend.[18]

Unlike a contemporary school teacher, the governess was part of the domestic life of the family, and as a result her role was much wider. She supervised her

[18] Kathryn Hughes, *The Victorian Governess* (London and New York: Hambledon and London, 1993), p. 21. Hughes is primarily concerned with governesses working in England in the nineteenth century, although interestingly she does make some references to 'Miss Lucy R.', a governess who was treated by Freud in Vienna (*Victorian Governess*, p. 135). Decker's shorter account of the role of governesses in what she terms 'Freud's Vienna' suggests that the roles played by governesses were broadly similar in English and Austrian contexts.

pupil in any social situation, policing her sexuality as well as, for example, placing limits on her ability to engage in political action. This is particularly relevant in the case of Dora. Freud explains that '[Dora's] only brother, who was a year and a half older than she was, had been her model in earlier years, and her ambition made her try to emulate him' (Freud, 'Fragment'). In later life, Otto Bauer was to become a prominent figure in the Social Democratic Party of Austria, and he served as Minister of Foreign Affairs from November 1918 to July 1919.

The governess played a vital role in ensuring that young bourgeois women conformed properly to the expectations placed on them by their moral code, and yet like their young charges, they were not supposed to have the capacity or self-control to follow this moral code themselves. Hughes discusses at length the tension between on the one hand, popular culture images of the governess as ugly, sexless and domineering, and on the other hand evidence that governesses were often the object of sexual advances by their masters and were a stock type often featured in pornographic stories and photographs (*Victorian Governesses*, pp. 119-26). This contradiction is accepted without comment in Dora's family scene, and Herr K.'s seduction of his children's governess is not presented as surprising in either Freud's 'Fragment' or Cixous's play. Maria Ramas points out that bourgeois reliance on domestic staff for the care of babies meant that it might often have been governesses who filled the mother's role in the oedipal triangle as first love objects of their charges ('Freud's Dora', p. 175), and Jane Gallop adds the crucial distinction that unlike the mother, the governess is paid and so when the governess is the maternal love object, the

feminine sexual position becomes associated with servitude.[19] The governess, whose position as servant (translated as sexual serviceability) becomes her defining feature, is therefore unable to teach with authority. As a result, governesses become passive enforcers and transmitters of a code dictated by powerful bourgeois men. The moral lesson that could be taken from the governess and her treatment was the requirement for women of all ranks to accept a passive social and sexual position.

In Freud's 'Fragment', the relationship between the governesses and their female pupil is dominated by conflicting relationships with men: the K's governess is important to Dora chiefly because her story acts as a warning to her against succumbing to Herr K.'s advances, and although it might be wounded pride that prompts Dora to have her governess sacked, it is the governess's desire for a relationship with Herr B. that has hurt Dora. In Cixous's play, Dobson argues, the governesses are 'emblematic of the patriarchal view of women as sexually available and easily replaceable' (*Scene of Writing*, p. 27) and so, when she tells the story of the K's governess, Dora is brief and matter of fact: 'elle céda. Ensuite, il ne se soucia plus d'elle; depuis, elle le haïssait'. Freud asks what had happened to the governess, and Dora replies 'je sais seulement qu'elle est partie' (*Portrait de Dora*, p. 86). Since she is in the mind of contemporary bourgeois men inevitably 'sexually available and easily replaceable', the governess's story is an uninteresting, logical progression of events, and Dora does not claim to have had much interest in the outcome. When

[19] Jane Gallop, 'Keys to Dora', in *In Dora's Case*, ed. by Claire Kahane and Charles Bernheimer, pp. 200-220 (pp. 211-12).

she talks about her own governess, Dora agrees that she was in love with her father, but she says that 'je m'entendais assez bien avec elle', and what is more 'je ne lui en voulais pas. Mon père n'a d'ailleurs jamais fait attention à elle' (*Portrait*, pp. 83-4). Dora denies that she blames the governess for desiring her father, and moves away from the system that always finds a guilty woman where there has been sexual trangression. At the same time as denying that she was angry, Dora is perhaps also denying that her own desire entered into the picture ('je ne lui en *voulais* pas'), denying that she wanted to take the place of her father in her governess's desires, or of her governess in her father's (who anyway did not have any great affection for the governess, Dora claims, in perhaps a self-protective gesture of denial). This rejection of the system of exchange is clear, but the question of Dora's relationship to the governesses is left open and undecided in the play. It is not clear whether Dora's attitude is of polite disinterest or whether her denial should be understood to suggest hidden jealousy, not least because neither of these scenes where Dora describes her relationships with either governess appears in Benmussa's production. The effect of this omission of the governesses is to leave Mme K. as the only significant relationship with a woman in Dora's life,[20] and to simplify the system of exchange of women that is operating in the play, limiting it to Dora, Frau K., and Dora's mother.

Whilst the major scenes involving the women who were paid to act as governesses may have been absent from Benmussa's production, the play is

[20] I discuss the significance of this relationship, and the moral lessons that Dora draws from it, in my section on 'Pointing out Ignorance'.

interested in the figure of the *male* governess. In his 'Fragment', Freud laments his failure to master Dora's transference of her feelings for Herr K. onto him ('Fragment', pp.160-2), but in Cixous's play, it seems that Freud has taken the place not of Herr K. but of the governess. Angry that Freud insists she stay in treatment for several more months Dora tells him 'je n'ai pas besoin d'une gouvernante' (*Portrait*, p. 82), although this is the role that her family seem to have envisaged for Freud all along; as Martha Noel Evans puts it '[Dora] was brought to Freud by her father when she was eighteen, not so much to cure her of her numerous hysterical symptoms which, after all, had plagued her for the past decade, but rather so that Freud could "bring her to reason"'.[21] It is striking that the focus is on Dora's reintegration into the family social circle: 'bring her to reason' implies that the speaker is a representative of reason and that Dora should join him. In other words, she must learn to accept the moral code in its current form. As Toril Moi points out, ultimately what the focus on bringing Dora to reason means is persuading her to accept her position in the exchange between her father and Herr K.,[22] an insistence that is problematic even if it would mean an end to Dora's symptoms.

Cixous's Freud brings up governesses when Dora tells him that she has decided to leave treatment:

> FREUD: Quand avez-vous pris cette décision?
> DORA: Il y a quinze jours je crois.

[21] Martha Noel Evans, '*Portrait of Dora*: Freud's Case History as Reviewed by Hélène Cixous', *SubStance*, 11.3 (1982), 64-71 (p. 64). Freud, 'Fragment', p. 57.
[22] Toril Moi, 'Representation of Patriarchy: Sexuality and Epistemology in Freud's Dora', in *In Dora's Case*, ed. by Claire Kahane and Charles Bernheimer, pp. 181-99 (p. 182).

> FREUD: Quinze jours? C'est l'avis que donne une gouvernante de son départ.
> DORA: Vous êtes seul ? Où est votre femme? (*Portrait*, p. 98)

As Gallop points out in her analysis of *Portrait de Dora*, a double reading is possible here, and either Freud or Dora could take the place of the governess ('Keys', p. 210). Eager to frame Dora as a servant, just as he was when he chose her pseudonym, Freud, who had been called a *gouvernante* earlier, and who is paid by Dora's family to provide a moral education, risks being placed in the position of the servant. Dora ignores Freud's interjection, and with it his latest attempt to remind her of the place that she (and/or he) occupies in a string of substitutions. Benmussa describes how, in her production of the play, 'Freud only gets up from his chair, which is in the background so that he can watch the other characters, during Dora's nightmare, in the middle of the three men: B takes the place of K, and Freud takes that of B, thus delineating the displacements and transfers of Dora's desires' (*Benmussa Directs*, p. 19). This sequence of male/male substitutions ignores the governess, and is closer to the sequence that Freud imagined in his 'Fragment', where he complains of his failure to master Dora's transference of her feelings for Herr K. and her father on to her analyst. However, it does show that the appearance of professional detachment from the events surrounding him, achieved in Benmussa's production through his separate position on the stage, can be broken down by the revelation that the doctor-teacher might be substitutable like his patient.

Freud's chief aim in his psychoanalysis was to educate Dora about her mental state, to reveal the unconscious desires and forces that were determining her behaviour, and in this way to cure her of her hysterical symptoms. In her play, Cixous draws out the necessary tension between this pedagogic aim and the analyst's mission to listen and interpret, as Hanrahan shows:

> The dynamics of the analysis are superbly encapsulated in a short exchange in Cixous's play: 'DORA: Qu'est-ce que vous voulez me faire dire? FREUD:... Vous faire entendre' (pp. 57-58). Given that the ostensible aim of the treatment is to 'hear' the desire the patient is unable to articulate, the first meaning of Freud's reply seems 'to get you heard', in which case 'vous', the pronoun referring to Dora, is in the place of the direct object. But 'vous faire entendre' can also be translated as 'to get you to understand', in which case Freud's desire is to get himself heard. (Hanrahan, 'Whose Voice?', p. 51)

The exchange that Hanrahan examines here comes just after Dora has commanded Freud 'dites-moi ce que vous savez', to which he has responded 'je ne "sais" rien' (*Portrait de Dora*, p. 57). This exchange about knowledge does not come from the 'Fragment', but is Cixous's invention. Freud's claim in *Portrait de Dora* not to know anything can be understood as a reflection of the doubt that exists in psychoanalysis as a result of its revelation of the range of different unconscious desires and beliefs that can determine hysterical symptoms and conscious mental experiences, and also suggests that Freud is positioning psychoanalysis as a method of interpretation rather than a body of knowledge. Dora's challenging question suggests that there is some disjuncture

between this stated commitment to maintaining doubt, and the lived experiences of individuals undergoing analysis, who might indeed feel that the analyst claims knowledge about their case. Through her question, Dora indicates that she sees Freud not so much as a doctor as a teacher, perhaps imposing his knowledge of his society's moral code. Clément argues that the analyst's desire to teach is a moral urge: the analyst must point out the analysand's ignorance, since ignorance is sinful (*La Jeune née*, p. 30), and as a result of the process of analysis, the patient can assume their full subjectivity, and all of the guilt that necessarily accompanies it (*La Jeune née*, p. 80). The process of analysis teaches the analysand to take up their place as a subject of their dominant moral code by providing a form of self-knowledge that allows them to assume the position of a moral subject.

In *Ville Parjure*, the focus is not on the attempts of members of the elite to educate their daughters into conforming to a moral code that will ensure the smooth functioning of the sexual political system, but on the efforts of a mother who is firmly outside of that elite to teach its members the shortcomings of its moral code. All of those implicated in the deaths of the Mother's two sons and its subsequent cover up are highly educated professionals: doctors, lawyers, and politicians. They are individuals who have mastered the moral code of the city in which they are living. Waiting for his trial to begin, X2 self-pityingly complains:

> X2: Hier je rêvais d'honneurs
> J'entrais à l'Académie…

L'ÉCHO: Démie…
X2: Je me réveille dans l'infamie,
On m'appelle assassin.
Pour ceux qui sont en plein éclat,
Comme il est atroce et brutal le bourreau public! (p. 100)

Entrance to the *Académie*, a reward for excellent research and scholarship is also an *honneur*, which recognises and cements his privileged position in the city. Significantly, this potential honour is lost not because of the evident shortcomings in his medical and scientific work, but because of damage to his reputation (he has become infamous and is *called* a murderer) linked to his unethical behaviour. High levels of education are linked closely to privileged social position, and the retraction of the honour when the wrongdoing is revealed suggests that the appearance of adherence to the moral code is a prerequisite for maintaining this privileged social position. It is not the case that X2's education has led him to be more inclined to act in a morally good way, rather his education has brought him a social position where his actions are eventually visible to a wide public. Cixous reminds her audience of their potential capacity to hold wrongdoers to account, and at the same time she shows morality in the city to be really an agreed code of conduct such that, when X2 commits his crime, his whole community have a stake in dealing with his wrongdoing.

In the cemetery, and outside the city that is dominated by these elites, the education received is not professional but literary. The cemetery that is home to the chorus and to the Mother is watched over by Eschyle, the ancient playwright and poet, and Dobson describes how Eschyle inscribes 'the names of outcasts

and martyrs [such as Anne Frank and Steve Biko] in stone on the cemetery walls'.[23] The gesture is an individual act of affection and reverence, but significantly it is also an educational gesture that ensures that those who live in or pass through the cemetery – including the audience at the Théâtre du Soleil – know the stories or at least the names of those martyrs and outcasts who have suffered. Dobson argues that Eschyle's gesture in *Ville Parjure* is 'an analogy to Cixous's belief in the role of the poet as guardian of memory and conscience' ('Theatre of the Self', p. 308). This image of guardianship suggests that the actions of these martyrs are a public good that must be protected, and perhaps the audience, invited in to the space made sacred by its dedication to martyrs, will be encouraged to assume a similar guardianship role. Like Cixous's plays, Eschyle's cemetery provides a moral education by preventing the erasure or forgetting of examples of good ethical behaviour: Weltman-Aron refers to the 'ethical need to remember' that she believes is 'intrinsically linked' to justice in the play, justice being the play's key theme ('Political Betrayal', p. 85). In most French towns, road names remember Generals and presidents, but in the cemetery constructed in the theatre, the names of those who made grand ethical gestures dominate the landscape.

Inside the city, literary guardians do not provide moral education as they do in the cemetery, and instead this teaching comes in part from educational institutions. The Hippocratic Oath is one particularly striking example of this, and the noble Madame Lion recites it to the assembly of doctors: 'En présence

[23] Julia Dobson, 'The Theatre of the Self: Poetic Identity in the Plays of Hélène Cixous and Marina Tsvetaeva' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Nottingham, 1996), p. 308.

des maîtres de cette école/ Je promets et je jure d'être fidèle/Aux lois de l'honneur et de la probité' (*Ville Parjure*, p. 160). Intended to be made before 'les maîtres de cette école' as part of the medical student's schooling, the Hippocratic Oath is here made ostensibly, and in an ironic gesture, to a group of doctors whose moral code the Mother and perhaps the audience will find lacking, although it is tempting to imagine that the oath might be made to the audience, calling them once more into the role of moral guardian, to compensate for the shortcomings of the medical profession. Nevertheless, the wording of the oath shows that there is an expectation that moral and professional education should be intertwined, and that those who have mastered the profession of medicine should also be in a position of moral authority, and act as guarantors of the oath made by the students. This vision is rejected almost immediately by Brulard, one of the doctors called to the cemetery, who claims:

> C'est terrible! On ne devrait jamais faire ce serment. On est si jeune.
> On ne sait pas ce que l'on fait. On jure devant les Maîtres.
> Le lendemain déjà on est parjure. Une fois parjure, on continue. (p. 160)

Brulard's implication is that the pledge is made naively ('on est si jeune') and in the name of ideals ('honneur', 'probité') whose nature or implications are not understood by those taking the oath ('on ne sait pas ce que l'on fait'). The Hippocratic Oath is an expression of moral obligations but it does not constitute a moral education alone, and it is not supported by one. Brulard claims that the oath is (therefore) broken, almost immediately (and, in his eyes, inevitably), and

that the structure of the oath means that once it is broken, further perjuries do not carry the same moral weight as the first, and they will therefore always follow. Madame Lion's recitation of the oath does suggest that it is still possible to have some faith in its power, the implication being that breaking the oath is not structurally inevitable even if, in the system of the city, it is so widespread as to appear to be inevitable.

Although the moral education given to members of the elite of *Ville Parjure* appears to encourage them to ignore ethics in ways that profit the city's system (which privileges financial gain over human wellbeing), the authorities of the city remain suspicious of the potential of places of education to foster rebellion against that system. Maître Brackmann, the lawyer who represents X1 and X2, warns that if the Mother continues her protest:

> Demain, la brouille civile cavalera à grand vacarme
> Dans les cours des écoles, des lycées
> Et piétinera tout le monde sous ses sabots d'orage.
> Voilà l'œuvre de ce bruit,
> Car rien ne se répand plus vite que le mauvais exemple. (p. 31)

The Mother's eloquent protest becomes a deafening row. It seems to bring with it a possibility of change and political protest, which is immediately cast as oppressive and destructive: Brackmann does not consider that, in the still and grey world presented on stage, such dramatic noise might be welcome. The final line, 'car rien ne se répand plus vite que le mauvais exemple' (which is then

echoed ironically by Eschyle, who is critical of the immorality that is spread by the city elite) suggests that in the city there is a fear that there could be a really effective moral education, informed by ethical responsibility, if it were possible to establish strong models of how to behave: the Mother's protest travels first of all through school playgrounds. Establishing models or examples of good moral behaviour can be the first step towards an ethically informed moral education that will encourage the audience towards political action.

Spectacles of prohibited and permitted behaviours

In the conversation between Cixous and Clément that is the last section of *La Jeune née*, Clément argues that hysterics are 'une métaphore de l'impossible, de la totalité idéale et rêvée' (*La Jeune née*, p. 285). Like other marginalised people, hysterics 'occupent des places de contestation prévues par les corps sociaux, des fonctions de contestation prévues par toutes les cultures, ça ne change pas les structures, au contraire, cela les conforte' (*La Jeune née*, pp. 285-6). Society tolerates the existence of hysterics, who might appear to have the potential to challenge its norms, precisely because they are at the edge of society, in the space reserved for them, where they can perform the socially useful and strengthening function of marking out the edges of permitted behaviour. In the 1880s, Freud's teacher, Charcot, famously drew large audiences to watch his treatments of hysterical patients in Paris, and it was the public and theatrical nature of this display of symptoms and subsequent cure that allowed the hysterics he treated to fulfil the reassuring, comforting role that Clément describes. Christina Wald describes how Charcot's public treatments

of hysterics sparked something of a 'vogue' in late nineteenth-century Paris at the time for theatre performances featuring hysteric characters or plotlines that turned around hysteria, and argues that as a result, the terms 'hysteric' and 'histrionic' became almost synonymous with 'theatrical'.[24] The modern history of hysteria, then, begins with the public display of the patient and symptoms (themselves the attempt to communicate or make public, through bodily gesture, some inner trauma), in a show which, whether performed in the treatment room or in the theatre, was meant to remind the audience that they, at least, lived reassuringly within the bounds of acceptable behaviour.

The parallels with theatre here are interesting. Like hysterics, theatres might be considered to occupy a social space where challenging social norms is expected and permitted by elites. This is of course not a space that all theatre companies choose to occupy: Roland Barthes, for example, points out that when the Comédie Française produce versions of Racine that rely on the assumption that there is a single, fixed, identifiable meaning to his plays, they feed into 'anti-intellectualisme' and reinforce the prejudices of the petit bourgeois.[25] Neither Benmussa nor the Théâtre du Soleil fall into this trap. Although both produce work that is celebrated by cultural elites and sanctioned by the French government – the Théâtre du Soleil receives the largest government grant of any private theatre company in France – they also position themselves as marginal to the elite of French society. This is achieved in part through formal innovation and by tackling difficult subject matter in work that challenges and stretches

[24] Christina Wald, *Hysteria, Trauma and Melancholia: Performative Maladies in Contemporary Anglophone Drama* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 33.
[25] Roland Barthes, 'Racine est Racine', in Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil, 1957), pp. 90-2.

preconditioned modes of thinking but also, for instance, in the case of the Théâtre du Soleil, by taking up a base that is spatially distant from the centre of the capital, and by engaging in anti-elite protest movements.[26] These forms of self-marginalisation (which do not run counter to the desire to attract a larger, more diverse audience) are strategic, deliberate decisions that tend to increase the political clout of the theatre company's message, either by associating the theatre company with other established political movements (by joining protests) or by giving that company greater artistic freedom. As such, although both theatre and hysteria occupy special, designated spaces of opposition, theatre offers a workable site for political rebellion in a way that hysteria cannot.

Feminist critics including Cixous and Irigaray have tried to reevaluate hysterics, using them not to mark out the edges of permissible behaviour but rather as an example of the ways in which phallogocentric authority can be resisted.[27] Whereas in Freud's case history Dora and her version of her own story are more or less silenced by Freud's construction of a single coherent narrative, Cixous's play shows Dora to be intelligent, a relatively astute analyst of her own situation (something that Freud also acknowledges when he more or less accepts Dora's assessment of her family situation), and aware of the power that she (potentially)

[26] For instance, the Théâtre du Soleil protested against Sarkozy's attempts to reform retirement and pension entitlements. See Judith Sibony 'Manifestation pour les retraites: le Théâtre du Soleil illumine le cortège', *Le Monde blogs*, 12 October 2010 <http://theatre.blog.lemonde.fr/2010/10/12/manifestation-pour-les-retraites-le-theatre-du-soleil-illumine-le-cortege/> [accessed 25 October 2016].

[27] See for example Irigaray, who states that 'Et le mime hystérique sera le travail de la fillette, de la femme, pour sauver sa sexualité d'une totale repression, disparition' (Luce Irigaray, *Speculum: de l'autre femme* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1974), p. 86). The literary critics Elaine Showalter and Juliet Mitchell have also been influential in encouraging renewed feminist interest in Dora's case, as have several rewritings of Dora's story: *Portrait de Dora*, but also the play by Kim Morrissey, *Dora: A Case of Hysteria* (London: Nick Hern Books: 1994) (later a BBC Radio 3 radio play), and the film *Sigmund Freud's Dora: A Case of Mistaken Identity*, dir. by Claire Pajaczkowska (Jane Weinstock: 1979) amongst others.

holds in the circle of exchange. Towards the end of her analysis, Dora asks ‘Si je n’étais pas là pour tomber, comment marcheraient-ils?’ (*Portrait*, p. 84). The difference between the two verbs ‘tomber’ and ‘marcher’ is significant here, as Dora’s passive, accidental action of falling is contrasted with ‘their’ deliberate walking (making progress) and working. Without its object, without something to exchange, the system of exchange would cease to work, and to take her place as object, the woman must be passive. Sexual compliance is also suggested in the word ‘tomber’, as a woman might fall for a *tombeur*, *tomber enceinte*, or *tomber amoureuse* (love being Freud’s favourite euphemism for Herr K.’s feelings for Dora, and her supposed feelings for him). Dora instead falls ill, and the contradictions she experiences as part of the family circle of exchange, and her desire to rebel against that system, feed into her hysteria. Benmussa states that ‘to convey the frailty of the characters, and at the same time to show how, in spite of their social power, they are still jeopardised by Dora, was one of our concerns’ (*Benmussa Directs*, p. 18). It is not Dora’s strength but the frailty of the system around her that means that Dora’s hysteria could be politically subversive. Yet, manifesting itself as illness, Dora’s rebellion is painful and self-destructive, and means that her accounts of her experiences might be dismissed as fantasies (this is the reaction that her family has to her telling of the scene by the lake) and her rejection of the system of exchange understood as an illness to be cured. As Moi points out, hysteria is an ‘inefficient’ form of rebellion that holds out little possibility of significant long-term gains for women (‘Representation of Patriarchy’, p. 192) and, as Charles Bernheimer argues, the division between strong, active men and weak, passive women is

untroubled by hysteria.[28] The costs of hysteria are too high for it to be a politically effective form of rebellion and nor is it an ethical gesture. Dora's rebellion through hysteria is not immediately successful, then, although it gains ethical or political value when taken up as a pedagogical tool by Cixous in her play.

Cixous's portrayal of Dora's decision to leave Freud's analysis is a particularly striking instance of Cixous's dual use of Dora's history as both warning and example. Whereas, when he comes to write about this moment in his case history, Freud suggests that he reacted to Dora's decision to leave with calm dignity ('Fragment', pp.146-50), in Cixous's hands, the scene becomes more emotionally charged:

> FREUD: (*ne dissimule pas un affolement*) Vous vous vengez de moi comme vous auriez voulu vous venger de monsieur K. Et vous m'abandonnez comme il vous a abandonnée.
> DORA: Vous ne comprenez rien. Ça ne vous empêchera pas d'exister! Voilà ma vengeance: j'irai 'seule'. Je guérirai 'seule'. Et j'ai décidé de vous abandonner au jour marqué par moi. Ce sera le 1er janvier 1900.
> FREUD: Écoutez… Votre décision… Nous avions décidé…
> DORA: Non. (*Portrait,* pp. 99-100)

[28] Charles Bernheimer, 'Introduction: Part One', in *In Dora's Case,* ed. by Claire Kahane and Charles Bernheimer, pp. 1-18 (p. 6).

Confronted by Dora's refusal Freud begins to stutter, his smooth scientific discourse breaking down before her resistance as he is unable to hide his own 'affolement', panic, perhaps bordering on feminine *folie*. He hesitates between the pronouns 'vous' and 'nous' in what seems to be an admission of the ways in which his analyses were often impositions rather than interpretations; since other characters are present on the stage when Freud speaks, it is not clear whether his 'nous' includes Dora. She, however, is sure that she will not be included in his 'nous', but instead, as a revenge that she portrays as less violent than Freud's attempted cure ('Ça ne vous empêchera pas d'exister') and moreover does not implicate Dora in a new system of substitutions (Freud for Herr K., the substitution she dreamed but is consciously rejecting), she will leave and cure herself 'seule'. Dora's declaration that she does not need the support and protection of Freud is a hopeful, positive statement but, as I have argued, in Cixous's plays the formation of a new community, although often a problematic process, can be one important basis for effective political action. Dora's rebellion through the refusal of help and the choice to remain isolated looks to be limited in its potential scope.

Nevertheless, Conley argues that 'Cixous admires [Dora's] courageous "no" that jams the smooth functioning of the social and family machine' (Conley, *Writing the Feminine*, pp. 44-5). Conley brings together the 'social' machine and the 'family machine': played out on stage or in a famous case study, Dora's story no longer belongs only to the family scene. Moreover, the system of exchange that she experienced within her family was always typical of the wider system of exchange that supports the masculine economy: Freud chose to tell

Dora's story, he says, not because it was 'interesting' but because it was an example of the '*commonest* cases' of hysteria ('Fragment', p.54). Dora's illness might not have been a profound gesture of resistance, but with her 'no' to family and society she refuses to learn to fall into line, the inevitable result of the cure that Freud is offering her. In her analysis of the 'no' that the real Dora gives Freud, Elizabeth Grosz follows Jane Gallop's terminology in calling Dora a '*prick-teaser*' for her ability illicitly to take pleasure on her own terms from the men around her, both when she seduces them and when she refuses them.[29] There are parallels here with the ways in which Cixous steals language in her practice of *écriture féminine*, which suggests that women should be able to take what they desire from the masculine economy without conforming to its demands. However, Dora's unconscious rebellion through illness is a painful experience, and not the joyful *deliberate* rebellion through writing which Cixous imagines.

As Hanrahan points out, 'the crucial difference between Dora and Cixous is that Dora does not write' ('Whose Voice?', p. 53), although Dora does describe one letter that she would like to write:

> Elle commencera par ces mots: 'vous m'avez tuée'. Et j'écrirai 'tu m'as tuée'. Puis j'écrirai une autre lettre sur du papier fin comme une pelure, qui commencera par ces mots: 'Tu l'as voulu…'. Je laisserai l'équivoque, pour qu'il complète 'lui-même'. Car je ne sais pas ce qu'il a voulu. Cependant, 'c'est moi' qui suis morte. Mon corps est

[29] Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 187.

> enfoui. Dans la forêt. Il y fait sombre. Je suis sans voix. (*Portrait*, p. 29)

Unlike the sort of resistance that Cixous describes when she talks about the practice of *écriture féminine*, which is closely related to birth, Dora describes writing as a precursor to death. Like Cixous's dense poetic fictions, and indeed the play *Portrait de Dora*, this letter deliberately leaves room (*l'équivoque*) for the reader to engage actively in imposing their own desires on and creating meaning from the text, but in Dora's imagining this process is a sort of damaging, permanent self-erasure that leaves her *sans voix* and without a body, since 'mon corps est enfoui', a word which brings together burial and madness. Cixous urges women to write with breath, voice, and the body but Dora, caught in her domestic scene of the exchange of women cannot produce feminine writing, and her description of writing a letter becomes a parable of the dangers of masculine language, a pedagogical tool.

Cixous's play, in which Dora reads out these words, might be understood as one way to combat this silencing. On the stage, Dora has a body, and is able to voice her experiences of exclusion from language, but it is not Ida Bauer who has this opportunity, but an actress playing a character who is a playwright's reinterpretation of the persona given to Ida Bauer by her psychoanalyst. When Dora reads out her letter in *Portrait de Dora*, she is not citing Ida Bauer's suicide note, but giving an almost-quotation of Cixous's novel, *Portrait du soleil*, which was written shortly before *Portrait de Dora*:

> J'écrirai une lettre hésitante qui commencera par ces mots: 'Dieubis tu m'as tuée'. Puis j'écrirai une autre lettre sur du papier fin comme une pelure, à tout hasard, qui commencera par ces mots: 'Dieubis tu l'as voulu, etc.'. Je laisserai l'équivoque afin qu'il complète lui-même car je ne sais pas ce qu'il a voulu, et si par hasard ce n'est pas moi qui l'aurais eu, cependant c'est moi qui suis morte.[30]

Cixous's choice to use a quotation from her own novel in place of Ida Bauer's suicide note (which is mentioned but not quoted at length by Freud ('Fragment', p. 53) is significant as a means of avoiding bringing a young woman's actual suicidal tendencies into the play's discussion of writing and death, and also juxtaposes the hysteric's painful experience with the writer's more hopeful one. According to Dora's account in *Portrait de Dora*, writing means allowing oneself to be killed by the other, but whereas choosing to be killed might in some circumstances be understood as an active decision that holds a powerful ethical value (there are precedents for this in a number of Cixous's plays, including the Mother's death as a result of her ethical relationship to her sons in *Ville Parjure*, for instance), for Dora being killed means responding to the other's (incomprehensible) desire, and it holds only fear. The intertextual reference to *Portrait du soleil* allows both meanings to be present here, and so is one way of resisting the reduction of the play to a single moral lesson about the imperative to write.

Freud asks Dora about writing again when, in nearly the last exchange of the play, he asks Dora 'Donnez moi de mes nouvelles (*il fait un lapsus de telle*

[30] Hélène Cixous, *Portrait du soleil* (Paris: des femmes, 1973), p.29.

manière qu'on peut ne pas le remarquer). Écrivez moi', and he gets the response 'Écrire?... Ce n'est pas mon affaire' (*Portrait de Dora*, p. 103). Dora's words are unequivocal: she has nothing to do with the 'affaire' (business, love) of writing, and she leaves it to (male) others. Freud's question seems more ambiguous. In asking for 'mes nouvelles', it could be that Freud has inserted himself once more into the B/K family set of substitutions, and that this time he has found himself in the place of Dora; it could suggest the ways in which he has used the story of Dora as a mirror or tool that might guide him to greater self-knowledge; and it could suggest, finally, that Freud sides with Dora at her most anxious, and agrees that, once she writes it down, Dora should lose claims to ownership of her story, and allow it to be appropriated (and rewritten into the appropriate language of science and publishing) by Freud.[31] Dora's symptoms include aphonia, and so by refusing to write, she is not taking her story for herself, but rather ensuring that it is silenced forever (albeit on her own terms).[32] It is another example of Dora's withdrawal from the public sphere. Her refusal to write is a refusal to be used by Freud but also a refusal to attempt to engage with the phallogocentric economy as a subject. Dobson describes Dora as 'a site of potential rebellion', who is 'unable to make the radical leap from textual disruption to textual production' (*Scene of Writing*, p. 33). In other words, her refusal to write limits the scope of her resistance. On the level of ethics, though, in having Dora refuse to write, Cixous is doing her a kindness, reminding the audience that the object of the play is not the real young woman's life, but the

[31] Dobson also looks at this incident on p. 33 of *Scene of Writing*.
[32] According to Freud's case history, though, 'In the first days of her attacks of aphonia, writing had always come specially easy to her'. Freud finds that as well as a substitute for the lost faculty of speaking, this is yet another proof of Dora's love for Herr K.: 'Herr K. used to write to her at length while he was travelling' ('Fragment', p. 72).

hysteric character whom Freud constructs from what he can remember from their analysis, and whose story has in turn been taken up by Cixous. Dora the character, then cannot serve as an example for effective political rebellion, or for good ethical action, but we can learn from Cixous's careful treatment of her.

Like Dora, the Chorus in *Ville Parjure* rebel against and refuse a society formed by a restricted dominant elite class. This refusal is figured visually in Mnouchkine's production: the cemetery is separated from the town by high black iron gates, and the chorus wear rags and bandages, and have their faces painted in white and grey, the colours of the cemetery that they inhabit. X2 calls the inhabitants of the cemetery the 'académie des morts' (*Ville Parjure*, p. 100), addressing both the dead of the cemetery and its living chorus at the same time, in an ironic nod towards the play's ending. I described how X2 hyperbolically claimed to have experienced his condemnation by the city's public opinion as a form of execution, and so it seems to be fitting that he should believe that the chorus, who choose to live outside of the city, are already dead. Their spatial distance from the city is cause and evidence of a more profound separation, also acted out by the chorus, who are physically weak and whose movements are difficult; few of them are able to walk in Mnouchkine's production of the play. Françoise Quillet argues that this disability makes physical and visible the political exclusion and powerlessness of the chorus ('Echo tardif', p. 202). The chorus may have chosen their marginal position, but they are now physically incapable of leaving it, or of intervening in the life of the city. Brian Singleton compares Mnouchkine's production of *Ville Parjure* to the Théâtre du Soleil's productions of the *Oresteia*, and concludes that

> The physically strong dance sequences of choric suffering, read from the point of view of the whole 'Greek cycle', indicated that the masked dancer engaged in a healthy lament principally through movement. The reduction in the physical capabilities of the new chorus in *La Ville Parjure*, therefore, could be read as signifying the absence of a healthy lament. The dancing days of the chorus were over. Catharsis was no longer possible. [33]

The process of catharsis as described by Aristotle was intended as a means by which audiences could purge themselves of impulses that were forbidden according to the moral code of his day. In *Ville Parjure*, the audience cannot be purged of their desire to lament the events that they have seen on stage, and so they are left with a very different type of moral lesson.

This moral lesson is not, however, that those in difficult circumstances should accept their powerlessness. Complaining about their marginalised status, the chorus members each imagine how they would attack the town. One states:

> Comme vous le voyez, notre baril est plein de poudre.
> Il suffirait d'une étincelle.
> Si je voulais, la Ville serait décombres
> Mais j'attends le suicide.

[33] Brian Singleton, 'Body Politic(s): The Actor as Mask in the *Théâtre du Soleil*'s *Les Atrides* and *La Ville Parjure*', *Modern Drama*, 39.4 (1996), 618-25 (pp. 622-3).

This chorus member's hopefulness about the possibility of social change is hyperbolic, particularly since ultimately he chooses not to (attempt to) realise that potential, and waits for suicide, which seems to be imagined as something outside of his control. There is an element here of recognition of the superior forces of the town, a recognition of the chorus's relative powerlessness that is both pragmatic and a reminder to the audience that a moral duty to attempt to enact social change for the better cannot fall entirely on the shoulders of the marginal and powerless; the relatively fortunate members of the Théâtre du Soleil's audience must also take up the cause. The attack on the city that the chorus member imagines is solitary; *notre baril* is full of powder, but the single chorus member could decide to bring the town to ruins. If he can only imagine the failure of his gesture, it might in part be because he aims to attack alone, because there is not a plan for action as a community or group. Traditional tragic theatre might put its faith in the actions of solitary heroes, but here the implied emphasis on the importance of group action is an entreaty to and an education for the audience as well.

Nevertheless, two strong individual female heroes do emerge from *Ville Parjure*: the Mother and Madame Lion. Whereas the chorus has rejected/been rejected from the city and has set up an insular marginal city where they speak of changing the order in the city without holding out any real hope of effecting such a change, the Mother and Madame Lion continue to engage with the city. Martha Walker argues that 'the play's female characters are political actors in a very literal sense. That is, they take action and protest against the social problems in the outside world and urge others (the spectators) to do the same'

(Walker, 'Rehabilitating Feminist Politics', p. 498). I would certainly agree that Madame Lion and the Mother 'protest' in interesting ways, and that Cixous's play urges its spectators 'to do the same', but I would characterise their protests as attempts to provide a moral education driven by ethical relationships (towards her sons for the Mother, and her patients for Madame Lion), rather than political action in the sense of calculated, negotiated attempts to alter the systems that dominate the city. Parallels can be drawn between the ethico-political writing practice of *écriture féminine* as suggested by Cixous in *La Jeune née* and the actions of the Mother and Madame Lion. The woman writer of *écriture féminine* is a thieving bird who flies into masculine discourse, takes what she desires, and then retreats to a position on the margins. Like the woman writer, the Mother in *Ville Parjure* always seeks out or engages with figures from the city of masculine discourse; she brings X1 and X2, and the council of doctors to the cemetery, and the queen and the lawyers who represent X1 and X2 come to her after hearing her protest, but just as the woman writer flies out of masculine discourse once she has taken what she wanted, so the Mother holds her meetings in the cemetery, under the gaze of the audience and of the chorus in a rejection of the closed and secretive politics of the city. This decision also allows the mother to interact with the figures from the city without having the terms of the engagement dictated by the city, with the moral support of the chorus and the physical support of the Erinyes, and in a space filled with literary references where more emotional and violent, less professional and measured, forms of language are permitted. The Mother's rejection of the city which is responsible for the deaths of her sons is one aspect of her ethical stance, and it is also significant that it is only once X1 and X2 have been separated from the

assumptions and convenient silences and euphemisms of the city that the Mother's attempts to provide a moral education can take place. Challenging dominant modes of thought and the language with which they are expressed is a necessary part of the moral education in this play.

Madame Lion's position is slightly different, and she first enters the play as part of the elite group of doctors who shelter X1 and X2. Bernadette Fort identifies the Parisian doctor and haemophilia specialist Yvette Sultan as the real-life inspiration for Madame Lion. Cixous explains that she first noticed Sultan whilst watching coverage of her testimony at the trials of the heads of the CNTS, and that although Sultan was not the only doctor to speak out against the practices of the CNTS, 'there was something specifically "feminine" in the outspokenness of "Madame Lion", a way of breaking the social "gag" and of choosing the truth without fear of the ensuing hostility of what is called "the profession"' (Fort, 'Theatre, History', p. 436). Cixous's reference to the potentially hostile, singular (self-protecting community of the) 'profession' repeats her portrayal in *Ville Parjure*, where political concerns for the reputation of the body and about losing the trust of patients trump concerns about patient safety or care. Madame Lion works hard to convince 'the profession' to condemn X1 and X2, and she begins by addressing them in the language of science, producing reasoned arguments and written evidence to demonstrate the guilt of X1 and X2, whilst the other doctors assembled rely on hearsay and supposition (*Ville Parjure*, pp. 142-3). Later it is revealed that before the crimes were made public, Madame Lion had already made countless unsuccessful attempts to prevent X1 and X2 from continuing to sell the contaminated blood,

and to convince a regulatory body to become involved in the affair (*Ville Parjure*, pp. 144-6). It becomes clear that Madame Lion's attempts to educate the medical authorities and to change their attitudes and actions from within will fail, and moreover it is made clear to her that if she is to maintain her position in that group of doctors, she will have to abandon her objections and fall in with the consensus decision to write a letter of support for X1 and X2 (*Ville Parjure*, pp. 150-1). Yet Madame Lion's decision to leave the medical council does not suggest that she has opted for individual rather than communal political action. Madame Lion pleads with other members of the medical council to join her in rejecting the letter (*Ville Parjure*, p. 152), and moreover she imagines that her refusal to support X1 and X2 means that 'je donne ma signature/ Aux centaines d'enfants morts' (*Ville Parjure*, p. 151). Like the Mother, Madame Lion shows how ethical concern (an uncalculated devotion to her patients, in Lion's case) can be married with political action.

Both women are eloquent and express their protests in ways that Dora cannot, although the women of *Ville Parjure* do experience some of the same silencing tactics as were used in Dora's case: an indignant Dr Jumeau insists to the group of doctors assembled by the Mother's trial that 'On ne va pas se laisser dicter une conduite par une hystérique', (*Ville Parjure*, p. 152). Madame Lion displays no hysterical symptoms, and Jumeau's dismissal of her protest on these terms is a striking example of the ways in which the diagnosis developed for patients like Dora can be used to silence women. After Madame Lion leaves, the leader of the medical council, Cornu-Maxime, expresses his frustration with her and her decision:

> Une femme! Tout ce que je déteste!
> Et sous prétexte que…
> Et de toute façon, ça n'est pas l'absence d'une femme qui entamera notre cohésion.
> Une nulle. Une. Bref. D'ailleurs jamais vous ne fûtes des nôtres, d'aucune manière. (p. 154)

Here, then, is an argument against the case for withdrawing completely from corrupt societies. As a woman, it seems, Madame Lion was always somewhat outside of the medical council, and when she leaves it completely, that group is left more cohesive and lacks any dissenting voices.

Pointing out ignorance; framing situations as having to do with morality

The Mother and Madame Lion may be considered to be heroes in *Ville Parjure* for their courageous efforts to speak out against deception. The plays suggest that deliberate ignorance is a pernicious feature of the societies Cixous portrays, and is necessary if they are to continue to function and to reproduce themselves as before. In *Portrait de Dora*, this necessary ignorance, or at least feigned ignorance, centres on sexuality: Frau B and Herr K. are ignorant of, or just ignore, the affair between Herr B. and Frau K.; Herr B. is ignorant of Herr K.'s desires for Dora, at least on a conscious level, and Freud and the other adults (or adult men) are ignorant of the extent of Dora's homosexual love for Frau K. Ignorance in *Portrait de Dora* is a social and political tactic that has to do intimately with reproduction, both in the sense of creating children and in the

sense of the action of ensuring the repetition of social norms and systems from one generation to the next. Freud claimed that the imaginary, traumatic, oedipal sexual scene was hidden and forgotten in order that the child can take his or her place as a subject; in *Portrait de Dora* it is clear that real sexual scenes are likewise hidden by society and that whilst these scenes are considered potentially dangerous if revealed, their existence is on some level foundational of society. On one level Cixous is repeating the work of Freud's psychoanalysis, which revealed the presence of hidden desires, but by fracturing and challenging Freud's account on certain points, her play also highlights some of the cruelty of the moral code that taught repression as an imperative.

Portrait de Dora's three different examples of prohibited sexual behaviour do not all require the same level of secrecy. Although the other relationships in the family are all arranged around the affair between Herr B. and Frau K., and the desire to maintain secrecy about this affair, the relationship does not seem to have been well-hidden at all. In *Portrait de Dora*, when M. B. seeks to defend himself from Dora's accusations of infidelity he maintains that he is linked to Mme K. by 'une sincère amitié', and that 'Madame K. possède en moi son seul ami' (*Portrait*, p. 22). Cixous uses the language of friendship ambiguously here; M. B. is making a claim of close friendship in order to distance the possibility of a sexual relationship, but friendship and sexuality are not exclusive in this way (as is clear even in the terms used to describe a sexual relationship: boy/girlfriend, *copine*/*copain*, *petit*(*e*) *ami*(e)), and the affirmation of their closeness, mutual respect, and the importance of their relationship, as well as

M. B.'s claim that Mme K. possesses him, sound more like an admission of infidelity.

Likewise, only limited efforts are made to disguise M. K.'s attempts to seduce Dora. In *Portrait de Dora*, M. B. echoes language used by Herr B. in Freud's case analysis when he attempts to demonstrate the innocence of that relationship:

> Lorsqu'il était là, monsieur K. se promenait avec elle. Avec une affection presque paternelle. Bien qu'elle ne fût qu'une enfant. Il lui faisait de petits cadeaux et veillait sur elle avec une affection presque paternelle. De son côté, Dora s'occupait avec une merveilleuse sollicitude des deux petits enfants de mes amis. Elle aurait pu leur tenir lieu de mère. (*Portrait*, p.11)

As evidence of the innocence of M. K.'s feelings towards Dora, M. B. cites behaviours that would seem to be typical of an attempted seduction; he is affectionate towards her, takes opportunities to spend time with her, and offers her presents. Decker's historical study suggests that it is not anachronistic to assume that there was recognisable sexual intention in M. K.'s actions here, explaining that 'the two of them (as well as Dora's parents) [were] surely aware, the older Dora got, that this behaviour was slightly scandalous, even though K. was a married man and a friend of the family' (*Freud, Dora, Vienna*, p. 75). M. B. claims that M. K. treats Dora 'Avec une affection presque paternelle', a claim made in a strange, isolated phrase without a verb, suggesting that it has the quality of a mantra, perhaps repeated to help M. B. to ignore the presence of

presque in the middle of his phrase – not that, particularly in the context of Freudian psychoanalysis, it would anyway be safe to assume that sexuality is necessarily excluded from parent-child relationships. There seems to be a demand on the part of the almost paternal M. K. that Dora maintain a childish ignorance of sexual matters, and when in Cixous's play, Dora describes her desire for Mme K., and Mme K. reveals that Dora has read books on sexual matters, M. K. is appalled, since 'une jeune fille qui s'intéresse à de pareilles choses ne peut prétendre au respect d'un homme' (*Portrait*, p. 39). The adults in Dora's case have contrived to be able to deny all knowledge of the sexual behaviour of other members of the household and yet, with the possible exception of Dora's mother, they are all complicit in it. In her turn, Dora must conform to the moral code's demands on her sexuality whilst maintaining conscious ignorance of that part of the moral code and of sexuality.

A greater degree of secrecy is maintained around the relationship between Dora and Frau K., and Freud attributes the failure of his analysis of Dora to his failure to recognise the importance of this love. Dora might recognise and openly discuss her attraction for Mme K., but it is ignored by the men in Cixous's play – as Dobson points out 'the Freud of Cixous's play is permitted no retrospective analysis and his discourse remains inflexible in its exclusion of homosexual desire' (*Scene of Writing*, p. 28) – and denied by Mme K. In Adrienne Rich's influential essay 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence' she argued this sort of ignorance is absolutely necessary for the smooth functioning of a male-dominated economy. Rich argues that heterosexuality has long been made compulsory by a social-moral agreement whereby lesbian experience was

positioned 'on a scale ranging from deviant to abhorrent or simply rendered invisible'.[34] This erasure or demonization applied to a broad range of experiences since, she argues, lesbianism has traditionally been too narrowly defined, and should instead be thought of as existing on a continuum: 'I mean the term *lesbian continuum* to include a range—through each woman's life and throughout history—of woman-identified experience, not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman' ('Compulsory Heterosexuality', p. 51). This lesbian continuum would encompass experiences ranging from sexual relationships to 'the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support' (ibid., p. 51). The relationship between Mme. K and Dora might fall along the lesbian continuum without being a sexual relationship. Rich argues that any relationship falling along this lesbian continuum might be a source of fear for men: 'It seems more probable that men really fear […] that women could be indifferent to them altogether, that men could be allowed sexual and emotional – therefore economic – access to women *only* on women's terms, otherwise being left on the periphery of the matrix' (ibid., p. 43). Teaching women to ignore lesbian (sexual and non-sexual) desires by ensuring that only heterosexual desires are visible and celebrated in the public domain is a means of ensuring that the masculine right to reproduce current political systems remains unchallenged.

[34] Adrienne Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', in *Blood, Bread and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979-1985* (London: Virago, 1986), pp. 23-75 (p. 26).

Whatever the relevance of Rich's call for 'lesbian feminism' to contemporary feminist debates, it is possible to see the dynamic that she identifies at work in the case of Dora. In Freud's 'Fragment', Dora's lesbian love is rarely discussed (it features as a footnote, added by Freud when he revises the case study some time later), whilst Freud devotes a good deal of time to his attempts to have Dora accept her attraction to Herr K. Cixous's play corrects this imbalance, and Benmussa describes how this was reflected in the stage dressing, where there were 'no props, except those of Mrs K in the garden, her parasol at the bottom of the stairs, her hat on the bench, her book behind the Venetian blind, as so many signs of her presence and her power over each of the characters' (*Benmussa Directs*, p. 14). Desire for Mme K. is not attached to any particular character or characters, but rather occupies the entire stage space. Dora's lesbian desire is not, then, set apart from the heterosexual desires of her father and M. K., but rather joins and competes with them. Yet, as Cixous portrays it on stage, the relationship between Dora and Mme K. does not encourage hope for the development of a better political system. Dora asks Mme K. for a moral education; she wants to learn 'toutes les choses que savent les femmes; faire de la confiture, faire l'amour, faire le maquillage, faire de la pâtisserie, adopter des petits bébés, faire cuire la viande, trousser les volailles' (*Portrait*, p. 40). There is irony present in the reduction of feminine knowledge and experience to this list, alongside an element of genuine joy in this variety of pleasurable, practical, creative skills. However, what Dora learns from Mme K. is the moral lesson that she must take up her designated position in the system of sexual exchange: 'tu ne peux pas être une madone. Tu es trop beau, mon petit' (*Portrait*, p. 93). Mme K.'s use of the masculine 'mon petit' to address Dora suggests that, if

Dora has escaped or refused her position in the system of sexual exchange so far it is only by refusing to take up her position as a woman, something which she will not be allowed to do for much longer. Far from undermining the systems of sexual exchange operating between the two households, Mme K.'s relationship with Dora serves ultimately to reinforce them as Mme K teaches Dora to adhere to the dominant moral code. Dora says to Mme K. 'si j'étais un homme, je vous épouserais' (*Portrait*, p. 39), and her 'si j'étais un homme' is a recognition of the practical impossibility for two women to marry at that time and also of the limited scope of the women's desires for a life together.

Dora, as presented on stage by Cixous, is a politically and ethically interesting figure for the ways in which she reveals the deliberate blindness practised by all of the adults who surround her. Wald argues that plays where madness is performed always reveal these types of ignorance, since they oblige the audience to examine their unconscious processes (*Hysteria, Trauma*, p. 20). This is not true of Dora's hysterical performance of the system of exchange of women; as Rosette C. Lamont points out, 'while Dora's illness is clearly the symptom of a girl's acute lucidity within a repressive and unbalanced society, the clever doctor never comes to grips with this fact since he is an accomplice of the social order'.[35] Dora as written by Freud shares the 'lucidity' of Cixous's Dora, but before her experiences are staged they cannot act as a moral education.

[35] Rosette C. Lamont, 'The Reverse Side of a Portrait: The Dora of Freud and Cixous', in *Feminine Focus: The New Women Playwrights*, ed. by Enoch Brater, pp. 79-93 (p. 87).

The elite of *Ville Parjure* similarly use ignorance as a tactic to ensure the survival of their city's system. If X1 and X2 are able to commit their crimes and yet maintain their innocence, it is because the moral code that they have learnt in the city allows them to remain wholly ignorant of their wrongdoing. This ignorance is particularly evident in a scene where Night, the mother of the Erinyes, talks to X1 during the trial:

> LA NUIT: J'ai lancé sur toi un filet de regards si serré
> Que nulle pensée, nul visage, même les plus secrets
> Ne peuvent m'échapper.
> Devant moi, toi qui te tiens devant moi
> Comme devant ton miroir, tu es qui tu es.
> Regarde:
> X1 (*Regardant le* '*miroir*'): Ah! Je vois la mère arriver.
> LA NUIT: Comment!? Et toi, tu ne te vois pas?
> X1: Pas du tout. Regardez. Qu'y a-t-il?
> La Mère.
> LA NUIT: C'est tout? Et là?
> X1: Là? C'est tout. (p. 173)

Night's mirror is designed to reveal X1's hidden thoughts and to force him to confront his deception and guilt. Night points to where X1's reflection should be— '*Et là?*'—but whilst she is able to see X1, he sees through the mirror to the city. A character on the stage, it is perhaps unsurprising that X1 can see only himself as an expression of his environment, lacking any interior self or identity. Nevertheless when Night's gesture, which should have laid X1's crimes out before him and obliged him to contemplate them, fails, it suggests that X1 lacks a capacity of self-reflection, the basic tool needed for Night's gesture to

succeed. Weltman-Aron argues that X1 and X2's defence relies on 'the disconnection between intention and murderous effect'; they did not want to kill the children, and 'there is, therefore, no guilt in that there is no ascertainable will' ('Political Betrayal', p. 76). Night's mirror cannot reflect X1's lies, because he is not conscious of lying. The failure of moral education here is profound; it has not only failed to prevent the crime from taking place, but it has also left the criminal incapable of recognising his own guilt. Moral education must first of all mean developing the capacity and desire to consider the consequences of our own behaviour and to be able to imagine the possibility of an ethical relationship. Broadly, X1 and X2 are guilty of privileging financial profit over patient safety and, ultimately, their patients' lives. Moreover, they are ignorant of the moral law that would reverse that hierarchy and, more profoundly, they are unable to understand that such a rule might have anything to do with their own behaviour.

The Mother and Madame Lion show that this ignorance is not an inevitable consequence of having been educated in the city. Both women have a keen sense of their ethical responsibilities and, as I have argued, they work hard to convince those around them to understand that the case of the Mother's murdered children has to do with an ethical relationship that doctors should have with their patients and that questions of financial reparation or professional reputation cannot usefully be weighed against the crime that has been committed. For Françoise Quillet:

> Il s'agit bien d'un théâtre civique, d'une présentation de notre société, de ce vers quoi elle va, d'un appel à une prise de conscience de la part du public, de ce que c'est qu'être citoyen aujourd'hui, ce que c'est que la démocratie et quels risques elle court. ('Echo tardif', p. 206)

Quillet characterises the play as 'un appel à une prise de conscience de la part du public', although it is equally true that the women characters work for a 'prise de conscience' in the characters on stage. The use of the word 'conscience' is significant here, since it refers at the same time to knowledge about the reality of society today, to understanding of the duties that come with citizenship, and also to the moral sense that X1 lacks, the capacity for self-awareness. This is framed by Quillet as a civic duty, to do with democracy, and so as a political duty, in a traditional sense, having to do with our system of government and with the ways in which the individual should navigate their relationship to the state. The play, particularly through its strong female characters, is an affirmation of the possibility of moral education and a 'prise de conscience' even in a corrupt system.

Conclusion

Both plays centre on the moral education of people considered to be wrongdoers according to the moral code of the time and place in which they were living. In the case of X1 and X2, the crimes that they committed would almost certainly have been recognised as very wrong by Cixous's audience. Dora, on the other hand, is guilty of questioning her contemporary social mores, particularly the norm of compulsory heterosexuality, and of behaving in a way that might

trouble the smooth running of the political and sexual system operating around her. Freud attempts Dora's moral education through medical treatment, whilst X1 and X2 become the defendants in an educational show-trial. Ultimately, neither attempt at moral education is shown to be successful, but the failures are significant in different ways.

Portrait de Dora finds hope in the failure of Dora's moral education. It is assumed that her rejection of continued treatment means a rejection of turn of the century Vienna's moral code, and although this cannot in itself be read as an act of political rebellion, Dora has performed an individual act of defiance towards those who demanded that she should accept her position and only attempt to control or reduce the symptoms that resulted from it. What is particularly valuable in Dora's defiance is that she has been able to identify the system in which she is caught, and the ways in which it has manoeuvred and conspired to make her an object of sexual exchange. The construction of the play encourages its audience to begin to deconstruct the political systems and discourses that surround Dora (as Dora has done herself), and hopefully, once out of the theatre, the contemporary political systems and discourses that surround them.

The failure of the Mother's moral education of X1 and X2 is not a cause for celebration in the same way, since the moral code that the Mother is attempting to pass on to them is not objectionable in the way that the moral code of Freud's Vienna might be, and moreover has itself been established in reaction and rebellion against the faulty moral code of its border city. However, the failure

of the Mother's fictional act of moral education is structurally necessary if the moral education of *Ville Parjure*'s audience by Cixous is to succeed. Cixous's portrayal of the reasons for the failure of the education constitute a critique of contemporary moral and political norms that is almost as damning as the references to the original crimes. Having watched the Mother's failure (which denied them cathartic pleasure), and heard her beyond the grave entreaty to take up her legacy of political action (to emulate the model presented on stage), the Théâtre du Soleil's audience is supposed to leave the theatre more prepared to speak out against instances of injustice, greed, and deliberate blindness to the suffering of others. Whereas traditional pedagogical plays leave the audience with clear indications of how to act for the better, in both *Ville Parjure* and *Portrait de Dora* Cixous engages in an alternative form of didacticism whose chief aim to nurture a critically engaged attitude.

The moral education provided by Cixous and the Théâtre du Soleil encourages their audience to critique the moral code of their contemporary France, which often allows its citizens to ignore or refuse ethical responsibilities that they should rightly have, as did the doctors X1 and X2 in *Ville Parjure*. This moral education also obliges the audience to pay attention to the ways in which their moral code exploits and hurts those who are the weakest in society. Importantly, the plays combine this awareness raising work with explicit or implicit demands that the audience take political action, guided by their new sense of ethical responsibility.

Chapter Five: Problems of sacrifice in *Tambours sur la digue* and *L'Indiade ou l'Inde de leurs rêves*

In 'Aller à la mer', Cixous's first major intervention on the theatre, written in 1977, shortly after *Portrait de Dora* was performed for the first time (offering, of course, an example of a woman who has often been cast as a victim of sacrifice), Cixous discusses the position of women characters in the theatrical canon, and argues that their traditional role in the theatre is that of sacrificial object:

> COMMENT, femme, peut-on aller au théâtre? Sauf à s'y trouver en complicité avec le sadisme dont les femmes y sont l'objet. À se voir invitée à prendre, dans la structure familiale-patriarcale, que le théâtre reproduit à l'infini, la place de la victime. (Cixous, 'Aller à la mer')

The major problem that Cixous identifies with the theatre in 'Aller à la mer', is its tendency to feature women chiefly as sacrificial victims. In this chapter, I will argue that a strong association between theatre and sacrifice remains in Cixous's own theatre, but that it features rather differently in her plays, where Cixous is concerned to show how sacrifice can be used as a political tool by a dominant (masculine) elite, and by those who take a principled stance against those elites.

Sacrifice is a significant part of many of Cixous's plays, and she has staged instances of self-sacrifice and the sacrifice of others. In *Portrait de Dora*, it is possible to understand the character of Dora as a victim whom her father and

others (his lover, her husband, and Freud, for example) collaborate to sacrifice in order to ensure the continued smooth running of the system. The slightly later play *La Prise de l'école du Madhubaï* shows how Sakundeva, a character modelled on the Indian 'Bandit Queen' Phoolan Devi, sacrifices her own life to secure a better future for women and girls in the village where she was born. The Khmer Rouge are prepared (even eager) to sacrifice a large part of the population of their own country in order to build a new community in *Sihanouk*, and in *Ville Parjure* the mother sacrifices her own life and the safety of her followers when she pursues her ethical quest for justice for her sons. However, the most striking examples of sacrifice in the plays are found in *L'Indiade ou l'Inde de leurs rêves* (1985) and *Tambours sur la digue* (1999).

Indiade retells the story of Indian independence, focusing on the political rivalries between key members of the Indian National Congress (INC), the party led by Gandhi and Nehru, who favour the independence of a united India, and on the other hand Jinnah's party, the Muslim League, which fought for a form of independence that would include the creation of the separate state of Pakistan. The play tracks the latter part of their fight for independence, and also shows the violence that accompanied partition. There are a number of examples of different types of sacrifice in the play: both sides talk about the violence of partition as a form of sacrifice; Jinnah's sister, Fatima, sacrifices her own independence and aspirations in order to support her brother and his career; and finally Gandhi threatens self-sacrifice when he begins a hunger strike in an attempt to end the violence associated with partition. Whereas *Indiade* features sacrifice prominently and in a number of different places, in *Tambours* it forms

the centre of the plot. The play shows an aged ruler who has to choose which part of his country he needs to sacrifice in order to protect other areas; response to this calculated form of sacrifice of others comes from Duan, a young woman who is prepared to sacrifice herself to save those whom the ruler is prepared to kill.

In this chapter, I begin with analysis of Cixous's arguments about sacrifice elsewhere in her work, focusing particularly on her indictment of the ways in which the sacrifice of women has always been central to the theatre tradition, as explored in 'Aller à la mer'. I then track the uses of the word 'sacrifice' in both plays, showing how it is a useful tool of political manipulation, and go on to analyse the examples of sacrifice or self-sacrifice in the plays. I differentiate between cases of sacrifice and cases of suicide or murder, before returning to the type of sacrifice that Cixous identifies in 'Aller à la mer', the sacrifice of women for the good of men, and suggesting that there is one prime example of this in the plays, in Fatima Jinnah's devotion to her brother. Finally, I identify and consider several somewhat more ambiguous examples of sacrifice being used as a political tool by both men and women, particularly in the cases of Gandhi in *Indiade* and Duan in *Tambours*.

'Aller à la mer': Cixous's discussions of sacrifice and theatre

In 'Aller à la mer', Cixous does not simply identify a general tendency to sacrifice women in the theatre (although she does that too), but rather focuses her analyses on a number of key female figures in the theatre tradition:

> Qui est-elle? Toujours la fille-du-père, son objet à sacrifier, gardienne du phallus et support du fantasme narcissique à l'aide duquel le père pare à la menace de castration. Électre ou Antigone. Éliminée. Ou Ophélie trois fois condamnée à être enterrée vivante, par les trois pères jaloux (Polonius-Laërte-Hamlet) qui ne s'entendent qu'à lui faire la loi: 'Femme-toi, sois folle de moi, enferme-toi au couvent'. Coffrée. Si elle est Ophélie, le corps interdit, l'âme violée, elle n'aura jamais vécu. Et si elle trouve la force de Cordélia pour affirmer une féminité non asservie au rôle de miroir du délire paternel, elle mourra. (Cixous, 'Aller à la mer')

The cases of sacrifice that interest Cixous here are four women characters in Greek and Shakespearean tragedies (always Cixous's two major reference points when she talks about the theatre), who are used as sacrificial objects by fathers, brothers, and lovers. The sacrifice of the four women whom Cixous discusses here takes different forms. Cixous describes 'Électre ou Antigone' (the 'or' rendering their cases interchangeable examples of the same phenomenon) as 'éliminée'. Antigone's elimination in Sophocles' play *Antigone* centres on her body; after Antigone attempts to give her brother the proper burial he has been refused because of his rebellion against his King and uncle, Créon, she is removed physically from her town and buried alive in a cave, where she hangs herself.[1] Luce Irigaray is one of a number of French feminist critics to have taken an interest in classic examples of the sacrifice of women, and she has also discussed the sacrifice of Antigone extensively. Irigaray uses Hegel's reading of the case of Antigone to show that women are

[1] As Irigaray points out, 'Elle répète, en tout cas, sur elle-même le geste meurtrier, mais non sanglant, de sa mère' (*Speculum*, p. 272).

considered to have particular duties towards men after their death: 'elle doit, essentiellement, s'occuper à inhumer encore et toujours, en dépit de toute condition y compris sa vie à elle, ce cadavre que devient l'homme dans son pur être'.[2] As a result of this work, which must be performed by women whatever the personal cost, men are able to have access both to individuality and to community.[3] Yet, as Kelly Oliver explains, unlike other relationships described by Hegel, notably the master-slave dialectic, this is always asymmetrical:

> The relation of mutual recognition between brother and sister turns out to be a morbid recognition of the dead brother by the sister for the social. But who recognizes her after her death? Who buries her? Ultimately, in spite of Hegel's claims, there is no mutual recognition in this sacrificial relationship.[4]

As Oliver points out, the elimination of women (the process that Cixous shows to be central to sacrifice in the theatre) is traditionally disguised by language of reciprocity or mutuality; in fact the sacrifice of Antigone for her brother (and women for men through much of history) is all one way.

Death rites are also key to the elimination of Electra in Cixous's next example. In Aeschylus's *The Libation Bearers* (which was performed by the Théâtre du

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[2] Luce Irigaray, 'l'éternelle ironie de la communauté…', in *Speculum: de l'autre femme*, pp. 266-81 (p. 267).
[3] Irigaray describes the burial rites, stating that: 'elle remet ce parent au sein de la terre, le ré-unissant ainsi à l'individualité élémentaire impérissable. Le ré-associant aussi à une communauté – réligieuse – laquelle retient sous son contrôle les violences de la matière singulière et les basses vitalités qui, s'acharnant sur ce mort, pourraient encore le détruire' ('l'éternelle ironie', p. 267).
[4] Kelly Oliver 'Antigone's Ghost: Undoing Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit', *Hypatia*, 11.1 (1996), 67-90 (p. 79).

Soleil as part of their *Atrides* cycle in 1991), as a result of her determination to mourn her father, Electra remains unmarried and describes herself as having the life of a 'slave': she is eliminated from public life (which was closed to both women and slaves) as well as being excluded from her 'proper' place in the domestic sphere, where as a woman she should be expected to have a role as wife and mother.[5] In the final play of the *Oresteia*, *The Eumenides,* in which Orestes receives absolution for the crime of killing his mother (carried out at Electra's instigation), neither Electra nor her mother appear. Clytemnestra has been violently eliminated from the family and political scene, and Electra is made absent from the story of that death. As Irigaray points out, although both Orestes and Electra are supposed to have been driven mad by the murder of their mother, which they commit together, 'Électre, la fille, restera folle. Le fils matricide doit être sauvé de la folie pour instaurer l'ordre patriarcal' (Irigaray, 'Corps-à-corps', p. 24). Electra is not physically imprisoned and does not die, as Antigone does, but in both cases devotion to a male relative becomes the sole purpose and feature in the woman's life, and as a result of attempts to honour their duties to their (dead) male relatives, they are forbidden from the public sphere, as well as being denied the place that other women hold in the domestic

[5]Act I Scene I, line 176, Electra expresses her anger at her mother for having exchanged her children's happiness for her life with her lover, since Clytemnestra is happily living with Aegisthus whilst Orestes is in exile and 'now I live/just like a slave'. In the Théâtre du Soleil's Atrides cycle, Sophocles' Iphigenia at Aulis was performed before Aeschylus's Oresteia, positioning Clytemnestra's actions as a response to the sacrifice/murder of her daughter Iphigenia by her husband and Iphigenia's father Agamemnon and only to a lesser extent motivated by Clytemnestra's desire for her lover (or indeed, for power). Irigaray is one of a number of French thinkers who have taken an interest in the story of Iphigenia, and like Cixous she is paticularly interested in the question of gender in the story. In 'Le Corps-à-corps avec la mère', Irigaray writes of Clytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon that 'Elle le tue par jalousie, par peur peut-être, et parce qu'elle est restée insatisfaite et frustrée pendant si longtemps. Elle le tue aussi parce qu'il a sacrifié leur fille à des conflits entre hommes, motif souvent oublié par les auteurs tragiques'. Luce Irigaray, 'Le Corps-à-corps avec la mère', in *Sexes et parentés* (Paris: Minuit, 1987) pp. 20-33 (p. 24).

sphere, and they suffer physical hardship. I would note that in these cases, as in Cixous's *Ville Parjure*, what is important to the women are the ethical duties that are owed to the dead; duties which are not related to any capacity to increase the happiness or improve the material situation of the person to whom the ethical duty is owed. However, whereas in 'Aller à la mer' there is a focus on the politics of the father and brother who demand absolute devotion from their sisters or daughters, making them objects to be sacrificed to their own 'fantasme narcissique', in *Ville Parjure* the ethical actions of the mother are shown to be powerful, and her devotion is admired.

Cixous also refers to two Shakespearean examples of sacrificed women. The first is Ophelia, who is the sacrificial object of 'trois pères jaloux', the role of the jealous father being taken up in turn by her father, her brother, and her lover. These men 'ne s'entendent qu'à lui faire la loi', the sacrifice of a woman here offering the potential for the cessation of conflict between men. Ophelia is ordered to sacrifice herself in three ways. First she is told 'femme-toi', a play on ferme-toi, a violent demand for silence and literally a demand that she become a woman, which amounts to the same thing when she exists solely within the masculine economy. Told to 'femme-toi' in this context, Ophelia does not have access to a positive femininity but rather remains as the impoverished reflection of the men who give her orders. Second, Ophelia is told 'sois folle de moi', to be mad about the man, and think only of him, but also to be his madness, to form the outer limits of the sanity to which he can lay claim. Finally, Ophelia is told 'enferme-toi au couvent', Cixous's slightly altered

version of Hamlet's demand 'get thee to a nunnery' (in French standard translation, 'va-t-en dans un couvent'). Cixous's version stresses the demand for imprisonment and enclosure, which was also the demand made of Electra and Antigone. The demand also highlights social controls on women's sexuality, and the role that religion may play in enforcing these. Cixous's final example is Cordelia, whose refusal to accept that she should be the sacrificial object of her father, and attempt to assert a more positive femininity, lead to her death. Women in plays, Cixous is suggesting, must act as the sacrificial objects of their male relatives; refusal to do this leads to death, and as such can be understood as a gesture of rebellious but painful self-sacrifice.

In 'Aller à la mer', after identifying this tendency towards the sacrifice of women in the theatrical canon, Cixous aims to suggest its implications for women theatregoers and theatre makers. When she begins to do this, she makes the assumption that the audience relates to the characters on stage through identification. A play cannot be made without the sacrifice of a woman, Cixous claims, and watching this theatre a woman spectator is complicit with the on-stage perpetrators of the violent sacrifice, and so is sadistic. At the same time, Cixous accuses the makers of traditional theatre of assuming that a woman spectator should identify with the woman who is a sacrificial victim, although Cixous's word 'invitée' leaves open the possibility of refusing this assumption and engaging in a rebellious counter-reading. Yet this type of rebellion is made more difficult by the form that the sacrifice of women takes. A woman is sacrificed, Cixous claims, 'pour que la pièce commence', in order that the play can begin, before it starts and not necessarily on-stage. Violence against women,

then, is a necessary motor for the play, and not always made visible or identifiable; Dobson argues that 'Aller à la mer' is an expression of a 'rejection of the theatrical form itself as dominated by the structures of voyeurism and exhibitionism, structures which she identifies with patriarchal discourse and masculine economies, and which inevitably exclude positive representations of the female subject' (*Scene of Writing*, p. 17). In traditional modes of theatre that are, as Dobson shows Cixous is assuming, voyeuristic or exhibitionist, it is accepted that only the visible is important or valuable, which means that the process of rendering women invisible that Dobson shows Cixous to have identified as being key to traditional theatre, is one of the most violent acts possible. A woman spectator in this form of theatre assumes her own silencing or erasure, whilst identifying with those people who are responsible for the violent sacrifice that creates this absence.

As Cixous identifies, the woman who is sacrificed in theatre ultimately acts as the *fille-du-père* and 'gardienne du phallus et support du fantasme narcissique à l'aide duquel le père pare à la menace de castration' ('Aller à la mer'), welcoming the destruction of her body since this can enable her father to escape his fear of the destruction of the symbolic representation of part of his body, tied up with his power. Her sacrifice – and the fact that she agrees to be sacrificed – is therefore a politically conservative gesture, which maintains the phallogocentric political hierarchy which was already in place. I would note the genders of the various nouns Cixous chooses to describe the woman who is sacrificed here: as a protecting force (gardienne) she is feminine, but when she is the 'support du fantasme narcissique', she is marked in the masculine,

protecting her father from the feminine threat of castration. Cixous's playful implicit comparison here is with Freud's reading of women's love for their sons, who are substitutes for the penises that they envy.

Cixous has also analysed another famous example of a sacrifice of a woman in theatre elsewhere. In 'La Communion des douleurs', the essay Cixous wrote as an introduction for Michèle Laurent's book of photographs of the Théâtre du Soleil production of the *Atrides* cycle, Cixous is largely concerned with the role of the chorus in Greek tragedy, but she also discusses the death of Iphigenia, who is sacrificed by her father, Agamemnon, in Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*.[6] In Euripides's play, Iphigenia is called to Aulis by her father, Agamemnon, on the pretext that she is to be married to the hero, Achilles (who has, of course, already married, in secret, and abandoned his bride, though Euripides's play makes no mention of this). In truth the Greek fleet, on its way to fight the Trojan War, has been becalmed in Aulis, and Agamemnon has been told that only the sacrifice of his daughter will allow them to leave the port. When Iphigenia arrives at Aulis with her mother, Clytemnestra reminds the audience and her daughter that 'thou wert ever most fond of thy father, of all the children I bore' (Euripides, *Iphigenia at Aulis*). The phrase, which labels Iphigenia as a *fille-du-père*, is of course immediately ironic, but its truth is borne out in Iphigenia's speech later, when Clytemnestra and Achilles fail to convince Agamemnon to spare his daughter, and Iphigenia intervenes:

[6] Hélene Cixous, 'La Communion des douleurs', first published in Michèle Laurent, *Les Atrides I: Iphigénie à Aulis et Agamemnon* (Paris: Théâtre du Soleil, 1992), and also available at Hélène Cixous, 'La Communion des douleurs', Théâtre du Soleil Website <http://www.theatre-du-soleil.fr/thsol/nos-spectacles-et-nos-films/nos-spectacles/les-atrides-1990-92/la-communion-des-douleurs?lang=fr> [accessed 20 October 2016].

> It is not meet that this man should come to strife with all the Greeks for the sake of a woman, nor lose his life. And one man, forsooth, is better than ten thousand women, that he should behold the light. But if Diana hath wished to receive my body, shall I, being mortal, become an opponent to the Goddess! But it cannot be. I give my body for Greece. Sacrifice it, and sack Troy. (Euripides, *Iphigenia in Aulis*)

Iphigenia is the ultimate *fille-du-père* here, and her sacrifice (which is made in the most literal sense, with religious ceremony) ensures that her father Agamemnon will be able to maintain his powerful position. Iphigenia accepts her sacrifice on three counts; first because men are ten thousand times more valuable than women, second because of the duty that she owes to the goddess Diana, and third because of the demands of her country and its war. She embraces her position as sacrificeable here, and her underprivileged position in the hierarchies between men/women, states/individuals, gods/humans. In 'La Communion des douleurs', Cixous tells us that 'N.B. Moi, personnellement, H.C., je suis pour Clytemnestra, N.B. N.B.: et je ne suis pas d'accord avec Iphigénie. Mais je n'engage que H.C. dans cette parenthèse' (Cixous, 'La Communion des douleurs'). In the case of the ritual sacrifice of Iphigenia, then, Cixous repeats the angry response that she has to the political sacrifices she sees in 'Aller à la mer'.[7] Unlike Iphigenia, Cixous seems to see no justifiable case

[7] Indeed, her response to the sacrifice of women here is typical of her anger at the glorification of instances of violence against women throughout her work. In *La Jeune née* for example, Cixous criticises classical literature in which women are sacrificed (*La Jeune née*, p. 137). Later she states that she could almost empathise with the (self-) sacrificing heroine Joan of Arc (about whom she writes the play *Rouen, la trentième nuit de mai 31*), if it were not for her Frenchness

for the political sacrifice of women and, I will argue that, like Clytemnestra, Cixous works (in her theatre) to expose the self-interested political calculations that motivate many instances of sacrifice.

Theatrical sacrifice is of interest to the Théâtre du Soleil, as well as to Cixous. In the list of 'Mots trompeurs et fondateurs' included in the programme for the Théâtre du Soleil production of the *Atrides* cycle, sacrifice is not included, but the word 'victim' is defined with reference to sacrifice:

> **Victime**: (*Littré*) 1. Chez les païens et les peuplades sauvages, créature vivante offerte à la divinité. *Corneille:* 'Demain au Capitole il fait un sacrifice; Qu'il en soit la victime! […]' *Bougainville*: 'Quand la lune présente un certain aspect (...) ils (les Taïtiens) sacrifient des victimes humaines […]'. *Bossuet*: 'Le prix de la victime augmente le prix du sacrifice'.

A victim, in this account, is particularly a victim of a religious sacrifice. Even in secular versions of sacrifice, religion is not so far away. Both English and French dictionary definitions mention the root of 'sacrifice' in *sacer*, the sacred, and both begin their definitions of the term 'sacrifice' with reference to religious examples, before moving to the secular. I will be discussing the example of Gandhi's hunger strike as a key example of sacrifice, and 'saintliness' is often a word which attaches to Gandhi (Cixous talks about 'la sainteté de Gandhi' in

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and Catholicism– qualities which of course have made Joan of Arc so popular with France's far right). See *La Jeune née*, pp. 142-3.

one of the essays published with *L'Indiade*, 'Si vous permettez, je vais vous parler de l'amour…'), although in the play, Gandhi's motivation is always expressed in secular terms, motivated by political ambitions for his country and by empathy for suffering people, rather than being related explicitly to Hindu or Christian gods. Religious and secular modes of sacrifice are not, then, always easy to separate.

The difference between self-sacrifice and the sacrifice of others is another significant distinction that is questioned and troubled in several places in Cixous's theatre. In *Voile Noire Voile Blanche*, the poet Anna Akhmatova may be seen as self-sacrificing, giving up her own safety and comfort in the name of her poetry. Yet Cixous's play reminds us that Akhmatova sacrifices her son, too, who is arrested and incarcerated in a gulag as a result of his mother's public profile. Similarly, in *Ville Parjure*, the Mother's ethical determination to achieve justice for her sons leads ultimately to the deaths of her supporters, the play's chorus. Although Cixous's inclusion of an 'afterlife' scene in which the play's characters are shown happy and in heaven (a scene intended to soften the play's pessimistic ending) tends to mitigate any negative judgement of the Mother's actions, her ethical self-sacrifice for her sons has led to the deaths of others. I will argue that the potential for slippage between the ideas of self-sacrifice and sacrifice of others is exploited in political discourse in both *Indiade* and *Tambours*, either to disguise the leader's relative position of safety, or to convince the population to agree to their own destruction.

The classic example of Abraham's intended sacrifice to God of his son Isaac is one which reveals the complexity of the many often conflicting ways in which we might think about sacrifice. Abraham's sacrifice is important in debates about ethical sacrifice, where it serves to show that an ethical gesture, performed out of absolute responsibility to the other, can be abhorrent to most moral codes. It also relates to some debates around the definition of self- sacrifice. Both Cixous and Derrida have engaged with this Judeo-Christian example of sacrifice, Cixous most notably in her 'Conversations avec l'âne', and Derrida in several places, including his 1999 text *Donner la mort*, where he gives a reading of Søren Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*. Briefly, Kierkegaard argues that Abraham is asked to give up Isaac as a true test of his faith because Abraham values his son's life more highly than he values his own, since the son represents the potential for the fulfilment of God's promise to him, namely the promise that he will have countless generations of offspring to follow him. Nevertheless, when God calls on Abraham to sacrifice his son, Abraham answers this call immediately and without question. This acceptance of God's demands, done without compromise or negotiation, renders Abraham's relationship to God ethical, and his actions praiseworthy within traditions of Christian thought, although they have been questioned and complicated by a number of later thinkers.

As Cixous argues in 'Aller à la mer', there are many examples of sacrifice in the dramatic canon. By contrast, the theatrical tradition contains very few

examples of sacrifice that is ethically motivated, as Abraham's sacrifice is. The absence of ethical sacrifice from theatre traditions can be related to the fact that ethical forms of sacrifice do not easily fit within the theatre's tradition of moral education, a problem with which the imagined cleric-narrator of Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* wrestles at the beginning of the book. This difficulty comes not only because ethical sacrifices are often not acceptable gestures according to moral codes (as in the case of Abraham's sacrifice) but also because ethical sacrifice cannot furnish the audience with any readily available model of behaviour to follow (one of the key ways in which theatre traditionally provides a moral education), since ethical sacrifices are unique events: when asked about the sacrifice on Mount Moriah in an interview, Cixous replied 'there will be only one Abraham'.[8] Unlike the actions of some of the most prominent figures in plays that aim to provide a moral education, Abraham's actions cannot provide a model to follow, they are unique. Derrida links the singularity of Abraham's actions to the question of language, paying particular attention to Kierkegaard's assertion that Abraham's actions may sit outside of the realm of what can be communicated in language:

> Dans la mesure où ne disant pas l'essentiel, à savoir le secret entre Dieu et lui, Abraham ne parle pas, il assume cette responsabilité qui consiste à être toujours seul et retranché dans sa propre singularité au moment de la décision. De même que personne ne peut mourir à ma place, personne ne peut prendre une décision, ce qui s'appelle une décision, à

[8] Mireille Calle-Gruber, 'Interview with Hélène Cixous: In the beginnings, there were many…', trans by Amaleena Damlé, in Susan Sellers, ed., *White Ink*, pp. 30-48 (p. 43). The interview appeared originally as 'Aux commencements, il y eut pluriel…Entretien avec Hélène Cixous', *Genesis*, 11 (1997), 131-41.

> ma place. Or dès qu'on parle, dès qu'on entre dans le milieu du langage, on perd la singularité. On perd donc la possibilité ou le droit de décider. Toute décision devrait ainsi, en son fond, rester à la fois solitaire, secrète et silencieuse. La parole nous apaise, note Kierkegaard, parce qu'elle 'traduit' dans l'universel. (*Donner la mort*, p. 87)

For Kierkegaard, the unspeakability of Abraham's actions was on some level a practical concern. Abraham could not discuss his plans with his family or community because they would have hated him and may have prevented him from acting, and he must therefore act alone. For Derrida too, the impact of the unspeakability of Abraham's actions is to isolate Abraham, but this isolation is for Derrida key to the question of responsibility, which must be assumed individually. In Derrida's reading here, the risk in speaking seems not to be that Abraham would be prevented from acting, but that 'la parole nous apaise', stripping the action of some of the risk that must be present in all ethical relationships. Abraham's actions are unspeakable, unrepeatable, and unrepresentable: they cannot be staged, unlike the political sacrifices of women that Cixous cites in 'Aller à la mer'.

Unlike the ethical, the political has to do with compromise and negotiation, but that does not imply that it is the same as exchange or bartering, in which objects judged to be of equal value are traded reciprocally, and the price agreed and negotiated between the parties. The sacrifices discussed by Cixous in 'Aller à la mer' may be understood as prime examples of political sacrifice. In the fates of these four women, there is no sense of the circularity that characterises relationships of exchange, but nevertheless their elimination is a calculated

move, designed to maintain the dominance of the patriarchal economy. Calculation, then, is the defining characteristic of political sacrifice, and it is key to the ways in which characters use the word 'sacrifice' in both *Indiade* and *Tambours sur la digue*.

Explicit discussions of sacrifice

The use of the rhetoric of sacrifice is an important political tool for many of Cixous's characters. In *Indiade,* Gandhi uses the word sacrifice to describe his treatment by the Indian National Congress (INC) when they decide to support Britain's war effort:

> GANDHI: Mes amis étaient prêts à me sacrifier, à renier trente ans de non-violence pour mériter l'honneur d'être vos alliés pendant votre guerre mais vous ne voulez pas d'Indiens debout à vos côtés et vous les rejetez?! L'Angleterre ne nous tolère qu'à plat ventre dans la poussière sous ses sabots?! (*Indiade,* p. 61)

Gandhi's objection seems to be not so much that he was sacrificed (although his use of that strong word suggests his bitterness), but the cause to which he has been sacrificed. In his exasperation, Gandhi reveals the irony at play here; the INC have given up their leader and their principles (it is not entirely clear whether Gandhi believes giving up non-violence to be a form of sacrifice, but the syntax suggests that he might) in order that the Indian people may, in their turn, be sacrificed by the British in fighting World War Two – the *Centre*

National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales (CNRTL) definition of sacrifice makes particular mention of its use as a term to describe the loss of soldiers in battle.[9] In his speech, Gandhi's focus is not his newly marginalised position, but rather the indignities that he believes Indian soldiers will face when they fight alongside the British. Gandhi's indignation, which seems really to be his frustration at how little the INC have gained from their sacrifice, suggests that Gandhi accepts that sacrifice might be used as a political tool, and furthermore knows well his own value as a commodity that could be sacrificed.

Sacrifice also plays a significant part in Jinnah's political rhetoric:

> JINNAH: Je sors de la clôture indienne et britannique! Oui! Je change de loi. Mon peuple, rassemble-toi et prépare-toi au sacrifice! Plus de Conférence. De l'action. Et directe, immédiate! (*Indiade*, p. 109)

Sacrifice here is once more recalled in relation to an armed or military conflict; the play shows that this use of the term is a feature of rhetoric from across the political spectrum in the Indian subcontinent in the mid-twentieth century. Yet whilst Gandhi clearly deplores sacrifice, both the sacrifice of soldiers and of himself and his principles, here Jinnah calls for his followers to prepare for it, although it is not clear whether he is demanding that his followers be prepared

[9] One sub-definition given by the *CNRTL* is 'perte en soldats au cours d'une bataille, d'une guerre'.

to sacrifice themselves in the name of the cause of Pakistan, or whether he is asking them to prepare to sacrifice Hindus.[10]

Later, the INC's Sarojini complains that 'certains disent que les hindous sacrifient des enfants musulmans à leurs idoles et certains le croient' (*Indiade*, p. 130). This vision of ritualistic child sacrifice by an other taps into a number of different discourses on sacrifice. A genocidal urge to cut off future generations who may continue the communitarian violence could be recalled here, though Sarojini does not suggest that there are rumours of child sacrifices on this scale. The rumour also relates to a fear of cannibalism: in 'Il faut bien manger', Derrida argues that sacrifice is a means of ingesting the body of the victim, and as such is a cannibalistic act. Further, killing children demonstrates violent excess, the killing of those who can pose no immediate physical threat.

Sacrifice of children is a significant part of the model of sacrifice that was proposed by the French thinker René Girard and has been significant in French thought about sacrifice. Girard supposes that, as part of the development of any society, there was an original sacrifice which was the inevitable result of

[10] In a speech at a rally at the University Stadium in Lahore on October the 30th 1947, the historical Jinnah also made use of some of the rhetoric of sacrifice, saying 'That freedom can never be attained by a nation without suffering and sacrifice has been amply borne out by the recent tragic happenings in this subcontinent. We are in the midst of unparalleled difficulties and untold sufferings; we have been through dark days of apprehension and anguish; but I can say with confidence that with courage and self-reliance and by the Grace of God we shall emerge triumphant'. See Mohammed Ali Jinnah, 'The Task Ahead' <http://m-a-jinnah.blogspot.fr/2010/04/task-ahead-30th-oct-1947.html> [accessed 20 October 2016]. See also 'Quaid-e-Azam Muhammed Ali Jinnah's Speech at a Mammoth Rally Lahore 30th Oct 1947', online audio recording, YouTube, 7 October 2011 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RPJ98HE29Ws> [accessed 20 October 2016]. The relevant section is at 5mins 19.

competition for resources (for Cixous, the masculine (sexed/sexual) economy is predicated on an assumption of lack, and of finite resources):

> Aussi longtemps que les rivaux se disputent des objets, ils ne peuvent pas s'entendre. Une fois les objets détruits, ou écartés, ou oubliés, les rivaux sont face à face et tout semble perdu car la violence redouble mais, au contraire, tout est sauvé. Ce que le désir d'un même objet ne fait jamais – réconcilier les adversaires – la haine pour un même ennemi paradoxalement le fait. Deux, puis trois, puis quatre antagonistes vont faire alliance contre un cinquième et, de proche en proche, le mimétisme va faire boule de neige contre un antagoniste plus ou moins quelconque. Le système entier, alors, va finir par basculer dans l'unanimité contre un adversaire unique, un *bouc émissaire* choisi par le mimétisme lui-même. [11]

There are several distinct phases in the development of sacrifice here. The first period of conflict ends when the disputed resources are either no longer available, or have been forgotten – a potential for amnesia which suggests that the competition for resources was in some cases at least born from a desire to establish or maintain a hierarchy, rather than from immediate need. This leads to an increase in violence between the warring parties which is paradoxically at the same time the key to ending the conflict, since gradually the parties identify one antagonist who, more or less at random, will be designated the scapegoat and will be the object of a hatred that unifies the other parties in the conflict.

[11] René Girard, *Le Sacrifice* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2003), p. 26.

The scapegoat is sacrificed, but is ultimately rewarded when he (and the original scapegoat is always male, one of the first competitors for power) is worshipped as the founder of the society:

> Pour que le sacrifice soit possible, il faut croire que la victime originelle est responsable du désordre mimétique d'abord et ensuite, par l'intermédiaire de la violence unanime, du retour à l'ordre. On a donc affaire à un dieu, croit-on, qui, après avoir malmené la communauté, l'a prise en pitié et lui a enseigné le sacrifice. (Girard, *Le Sacrifice*, pp. 7-8)

Girard's scapegoat occupies a paradoxical position, inside the community as its founder, outside as the person who is hated. This paradox appears to be resolved by the deification of the victim of sacrifice; Girard posits the celebration of sacrifice in religion (and its repetition in religious ritual) as mimicry of an original sacrifice, the lynching of the scapegoat.

It is this last stage, in which sacrifices are repeated, particularly in religious rituals, which is of most relevance to Cixous's analysis of sacrifice in 'Aller à la mer', and to Sarojini's comments here. According to Girard's reasoning on sacrifice, when the innocence of a child or virgin is praised, it would serve to disguise the (probably unconscious) calculation that children and virgins are of low value to the community – since they have few skills and have not proved that they can bear children successfully – and that therefore they can be considered to be disposable. This idea of the disposability of the sacrificial victims seems apparently to be odds with most understandings of innocence,

which is thought to increase or ensure the value of victims, moral failings often being associated with what is dirty or disgusting and innocence supposed to be a scarce and therefore valuable quality. As Girard points out, this gap is key to the functioning of sacrificial systems, which are able to gain the consensus-building value that comes with the sacrifice of the scapegoat without risking the destabilisation of the community that might accompany the sacrifice of its more prominent members. For this reason, it is Iphigenia and not Agamemnon who must be sacrificed before the Trojan War, Electra and not Orestes who must be eliminated.

In Cixous's play, however, this synergy is disrupted by the nature of the history of Indian independence and by the fact that rumours of child sacrifice that circulate are false. According to the rumours that Sarojini hears, Hindus are supposed to be enforcing the unity of their community with the blood of Muslim children, in gestures that are both religious rituals and brutal punishments. In Girard's scapegoat model, it is important that the sacrificial victim should come from within the community before they are singled out; here the complex dynamic of rupture and creation that defines Indian independence means that the children both are and are not part of the same community as those who are supposed to be sacrificing them – although the act of sacrifice would remain as horrific in both cases. Cixous spares the audience some of the horror of imagining child sacrifice as Sarojini makes it clear that the rumoured sacrifices are not, in fact, taking place. Girard invites calculations about the value of the victims, but these are redundant in the case of rumours, where no victim will be lost. With no sacrificial victims to mourn, the focus is on the ill-defined group

of people who are supposed to be making the sacrifice, and the complete lack of sympathy and discipline that must drive them. Girard posits that repeated sacrifices can galvanise a community and end violence, but here Cixous shows that sacrifice, or more importantly the rumour of sacrifice, can more easily serve to cement a rupture between communities and perpetuate uncontrolled bloodshed.

During the 'direct action' which Jinnah called on his followers to instigate, the beggar woman character Haridasi sings:

> Que de cadavres dans les rues
> Que de musiques sauvages.
> Pour qui ces sacrifices, pour quel Dieu cette fête?
> Haridasi vous dit: C'est la fête de l'action directe. (*Indiade*, p. 113)

Haridasi is not only taking issue with the volume of killing, but is particularly worried about the joy with which it is carried out, calling it 'cette fête'. Haridasi's implication appears to be that the sacrifices themselves constitute a celebration, in the name of a god she cannot identify. Some association between sacrifice and festival has theatrical precedents – when Iphigenia and Clytemnestra arrive at Aulis, amongst their first concerns is to know the arrangements for the sacrifices of animals that should accompany a wedding feast – but there is a distinct ethical and political difference between making sacrifices to accompany a festival, and revelling in and celebrating the act of killing and sacrifice alone. Haridasi's words assume that taking pleasure in

killing is itself an ethical fault, linked but separate to the act of killing itself. During this intercommunal violence, where killing and sacrifice seem to have become joyful acts, sacrifice is not sacred but becomes a mark of savagery (Haridasi refers to 'musiques sauvages') and associated with violence, in the accumulation of cadavers.

There are two mentions of sacrifice in *Tambours*, the first of which comes when one of the Seigneur's advisors reminds him of how a neighbouring country had dealt with flooding:

> LE GRAND INTENDANT: Lorsqu'il y a dix ans, les si célèbres digues de notre si puissant voisin ont été débordées et rompues en plus de vingt endroits, il eut été plus sage de faire un sacrifice.
> LE SEIGNEUR KHANG: C'est-à-dire ?
> LE GRAND INTENDANT: Pratiquer une brèche dans la digue. Alors le Fleuve, libéré, eut ravagé les quartiers qu'on lui aurait livrés, puis, apaisé, il se serait endormi. (*Tambours*, p. 12)

Here, the word sacrifice has a euphemistic quality, allowing the Intendant to gesture towards the type of action that he would like to take, and its likely consequences, without being direct or explicit (the Seigneur must ask him for clarification). Far from being unspeakable, here the claim to sacrifice makes the calculated action more palatable. Derrida's reading of Kierkegaard suggested that in some cases (political) sacrifice is understood as being necessary for the greater good of the community, and as such can be translated into language and

understood by others. Cast as a sacrifice, the Intendant's desire to breach the dam will be understood in the context of protecting the common good of the country and its people, and the suffering of the people becomes noble and praiseworthy rather than avoidable and deplorable. Without the language of sacrifice, the breaching of the dam must be interpreted differently, as the elite's selfish attempt to protect its own economic interests which, Cixous establishes early in the play, would be threatened by wide-scale flooding. In the Intendant's use of the word sacrifice, financial self-interest is conflated with the demand to create the greatest good for the greatest number, a demand that may be thought of as ethical, in utilitarian models of ethics, but which according to a Cixousian understanding would always be political, relating to compromise, negotiation and calculation (even if Cixous makes calculation impossible in *Tambours*, never telling us exactly how many people will be affected by the breaches). As was the case in *Ville Parjure*, Cixous rejects arguments about the greater good.[12] Instead, by highlighting the work of Duan and her drummers, Cixous focuses on the individual ethical duties owed particularly to the weakest in society.

There is a particularly interesting link between *Tambours*'s descriptions of the river and Girard's model of sacrifice. The river is assumed by the (male) authorities to act according to hydraulic principles, where it is subject to a build-up of pressure, which must be released (perhaps by a limited breach of the dam) in a controlled way in order to avoid a devastating explosion, a logic which, as Irigaray points out, has often been thought to explain masculine sexuality (the

[12] When I refer to arguments about the greater good in *La Ville Parjure*, I am thinking particularly of Cixous's scorn for the medical community's decision to support the two doctors X1 and X2, in order to avoid widespread panic, a decision which is again motivated equally by self-preservation and by justifiable political concerns.

assumption that men need frequent orgasms in order to prevent a painful build-up of semen being a fundamental if still common misunderstanding of the male reproductive system).[13] Irigaray shows that Girard's idea of sacrifice follows the same hydraulic logic that informs Freud's idea of masculine sexuality and the male characters' understanding of how the river functions in *Tambours*. *Tambours* ends as the river overwhelms the country despite the attempts to direct its flow, perhaps showing itself to be aligned not with the hydraulic but with the fluid, which Irigaray has associated with a feminine approach to desire, in which it does not have to be limited or directed.[14] Sacrifice – in this case it is the sacrifice of an underprivileged area of the country – ensures that the political and social system continues to operate smoothly. When the river refuses to act hydraulically, as the logic of masculine sexuality demands, calculated political forms of sacrifice become impossible and the old order is uprooted.

Seigneur Khang adopts the Intendant's vocabulary when he comes to justify his decision to flood the countryside to the monk who has come to offer him spiritual guidance, and like the Intendant he uses the term to explain or justify killing:

> LE SEIGNEUR KHANG: Moine, quoique tu veuilles dire,
> tais-toi. Tu viens trop tard. J'ai pris mes responsabilités.

[13] Although some studies do suggest that regular ejaculation might help to prevent prostate cancer (see for example Marc Garnick, 'Does Frequent Ejaculation Help Ward off Prostate Cancer?', *Prostate Knowledge*, April 2009 <http://www.harvardprostateknowledge.org/does-frequent-ejaculation-help-ward-off-prostate-cancer> [accessed 20 October2015]).

[14] In 'La "Mécanique" des fluides', for example, Irigaray states that 'Pourtant, la femme, ça parle. Mais pas "*pareil*", pas "*même*", pas "*identique à soi*" ni à un x quelconque, etc. Pas "*sujet*", à moins d'être transformée par le phallocratisme. Ça parle "fluide", y compris dans les revers paralytiques de cette économie' (Irigaray, 'La "mécanique" des fluides', in *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un*, pp. 103-16 (p. 109).

> Désormais, la campagne est sacrifiée et toutes les portes de ma ville sont fermées. (*Tambours*, p. 62)

Like Derrida in his reading of Kierkegaard, Cixous is here using the question of sacrifice to question the nature of responsibility and of decisions. For Derrida, taking responsibility means taking a decision, something which must be done in isolation, standing apart from others but after a process that is 'as thoughtful as possible' (Derrida, 'Ethics and Politics Today', p. 296). Although adamant that he has 'pris mes responsabilités', Khang refuses to live up to either of Derrida's criteria. Rather than stand alone, he follows the Intendant's directions wholeheartedly. Khang further refuses to put the matter to thoughtful discussion with the monk, who is a representative in the play not only of religion but also of human kindness and decency. Thus when Khang tells the monk that he has taken his responsibility, and that this means that the decision can no longer be changed, he is in reality refusing to take responsibility for the decision precisely because he refuses to listen to the monk.

It is also significant that Khang seeks to portray the sacrifice that he envisages as, on some level, a form of self-sacrifice – although he does not use those terms precisely. The countryside, which is to be sacrificed, is at one point imagined by Khang to be part of his own body – he cries 'je ne veux pas être mon corps sans Nord ou bien sans Sud' (*Tambours*, p. 14), although it is worth noting here that Khang is played by an actor pretending to be a puppet, which could be taken apart and repaired, and as such the stakes are lower. What is even more significant is that the link between the land and Khang's body allows him to perceive the sacrifice through the lens of his own suffering, his loss of power or

territory, erasing the experiences of the people living on the land; and it is always the ‘campagne’ rather than the ‘campagnards’ that is discussed by Khang. The Seigneur performs a complex double gesture here, where his hyperbolic affirmation of empathy actually reveals total disregard for suffering. *Tambours* shows its audience that it is necessary to be wary of these types of verbal trap, particularly around explicit discussions of sacrifice, but also when elites lay vocal claim to suffering for the sake of others.

In *Indiade*, the explicit uses of the word sacrifice suggest how sacrifices, or at least the word sacrifice, can be used as a political tool as part of a wider negotiation; the INC ‘sacrificed’ Gandhi and their principles of non-violence in order to gain favour with the British and eventual independence, whilst Jinnah calls for the ‘self-sacrifice’ of his Muslim followers and/or the ‘sacrifice’ of Hindu citizens as part of his fight for an independent Pakistan. Gandhi and Jinnah seem to share faith in the political value and efficacy of sacrificial actions in cases where the reward for the sacrifice will be great enough to justify the gesture. Haridasi and Sarojini, by contrast, do not assume that there is value or nobility in sacrifice, but rather play with associations between sacrifice and savage excess to communicate the terror and violence of intercommunal violence. In each of these cases, the use of the term sacrifice is quite different from that in *Tambours*, where the only gesture that is explicitly identified by the characters as a sacrifice is the breach of the dam and the decision to flood the countryside. This is an action which shares some significant features in common with the type of sacrifice that Girard envisions; it helps to resolve a build-up of tension (in this case, rather than the violence that leads to the designation of the

scapegoat, the pressure comes from the river's waters), it gives meaning to an act of violence, allowing it to be understood as a necessary gesture, and it involves killing a victim who is judged to be of little real strategic value to the community in order to protect the interests of the community's elite. The use of the word sacrifice in these instances reveals how sacrifice can function euphemistically, to disguise basic self-interest or bloodthirstiness, dressing them as a gesture that can be understood by the rest of the community as being for its greater good.

It is significant that in neither play is the gesture that most resembles a self-sacrifice (Gandhi's fast or Duan's vigil and subsequent death on the dam) ever explicitly named as such. The word sacrifice remains reserved for calculated political gestures. Cixous, then, is taking a dual approach to sacrifice in her plays, on the one hand addressing the use of the word or rhetoric of sacrifice, and on the other examining gestures that are sacrifices, without being explicitly named as such. The death by drowning of a number of characters in *Tambours* cuts across both categories, since Khang has called the breach in the dam a sacrifice, but finally Khang cannot control the floods. In *Indiade*, I will suggest, imagery of flooding is used in ways which suggest something of the importance of sacrifice.

Desired death, death as motivation

The use of sacrifice as a rhetorical image can, then, have various motivations, but the question of what motivates the gesture of sacrifice is far more ethically

and politically complex. The two relevant questions are first, whether a sacrifice always has to have a (conscious) motivation and second, what is an appropriate motivation for sacrifice, when there is one. The most urgent and difficult iterations of these questions centre on the distinction between suicide and self-sacrifice.

Tambours features one case of suicide, where the Architect who had designed the dam considers attempting suicide when he discovers that the dam is failing, but he is dissuaded by his wife, who tells him that it will be possible to convince the authorities to allow him to lead the repairs to the dam, and by making these repairs to avoid the anger of the people, whom the Architect had feared would try to kill him (*Tambours*, pp. 50-1). This is an example of an attempted suicide that is driven not by any desire for death, but rather by a desire to control the circumstances of one's own death, and to escape judgement. Neither does the Architect consent to being a scapegoat whom the town could kill; he prefers secretive suicide to becoming a symbolic victim to unite and re-found the community. This portrayal of a suicide attempt as a manifestation of what is on one level self-serving cowardice (even if the Architect's fear of the town's violence is justified, his unwillingness to take steps to protect others from a fault he knows to exist is unethical) could raise ethical questions related to the writing of mental illness in a more realistic play, but in the context of the puppet actors of *Tambours* it serves only as a reminder of the importance of responsibility. The Architect-character (who, like many of the characters in the play, is identified only by his job title) is not presented to us as a suffering individual, but rather as a figure for those who see more value in retaining a certain position

within a community than in maintaining the safety of that community; a parallel can be drawn with the actions of the council of doctors whom Cixous criticises in *Ville Parjure*. The Architect's abortive suicide raises important ethical questions around the concepts of honour and of social position, but seems to have little to do with sacrifice.

A clearer demonstration of the differences between self-sacrifice and a desire for death comes in the character of Jinnah in *Indiade*. Shiach argues that 'Jinnah's sense of political identity is premised on the obliteration of the Other, and he doesn't want to be obliterated' (*Politics of Writing*, p. 131). What is significant here is that Jinnah does not only build his own political identity around a desire to destroy the other, but rather believes that it is necessary to wish to destroy the other in order to have any political identity. His use of violence is, then, a mode of self-defence, as he understands any attempt by the INC to assert a political identity as being necessarily an attack on his own existence. This is evident even at the opening of *Indiade*, where Jinnah calls the INC's better than expected election results 'un superbe et inquiétant succès', and tells the INC that as a result 'Je crains que ma communauté se sente menacée' (*Indiade*, p. 24). Jinnah's claims to speak for a unified Muslim community are challenged throughout the play by Muslim members of the INC as well as by regional leaders, but they are key to Jinnah's claims to authority, as well as to his claims to be discussing a political concern rather than a personal grievance). Jinnah's political attitude is dominated by suspicion, fear, and particularly fear of loss, and in the play it manifests particularly as a concern with death; I have already shown that Jinnah makes use of the rhetoric of

sacrifice when he calls for the deaths of others, but he also repeatedly discusses his own death, an event which he ties to the birth of the nation of Pakistan.[15]

Kate Marsh suggests that, throughout the play, Jinnah and his sister are 'associated with death: literally in the case of the dying Jinnah, and figuratively in a desire to sow death and destruction'.[16] Jinnah does describe experiencing a slow death, in soliloquy:

> O ma mort impatiente, tu m'as déjà arraché le cœur qui ne battait que pour Rani la belle, mon épouse, mon supplice. Tu dévores Jinnah par morceaux. Et cependant même sans reins, sans foie, même si je dois respirer sans poumons, sans yeux scruter l'horizon, je resterai de ce monde, tant que je n'aurai arraché au sein avare de l'Asie, mon pays, mon enfant, ma tombe. (*Indiade*, p. 73)

I would note here the marked difference between Cixous's descriptions of birth as a moment of joyful excess in *La Jeune née*, for example, and Jinnah's violent imagery (Pakistan is a child 'arraché au sein avare de l'Asie') and association of the birth of Pakistan with his own death, almost as in a structure of compensation. Jinnah imagines being devoured, like the sacrificial victim who founds society in Derrida's 'Il faut bien manger'.

[15] Jinnah is sometimes known in Pakistan as *Baba-e-Quam*, father of the nation.
[16] Kate Marsh, *Fictions of 1947: Representations of Indian Decolonization 1919-1962* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 177.

In ‘Il faut bien manger’, a conversation with Jean-Luc Nancy, Derrida expands on Girard’s scapegoat theory of sacrifice when he discusses the consequences for later societies of this worship as a god of the original scapegoat who is paradoxically supposed to be both guilty of the problems of society’s problems and responsible for its foundation. Like Girard, Derrida argues that society leaves a place free for sacrifice, which Derrida understands to be ‘une mise à mort non criminelle: avec ingestion, incorporation ou introjection du cadavre’ (Derrida and Nancy, ‘Il faut bien manger’, p. 292). In this interview, the form of sacrifice that most interests Derrida is meat eating, a practice which, like anthropophagy (human cannibalism) should be understood broadly to refer to both lived and symbolic consumption of flesh, since ‘Les cultures dites non anthropophagiques pratiquent l’anthropophagie symbolique et construisent même leur socius le plus élevé, voire la sublimité de leur morale, de leur politique et de leur droit, sur cette anthropophagie. Les végétariens eux aussi mangent de l’animal et même de l’homme. Ils pratiquent un autre mode de dénégation’ (‘Il faut bien manger’, p. 296). Patrick Llored names the ways in which meat eating and language use form the basis of masculine power ‘*carnophallogocentrisme*’ and explains that:

> Le pouvoir politique en Occident est incarné par l’homme de sexe masculin qui se pense comme rationnel et qui exprime cette rationalité à travers la parole censée faire le propre de l’homme en conséquence. Mais ce pouvoir ne peut s’exercer que par le biais du sacrifice carnivore qui vise l’animal en tant que vivant à sacrifier.[17]

[17] Patrick Llored, *Jacques Derrida: Politique et éthique de l’animalité* (Mons: Éditions Sils Maria, 2012), p. 23.

Meat eating may often be thought to be a necessary part of our diet, but Derrida reminds us that we could satisfy a purely physical need for proteins with other foods ('et à qui fera-t-on croire que nos cultures sont carnivores parce que les protéines animals seraient irremplaçables?' ('Il faut bien manger', p. 293)). Derrida argues that meat eating can be related to the belief that society was founded by the sacrifice of a scapegoat/god, and as such is one of the factors that determines who may be allowed to be a society's leader: 'Le chef doit être mangeur de chair (en vue d'être d'ailleurs lui-même 'symboliquement' – voir plus haut – mangé)' ('Il faut bien manger', p. 295). The society's leader has to eat meat, and in this way to accept the sacrificial system in a recognition of the original sacrifice of the scapegoat. The leader accepts, too, that he must be sacrificed in the necessarily cyclical sacrificial system – although he will be sacrificed '*symboliquement*'.

When he both calls for sacrifice in the name of Pakistan and describes himself as being eaten away by death, Jinnah takes on the dual role that Derrida reserves for the leader. For Jinnah, this slow death seems to be less a description of physical decline and illness, as Marsh's characterisation would suggest, than it is an assertion that 'life is slow dying', as Philip Larkin would have it.[18] Being eaten away is woven into Jinnah's everyday, as is the possibility of cannibalistic sacrifice for the leader whom Derrida describes. Jinnah imagines continuing his

[18] Philip Larkin, 'Nothing to be Said', in *The Whitsun Weddings*. In Larkin's poem, the universal truth of mortality and boredom cuts across the lives of both 'small-statured cross-faced tribes' and 'cobble-close families', who may also take comfort in knowing that they are both entitled to a part in Larkin's disdain for the ways in which they spend their finite time on Earth, whether their fault is to be stuffily petit bourgeois ('holding a garden-party'), or disgustingly barbaric ('hunting pig').

life without any body, fuelled only by his determination to create a country in which he can finally build his tomb. The use of the tomb as the metonymic stand in for death is interesting here, and it reflects Jinnah's emphasis on legacy and permanence. Jinnah desires a death that will cement his reputation, and, in suggesting that Pakistan is his tomb, he indicates that he wants future generations in Pakistan to live in and with the memory of his death. In short, he desires the afterlife that is afforded to Girard's first sacrificial victim but, as I have suggested earlier, he is not prepared to lose (not even to lose face with the INC). Instead, Jinnah's focus is always mastery and ownership, as suggested by the series of possessive adjectives in the final line of his vision for Pakistan, above.

Marsh ties the association between Jinnah and death to her assertion that Jinnah and his party (particularly his sister, Fatima) represent 'masculine attributes' that are in stark contrast to the 'maternal, life-giving' qualities that are associated with Gandhi in the play (*Fictions of 1947*, p. 176). Certainly, Gandhi is on the side of life in the play, and when Gandhi is able to finish his fast, Azad reports to the other members of the INC that Gandhi 'veut fêter avec vous son futur cent-vingt-cinquième anniversaire!' (*Indiade*, p. 198), a playful nod to his already advanced years, but one which reveals an enthusiasm and determination to go on living. Ethical forms of sacrifice can only involve surrendering what is loved or valued (most normally perhaps the self, but in the case of Abraham, for instance, somebody loved more than the self) and so Gandhi's desire for life is key here as, in *Tambours*, is Duan's equal embrace of life and its possibilities (she dies shortly after falling in love, *Tambours*, pp. 72-4).

Sacrifice as duty to men in Cixous's plays

As I have argued, in 'Aller à la mer', Cixous makes a powerful case about the centrality of the sacrifice of women within the theatre canon. Cixous is not the only feminist critic to have addressed the sacrifice of women, and many have been more interested in lived examples of the sacrifice of real women; the practice of *sati*, for example, has been a major issue for a number of feminist scholars and activists.[19] Others, like Cixous in 'Aller à la mer' have been concerned chiefly with the power of the sacrifice of women in myth, literature and history; Irigaray is one other key example of a scholar who does this type of work, and who engages with the wider body of thought on the role of sacrifice in society. In 'Le corps-à-corps avec la mère', Irigaray discusses the place of the sacrifice of women within the narrative that is told about the creation of society:

> Quand Freud décrit et théorise, notamment dans *Totem et tabou*, le meurtre du père comme fondateur de la horde primitive, il oublie un meurtre plus archaïque, celui de la femme-mère, nécessité par l'établissement d'un certain ordre dans la cité. ('Corps-à-corps', p. 23)

[19] See for example Sharada Sugirtharajah, 'Courtly Text and Courting *Sati*', *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 17.1 (2001), 5-32 and Anne Hardgrove, '*Sati* Worship and Marwari Public Identity in India', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 58.3 (1999), 723-53, as well as Catherine Clément's letter to Julia Kristeva, sent from Dakar, 7th July 1997, in Julia Kristeva and Catherine Clément, *Le féminin et le sacré* (Paris: Stock, 1998), p. 201.

Certainly Girard's statements about sacrifice and the scapegoat, and perhaps also Derrida's discussions of the meat-sacrificing male leader could be considered to be guilty of Freud's error here. Irigaray contends that the sacrifice of the father dominates critical and popular discourse about the foundation of our society, but that in reality the sacrifice of the father is only ever a secondary event, and made possible by the earlier sacrifice of the mother. Women are then subject to a double sacrifice here, where not only are they victims of a first sacrifice, but they are also subject to elimination through forgetting and exclusion from public discourse. What is vital here is that there is always a hidden sacrifice of a woman preceding the possible sacrifice of a man.

Cixous's character Fatima Jinnah offers one example of the sacrifice of women to men that both Cixous and Irigaray have critiqued. In *Indiade*, we are first introduced to Fatima Jinnah when she offers reassurance to her brother, who is beginning to doubt that it will be possible to create Pakistan:

> JINNAH: Ce n'est pas du très noble but qu'il m'arrive de douter mais de Jinnah. Je crains la piètre endurance de cette chair que je sens fondre sur mes os…
> FATIMA: Tu vivras! Tu verras le Pakistan.
> JINNAH: Je veux le voir. Mais tu devras m'aider
> FATIMA : T'aider, je suis née pour cela. Je me souviens d'une seule enfance, d'une vie, la tienne. (*Indiade*, p. 72) [20]

[20] It is striking here that the published script of *Indiade* always uses the first name for Fatima Jinnah; their shared surname always refers to the brother.

It is worth noting here that Fatima is not immediately introduced as Jinnah's sister, and that it may not be obvious to the audience that this is their relationship. The duty of devotion and service – Jinnah is the first to use the word 'devoir' to suggest both duty and necessity – is not related specifically to family relationships (based on a shared history, genetic similarity, or love) but is the structure of women's relationships to male peers with whom they are not sexually involved (other duties may be owed to husbands). Although Fatima Jinnah ran for president of Pakistan in her own right in 1965, and has been praised for the sacrifices that she made in the name of the nation – in a recent statement by Munaza Hassan, head of the women's wing of the centrist Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party, which claims to be the largest party in Pakistan by membership, Fatima Jinnah was praised for 'her sacrifice, her total and selfless devotion to the cause of Pakistan [which] was and remains a source of inspiration and guidance for all of us' – when she is introduced in *Indiade*, Fatima is concerned first with the person of her brother, and only secondly with the state of the political negotiations.[21]

As in the cases of the sacrificed women from the theatrical canon, highlighted by Cixous in 'Aller à la mer', in Fatima's outline of her role here, fulfilling the duties owed to men means that the woman must renounce any individual personal ambitions or history. Fatima affirms that the only childhood, and the only life that she can remember are her brother's. The historical Fatima Jinnah

[21] Munaza Hassan, 'Fatima Jinnah's sacrifice, her devotion, remains a source of inspiration and guidance for all of us', Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf website, 31 July 2013 <http://www.insaf.pk/news/wings/item/16904-Fatima%20Jinnah%20s%20sacrifice,%20her%20devotion%20remains%20a%20source%20of%20inspiration%20and%20guidance%20for%20all%20of%20us-%20Munaza%20Hassan> [accessed 20 October 2016].

was seventeen years younger than her brother, and so in Cixous's play Fatima's affirmation that Jinnah's is the only childhood that she can remember cannot be an assertion of their longstanding closeness as much as it is a denial of the value of her own childhood memories.[22] If, as Kate Marsh claims, Fatima displays masculine qualities (*Fictions of 1947*, pp. 176-7), then this is symptomatic of her sacrifice to her brother, which has led to the erasure of her femininity along with her personal history. Like Athena or Iphigenia, she is an example of a *fille-du-père* who reinforces and maintains the dominance of the masculine economy.

This form of sacrifice of women is absent from Cixous's later play, *Tambours sur la digue*. The play opens with Duan accompanying her father to the court to relay a prophetic dream, but rather than simply act as a reflection of her father, Duan introduces both of them (she is the first character to speak), before both characters leave the stage to pursue their related but individual political projects. More attention is paid in the play to the duties that sons owe to their mothers, and we see the Chancellor make a dangerous journey across the country in the hope that he might see his mother and his family home again before the floods. However, in both the cases of the Chancellor and of Duan, no explicit mention of duty is made, and the focus instead is on the affection that links these parents and children. In this case, then, it seems that Cixous has moved away from

[22] The historical Fatima Jinnah wrote a biography of Muhammed Jinnah. Here, too, the sister functions as the brother's memory, and neglects her own (she did not publish an autobiography or memoir of her own experiences). See Fatima Jinnah, *My Brother*, ed. by Sharif Al Mujahid (Karachi: Quaid-e-Azam Academy, 1987).

bitterly exposing the ways in which women have traditionally been sacrificed, to imagining family relationships in which sacrifice does not play a part.

Cixous's positive self-sacrificing heroes

In *Tambours*, when the Devin's daughter Duan learns that the flood is imminent, she shouts 'assez vu! Assez tremblé! Et maintenant Duan choisit et décide d'agir' (*Tambours,* p. 8), before gathering a group of drummers at the dam that protects the countryside to beat out tunes to warn the population of any danger of a breach. At least initially, Duan does not set out with the intention of sacrificing herself. With her 'assez tremblé', Duan announces that she has had enough of fear and anxiety, the characteristics that Kierkegaard associates most strongly with Abraham's faithful sacrifice. Rather than an example of sacrifice, Duan frames her action as a form of political engagement from which she will also benefit, since she will no longer be afraid or anxious. Nevertheless, her gesture is a sacrifice in important ways. Prompted by Khang's nephew Hun, He Tao, Hun's lieutenant, acts out before the fact how he will kill Duan, shouting 'Rhaark, je l'égorge' (*Tambours*, p. 33), his scream a sound which would express violence or hatred on the stage in a way that it fails to on the page. In choosing to protect the dam it is evident that Duan has sacrificed her safety, and significantly, does not act from a welcoming or indifferent attitude towards death, but in response to the floods, out of an impulse to protect people from the effects of the floods. Duan's decision to 'man' the dam is a gesture of ethically-driven self-sacrifice, and one which is initially successful as her warning drum rhythms and later her military campaign against the forces who attempt to

breach the dam mean that the countryside's current order is maintained and protected.

Later, in an attempt to protect the people of the city, Duan shows that she is also prepared to give up her lover, Wang Po, even to fight and perhaps kill him. When Duan and Wang Po learn that (according to the hydraulic logic that the characters suppose to dictate the behaviour of the river) it could be possible to save some of the inhabitants of Khang's city without risking the lives of the inhabitants of the city, Wang Po still insists that 'les dieux ont rendu leur arrêt. Nous survivrons, et c'est la ville qui périra' (*Tambours*, pp. 72-3), whilst Duan argues that 'ce n'est plus aussi simple', and that, if possible, 'le quartier des marchés, les théâtres, les temples, les artisans, la bibliothèque' should be saved, along with the friends and relations that both lovers have left in the town (ibid., p. 73). Duan confirms that she has a duty to all of the citizens of the country, which is related to their capacity and to love, rather than deriving from a promise made to those individuals; Wang Po by contrast only stands by those he swore to protect when he told the audience 'Ecoutez ma déclaration! Moi Wang Po serviteur d'aucun Seigneur, en vertu du droit à la compassion qui nous est inné, et du devoir de la faire respecter, je prends en main les destinées des paysans' (*Tambours*, p. 67). When he refuses to consider saving some of the city, Wang Po shows the same determination to stand by a vow as Agamemnon displayed when he sacrificed Iphigenia; the duty towards compassion that apparently informed his vow becomes only a secondary consideration once the promise has been made. Finally, Wang Po tells Duan 'Ils nous ont traités comme des bêtes sans désir et sans lumière. Je n'ai d'autre mission que la vengeance, d'autre

vertu que la haine', to which Duan replies 'Tu veux tuer un père pour un père! Je t'en empêcherai' (*Tambours,* p. 74). When she takes up the biblical phrase 'eye for an eye' (which was also parodied by the historical Gandhi, who rightly declared that the policy 'ends up making the whole world blind') Duan also hints at the fact that Wang Po's form of vengeance does nothing but replace one masculine political economy for another, putting his own arbitrary judgements in place of Khang's. In the fight that ensues, both partners stab the other, and in freeing himself from Duan's blade, Wang Po injures her mortally. Like Nehru calling for a flood in *Indiade,* Wang Po's first impulse is to deny that he has the power to make a change to the circumstances of his country – 'les dieux ont rendu leur arrêt', and with that have decided that it should be the countryside that survives. Unlike Duan, Wang Po is unable to challenge the fundamental assumption that a victory must be at the expense of others; his thinking remains stuck in an economy dominated by hierarchy and competition. For Duan, by contrast, the question is to know who suffers, and how that suffering may be reduced. Ultimately, though, it is Duan who dies. Typically, in tragic sacrifice, the death of the victim should be the foundation of the new order. However, in the case of Duan, her death means the victory of the masculine modes of thinking that are accepted by the elite of the city as well as by Wang Po, who had set himself up to challenge that elite. Here, then, we see that Cixous has separated the positive, creative value of sacrifice from the gesture's violence, suggesting that the two must not always go hand in hand.

Gandhi's fast in *Indiade* is another prominent example of self-sacrifice performed out of a desire for positive change. When Gandhi announces his fast,

he says to the Indian people 'jusqu'à la mort je jeûnerai! Ce sera mon dernier combat ! Indiens, je remets Gandhi entre vos mains. La paix à Delhi, sinon je mourrai. Choisissez' (*Indiade,* p. 185). It is possible to link Gandhi's gesture to Girard's scapegoat model of sacrifice. Gandhi's sacrifice is a response to widespread conflict, and is a gesture intended to end that conflict and in so doing to found a new social order (independent India). Like Girard's scapegoat, Gandhi is believed responsible for the ills of the community: shortly before Gandhi announces his fast, Inder, a young *Dalit* man, and Rajkumar, a Punjabi farmer, chastise Gandhi for having failed to fulfil his promise to prevent partition, and claim that they are holding him personally responsible for abandoning them to the resultant intercommunal violence. It is also true that Gandhi is thought of as the founder of the new Indian nation (although *Indiade* is careful to pay attention to the roles played by other members of the INC, regional leaders, the Muslim League, and some figures in the British establishment in achieving Indian independence), and he may be thought of as saintly by some (the programme notes to *Indiade* make reference to his 'sainteté' (*Indiade,* p. 15)). Yet Gandhi's position deviates in an important way from tragic sacrifice as imagined by Girard. Although Gandhi believes that, like the scapegoat, by risking death he can unite the Indian people, Gandhi's gesture depends on the population sharing a desire to see him live, not taking part in his lynching: to end the violence, Azad asks the leaders of the INC and other parties to remind local leaders ('les chefs de toutes les communautés de Delhi') that 'la vie de Gandhi est notre bien le plus précieux' (*Indiade,* p. 193). After Gandhi's fast has begun, Nehru expresses surprise, anger, and sadness at the continued intercommunal violence, saying 'voir l'Inde libre se conduire aussi

sauvagement! Au risque de perdre son propre père, celui qui l'a élevée, conduit, consolée!' (*Indiade*, p. 192). The description of Gandhi as a father suggests that Gandhi had already earned the role of founder of the new India before beginning the fast, and certainly before his death. The importance of the self-sacrificing gesture is diminished as once more, Cixous emphasises the positive and creative over the destructive.

Indeed, in *Indiade*, the focus is on the potential of the fast to open up a positive and creative space for political dialogue, rather than on the possibility that Gandhi may die. When the talks descend into disagreement over who has been working the hardest, Azad tells those involved 'cessez d'aboyer ministres couronnés. Dois-je vous rappeler que Gandhiji jeûne et se meurt?' (*Indiade*, p.192). The peace talks are held because of intercommunal violence and killings, but the single, preventable death of Gandhi (a beloved figure, as the honorific –ji suffix on his name reminds us) remains a necessary rallying point for those involved. In the theatre, where the audience has witnessed the deaths of a number of well-developed characters, this reality is highlighted as particularly unjust. It is significant that Gandhi chooses fasting as his method of self-sacrifice. Fasting has a significant political history as a gesture of resistance, particularly in the cases of high profile prisoners like the suffragettes or members of the IRA (most famously Bobby Sands) and fasting also has a significant role in religious traditions as a gesture of devotion and meditation. In *Indiade*, the value of fasting is related to time. Sarojini reassures Gandhi that the political leaders 'vont lutter contre la montre' to save him (*Indiade*, p. 194), suggesting that fasting has brought urgency to the talks, although it is a slow

death (the historical Gandhi fasted from the 12th to the 30th of January 1948, although in the play, the indication that time is passing comes through the impressive reports of the work that has been achieved by the ministers involved in the talks, maintaining focus on the purpose rather than the gesture of the sacrifice). Importantly, Cixous shows that Gandhi refuses to eat at any point, even when he is offered 'une cuillère de jus d'orange dans ton eau? Pour attendre seulement, qui le saura?' (*Indiade*, p. 195). This refusal reaffirms Gandhi's honesty for the audience; although the fast is political insofar as it precipitates negotiation, it is not a feint or a ruse, and there is to be no compromise about its terms. If the success of Gandhi's fast is predicated on the recognition of his value and importance to India, then it is necessary that he maintain his position as the innocent, honest, and good leader. When Gandhi's threatened gesture of self-sacrifice is finally successful, then, it is a testament to his canny judgement of and ability to manipulate his image and popularity in order to achieve positive change. That Gandhi is later killed by a Hindu assassin, still bitter at partition, does not belie the significance of Gandhi's fast; rather, Cixous's inclusion of Gandhi's final assassination in the play suggests the impossibility of the complete consensus imagined by Girard as the basis for a community after sacrifice.

Conclusion

Through Jinnah's calls for the deaths of Hindus as revenge for the losses suffered by 'his' Muslim community, and the drowning of the countryside in *Tambours*, Cixous's plays describe a world in which sacrifice is routinely demanded by a masculine economy, where it makes sense to identify higher and

lower value victims, and where losses and wins must balance. Moreover, a demand that the weakest members of a community should sacrifice their goods (even those goods that might be thought to be held in common, such as the natural world or the river, in *Tambours*) is shown to be prevalent even in actions that are not explicitly named as sacrifices, as in Hun's plundering and logging of the forest in *Tambours*.

Yet Cixous's play is not an abstract critique of political systems and economies and the demands that they put on individuals. Rather, she is clear that guilt attaches to particular individuals. These plays are in a large part a call for individuals to realise their own capacity to create change, and a rebuke to those who use talk of gods, forces, or fate to avoid accepting responsibility for decisions. There are two particular examples of individuals who attempted to bring about political change through self-sacrifice, Duan and Gandhi. Whilst Gandhi's threat of self-sacrifice is sufficient to achieve lasting political change, since his high profile as a leader and the affection that the population feel for him can unite the country, at least sufficiently to end the intercommunal violence, Duan, a relative unknown, is only able to achieve a very limited reprieve for the people whom she aimed to protect, and is killed for her failed attempts to alter the system: she shares the fate of the mother in *Ville Parjure*, who dies because of her ethical relationship to her sons.

In 'Aller à la mer', Cixous warned of the silent and assumed sacrifice of women throughout the theatrical canon. In her own plays she showcases powerful women and men who are prepared to sacrifice themselves out of an ethical duty

of care to others. Significantly, though, she shows that these self-sacrificing gestures, although praiseworthy, are futile; those who are outside of or undervalued by society cannot change it by eliminating themselves. The political value of the plays lies in the ways in which they combine rejection of the strategy of self-sacrifice with praise for the urgency and commitment that prompt the gesture.

Chapter Six: Compromising with Theatre; Ethics and Politics

Cixous's theatre is political, both in the sense that it deals explicitly with the business of governments and those who consciously engage in forms of political activism or rebellion, and in the sense that writing and staging her plays is a political gesture that seeks to intervene to change the course of contemporary society. Cixous discusses ethics in relation to her theatre,[1] and the border between ethics (a relationship of absolute responsibility) and politics (the realm characterised by negotiation and compromise) is constantly at stake in her plays, where it is challenged and deconstructed. Although some critics argue that Cixous has taken a step back from the innovation of her essays and novels in the plays that followed *Portrait de Dora*, her theatre does take a new and distinctive approach to political theatre.[2]

In this concluding chapter, I show that the difficulties that these critics point out are a strategically important part of Cixous's approach to political theatre. I begin with the way that Cixous has treated the difference between ethics and politics, drawing out the difference between ethics and politics in the everyday sense, and ethics and politics in the precise, critical sense. I show that whilst ethics is a recurring concern in Cixous's theatre, they are most interesting for the ways in which they approach politics. I demonstrate that her plays provide

[1] See particularly the Bernadette Fort interview with Cixous 'Theatre, History, Ethics'.

[2] Discussing *La Ville Parjure*, for example, Noonan states that 'formally, the play is not unconventional', in contrast to Cixous's earlier theatre (*Dora* and *Le Nom d'Œdipe*) and to her novels (*Echo's Voice*, p. 105). In relation to *Sihanouk* and *Indiade*, Susan Sellers states that 'the adoption of traditional dramatic form, where considerations of staging curtail the extent to which the writer may allow the components of writing their own generation, appears at odds with Cixous's delineation of *écriture féminine*' (*Authorship, Autobiography, and Love*, p. 74).

an effective critique of issues in contemporary politics although she strategically refuses to offer any clear solutions to those issues, preferring an alternative form of didacticism that focuses on fostering a critical sense in the audience. I conclude that this approach to political theatre distinguishes Cixous's work from the plays of other politically engaged playwrights.

Redrawing the distinction between ethics and politics

Cixous's plays often begin with events that are political in the everyday sense of the term. The history plays that Cixous wrote with the Théâtre du Soleil in the 1980s, the first concerned with Khmer Rouge rule in Cambodia and the second with the machinations that led to Indian independence, are prime examples of this. Most of the characters in these plays are active on the national and international political stage, and the stories revolve around the business of government. Despite this narrative background of politics, what really interests Cixous are stories that are ethical, in the everyday sense of the term. In her plays, Cixous always shows the grand business of politics and nation-building to be made up of at the same time many smaller-scale, ethical, relationships, interactions, and decisions. Thus, as she explains, *Ville Parjure* is 'the story of a small group of human beings struck terribly by modern cruelties, and that of our society and our science without a soul; and it is also the trial or the x-ray that unmasks the rot hidden under the "developed" exteriors of the so-called democratic states' (Fort, 'Theatre, History', p. 429). Morality, which overlaps with both ethics and politics and can be defined as the socially defined set of rules that govern acceptable and unacceptable behaviour within a certain

community at a certain time, is also a target of Cixous's critique in many of her plays. Cixous establishes a multi-level focus on ethics and politics in the essay included in the programme notes for *Indiade*, 'Si vous permettez, je vais vous parler d'amour'. In that essay, Cixous describes *Indiade* as 'une pièce sur l'être humain, sur le héros et la poussière, sur le combat de l'ange et de la bête en chacun de nous', and discussed the 'sainteté de Gandhi' as well as the 'idéalisme de Nehru'.[3] The play that centres on the political fight for Indian independence is framed here as being equally to do with saintliness or the ethical struggle within each of us. As she does when she writes about *écriture féminine*, Cixous moves fluidly between different levels of concern, highlighting both ethical and political stakes in the stories that she examines.

Whereas Cixous's moves to bring out the politics in reading and *jouissance* have been welcomed by many critics, the reception of her history plays has been less positive, and some scholars have been concerned by what they understand to be Cixous's de-politicised version of South-East Asian history.[4] Any attempt to deal with both politics and ethics (both small-scale and large-scale dilemmas) within the same play is understood by some critics to be a threat to the overall political message of the piece (which must be more important than the ethical, within the masculine economy). The assumption is that the border between ethics and politics must remain staunchly in place if a play is to be politically engaged. Any deconstruction of that border is considered to be particularly problematic when Cixous sets her plays in non-European spaces, and risks

[3] Cixous, 'Si vous le permettez, je vais vous parler d'amour…', in *Indiade*, 11-17 (pp. 15-16).
[4] See Bradby, *Modern French Drama*, p. 267 in particular.

repeating or playing into tropes of Asia, in particular, as a single timeless spiritual space, divorced from modernity. Rustom Bharucha has been particularly outspoken, accusing Cixous of repeating 'tropes of an unacknowledged neo-orientalism' and drawing on 'the archetypes of "eternal India"' in *Indiade* (Bharucha, '"Eternal India"', p. 47). I argue, however, that Cixous's representations of Asia and its history are interesting manifestations of the political strategy she deploys throughout her theatre work.

Certainly it is possible to see why critics have considered that Cixous's theatre has some case to answer in its representation of India or Cambodia or, in her later play *Les Naufragés du Fol Espoir*, South America. The simplified, aestheticized versions of these countries that Cixous presents in her plays do seem to make use of many of the exotic fantasies and easy stereotypes that have dominated Western discussions of spaces outside of Europe. Dobson highlights this risk when she discusses how the Théâtre du Soleil representations of spaces outside of Europe are accompanied by exotic foods and can include the (sexualised?) naked or semi-naked bodies of racially cross-cast actors, as well as drawing on ideals of spirituality or humbleness associated with spaces outside of Europe in some forms of Orientalist discourse (*Scene of Writing*, pp. 101-2). However, I argue that this staging is neither naïve nor politically conservative, but rather should be welcomed for the ways in which it openly acknowledges the impossibility of accessing an 'authentic' or 'real' East-Asian, South-American, or African experience without moving from a Parisian theatre, in a way that less obviously artificial productions may not. As Françoise Quillet puts it, 'L'Orient du Théâtre du Soleil, tel qu'il surgit dans les spectacles,

participe d'une forme théâtrale imaginaire et c'est là toute son originalité (*Orient au Théâtre du Soleil*, p.268). Quillet is correct when she claims that what is interesting and novel about Cixous and the Théâtre du Soleil's interpretation of 'l'Orient' is that it is an 'Orient de rêve' (ibid.), a false version of the Orient that reflects dreams about that space that have been created through a Eurocentric lens, under the influence of a history of empire. Importantly, Cious and Mnouchkine are clear and upfront about this dream status and do not lay claim to any insight into the reality of non-European spaces. The ways in which Cixous and the Théâtre du Soleil underline this artificiality are perhaps clearest in *Naufragés*, which focuses on a group of idealistic Socialist filmmakers from 1913 who want to denounce 'l'imbécillité nationaliste des colons sud-américains' (p. 76). Guided by their Marxist ideals and their deep investment in the ideal of the noble savage, they film a version of a late novel by Jules Verne, whose attitudes towards empire and towards non-European people have been the subject of both debate and ridicule and who is, however unfairly, generally thought of as a champion of colonial expansion.[5] There are, then, two distinct framing devices standing between Cixous and her theatre group, on the one hand, and the version of South American Indian history that appears on stage, on the other. Both the pro-colonial impulse and the suggestion that colonisation should be opposed because the West has a corrupting influence on the innately good and simple native peoples are viewpoints expressed by characters speaking a century ago, whose own naivety is repeatedly underlined

[5] As Timothy Unwin points out '[Jules Verne] is a hunter-coloniser, very much in tune with the ideologies of his day, writing in an era of expansion which is mirrored in his approach', (*Journeys in Writing*, pp. 28-9), and at the same time 'his writing consistently unveils the complexities and the ambiguities of its own nineteenth-century framework and, crucially, re-enacts these in its textual practices'. (ibid., p. 51).

through the play's sadly ironic references to the approach of *la Première Guerre* (*Naufragés*, p. 9). The treatment of Cambodia and India is not wildly different to the treatment of South America; in all of these plays, Cixous is concentrating on obliging her audience to engage in examining, unpicking, and challenging European attitudes towards spaces outside of Europe. The wary critical reception that Cixous's representations of those spaces received suggests that Cixous and the Théâtre du Soleil had succeeded in highlighting and calling into question unthinking attitudes.

Cixous's theatre is not apolitical in a way that is conservative or reinforces prejudice, as some critics have believed (and, moreover, the naivety of her representations of East Asia and South America is itself a political strategy), and its politics exists alongside and often within questions that are 'ethical' in an everyday sense (later, I will come to the role of ethics in the precise philosophical definition that I established in response to Cixous's writing). Examples of questions that are 'ethical' in this everyday sense can be found throughout Cixous's plays. One that is particularly striking is her treatment of medical ethics, which is an increasingly significant field within the study of ethics. In *Ville Parjure* two doctors are on trial for negligence, and in *Dora* Freud's attitudes towards his attractive young patient are called into question. Cixous's portrayal of everyday kindness and friendship in *Voile* showcases the value of mutually supportive female friendships; both kindness and friendship, which relate to the interactions between a few individuals, have often been thought of as falling into the realm of ethics, although the long history of the politics of friendship (as traced by Derrida in *Politique de l'amitié*) highlights

the difficulty of maintaining a strict boundary between ethics and politics. Cixous also explores family relationships and questions what duties we have towards our family in *Sihanouk*, where two female friends form a new family unit, and where the father Suramarit returns from the dead to support his son. The question of whether I have more or different duties towards my family members than I would have towards a stranger has been one that has exercised classical thinkers on ethics and has remained a theme in contemporary writing on ethics – particularly for those who are influenced by Kant.[6] These types of questions are also present, often in an overtly political version, elsewhere in Cixous's theatre (for instance, when Akhmatova balances her son's welfare with her wish to publish work that she knows risks being read as critical of the state, or when old friends of Gandhi accuse him of ignoring them in order to focus on world politics), and they become increasingly important with an approach to politics that rejects the logocentric obsession with efficiency to place love at its centre.

Is there ethical action in Cixous's plays?

Cixous's plays are, then, frequently concerned with 'ethics' in the sense of individual responsibility, and they include a number of characters who act ethically according to classical definitions of ethics; Gandhi, most notably, but even Jean Salvatore, for example. However, the more interesting and pressing

[6] See Anthony Cunningham, 'The Aim of Ethics', in *The Heart of What Matters: The Role for Literature in Moral Philosophy* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 7-68 (p. 9). Cunningham stresses that the ethical value of actions is always determined by their context, and argues that we have very different duties towards individuals, depending on our relationship towards them.

question of the position of the ethical as defined precisely as a relationship of absolute responsibility, in which the other always takes priority over the self, still remains. The clearest example of ethical action (action rooted in an ethical relationship) in Cixous's plays is the Mother's determination to find justice for her sons in *Ville Parjure*. The Mother rejects all offers of compromise that she receives in the play; she curses the lawyers who act for the doctors and who suggest that she should have financial compensation for their deaths, and sends away the Queen, who comes to sympathise with the Mother and to offer her the opportunity to improve the lives of other haemophiliac children. The Mother's demand for justice remains constant, and she refuses to be silenced even if she is open to allowing justice to be expressed in different ways: when she first arrives on stage she calls bitterly for the doctors to be punished, and later she asks variously for an apology, recognition that a crime has taken place, or an admission of guilt. Although the Mother's action revolves around the trial of the doctors, her actions are not motivated by her relationship to them. Rather, she is prompted to act by her two sons, who visit her as silent puppets in a dream in Mnouchkine's staging of the play. Cixous's play can hardly be understood as an endorsement of the Mother's form of ethical action. Indeed, those critics who have broadly praised the play have focused overwhelmingly on its *politics* rather than its ethics. Irma Erlingsdóttir has called *Ville Parjure* 'a political contribution to the debate over memory and justice' ('Politics of Justice', p. 369) and, like Susan Ayres (with whom Erlingsdóttir is in conversation in her article), links *Ville Parjure* and its discussion of justice to similar debates taking place around a broad range of contemporary political tragedies, including ethnic

cleansing in Bosnia, South African apartheid, and the Holocaust.[7] Thus, the play is shown to have the potential for far-reaching political importance. At the same time, the ethical call for justice – the Mother's absolute need for some justice to be done – is unsuccessful. The doctors on trial fail to admit their guilt, and moreover the Mother and her supporters are drowned when their actions contribute to the rise to power of a fascist dictator, who floods the cemetery where they are living.

Indeed, throughout Cixous's plays, actions taken as a result of an ethical relationship of absolute responsibility appear to be naïve, misguided, and dangerous, even when those who are acting ethically are the only sympathetic characters in the plays. Besides the Mother's gesture (which is a failure if judged politically, since it has devastating consequences), possibly the only ethical action that can be found in the plays comes with the two working-class women in *Sihanouk* who at the urging of the ghost of the former king Suramarit decide to adopt a young boy whose parents had been killed in American bombings of Cambodia. The women immediately offer hospitality to the young boy, and despite his constant demands to be allowed to have revenge on the Americans who had killed his family, which suggest his potential for violence, they welcome him as their son without fear and hesitation. Although their food supplies are limited, the women use the sugar that they have had stashed away in secret to celebrate his arrival (*Sihanouk*, p. 223). Their generosity is verbal as well as material. By praising the boy as 'un cadeau' and a 'miracle' (*Sihanouk*,

[7] For more on justice in *La Ville Parjure*, see Brigitte Weltman-Aron's 'Political Betrayal: Hélène Cixous's Perjured City', and the discussion of *La Ville Parjure* in my Masters dissertation.

p. 22) they are using the commonplace language used to hail a biological birth, stretching the bounds of family and childbearing in a way that is politically valuable in the context of Cixous's praise for maternity and pregnancy elsewhere (often misread as a dangerous endorsement of biological determinism). They are furthermore placing the child in the position of the giver rather than the recipient of a benefit, placing themselves in his debt in a way that should allow him fully to enjoy the pleasures of membership of their family. Cixous's *écriture féminine* finds value in the politics of pregnancy and maternity (and the attitude to the other that they embody), and in Cixous's plays it is notable that the only strong examples of ethical relationships come from women and are associated with maternity. However, unlike in traditional formulations where the association of women and the ethical (rather than the political) was a product of the confinement of women to the domestic sphere, in Cixous's plays the ethical course of action is the stronger and the more risky for the agent and for those connected to her.

Indeed, the decision of the old women in *Sihanouk* to take in the young boy as a member of the (unorthodox, reconstituted) family could also be understood as a gesture of political rebellion in the context of the Khmer Rouge attempt to sever all forms of family ties. In the political re-education sessions that Lamné and Khieu Samnol are forced to attend, they must learn and repeat the mantra that Cambodians are superior to the Chinese because:

> KHIEU SAMNOL: [Les Chinois] achètent des machines à coudre pour leurs femmes, car ils sont encore attachés à la famille et à leur comfort
> Nous, nous sommes parvenus à abolir tout sentiment envers la famille et notre famille c'est l'Angkar.
> Et pour le confort nous aimons surtout travailler avec nos deux mains pour la Révolution. (*Sihanouk*, p. 322)

The attitude towards sexual difference is striking here: investment in technology related to industries traditionally dominated by women, like textiles, is automatically seen as counterrevolutionary luxury. Rejection of (feminine) comfort and family life is turned into a virtue and mark of progress; cold comfort for those who are performing forced labour. The phrases that the women are forced to learn acknowledge implicitly that family is a threat to the state not only because the traditional family formed part of the old system of social organisation that was supposed to be swept away by the revolution, but also because the existence of mutually supportive groupings like the family may reduce reliance on and loyalty to state mechanisms. In this context, the maintenance of ethical relationships is a politically revolutionary gesture; the boundary between ethics/politics, personal/public is deconstructed.

Like the Mother's ethical gesture, this ethical welcome of the young boy also takes a violent turn when together he and the ghost of one of the women who have adopted him kill a local Khmer Rouge leader who had been threatening them (*Sihanouk*, pp. 327-8). Moreover, the tactics that the women use to ensure the survival of their new family are morally questionable. When the women spot the arrival of a local Chinese man – whose nationality seems to serve them as

both an indication of his wealth and a justification for taking it from him – they plan to trick him into exchanging his remaining boxes of rice for their worthless US dollars (*Sihanouk*, pp. 295-303). The trick takes advantage of flaws in his moral character (greed: he thinks he is himself slyly gaining the upper hand in the deal) and the scene is intended to be comic. Although scenes of trickery can be played for either tragedy or comedy (Malvolio is one important case in point here), the humour that can be derived from seeing less privileged characters get some of their own back through guile is key to the success of many characters throughout the theatre and film canon, from Shakespeare's Falstaff to Marivaux's valets and even Rowan Atkinson's Blackadder. In *Sihanouk*, the high stakes (very real possibility of starvation) involved in the trickery scene, which plays out during the Khmer Rouge's killing fields, means that it is difficult to imagine it as part of any moral action. What is clear is that actions motivated by an ethical relationship of absolute responsibility (for instance, stealing to feed a son you welcomed) would not always be deemed to be ethically good in the everyday sense of the word; everyday morality is distinct from ethics as defined precisely. What is also highlighted by the cases of these women and the Mother is the difficulty of judging the 'success' of an ethical gesture (indeed, the possibility of calculating such a judgement might be excluded by definition), at least in part because, whether or not the ethical gesture brings about positive change (and even if it brings harm), it is the public manifestation of absolute responsibility and as such exists as a horizon according to which all of the hypocrisies and shortcomings of everyday politics and morality can become visible. The ethical relationship plays an important part in shaping the ethico-political landscape even if, as Cixous makes clear, it

would be impossible or undesirable to act in accordance with its demands all of the time.

Many of the gestures in Cixous's theatre that at first seem to be rooted in an ethical relationship finally have as much, if not more, to do with politics than with ethics. Perhaps the clearest example of this is the case of self-sacrifice, which I explore in Chapter Five. Although sacrifice may be praised as a grand and revolutionary gesture (both in everyday discussions of self-sacrifice and, on occasion, in Cixous's plays), self-sacrifice normally functions to preserve a society's status quo, as Cixous argues in her early article on the theatre, 'Aller à la mer'. In Cixous's play *Rouen, la Trentième Nuit de Mai '31*, this sort of political sacrifice posing as a self-sacrifice is portrayed through the death of Jeanne (Joan of Arc) who was prepared to give up her life to help her beloved king to fight to keep the English from France, but who was ultimately traded to the English, and burned as part of a peace settlement. Her refusal to recant her story of having heard the voice of God telling her to protect the king, even though such a statement may have persuaded the English to save her life, means that her story can be framed as one of self-sacrifice, although ultimately her death served to cement a political deal between men.[8] The versions of self-sacrifice that are particularly interesting in Cixous's other plays, however, are political in different ways. In *Tambours*, Duan dies in the name of politics, fighting to oblige her lover to accept a political, negotiated solution to the problem of the coming humanitarian crisis that would be caused by the flood.

[8] Cixous's play talks about the last night of her life as she waits for her death. The play moves between the present and the distant past, and the young Jeanne, who implies that she may be the king's lover, discusses her longing for him to come to her both to save her and to be physically close with her once more.

In the case of Gandhi, although it is made clear in *Indiade* that he was genuinely willing to suffer bodily for the good of his country, his self-sacrificing gesture is also a negotiating position, designed to oblige others to find some peaceful compromise around Indian independence and partition. These gestures that combine an ethical relationship of responsibility (to the Indian people, for Gandhi, or to the citizens of the country in *Tambours*) with some negotiation and calculation, are successful in a number of places in Cixous's plays. Political action that is guided by ethics is shown to have positive revolutionary potential.

Political theatre

Participating in theatre, either as a theatre-maker or as an audience member, is always a political act, having to do with negotiation and compromise. On the most mundane level, this shows itself in the rules and etiquette of the theatre space which, due to the specific demands of a theatre performance, are more highly visible and more keenly felt than the rules that govern other public spaces. During a performance, audience members compromise on their own desire to answer the phone, to get up, or to chat to their neighbour in exchange for the silence and stillness of other members of the audience, and the creation of a mutually acceptable environment. This code of behaviour is the subject of ongoing negotiations between audiences: they may be suspended or altered for particular shows or types of performances (some more combative comedians invite or expect heckling, for example) or they may alter because of technology (the most recent debates surround the use of mobile phones) or wider social change. This micro-politics that revolves around managing relationships between members of the audience is indicative of and ties to larger-scale

political concerns. The design of the theatre space is a clear example of this: traditional European theatres have tiered seating that divides patrons according to class (or at least disposable income) and, in the past, would have also played an important role in allowing wealthy spectators to see and be seen by other audience members. In these cases the arrangement of the theatre was political, but politically conservative: the same could be said of the bourgeois classical canon that is often staged there.[9] By contrast, many more recent Parisian theatres adopt a first-come-first-served approach to seating that chimes with more egalitarian political values. The performance spaces of the theatre groups with whom Cixous collaborates also reflect their politics in significant ways. *Portrait de Dora* was performed at the Théâtre d'Orsay, Barrault's temporary theatre structure inside the former Gare d'Orsay. Reclaiming disused public spaces to house public arts events is also a valuable political gesture that makes a strong statement about social priorities. *L'Histoire (qu'on ne connaîtra jamais)* was first performed in Paris's Théatre de la ville which, although it is a more traditional theatre space with tiered seating, from its foundation in 1968 placed 'service public' at the forefront of its mission, aiming to provide 'tarifs pratiqués [sic], parmi les plus bas de la capitale, permettant à un large public de venir'.[10]

For the Théâtre du Soleil, Cixous's most important collaborators, far from being divided according to wealth the audience are supposed to form a collective.[11] The theatre group makes use of a number of techniques in their attempts to

[9] See Barthes's critiques of the bourgeois theatre in 'Racine est Racine', for example.
[10] See Théâtre de la ville, 'Une page d'histoire', <http://www.theatredelaville-paris.com/projet-histoire-11> [accessed 21 October 2016].
[11] I discuss the role of the collective in the Théâtre du Soleil in Chapter One.

foster this collective feeling, including providing a designated bus service to take audience members from the metro station to the theatre, inviting audience members to sit and eat together before the performance, and doing away with price differentials for seating. Further, the Théâtre du Soleil attempt (though perhaps not always successfully) to open their doors to audience members from across the social spectrum, working with schools to encourage them to bring groups in and ensuring that both the seats and the travel to the theatre are as affordable as they can be; the commitment to democracy and to the collective that is evident in the troupe's organisation is extended to their current audience, as well as being visible on stage.

The other theatre groups or directors with whom Cixous works are not always as committed as the Théâtre du Soleil to the idea of the theatre audience as a collective (and I mean to leave aside *La Pupille*, the one example of closet theatre that Cixous produces and a play that I chose not to analyse in this thesis). Both Daniel Mesguich and Simone Benmussa are more traditional than the Théâtre du Soleil in the ways in which they negotiate the relationships between audience members even although the plays that both directors produce could be considered to be more avant-garde or experimental in their form than the work that Cixous produces with the Théâtre du Soleil (*Dora* in particular has been praised by critics for its innovative staging and incorporation of different audio-visual media into the performance). This type of innovation is not always an indication of revolutionary politics, as Barthes points out when he critiques the 'formalisme pur' of the 'jeune théâtre' of playwrights like Artaud, Genet,

Adamov and Ionesco,[12] which gives the 'public bourgeois' new visual experiences that are 'complètement inutile', there only to mark the director's hard work and so to justify the ticket price under 'la dure loi de l'échange'.[13] In the case of Cixous's plays, however, formal innovation is not gratuitous but rather links to her attempt to educate her audience to adopt a new, critical attitude. In *Portrait de Dora*, for example, formal innovation allows Cixous and Benmussa to present alternative versions of the story, a political challenge to Freud's dominant singlucar narrative. In *L'Histoire,* formal innovations can be linked to Daniel Mesguich's explorations of what it meands to be part of an audience. In that play, the narrating character was an author engaged in writing, and was surrounded by piles of books on stage. As Dobson argues, 'the play is formally and thematically structured around a contrast between two different modes of writing' (*Scene of Writing*, p. 133), with the result that the audience were cast more as readers of the *histoire* of the title than spectators of a play. As I argue in Chapter Two, in *L'Histoire* as in *Voile Noire Voile Blanche*, both writing and reading are portrayed as communal activities. The audience member may become a reader, but they remain part of a group act of interpretation, still subject to the political rules of the theatre space and still expected to exercise their critical faculty, an urgent political demand particularly outside of the theatre, and after the performance. The experience of reading is not an isolating one, according to Cixous. The act of attending the play is still political, even if the director has not made any radical attempt to alter the theatre space or audience experience as a reflection of their politics.

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[12] Sarah Vajda traces Barthes' relationship with his contemporary theatre in 'Au théâtre avec Roland Barthes', *Communications*, 63.1 (1996), 23-38 <http://www.persee.fr/doc/comm_0588-8018_1996_num_63_1_1954> [accessed 13 February 2017].
[13] Barthes, 'Deux mythes du Jeune Théâtre', in *Mythologies*, pp. 100-3 (p. 102).

For Cixous, the experience of making theatre is also political. When Cixous talks about what is specific about writing for the theatre, she always highlights the importance of cooperation, contrasting theatre writing to prose writing, where the author is more independent and also more isolated.[14] The cooperation that marks theatre writing is political, insofar as it is a form of negotiation in which compromises are found that respect the different needs and desires of the playwright, director, actors, technicians, other professionals involved in the creation of the theatre performance, and the audience. One particularly interesting example of a relationship that is crucial for the creation of theatre is the relationship between actor and character. In 'L'Incarnation', the essay published in *Indiade* in which Cixous gives her longest account of her understanding of acting, Cixous suggests that 'les comédiens sont des mères' (*Indiade*, p. 263), suggesting that ethical relationships could be possible between actor and character (just as the Mother in *Ville Parjure* has an ethical relationship with her children) but without insisting on that ethical aspect. Like a pregnant woman, the actor welcomes the character in without attempting to erase its difference, but this form of welcome alone does not mean that the relationship is ethical; the character/foetus can be welcomed by the actor/expectant mother without her giving it absolute priority, as would be the demand of an ethical relationship. The negotiation of the relationship between actor and character is evident in a number of plays written by Cixous, including the opera *Le Nom d'Œdipe (chant du corps interdit)* where the characters are

[14] See Chapter One for a longer discussion. Cixous talks about being part of a creative community when she writes for the theatre in her interview 'L'auteur entre texte et théâtre'.

played (and the creation of a character negotiated) by an actor and a singer simultaneously.[15] Similarly, in *Portrait de Dora*, some of the words supposed to be spoken by the characters come from off-stage, and video sequences portraying the characters interrupt the on-stage action at several points; this dissonance leaves it to the audience to calculate and judge where the truth of the story lies. In *Tambours sur la digue*, the puppetmasters who manipulate the actor-puppets in that play perform a similar function, doubling or representing the influences that determine the actor's on-stage movements, highlighting the political process of negotiation and compromise that governs a performance. For Cixous, then, although the potential for ethics is there in the theatre (particularly in maternal actors or in on-stage portrayals of ethics), the creation and the enjoyment of theatre can only exist through negotiation and compromise, something which she highlights and pays tribute to, placing it in the foreground of her plays (which often stage negotiations) and her discussions of her plays. Examples of ethics in the plays sit alongside and in tension with an idea of the theatre of a predominantly political realm, where negotiation is vital.

Significantly, a number of Cixous's plays make deliberate efforts to include the audience within the network of political relationships in the plays, as in the endings of *Ville Parjure* and *Voile Noire Voile Blanche*, where the audience was addressed directly by characters who pass on to them a responsibility to remember the events that they had just seen, and to join in some form of

[15] For further analysis of the doubling of characters in *Nom d'Œdipe* and *Dora*, see Josette Féral 'Writing and Displacement: Women in Theatre', trans. by Barbara Kerslake, *Modern Drama* 27.4 (1984), 549-63 (p. 558).

resistance of the repressive economies that both plays represent. Through these direct interventions, as well as through their content, Cixous's pays show the need for a good politics, and never more so than when they indicate the difficulty of acting according to the demands of ethics.

Politics as critique in Cixous's theatre

Cixous's theatre is political in both the way in which it is made and the way in which it is experienced. This gives rise to two key questions: first, is there a clear and identifiable political message in her work, and second, how is her theatre distinct from other forms of political theatre? The question of how the form and style of Cixous's theatre – which here I am perhaps artificially separating from content – constitutes a critique of politics will be approached later. On the level of content, it is certainly often possible to identify obvious messages of political critique in Cixous's theatre. As she does elsewhere in her essays and prose, in her theatre Cixous works to lay bare some of the contradictions and cruelties of the phallogocentric economy, which ultimately means addressing a broad range of political questions.

The preferred example of Cixous's critical use of the theatre for many scholars has been in *Portrait de Dora*, where Cixous returns to a subject whom she has treated before – the young Austrian woman who was the subject of Freud's 'Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria' – to show how Dora was an object of exploitation and exchange both by male and female members of her family and later, to a lesser degree, by the medical man who attempted to treat her. The same critique of the demands of the masculine economy can be found

in *Ville Parjure*, where the target is really the system of capitalism that can be linked to phallogocentrism.[16] In *Voile Noire Voile Blanche* there is a critique of political repression and of the limits placed on free speech. Cixous's rejection of the repressive actions of the Soviet Union might not seem to be a controversial political statement, but Cixous was writing in an intellectual context where a number of her contemporaries had been prepared to overlook or to downplay the brutalities of totalitarian regimes in response to the excesses and failures of capitalism.[17] The assumption that the binary at play here must be accepted (that communism, whether Maoist or Soviet, must be the response to the failure of capitalism) is part of the system that Cixous's most famous works attempt to redress. Although many scholars have found fault with Cixous's representations of non-European countries, the plays in which she deals with these countries should be understood as offering critiques of stereotypical attitudes towards non-European countries, and particularly to a policy of colonialism, whether practiced in the nineteenth century (as in the gleeful Queen Victoria dancing on a globe and the utopian attempt to build a new community in Patagonia in *Naufragés*) or in the twentieth (as in her portrayal of American actions in Cambodia in *Sihanouk*). The objects of Cixous's critique are diverse, running from the position of women to the system of capitalism, to Western attitudes to non-European spaces. A number of these objects are familiar from Cixous's novels and essays, although she also uses her theatre to discuss specific current events that do not appear elsewhere in her work, as in *l'affaire du sang contaminé* in *Ville Parjure*. Mary Noonan states that Cixous's later theatre

[16] Still makes this link effectively in *Feminine Economies* (p. 150).
[17] For instance, Kristeva toured communist China with Roland Barthes, producing the text *Des Chinoises* in response to her experiences. See Julia Kristeva, *Des Chinoises* (Paris: des femmes, 1974).

explores ‘contemporary socio-political issues’ in a way that is new for Cixous even if it is ‘not necessarily incompatible with her earlier work, which was always concerned to explore the political, as well as the personal, dimension of gender and sexual politics’ (*Echo’s Voice*, pp. 100-1). Although the division of Cixous’s work into distinctive ‘later’ and ‘earlier’ periods here is misleading (the most important divisions in Cixous’s work for the theatre are between the plays that she writes for the Théâtre du Soleil and the plays that she writes for other collaborators) it is certainly true that one of the things that is particularly novel about Cixous’s plays for the Théâtre du Soleil, in the context of the rest of her work, is the repeated and sustained focus on current events. The value of Cixous’s discussions of current events lies in the ways in which she is able to marry them to the wider questions that have been recurrent issues for her (*l’affaire du sang contaminé* leads us to justice and moral education).

Although Cixous clearly identifies and pinpoints problems in her plays, her aim is not really to offer individuals guidance on how to respond to or to resolve these problems. By contrast, in Cixous’s polemic essay ‘Le Rire da la Méduse’, it is clear that a *sortie* from the dominant, and repressive, phallogocentric economy might be possible if women write, though writing can take the form of a numer of different creative, interpretive, or speaking acts. Writing is a revolutionary political gesture, and when Cixous demands that women write, she moves beyond critique towards a manifesto. The demand to write crops up again in Cixous’s theatre work, where both Anna Akhmatova and Snorri Sturluson struggle with balancing personal desires for comfort, their need or desire to write, and political concerns about the impact that their writing might

have. Both face a political struggle between conflicting demands or loyalties, ultimately decide that they must write, and assume their responsibilities for their positions as writers. In other plays, characters begin to 'write' in other ways, as when Dora is able to defy Freud, or when the Mother finds space to prosecute X1 and X2. However, these instances do not amount to the same call to writing as can be found elsewhere in Cixous's work.

Some of the other demands that Cixous links to the demand to write play prominent roles in her theatre. In Cixous's essays the call for women to write is accompanied by the demand that writing should be embodied. In her plays, the characters who appear to be the most good and admirable are shown enjoying bodily pleasure, often in the form of food. I have already suggested that the willingness of the women in *Sihanouk* to share their sugar when they adopt a son was tied up with their ethical hospitality. The Monk in *Tambours*, whose sound and compassionate advice to the Seigneur is ignored, buys and enjoys a meal of noodles from Madame Li, another minor but ultimately likeable character in that play. In *Voile Noire Voile Blanche*, preparing food together is a key way in which the female friends offer support and demonstrate kindness and friendship through a form of practical creativity. By contrast, when the Khmer Rouge leader Khieu Samphan in *Sihanouk* does not pay attention to what he is eating, it is a sign of his distance from the concerns of his mother, who in Cixous's play features as a representative of the concerns of the everyday working class in Cambodia. In Cixous's plays, eating is not morally suspect as a gateway to gluttony, but rather a pleasure that is linked to positive values of maternity, friendship, and hospitality.

In Cixous's essays, the demand to write the body focuses on sexuality and sexual pleasure at least as much as on the pleasure of eating. This form of bodily pleasure is largely absent from Cixous's theatre, as a number of critics have noted, and there are no sex scenes in any of the plays.[18] There are, however, a few scenes that suggest erotic passion: amongst moving silk sheets that suggest the rising water Duan kisses Wang Po when they are reunited in *Tambours*, and characters portraying a bourgeois investor and his wife kiss and roll across the stage as part of the film that they are creating in *Naufragés*, (contrary to the demands of the socialist director, who ordered the wife to resist her husband in protest against patriarchal systems). In *Portrait de Dora*, a number of stand-ins (a purse, cigar smoke) come to signify sexual pleasure or sexual desire, although the sex is not played out. The absence of on-stage sex, then, does not mean that *jouissance* is entirely absent from Cixous's stage, only that it is not represented directly, but rather remains complex, allusive, and interior. Unlike eating, though, these sexual forms of bodily pleasure are not always celebrated in Cixous's theatre. Rather, there is an awareness of the complex set of social and moral determinations that impact on sex, alongside suggestions of the positive value of *jouissance*: the scene in *Naufragés* illustrates this clearly, as do the ways in which Dora's sexual development is moulded and limited by the moral code of turn of the century Vienna. Sexuality in the plays, then, is often separated somewhat from the positive revolutionary potential of *jouissance*.

[18] Discussing Cixous's essay 'De la Scène de l'inconscient…', Dobson finds the arguments made there for theatre as 'a space free from representations of physical sexual love' generally 'unconvincing' (*Scene of Writing*, p. 54).

In her prose work, Cixous links the need to write the body and *jouissance* to her concern for the underprivileged position of women and the feminine in the phallogocentric economy. The same concern with the politics of sexual difference can be found in a number of Cixous's plays. *Portrait de Dora*, which Cixous with Benmussa adapted from an earlier Cixous novel *Portrait du Soleil*, can be understood clearly as a continuation of the concerns about the feminine that Cixous expresses elsewhere, as can *Le Nom d'Œdipe* and, to some extent, also *Voile Noire Voile Blanche*. However, Cixous's other plays, and particularly her history plays, centre largely on male characters who rarely if ever explicitly question the assumptions of the masculine economy. It is striking, then that the strongest examples of ethical behaviour in the plays come from women, and in both cases, their ethical actions are related to their positions as mothers. One possible exception to this is Gandhi, who takes a position as a mother although he remains a main: in Kate Marsh's judgement 'Gandhi's conception appears overtly associated with the maternal' ('Literary Representations of Indian Decolonisation', p. 149). For Cixous childbearing and childbirth are important within the feminine economy, although they do not relate to the idealised version of motherhood that is current within the masculine economy, in which the mother is confined to the domestic sphere, but rather signify a position of extreme openness to the other. Effective political action, too, comes from women in Cixous's plays, and characters like Duan in *Tambours*, Dora in *Portrait de Dora*, or Akhmatova in *Voile* make calculated interventions into the political sphere. As she does in her prose works, Cixous recentres our attention, encouraging us to focus on normally marginalised feminine characters, or to

identify the feminine in characters and stories that at first seem to be dominated by the masculine.

Not all of the female characters whom Cixous includes in her plays are, however, held up as models to be followed; Cixous does not naively associate female bodies with the capacity for ethical goodness or disruptive politics. Jinnah's sister, Fatima, repeatedly urges her brother on to ever more violent action in *Indiade*, and happily proclaims that she exists as a mirror to her brother, content to serve him, as I discuss in my chapter on self-sacrifice. Fatima, like Frau K. in *Portrait de Dora*¸ appears to exemplify the women whom Cixous describes in *La jeune née* as suffering from an *anti-narcissisme*, who are capable of loving themselves only as impoverished reflections of men, and as a result police the masculine economy and ensuring women's conformity to its norms.[19] The Queen appears briefly in *Ville Parjure* when she comes to the cemetery to persuade the Mother to give up her trial in return for the possibility of improving the lives of other haemophiliac patients, attempting to use sympathy based in their shared position as mothers to secure the Mother's approval. She uses a simulated version of the emotional engagement with other people's suffering that Cixous seems to advocate throughout the play as a political tool; the Mother's refusal of even this settlement, morally acceptable in *Ville Parjure*'s town and, perhaps, to many members of the play's audience, reaffirms her position on the side of the ethical rather than the political. The Queen's intervention demonstrates how attempts at rebellion can be assimilated

[19] For instance, it is Fatima who chases away Jinnah's daughter Dinah when she comes to ask her father permission to marry a non-Muslim man (Cixous, *Indiade*, pp. 119-20).

into the masculine economy, finally serving its aims. Adrian Kiernander argues that the feminist instinct that is at play in Cixous's work for the Théâtre du Soleil is not always obvious, and that her history plays in particular often appear initially to be masculine in form and content, whatever their underlying politics.[20] This translates into plays in which the female characters are far from unanimous in attempting to challenge the assumptions of the masculine economy, although there are notable, powerful examples of female characters who do precisely that.

It is interesting that several of Cixous's plays feature mythic female characters who are old, disgusting, and violently unpleasant: Edda in *L'Histoire (qu'on ne connaîtra jamais)* and the Furies in *Ville Parjure* are the clearest examples of this type of feminine character in Cixous's plays. On one level, the inclusion of these characters can be understood as a kind of politics of visibility that provides interesting, complex roles for women who are not normally allowed on the stage (Roger-Daniel Bensky's assertions that Edda is *obscène* (*Cixous/Mesguich*, p. 53), literally not fit to be staged, are interesting in this context, and I discuss them in Chapter Two). Edda is one of a number of these mythological women who were cross-cast to some degree; she was played by a young man, and whilst the Furies were all played by women, they were not old but young or middle-aged when they appeared. The decision to cast Edda as a man can be linked to Cixous's version of *bisexualité*, and her assertion that both people in male-sexed bodies and people in female-sexed bodies can both have access to both

[20] Adrian Kiernander, 'The Role of Ariane Mnouchkine at the Théâtre du Soleil', *Modern Drama*, 33.3 (1990) 322-32 (p. 325).

masculine and feminine economies. It is significant that, although Cixous's plays do include examples of non-mythical old women (Akhmatova in *Voile*, the women in *Sihanouk*, and many of the female characters in *Indiade*, for example), the characters that most challenge conventional expectations around femininity are all mythological or semi-mythological characters. Cixous is not so much making existing groups of women more visible as staging completely different modes of femininity.

These characters can more importantly be understood as a counterbalance to any tendency to associate women simply with the ethical. Nor can women (or indeed the ethical) be associated with the values of sweetness or niceness, both to be understood as synonyms for a willingness to remain confined and accept masculine domination, that characterise the ideal of femininity as constructed for the benefit of the masculine economy. In *Ville Parjure*, the presence of the cruel, violent Furies, whose form of justice, centred on a demand for blood, is no longer seen as ethical, balances the presence of the Mother as an isolated ethical actor. In both *Ville Parjure* and *L'Histoire (qu'on ne connaîtra jamais)*, the age of the women signals their worthlessness within a masculine economy that values women only as the tools of sexual reproduction, but their age also acts in both plays to allow these women some critical distance from the contemporary demands of the masculine economy, linking them to an imagined and semi-mythological earlier time in which feminine values were not sidelined, and where *bisexualité* would have been possible. Cixous, then, uses female characters to offer models of ethical behaviour, to issue warnings about the pitfalls of living as a woman within the masculine economy and also finally to

suggest something of what a character capable of moving between masculine and feminine economies might look like.

Whilst echoes of the suggestions for *sorties* from the phallogocentric economy that Cixous offers in her essays do remain in her theatre, then, these are often peripheral to the main action of her plays, in which alternative solutions to the same problems are suggested and acted out. The key *sorties* that she attempts through her plays are the urge to create a new community, the use of self-sacrifice as a political tool, and the attempt to provide a moral education that would change behaviour within the phallogocentric economy. Each time that Cixous acts out one of these proposed solutions she shows it to fail. Within these failures, the faint indications of where other solutions may lie (as in a recognition of the importance of moral education in existing communities when the creation of new communities is impossible) tend to point only to solutions that are tested and found wanting in other plays. This is not a teleological development in Cixous's work, chipping away and shedding off of ideas that have been found wanting as part of a movement or development towards something that will not fail. Rather, Cixous circles around different solutions, returning repeatedly to particular ideas only to find them inadequate once more. The result is that her audience is left unsettled and uncertain, without clear guidance on how to act, forced to return to their own capacity for critical analysis. Cixous's plays are not didactic in a traditional sense, since they do not teach a particular code of behaviour, but rather seek to leave the audience aware of the necessity of a critical attitude.

Is Cixous's theatre a new form of political theatre?

It is difficult to align Cixous's brand of theatre of political critique with any other form of political theatre. Links can be made between the more female-focussed of Cixous's plays and modes of feminist theatre, but the question of the feminine overall is not central to many of Cixous's plays – with the exception of *Portrait de Dora* – and moreover most of Cixous's plays eschew the sort of dense, poetic writing that is characteristic of *écriture féminine*, Cixous's response to the difficulties of sexual difference. Overall, Cixous's theatre is quite different in scale and ambition to the types of work produced by small local or regional theatre companies that sprang up in the 1980s (at the same time as Cixous was writing many of her plays) and which aimed to educate their audience about a social issue before instructing them on how that issue may be resolved. Most famously in the recent French tradition, both Camus and Sartre produced theatre work that showcased a critique of contemporary politics that stemmed from their critical thought, much as Cixous does. Yet their approach differs significantly. Whereas both Camus and Sartre often centre their work on explicit discussions of key political and ethical questions, Cixous's theatre tends to avoid these discussions, and her critique comes on the level of character and action. In *L'Histoire (qu'on ne connaîtra jamais)* the whole weight of the violent masculine militaristic tradition is represented by a few ghosts of warriors, who do not set out or justify their position. Similarly, in *Tambours*, the manmade ecological threat of flooding appears in the play as a river god angered by human actions and issuing poetic threats to a group of fishermen who do not reply or acknowledge her presence. The absence of explicit argument in most of these plays excludes the possibility of resolution

of the political issue at hand. This approach differentiates Cixous's theatre from many other modes of political theatre.

The two major theatre figures with whom critics have most often associated Cixous's theatre are Artaud and Brecht.[21] An interest in linking Cixous's theatre to Artaud persists although Cixous rarely discusses Artaud in her interviews or writing about theatre (the exception being a passing citation in the interview 'Enter the Theatre', which appears in Eric Prenowitz's anthology of Cixous's plays). Artaud and Cixous share a desire to regenerate the theatre using influences derived from Asian theatre. However, whilst Cixous has praised how the theatre 'nous donne la chance de rencontrer la cruauté, qui est une partie de l'existence' ('De la scène de l'Inconscient', p. 30), in general Artaud's conception of the *théâtre de la cruauté* is strikingly at odds with Cixous's descriptions of the theatre as a space of love and the heart.

The links to Brecht's forms of epic theatre are stronger, particularly when it comes to Cixous's history plays. These certainly make use of a number of distancing effects that serve to underline the artificiality of the stage

[21] *Hors Cardre* magazine, for example, quizzes Cixous on the influence of Brecht on her work during the interview 'L'auteur entre texte et théâtre'. Timothy Scheie addresses the Théâtre du Soleil's performances of Indian characters in Indiade in the light of Brechtian ideas about performance in Timothy Scheie, 'Body trouble: corporeal "presence" and performative identity in Cixous's and Mnouchkine's *L'Indiade ou l'Inde de leurs rêves*', *Theatre Journal*, 46 (Spring 1994) 31-44. Marie-Claire Ropars Wuillemier looks at points of similarity and difference between Cixous's approach to theatre and Brecht's in 'Une *Verfremdung* non-brechtienne', and words closely associated with Brechtian modes of theatre, didactic and epic, appear repeatedly in reviews and articles of the plays that Cixous writes for the Théâtre du Soleil, in particular. The other key theatre figure that people like to link with Cixous and the Théâtre du Soleil is Artaud. Quillet, for instance, prefaces her examination of the influence of the Orient on the Théâtre du Soleil with some discussion of Artaud and Brecht (*L'Orient au Théâtre du Soleil*, pp. 40-2). Dobson calls on Artaud as a point of comparison when she discusses Cixous's essay 'L'Incarnation' (*Scene of Writing*, p. 52).

environment, and to prevent the audience from identifying the actor with the character, and from identifying themselves with either. The use of actor-puppets (controlled by puppetmasters external to them) is an example of such an effect in *Tambours*, and in *Naufragés* the play's repeated framing devices, which mean that the characters on stage are also playing characters in a film, similarly means that there is a marked distance between actor and character. Indeed, in all of the plays that Cixous creates with the Théâtre du Soleil, the theatre group's practice of applying make-up in front of the audience, for example, can be understood as a means of underlining the artificiality of the on-stage world, preventing this type of identification. Equally, in the work that Cixous produces with other directors, avant-garde techniques such as the use of video and sound in *Dora* would disrupt any audience attempts to identify with the characters in the straightforward way that for Brecht is characteristic of the bourgeois theatre, and for Barthes is symptomatic of a bourgeois anti-intellectualism (Barthes, 'Racine est Racine'). The drama that Cixous writes for the Théâtre du Soleil (though not really for other directors) also tends to interrogate grand historical events and themes, and to reveal the social and political forces that drive and manipulate situations and the characters involved in them, one of Brecht's key demands in his discussion of the proper social role of theatre.

Cixous's plays differ from Brecht's in the purpose to which they put these effects. Brecht aimed to arouse a critical attitude in his audience, which would allow them to analyse their own situation as a precursor to political action. Although individuals adopting a critical attitude were to think situations through for themselves, Brecht was clear about the conclusion that they would be

obliged to find: that the forces of capitalism were responsible for the cruelty that individuals faced, and were responsible for manipulating individual actions, and that there was a need for concerted collective action by the working classes to alter and overthrow that system.[22] As I have argued, this is never the way in which Cixous's more open theatre works. The second major difference between Cixous's approach and Brecht's is the value that both place on emotion. Whilst Brecht argued for the importance of pleasure in the theatre, he was clear that only what he termed 'stronger' or 'complex' pleasures were really to be encouraged – and chief amongst these was the pleasure of the critical attitude. Other forms of emotion, and particularly empathy and sympathy, were fundamentally suspect for what Brecht considered to be their capacity to distract from the important critical work that he saw it as the audience's duty to do. For Cixous, on the other hand, empathy and compassion are key to the practice of good politics. The systematic exclusion of emotion from the public sphere is tied to the consistent underprivileging of the feminine within the phallogocentric economy, precisely the tendency that she attempts to reveal and critique in her essays and plays.

Cixous's plays are, then a form of political theatre quite unlike any other major strand of political theatre. What makes it unique is its focus on the interplay of the ethical with the political, and its insistence on openness and unresolvability not as a problem but as a positive goal. This slipperiness is particularly strange

[22] In Brecht's 'Short Organum for the Theatre', he describes how 'only a minority gain from the exploitation of nature and they only do so because they exploit men', a process that leads inevitably to 'mighty wars' (p. 184).Brecht's response to this problem is to push his theatre to 'edge as close as possible to the apparatus of education and communication', and to place itself 'in a position to influence society' (p. 186), moving it away from the violent divisions of capitalism.

and difficult since in Cixous's writing for the Théâtre du Soleil it hides within apparently straightforward modes of storytelling that include linear plots, recognisable settings, and characters who, although they may not have the kind of deep psychological motivation that many characters of the bourgeois theatre can lay claim to, nevertheless generally have reasons for what they do. This juxtaposition can pose significant problems for Cixous's theatre, and could mean that ultimately the slipperiness of it can be overlooked or left to one side, leaving stories that appear to be worryingly conservative, particularly when the plays are read away from the stylistic strangeness that sets Théâtre du Soleil productions apart. The answer is to take the lesson of the alternative didacticism that marks Cixous's plays, and to attempt to watch them in a state of critical openness, engaging positively with the ideas that are staged without assuming that the plays hold any real solution to the problems and shortcomings that they so eloquently describe.

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