

**ASPECTS OF ETHICS IN FOUR
PLAYS BY HÉLÈNE CIXOUS**

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Abstract

This thesis examines ethical questions in four plays written by Hélène Cixous for the Théâtre du Soleil; *L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk, roi du Cambodge* (1985), *L'Indiade ou L'Inde de leurs rêves* (1987), *La Ville parjure ou le Réveil des Erinyes* (1994), and *Tambours sur la digue* (1999). It begins by establishing a working definition of the remit of ethics and discussing some of Cixous's accounts of writing for the theatre. It goes on to compare the use of power by three different groups in *Norodom*, suggesting how power may be used ethically. There is an examination of how identity is created in *Indiade*, which leads to analyses of the ethical value of love and of innocence. Three conflicting models of justice are identified in *Ville parjure*, and there is an exploration of the question of what the basis of justice should be. The ethical implications of the manipulation of the dramatic form of tragedy in *Tambours* are then discussed. In the final chapter of the thesis, the responses to these apparently disparate questions are brought together. Drawing on the conclusions of the previous chapters, the final chapter suggests answers to the questions of 'where can ethical questions be asked?', 'what should the basis of ethics be?', and 'whom should I care about?'.

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My family, urban family, and friends are all brilliant.

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Chapter One: Introduction to Cixous, Ethics, and Writing for the Theatre

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.¹

This epigraph should indicate why ethics are of particular interest in Cixous's theatre. The quotation is the opening line of 'L'Ourse, la Tombe, les Étoiles', the first of four essays that were included in the published edition of Cixous's 1987 play *L'Indiade ou l'Inde de leurs rêves*. These four essays in some ways form an apologia or manifesto for Cixous's drama; they express her vision of the theatre that she would wish to write and hint at its potential and at the ways in which a writer may begin to approach the form. Cixous begins this apologia therefore with an affirmation that she may begin to write theatre only through (the) heaven(s). Whilst heaven may be an ideal of pleasure and beauty, it is also inevitably tied up with ideas of morality, ethics and reward. A need for heaven like a need for sky indicates the wish that theatre will represent something absolutely beyond everyday experience, a place where the everyday meets its limit. The natural world is not absent from the celestial scene of theatre, but is present in a bare form: as sun and cloud, clichéd symbols of good and bad, power and trouble. The quotation also reveals something interesting about the relationship between the material scene and the heavenly scene within Cixous's theatre. Although the heavenly is necessary for writing it is also the self-reflection of the earthly. Heaven is not the constant that forms us nor is it an image that we have formed; it is a reflection and not a painting, somehow beyond conscious control and revelatory. Morality and materiality are intertwined. Theatre, the third sentence of the epigraph tells us, is sometimes dark, sometimes heavenly, sometimes bright and always related to the human heart, our emotional core. Cixous's theatre

¹ Hélène Cixous, 'L'Ourse, la Tombe, les Etoiles' in *L'Indiade ou l'Inde de leurs rêves* (Paris: Théâtre du Soleil, 1987) (henceforth *Indiade*).

is a place where emotion, morality and materiality may interact and so is an ideal place to explore ethics.

My thesis examines ethical questions in four plays written by Hélène Cixous for the Théâtre du Soleil; *L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk, roi du Cambodge* (1985),² *L'Indiade ou L'Inde de leurs rêves* (1987), *La Ville parjure ou le Réveil des Erinyes* (1994),³ and *Tambours sur la digue* (1999).⁴ This chapter provides the context and framework for the discussion of specific ethical questions in Chapters Two to Five. It begins with an attempt to define or clarify the term ethics, and to suggest what the purpose, remit, and scope of ethics might be. It then begins to talk about Cixous's work for the theatre. There is an overview of the existing critical material on Cixous's theatre and then a very quick introduction to Cixous's work and thought outside of her work for the theatre. This is a necessary precursor to the consideration of what is specific about Cixous's writing for the theatre. The chapter will contrast Cixous's accounts of writing for the theatre and writing fiction, will consider her claims that writing for the theatre is a communal activity, and will discuss the claims that moving into the theatre allows Cixous to write about history and current affairs in ways that would be impossible in her fiction. My thesis is concerned with plays that Cixous wrote for the Théâtre du Soleil, and so this chapter will also provide an introduction to this theatre group. This introduction will look at the Théâtre du Soleil's theatrical influences, as a way of considering the relationship of the plays that Cixous wrote for the group to a larger theatrical tradition. Asia and Asian theatre have had an important influence on the Théâtre du Soleil, and so this chapter will also discuss the presentation of

² Hélène Cixous, *L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk, roi du Cambodge* (Paris: Éditions Théâtrales, 2010) (henceforth *Norodom*).

³ Hélène Cixous, *La Ville parjure ou le réveil des Erinyes* (Paris: Éditions Théâtrales, 2010) (henceforth *Ville parjure*).

⁴ Hélène Cixous, *Tambours sur la digue* (Paris: Théâtre du Soleil, 1999) (henceforth *Tambours*).

Asia in Cixous's plays. Finally, it will outline the questions to be addressed in Chapters Two to Five.

Ethics

Investigations of ethics are a response to a question. Martha C. Nussbaum, after Aristotle, asks 'How should a human being live?',⁵ Anthony Cunningham asks 'How should I live?',⁶ and for Jacques Derrida, ethics (and politics) answer the question 'What should I do?'.⁷ The three thinkers begin their considerations of ethics with questions that are apparently similar, or at least seem to prompt similar answers. However, asking what to do is different from asking how to live, and posing a question about 'I' is different from posing a question about 'a human being'. These differences in the ways that the questions are formulated are telling, and suggest that there is an incomplete consensus on the scope and nature of ethics as a concept (behaving ethically) and as a field of study (within the discipline of philosophy). What remains constant in these questions is the modal verb 'should', and the implications of this word will be the main concern of my attempt to define ethics. The issues of what motivates ethical action, of what aims could be called ethical aims, of how (or whether) we can define (or choose) those aims, and of what the realm (actual or hypothetical) of ethics is, all seem to inform our understanding of the word 'should'.

It could be useful to think of 'should' as introducing statements about what we ought to do, given what we know or believe about how the world is. As my thesis is concerned with considering ethical questions through works of theatre, what 'is' will be what 'is' within a

⁵ Martha C. Nussbaum, 'Introduction: Form and Content, Philosophy and Literature', in *Love's Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 3-53 (p. 25).

⁶ 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).

⁷ Jacques Derrida, 'Ethics and Politics Today', in *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews, 1971-2001*, ed. and trans. by Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 295-314 (p. 296).

fictional world. In the essay '*Trauerspiel* and Tragedy', Walter Benjamin expressed his reservations about the ways in which 'the work of art is unhesitatingly accepted as the exemplary copy of moral phenomena, without any consideration of how susceptible such phenomena are to representation'.⁸ It will be argued that Cixous does not attempt to make theatre 'copy' moral phenomena in everyday life, that the question of how to represent 'moral phenomena' is a recurrent concern in Cixous's work for the theatre, and moreover that the decision to use drama to address moral concerns is strategically useful rather than problematic.

My attempt to define ethics will begin by looking more carefully at the question of 'What should I do?', and trying to discover what the question may reveal about the concerns of ethics. It will also consider what form the answer to this question might take. It is here that the ethical and political of the question will be separated and an ethical response to the question differentiated from a political one.

What should I do?

This investigation of ethics begins with 'what', a question and not a hypothesis, and questioning itself is ethically important. Nussbaum has suggested how ethical questioning is both urgent and inescapable (*Love's Knowledge*, p. 28). Derrida demands that ethical actions be 'as thoughtful as possible, thus preceded by a questioning that constitutes an essential part to any ethical and political act' (Derrida, 'Ethics and Politics', p. 296). Questioning appears as a necessary but not sufficient criterion for ethics. This ethical questioning seems to be related to the moment of 'undecidability', when making a decision appears impossible, that Derrida is discussing when he says that

⁸ Walter Benjamin, '*Trauerspiel* and Tragedy', trans. by John Osborne, in *Tragedy*, ed. by John Drakakis and Naomi Conn Liebler, pp. 106-122 (p. 108).

Far from opposing undecidability to decision, I would argue that there would be no decision, in the strong sense of the word, in ethics, in politics, no decision, and thus no responsibility, without the experience of some undecidability.⁹

The implication is that any ethical act must involve taking a decision. It may be assumed that questioning stems from undecidability, and that both occur when a decision is made. Undecidability and questioning would not be a weakness or problem for ethics but rather a strength, since they allow an ethical decision to be made.¹⁰ Ethics should therefore not aim to abolish the moment of questioning by instituting a completely rigorous system of laws which may be automatically or thoughtlessly applied in any situation, like a computer programme. This emphasis on the moment of (in)decision within ethics is certainly valuable inasmuch as it prevents the ossification of ethics and allows morality to adapt to a changing material situation. Both Nussbaum and Cunningham stress the fact that ethical actions always occur within certain social and material contexts and that it is vital and good that they should respond to these contexts (Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, p. 26; Cunningham, *What Matters*, p. 9). Cunningham further denies the value of what he terms 'ethical theory', attempts to come up with a codified set of laws which would be able to guide all of our actions, although he does so not because he sees particular ethical value in the moment of questioning but because he denies that any set of rules may be able to deal with the complexities of a life (Cunningham, *What Matters*, pp. 21-2). This denial comes in the context of a critique of Kantian ethical theory, which holds that 'what is essential in the moral worth of actions is

⁹ Jacques Derrida, 'Hospitality, Justice and Responsibility: a Dialogue with Jacques Derrida', in *Questioning Ethics: Contemporary Debates in Philosophy*, ed. by Richard Kearney and Mark Dooley (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 63-83 (p. 66).

¹⁰ Cf. Judith Still, *Derrida and Hospitality: Theory and Practice* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp. 10-11.

that the moral law should directly determine the will'.¹¹ The existence of the ethical question as the basis of ethics already seems to rule out one of the possible ways in which we could answer that question: the creation of a strict set of laws.

What is difficult if we insist that ethics be preceded by questioning is the issue of how we then deal with those actions which were not decisions 'in the strong sense'. Certainly, it may be said that they were not ethical, but we must then consider whether this implies that they are ethically bad, unethical, or ethically neutral, anethical.¹² Both options are problematic: on the one hand, we risk labelling as 'bad' the actions of all those who are incapable or considered incapable of reflecting on their actions;¹³ on the other we lose the ability to criticise retrospectively behaviours which were unthinkingly accepted in the past (the most obvious example being slavery). It could be that very few actions fall into the category of the undecided. In 'Ethics and Politics Today', Derrida suggests that we may be 'responsible even before [we] want to be', that 'inaction is *already* an action, a decision, an engagement, a responsibility that has been taken' (p. 296). A failure to reflect upon our actions is itself an action for which we can be held responsible, and therefore it is possible to judge the behaviour of people who refuse to question their actions as ethically good or bad. Derrida expects that the questioning that precedes an ethical act be 'as thoughtful as possible'; it seems to be the action of questioning which is important, and the process of reflection does not have to live up to any universal criteria of rationality or subtlety. We may therefore judge as ethical the actions of many different types of being. Still, it seems that the question of what

¹¹ Immanuel Kant, 'Pure Practical Reason and the Moral Law', in *Ethics*, ed. by Peter Singer, Oxford Readers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 123-131 (p. 129).

¹² This does not of course imply that all of those decisions which are taken after reflection will be ethically good. You may after reflection make a decision to do something that is 'wrong', but we would be able to label that action right or wrong from an ethical perspective.

¹³ The question of who or what may be an ethical subject is interesting and is dealt with in detail in my third chapter.

to do when deeply ingrained social norms prevent reflection upon certain actions remains open.

The question ‘what should I do?’ rarely occurs in this blunt and truncated form. Generally, we ask what to do in relation to a problem where the desire for a certain outcome has already been established. Thus, to give an analogous but unethical example, the answer to the question ‘What should I do to improve my essay?’ would take into account a platonic model of a good essay and also a knowledge of my capabilities as a student and the resources at my disposal.¹⁴ When the analogous ethical question ‘what should I do?’ occurs alone, we have as context the subject asking the question and the entirety of their lived experience. Just as in response to the question of the essay we had to refer to a model of a successful essay, so the question ‘what should I do?’, alone or in response to some dilemma, requires the creation of a model of a good life or a good subject. Thus Ludwig Wittgenstein begins his lecture on ethics by quoting G.E. Moore, who defines the philosophical field of ethics as ‘the general enquiry into what is good’.¹⁵ Ethical enquiry is not the attempt to find an acceptable means to achieve a certain end but the attempt to define the ends that we should have. Ethics, as Cunningham claims, forces us to decide what matters, determine the ‘objects of ultimate honor and concern in a human life’ (Cunningham, *What Matters*, p. 41). For Immanuel Kant, the object of ultimate concern in a human life should be the living of a good life. He claims that the ‘good will’, virtue, is ‘good of itself’, and not because of what it may be used to achieve. It follows that being virtuous is an end and not a means, and that it makes no sense to ask what the purpose of ethics or ethical behaviour may be: being ethical is ‘to be esteemed incomparably higher than anything which could be brought about by it’ (Kant, ‘Practical Reason’, p. 124). Thus the desire to be virtuous need not justify itself by reference to any

¹⁴ This example will be discussed further on p. 8.

¹⁵ Ludwig Wittgenstein, ‘A Lecture on Ethics’, in *Ethics*, ed. by Peter Singer, pp. 140-147 (p. 141).

other desire.¹⁶ Ethics, as a field of study or thought, appears to consist in this attempt to define what is ‘good’, what sort of a thing may be desirable in itself and not because it can help us to achieve any goal. It is possible to accept this as the remit of ethics without committing ourselves to Kant’s position that, since the only goal of virtue is virtue, actions from which we derive pleasure or satisfaction are ethically bad (Kant, ‘Practical Reason’, p. 131).

There are many different potential models of this ethical good, and indeed many different principles that we may potentially legitimately use to define or discover the good, to found ethics. Perhaps the most obvious is the omnibenevolent, omniscient, and omnipotent God, whose commandments and principles define ethically good action. According to Kant, ‘I should never act in such a way that I could not will that my maxim be a universal law’ (‘Practical Reason’, p. 129). This universal applicability is the basis of good action. The utilitarian principle of the pursuit of the greatest happiness for the greatest number functions slightly differently because it appears to leave open the possibility of defining good happiness in different ways. One of the concerns of this thesis will be to attempt to find the basis of the ethics presented in the four plays.

The case of a student who wished to improve an essay was used above to illustrate the way in which the question ‘what should I do?’ functions. It was stated that this example was unethical, that the desire to improve an essay was neither ethically good nor ethically bad. However, ‘improve your essay’ is a plausible response to the question ‘what should I do?’, and so some clarification of the domain of ethics is necessary to justify the decision to exclude the improvement of essays from the field of ethics. Derrida claims that ‘l’*éthique*

¹⁶ For a detailed account of whether ethical imperatives are desire-dependent or desire-independent, see Michael Smith, ‘The Definition of “Moral”’, in *Singer and his Critics*, ed. by Dale Jamieson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 38-63.

pure, s'il y en a, commence à la dignité respectable de l'autre comme l'absolu *dissemblable*, reconnu comme non reconnaissable, voire comme méconnaissable, au-delà de tout savoir, de tout connaissance et de toute reconnaissance'.¹⁷ Pure ethics, which may be impossible, begins with a radically unknowable other. It seems justifiable to assume, therefore, that ethics that can be practised will also always begin with a relationship with an other, if a recognisable one. This is a departure from certain traditions in ethics, where it would be possible to judge according to ethical criteria actions that had little or no impact on others. These traditions are at play, for example, when the debates around drinking or drug taking are couched in ethical terms. According to the definition of ethics that is being established here, a decision to drink would become an ethical issue if it led to a person becoming violent, or being unable to function as a parent, for example, but would be unethical normally. We may of course consider that our decisions always have some impact on others: your decision to drink may inconvenience a friend who was hoping that you would be driving that evening, for example. Cases such as this, where an action has minimal impact on others, will not be considered to fall within the domain of ethics for this thesis.

The question 'what should I do?' demands that this ethical definition of the good have some bearing upon or relationship to our actions. Cunningham argues that 'we should not judge the adequacy of rules, principles, or ideals independently of their power to move us' (Cunningham, *What Matters*, p. 10). For classical philosophers, he goes on to say, 'divorcing the content of ethics from motivation would have been unthinkable' (ibid., p. 13). Likewise, most western philosophers have 'sought an internalist account of morality' (ibid.), in which it is sufficient to say that something is good to imply that we ought to do it, or that we ought to do something to imply that that thing is good. It is worth noting that it does not follow that all

¹⁷ Jacques Derrida *Voyous* (Paris: Galilée, 2003), p. 90.

of those things that we desire to do will be ‘good’, since we may desire to do things simply as a means to achieving something else, or indeed desire to do things that we know to be bad, to be things that we ought not to do. Nevertheless, it is true that if an ethical principle is good, then we will feel that we should obey it and, if we do not, then we will ‘locate the mistake in us rather than in the conception of morality’ (Cunningham, *What Matters*, p. 13). It is, at least partly, in this way that an ethical choice differs from a choice based on taste: if we do not eat bananas, we are likely to justify our choice by finding fault in bananas and not in ourselves.

Like political and aesthetic choices, ethical choices define us and change the way that we define ourselves. What may perhaps be unique about ethical choices is the limited degree of socially permitted variation that is allowed within them. There are certain ethical norms to which we must adhere, or else we face exclusion, either legally mandated exclusion (imprisonment) or, potentially more violently, informal exclusion (for instance, in the treatment of known or suspected sex offenders when they come into a new community). When aesthetic or political choices move outside of a certain permitted variation, they are seen as ethical choices. This is most evident in the political sphere, where abolishing slavery, terrorism or fascism may be glossed as either political or ethical choices, or both, according to the speaker and their social context. This seems to be a symptom rather than the definition of the difference between the political and the ethical: defining an action as ethical rather than political rests upon a difference in meaning between the two terms, rather than constituting it.

If the ethical and the political are both responses to the same question of ‘what should I do?’, then the difference between the two should perhaps not be sought in their content. Judith Still argues that ‘ethics can be seen as the realm of metaphysical absolutes (transcendentals, or, in the case of Derrida and perhaps Levinas, “quasi-transcendentals”) while politics is the realm

of pragmatic compromise and of negotiated rules [...], both a necessity and a perversion' (*Hospitality*, p. 8). Geoffrey Bennington terms 'quasi-transcendental' those concepts where there is 'a complicity (even an identity) between conditions of possibility and conditions of impossibility, such that the *necessary possibility* of the failure, compromise or contamination of the supposedly (or desiredly) pure case is sufficient to justify the thought that purity is *already* compromised in its very formulation'.¹⁸ Ethics is only possible insofar as it is also impossible. We can only act ethically because there is the possibility that we could have failed or refused to do so. Therefore, the absolute realm of ethics exists precisely as something impossible, but its existence is nevertheless what allows ethical action within the world.

In Still's reading of Derrida, ethics allows and obliges us to analyse and decide upon 'what the political "better" would be' in any situation (*Hospitality*, p. 9). The question of ethics is one of how to live within the material world, and we can call ethical, or more usefully, ethically good, actions which are taken in order to allow the subject to approach the ethical. There is therefore no contradiction between the idea that the realm of ethics must be completely absolute and the need for actions that we would term ethical to have first been questioned: we are simply obliged to ask ourselves questions about the transcendental ethical realm before acting in the negotiated world. Our actions may be the negotiated ones of politics, but this simply shows that it is possible to have an ethical politics, one which keeps the ethical horizon in view.

¹⁸ Geoffrey Bennington, 'Deconstruction and Ethics', in *Interrupting Derrida* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 34-46 (p. 41).

Literature Review

Cixous has written extensively about her own work for the theatre. In addition to the four essays that were published together with *Indiade* and which have been mentioned above, there is ‘De la scène de l’Inconscient à la scène de l’Histoire: chemin d’une écriture’ a lengthy essay which charts Cixous’s path into the theatre and then, repeating material that is published with *Indiade*, gives a description of Cixous’s theories of writing for the theatre.¹⁹ In their editions of Cixous’s plays, the Théâtre du Soleil publishes the extensive programme notes that were written by Cixous for the productions as well as some of their own rehearsal notes. These notes have proved to be useful points of departure for thinking about the plays even if they are written strategically and so require careful analysis before they can be of critical use. Finally, Cixous has often given interviews in which she touches upon her theatre. An interview entitled ‘The author between text and theatre’, which was given to *Hors Cadre* magazine but which has been reprinted in Sellers’s *Hélène Cixous: White Ink: Interviews on Sex, Text and Politics*, is a particularly interesting and detailed discussion of Cixous’s views on the theatre.²⁰

Julia Dobson’s *Hélène Cixous and the Theatre: The Scene of Writing* is the only book-length study to deal uniquely with Cixous’s theatre.²¹ It analyses the plays as indications of the development of Cixous’s writing project and whilst Dobson gives an overview of each play and highlights any points of critical controversy related to it, there is no detailed criticism of the individual texts. Elsewhere, Dobson has given more in-depth analysis of individual

¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ 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 (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008), pp. 97-123.

²¹ Julia Dobson, *Hélène Cixous and the Theatre: The Scene of Writing* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2002).

plays,²² as have other critics.²³ Critical reviews of performances have also been useful, particularly in relation to the two later plays, which have had less critical attention. Some of the books on Hélène Cixous's work published since the 1990s have included a discussion of her theatre. Of these, the most valuable for this dissertation has been Chapter Four of Morag Shiach's book *Hélène Cixous: A Politics of Writing*.²⁴ Shiach begins by introducing Cixous's thought on the theatre and suggesting how her work may be placed within the context of twentieth-century theatre and offers a careful if brief analysis of the key critical and political issues related to the plays that were published before 1988. However, neither Dobson's work nor any of these articles or chapters have been primarily concerned with ethics, even if they may have suggested some ethical issues.

There is discussion of Cixous's plays in some texts devoted to twentieth-century French theatre. Of particular interest is David Bradby's *Modern French Drama 1940-1990* (1991), which discusses the work of the Théâtre du Soleil and briefly analyses *Indiade* and *Norodom*, as well as Patrice Pavis's *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture* (1992), which compares the 1987 production of *Indiade* to other contemporary productions set in India. Although Bradby in particular may be too quick to dismiss Cixous's theatre and so miss some of the subtlety of her project, both Bradby's and Pavis's texts provide an interesting counterpoint to the analysis of Cixous's theatre that comes from critics who have published extensively on Cixous's work and who generally do not have a background in theatre.

²² 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*, Modern French Identities, 81 (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 173-185.

²³ A number of articles on Cixous's theatre were published in *Hélène Cixous: Croisées d'un œuvre*, ed. by Mireille Calle-Gruber (Paris: Galilée, 2000).

²⁴ Morag Shiach, *Hélène Cixous: A Politics of Writing* (London: Routledge, 1991).

Finally, there has been critical attention paid to the work Théâtre du Soleil, criticism which has generated some interesting perspectives on the plays that Cixous produced in collaboration with the group. Adrian Kiernander's articles on *Norodom* and *Indiade* were particularly valuable,²⁵ as were the texts collated by David Williams and published together as the *Théâtre du Soleil Sourcebook*.²⁶

Hélène Cixous

Hélène Cixous was born in 1937 in Oran, Algeria. Her father was of Spanish and French origin and her mother was born in Germany. Both of Cixous's parents were Jewish.²⁷ Cixous talks about the importance of her origins in 'La venue à l'écriture':

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'.²⁸

Cixous's early years were marked by historical tragedy: the Holocaust and the violence of the French occupation of Algeria. Ethical, material and historical concerns are thus not specific to Cixous's theatre but were evoked in texts that preceded her dramatic writing and were moreover characteristic of her childhood, essential to it. That such concerns were an unavoidable part of her life is, she suggests tentatively or perhaps ironically, a « chance », lucky or perhaps fortunate; whatever the horror of the history into which she was born, the

²⁵ I am referring to two essays in particular: '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), 183-192, and 'The Théâtre du Soleil: Part Two. The Road to Cambodia', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 2.7 (1986), 203-212.

²⁶ *Collaborative Theatre: The Théâtre du Soleil Sourcebook*, ed. by David Williams (London and New York: Routledge, 1999)

²⁷ Hélène Cixous, 'Sorties' in *Le Rire de la Méduse et autres ironies* (Paris: Galilée, 2010), 69-197 (p. 84).

²⁸ Hélène Cixous, 'La venue à l'écriture', in Hélène Cixous, Madeleine Gagnon and Annie Leclerc, *La venue à l'écriture* (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1977), 9-62 (p. 24).

inescapable presence of the ethical and the historical in the everyday was nevertheless potentially positive. Cixous uses her childhood experiences to demonstrate the importance of an ethical dimension within human life.

Cixous was already well-established as a writer before she began to write for the theatre, having published several well-received poetic novels and essays principally concerned with literary theory. It is for her theories of writing and particularly the concept of *écriture féminine* that Cixous is best known in the Anglophone world.²⁹

Écriture Féminine

Cixous affirms that all writing is sexually marked but that few examples exist of writing that is marked in a feminine way.³⁰ *Écriture féminine* is broadly an exploration of how one may write in a way that escapes a masculine economy, an action which is presented as an obligation. We have an obligation both to write and to practice writing in a certain way (Cixous, 'Le Rire', p. 37). An obligation to write is also suggested in the four plays considered in this thesis, although in the plays this obligation is no longer explicitly or solely tied to the need to express a feminine libidinal economy: it will be argued that in *Indiade* and *Norodom* there is an obligation to write or speak that is linked to our ethical responsibilities to history and to the dead, and in *Ville parjure* and *Tambours* one that is related to the wish to prevent injustice. It will be shown that these obligations to write may be considered to be ethical. Likewise, it will be argued that in all four plays there appears to be a need to find a way of writing that is adapted to the ethical message that will be conveyed, and that this need is an ethical one: it is not simply efficient but right that care should be taken in writing. Cixous suggests that it is dangerous to create writing that is sexually marked as feminine: to

²⁹ Sellers Susan (ed.), *Hélène Cixous Reader* (London: Routledge, 1994) p. xxix

³⁰ Cixous, Hélène 'Le Rire de la Méduse' in *Le Rire de la Méduse et autres ironies*, 35-68 (pp. 42-3).

attempt to write in this way is to bring 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 (Cixous, 'La venue', p. 15). Risk is equally an important concern in the four plays discussed by this thesis, and the ways in which risk is related to ethical action will be discussed. When certain of the concerns of the *écriture féminine* project are taken up again in the plays, their ethical dimension is evident.

Écriture féminine is, as Shiach indicates, not a descriptive label of certain types of writing but rather a 'writing practice' (Shiach, p. 10). An emphasis on the importance of action is suggested here, and an examination of the importance of action will be one of the significant strands of the discussion of ethics in this thesis. As *écriture féminine* is a practice rather than a label, Cixous's suggestions of what it may be do not come through definitive descriptions of a writing style: any such description would anyway be impossible as *écriture féminine* exceeds rational discourse and will always be located somewhere beyond the terms with which one tries to define it (Cixous, 'Le Rire', p. 50). 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. Nonetheless it is possible to identify certain ways of thinking about *écriture féminine* that will allow the concept to be used in a critically useful way in the course of this essay.

Cixous likens writing to blood: ‘comme le sang: on n’en manque pas. Il peut s’appauvrir. Mais tu le fabriques et le renouvelles’ (Cixous, ‘La venue’, p. 12).³¹ This image economically suggests many of the qualities of female writing; it is necessary to life, fluid, renewable and never lacking, material in as far as it is something to be fabricated. Significantly, writing is also of the body, both present within the body and created by it. The body is central to Cixous’s imagining of writing and she praises the often denied ability of writing to affect us bodily, to give us an orgasm or to make us cry.³² The Cartesian tradition would split the mind and the body to privilege the mind as the seat of the self and make of writing therefore an expression of mind. Body-writing is hence a challenge to the received hierarchy between the binary pair of mind and body. Cixous in ‘Sorties’ suggests how hierarchical binary oppositions have structured Western thought with the result that the feminine either does not exist or else is maintained in an underprivileged position of passivity (Cixous, ‘Sorties’, pp. 72-3). An embodied feminine writing practice is therefore one way of undermining or subverting the systems that restrict women, a political gesture. It will be argued that a related discussion of the importance of the body and of emotions is one significant aspect of Cixous’s ethics and is particularly relevant to the attempt to find a foundation for ethics.

Some critics have been wary of these attempts to tie female writing to the bodily, perhaps asking, 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”?’³³ To charge Cixous with essentialism

³¹ Interestingly, blood is also the dominant image of *Ville parjure*, where it evokes questions of purity, violence and family. These are themselves related to the ethical questions of what it means to be good and whom we should care about.

³² Hélène Cixous, ‘Difficult Joys’, in *The Body and the Text: Hélène Cixous, Reading and Teaching*, ed. by Helen Wilcox, Keith McWatters, Ann Thomson and Linda R. Williams (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), pp. 5-30 (p. 27). See also Cixous, ‘Le Rire’, p. 55 ‘Il faut que la femme écrive par son corps’.

³³ Ann Rosalind Jones, ‘Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of “L’Écriture Féminine”’, *Feminist Studies*, 7.2 (Summer 1981) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3177523>> [accessed 06 August 2012], 247-263 (p. 255).

is perhaps to misinterpret her understanding of the body. In the reading of Cixous's work that forms the basis of her criticism of it, Toril Moi demonstrates how, for Cixous, the terms masculine and feminine are not reflections of what Moi terms the 'empirical sex' of their bearers but rather denote different 'libidinal economies', different relationships to desire and repression.³⁴ 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, 'Sorties', pp. 113-5). Indeed it may even be easier for a man than for a woman to produce writing that is sexually marked as feminine (Cixous, 'La venue', p. 62). Cixous points particularly to the example of Jean Genet (Cixous, 'Le Rire', p. 43).

This embodied feminine writing practice celebrates *naissance* in a way that does not tie femininity inseparably to the possession of female reproductive organs but is rather a refusal of the tendency to erase the mother-figure (Cixous, 'Sorties', p. 73). Hence whilst Cixous affirms that it was through helping her midwife mother and watching women give birth that she learnt to love women in a way that refuses to separate birth from lived, bodily experience (Cixous, 'La venue', p. 37), she, at the same time, opens up a wider conception of gestation and *naissance*, allowing it to be something to which 'empirically sexed' men could have access. The chief characteristic of this wider pregnancy is an openness to an other which is not possessed, consumed or controlled. Thus the baby, whilst carried by the mother, is not an extension of her but is accepted and loved as different to its mother and its independence, its birth, is a cause for celebration. As has been argued, the question of how we relate to others is

³⁴ Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 1985) p. 108.

the key issue for ethics. The other to which feminine language is open may be different languages,³⁵ may be the other within the speaker,³⁶ or may be other meanings such that feminine language would not only mean in more than one way but would playfully embrace a multiplication of meanings. Feminine language ‘ne contient pas, elle porte’ (Cixous, ‘Le Rire’, p. 61). The distinction between containing and carrying here may lie precisely in openness, a language that carries being one that does not attempt to restrict meaning nor claim that meaning can be entirely present within an utterance.

Writing for the Theatre

Cixous gives accounts of writing both fiction and theatre. In ‘L’Incarnation’, she describes how:

pour ‘écrire’ une pièce de théâtre, je ‘vais’ au théâtre en passant derrière la pensée. Je ferme les yeux, et assise au fond de mon corps, je regarde vivre les personnages, je m’agite, je pousse des exclamations seule devant mon papier, je verse des larmes. C’est donc que c’est déjà le théâtre et je ne suis pas seule. (Cixous, ‘L’Incarnation’, p. 261)

This description of writing a play appears remarkably similar to the description of writing more generally given in ‘La venue à l’écriture’:

Vision : ma poitrine comme le tabernacle. Ouvre. Mes poumons comme les rouleaux de la Thora. Mais une Thora sans fin dont les rouleaux s’impriment et se déploient à travers les temps et, sur la même Histoire, s’écrivent toutes les histoires, les événements, les changements éphémères

³⁵ Cixous has often spoken of the importance of her polyglot upbringing to her conception of writing (‘La venue’, p. 22 for instance)

³⁶ This interior other would be the unconscious.

et les transformations, j'entre à l'intérieur de moi les yeux fermés, et ça se lit. (Cixous, 'La venue', p. 57)

In 'La venue' this interior reading is inseparable from writing, is also a writing that is also a birth (Ibid). In both portrayals, writing begins with closing the eyes, a refusal of immediate external stimuli that facilitates an interior movement. This interior movement allows the author to read something that is already present within her, written on/in her body. This necessitates on both occasions a refusal of conscious thought, explicitly in the account of writing for the theatre and suggested through the reference to 'ça' which in the account of writing for fiction refers both/either to the writing itself or to the author's id. Thus although some shift in literary tone may be perceptible between Cixous's theatre and her other works, and Cixous herself may claim that there is such a disjuncture, her reports of the writing moment suggest that the writing is not produced, at the instant of inscription, in a radically different way. Nevertheless, it will be interesting to consider what may be different about Cixous's writing for the theatre.

Dedans, published in 1969, was Cixous's first fictional text and is broadly typical of her early work. Critically acclaimed, *Dedans* won the prestigious Prix Médicis in 1969. It is a complex and densely poetic fiction that explores the narrator's attempts to come to terms with the death of her father. The book has a central writing voice but an indeterminate number of characters, for the other voices of the text seem to exist only for and through the narrator. It is equally difficult to describe the setting of the text, which seems to take place in a strange dream-time and moves between an ill-defined domestic space, the narrator's interior space and a dream-like town scene that may also exist only within the narrator's imagination. Critics who, like Susan Sellers, suggest that there is a 'divergence' from the concerns of the

project of *écriture féminine* in Cixous's theatre may well be prompted by the very evident qualitative differences between her theatre and the early texts exemplified by *Dedans*.³⁷

Although in the 1970s Cixous wrote several plays which in style quite closely resemble her early fiction,³⁸ in general her theatre 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. It has been suggested that these changes are the result of practical concerns for what it is possible to present on stage (Cixous, 'Text and Theatre', p. 97), of Cixous's desire to expand the scope of her writing,³⁹ or of a move away from the concerns of the project of *écriture féminine* (Dobson, *Scene of Writing*, p. 55). In this thesis, the move towards the theatre will be linked to aspects of Cixous's ethics.

Cixous believes that the theatre has a particular ethical responsibility. Poetry does always, for Cixous, have an ethical function and must be 'the voice of the people' at times when 'both civilisation and culture are fragmenting from misery and pain'.⁴⁰ However, she claims that this ethical responsibility is more pronounced in the theatre, where the poet, in addition to their role as a voice of defiance in times of tyranny, must speak out for political engagement every day. The ethics of speaking out and of calling for action will be discussed in greater detail in my Chapters Four and Five, where it is suggested that even when attempting to

³⁷ Susan Sellers, *Hélène Cixous: Authorship, Autobiography and Love* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), p. 92.

³⁸ I am referring here to the unperformed work *La Pupille* (Paris: Cahiers Renaud Barrault/ Éditions Gallimard, 1971), the 1976 play *Portrait de Dora*, the opera *Le Nom d'Édipe: Chant du corps interdit* (Paris: des femmes, 1978) and to some extent *La prise de l'école de Madhubai* (Published with *Portrait de Dora* as *Théâtre* [Paris: des femmes, 1986]). Each has the complex and poetic style characteristic of Cixous's early fiction and is concerned with themes of sexual difference and the presentation of the unconscious.

³⁹ 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 (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1988), pp. 141-154 (p. 153).

⁴⁰ Dominique Lecoq, 'Against the Emotion of History: An Interview with Hélène Cixous', trans. by Jessica Benson, in *White Ink*, ed. by Susan Sellers, pp. 88-95 (p. 89).

inspire political action, if we speak out against injustice we must precisely refuse to negotiate or compromise in a way that is absolutely ethical. Cixous suggests that the immediacy of the theatrical form may form the basis of its necessary ethical dimension.⁴¹ Her theatre is written in the present;⁴² whenever the injustice took place in reality, it is present and must be faced within the theatre. For Sellers, the confrontation that is inherent to theatre ‘reflects back on our lives, affecting the way we think and act and helping us to distinguish the fine line between “good and evil” (Sellers, *Authorship*, p. 84). Theatre’s ethical message does not only lie in this confrontation. Theatre is, Cynthia Running-Johnson points out, also a place which ‘at least offers *hope* for change- a dream that is the first step toward the transformation of the feminine- and masculine- self and context’.⁴³ Theatre is a material space in which alternative modes of being can be posited and, if imagining an alternative is the first step towards creating one, then theatre is potentially a very powerful ethico-political tool.

The question of how the conventions of theatre can be adapted so that theatre becomes this powerful ethical tool is one of the chief concerns of this thesis and is considered particularly in my Chapter Five. To inspire the audience to work towards an alternative world, Cixous relies not on reason, along the Brechtian model, but instead claims that ‘J’ai envie (moi qui ai écrit cette pièce) de vos larmes, de vos rires’ (Cixous, ‘L’Incarnation’, p. 260) Displaying emotions is, Cixous suggests, normally prohibited for us,⁴⁴ and it was a goal of the *écriture féminine* project that the part that emotion and affect plays in our lives be celebrated (Cixous, ‘La venue’, p. 61). Theatre becomes a space in which we can feel with the characters and, in Dobson’s words, ‘rediscover’ our ‘capacity for empathy and catharsis’ (Dobson, *Scene of*

⁴¹ Kathleen O’Grady, ‘Guardian of Language: An Interview with Hélène Cixous’, trans. by Eric Prenowitz, in *White Ink*, ed. by Susan Sellers, pp. 81-88 (p. 83).

⁴² Julia Dobson, ‘At the Time of Writing Theatre: Cixous’s Absolute Present’, *Paragraph*, 27 .3 (Nov. 2000), 270-281(p. 273).

⁴³ Cynthia Running-Johnson, ‘Feminine Writing and its Theatrical “Other” in James Redmond (ed.) *Themes in Drama: Women in Theatre* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989), 92-99 (p. 180).

⁴⁴ Hélène Cixous, ‘Le lieu du crime, le lieu du pardon’, in *Indiade*, (pp. 254-5).

Writing p. 53). Catharsis is a concept derived from the Greek belief that theatre could have an almost medicinal role. Purging themselves of the desire for violence through empathy for the action on stage, the audience leaves the theatre better able to live in an ethical way as they resume their normal lives.⁴⁵ Cixous's cathartic theatre is, then, an outlet for excessive emotion which is at the same time and necessarily also a call for us to act well.

The Théâtre du Soleil and Cixous's Theatrical Influences

Cixous considers that a major difference between writing for theatre and writing fiction is located in the fact that, whilst fiction writing always remains solitary, writing for theatre means that 'je ne suis pas seule'. Even when, literally, she is sitting alone and beginning to write, there is already a whole group of others who are playing a part in shaping the writing. Cixous describes how a 'whole community' of actors, directors and producers must come together with the writer to complete the creation (Cixous, 'Text and theatre,' p. 121). This community is, she claims 'the reward of writing for the theatre' (Ibid). What Cixous is claiming is hardly original: success that is shared brings a greater sense of fulfilment than success achieved alone.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the sentiment does introduce one of the ethical debates that will be of interest in this thesis, the question of what things we should value and of why our relationships with others should be important, if we consider that they are important. Cixous's work with the Théâtre du Soleil is evidence of the value that she places on collaboration in writing for the theatre. The plays that Cixous has written for the group have always been commissioned (Ibid, p. 97) and are often developments of ideas that Cixous is given by Mnouchkine.⁴⁷ The Théâtre du Soleil have thematic input into the play from the

⁴⁵ Christopher Balme, *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 72-3.

⁴⁶ Of course the opposite statement, that we may gain more satisfaction from knowing that we have earned what we have ourselves, also sounds like a cliché.

⁴⁷ Hélène Cixous, 'Reconnaissance de dettes', in *La Ville Parjure ou le réveil des Erinyes*, 9-16 (p. 10).

very beginning and the final performed script will be the result of a long rehearsal process in which scenes that were unsuccessful dramatically have been changed, abridged or deleted.⁴⁸

The work of the Théâtre du Soleil has been praised by David Bradby as some of the most ‘exciting and influential’ to have emerged in France since 1960 (Bradby, p. 191). Officially formed in 1964 after Ariane Mnouchkine’s return from a trip to Asia, the Théâtre du Soleil developed out of the smaller ‘Association Théâtrale des Étudiants de Paris’.⁴⁹ The company was created as a ‘société cooperative ouvrière de production’, and this commitment to cooperation still informs its working practices (Williams, *Sourcebook*, p. xvii). All of the members of the troupe are expected to help with the menial tasks such as cleaning that are necessary for the running of the theatre and all draw the same pay (Ibid., p. xvii and Bradby, p. 192). Although Ariane Mnouchkine, as the company’s creative director, is the ‘administrative heart and director of the company’,⁵⁰ the Théâtre du Soleil generally works to avoid hierarchical group structures (Dobson, *Scene of Writing*, p. 66). In 1970 the Théâtre du Soleil moved permanently to The Cartoucherie, a former munitions factory located in the Bois de Vincennes, for Bradby a ‘distant and unfashionable suburb of Paris’ (Bradby, 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.

The Théâtre du Soleil’s theatrical influences are diverse and include significant twentieth-century theorists of the theatre such as Brecht, Meyerhold, Artaud and Copeau (Williams,

⁴⁸ Cf. Cixous, *L’Indiade*, pp. 209-240, where three different versions of Act II, Scene 1 are presented.

⁴⁹ Adrian Kiernander, ‘The Théâtre du Soleil Part One: a Brief History of the Company’, *New Theatre Quarterly*, 2.7 (1986), 195-203 (p. 195).

⁵⁰ Ann-Marie Picard, ‘*L’Indiade*: Ariane’s and Hélène’s Conjugate dreams’, *Modern Drama*, 32.1 (1989), 24-38

Sourcebook, p. xi). 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, it was 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).

Cixous has explicitly avoided suggestion that there is a Brechtian element to her work (Cixous, 'Text and theatre', p. 110). Brecht created a theatre which aimed to be 'epic', impressive, and capable of arousing a desire for political action in the audience through the representation of history. In Brechtian theatre, this is to be achieved in part through *Verfremdungseffekte*, 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 purpose of these effects is to prevent the audience from unthinkingly consuming the play as comforting and impressive spectacle: rather they must always engage their critical faculties to co-produce the play, and discover the historical forces that are shown to be behind the play's events and the character's actions.⁵¹ This is not to suggest that the Brechtian theatre-goer should not enjoy the play that they are seeing, but that their enjoyment should be of a type that allows for reflection.⁵² Cixous claims that distantiation has no place in her early vision of

⁵¹ Cf. Bradby, pp. 98-99, and Joe Kelleher, *Theatre & Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 60.

⁵² Brecht discusses the 'weaker' and 'stronger' pleasures that theatre can create in his *Short Organum for the Theatre* (trans. by John Willet, in *Tragedy*, ed. by Drakakis and Conn Liebler, 87-105 [particularly p. 89]).

a feminised theatre,⁵³ but 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.⁵⁴ Whilst Cixous and Mnouchkine both stress that the Théâtre du Soleil actor fully becomes the character that they play,⁵⁵ 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.

The Théâtre du Soleil’s attitude towards the actor owes more to the legacies of Meyerhold and Copeau than it does to that of Brecht. Both Meyerhold and Copeau placed the actor at the centre of their theories of the theatre.⁵⁶ Cixous has a similar respect for the position of the actor, as she indicates in ‘De la scène de l’Inconscient à la scène de l’Histoire’. Bradby contends that to be a French theatre actor in the 1960s, at the height of what he calls ‘the “absurdist” vogue’, was a disheartening experience: the thinking on theatre at the time meant that ‘the personal responsibility of the actor was severely reduced and he often felt no more than a puppet moved by the inscrutable forces of author and director’ (Bradby, p. 198). Meyerhold has also been charged with reducing the actor’s status to that of a puppet (Milling

⁵³ Hélène Cixous, ‘Aller à la mer’, trans. by Barbara Kerslake, *Modern Drama*, 27.4 (1984), 546-548 (p. 547).

⁵⁴ Marie-Claire Ropars Wuilleumier, ‘Une *Verfremdung* non brechtienne’, in *Croisées d’un œuvre*, ed. by Mireille Calle-Gruber, 447-451 (p. 449).

⁵⁵ Cf. Hélène Cixous, ‘Qui es-tu?’, in *L’Indiade*, 267-278. The Théâtre du Soleil’s theory of acting will be examined in more detail below.

⁵⁶ Jane Milling and Graham Ley, *Modern Theories of Performance: From Stanislavski to Boal* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 58.

and Ley, p. 68). Within Meyerhold's thought, however, the puppet is reclaimed as a positive figure, necessarily outside of the demands of 'naturalistic' representation, expressing only through the body (Ibid). This use of the body as an expressive tool is one significant aspect of Meyerhold's practice that is also to be found in the work of the Théâtre du Soleil: all of the Soleil's actors receive extensive training in dance and mime and *Tambours sur la digue*, which is a play 'sous forme de pièce ancienne pour marionnettes jouée par des acteurs', is a playful nod to the importance of the figure of the puppet in their conception of theatre.

Copeau considered acting to be a 'vocation', similar to a religious vocation, and there was a pronounced 'moral and religious agenda' in all of his work (Milling and Ley, pp. 78-9). The influence of this attitude can be seen in the work of the Théâtre du Soleil, although it is probably more accurate to term their approach spiritual than religious. Nevertheless, Cixous's account of the ways in which actors can be transformed into their characters relies, as Picard suggests, on a celebration of self-sacrifice that is consistently couched in religious terms, is seen as a type of saintliness (Picard, 'Conjugate Dreams', p. 27). The motifs of saintliness and self-sacrifice and their relationship to ethics are of interest and will be considered in detail in my discussion of *Indiade*.

The Importance of Asia

Artaud's interest in Asian theatre forms is reflected in the practices of the Théâtre du Soleil. This is evident even in their choice of dramatic settings: of the four plays that will be discussed in this study, three are set in real or imagined Asian countries. Many of the Théâtre du Soleil's actors have had extensive training in Asian theatre forms and both Mnouchkine

and Cixous make reference to how these traditions inform their understanding of drama.⁵⁷ The Théâtre du Soleil, following Artaud, hope that an expressive bodily language that is specific to the theatre can be found through highly stylized Asian theatrical forms.

Cixous and Mnouchkine have been criticised for the ways in which they, as Westerners,⁵⁸ portray the Orient. Julia 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). The term ‘Orient’ has just been used here to refer to many different countries and cultures, and indeed the suggestion that there is a single, homogenous ‘Orient’ which includes anywhere that is not Western Europe and North America is one of the tropes of Orientalism. In Edward Said’s study of Orientalism he is, he tells us, principally concerned with the countries tellingly known as the near or middle East.⁵⁹ However, the term Orient has often been used in English to refer specifically to the countries of South-East Asia. In *Norodom* and *Indiade*, Cixous and Mnouchkine do not suggest that the entire Orient has a single identity which they can portray: they are specifically describing Cambodia and India.

Yet a concern for the way in which their position as Westerners affects Cixous and Mnouchkine’s presentation of Cambodia can perhaps be justified. Said has described how the Orient plays a decisive part in structuring the way that the Occident is able to think about itself (Said, *Orientalism*, p. 1), 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

⁵⁷ Cf. 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/1-influence-de-l-orient-au-theatre/1-orient-au-theatre-du-soleil-le?lang=fr>> [accessed 09/08/2012].

⁵⁸ Although Cixous was born in Algeria, her mother was German and her father French. She has written about her anguish 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 (cf. Hélène Cixous, *Les rêveries de la femme sauvage* [Paris: Galilée, 2000]).

⁵⁹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p. 17.

he comes up against the Orient as a European or American first, as an individual second' (Said, *Orientalism*, p. 11). The ways that Cixous and Mnouchkine are able to consider and so write about the Orient will be coloured by the fact that they are European. Said argues that authors are not 'mechanically determined' by their circumstances, although they are 'in the history of their societies', and are 'shaped by that history'.⁶⁰ Thus it would seem that, for Said, whilst it is not possible to deny that being European influences how Cixous and Mnouchkine understand and portray Asia, it is also not the case that they must therefore react to Asia in an easily predictable way.

There still remains a question of how the play reflects its author's position as European, or is marked by the historical power relations between the culture of its author and the culture that it portrays. If, as Homi K. Bhabha argues, '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',⁶¹ then it appears that it is not useful either to praise the plays for presenting Asia as generally better than Europe, since such a presentation would simply be reverse ethnocentrism, or to criticise Cixous for her presentation of Cambodia and India as feudal and poetic lands. It remains important to consider how Asia is represented, but the goal of this consideration is not to classify the representation as simply good or bad, but to consider the extent to which the play favours or resists the subjectification of the Orient, and how far the author has been sensitive to the difficulties of writing about Asia as a European.

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

⁶⁰ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. xxiv.

⁶¹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 67.

about 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’.⁶² 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 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’.⁶³ If the East has first been allowed to portray itself, and if the Occident is not

⁶² 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).

⁶³ Edward W. Said, ‘Orientalism Reconsidered’, in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002), 198-215 (p. 206).

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. 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.

Collective Theatre

Cixous describes how working with the Théâtre du Soleil dictates 'certain characteristics' of 'the economy of the play' (Cixous, 'Text and theatre', p. 97). Cixous is writing for a large group of actors and her play must provide them with a number of interesting parts. Cixous's embrace of the collective nature of theatre is not a happy accident resulting from collaboration with the Théâtre du Soleil but is rather fundamental to her dramatic aesthetics. She has described the theatre as 'le palais d'autrui'. The word 'palais' indicates the importance and value of the other both for Cixous's thought generally and for her conception of the theatre. Theatre is a place which lives from the 'désir de l'autre, de tous les autres. Et du désir du désir des autres : du public, des comédiens' (Cixous, 'L'Incarnation' p. 260). The actors and the playwright need the public to desire them and their work; the needs of the

other are fundamental to the creation of theatre. It is not just the creation of theatre but also its consumption that is a collective experience and necessitates interaction with the other, for the audience cannot have a theatrical experience alone. Both the audience and the actors give life to the theatre.

Cixous claims that, to write for this palace of the other 'il faut parvenir à cet état de « démoïsation », cet état de sans-moi, de dépossession du moi, qui va rendre possible la **possession** de l'auteur par les personnages' (Cixous, 'De la scène', p. 28). Démoïsation means giving up ownership of the self, allowing the other to possess the author. According to Derrida's reading of Lévinas, a properly ethical relationship between a subject and an other would require a subject to give the other a welcome that was 'démessurée'(Derrida): the subject would have to 'recevoir d'Autrui au-delà de la capacité du Moi' (Lévinas quoted by Derrida).⁶⁴ This ethical welcome of 'Autrui' is also dangerous (and impossible) since, taken to its absolute conclusion, it means giving over to the other all of those resources that allow you to welcome them, or even to exist (cf. Still, *Hospitality*, p. 9). For this reason there is always a third present in any relationship with an other subject, a third who brings the possibility of justice and makes it possible to avoid the violence of the destruction of one by the other (Derrida, *Adieu*, p. 63).⁶⁵ The 'possession' and 'dépossession' that Cixous referred to in her description of writing for the theatre also bring to mind Cixous's criticism of the 'l'empire du propre' and the appropriation that is associated with a masculine economy (Cf. Cixous, 'Sorties', p. 100). As Ward Jouve suggests, theatre is 'selflessness incarnate' and can only be achieved through a loss of self on the part of the author and the actors.⁶⁶ In order to achieve

⁶⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Adieu à Emmanuel Lévinas* (Paris: Galilée, 1997), p. 55.

⁶⁵ The implications for the subject of attempts to behave ethically are considered in my third chapter, and the question of justice in my third.

⁶⁶ Nicole Ward Jouve, 'Hélène Cixous: From Inner Theatre to World Theatre', in *The Body and the Text: Hélène Cixous, reading and teaching*, ed. by Helen Wilcox (et al) (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990) p. 44.

this selflessness, Cixous tells us, 'j'ai dû écrire quelques textes pour ordonner les chambres et apaiser le moi. Une fois la paix obtenue, dans l'œuvre comme dans la vie, on peut espérer que le moi va faire silence, laisser le terrain au monde' (Cixous, 'L'Incarnation' p. 260). Cixous draws a distinction between her fiction, characterised as an exploration of self, and the theatre, which is driven by characters and in which self-discovery is emphatically not a concern (Cixous, *La Ville parjure*, p. 215). The writing of the self is a necessary precursor to writing on the other and has particular value because it permits this later other-writing. In Cixous's writing, as Ward Jouve claims 'private, leads to public. Inner, to outer' ('From Inner Theatre,' p. 44). For Simone de Beauvoir, any self naturally generates an other of which it is suspicious, and which it attempts to dominate.⁶⁷ In Cixous's understanding of writing for the theatre, by contrast, if there is a hierarchy between self and other, then it is other that is the privileged term. Although Cixous's theatre may for some critics have 'all the marks of Cixous's poetry',⁶⁸ it is the result of a conscious effort to efface her own writing voice.

Theatre and History

For Mara Negrón Marrero, the key question addressed by Cixous's theatre is that of 'comment la poésie peut-elle caresser tendrement l'Histoire'.⁶⁹ As has already been suggested, the desires to write history, and to write history in a particularly poetic way, are ethical desires related to our obligations towards the dead. Theatre is a space in which, for Cixous, history has 'sa figure humaine', destiny (Cixous, 'De la scène', p. 28). Destiny comes to mean a history that is not abstract and it is only within the theatre that, she claims, it still makes any sense to discuss it. Actors follow a script that has been laid out for them towards an end that they know is coming. The same may be said of self-conscious modes of fiction,

⁶⁷ Simone de Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe I: Les faits et les mythes* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1986), p. 16.

⁶⁸ Verena Andermatt Conley, *Hélène Cixous* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), p. 100.

⁶⁹ 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. 25-212 (p. 205).

but to equate Cixous's theatre with such a fiction would be to ignore the vital importance of the actor's body and the communal experience of being in an audience.⁷⁰ 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 'La Rire de la Méduse' Cixous called explicitly for a history that would be feminine and combine the personal with the political 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 (Cf. 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.

Outline of Chapters Two to Five

My Chapter Two examines Cixous's presentation of the USA, Sihanouk and the monarchists, and the Khmers Rouges, the different groups that compete for power in *Norodom's* Cambodia. The discussion begins by asking how it is possible to present the foreign, and particularly foreign historical tragedies, in an ethically positive way and then, looking at the actions of the different groups presented as well as play's portrayal of their motivations, my chapter will ask how it is possible to use power ethically.

Chapter Three looks at the question of identity in *Indiade*. It will look at the problems of forging a new national identity and particularly the question of inclusion and exclusion, which will be shown to have important ethical ramifications. It will then look at questions of

⁷⁰ That being part of a large audience can be a unique and thrilling experience is one of the tenets of Meyerhold's theatre theory (Milling and Ley, p. 75).

love, grace, innocence, and responsibility which are raised by the presentation of the saintlike aspect of Gandhi's identity in the play.

In Chapter Four, the concern is the question of justice in *Ville parjure*. The chapter will suggest that *Ville parjure* portrays three different models of justice; one related to the play's *ville*, one championed by the Erinyes, and a final one hoped for by the Mother at the centre of the play. The chapter will analyse each of these models of justice and the ethical questions that they raise in turn.

Chapter Five contends that *Tambours* uses and adapts the conventions of tragedy. It looks at the play's presentations of suffering, of the figure of the tragic hero, and the idea of the divine plan, and asks what these reveal about Cixous's ethics. Underlying this discussion of tragedy in *Tambours* is the issue of how it is possible to represent ethical issues in fiction.

Chapter Two: The Use of Power in *L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk, roi du Cambodge* (1985)

L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk, roi du Cambodge, produced in 1985, was the first of the plays to emerge from Cixous's collaboration with the Théâtre du Soleil. It describes a twenty-four year period of Cambodian history, beginning with the abdication of the King Norodom Sihanouk and his election as president and ending with the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in 1979. The play tells of the coup that established a pro-American republic in Cambodia in place of Sihanouk's monarchy, of the civil war following which this republican government was replaced by the Khmer Rouge, and finally of some of the horror suffered by the Cambodian people under the Government of Democratic Kampuchea. This tumultuous period in Cambodia's history is approached through an account of the personal history of Norodom Sihanouk, King of Cambodia. There is a concentration on the internal politics of Cambodia and an implicit invitation to compare monarchy, republicanism and communism. The impact of a colonial history and of American involvement in South-East Asia is explored.

In Chapter One it was argued that Cixous and the Théâtre du Soleil took great care in their representation of the Orient, and that this careful representation was a response to obligations not to ignore global tragedies, and not to repeat discourses that allowed the colonisation of Asia. This chapter begins by looking specifically at the presentation of Cambodia in *Norodom*, asking whether the play is successful in living up to these obligations. The search for power is at the heart of this play, and this chapter considers in turn the different groups that compete for power: the West, the monarchy, and the Khmer Rouge. It looks at what motivates these groups to gain power, and how they use any power that they gain, and asks whether they can be said to have acted ethically.

The Representation of Cambodia

The Théâtre du Soleil, as Morag Shiach points out, took ‘great care’ in their 1985 presentation of Asia (Shiach, *Politics of Writing*, p. 135). Adrian Kiernander describes the way in which Asia was brought into the whole of the theatre space and was not confined to the stage (Kiernander, ‘The Orient’, p. 185). He claims that this spatial overflow of Asia, coupled with the length of the plays, has the effect of normalizing Asia: it is the Westerners that appear out of place (Kiernander, ‘The Orient’, pp. 185-6). Julia Dobson refutes this, arguing that the production ‘fails to avoid the presentation of the Orient as spectacle simply by extending its boundaries’ (Dobson, *Scene of Writing*, p. 102). Extension of Asia is still always confined to the Cartoucherie, and however long the performance may last, the audience is unlikely to have forgotten that they are witnessing a piece of drama and that they are in France. Dobson therefore seems quite justified in characterising the theatrical expansion of Asia alone as an inadequate response to the concern that East may be presented as spectacle, as subject other.

Yet it seems that both Dobson and Kiernander have overlooked certain key elements of this staging strategy. Waiting for the performance to start, the Cartoucherie’s audience were certainly invited to mingle in a lobby and bar area that resembled the company’s on-stage evocation of Asia (Dobson, *Scene of Writing*, p. 81). They were also welcome to look into the dressing rooms as the actors were applying their makeup. In this way, the audience was made a participant in the ritual preparation for the show.⁷¹ The audience is reminded that it is surrounded not by an ‘authentic’ Asia but by artifice. The overflow of the setting has done little to normalize or bring reality to the play’s presentation of Asia but has rather highlighted

⁷¹ Cf. Kiernander, ‘Road to Cambodia’, p. 205. Also Timothy Scheie’s description of the same in *L’Indiade*, 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.

the potential theatricality of off-stage experience. Appropriately, when discussing the importance of Asia in her theatre, Cixous refers most often to the eastern theatrical tradition: the Asia that she draws upon is already one of drama and performance.⁷² In her discussion of the writing of *Indiade*, Cixous tells us that she has written a ‘trace’ of India, a play inspired by the country; she makes no claim to capture an entire India (Cixous, *Indiade*, p. 16). The audience is brought into an Asia that is self-consciously unreal, in Kiernander’s words ‘a representation of Asia and not the real thing, and a western representation at that’ (Kiernander, ‘The Orient’, pp. 189-190). The scene that Cixous and Mnouchkine present is the consequence of a going-towards Asia that accepts that there may not be an ‘authentic’ East to reach and that if there were, they could never hope to capture it in a Parisian theatre.

2011 saw a new production of *Norodom*, which featured young actors from the École des Arts Phare Ponleu Selpak. The school has its origins as a series of workshops for the residents of the Site 2 refugee camp on the Thai border, not far from the place where Mme Lamné finally leaves the fictional Cambodia of *Norodom*. Now situated in Anchanh village, close to Battambang, the school still aims to ‘favoriser l’expression des enfants, notamment à travers l’art, afin de dépasser les traumatismes de la guerre et de la vie en camps’.⁷³ The actors of the 2011 production of *Norodom* are ‘les descendants des victimes des Khmers rouges’ (*Dossier pédagogique*, p. 5) still living with the consequences of the awful events described in the play. The group performed a shortened version of Cixous’s original script, translated into Cambodian. The project of the new production of *Norodom* began in 2007 and was the idea of Ashley Thompson, whom Cixous describes as a ‘linguiste anthropologue’.

⁷² Cf. for example, Cixous’s references to Nô theatre master Zeami in ‘L’Incarnation’, in *Indiade*, pp. p. 260.

⁷³ ‘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 *Norodom*, < <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 20 April 2012] (p. 10).

Whereas, according to the 2011 programme notes, the 1985 production of *Norodom* in French and by French actors gave ‘un regard strictement occidental’ on Cambodian history, the 2011 production will allow a « retour aux sources » for the story (*Dossier pédagogique*, p. 9) and the Cambodian people will be able to ‘reprendre leur héritage, [...] devenir les héros actifs de leur destin, de se comprendre eux-mêmes, de se réadopter’ (Cixous, *Dossier pédagogique*, p. 23). The story has been taken, not given, back and belongs to the Cambodians as it is now in their language. It seems simplistic to suggest that the translation of the play has been so decisive in altering the ownership of it. The surtitles projected above the play during its French performances were taken unaltered from the published text of the play. Not only does this suggest a high level of fidelity in the Cambodian translation to the original French text, but also it means that *Norodom*’s French-speaking audiences in 1985 and 2011 read the same writing, even if qualitatively the two performances were very different. If the 1985 *Norodom* was a ‘regard strictement occidental’ then the 2011 performance, which retains the same plot, characterisation and references and was directed by members of the original cast who imposed an acting style similar to that used in the 1985 performance,⁷⁴ cannot be classed as completely oriental. If, as Said argues, the West produces the Orient through its discourse (Said, *Orientalism*, p. 22) then knowledge of an eastern subject that is completely outside of occidental knowledge is impossible. Therefore, the version of Cambodia present in the translated play - a European interpretation of Cambodia that is couched in Asian idiom - is valid precisely because it does not deny western influence nor repeat a myth of an authentic Asia.

⁷⁴ Cf. Jennifer Birkett, ‘The limits of language: the theatre of Hélène Cixous’, in *Voices in the Air: French dramatists and the resources of language*, ed. by John Dunkley and Bill Kirton (Glasgow: Glasgow University French and German Publications, 1992), pp. 171-186 (p. 181), for e.g., for an account of Sihanouk dancing a ‘jig’ when his ‘schemes’ go well. He did likewise in the 2011 performance.

Considering a Cambodian identity in this way, as never outside of a West-East power dynamic, may be helpful in discussing Cixous's claims that the play allows the Cambodian people self-knowledge. Knowledge of a Cambodia shaped by a history of colonialism and western material dominance can be gained by taking western knowledge of the country's history and, through translation, rendering it inaccessible to most western audiences, except through surtitles. Such translation serves to highlight the partial nature of *Norodom's* inscription of Cambodian culture. In highlighting that the 1985 production of *Norodom* had completely failed to render the Cambodian language, a major element of Cambodian culture, the translation implies a whole, rich, set of traditions that it had not been possible for Cixous and Mnouchkine to bring to the Parisian stage. We are reminded that they could only render those elements of the culture accessible to them as occidental observers. Cixous and Mnouchkine's 1985 Cambodia 'contained both the strange and the familiar' (Shiach, *Politics of Writing*, p. 127); showed through the 'familiar' that a view of the Orient is important in the Occident, through the 'strange' that this vision is a construct that does not contain Asia. The translation of the play ensured that the audience could not ignore the presence of the 'strange'. The translation of the play, whilst not attempting to escape the importance of the West in the creation of the country, is a celebration of Cambodia's difference, a refusal of the idea that the Orient may be simply dissected and understood by Europeans.

The Presentation of the West

The play deals critically with American foreign policy in South-East Asia as it affected Cambodia. Between March 1969 and May 1970, American forces ran an operation codenamed 'Operation Menu' in which 100,000 tonnes of bombs were dropped in Cambodia in an effort to disrupt supply lines to the People's Army of Vietnam and to destroy a 'massive Communist headquarters' that the U.S. Army—correctly, as it was later revealed—believed

to be hidden in the area.⁷⁵ Cixous presents this operation through reports of the consequences for the Cambodian people and in two dramatic scenes that show the U.S. policy-making process.

Cixous has described how, for Mnouchkine, the ‘Kissinger scene’ remains ‘the stain of *Sihanouk*, the scene which failed’. Cixous suggests that the failure of the scene could be attributed to her inability ‘to feel sympathy or antipathy for the Americans, or Kissinger’; the scene does not work because she had ‘become dispassionate’ (Cixous, ‘Text and Theatre’, p. 110). The register of the Kissinger scene contrasts to that in which Cixous treats her other villains: whereas we are also invited to condemn the actions of X1 and X2, the doctors who sell contaminated blood in *Ville parjure*, we are not encouraged to mock them as we are Kissinger. Little sympathy is evident in Cixous’ portrayal of the Americans of the Kissinger scene who, for Sellers, are described in ‘grotesquely simple terms’ (Sellers, *Authorship*, p. 142); they appear as almost demonic figures in the play and David Graver describes how in the 1985 production ‘their faces are lit harshly from below, as if by the fires of hell that they have kindled in Indochina’.⁷⁶ When General Abrams joyfully shouts ‘Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!’ as he indicates civilian targets on a map of Cambodia (*Norodom*, p. 135), it is difficult to feel anything but contempt and anger for the American leaders that are the subject of Cixous’s biting satire. This portrayal of the Americans has led to the suggestion that the scene is in a ‘Brechtian’ register, a comparison that Cixous denies even whilst recognising the validity of its basis (Cixous, ‘Text and theatre’, p. 110). Critique has replaced understanding in Cixous’ portrayal of these characters, a change which may, according to Shiach, result from the importance of Cambodia’s defence against ‘US aggression’ as a cause for the

⁷⁵ Earl H. Tilford Jr., ‘Operation Menu’, in *The Encyclopaedia of the Vietnam War: A Political, Social and Military History*, ed. by Spencer Tucker (Santa-Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2011), p. 740.

⁷⁶ David Graver, ‘The Théâtre du Soleil Part Three: the Production of *Sihanouk*’, *New Theatre Quarterly*, 2.7 (1986), 212-6 (p. 213).

French Left in the early 1970s (Shiach, *Politics of Writing*, p. 126). The change in register does not, however, mean that the scenes are a failure: the satire is enjoyable to watch and whilst Cixous's rejection of the Brechtian tag suggests her wariness of *Verfremdungseffekts* or any alienation of her audience, the distance between the audience and Kissinger here serves ultimately to encourage the audience to have greater sympathy for the play's Cambodian characters.

In 1985, Kissinger was played by the same actor who played Pol Pot.⁷⁷ Describing casting at the Théâtre du Soleil, Ariane Mnouchkine explains that 'C'est un magnifique hasard: il y a des acteurs qui trouvent deux, trois personnages dans une pièce, d'autres rien, d'autres un',⁷⁸ and so it is unwise to place too much emphasis on this casting decision. Our anger at Kissinger's actions should not reduce our horror at Pol Pot's regime, it should not be suggested that all wrongdoing stems from the same root, and Pol Pot's actions should not be normalised or justified as a response to American aggression. Nevertheless, some parallels may be drawn between the actions and attitudes of Pol Pot and Kissinger, and the casting serves to underline this. Both Kissinger and Pol Pot purport to stand for a set of ideals- democracy or Marxism- for which they show disregard when in private. Both use idealistic rhetoric and claim to act for the good of a people for whom they feel contempt. Pol Pot describes how it is his hatred and not his Marxism that drives him. Kissinger mocks the American legislature and the principle of democratic checks and balances (*Norodom*, p. 133), and advocates the deception of the American public (*Norodom*, p. 87). More significant still is Kissinger's indifference to human rights and particularly the right to life. In response to Laird's concerns about potential civilian casualties in Cambodia, Kissinger responds that 'il

⁷⁷ Rosette Lamont, 'Review of *The Terrible but Unended Story of Norodom Sihanouk: King of Cambodia*', *Performing Arts Journal*, 10.1 (1986) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3245573>> [accessed 20 April 2012] (46-50 [p. 48]).

⁷⁸ Hélène Cixous and Ariane Mnouchkine, 'Faire arriver une Hécube de maintenant' in *Croisées d'une œuvre*, ed. by Mireille Calle-Gruber, 221-234 (p. 229).

faut savoir faire des sacrifices’, but that he will of course try his utmost to reduce ‘les risques encourus’ (unknowingly, unintentionally) by those to be sacrificed, the population of a distant country, run by an Asian Prince who must ‘ferme ses *petits yeux*’ (my emphasis) whilst America acts (*Norodom*, pp. 86-7). Kissinger unilaterally decides the fate of Cambodia and ignores democracy whilst simultaneously and without irony denouncing Communist imperialism and totalitarianism (*Norodom*, p. 88). By creating this distance between Kissinger and Sâr and the ideals that they claim to represent, Cixous is able to criticise the ways in which the concepts of democracy or Marxism are used or realized, without passing judgement on the ideals themselves.

Despite this harsh critique of American military leaders, Cixous is still, Rosette Lamont argues, ‘even handed’ in her presentation of the U.S.A. (Lamont, ‘Review’, p. 48). Indeed there are some more positive depictions of Americans in the play. Lamont points particularly to the portrayal of John Gunther Dean as ‘a noble, generous, suffering man’ (ibid.). He certainly does show genuine affection for members of the Cambodian Republican government, pleading with them to leave Cambodia with him as the Khmer Rouge forces are closing in on Phnom Penh. His pleas are rejected: Sirik Matak chooses a ‘belle mort’, a beautiful and honourable death, over a life in America (*Norodom*, p. 271). Dean, who had identified himself as ‘cambodgien’ (*Norodom*, p. 252), is finally obliged to leave the country when U.S. personnel are evacuated. In this decisive moment his identity is American and he cannot share the fate of Cambodia. Their differences in this ultimate moment reveal the gap that had always existed between the two. Sirik Matak tells Dean that ‘nous ne nous sommes jamais compris’ (*Norodom*, p. 272), denying that the friendship that Dean is so keen to praise was ever based on understanding, and so denying the value of Dean’s interpretation of their past relationship or of Cambodia. Cambodia is inaccessible even to this man who had

declared his love for it, for his love of Cambodia always existed without comprehension. As Dean leaves, he is rebuked by Matak for America's failures: 'vous nous avez refusé votre protection, comme les dieux sans pitié de nos croyances' (ibid.). This phrase reveals the conflicted relationship that the Republican government has with the U.S.A. Sirik Matak believes in a godlike U.S.A. His belief in the country is not based simply on shared values but stems from U.S. power. The differences in power between the two countries profoundly influence their relationship and make a genuine connection difficult. The U.S.A. will always be in the position of authority and exploitation, Cambodia will always be in that of supplicant. America has not been a benign god and has refused to protect Cambodia. Dean is made responsible for this pitilessness as the recipient of Matak's bitter words. Certainly, Laird and Dean, whilst shown to be generally decent men, are depicted as ineffectual, unable to alter the course of politics in their own country or to help those for whom they feel compassion (cf. *Norodom*, p. 89). We see in Cixous's less critical portrayals of Americans that compassion is ineffectual if it is not coupled with a willingness or ability to use power and alter the world.

Monarchy

The figure of Sihanouk is central to the play. Conley describes how 'Cixous chooses to write about an ideal person or couple, in order to say what is, was or could be' (Conley, *Hélène Cixous*, p. 95). In this *Histoire terrible*, the ideal figure is Norodom Sihanouk. Sihanouk is rendered ideal not in the way that *Indiade*'s Gandhi is, by the attribution of saint-like qualities (ibid., p. 97), but rather by his capacity to embody his nation. In a partial echo of Louis XIV's declaration that 'L'État, c'est moi', Sihanouk regrets that 'je ne peux plus m'arrêter d'être le Cambodge' (*Norodom*, p. 148). His identification with Cambodia, expressed negatively, is, Sihanouk considers, inevitable and involuntary even although, as Sirik Matak makes clear in

the play, his accession to the crown was not inevitable: the French chose him to rule (*Norodom*, p. 43). The significant difference between the statements of Sihanouk and of Louis XIV may be found with the contexts in which they are spoken: whereas Louis XIV's statement is a triumphant declaration of his domination over his country, Sihanouk's words come once he has been deposed and express his sadness and regret at being obliged to continue to feel for a country from which he has been exiled. As will be discussed in detail in my Chapter Five, the idea that the tragic hero represented or embodied his entire nation was common in classical tragedy. This trope was dramatically expedient, allowing the fates of large numbers of people to be discussed in an efficient, comprehensible, and entertaining way. The problems inherent in the suggestion that a single, privileged, voice can represent an entire nation may be mitigated though not altogether removed by the presentation of Sihanouk as a mercurial and often isolated figure.

The way in which the trope is taken up in *Norodom* suggests something of the ethics of the use of power. What seems to be most significant in Sihanouk's claim that he embodies his nation is the claim to have an absolute and immediate empathy with its people. The question of risk is also significant: in contrast to Kissinger and Saloth Sâr, Sihanouk will not risk his people without also risking himself. For Juliet Flower MacCannell, in identifying himself with Cambodia Sihanouk is demonstrating his 'strict awareness' of the 'multiplicity of selves' that 'go into making up his "identity" as monarch'.⁷⁹ Sihanouk can only have an identity as a monarch insofar as he is supported by his people: in MacCannell's understanding of his words, Sihanouk is not so much imposing his singular will on his people as he is asserting the collective consent by which he believes he governs. Sihanouk is both Cambodia made flesh and, in Conley's words, the country's 'maternal father' (Conley, *Hélène Cixous*, pp. 97-8).

⁷⁹ Juliet Flower MacCannell, 'Cixous and Modern Consciousness', in Hélène Cixous, *The Terrible but Unfinished Story of Norodom Sihanouk, King of Cambodia*, trans. and intr. by Juliet Flower MacCannell, Judith Pike, and Lollie Groth (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), p. xiv.

The king is ‘Monseigneur Papa’ to his people,⁸⁰ and when on hearing rumours of the coup in his capital Sihanouk wishes nevertheless to continue his diplomatic trip to Moscow rather than return to Phnom Penh, Sihanouk is warned by Penn Nouth ‘ne laissez pas l’enfant en mauvais nourrice’ (*Norodom*, p. 102). Cambodia is Sihanouk’s child and the republican government are but a ‘nourrice’, a nanny hired to stand in for a king who is both father and, his musician claims, ‘une mamelle pleine pour le nourrisson’ (*Norodom*, p. 24). Presenting his people as his family, Sihanouk claims to care deeply for all of them, whilst also attempting to present his position within Cambodian politics as natural and unquestionable. Whilst it may be true that Sihanouk values the supposed love of the people that he governs, having to be reassured at times of uncertainty that ‘vous savez comme les paysans vous aiment’ (*Norodom*, p. 75), he also maintains this affectionate consensus by excluding those who challenge him, as he does when he refuses to give his support to the Khmers Rouges, unemployed since their return from their studies in France (*ibid.*, pp. 28-30).

The centrality of Sihanouk to the play does not imply that there is an unwaveringly positive portrayal of the king. He is, as Conley suggests, presented as ‘a person of integrity struggling in an impossible situation and making at times, unbeknownst to him, wrong decisions’ (Conley, *Hélène Cixous*, p. 97). In this way, Sihanouk may be likened to the figure of the tragic hero who, despite his noble character, will unknowingly do wrong and be punished.⁸¹ The joy with which, for example, Sihanouk greets the Khmer rouge offer of collaboration is painfully ironic for the audience, and indeed Sihanouk’s naivety becomes evident almost immediately as he is side-lined by the Kampuchean government following their first cabinet meeting (*Norodom*, pp. 167, 200). Sihanouk is not, then, portrayed as a brilliantly astute politician or as a perfect leader for his country. He is instead ‘intuitive’ in his use of power,

⁸⁰ *Norodom*, p. 148. Sihanouk’s current official title is ‘Roi-père’ of Cambodia (cf. site of the Cambodian monarchy, <<http://www.norodomsihanouk.info/>> [accessed 20 April 2012]).

⁸¹ The figure of the tragic hero will be discussed in some depth in my Chapter Five.

still ‘relatively adept’ as a manipulator despite his failings (Kiernander, ‘Road to Cambodia’, p. 201). If we wish him at the centre of Cambodian politics it is not because we are impressed by his skill but because we recognise what has been called his ‘unshakeable’ sense of his ‘responsibility to the peoples of Cambodia’.⁸² Sihanouk’s redeeming features only make him relatively appealing in comparison to many of the other political figures in the play.

Sihanouk is kept at the centre of the play even in the second époque, where his actions are of limited relevance to the advancement of the plot not because, as Jennifer Birkett suggests, of his resemblance to the charismatic prince Hamlet (Birkett, ‘Limits of Language’, p. 180), but because of what Sellers calls his ‘capacity to remain attuned to the essential’. This capacity is, she claims, evident in his Sihanouk’s decision to attend Hồ Chí Minh’s funeral although it was ‘politically unwise’ to do so (Sellers, *Authorship*, p. 82). This choice does not reveal that Sihanouk values his immediate ethical obligations over pragmatic politics, since the shrewd decision to stay and work for the good of the country could also be considered an ethically positive one. Rather, Sihanouk’s actions suggest that in his ethics, obligations towards individuals are more important than obligations towards the country. Sellers calls ‘essential’ Sihanouk’s desire to mourn the General with whom he had had a tense relationship, an affirmation that human life and death are more important than political demands and ideals. The ‘essential’ is associated with death, mourning, and the ability to feel loss and so, vitally, with emotion and the physical. Sihanouk is, for Kiernander, emotional ‘above all’. He does not dissimulate his feelings but displays them in ‘highly theatrical gestures’ (Kiernander, ‘Road to Cambodia...’ p. 207). Sihanouk is driven by emotion and sympathy; these are his endearing or redeeming qualities and, as he is at the centre of the play, the qualities by which we come to judge *Norodom*’s other protagonists.

⁸² David Williams, ‘Review of *L’Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk, roi du Cambodge*’, *TDR*, 40.3 (Autumn 1996) < <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1146563> > [accessed 20 April 2012] (198-200 [p. 199]).

The Khmer Rouge

It is Sihanouk's embrace of the emotional that is missing from the ideology of the Khmers Rouges. Saloth Sâr tells Khieu Samphan that he must 'Pense au peuple mon frère! Ne te sers pas seulement de ton esprit, sers-toi aussi de ton cœur' (*Norodom*, p. 33). Thought precedes emotion. The love that Samphan must work to achieve will not be, as Sihanouk believes his to be, based on a bodily connection to the people. It will be derived firstly from an ideology and then imposed onto the heart. Saloth Sâr may here refer to Khieu Samphan as 'frère', but little brotherly love is evident in the superior attitude that he takes towards his comrade. Derrida has written about the prevalence of the figure of the brother in law, ethics, and politics, in the Greek, Abrahamic, Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions.⁸³ In calling their co-revolutionaries 'frère' here, the Khmer Rouge place themselves within a long and widespread tradition that sees fraternity as the basis of good society. Derrida argues that those who use the figure of the brother often, as the Khmer Rouge would here, deny 'la littéralité de ces implications', but are unable to explain why the figure of the brother should be privileged over the figures 'de la sœur, de la fille, de l'épouse ou de l'étranger' (*Voyous*, p.88). For Derrida, the privileging of the figure of the brother allows power to be passed between those deemed to be 'semblable' brothers, to the exclusion of all others (*ibid.*, p. 89). Under The Democratic Republic of Kampuchea, families were routinely split up as the family unit was considered to be a potential source of resistance to the revolution. The state was to take over the role of the parent.⁸⁴ If Saloth Sâr calls Khieu Samphan 'brother' in these conditions it is not an indication of the love he feels for Samphan, a simile based on a stable idea of what

⁸³ Cf. *Voyous*, pp. 87-8, where Derrida outlines the argument that he makes on this subject in *Politiques de l'amitié*.

⁸⁴ Ben Kiernan, 'Introduction: A World Turned Upside Down', in *Children of Cambodia's Killing Fields: Memoirs of Survivors*, ed. by Kim DePaul and compiled by Dith Pran (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. xi-xii.

familial ties should be, but rather a subtle indication of the Khmer Rouge desire to usurp the place of the family.

Sellers claims that ‘the beginnings of the Khmer Rouge movement are described in terms which make the movement seem attractive’, but that Saloth Sâr’s ‘altruistic advice’ to Khieu Samphan is ‘contextualized by a speech in which hatred and the desire for victory are portrayed as motivating influences alongside the concern for justice and equality’ (Sellers, *Authorship*, p. 90). The characterisation of Sâr’s advice to Samphan as ‘altruistic’ seems to be flawed given that the advice comes together with a veiled threat of expulsion from the Khmers Rouges and is moreover a criticism of Samphan’s lack of political expediency rather than of a failure to serve society. Further, it seems unlikely that the Théâtre du Soleil’s audience would be so unfamiliar with Cambodia’s history as not to be chilled by even the initial appearance of the Khmers Rouges.

It is, however, true that with Saloth Sâr’s speech at the end of Act I Scene 1, the hatred at the core of his politics is made explicit. Sâr declares

Je les hais tous. Ceux qui n’ont pas le noble courage de haïr,
Ceux qui haïssent seulement de bout des lèvres, et sur la pointe des pieds.
Ô haine, je te rendrai justice.
Haine tu es puissance, tu es intelligence.
Et j’ose te proclamer
Le vrai Soleil de mon destin. (*Norodom*, p. 34)

Sâr’s hatred is indiscriminate. It is not careful, realised on tiptoe, nor a concept to which he pays lip-service, a rhetorical tool. It is all-consuming. Hatred is Sâr’s god, the Sun around which his destiny turns, the concept to which his apostrophe is addressed. A concept and not

an emotion, hatred is intelligence. It is the way in which Sâr sees the world, renders it intelligible. This hatred is seductive, evoked poetically in almost archaic terms that stand in stark contrast to the pragmatic plainness of Sâr's speech elsewhere. The beautiful and stirring piece of music that accompanied this speech in the 2011 performance was a chilling reminder of just how attractive rhetoric of hate could be. The ability to hate is, Sâr believes, proof of a 'noble' courage, proof of superiority. His hatred and not his Marxism separate Sâr from the people.

This embrace of an intellectual hatred is coupled with a rejection of emotion and the body, which are both key to Sihanouk's approach to his people. Sellers argues that 'the dreams of the Khmer Rouge for a reborn, innocent Cambodia, for example, are sabotaged as victory becomes more important than its cost in human life' (Sellers, Authorship, p.81). Sellers is correct in identifying an early dream for a 'reborn' and 'innocent' Cambodia: Sâr speaks of 'Notre prochain Cambodge, le vierge, le viril, l'incorruptible' (*Norodom*, p. 34). In the idea of a Cambodia that is 'vierge' is a complete rejection of Cambodia's past and all the tradition valued by Sihanouk. Virgin yet incorruptible, the country will be barren and static for all its masculine virility. The contradictory wish for virginity and virility, common to the Khmer Rouge and to certain militant religious orders,⁸⁵ indicates how far removed Sâr has become from the body and desire even as he evokes them. The body exists figuratively for Sâr, not as a material, desiring thing. The Khmer Rouge dream of Cambodia, which always ignores the body, was suspect from the start and not a beautiful project that becomes derailed. Nevertheless, it is true that the Khmer Rouge disregard for human life has increasingly terrible consequences for the Cambodian population. Khieu Samphan's asceticism is in the first époque praised by Sihanouk as an indication of his incorruptibility (*Norodom*, p. 49) and

⁸⁵ The Carmelite monks, for example, describe themselves as 'the Navy Seals, Green Berets, and Marines of the Roman Catholic Church', and see themselves as acting 'in a virile, ancient tradition of prayer'. They also live 'the Marian life', taking a vow of chastity. Cf. <<http://www.carmelitemonks.org/>> [accessed 31 August 2012].

whilst it earns him censure from a mother often figured holding a large basket of vegetables to underline her connection with food (*Norodom*, pp. 33-34), it does not seem to be a dangerous quality but rather an expression of a determined self-discipline. The Khmer Rouge rejection of the bodily begins as an indication of difference to the Cambodian population and the king that causes humorous incomprehension and irritation rather than fear. It becomes a concern when it is imposed on an entire nation.

The extent to which human life is subordinated to an ideal for the Khmer Rouge is made obvious as Khieu Samphan declares in Act II Scene 3 that ‘il ne faut pas compter nos morts. Il ne faut plus compter que nos victoires’ (*Norodom*, p. 79). ‘Nos morts’ are not casualties suffered by the Khmer Rouge leadership but deaths that happened in their names. Like Kissinger, Samphan accepts that others should sacrifice themselves for his cause. If they do not care about deaths, the Khmers Rouges also do not care about the quality of human lives. The revolution for Samnol ‘c’est transformer les pauvres Cambodgiens en bestiaux qui n’ont plus rien d’humain sauf la mémoire’ (*Norodom*, p. 289). In the pursuit of a country that is ‘vierge’, the Khmer Rouge will also attempt to destroy the memory, history, of the Cambodian people (Kiernan, ‘World Turned Upside Down’, p. xvii). The picture given here of the Khmer Rouge denying the Cambodian people humanity as they turn them into beasts is very different to the animal images that have been used by the monarchists to discuss the population. When Penn Nouth figures the Cambodian people as a herd of buffalo it is because he is also presenting Sihanouk as a bird (*Norodom*, p. 95). The image is a suggestion of the strength of the population and not of the superiority of the leadership. The Khmer rouge are ‘prêts à tout sacrifier’ for ‘le peuple khmer’ that ‘nous aimons par-dessus tout’ (*Norodom*, p. 190). This love is for an ill-defined idea of a Cambodian people rendered abstract as they are only ever conceived of as a mass, the importance of individual ties having been denied by the

Khmer Rouge.⁸⁶ Thus Khieu Samphan chooses to empty Phnom Penh, risking the deaths of all of its inhabitants and his own family rather than ‘renie aucune de mes theories’ (*Norodom*, p. 266). Hou Youn is killed for his refusal to accept this rationalisation of suffering (*ibid.*, p. 278). It is Hou Youn who recounts the emptying of Phnom Penh. He describes a ‘corpulent’ Ieng Sary driving past the fleeing population in his ‘Mercedes noire’ (*ibid.*, p. 279). The Democratic Republic of Kampuchea is already corrupt even at the moment of its realisation. The Khmer Rouge dream of an incorruptible, virgin, masculine Cambodia is shown to be founded on a denial of the body that renders it horrifically cruel. What is more, this denial of the body does not extend to all of the Khmer rouge leadership and corruption and hypocrisy are shown to be present at the very centre of government.

Conclusion

This chapter began by looking at how Cixous presents Cambodia in *Norodom*, and then went on to look at how different groups- the West, the monarchy, and the Khmer Rouge- use power in the play. Looking at the ways in which these groups used their power, and what their motivations were, gave some indication of what the basis of ethics could be.

Hypocrisy characterised the use of power by the Khmer Rouge and the West. The aims that they implicitly claimed through the explicit championing of democracy or Marxism—the promotion of freedom or of equality—were shown not to be the goals of those who represented either group in Cambodia. It was therefore not possible to pass judgement on the values of either freedom or equality as (ethical) goals based on the play’s presentation of the groups that claim those aims. Love of his people appeared to be genuinely the motivation of the fictional Sihanouk created in the play. This goal appeared to be positive, and the play

⁸⁶ Cf. Khieu Samphan’s insistence that the leadership not be accompanied by families or partners as they go into hiding (*Norodom*, p. 80).

celebrated love, emotion, and friendship. The ethical value of these will also be discussed in the following chapters.

Sihanouk's actions, although motivated by love, were not always shown to be positive, and his support of the Khmer Rouge, for example, allowed them to begin their bloody rule of Cambodia. It was argued in this chapter that naivety and not malice caused Sihanouk's shortcomings. It may therefore be tempting to absolve Sihanouk of responsibility for unethical actions that he (inadvertently) commits or allows to happen, and certainly he generally emerges as a better figure than many others in the play. Yet it is not true that Sihanouk appears as a wholly positive figure in the play: his naivety and lack of political shrewdness are flaws. What may be taken from the *Norodom*, then, is that knowledge and awareness of the world, and perhaps even pragmatism or shrewdness, may be ethically valuable.

Chapter Three: Identity in *L'Indiade* ou *L'Inde de leurs rêves* (1987)

Indiade, first produced by Ariane Mnouchkine in 1987, is the second of the plays that Cixous wrote for the Théâtre du Soleil. The play is both a poetic rewriting of historical events and an exploration of philosophical and ethical themes. It tells the story of the culmination of India's fight for independence, opening just before the outbreak of World War Two and ending with Gandhi's death and the bloody civil war that accompanied partition. The play revolves around the leaders of the Indian National Congress (henceforth INC) and of the Muslim League, although other characters, for whom there is no historical model, also appear within the drama.

Anu Aneja, in her reflection on the experience of translating *Indiade* into Hindi, claims that 'a story of the self' emerges from the exploration of India's history in the play.⁸⁷ *Indiade* is opened by Haridasi, a 'solitaire errante Bengali' (*Indiade*, p. 8) who, according to Julia Dobson, functions as the play's chorus (Dobson, *Scene of Writing*, p. 93). She immediately attempts to include the audience within the drama, asking questions in the manner of a stand-up comedian:

Hello!
Where do you come from?
Which country?
Where is your husband?
What are you doing here?
What is your name? etc (*Indiade*, p. 19)

⁸⁷ Anu Aneja, 'Translating HC/Writing the Self', in *Joyful Babel: Translating Hélène Cixous*, ed. by Myriam Diocaretz and Maria Segarra (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2004), pp. 165-182 (p. 174).

This female character is associated with humour from the opening of the play, an association which is common to several of Cixous's plays and that suggests a link between the theatre and *Le Rire de la Méduse* even if, as Conley points out, the 'sublime' humour of the plays is used to less 'explosive' effect than that of the essay (*Hélène Cixous*, p. 101). The questions are asked in English, which, it appears, is the lingua franca in India, where many different languages are spoken. The use of English is a striking reminder of India's subject status, and is also linked to the complex relationship between the colonial dominance of India by the British and the attempt, by elements within the Indian independence movement, to forge a unified India. Haridasi attempts to establish the identity of the audience, a precursor to the dramatic action where the audience, in turn, will search out the identity of an Indian subject. It is interesting therefore that the elements of identity she enquires after are first local, then national, relational then functional, and only finally personal or nominal.

Jean-François Lyotard claims that 'le *soi* est peu, mais il n'est pas isolé, il est pris dans une texture de relations plus complexe et plus mobile que jamais'.⁸⁸ The '*soi*' is 'placé à des postes par lesquels se passent des messages de nature diverse', and 'n'est jamais, même le plus défavorisé, dénué de pouvoir sur ces messages qui le traversent en le positionnant' (ibid.). It could be useful to use this model of selfhood to think about the characters in *Indiade*. What will be of interest to this chapter will be the ethical implications of the ways in which the characters are positioned in the society of the play by the different 'messages' which 'traversent' them, creating their identities. Lyotard argues that it is structurally necessary that the self have power to move within or alter the system, since this allows the system to resist 'sa propre entropie' (ibid.). This chapter will also consider the ethical

⁸⁸ Jean-François Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1979), p. 31.

implications of the ways in which the characters use their power to move within the 'complexe' and 'mobile' system, and control or alter messages about identities.

The first part of this chapter will look at the search for national identity that is at the heart of this play, and will also consider the other identities- regional, religious, caste or class- that the characters claim in addition to, or as a replacement for, the national identity that they desire. It will consider certain ethical questions related to this search for identity, including issues of inclusion and exclusion, and of how conflicting obligations may be judged. The figure of Gandhi in the play will then be considered in more detail. There will be an examination of his relationship to his wife, and to his double, the bear Moona Baloo. A comparison of the deaths of Moona Baloo and of Gandhi leads to a discussion of the ethical questions of grace, innocence, and responsibility. Finally, the chapter analyses the role that love may play in ethics in *Indiade*.

Identity

For Anne-Marie Picard, there is a particular 'être-indien' within the play, who 'se constitue sous nos yeux dans une réponse à la question: « Où suis-je? Que suis-je »'.⁸⁹ The 'être-indien' that Picard sees being constituted in the play has a national and only secondarily a personal identity: it asks first where it is and then who it is. This constitution of an 'être-indien' means the construction of the possibility of an Indian identity rather than the definition of a group of subjects as essentially Indian. Picard argues that this national identity can only be accessed through a relation to the other, which must name the nascent national I. In this way, the 'nous-indien' comes into being through its opposition to '*les Anglais*' (Picard, '*Indiade*', p. 18). It is true that political opposition to the English initially drives a

⁸⁹ Anne-Marie Picard, '*L'Indiade ou l'Inde de leurs rêves*', *Dalhousie French Studies*, 17 (Winter 1989) 17-26 (p. 18).

desire for cooperation between the Muslim League and the INC (*Indiade*, p. 21). Yet to claim that a unified Indian-we was created in opposition to the English would be to ignore the violent fragmentation that occurs at the end of the play. That this violence is only fully realised once the English other has withdrawn from sub-continental soil is not evidence of any unifying consequence of their presence but rather testament to English military power. Sarojini believes that

Cette division, les Anglais l'ont versée dans nos coupes comme un poison et bêtement nous nous en enivrons. Quand nous aurons enfin chassé l'étranger, le véritable, l'Anglais, les frères se retrouveront (*Indiade*, p. 34)

Far from having a unifying influence, the English are seen to have been crucial in creating divisions within the country. The power relations between the colonial and subject powers are here figured elegantly. India, colonised, is necessarily in a position of debt towards England, with its citizens, regions, and leaders holding up their empty cups to the colonial power. England gives not positively, unselfishly, but malevolently, as a means to weaken India further and so to confirm its position of power. The gift that they give is also Gift, poison. British power derives from having tempted India into intoxication, political pragmatism figured as moral corruption. That the discourse of division that is passed from Britain to India is figured as alcohol/poison suggests the way in which this relationship is played out on both ideological and material levels. India is poisoned by Britain but is also dependent upon her, as an individual may become dependent upon a drug or on alcohol. Although a specifically Indian subject may be constituted in *Indiade*, this subject is not created through opposition to the English, for the English have sown division within India for their own purposes.

Picard does see that a number of different Indian regional and ethnic identities ‘Hindou, Musulman, Punjabi, Bengali’ are possible within her ‘je-indien’ (Picard, ‘*Indiade*’, p. 18), but overlooks the profound implication that these identities may render the naming of a single Indian subject at all an impossible task. Political representatives from the Punjab and from Bengal feature repeatedly in the play and argue passionately for the independence and unique identity of their regions (*Indiade*, p. 66). The existence of such well-defined regional identities points to multiplicity in Indian identity that predates the division created by the English but that may cohabit within a single nation. Pakistan, by contrast, will be ‘le Pays des Purs’ (*Indiade*, p. 31). The Muslim League’s evocation of purity may be intended to conjure images of paradise and of a country in which crime and corruption will not be permitted. Judith Miller has demonstrated how *Indiade*’s Muslim League also presents the purity of Pakistan as the best possible solution to the problem of ‘the inequality of Muslims in pre-partition India’ (Miller, *Mnouchkine*, p. 85). Nevertheless, and more significantly, the image of purity suggests the desire to create a nation in which religious and racial difference will not be permitted. A single identity, coextensively national and religious, will be demanded in this pure Muslim nation.

The creation of Pakistan denies the possibility of an identity that is Indian and Muslim as well as Punjabi or Bengali. It is suggested that the India that will exist after partition may not have the same potential to join together different identities as would the inclusive India of Gandhi’s dreams. Ghaffar Khan reacts bitterly to the news of partition and the suggestion of self-determination in his region:

Je n’irai pas quémander mon admission à la porte de l’Hindoustan comme un pouilleux. Moi j’étais un seigneur, j’étais libre d’aimer qui j’aimais. Je

ne veux pas voter pour mon amour! Non! Je ne veux pas de l'Hindoustan!
Je veux le Pashtunistan! (*Indiade* p. 167)

The 'India' that emerges after partition is no longer seen as such by Khan. A partitioned India would be 'Hindoustan', a country dominated by a single religion, not his own. Despite the new India's pretended secularism, and the presence of other religious minorities within the new country, Khan nevertheless feels that assuming an Indian identity would now imply distancing himself from his religion. Khan rejects an India that is selectively inclusive: the India that he loved, dreamed of, and fought for, was one that included him unconditionally and allowed him a position of respect and freedom. He wanted an India which would give him an absolute and ethical welcome, the type of welcome which does not require an invitation. The India that will actually be created after partition will be one to which he must demand entrance. Khan reacts to the withdrawal of the potential for a lovingly inclusive national identity with an assertion of his local identity. The dream of absolute inclusivity destroyed, a partitioned India risks becoming increasingly fractured.

Cixous highlights the vast differences in wealth and divisions on the basis of caste and social class within Indian society that, we are told, will not be remedied by partition or by independence (*Indiade*, pp. 90, 97). For Inder, his identity as poor and untouchable will always precede any religious or national identity: 'Je suis Inder et je suis intouchable' (*Indiade*, p. 89) he says as he introduces himself to the audience. His poverty, his hunger, is an immediate, embodied concern (*Indiade*, p. 97). An Islamic religious identity is, of course, also written onto the (male) body, a fact whose comic potential is exploited by Cixous (*Indiade*, p. 181). Yet whilst Bahadur's circumcision positions him within a community and gains him temporary refuge in a Sufi tomb (*ibid.*), Inder's hunger does not visibly prove a connection to others and far from offering refuge is a constant worry to him. Whilst the

play's poor characters may be lovable, the play does not claim that poverty necessarily or always creates a positive identity or a comforting community, in the way that some who wish to justify ignoring the problem of poverty may do.

When characters in *Indiade* name themselves, it is often in relation to their social function or purpose within the drama. This can be seen in the presentation of the 'Vice-Roi', an unnamed occupant of the post, a figure of unwavering English authority (*Indiade*, p. 60), and in Act II Scene 3, which opens with an exchange between characters identified only as 'un soldat Sikh' and 'un soldat Hindou' (*Indiade*, p. 87). These characters exist not as fully psychologically motivated people but simply to indicate a perspective on the history of India that is related to their religion and social status. The Vice-Roi through his connection to England and the soldiers in 'grand uniforme de parade' (*Indiade*, p. 87) are also potent reminders of historical events and forces occurring beyond India. It is not only these minor characters who identify themselves through their function, but also the well-developed central characters of the play. In Act I Scene 4, Jinnah demands of Fatima 'Et maintenant, laisse-moi seul avec Jinnah' (*Indiade*, p. 73). This apparently bizarre request indicates that Jinnah's self is split. He refers to the half of it that is not explicitly 'moi' as 'Jinnah', not his first name but his surname, the name that appears in the stage directions of the play. Jinnah has two selves: a poetic self that exists within the play and is capable of emotion and also an existence as a Jinnah-function, a reflection of a historical original who must perform the same actions as this model in order to advance the dramatic action. This tension must be present in all of Cixous's poetic dramatizations of historical figures.

One of the important ethical questions posed in all of the plays is that of agency: how far we are free to make ethical decisions. The outcome of the decisions taken by the members of the

INC and Muslim league presented on stage are likely to be already known to the audience, and so it may seem that they are not really free to decide at all. Yet Cixous insists upon the fact that theatre is always experienced in the present, as Dobson has noted (cf. 'Absolute Present'). The characters may be deliberating over making decisions that were taken half a century ago, but they still have agency in the present of the fictional world they are creating on stage. The fact that we already know in advance the decisions that they will take does not mean that the play cannot provide us with a model of how ethical decisions can be made.

Some critics have been wary of the way in which Gandhi is portrayed in *Indiade*: Aneja, for example, has warned that 'the historical Gandhi has been engulfed into the larger than life legend of Gandhi that is created in the drama' (Aneja, 'Translating HC', p. 174), leaving little space to criticise the real historical figure of Gandhi who, she demonstrates, held some potentially objectionable and conservative views, particularly regarding the position of women (Aneja, 'Translating HC', p. 171). Certainly any attempt to canonise in theatre a historical figure whose actions were ethically wrong would be ethically problematic. However, as will be discussed below, the legendary Gandhi created in the play is not an uncomplicatedly 'good' character. It will furthermore be shown that there is much that is fantastical in the play's presentation of Gandhi, particularly the recurrent use of images of divinity and saintliness. The play does not claim to be an attempt at accurate biography, and it is in this way that the audience may relate to a fictional Gandhi, whose actions can illuminate moral questions, without passing judgement on the real, historical figure of Gandhi. Whilst the public actions of *Indiade*'s Gandhi are those of his historical model, in the play we watch a private Gandhi, with an inner life that is Cixous's invention.

This does not resolve all of the problems related to the tension between poetic character and historical model

Gandhi, the poetic character, has a complex relationship to, and shared identity with, his wife. Mourning Kastourbaï's death, Gandhi asks 'Peut-on dormir les yeux ouverts? Ton absence m'arrache les paupières. Trop de nuit et trop de lumière' (*Indiade*, p.76). He characterises the experience of his wife's death as one of physical pain and violence; he has lost part of his own body, for she was the eyelid whilst he is the eye. They coexisted within the same organ, interdependent yet distinct. Kastourbaï's death does not end the embodied relationship between the two, and Gandhi's wife returns to the stage in the scene that immediately follows the announcement of her death. Offering her husband sage advice, just as she did when first she appeared in the play (*Indiade*, p. 56), Kastourbaï asks Gandhi if 'Tu m'entends?' to which he replies 'Evidemment, puisque tu es dans ma poitrine' (*Indiade*, p. 85). The almost humorous use of the word 'évidemment' suggests that Kastourbaï's reappearance is not some profound spiritual experience but rather natural and quotidian. The change that can be noticed in Gandhi's behaviour after Kastourbaï's death, his increased willingness to listen to others and accept shared leadership (cf. *Indiade*, p. 161), suggests that Kastourbaï, in Gandhi's chest, may influence his behaviour. Several critics suggest that *Indiade's* Gandhi may display the sort of bisexuality that Cixous described in 'Sorties'.⁹⁰ This is a bisexuality that is an ability to access both a male and a female libidinal economy.⁹¹ It may be this embodied relationship with his wife that allows Gandhi to have access to a female economy. Kastourbaï, who sometimes appears on stage, and who continues to advise and influence her husband, has lived on within Gandhi's body past her death without the erasure of her difference. The relationship of connected difference lived by Gandhi and Kastourbaï cannot

⁹⁰ Aneja, 'Translating HC', p. 172; Judith G. Miller, *Ariane Mnouchkine* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), p. 86; and Picard, 'Conjugate dreams', p. 33.

⁹¹ Cf. Hélène Cixous, 'Sorties', pp. 113-115. Cixous's concept of bisexuality is discussed in greater detail in my Chapter One.

be reduced to the simple consumption of one by the other, and appears as a model for the desired relationship between the Islamic community and a unified India.

The change in Gandhi's behaviour after his wife's death may also be related to the question of the ethical value of emotion. It is only through Kastourbai's death that Gandhi experiences an excess of emotion: when he cries in mourning, Sarojini is 'le seul et silencieux témoin de l'unique chagrin de Gandhi' (*Indiade*, p. 76). This will be not simply the first but also the only experience of grief that Gandhi will have. He calls his grief a 'tribut à la tendresse humaine' (ibid.), which he does not wish to pay again. Gandhi's experience shows that grief has a potentially positive role to play in ethics; grief is related to human tenderness, and it is after his experience of mourning that Gandhi, in the next scene, is prompted to attempt an ethically positive reconciliation with Jinnah (ibid. pp. 77-8). Nevertheless, the experience of mourning is clearly painful and the wish to avoid such pain does not seem to be an ethical fault in the play. Indeed when Jinnah, after losing his wife, retreats into his grief, declaring himself to be motivated by the 'crauté' of death, it is evident that the wholehearted embrace of grief is dangerous.

Innocence and Responsibility

As Picard and Aneja both point out, Gandhi and the she-bear Moona Baloo are also linked in important ways.⁹² Haridasi makes the connection between the two explicit within the play, suggesting that Gandhi and Moona Baloo are:

Deux bébés Moona.

L'un est couvert de poils.

L'autre est un Moona tout nu. (*Indiade*, p. 125)

⁹² Aneja, 'Translating HC', p. 176; Picard, 'Conjugate dreams', p. 29.

Although the differences in appearance that make the link between Gandhi and Moona Baloo visually so comically unlikely are pointed out, the two are nevertheless connected. Gandhi becomes Moona, a bear, but the infant bear is not an ‘ourson’ but a ‘bébé’: neither the animal nor the human is effaced in Haridasi’s comparison. The pair are immediately joined by their shared innocence: they are both ‘bébés’.

Despite having been characterised by her innocence, Moona Baloo will eventually kill two men and be killed in her turn by Bahadur, her handler. Even as he is obliged to kill Moona because she has become violent, Bahadur insists that ‘Pourtant, je le sais, tu étais innocente’ (*Indiade*, p. 191). Morag Shiach suggests that ‘the story of the bear immediately brings to mind Kleist’s thoughts on the limitations of human consciousness, where he attributes more grace to a puppet, or to a bear, than to any human burdened with the legacy of self-consciousness’ (*Politics of Writing*, p. 133). In Heinrich von Kleist’s 1810 essay, ‘On the Puppet Theatre’, it is claimed that a puppet dances with greater grace than any human can, for their actions always emanate from a single centre of gravity. The dancer, by contrast, risks affectation for their soul or understanding may not always be located in the same place as the centre of gravity that drives their movements. Kleist’s essay goes on to consider the figure of a tethered bear who can best any man at fencing, because it is never tricked when a fencer feints. ‘On the Puppet Theatre’ concludes with this exchange:

‘But,’ I said rather distractedly, ‘should we have to eat again of the Tree of Knowledge to fall back into the state of innocence?’

‘Indeed,’ he replied; ‘that is the final chapter in the history of the world’.⁹³

⁹³ Heinrich von Kleist, ‘On the Puppet Theatre’, in *Selected Writings*, ed. and trans. by David Constantine (London: JM Dent, 1997), pp. 411-6.

As Cixous explains, the essay has proposed ‘two kinds of innocence’. The first innocence is the innocence of ‘the child who is not yet born’, who lacks any knowledge. It is an innocence that is impossible for any subject, since ‘we are not without a certain kind of knowledge’. Cixous and Kleist are describing an innocence that is primarily related to (self-) knowledge, not actions, and as soon as we are born, Cixous suggests, we already know too much to be innocent. Yet the subject that cannot have access to this ‘virgin’ innocence may still attempt to find ‘a second innocence, neither pre-given nor paradisiacal but one that has been found again. Or rather, it can be regained though it is constantly threatened or being lost again’.⁹⁴ For Kleist, to achieve this innocence we must ‘eat again of the Tree of Knowledge’, expanding our knowledge until it is almost godlike. Thus in Kleist’s story there appear two innocent figures: the tethered bear who lacks knowledge and the all-knowing divine. These figures may be present in *Indiade* as the bear Moona Baloo and the saint-like Gandhi.

First innocence may be impossible for man but, for Kleist, it is can be accessed by the puppet or the animal, and so it is available to Gandhi’s double, the bear Moona Baloo. Like the bear of Kleist’s story, Moona Baloo is innocent of self-knowledge: she (re)acts according to her environment and not according to any principles that she has established or (false) picture of the world she has created in her mind.⁹⁵ In the violence of partition, innocence thus becomes an encouragement more than an obstacle to wrongdoing. Moona Baloo’s behaviour stands in a stark contrast to Gandhi’s. Whereas Moona Baloo becomes violent because she has been profoundly affected by her environment, Gandhi may be criticised for failing to take adequate

⁹⁴ Hélène Cixous, ‘Grace and Innocence’, in *Readings: The Poetics of Blanchot, Joyce, Kafka, Kleist, Lispector, and Tsvetayeva*, ed. and trans. by Verena Andermatt Conley (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), pp. 28-73 (p. 31).

⁹⁵ G.A. Wells argues that the difference between the conscious human subject and the animal lies in the fact that the human subject, who has partial knowledge of the world, has built up in their mind a false ideal picture of the world. It is necessary for the conscious subject to refer back to this ideal picture when making decisions. The conscious human subject thus always acts with reference to their own mind and not directly in response to the world. The animal, by contrast, reacts instinctively to stimuli from their environment, and it is in this way that the bear is able to best the man in fencing. (G.A. Wells, ‘The Limitations of Knowledge: Kleist’s “Über das Marionettentheater”’, *The Modern Language Review*, 80 [1985], 90-96 [p. 94]).

account of the world around him. In the midst of the growing violence in Bihar, Gandhi counselled Nehru ‘Pas de bombes. Du temps. Prenez du temps’ (*Indiade*, p. 141). The extent to which Gandhi has underestimated the violence is here indicated. He appears unable to offer a pragmatic solution to violence and proffers a clichéd maxim; take your time. In *Indiade* it is clear that it is dangerous to attempt to divorce oneself completely from the world, just as it is dangerous to submit completely and uncritically to a status quo.

In Cixous’s reading of Kleist she describes how the ‘second innocence’, innocence that can be regained, exists ‘only in relation-ever so slight but always there-with the possibility of its opposite’ (Cixous, ‘Grace and Innocence’, p. 31). This innocence must be threatened if it is to exist at all, and so it is when Gandhi’s faults become evident that he may hope to gain innocence again. Gandhi is made to understand the deadly consequences of his innocent actions and attitudes when he is confronted by his old friend Rajkumar, who had lost his family in India’s violence. The promise of a visit by Gandhi means that Rajkumar remains in the Punjab despite the dangers of inter-communal violence that accompany partition (*Indiade*, p. 173). Having lost his family, his home and his innocence in the sectarian fighting, Rajkumar returns to rebuke Gandhi for not having lived up to his own rhetorical promise: ‘Rajkumar est venu vous dire: je ne veux plus de vous, Mahatma. Vous aviez dit: sur mon cadavre la Partition! Non ! Sur les cadavres de mon épouse et de mes enfants!’ (*Indiade*, p. 184). The ‘cadavre’ of Gandhi’s clichéd expression is made material in Rajkumar’s invocation of the dead bodies of his wife and children. Gandhi is criticised for having failed to make adequate use of his vaunted privileged position in India: his failure to keep his promise of self-sacrifice makes Gandhi responsible for the deaths that happened during partition. In her discussion of Kleist’s grace and innocence, Cixous states that she ‘would like to avoid the trap that consists in constituting innocence as an infantile state, where it becomes

synonymous with irresponsibility' ('Grace and Innocence', p. 41). Gandhi and Moona Baloo are both innocent and yet responsible for the deaths of others.

Gandhi's response to his new self-awareness is to determine to fast until India's violence ends. He makes an attempt to regain his innocence through self-sacrifice, finally living up to the promise that he had made to Rajkumar. Gandhi's actions suggest that there is a possibility that divine innocence and grace can be lost but regained. Like Christ, who suffered on the cross so that humankind may be forgiven, Gandhi too will suffer physically in order to save those he loves and in this way achieve grace. Gandhi's self-awareness has been accompanied by the knowledge that he may act to improve India's situation. This may not be the perfect knowledge of Kleist's divine, but it is enough perhaps to redeem Gandhi in the eyes of his audience and of the INC's members. In the scenes that preceded his decision to fast, Gandhi had been shown to withdraw from or be marginalised within his own party and the Indian political scene. Thus in Act III Scene 4, Nehru mentions that he has not seen the Mahatma 'depuis trois mois' (*Indiade*, p. 141), and it is ultimately with Nehru that Mountbatten negotiates independence (*Indiade*, p. 163). Gandhi's marginality within the INC may be related to his message: Conley suggests that Gandhi's 'dreams of love' and different 'modes of exchanging' are 'incompatible with contemporary fights for power' (Conley, *Hélène Cixous*, p. 100). Although Binita Mehta insists that, in reality, the historical Gandhi was a 'shrewd' politician,⁹⁶ the divine morality of *Indiade's* Gandhi may mean that practically, he is an inefficient leader.

Yet when he fasts it is agreed by the INC leadership that 'la vie de Gandhi est notre bien le plus précieux' (*Indiade*, p. 193). However ineffective his leadership may be politically,

⁹⁶ Binita Mehta, *Widows, Pariahs, and Bayadères: India as Spectacle* (London: Associated University Press, 2002), p. 193.

Gandhi is described as a valuable commodity for India. The potential loss of Gandhi mobilises the members of congress, prompting renewed efforts for peace. The success of Gandhi's fast may therefore owe as much to recognition of his vital position as national figurehead and international representative as to the intervention of any divine grace. Cixous does not ignore the realities of politics in order to deliver a utopian message. When he is able to end his fast, Gandhi is only on stage for a brief moment before his death. It is therefore not entirely clear that he has succeeded in achieving a renewed innocence through knowledge and ascetic suffering.

Picard notes that Gandhi and Moona Baloo are finally joined together by their deaths (Picard, 'Conjugate Dreams', p. 29). Nevertheless, it is not possible to draw a strong parallel between X and Bahadur, for whilst Bahadur kills Moona Baloo in order prevent any further deaths, X revels in the act of killing and is motivated by bitterness combined with a desire for fame (*Indiade*, p. 187). The bear's handler feels great remorse at killing his bear and is left widowed and alone after her death, when X kills Gandhi it is the whole of India that is left bereft. Their deaths may draw Moona Baloo and Gandhi together, but that does not mean that the two events are identical. The question of guilt, and particularly of whether motivations can mitigate guilt, will be considered further in the following chapter; certainly here Bahadur's actions are portrayed as ethically better than X's.

Universal Love

Dobson points to Gandhi's 'apparently boundless capacity for love' (Dobson, *Scene of Writing*, p. 92), and it is certainly true that he preaches love as a response to the political problems that India faces (*Indiade*, pp. 81-5), vaunting his ability to love Jinnah even as he is rejected. He practices what Mehta refers to as 'universal love', unconditionally and ethically

extended even to those who wish him harm (Mehta, *India as Spectacle*, p. 197). Gandhi's universal love does however lead him to sometimes act in a way that the audience may find distressing or ethically dubious, as is particularly evident in his response to Nazism. Although he clearly feels no sympathy for the attitudes and actions of the Nazis, Gandhi responds to their aggression with pity and a demand for non-violent resistance on the part of Europe's Jewish population (*Indiade*, p. 46). Believing in universal love, of everybody, Gandhi cannot place a higher value on the lives of Europe's Jews than on the lives of those that threaten them, and therefore cannot countenance armed resistance to Nazism. Such a response is perhaps saintly but is also naïve to the point of being shocking and chilling. Cixous's Gandhi suggests how it may be necessary to prioritise or limit our ethical responsibilities to different people.

Yet saintly love still connects Gandhi to the everyday, in so far as it allows him to develop personal relationships with members of lower castes and so leave the rarefied realm of politics. As Dobson has suggested, it is this 'contact with ordinary people' which distinguishes Gandhi from the other politicians portrayed in the play (Dobson, *Scene of Writing*, p. 91). Although Mehta may be correct in suggesting that the historical Gandhi was used by the INC to 'mobilize the peasantry', his love of the lower castes being a political ploy (Mehta, *India as Spectacle*, p. 193), it is nevertheless true that the Gandhi of *Indiade* displays genuine love for the untouchables or peasants that he encounters. Gandhi is the only one of the political class who ever notices Haridasi's presence on stage and converses with her. Equally, Gandhi's determination to build a positive relationship with Inder is a marked divergence from the indifference shown to the Rickshaw-driver by other politicians. When Inder is dismissive of his political concerns (*Indiade*, p. 90), mocks his decision to move into Banghi colony (*Indiade*, p. 124) and is unrelentingly pessimistic about India's future

(*Indiade*, p. 134), Gandhi reacts only with good humour and affection (*Indiade*, p. 124). For all his apparent aggression toward the Mahatma, Inder is forced to ask himself when Gandhi's death is announced 'Et maintenant qui va m'aider? Qui va me supporter?' (*Indiade*, p. 200). Coming as they do just after his death, these words function almost as a eulogy that leaves his affection for the poor and those who are determined to be unlovable as our final impression of Gandhi.

It is not just the impoverished and those who do not believe that they will find other representation that love Gandhi. Although they may display frustration at his leadership, other members of the INC do display love for Gandhi. Reunited with Nehru following their incarceration, Gandhi teases his old friend, lifting his hat and exclaiming 'Plus un cheveu!' (*Indiade*, p. 88). The gesture is not saintly but very human and affectionate, and indicates the love and the humour that are present in Gandhi's personal relations. The love felt for Gandhi by members of the INC is particularly evident in his relationship with Ghaffar Khan, who reacts bitterly to the failure to prevent partition, saying 'Vous ne m'avez pas sauvé. Et pourtant j'ai en vous une foi sans mélange. Votre visage est toute ma joie' (*Indiade*, p. 171). It is not entirely clear whether Khan is reproaching a god whose presence nevertheless brings him bliss or expressing an almost homoerotic love for Gandhi. The words follow a scene in which Gandhi has failed to convince India's political leaders to reject partition, but the calls for godly intervention in politics that occur throughout the play mean that it could equally be a god who is criticised for this failure. Later in his speech, Khan directly addresses Allah, but it is not clear that when Khan exclaims 'Oh! Allah, mon Aimé, tu m'as déraciné' (*Indiade*, p. 172) he is addressing the same person as he was earlier in the speech: certainly Gandhi responds as if Khan's words were meant for him. If it is impossible then to define who exactly Ghaffar Khan's intended interlocutor is, it may be because his 'foi sans mélange' is

not in a single figure but in both Gandhi and God. His faith is pure in that it is not mixed with doubt, but it is not faith in something pure, in a single idea. This is borne out in Khan's promise that in the future, he will pray turned to Mecca, but also turned to India and to Gandhi (*Indiade*, p. 172). Gandhi is capable of inspiring devotion in others, with all the religious connotations that the word implies.

Conclusion

This chapter began by looking at the question of identity in *Indiade*. It argued that, in the play, a positive national identity would be one that was welcoming and heterogeneous, able to include with love people with many different, for instance, religious, class, or regional identities. The same suspicion of the notion of 'purity' that was identified in *Norodom* was shown to be present in *Indiade*. The chapter examined how Gandhi's wife Kastourbaï, after her death, maintained an independent identity whilst also living on within her husband's body. It was argued that, implicit in this image, was the idea that openness to others and to difference was a good quality on a local as well as a national level.

The chapter went on to argue, with reference to the figure of Gandhi, that, in *Indiade*, the concept of innocence is separate from that of responsibility. Innocence was not always portrayed as a good condition, since the innocent could be responsible for bad actions. The question of how responsible a subject is for actions that they committed unknowingly will also be of importance in the next chapter.

Finally, the chapter explored the ethical value of love. It was argued that Gandhi attempts to practise a universal love that encompasses everyone equally. This goal was certainly praiseworthy: as it does in *Norodom*, love figures positively in this play, it gave hope to the

underprivileged of India and, moreover, it was love of others that prompted Gandhi to begin the fast that ends the violence of partition. However, the goal of universal love was also flawed, and obliged Gandhi to support some ethically dubious views. In *Indiade*, it seems that Gandhi consistently fails to prioritise his obligations appropriately. This chapter linked this failure to Gandhi's innocence, but it can also be related to the attempt at universal love. Gandhi is rebuked for ethical failures by friends who believe that he ought to have particular moral obligations towards them. Gandhi is distracted from his friends, as he is from his duties as political leader, by other obligations often related to the attempt at universal love.

Chapter Four: Justice and *La Ville parjure ou le Réveil des Erinyes* (1994)

Cixous's first two collaborations with the Théâtre du Soleil were both epic retellings of contemporary Asian history. Her 1994 play, *La Ville parjure ou le Réveil des Erinyes* abandons many of the features that were common to *Norodom* and *Indiade*. The play is not set in Asia; instead the action takes place in an imaginary location, a cemetery modelled on Cairo's city of the dead,⁹⁷ but which has been transposed to the edge of a city which is explicitly European (*Ville parjure*, Scene XII, p. 124). Rather than the Shakespearean histories that informed *Norodom* and *Indiade*, *Ville parjure* takes Greek tragedy as its model.⁹⁸

Nevertheless the inspiration for *Ville parjure* is still contemporary history: France's *affaire du sang contaminé*. The blood scandal centred around two key figures: the head of the Paris Blood Centre, Michel Garetta, and Jean-Pierre Allain, the centre's chief scientist. The Paris Blood Centre provided haemophiliacs with blood concentrates made with plasma from between 2,000 and 20,000 donors. These concentrates were designed to improve clotting in haemophiliac blood and had a shelf-life of around two years. However, the large pool of donors used to produce the concentrated blood products meant that they were particularly at risk of contamination by HIV.⁹⁹

Despite U.S. warnings that HIV could be spread through blood products, recommendations in 1984 that plasma should be heated to deactivate the HIV virus, and the availability from March of 1985 of an American Abbott test for HIV, until the October of 1985 the Paris Blood

⁹⁷ Bernadette Fort, 'Theater, History, Ethics: An Interview with Hélène Cixous on *The Perjured City, or the Awakening of the Furies*' in *New Literary History*, 28.3 (1997), 425-456 (p. 443).

⁹⁸ For a detailed examination of the relationship between Cixous's *Ville parjure* and the conventions of Greek tragedy, see Françoise Quillet, 'L'Écho tardif de la tragédie dans la création contemporaine: *La Ville parjure ou le Réveil des Erinyes*', in *Tragédies tardives*, ed. by Pierre Frantz and François Jacob (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 2002), pp. 199-210.

⁹⁹ Susan Ayres, 'Hélène Cixous's *The Perjured City*: nonprosecution alternatives to collective violence', in *New York City Law Review*, 9.1 (2005-2006), 1-30 (pp. 3-4).

Centre did nothing to prevent their blood products from becoming contaminated by HIV.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, the centre actively worked to ‘dump’ the blood stocks that they suspected of contamination on foreign markets and in hospitals. Almost half of the estimated 3000 haemophiliacs in France were infected with HIV by 1985 and in Paris the figure was even higher, with 71% of haemophiliacs affected. In total, an estimated 4,000 people were finally infected with HIV from contaminated blood transfusions.¹⁰¹

Ann-Marie Casteret brought the affair to public attention in 1991 with an article in the magazine *L'Événement du jeudi*. In 1992 she published a book on the scandal, *L’Affaire du sang*. Subsequently, in 1992, Garetta and Allain were tried and convicted for the crime of merchandising fraud. Garetta received a four year sentence and Allain a four year sentence with two years suspended. A higher court later found that Garetta and Allain 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 sentence (Ayres, ‘nonprosecution’, p. 4). In 1999, the former Prime Minister Laurent Fabius, Minister of Social Affairs Georgina Dufoix and Health Minister Edmond Hervé were charged with manslaughter. Dufoix and Fabius were acquitted and whilst Hervé was found guilty, the court did not hand down any punishment (BBC).

For Cixous and Mnouchkine, the affair was ‘immediately *the metaphor of today’s tragedy*’ (Fort, ‘Ethics’, p. 430). Their exploration of the blood scandal is therefore also an

¹⁰⁰ *tasante.com* with *Libération, Le Parisien, l’Humanité*, ‘Sang contaminé: affaire classée’ (19/06/2003), <<http://www.tasante.com/article/lire/2098/Sang-contamine-affaire-classee.html>> [accessed 15/03/2012].

¹⁰¹ BBC News, ‘World: Europe Blood scandal ministers walk free’ (09/03/1999), <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/293367.stm>> [accessed 15/03/2012]; and Ayres, ‘Non-Prosecution’, p. 4.

examination of wider problems in contemporary France. This is not however to deny the specificity of the historical inspiration of the play: the blood scandal and the critique of contemporary society are interdependent. *Ville parjure* is not a retelling of the events of the scandal, but rather stages a trial of X1 and X2, two doctors accused of having infected children with an unnamed plague. As Prenowitz points out, by the time the play begins it is already ‘too late’ and the Mother, the plaintiff at this tribunal, has already seen both of her sons die.¹⁰² All that remains is the attempt to achieve justice. For Cixous, the theatre is the ideal place for the staging of a search for justice. There is, she claims, ‘always a trial’ either ‘behind or just underneath all plays’ (Fort, ‘Ethics’, p. 441). The trial that lurks behind all plays is of a different type to the trials that are permitted within the legal system. Cixous claims that ‘in real life, the tribunals are there to repress’, are designed to prevent the victim from seeking vengeance and the criminal from reoffending. Within the theatre, by contrast, a tribunal can be held that does not repress, that does not prohibit any kind of testimony, that does not therefore ignore the emotional impact of the crime, and in which victim and accused can speak themselves, not through representatives (ibid.).

In order to bring about this theatrical trial, Cixous borrows figures from Greek mythology: the Erinyes or Furies. These three divine female figures of justice and vengeance appear in Aeschylus’ play *The Eumenides*, which Cixous translated for the Théâtre du Soleil in 1992. Cixous is, as Françoise Quillet explains, borrowing from the long theatrical tradition in which the playwright consistently places herself (Quillet, ‘Écho tardif’, p. 207), and thus the introduction of the mythical is not intended to be radical or jarring but rather appropriate to the type of theatre that she always wants to create. Cixous explains that ‘Il faut garder à l’horreur sa grandeur et à la pitié sa profondeur de pur cristal, et cela ne peut se faire que dans

¹⁰² Eric Prenowitz, ‘Dialectics of Another Litter: Found(er)ing Democracy’, *OLR*, 24 (2002), 113-131 (p. 121).

les airs mythologiques' ('Reconnaissance de dettes', p. 15). The absolute figures of the Erinyes function to permit an absolute experience of emotion. Myth, removed from the everyday, escapes pragmatic concerns and a social need for compromise and allows the audience to sympathise completely with the victims of the crime and be disgusted by the actions of the accused. As Dobson explains, the use of mythic characters thus reveals the extent to which we, in our everyday lives, must accept modern tragedies and acts as 'defence against the anaesthetic effects of mass-media coverage of contemporary injustices' ('Absolute Present', p. 277). The implication here is that however moralising or sensationalising mass-media coverage of certain events may be, it does not ultimately encourage full sympathy with the victims of atrocities nor inspire a criticism of the systems of society. Cixous's play will aim to achieve both of these things.

Within *Ville parjure*, several different models of 'justice' emerge. The model of justice used by the imagined *ville* corresponds roughly to the justice of the contemporary legal system, the system through which Garetta, Allain and several members of the French government were tried in the wake of the real blood scandal. In response to the failings that they see in this system, the play's Erinyes call for a return to the vengeful justice, *Dike*, of which they were the arbiters in former times. A final model of justice is suggested by the Mother, who becomes the representative of the suffering of victims of crime. Ayres likens the Mother's justice to the 'restorative justice' enacted by South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Committees after the end of Apartheid (Ayres, 'Non-Prosecution', p. 19). This chapter will examine and compare these different representations of justice.

The Justice Practised in the City

Mary Noonan claims that it is the entire ‘law of the democratic state’ that is ‘put on trial’ in Cixous’s play.¹⁰³ Whilst it is problematic to characterise *Ville parjure* as an abstract critique of timeless structures given the importance of the Blood Scandal as a source for the play, it is possible to find in *Ville parjure* a larger criticism of the social order. Within *Ville parjure*, the social order and the legal system are inextricably tied. These ties are evident from the first appearance on stage of the two lawyers, Maîtres Brackmann and Marguerre, who represent X1 and X2. In scene II, Brackmann describes how he would have counselled his clients to accept a prison term as punishment for their involvement in the affair. Not only is a prison sentence bearable because there is, in the words of the cemetery guardian Eschyle, ‘un terme à la emprisonnement’ (*Ville parjure* scene II, p. 29) but moreover, for Maître Brackmann

Nous acceptons une sanction ingrate, cruelle,
Mais l’homme est noble.
Comme Goethe il aime l’ordre par-dessus tout.
« Mieux vaut une injustice que le désordre. »
Nous consentons à payer une note injuste
Pour mettre un terme à ces bouleversements. (Ibid., p. 30)

Eschyle’s comment implicitly prompts a comparison between the suffering of the victims of the crime, which will be endless, and that of the perpetrators, which has a legally sanctioned limit. If Eschyle’s comment seems bitter and ironic, it may be because there is an assumption that in a fair or just system, the suffering of the punished criminal should be commensurate with the suffering of their victim. Elsewhere in the play, the Mother suggests that it may be impossible and undesirable to measure and balance individual suffering in the way suggested here (*Ville parjure*, Scene XVII, p. 165). Even if such a thing were desirable, Eschyle is

¹⁰³ Mary Noonan, ‘Performing the Voice of Writing in the In-Between: Hélène Cixous’s *La Ville parjure*’, *Nottingham French Studies*, 38.1 (Spring 1999), 67-79 (p. 69).

indicating that it would not be possible given the apparatus of the state's justice system. For Maître Brackmann, the temporal limit that comes with all legal punishments becomes something to be celebrated, for it allows the client to bear the unjust prison sentence that he must suffer for the greater good of the order. Eschyle agrees with Brackmann that the 'note' paid by the criminal will be 'injuste', but there is an ironic lack of understanding on Brackmann's part as he fails to see that Eschyle's idea of what a just reaction to X1 and X2's actions would be is not the same as his own.

Brackmann's speech begins to suggest the number of institutions tainted by the crimes of X1 and X2. Brackmann always uses the subject 'nous' and in this way portrays his clients' wishes, culpability, and responsibilities as inseparable from his own. With his 'nous', Brackmann attempts to speak not just as himself and his client but as all of the men of the city, rendering his opinions unquestionable, shared, common sense. With their voices appropriated by Brackmann's pronoun, all of the inhabitants of the city are tacitly, passively, playing some part in maintaining order as defined by the lawyer. It is only by setting themselves up outside of the city, in deliberate opposition to its order, that the Mother and her supporters avoid inclusion within the order's 'nous'.

A quotation from Goethe forms the basis of Maître Brackmann's call for order. The writing that Cixous performs in her own voice is deeply intertextual but whereas generally she uses quotations playfully, to encourage a consideration of multiple viewpoints, here Brackmann quotes a supposed authority in order to demonstrate his own learning and to render his opinion axiomatic. Maître Brackmann's quote may not in itself be enough to suggest that the education system and the literary canon are implicated in the maintenance of a fundamentally unjust system, particularly given the way that Eschyle is presented in *Ville parjure* as a

guardian of memory and protector of the marginal. However, Brackmann's quote does suggest how knowledge can become a powerful tool for the construction of an unquestionable social order. Goethe's maxim certainly has currency with the educated elites of the perjured city and, with the exception of a single doctor, Madame Lion, the medical profession decides to support X1 and X2 out of fear that condemning them would place their 'ordre' at risk (*Ville parjure* scene XIV, p. 146-9).

Ville parjure's intertextual references to *The Eumenides* suggest how the legal system of the city state came into being precisely so that 'ordre' could be maintained. Despite having killed his mother, Orestes is acquitted by Athena's tribunal.¹⁰⁴ His successful defence rests on three main arguments: firstly, he was acting on the instructions of a higher authority, Apollo;¹⁰⁵ secondly, his actions were only a response to the unnatural and disorderly actions of his mother (*Eumenides*, ll. 625-8, p. 50); and finally, he did not pose any threat to the city of Athens because he had been cleansed (*ibid.*, l. 445, p. 39). Thus the inaugural and model criminal trial (*ibid.*, ll. 680-685, p. 53), which was set up in order to protect Athens from the wrath of the Erinyes (*ibid.*, ll. 475-80, p. 40), shows with its result that the good of the city and the maintenance of order should be the standard by which guilt is judged.¹⁰⁶ Legal guilt is related to future threat and not only to past action, and so becomes negotiable. X1 and X2's defence relies on the idea that guilt can be passed on to others- for Dobson, passed like a 'baton' from individual doctors to ministers and the state (*Scene of Writing*, p. 108)- or mitigated by circumstances.

¹⁰⁴ Aeschylus, *The Eumenides*, in *The Oresteia*, trans. and with notes by Hugh Lloyd-Jones (London: Duckworth, 1982), l. 752 (p. 59) (Henceforth *Eumenides*).

¹⁰⁵ (*Eumenides*, l. 594, p. 48). Apollo also claims to be acting on the authority of Zeus (*Eumenides*, ll. 615-618, p. 49).

¹⁰⁶ The trial of Orestes will be discussed in more detail below, in relation to the Erinyes.

During questioning by the Erinyes, X2 attributes the deaths of the Mother's children to 'homicide naturel', but is quickly corrected by X1:

Imbécile! Permettez!

S'il y a eu faute, c'est la faute de l'État, évidemment.

Ceux de l'État, c'est eux qui tracent le chemin

Dont moi je suis la pente soumissieusement. (*Ville parjure* scene XII, pp. 118-9)

The defence of 'homicide naturel' does appear ridiculous given that the concept of homicide exists within legal vocabulary to describe the killing of one person by another. X2's clumsy phrase is both an indication of his lack of political skill and a suggestion of the ways in which the concepts of science, nature and necessity may be manipulated to justify the most unethical behaviours.

Despite his violent rebuke to X2, X1 still denies that individual conscious human agency is responsible for the affair. It is to the state that the Mother should look and X2 confirms that, in this affair, 'C'était à l'État de nous interdire de vendre des produits frappés d'incertitude' (*Ville parjure* scene XII, p. 119). X1's defence is carefully worded to avoid categorically admitting that there was any fault, and he claims hyperbolically that he would rather die than lose 'une seule goutte de mon innocence' (*Ville parjure* scene scene XVIII, p. 175). Not yet having been judged to be guilty, X1 is legally, and therefore in his eyes completely, innocent. Yet despite his efforts to deny any personal culpability, to assert that he was acting legally and therefore acceptably, X1's adverb, 'soumissieusement', which is a combination of the ideas of submission (se soumettre) and of tendering for a contract (soumissionner), reveals the

self-interested financial motivation that was at play in his actions. A critique of capitalism can be identified not only here but elsewhere in *Ville parjure*.¹⁰⁷

Cixous has suggested that the language of the Vichy and Nuremburg trials resonates throughout *Ville parjure* (Fort, 'Ethics', p. 438). This is strikingly evident in the passage that has just been discussed. Elsewhere, in her characterisation of X1, Cixous borrowed elements of the biography of René Bousquet, a Vichy officer who had, in his youth, become famous for saving the lives of two young children. X1 describes how, as a young man, he saved two children from drowning. X1 claims that it is impossible that he would have then sent other children to their deaths: 'Entre cet acte et moi se dresse une muraille immense./Il n y a pas de porte, pas de fente' (*Ville parjure* scene XVIII, pp. 175-6). The metaphor of the wall is telling: the doctor will never be able to offer the Mother the genuine compassion, guilt, or sorrow that she wants of him, if only because he has, in his own mind, completely separated his speaking self from any knowledge of the crime. Cixous claims that she included the detail of X1's past to show that 'crime is not ingrained, that it is always a choice' (Fort, 'Ethics', p. 435). This becomes evident even as X1 attempts to use his past to prove precisely the opposite. For X1, human nature is immutable and single faced: he is essentially good and therefore all of his actions must also be good. X1 and X2 are unable to comprehend their own guilt.

¹⁰⁷ The parallels with the French Blood Scandal here are interesting. Initially only Allain and Garetta faced charges related to the sale of the contaminated blood products. When criminal proceedings were later opened against government officials, these officials faced more serious charges, suggesting an expectation that the government should adhere to a higher moral standard. Whilst in Cixous's play the King, head of state, is criticized for being uncaring and failing to take action against X1 and X2 (*Ville parjure* scene VIII, pp. 76-7), there is no suggestion that he was himself actively involved in the affair. In France's real Blood Scandal, the government officials that delayed approval of the American Abbot HIV test are far more strongly implicated.

The Justice Practised by the Erinyes

Through her introduction of the figures of the Erinyes, Cixous encourages the audience to trace the roots of this new justice back to the trial of Orestes as dramatized by Aeschylus in *The Eumenides*. Following the instructions of Apollo's oracle, Orestes kills Clytemnestra, his mother, to avenge Agamemnon, his father, who had been killed by Clytemnestra and her lover Aegisthus in another act of vengeance: for the death of Iphigenia, the daughter of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon, who had been killed by her father in an attempt to appease the gods that were preventing his fleet from leaving the harbour at Tauris and joining the Trojan wars. The Erinyes, personified curses (*Eumenides*, Introduction, p. 1), are summoned by Clytemnestra's ghost to pursue her son who, with Apollo's help, has been cleansed of his crime by being washed with pig's blood in a temple and has fled to Athens. On the Aeropagus, at the outskirts of Athens, the goddess Athena intervenes. She declares that a tribunal will be held to determine Orestes' guilt, with a jury made up of the townsmen of Athens. This will be the first criminal trial, and it signals the abandonment of a law based on vengeance and the adoption of a law founded on the maintenance of order.

Apollo argues for acquittal. Arguing eloquently for the mother and the importance of familial and maternal relationships, the Erinyes attempt to force Orestes to admit his guilt. When the jury finally vote, their votes are tied. This results in Orestes' acquittal, Athena having already declared that mercy is more important than harshness. The Erinyes, furious at the result, threaten to bring down disease and suffering on the city of Athens. Athena manages finally to placate the older goddesses, offering them a place within the new democratic order. If the Erinyes will only bless Athens and retreat underground, they will be honoured and have offerings made to them by the people of the city. When they agree to this compromise, the Erinyes are led off the stage in a grand procession, with the red robes worn by Athens' foreign-born population on feast days placed over their own black dress.

The story of *The Eumenides* illustrates how the democratic state is built upon suppression. Brian Singleton demonstrates how, although *The Eumenides* ends with recognition that the

Erinyes play a vital role in assuring the health of the city, must perform this role from the underground, confined and permanently excluded from the city space.¹⁰⁸ For Noonan, this is a suppression of the female (Noonan, p. 71): the Erinyes are always female figures,¹⁰⁹ and they appear at the trial of Orestes on behalf of a mother, a ‘mother’s blood drives [them] on’ (*Eumenides*, lo. 230, p. 25). Furthermore, Orestes is only acquitted when Athena accepts Apollo’s improbable argument that women are not necessary in either the conception or raising of children and that the man is more important than the woman in the running of the household (*Eumenides*, lines 658-666, p. 52 and lines 735-40, p. 58). As Sallie Goetsch argues, the portrayal of the suppression of the feminine may be seen in *The Eumenides* as ‘an exposé rather than an endorsement’, making the suppression evident rather than celebrating it.¹¹⁰ A suppression of the foreign is also identifiable. The procession that leads the Erinyes off stage may be celebratory, but they depart as foreigners, deliberately marked out with bright robes that efface their identities. They are no longer black daughters of the night and now express through their clothing an identity based only on their foreignness, to be conflated with any other strangers.¹¹¹ Finally, the suppression of the Erinyes is also a suppression of a certain model of justice. The Erinyes are the servants of the goddess *Dike*, justice, who is dear to Zeus (*Eumenides*, Introduction, p. 5). *Dike* means variously ‘right and wrong’, ‘punishment’, and ‘judicial proceedings’ and, Alan H. Sommerstein argues, it can ‘only act through wrathful violence’ (Sommerstein, p. 193). *Dike* always serves to perpetuate a cycle of violence (ibid., pp. 195, 197). Nevertheless, *Dike* is a justice that is certain, clear, and will always find its criminal, or their descendants (ibid., p. 201). Mnouchkine indicates that it is the suppression of the Erinyes, the adoption of a merciful but uncertain human

¹⁰⁸ 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), 618-625 (p. 623).

¹⁰⁹ Alan H. Sommerstein, *Aeschylean Tragedy*, 2nd edn (London: Duckworth, 2010), p. 190.

¹¹⁰ Sallie Goetsch, ‘Playing against the Text: “Les Atrides” and the History of Reading Aeschylus’, *TDR*, 38.3 (Autumn 1994), 75-95 (p. 88).

¹¹¹ Cf. *Ville parjure* scene V, p. 55. The Erinyes describe being led underground dressed in red and are corrected by Eschyle. The Erinyes, he says, always wore black.

justice and the rejection of *Dike* that makes the advent of democracy possible in *The Eumenides*.¹¹²

The movement into democracy cannot therefore be understood simply as progress, for with the suppression of the Erinyes and *Dike* society also suffered a significant loss (Fort, 'Ethics', p. 431). Goetsch criticises those who read *The Eumenides* as a play with a happy ending, rejoicing in the triumph of democracy (Goetsch p. 76). The Erinyes of *Ville parjure* bitterly regret the sacrifice that they made for democracy. Democracy has flourished whilst they were underground but nothing important has improved, save the invention of the telephone (*Ville parjure* scene V, pp. 55-6). This is not to deny that democracy is generally a better system than what came before, but merely to recognise the losses and exclusions that have made it possible.

Having lost so much at the trial of Orestes, the Erinyes are initially suspicious of Eschyle's proposition that a new trial be held at the cemetery (*Ville parjure* scene VII, pp. 70-71). One of the Erinyes states that:

Il n'est aucun état aussi insupportable
Que celui des plaignants que l'on envoie au tribunal
En leur ayant, au préalable, coupé la propre langue (Ibid., p. 70)

If the removal of the Erinyes was supposed to have taken the violence from justice, then it has failed. All of those who go to tribunals have first had their tongues cut out. Whilst perhaps the vividly violent image used here reflects only the bloodthirstiness of the Erinyes, it is worth considering the larger point, that there is violence or an injustice in tribunals where

¹¹² Alfred Simon, 'The Space of Tragedy', interview with Ariane Mnouchkine, in *Sourcebook*, ed. by David Williams, pp. 187-198 (p. 193).

representatives speak for the victims. The Erinyes often take charge in the questioning of X1 and X2, but they speak only for themselves and their own notions of justice and not for their ally and commander, the Mother. Maîtres Brackmann and Marguerre, the lawyers that represent X1 and X2, do not emerge from *Ville parjure* as positive figures. The playful eloquence of Eschyle makes a mockery of Brackmann and Marguerre's supposed linguistic skills, however 'smooth-talking' Ayres holds them to be (Ayres p. 10), and the lawyers appear to be as callous as their clients when, in response to X1 and X2's crimes, they can only offer the Mother money whilst becoming increasingly openly irritated by her (*Ville parjure* scene II). Representatives are shown not to be ideal figures of legal wisdom and understanding. More than this, the denial of the victim's right to speak out in court means that the emotional impact of the crime is systematically excluded from consideration, as another of the Erinyes points out (*ibid.* scene VII, p. 71). Certainly following the trials of Fabius, Dufoix and Hervé, the families of those infected by HIV during the Blood Scandal complained that the judgements reflected political expediency and ignored their suffering (BBC, ta santé). Any attempt to include an assessment of the emotional impact of crimes within the justice system would raise further practical and ethical concerns: it may be traumatic for victims to have to confront those who perpetrated crimes against them or difficult to judge how genuine accounts of the crime's impact are. The Erinyes thus suggest a problem that may exist within the French justice system, without giving a comprehensive response to it. This is not necessarily a shortcoming of Cixous's play for the purpose of her presentation of these models of justice may be to stimulate debate rather than to provide a coherent manifesto for social change.

The Erinyes' call for directness is not limited to a desire for both victims and criminals to speak for themselves but extends to a call for the use of direct language. Thus, as Cixous highlights in her interview with Fort, the Erinyes insist that the word 'crime' be used, rather than 'homicide' (Fort, 'Ethics', p. 434). In Roland Barthes's account of the Dominici trial, he highlighted how the language used by the legal system, assumed by them to be 'universel', was in fact a 'particulier' form of language, and that consequently there was a gap in understanding between the accused, Gaston Dominici, and the legal establishment who were trying him. Imposing models taken from literature onto the psychology of Dominici, the legal establishment assumed his guilt.¹¹³ X2's surprise and dismay at hearing the word 'crime' used to describe his actions demonstrates just how effectively legal vocabulary can be used to disguise wrongdoing (*Ville parjure* scene XII, p. 116). This was made particularly apparent during France's Blood Scandal, where Garetta and Allain were first tried for 'merchandising fraud' (Ayres p. 4), a charge that seems so profoundly inadequate in comparison with the consequences of their actions that the effect is darkly comic. When the Erinyes lament that 'Autrefois, quand nous faisons partie du paysage du crime,/ Tout assassin savait clairement qu'il était assassin' (*Ville parjure* scene V, p. 57), they suggest that their uncompromising directness is necessary if criminals are always to know that they have done wrong. X1 cannot have compassion for the Mother because of the wall between himself and his guilt, a wall which could only be built in the absence of the Erinyes.

Whilst *Ville parjure* does, then, highlight several positive features of the Erinyes' *Dike*, it also suggests the impossibility and undesirability of a return to such a justice. The violence of the Erinyes is made clear throughout the play: 'En un clin d'oeil/ Nous l'égorgeons comme un cochon' say the Erinyes of X1 and X2 (*Ville parjure* scene VII, p. 69), the entire medical

¹¹³ Roland Barthes, 'Dominici ou le triomphe de la Littérature', *Mythologies* (Paris: Éditions Points, 1970), pp. 47-50.

order will suffer 'Des jets de sang bouillant sur ta calvitie' (*Ville parjure* scene XIV, p. 155), and even when the cemetery of their allies is destroyed 'Pour nous, c'est très excellent' (*Ville parjure* scene XIX, p. 182). Violence evoked in this joyful, comic way is enjoyable to read and expresses an attractive physicality which seems to be an extension of the positive directness of the Erinyes. Nevertheless, this embrace of violence may be more chilling than comic in performance and, as the Mother constantly reminds the audience, if such violence were actually realised it would be horrific.

Cixous argues that we cannot truly wish to return to a system of violent retribution (Fort, 'Ethics', p. 448). If the Erinyes are at pains to evoke their former power (*Ville parjure* scene V, p. 59), it is not at all clear that they are justified in their evaluation of their importance. Exaggerated exclamations of fear at the suggestion that the naming of the doctors designated X1 and X2 may be grounds for libel action illustrate humorously the fallibility of these deities who have already lost their freedom once (ibid., p. 58). Goetsch complains that the Erinyes of Mnouchkine's *Eumenides* are not terrible figures of power and fear but elderly and ridiculous (Goetsch p. 85). The Erinyes of *Ville parjure* are similarly aged and comic.¹¹⁴ This should not be seen as a mistake of staging but as vital to their characterisation. The Erinyes of *The Eumenides* do not choose to go underground because they are stupid or fooled by Athena, but because they are aware that they have become an anachronism in the new democratic state. *Dike* is more cruel than it is praiseworthy, and it is moreover a system whose time has passed.

¹¹⁴ Mnouchkine is eager to point out that this humour does not amount to derision of the Erinyes ('Space of Tragedy', *Sourcebook*, p. 194). Running-Johnson shows that the humour of the Erinyes is a vital mechanism for the release of tension in the play ('Theatrical Reawakening', p. 280)

The Justice Practised by the Mother

The play's final model of justice in the play is that which is championed by the Mother. Prenowitz argues that the mother 'refuses to enter any of the murderous circles of sacrifice: those of the Erinyes, those of Athena' (Prenowitz, 'Foundering Democracy', p. 126). She will neither sacrifice her call for justice in the name of the maintenance of society, nor call for others to be killed to satisfy a desire for revenge. Martha Walker discusses how the Mother's justice 'while passionate, is non-violent',¹¹⁵ and this leads the Erinyes and the Mother to clash at several points (*Ville parjure* scene V, pp. 60-1 and scene VII pp. 68-9). If its bloody violence was one of the factors that meant that *Dike* was no longer possible within our society, then the Mother's justice may seem to be a more appropriate model for today. Yet this does not imply that the Mother's justice is the same of that of *Ville parjure*'s democratic city. Her justice is not based on exclusion and it welcomes honest and direct speech. For Dobson it is her 'pure and plaintive voice' that characterises the Mother (Dobson, *Scene of Writing*, p. 110). Ayres argues that 'Cixous's play may be considered vengeance because it allows the mother to express "the wording of indignation"' (Ayres p. 23), yet the Mother's voice asks for compassion and not vengeance. She can speak out against the problems of the democratic city without asking for a violent response to them. Ayres does seem to be suggesting a more abstract kind of vengeance, but any kind of an 'eye-for-an-eye' that suggests that there can be an equivalent to the pain of the loss of her children, would be rejected by the Mother.¹¹⁶ The Mother resists the violences of the Erinyes and the city and argues in her powerful voice for a different kind of justice, her own.

¹¹⁵ 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), 495-506 (p. 498).

¹¹⁶ Cf. *Ville parjure*, scene XVII, pp. 164-5, where the Mother becomes angry at the suggestion that the death of the Queen's children can be compared to the murder of her own.

Whereas the Erinyes refuse to compromise, retain their violent attitude, what the Mother demands from X1 and X2 changes throughout the play. Her first words are full of anger towards the city, which is imagined as a wolf-serpent, masculine, threatening and full of corrupt temptation. She curses the city:

Reste étroitement refermé sur toi-même, Hôpital-Capitale,
Tiens tes mâchoires serrées sur ta langue
Qui se dresse venimeuse dedans la Ville
Comme un monument de mensonge,
Avale tes propres morves infectieuses. (*Ville parjure* scene I, p. 20)

The words are bitter, but their violence is not the same as that of the Erinyes. What the Mother desires is for the city to suffer from its own cruelty and contradictions. Unable to give the Mother compassion or to reach out to any other person, it must close in on itself and bite its own tongue, the tongue that can only lie. The city must swallow its own infected snot, a bodily fluid which is not ambiguous like the blood that both gives life and signals the end of it, but already a sign of illness. Later, when the Mother wants X1 and X2 to die ‘de honte, peut-être’ (*Ville parjure* scene VII, p. 69), she displays the same desire for a punishment born directly from the fault, not imposed from the outside.

The Mother’s desire for X1 and X2 to die from shame is also a desire for them to understand their crimes and the consequences that they have had. If X1 and X2 felt shame, it would mean that they had acknowledged that their actions were criminal, unacceptable, and had caused pain. Yet the law of the city has made it structurally impossible for X1 and X2 to acknowledge such a thing. They are sheltered from the word ‘crime’ and see legality and acceptability as identical. There remains of the Mother’s plea only the wish that they see the pain that their actions have caused and, recognising this, ask for ‘pardon’ (*Ville parjure* scene

XII, p. 114). Noonan argues that ‘The impossible word—“Pardon”—separates two worlds’ (Noonan p. 69). It is perhaps rather true that the debate over the word emblematic of divisions that already exist between the three worlds of the Mother, the Erinyes and the City. If pardon is demanded and granted it will, Noonan observes, ‘open the floodgates of grace’ and end the conflict (Noonan p. 69). The Mother explains that once the word ‘pardon’ is said:

Les grandes portes du ciel où demeure la Grâce
Qui efface tous les ressentiments
S’ouvrent aussitôt et tous ceux
Qui, en ce moment, même, sont armés jusqu’aux dents
Dans les deux camps, d’un commun accord
Sortent de l’Enfer
Où nous bouillons depuis tant d’années (*Ville parjure*, scene XII, p. 115)

When pardon is asked and granted, each party approaches the other. The Mother demands compassion from X1 and X2, but also asks to be allowed to know and understand them (*ibid.* scene XVIII, p. 174). It could be that this mutual movement is the kind of ‘commun accord’ that will allow society to move out of the Hell that it currently occupies.

For Ayres, this justice based on pardon is similar to the model established in post-Apartheid South-Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Committees (TRCs), in which those suspected of involvement in the crimes of Apartheid were obliged to testify in front of a court including their victims or the victim’s survivors. Legal amnesty was available for those who gave ‘full disclosure’ of their crimes and whose actions were found to be associated with political objectives. Additionally, defendants could ask for the forgiveness of their former victims (Ayres, ‘non-prosecution’, pp. 20-2, 25). Ayres argues for the social value of forgiveness, which can allow a victim to ‘reassert their own power and re-establish their own dignity,

while also teaching wrongdoers the effects of their harmful actions' (ibid., p. 17). As Ayres acknowledges, however, the doctors' failure to recognise their crimes means that on this level the Mother's attempts for justice have failed (ibid., p. 15): the wrongdoers do not learn the effects of their harmful actions and to this extent refuse to allow the mother any power over them.

Nevertheless, Ayres suggests that the Mother should perhaps still forgive X1 and X2, since 'forgiveness might be essential not just for a victim to heal and move on, but also for a society to move on after a mass atrocity' (Ayres, 'non-prosecution', p. 19). Such was the case in South Africa's TRCs, where re-integration was made a priority and forgiveness, either legal or individual, was granted to some of those who had not asked for it (ibid., p. 25). In *Ville parjure*, the Queen argues that the Mother should at least allow her society to 'move on' by at least giving the appearance of forgiving X1 and X2. She comes to the Mother and asks her to drop the prosecution of X1 and X2 for the good of the nation and the remaining haemophiliac children (*Ville parjure*, scene XVII, pp. 166-7). If the Mother accepts the Queen's offer of an alliance, the haemophiliac children will receive high quality medical care; if she refuses, far-right nationalist forces will come to power (ibid.). Apparently the Queen is making the Mother the same offer as Athena made the Erinyes. Forget, she says, come somehow into the city, and the suppression of your call for justice will be the foundation of a better society.¹¹⁷ We see that a refusal to follow the cause of absolute justice may not be the result of corruption and avarice, but stem from pragmatic altruism. The Mother's refusal of the Queen's offer suggests perhaps that it is not enough to work for small-scale social improvements if these leave an unjust system more generally intact. Yet as the scene is split

¹¹⁷ There is not enough space here for an examination of the role of memory in *Ville parjure*. The play opens up interesting questions of how memory, linked to poetry, can act as a bulwark against a relativist perspective that can rationalise all past injustices.

between the equally powerful voices of Mother and Queen, it is clear that the question is not an easy one to resolve.

The Mother's incessant calls for justice ultimately result in the deaths of herself and all of her supporters. The fascist leader Forzza, victorious in the elections, foreshadows Nicolas Sarkozy's notorious remarks about the 2005 rioters in calling for the cemetery's 'racaille' to be washed away (*Ville parjure* scene XIX, p. 182). Noonan's 'floodgates' have not released grace but destruction (Noonan, p. 69). Indeed where once God flooded the Earth and saved only Noah, now the corrupt city will sanitise itself by the death of the just (*Ville parjure* scene XXI, p. 191). Here we see the fragility of the Mother's justice, which lacks either the state apparatus of city law or the Erinyes' violence and so is open to attack and ruin. Cixous does not produce a utopian play in which an ideal mode of justice triumphs. An epilogue, which sees the Mother and her allies in a heavenly space asking the audience to take responsibility for political action and was added to mitigate the relentless tragedy of the play's finale (Fort, 'Ethics', pp. 449-50), has been seen as unconvincing by some (Cf. Dobson, *Scene of writing*, p. 114) and moreover does not change the fact of the Mother's death and failure to establish a new mode of justice. In *Ville parjure* it is both impossible and dangerous to change justice from a position of marginality.

Conclusion

Ville parjure shows the democratic state's legal system to function for the maintenance of order and not the pursuit of justice. Thus crimes that do not threaten the order, crimes against the marginal, are inadequately punished. Order, law, and morality have become closely linked in complex ways and so it is difficult to recognise that certain actions are wrong, and that the individual perpetrator and not wider systems or the state should take responsibility

for them. When the Erinyes return and in a positive way attempt to force recognition of these truths, they also bring with them an ideal of violent retribution that is unwelcome. The Mother attempts to go further than the Erinyes and force criminals to recognise their crimes, as well as the impact that they have had, and to demand forgiveness. This demand for pardon replaces the Erinyes' bloody punishments as the ultimate goal of justice. This is not to suggest that the Mother has created a new, ideal, mode of justice, synthesised from the opposing modes of Erinyes and the city. What the Mother demands is something entirely new, compassion and understanding, which require the Erinyes' recognition of crime and the city's rejection of bloodshed, but are not simply the union of the two. They are attempts to connect to others.

However positive the Mother's model of justice may appear, it is still ultimately unsuccessful. The Mother fails to gain an admission of guilt or attempt at sympathy from X1 or X2. Perhaps her justice, then, is only ever going to be possible in the theatre's perfect tribunal. It could be that the laws of the city are too deeply ingrained for any new model of justice to have a chance of success. The existence of the Mother, the Chorus, Mme. Lion and to an extent the Queen, suggests that this is not necessarily the case. What can perhaps be taken from *Ville parjure* is a recognition that problems exist in our current justice system and that the solution is not a return to violent vengeance but may be an admission of the value of emotion and compassion. This will not be easy to institute; the play's end shows the naivety of hopes to institute a compassionate justice model without any threat of sanction or legitimated source of power. *Ville parjure*'s final scene does nevertheless leave the audience with an explicit obligation to try.

Chapter Five: Tragedy and *Tambours sur la digue* (1999)

The Théâtre du Soleil's 1999 production of Cixous's *Tambours sur la digue* was both commercially and critically successful: 150, 000 people saw the play during its run at the Cartoucherie and its three tours,¹¹⁸ and it was awarded three Molière awards (Dobson, *Scene of Writing*, p. 7). The staging of *Tambours* was particularly praised for its innovation. *Tambours* is a play 'Sous forme de pièce ancienne pour marionnettes jouée par les acteurs'. Layers of makeup were used to give the actors' faces the appearance of puppets and each character was accompanied by at least one *manipulateur*, dressed in black, who seemed to be controlling all of their movements. The play is set in an imagined Asian country, ruled by the aged Seigneur Khang. In its opening scene, a seer visits the Seigneur to prophesy a flood that will destroy the kingdom. This flood cannot be prevented, for the forest that could have absorbed some of the water has been destroyed by Khang's nephew, Seigneur Hun. Khang can only protect part of the country by choosing to flood another. Separate dams protect the countryside, the wealthy industrial area to the north of the city, and the densely populated area that is also home to the city's theatres and libraries. Unable to decide which dam to breach and abandoned by his advisers, including his trusted Chancellor, Khang tacitly gives Hun permission to cause a fatal breach in the *Digue aux Cerisiers* which protects the countryside. However, when Hun's forces arrive to destroy the dam they find that it, in turn, is protected. Duan, the seer's daughter has assembled a group of drummers who sit above the dam and beat different rhythms to warn the population of different threats, and Wang Po, the Chancellor's secretary, has assembled an army of peasants who are able to defeat Hun's troops. When an existing weakness in the city's defences causes both parts of the city to

¹¹⁸ The play toured Bâle and Anvers in 2000, Lyon, Montréal Tokyo and Seoul in 2001, and Sydney in 2002. Information taken from the website of the Théâtre du Soleil <<http://www.theatre-du-soleil.fr/thsol/nos-spectacles-et-nos-films/nos-spectacles/tambours-sur-la-digue-1999,161/?lang=fr>> [accessed 24 May 2012].

flood, Khang sends his own forces to destroy the *Digue aux Cerisiers*. As the entire kingdom is finally submerged, the only survivor is Bai Ju, the owner of the puppet theatre, who fishes normal-sized puppet versions of the play's characters out of the water that has covered the stage.

Judith G. Miller, who translated *Tambours*, has described it as an 'enacted ritual of morality', throughout which the characters face the dilemma of 'the ethical question of what it means to be virtuous'.¹¹⁹ When the Chancellor is considering how he will advise his Seigneur, he outlines the different possible courses of action and finishes by muttering 'L'homme vertueux sera celui qui...' (*Tambours*, p. 15). The Chancellor at least believes that the Seigneur should be concerned with acting virtuously, ethically, and not simply be guided by political expediency. Elsewhere in the play, however, there seems to be some ambivalence about the value of ethics. When two fishermen decide to put aside their reservations and 'coupe les forêts', working for Seigneur Hun, they demand that 'nul n'aille nous juger', for their actions have been forced by their hunger and 'ce maudit Fleuve' (*Tambours* pp. 28-9). The fishermen's fear of judgement and initial reservations indicate the importance of an absolute ethical right and wrong, but their ultimate denial of the audience's right to judge suggests the impossibility of living up to such standards within the negotiated world. Likewise, when the Monk comes to advise Khang he suggests that the ruler allow himself to be guided by certain ethical principles: Khang is to 'Garde-toi de faire le mauvais choix and to 'Fais le choix le moins mauvais possible' (*Tambours*, p. 31). Failing to provide any criteria by which Khang could decide which choice is the 'moins mauvais', or even 'possible', the advice is hopelessly vague and only serves to frustrate the Seigneur. Once more, the first instinct of the character has been to consider ethics, but it has become evident that considering a question in the light

¹¹⁹ Judith G. Miller, 'Translating Hélène Cixous's *Tambours sur la digue*: the Ineffable on Stage', in *Joyful Babel*, 183-196 (pp. 190, 193).

of ethics alone will not provide an adequate solution. Peter Norrish has described how, since the end of World War Two, the French public has had an expectation that writers would provide ‘not only analysis of the human condition and its predicaments, but solutions to them’ which has led, in the theatre, to extensive experiments with the genre of tragedy.¹²⁰ Tragedy became a forum for the posing of the ethical question of how to act in the light of our faults.¹²¹ This chapter considers *Tambours* in the light of the conventions of tragedy and attempts to identify what Cixous’s use and manipulation of this theatrical genre may reveal about her ethics. It will begin by briefly discussing the genre of tragedy in an attempt to identify its features, and then move on to an examination of certain elements of the tragic genre as they appear in *Tambours*.

It may seem banal to point out that tragedy is a theatrical genre with a long history and one to which a great deal of critical and philosophical attention has been paid in the past, but it is equally important to acknowledge this long tradition in order to avoid presenting the use of tragedy by Cixous or other twentieth-century French dramatists as exceptional. Indeed, in his discussion of modern tragedy, Raymond Williams describes how their conception of this tradition has been of vital importance for playwrights who see themselves as ‘contributing to a common idea or form’.¹²² This is an attitude which he criticises, for it tends to downplay the changes that the concept of tragedy has undergone in its history (ibid.). Given the complexities of the tragic tradition, there is clearly, as Norrish argues, a need for flexibility in any definition of tragedy (Norrish, *New Tragedy*, p. 6). Yet, as Norrish goes on to say, this does not mean that it is impossible to identify certain features that normally characterise the tragic, and for Norrish ‘chief among these is intense suffering’ (Norrish, *New Tragedy*, p. 6).

¹²⁰ Peter Norrish, *New Tragedy and Comedy in France, 1945-70* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), p. 1.

¹²¹ To claim that tragedy took on this function in the hands of playwrights working during and after the war is not to deny that tragedy may also have had an ethical function previously. Nor is it impossible for comedy to be used to investigate the same ethical questions, as Norrish indicates (Norrish, *New Tragedy*, p. 3).

¹²² Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1966), p. 15.

This chapter will first of all consider whether the suffering of *Tambours*'s characters is really experienced as 'intense' given that they are all portrayed as puppets. In Cixous's essay 'La voix étrangère, la plus profonde, la plus antique', she suggests that tragedy, simply, 'c'est de découvrir que les êtres humains sont manipulés', whether by the gods of ancient Greece, destiny, higher powers or the unconscious.¹²³ This chapter will discuss the role of destiny, divine plans and manipulation in *Tambours*. Central to tragedy is the figure of the tragic hero who was traditionally a noble and who is destroyed by the action of the play. This chapter will attempt to establish a hero of *Tambours* and discuss this play's use of the trope of the destruction or sacrifice of the hero in the light of Raymond Williams's suggestion that tragedies can be seen to play out a parable of disorder and the overthrow of an old order being followed by the recreation of a new order (Williams, *Modern Tragedy*, p. 52).

Suffering

In tragedy, as suggested above, the dominant tone is one of suffering and pain. In *Tambours*, repeated portrayal of death and loss contributes to the creation of this tone. We see the pain of the architect's wife when her husband is murdered by the grand intendant (*Tambours*, pp. 54-5), of Wang Po when his father and brother are murdered (ibid., p. 66), of Wang Po when he kills his lover Duan (ibid., p. 74), and finally we witness the deaths of all of the play's characters in the threatened flood (ibid., p. 76). Whilst the violent deaths of characters' loved ones are the cause of many of the most intense instances of suffering in *Tambours*, other characters are shown to be in pain elsewhere in the play and Cixous is not indicating that suffering can be understood as an automatic response to a single type of event, a murder. Nevertheless, there is an evident emphasis on death and mourning as indices of pain, which suggests Cixous's unwillingness to claim suffering as a constant feature of a human

¹²³ Hélène Cixous, 'La voix étrangère, la plus profonde, la plus antique', *Rue Descartes*, 37 (2002/3), 111-119 (p. 118).

condition. Suffering is extraordinary, not part of the everyday. Such an approach does not deny that there are problems in everyday life but rather encourages a re-evaluation of the scale of such problems. In so far as this could encourage compassion and positive political action, this move is helpful. The pain felt by the characters certainly prompts them to act: Wang Po determines that he will lead the peasant forces in their protection of the *Digue aux Cerisiers* (*Tambours*, p. 66), and the architect's wife takes revenge on the grand intendant by stabbing him (*ibid.* pp. 54-5). Both Wang Po and the Architect's wife respond to suffering with a wish for bloody revenge, but this impulse to revenge only leads to greater suffering for both as the architect's wife is killed by the grand intendant (*ibid.*, p. 55) and Wang Po kills his lover because he is unable to abandon his desire for revenge (*ibid.*, p. 74). Their pain has simply led Wang Po and the architect's wife to enter into cycles of death and revenge that resemble those found in the tragedy of ancient Greece, and it is evident that if pain prompts positive action, then it can do so for those who witness it rather than those who suffer it.

This picture of tragic suffering is complicated by the staging of *Tambours*. *Tambours* is populated by actors playing puppets playing humans. In order to portray their character, the actors of *Tambours* pass through the inanimate, become puppet. For Dobson, the 'embrace of the figure of the marionette' in *Tambours* is a way to 'celebrate the presence of death, of a recognition of mortality, within the living'. The puppet figure challenges the border between life and death in a way that is an extension of the 'positively transgressive liminality' to be found elsewhere in Cixous's theatre ('Dramatic Returns', pp. 173-4). There is not space to explore all of the interesting questions of agency which are evoked by this 'challenging of the border between life and death' with the figure of the marionette. Derrida has suggested that:

Il est difficile de savoir ce qu'est une marionnette, si c'est de l'ordre de la chose mécanique et inanimée (réagissant sans répondre, pour reprendre

notre distinction cartésiano-lacanienne), ou si c'est de l'ordre de la chose animée, animale (vivant de pure réaction et supposé sans parole et pensée responsable), ou encore si c'est déjà de l'ordre humain, et dès lors capable de s'émanciper, de répondre autonomément, si je puis dire, et de s'emparer, prosthétiquement, prothétiquement, d'un pouvoir souverain.¹²⁴

It will be argued in my discussion of the divine plan in *Tambours* that the question of how far we are free to make choices and to act are key to the play.

It is true that we do not react to the deaths and the suffering of the puppet-characters in the same way as we would to the suffering of human actors simply portraying humans. Brecht argued that it was absolutely necessary that the audience should be shown this distinction between actor and character, for if the artificiality of the theatre were not always evident then the audience may themselves begin to identify with the characters and so leave behind their faculty for reason (Brecht, *Organum*, point 48, p. 101). Brecht cites mask and the techniques of contemporary Asian theatre – no doubt including the Bunraku puppet theatre that inspired the *mise-en-scène* of *Tambours* – as examples of traditional ways to prevent such identification with the character (Brecht, *Organum*, p. 99). Dobson has further suggested how the use of puppet-characters may have the effect of 'unsettling patterns of agency and identification' (Dobson, 'Dramatic Returns', p. 181). She is justified in claiming that the additional layer of separation between actor and character makes it impossible to completely identify the two and ensures that the artifice of the performance is evident.

If the suffering portrayed on stage during tragedy was moving simply because we could imagine that we were seeing 'genuine' pain, then for all the apparently painful moments in

¹²⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Séminaire La bête et le souverain Volume I (2001-2002)*, ed. by Michel Lisse, Marie-Louis Mallet and Ginette Michaud (Paris: Galilée, 2008), p. 255.

Tambours the overriding mood of the piece would not be one of suffering. However, as Kate Bredeson points out, it becomes hard to avoid ‘seduction by the beauty’ of the strange and ‘dislocated’ puppet-figures who are acted with such skill by the Théâtre du Soleil.¹²⁵ When the characters of *Tambours* die, lose their animation, we may then mourn this loss. Our sadness at witnessing their deaths may be tempered by enjoyment of the spectacle of the beautifully choreographed death scene, but this is simply evidence of the apparent paradox that has long been associated with tragedy: that of how the audience gains pleasure from watching scenes of pain.

Our ability to mourn the loss of the puppet actors suggests that identification may not be the only mechanism by which witnessing the suffering of another on stage can become moving for an audience. In his discussion of the purpose of the chorus, Friedrich Nietzsche argued that it existed simply to isolate the world of the play from its audience.¹²⁶ The play took place in a world that was deliberately kept separate from that of the audience, and identification with characters was not encouraged. Indeed, Greek tragedy was always masked. It was possible to create a mood of suffering and move an audience without that audience being able to emotionally place themselves in the position of the characters being portrayed. In tragedy, the purpose is to elicit pity for those that we know to be different from ourselves. Outside of tragedy, the ability to be moved by the suffering of others without assuming that their interests are identical with our own may be one basis for ethical action.

The Divine Plan: Tragedy and Accident

Norrish argues that ‘the decline of a common belief in a divinely ordered universe’ has brought about a ‘crucial change’ in the development of tragedy. Paraphrasing George Steiner,

¹²⁵ Kate Bredeson, ‘Human Puppets Dangling by Strings of Fate’, *Theater*, 32.3 (2002), 138-143 (p. 141).

¹²⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, extract from *The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. by Francis Golffing, in *Tragedy*, ed. by Drakakis and Conn Liebler, pp. 53-64 (p. 55).

who argued that ‘only classical mythology, with its shared belief in the presence of inexorable divine forces, was conducive to the creation of real tragedy’, Norrish shows how many critics believe that at the heart of tragedy is a hero whose actions are determined by the unknowable but unavoidable plan of some divine force (Norrish, *New Tragedy*, pp. 7-8). Tragedy derives from man’s helplessness and the realisation that we are unable to determine our own future through our acts alone. Whilst certain critics have declared that tragedy is no longer possible since there is no longer a shared belief in a divine plan, Norrish argues that both the presence and absence of ‘external authority or meaning’ are capable of ‘playing a similarly dramatic role in the tragedy of their very different epochs’ since both ‘belong to a world where irrationality reigns’ (Norrish, *New Tragedy*, p. 8). The question of ‘irrationality’ may not be the most appropriate one here, since it is possible to imagine a world without god but governed with reason, or indeed to imagine a divine plan that has been created according to reasonable principles, as in the enlightenment image of the world as a clock created by a divine clockmaker. What is true is that human beings cannot predict or entirely control their own futures in either a world with an unknowable plan or a world that is unplanned, populated by people with conflicting desires and subject to chance events such as natural disasters. Thus Norrish is justified in his conclusion that the tragedy of unavoidable and unjustified suffering is possible in a modern world as it was in an ancient: it is merely that the presumed root of this suffering has changed.

There is some suggestion that a divine plan underlies the suffering in *Tambours*. Cixous has claimed that she used the figure of the flood precisely because of associations with the divine. Describing how the 1998 floods in Northern China inspired *Tambours*, Cixous writes: “Voilà une inondation qui va détruire le monde, rêvons autour de ça.” D’abord il y a ça dans la Bible. Des inondations qui détruisent l’univers, on en a toujours eues. C’est même la façon

dont les dieux se défendent contre les êtres humains' (Cixous, 'La voix étrangère', p. 115). The image of the flood also recurs in Cixous's own work: the cemetery of *Ville parjure* is finally flooded. In both *Ville parjure* and *Tambours*, however, the floods are not caused directly by gods but by corrupt leaders who deliberately breach the defences that protect those members of their society deemed expendable. As such, within Cixous's plays, the figure of the flood does not carry any of the positive meanings that may be associated with cleansing, but simply suggests destruction and the reaffirmation of central, corrupt, power. Nevertheless, in *Tambours*, the flood does seem to fit into some wider, perhaps divine, plan. In the opening scene of *Tambours*, the Devin relates a dream which predicted the terrible flood. Like the prophecies of the oracles in ancient times, the Devin's dream is given as a warning but will also, inevitably, come to pass. Any suggestion that the future can be foreseen seems to assume that there is some sort of plan: that the future is, to an extent, already fixed. It is certainly possible to give warnings of future events based on existing data, and indeed, considering the play's ecological message,¹²⁷ the warning of the Devin may mirror the warnings of contemporary climate change scientists. However, a warning of the sort given by the Devin, which took the form of a dream, does only seem to be possible in a world with a preordained future.

There seems to be tension between this divine plan and the characters' ability to exercise free choice. Upon hearing the prediction of flooding, Khang regrets that 'semence de la volonté des dieux, voilà ce que nous sommes' (*Tambours*, p. 9). Wang Po repeats a similar idea after having killed the guards who had murdered his father and brother: 'Me voilà grand criminel, telle est la volonté du Ciel' (*Tambours*, p. 67). Both men are keen to hand over the responsibility for their situation to the gods, but both also reveal the possibility for human

¹²⁷ Discussed further on pp. 104-5

action within their words: Seigneur Khang may be the 'semence' of the gods, but this does not preclude him from choosing his own actions once created by the divine, and when Wang Po calls himself a 'criminel', he admits that he has transgressed criminal law which is, as was suggested in my fourth chapter, a code of behaviour created and policed by humans and not gods. Likewise, even the prophet and his daughter visit Seigneur Khang 'en hâte' in order to relate what was seen, suggesting their hope that the crisis could yet be averted and, as Duan bitterly notes as she dies, all does not happen exactly as her father had predicted (*Tambours*, pp. 7, 74). There is even, further, the claim that human action is opposed to that of the gods. When the Architecte surveys his dam and notes that it will not resist the flood, he laments that 'Ce sont des ouvrages humains. On ne peut leur demander de résister à la volonté des dieux' (*Tambours*, p.12). Once again, the idea of gods or of a divine plan becomes an excuse for a human failure, but what the architect is suggesting is that the divine imposes limits on human power rather than on human free choice.

The possibility of choice is a recurrent motif in the play. The Seigneur Khang must attempt to choose which area of his kingdom to flood; a choice which Wang Po and Duan also both face after their defence of the *Digue aux Cerisiers* is successful (*Tambours*, pp. 72-4). Contemplating suicide, the architect states that 'je n'ai plus qu'à disparaître', presenting the ultimate freedom available to any person, the freedom to end their own lives, as his only remaining option (*Tambours*, p. 50). In this constant dramatization of the moment of choice, Cixous's tragedy may be reminiscent of those produced by Sartre, Camus and other dramatists working immediately after the Second World War, who were attempting to produce a new form of tragedy which would reflect their philosophical ideas and be

appropriate to modern times.¹²⁸ Cixous's characters are not, however, free to choose their actions according to philosophical or ethical principles alone. The presence of the *manipulateurs* serves as a constant reminder that our actions are not always determined by our conscious intention, and on several occasions the characters suggest the economic or material concerns that curtail their freedom to act (Cf. *Tambours*, pp. 10, 17). Whilst, in the world of the play, there may well be some greater plan and powerful limiting forces, these do not mean that the play's characters are completely incapable of creating their own destinies. Human endeavour may be 'fragile', but it is possible within certain limits.

Raymond Williams claims that there is conventionally a distinction drawn between suffering that is tragic and suffering that is not. What he calls 'everyday tragedies' are generally assumed to have 'no significant tragic meaning' for an event is thought to be imbued with tragic meaning through a 'shaped response' and 'the capacity to connect the event with some more general body of facts', a wider meaning. Without these two prerequisites, the event is experienced not as tragedy but as 'mere accident' (Williams, *Modern Tragedy*, pp. 46-7). Williams criticises this distinction, particularly the suggestion that the suffering of 'war, famine, work, traffic, politics' may all be excluded from the tragic and not supposed to connect to wider meanings. He suggests that 'the real key, to the modern separation of tragedy from "mere suffering", is the separation of ethical control and, more critically, human agency, from our understanding of social and political life' (Williams, *Modern Tragedy*, pp. 48-9). Dramatizing the 1998 floods in China and suggesting that they play some part in a divine plan, Cixous renders the events tragic according to the criteria that Williams suggests are normally used in the definition of the tragic. However, it does not seem that in so doing she has returned 'ethical control' to this area of 'social life'. Whilst contemporary Chinese

¹²⁸ Cf. Norrish, *New Tragedy*, p. 1 for a discussion of the perceived need for a new type of tragedy and Bradby, *Modern French Drama*, pp. 34-40 for a more detailed analysis of some of the tragedies produced in this period, including Jean-Paul Sartre's *Les Mouches* (1943) and Jean Anouilh's *Antigone* (1944).

floods were mentioned by Cixous as the source for the play in the essay 'La voix étrangère, la plus profonde, la plus antique' (p. 115), in the essay that accompanied the published text of *Tambours*, 'Le théâtre surpris par les marionnettes', Cixous discusses floods as a form of destruction that recurs 'de toute éternité' and which is always said to be 'La Pire' (*Tambours*, p. 116). The floods are likewise transposed from contemporary China to an imaginary and timeless land and whilst the play contains an ecological message, criticising unchecked logging (*Tambours*, p. 10), and giving the last words of the play to 'L'Eau' who addresses the humans who 'aviez la terre pour vaisseau et vous l'avez trouée par péché d'inattention et paresse de l'âme' (*Tambours*, pp. 75-6), the play's wider meaning comes also and largely through repeated references to the gods. Thus little has been done to encourage recognition of elements of the tragic in the everyday world, for tragedy remains related to art and to inhuman forces. Cixous may use tragedy to consider ethical questions, but it is less clear that her play will encourage consideration of the ethical dilemmas and tragedies of everyday life.

The Tragic Hero

At the centre of tragedy is the figure of the tragic hero who, in ancient tragedy, was always a person of noble or aristocratic birth. The significance of this rank has been the subject of much debate. Norrish suggests that the rank of the hero gave them a 'superior and noble quality', and that, because of the hero's birth, they would gain the admiration of the audience even as pity was felt for their suffering (Norrish, *New Tragedy*, p. 7). For Walter Benjamin, the rank of the hero was only significant insofar as it allowed them to claim descent from mythical and usually semi-divine figures of the 'heroic age' (Benjamin, '*Trauerspiel*', p. 113). Raymond Williams contends that ancient leaders were thought to embody their state and so such leaders were used as tragic heroes, for the playwright could then discuss the fate of an entire nation through the presentation of the single figure of the ruler (Williams,

Modern Tragedy, p. 50). It is unlikely that, in a contemporary French play, a particularly 'superior' quality would be associated with the suffering of any character of noble rank. Nor is it likely that the characters of a play set in an imagined Asian world will claim Greek heroic descent, or that the contemporary audience would attach particular significance to this descent if they did. Of more interest in relation to Cixous's play is the contention that the hero of a tragedy could in some way embody their nation. In *Norodom* and *Indiade*, Cixous has already used protagonists who actually or in their imaginations are the embodiment of their respective countries.¹²⁹ In *Tambours*, the question is more complex since no character openly declares themselves the embodiment of their nation, but the play does feature Seigneur Khang, a ruler with absolute control over his country as well as other characters who, for various reasons, may be considered to be the hero of *Tambours*.

Certainly other characters in the play look to the Seigneur Khang as the figure of ultimate authority. His sanction is sought before any action is taken. The Devin and Duan run to Khang when they first foresee the flood (*Tambours*, pp. 7-8), and the wife of the architect advises him to tell the Seigneur who would then be able to resolve the issue (*Tambours*, pp. 50-1). Yet these attempts to gain the protection of the Seigneur seem ironically misguided. The Architecte and the Architecte's wife are killed before they can reach Khang (*Tambours*, pp. 53-5) and the Devin's warning leads only to bickering at court (*Tambours*, p.9). Both the Architecte and his wife died for the possibility to speak to a man who may not have acted upon their advice had they reached him. The inaction of Seigneur may have prompted Cynthia Running-Johnson's flawed assessment of Khang as 'physically weak but morally healthy'.¹³⁰ In fact, it seems that Khang does not lack the power but rather the will to embark on a morally good course of action. When Wang Po returns to the city, he finds that its gates

¹²⁹ Cf. My chapter on the use of power in *Norodom*, pp. 44-5

¹³⁰ Cynthia Running-Johnson 'Cixous's Left and Right Hands of Writing in *Tambours sur la digue* and *Osnabrück*', *French Forum*, 26.3 (2001), 111-122 (p. 114).

have been barred and the people denied the possibility of refuge in the city on the express orders of the Seigneur (*Tambours*, p. 63). Informed of Hun's plan to breach the *Digue aux Cerisiers*, Khang does not object, but rather continues to talk with his nephew, saying 'Si l'on pouvait dormir et, pendant cette absence de l'esprit, si des agents du destin pouvaient exécuter tout ce que la juste pitié nous interdit' (*Tambours*, p. 32). Khang may feel 'pitié' for his subjects, but although this 'pitié' is 'juste', he characterises it more as an irritation, preventing him from governing effectively, than as motivation for his actions. Khang may have moral awareness, but he lacks moral strength. Hun repeatedly asks his uncle for explicit permission to breach the dam, but his requests are repeatedly evaded though not denied. Khang effectively sanctions his nephew's pitiless realpolitik but through verbal manoeuvring maintains the ability to protest his innocence, just as absolute leaders have done throughout the centuries: this is how Henry II was rid of his turbulent priest and why Elizabeth I had her private secretary arrested after Mary Stuart's execution. Khang is not a leader who fearlessly governs according to his moral principles, but neither does he have the resolve to endorse fully the course of practical politics that he ultimately takes.

Far from embodying his kingdom, the Seigneur appears to be radically distant from it. Told of the risk of flooding to his own city, the Seigneur admits that 'jamais je n'avais regardé notre ville dans le détail' (*Tambours*, p. 13) in a comment that is dramatically functional as it allows exposition of the play's setting but also symptomatic of the Seigneur's lack of contact with the world outside his palace. He is entirely reliant upon his advisors to keep him informed of the situation in his kingdom and to push him to act justly. Thus he laments the absence of his advisers, saying bitterly 'on me laisse seul avec les destins. L'auteur de toute cette histoire, il faudra donc que ce soit moi' (*Tambours*, p. 35). This resentment of the Chancellor's absence seems ironic given that it was the Seigneur himself who threatened to

banish his loyal advisor (*Tambours*, p. 11). Khang is unwilling to recognise that his own actions lie at the heart of certain problems but at the same time is willing if not happy to assume responsibility for writing the ‘histoire’ of his kingdom. Yet his words even here seem contradictory. Although Khang will grudgingly become the ‘auteur’ of his kingdom’s story, he also sees himself left alone with ‘les destins’, the figure of destiny suggesting that a plot or plan for his kingdom already exists. Throughout the play, Khang displays conflicting desires to assert his own authority but deny responsibility for his kingdom’s problems. He signs the order to close the city gates ‘puisqu’il n’y avait personne pour me dire “Seigneur vous avez tort”’ (*Tambours*, p. 61). Khang’s defence here is similar to that used by X1 in *Ville Parjure*, who passes guilt for his crimes on to the state that failed to prevent him from committing them. Once again, the defence rests on the assumption that the individual will only act ethically if prevented from taking any other course of action and on a profound desire to abdicate personal responsibility. Lacking both knowledge of his country and the belief that he is alone responsible for its wellbeing, Khang cannot be said to embody his kingdom and therefore, according to Raymond Williams’s criteria, is not the tragic hero of *Tambours*.

Although she is not of noble birth and is not present onstage for large parts of the play’s action, some have seen Duan as the hero of *Tambours*. She does seem to have some of the characteristics normally associated with heroism. Particularly evident is her bravery, which is displayed in her unhesitant decision to protect the *Digue aux Cerisiers*, something that other characters confess they lack the courage to do (*Tambours* pp. 7, 18). Under her protection, the *Digue aux Cerisiers* becomes a symbol of hope to other characters who wish either for safety or for the opportunity to resist the forces that would sacrifice the peasantry (*Tambours* pp. 46, 47-8, 68). In this way, Duan may be seen as the figurehead or embodiment not of an entire nation but of a certain movement within it. From her account of translating *Tambours*,

it seems that this is how Miller originally understood the play and the figure of Duan. She describes how she had originally intended to translate the play's title as *Duan and the Drummers*, a move which would have placed Duan's resistance at the centre of the play's action. However, Cixous insisted that the title be translated as *Drums on the Dam*, stressing the action of resistance, specifically resistance through music and artistic expression, rather than the agents of this resistance (Miller, 'Ineffable on Stage', p. 187). Duan may be the most prominent figure within the movement, but it is the movement that counts and not her individual action.

Cixous seems to have created a play in which the mood is one of tragic suffering, but where the pain of a single central figure is not the focus. *Tambours* weaves together the stories of a number of different protagonists, none of whom completely dominates the play. As has been discussed, both Duan and Seigneur Khang possess some of the attributes of tragic heroism, but so do the Chancellor, Wang Po and Tshumi, all of whom display great bravery for which they suffer (*Tambours*, pp. 58, 67, 71). Perhaps in a world in which we no longer believe absolute rulers to be able to stand in for an entire country, a tragedy must not have a single, dominant hero but either abandon the attempt to discuss an entire nation or discuss the fates of various figures from different sections of society.

Tragedy and the Reestablishment of Order

Walter Benjamin argued that the sacrifice of the tragic hero was the basis of tragedy. The sacrifice of the hero, he argued, was 'at once a first and final sacrifice' (Benjamin, '*Trauerspiel*', p. 110). The tragic hero is sacrificed to appease the old order and its gods, but their sacrifice at the same time allows the establishment of a new community, and so is also a first sacrifice. Raymond Williams's contention is similar, although he is concerned with

disorder rather than sacrifice. Williams argues that ‘Specifically, in tragedy, the creation of order is directly related to the fact of disorder, through which the action moves’, suggesting that the action of tragedy, tragic suffering, is a form of disorder or the result of a challenge to order (Williams, *Modern Tragedy*, p. 52). There is, for Williams, ‘no continuing tragic cause, at the simple level of content’. What is constant, Williams argues, is that the disorder of tragedy eventually leads to the creation of a new order (ibid.). It will be interesting to consider whether destruction, disorder, or sacrifice lead to the creation of a new order within *Tambours*.

If we consider Duan as one of the play’s tragic heroes, then the moment of heroic sacrifice may be the point at which she is killed by her lover Wang Po. The sacrifice of the hero puts an end to disorder, and it does seem that Duan’s protection of the *Digue aux Cerisiers*, which must end with her death, was a challenge to the status quo and so could represent a moment of disorder. Duan’s defeat of Hun’s forces disrupted the smooth running of the previous order of Khang’s rule, which would have destroyed the *Digue aux Cerisiers* early on and displaced the countryside-dwellers without allowing them to seek refuge in the town. Duan dies, too, as a result of her compassion and desire to protect human life, the same impulses that had led her to protect the *Digue*. Wang Po kills Duan as she attempts to persuade him to allow the flooding of the countryside and ease the suffering of the town if this can be done without further loss of life (*Tambours*, p. 74). New order comes directly out of disorder: Duan’s actions instituted the *Digue aux Cerisiers* as a site of resistance and brought Wang Po out to fight for the protection of the people of the countryside. Her death removes any barrier to the creation of a new order based on Wang Po’s angry protection of one group of people at any cost. Wang Po’s order is however short-lived as its figurehead dies in the floods together with those he opposed. If Duan’s compassion and resistance are seen to be elements of disorder to

be overcome, then Cixous's play seems to be offering a hopeless vision of human society in which greed and corruption are only eventually replaced by anger and death. Yet there is an element of hope at the end of Cixous's play, as Bai Ju, the master of the puppet theatre, survives the flood. The fragile hint of hope and its potential for a better order comes only after the disorder wrought by the flood. This is a disorder that touches all of the play's characters, all of its multiple tragic heroes.

After being cursed by fishermen who fear the destruction and loss of livelihood that a flood will bring, the river of *Tambours* enters the scene and threatens: 'Vous ne voyez pas la fin du monde? L'inondation du siècle vous l'aurez, je vous la promets!' (*Tambours*, p. 30). The river promises the destruction of the entire former order, the entire former world. When we finally see that all save one of the characters has died it is evident that the river has kept its promise. The sacrifice has been twofold: those protected by the *Digue aux Cerisiers* have been deliberately sacrificed by the Seigneur Khang in the hope of protecting the city, and eventually all those that inhabit the city are also sacrificed as the river assuages the anger it feels at the humans who 'traite père et mère comme une poubelle' but then 'jette la faute sur les eaux du Fleuve' (*Tambours*, p. 29). Inherent within each of these sacrifices is the potential for a different new order. The deaths of the citizens of the countryside alone would have created an order in which the dominance of the city went unchallenged. This is not so much the creation of a new order but the entrenchment of the old, and so this first sacrifice has not achieved the new order that Williams suggests comes out of tragedy. Bai Ju's survival may represent the possibility for a new order. As the head of the puppet theatre, what survives with Bai Ju is the possibility that the events of the tragedy may be represented and that new communities may learn of the dangers of greed, indecision and a failure to take positive action promptly. Benjamin argues that 'in the presence of the suffering of the hero, the

community learns reverence and gratitude for the word with which his death endowed it' (Benjamin, *'Trauerspiel'*, p. 111). In *Tambours*, the suffering is great and the destruction almost total, perhaps in the hope that the play's warning may be greeted with such 'reverence'. It is perhaps for this reason that it is necessary that only one person survive the play and that the hope of a new order be so very fragile. The survival of Bai Ju is evidence of Cixous's belief in the power of theatre to incite positive change and also of her belief that it must be moving in order to do so.

Conclusion

In *Tambours*, Cixous explores ethical questions including the issues of human greed and its consequences, particularly its consequences on the environment, the possibility of action, and the permissibility of sacrificing certain people to save others. The play ends with an affirmation that theatre may be the vehicle for the creation of a new or more ethically positive order. In this way the final message of *Tambours* echoes Cixous's own ideas about the positive role of the theatre.

In her investigation of these questions, Cixous manipulates the form of tragedy. Whilst the overriding tone of the play remains one of suffering, this suffering is felt by puppet-actors. What is ethically positive in this innovative staging is the attempt to encourage the audience to be moved by the suffering of those with whom they cannot identify. As in Greek tragedy, within Cixous's play there is a sense that events are predestined to occur. However, within Cixous's play this plan is malleable and characters may choose how they act, within certain limitations. Those that seek to justify their failure to choose a good course of action with reference to a divine plan appear as weak or corrupt. Unlike ancient tragedy, *Tambours* no longer has a single, noble hero who suffers. Rather, we witness the pain of a number of

different characters. This may be the result of social change but, just as with the use of puppets, the consequence is to encourage recognition not just of particular individuals deemed noble or superior, but of all those who are in pain. Also in a deviation from the tropes of ancient tragedy, Cixous's play does not show the installation of a new order or a triumphant new community. There is simply the hope that such an order could possibly be created through the theatre that survives the tragic events.

The alterations that Cixous has made to the form of tragedy in *Tambours* reflect her wider concerns. Like the dramatists working in the immediate post-war period, Cixous has responded to the need for a tragedy that is more appropriate to twentieth-century France, where there is not a belief in gods that have absolute power over destinies, or that absolute rulers embody their nations. Cixous's tragedy is not calculated to reveal our radical capacity for free choice, but rather suggests the need for compassion to be extended to those different from ourselves, the need for ethical principles to be coupled with ethical action, the value of collective action and finally the revolutionary potential of art.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

This study began by defining ethics as an attempt to answer the question ‘What should I do?’. Political responses to the question dealt with negotiation and compromise, ethical responses involved the definition of a quasi-transcendental good which could serve as a guide for our actions. Ethics furthermore always dealt with our relationships with others. An analysis of four plays that H el ene Cixous wrote for the Th eatre du Soleil has shown them to be particularly concerned with ethical questions. Since the action of informed questioning is itself an important part of ethics, what is prominent in Cixous’s plays is not so much a clear response to the question of ‘What should I do?’, as an examination of related problems: where ethical questions can usefully be asked, what the foundation of ethics should be, and who should be treated ethically (whom we should care about). This chapter will draw together the responses to these questions found in the plays.

Where can Ethical Questions be Asked?

The first chapter of this thesis showed how, in her writing about the theatre, Cixous claims that the theatre is a uniquely privileged space for the discussion of ethical questions. Cixous attributes this quality to the theatrical tradition, to the historical function of the theatre as a place in which morality was discussed, as well as to certain aspects of the economy of the theatre, particularly to the fact that both the creation and the consumption of theatre are generally shared experiences. Evidence of Cixous’s concern with the role and function of the theatre and art more widely can be found in the plays analysed and is particularly clear in *Tambours*, where Duan protects her *digue* through the music of the drummers’ warning rhythms, and where the puppet master Bai Ju is the only character to survive the flood that ends the play, his art and its potential to represent of the events of the flood becoming the sole hope for the creation of a new and better order in the kingdom.

Art has the potential to be ethically valuable, but it is not true that all forms of art lend themselves equally to being the forum for the discussion of ethical questions. Nussbaum states that ‘perception’, the ‘ability to discern, acutely and responsively, the salient features of one’s particular situation’, is for her, as it is for Aristotle, not only a ‘tool toward achieving the correct action’, but ‘an ethically valuable activity in its own right’ (*Love’s Knowledge*, p. 37). The value placed on perception is linked for Nussbaum to a wish to ‘demand for ethics a much finer responsiveness to the concrete’, and she believes a commitment to such an ethically valuable perception to be ‘built into the very form of the novel as a genre’ (ibid.). Nussbaum’s ethical perception in novels is reminiscent of the idea in Brecht that theatre has a politically valuable role to play, allowing the audience to understand their historical position. For Nussbaum as for Brecht, certain forms of art favour this ethically and politically valuable perception.¹³¹ This thesis has considered how formal and stylistic choices in Cixous’s theatre may have had ethical implications, or favoured some sort of ethically valuable ‘perception’.

In my fifth chapter, it was demonstrated that Cixous uses the theatrical genre of tragedy to explore ethical questions in *Tambours*. Elements of the tragic may also be found in the other plays that have been discussed, most evidently with the inclusion of the Erinyes in *Ville parjure*, but also in *Norodom* and *L’Indiade*, where Sihanouk and Gandhi respectively may be considered to have some of the attributes of the tragic hero. However, Cixous manipulates the conventions of the tragic to better represent her ethical concerns; in *Tambours*, for example, she problematizes the reestablishment of order that would traditionally close a tragedy in order to leave the audience with an ethical responsibility to act. The two most significant elements of the tragic that were retained in Cixous’s plays were firstly the idea

¹³¹ Cf. *Love’s Knowledge*, p. 27, where Nussbaum advises that ‘certain’ novels be incorporated into the canon of texts on ethics.

that the theatre should be concerned with examining the human condition, and secondly the tone of suffering that was present in all of the plays despite their moments of humour. This tone was related to the ability of theatre to move the audience, an ability figured positively in Cixous's writing on the theatre.

Cixous's theatre does not, however, encourage the audience's sympathy or passion to the extent that it excludes the ability to reflect critically upon what is being presented. The plays demand thoughtful interpretation by the audience, particularly since their subject matter is often challenging, dealing with uncomfortable moments in contemporary history. There are recurrent criticisms of those who are deliberately blind to the injustices that are happening around them. The plays can be seen as attempts to combat such blindness, or at least that is what is suggested by the final scene of *Ville parjure*. It is not clear that the plays succeed in this aim: the areas of history with which they deal are likely to be known if not familiar to the audience of the Théâtre du Soleil and furthermore, as was suggested in my examination of *Tambours*, Cixous's insistence on the importance of artifice and spectacle may mean that the audience does not translate what they saw in the theatre into action in the world.

At the heart of Cixous's response to the question of how Asia or the foreign may be portrayed is an exaggerated artificiality, created by the intertextual references, staging choices, and supernatural occurrences that are present in all four plays. Whilst the audience is encouraged to be moved by the plays, they are at the same time forced to keep a distance between their lives and the drama, a distance which allows critical reflection. The desire for distance between audience and play is also an important factor in Cixous's choice to set so many of the plays that she writes for the Théâtre du Soleil in spaces that are culturally and spatially distant from France, in a deliberately artificial Asia or in imagined, utopian spaces. Situating

her discussion of the ethical questions in this sort of space prevents what Cixous has written from being a manifesto, something that can be immediately transferred into everyday life. In this way the artificiality of the theatre is central to its ability to function as a space for ethical enquiry, since the realm of ethics is structurally separate from the realm of politics, negotiated actions in the material world.

What is the Foundation of Ethics?

Within the plays there were attempts to find a foundation for ethics, a sure basis for our judgements of actions. These attempts were related to what we have identified as the remit of ethics as a field of study, the definition of what is good. In these plays, Cixous engages with the ideas that the foundation of ethics could be a set of laws, gods, or the emotions and sympathy.

The idea that laws or rules could form the basis for ethics is examined in *Ville parjure*. X1 and X2 affirm that their behaviour is acceptable because they have not broken (the letter of) criminal laws. In the play, it is suggested that the codes of criminal law exist to maintain (corrupt) order in the city; ethically bad behaviour is punished for this reason, and not because it *should* be punished. Criminal law is thus not the same as moral law which defines good behaviour, although X1 and X2 wish it to be. The distinction between the two forms of law(s) is clear if X1 and X2 are compared to Gandhi in *Indiade*. Gandhi's unbending law of non-violence is a moral law, understood by him to be good in itself rather than as a function of an order that it could create: he recommends non-violent resistance to Nazism even if this would allow the spread of fascism throughout Europe. Gandhi's moral law is hence equally not an appropriate basis for ethics: it obliges him to advocate actions which we would prefer to condemn as unethical and moreover, as was suggested in Chapter Three, may leave Gandhi

unable to sympathise with or understand others and therefore lead him to betray his friends. In Chapter One it was argued, after Derrida, that the establishment of a comprehensive set of moral laws which could be applied automatically in any situation would actually make ethics impossible, since it would mean that we could never make a decision ‘in the strong sense’; the sort of decision which is the basis of ethical action.¹³² The plays affirm this rejection of laws as the basis of morality, showing adherence to either moral law or criminal laws as the foundation of ethics to be practically unworkable and potentially dangerous.

A concern with the divine and the relationship between gods and ethics recurs in all of the plays. This is not entirely separate from the concern with laws; the Mother in *Ville parjure* makes reference to divine grace when she suggests how X1 and X2 may be forgiven for their crimes, and likewise when Gandhi wishes to regain his innocence, he does so by emulating the divine. Like the law, the divine does not necessarily prevent ethical action, but it is not always an encouragement to it either. Significantly, the divine often figures in the plays as an excuse for attempts to abdicate ethical responsibility; this abdication is suggested by the figure of Apollo at the trial of Orestes in *The Eumenides*, an intertextual presence in Cixous’s *Ville parjure*, and is also important in relation to my discussion of Gandhi’s innocence and my analysis of the presence of a divine plan in *Tambours*. This does not mean that a belief in a god is fundamentally incompatible with an ability to take ethical responsibility for actions, since we may consider that those characters who deny responsibility are misusing the concept of god. Nevertheless, Cixous does not show a divine that can reliably act as a basis for ethics, but rather a divine that is ambivalent, can be manipulated, and encourages wrong action as much as right.

¹³² See my pp. 4-5.

As has already been suggested, emotions and empathy are important in these four plays. Carla Bagnoli has identified the investigation of the role that emotions may play in our lives as ‘one of the main *foci* of philosophical attention’ in the last three decades.¹³³ She suggests how ‘venerable traditions of thought’ have placed ‘emotions such as respect, love, and compassion at the very heart of morality’ (ibid., p. 1). Bagnoli goes on to argue that ‘moral philosophy should account for how moral consciousness can be “oriented toward the good”, and it is in this context that emotions become a matter of interest for moral philosophy’ (ibid., p. 4). Nussbaum has likewise drawn attention to the ways in which ‘emotions embody some of our most deeply rooted views about what has importance’, and may consequently have a vital role in the study of ethics (*Love’s Knowledge*, p. 42). For both thinkers, emotions are a tool which can help us to identify the basis of ethics; this basis is itself located elsewhere.

The plays suggest that emotions, though important, have a potentially ambivalent relationship to morality, and may lead us to act in both good and bad ways. This problem, acknowledged by both Bagnoli and Nussbaum (*Morality and Emotions*, p. 1; *Love’s Knowledge*, p. 52), is eloquently suggested in *Indiade* through the presentation of the contrasting figures of Jinnah and Gandhi. Both men mourn their wives, but whilst Gandhi’s suffering leads to positive action, Jinnah becomes determined to close himself off from the world. This is not the main problem for the claim that emotions are the basis of ethics, since even if a strong basis for ethics is established it does not guarantee that all people always act positively. What is more significant is that emotions are shown to be ethically valuable insofar as they can inspire or guide ethical action: feeling is not in itself ethically valuable. Thus we criticise *Tambours’s* Seigneur Khang, who feels (or claims to feel) for his people and yet does not act to help

¹³³ Carla Bagnoli, ‘Introduction’, in *Morality and the Emotions*, ed. by Carla Bagnoli (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 1-27 (p. 2), in *Oxford Scholarship Online* <<http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199577507.001.0001/acprof-9780199577507-chapter-1>> [accessed 27 August 2012].

them. Cixous's ambivalent presentation of emotions in the plays returns us to the importance of ethical action.

The presentation of emotions in the plays also returns us to another of the key elements of my definition of ethics: the idea that ethical actions always involve our relationships to others. The most prized emotions in the plays are compassion and sympathy. In *Ville parjure*, for example, it is hoped by the Mother that sympathy might form the basis of a new kind of justice, that the emotional impact of events might be the criteria by which we judge them to be right or wrong. Bagnoli points out that 'emotions such as love and compassion are perceptions of the value of others' (*Morality and Emotions*, p. 1), and it is certainly true that, connected to the praise of love and compassion in the plays, are the questions of how highly we value others, and how highly we value ourselves. Thus Gandhi, motivated by love, redeems himself through self-sacrifice, placing the wellbeing of others before his own, and we condemn Forzza, Kissinger, and Saloth Sâr, who, deliberately blind to the pain of others, sacrifice others for the sake of their regimes. Yet it is not possible to draw the conclusion that others should always be valued equally or more highly than ourselves and that this should be the basis for ethics: we do not judge Bahadur too harshly for his decision to kill Moona Baloo in self-defence after the bear kills others on stage. The question of whom we should care about seems to need more careful consideration.

Whom Should I Care About?

We may consider ourselves to have ethical obligations towards many different things; other people, animals, gods, our country, or concepts such as art or history, for example. It is important to think about which of these things we must take into consideration when making decisions and, if we feel that we should care about a number of different things, we must

think about which obligations are the most important, since an ethical decision might include deciding between different obligations.

Our first option may be to care about everything and everyone. This is what Gandhi attempts to do when he practises what was called his ‘universal love’ in *Indiade*. However, the attempt at universal love fails as, in reaching out to his enemies, Gandhi ignores the suffering of his friends and does not prevent partition. If a comparison is drawn between Gandhi’s situation and that of Seigneur Khang in *Tambours*, it becomes clear that it is the goal of universal love and not Gandhi’s attempt at it which is flawed. If Khang fails to choose to sacrifice one area of his country, all of his people will suffer. Khang is not motivated by a desire to love all of his subjects equally, but his situation nevertheless illustrates the necessity of discriminating between ethical obligations to different groups.

It may be that our level of ethical obligation towards another person is related to the question of power, that we might have a greater obligation towards those over whom we have some power, or those who are powerless. Thus Eschyle protects down-and-outs in *Ville parjure*’s cemetery as Duan protects the peasants around her *digue*, Sihanouk refuses to help those who have already had the benefit of a European education, and the plays are harsh in their judgements of the actions of the English and the Americans in India and Cambodia respectively. The recurrent themes of death and memory in the plays may be related to the question of what we owe to the powerless. The Mother feels a duty to fight for justice not simply for herself and because of her own suffering but also for her dead sons, and at the end of *Ville parjure* the audience is left with a duty to continue to act precisely because the Mother and other inhabitants of the cemetery are dead, absolutely unable to change anything in the world themselves. A similar relationship to the dead may be found in the other plays,

and there is particularly clearly a duty to remember the dead, which is linked to the ethical value of art. Therefore, for example, the references to the Cambodian genocide in *Norodom* both carry out and create a duty to remember, in honour of the dead as well as in protection of the living. The idea that we may have an ethical duty towards the dead is also interesting because it suggests that the basis of ethics is not exactly the utilitarian principle of maximising happiness, since those who are dead can no longer have their position improved. The plays do therefore suggest that we have a duty to help the powerless, but it is not clear whether this duty is consistently present, or whether it is rather contingent, existing only because we may have a greater ability to help them.

Finally, it may be that we have a greater ethical duty towards people who we know personally and particularly to our families. Anthony Cunningham discusses this question in detail. He assumes that any attempt to love everybody equally would mean that we must first give up all 'intimate ties', our connections to loved ones. Setting himself up in opposition to his reading of Kantian ethics, he argues that any ethical theory that demands that we value all people equally 'rides roughshod over what is best and most beautiful about human life and character' (*What Matters*, p. 54). He further argues that what he calls 'intimate ties' not only have a role to play in determining the level of priority that we assign to our different ethical obligations, but also bring with them particular ethical obligations of their own. Being a good father, for instance, would, for Cunningham, be ethically positive and would, importantly, entail obligations that are unique to that role as father (*What Matters*, pp. 56-9). Whilst Cunningham is perhaps ungenerous to those who would, with *Indiade's* Gandhi, see some sort of 'universal love' as an ethical goal, his point, that the bonds that link us to loved ones are central to our lives and that theories of ethics should not only accommodate these links but value them, does resonate in the plays.

Particular attention is paid to the ethical obligations associated with family ties in *Ville parjure*, where the Mother's call for justice has more weight precisely because it is her sons who have died, and where there is a focus on the figures of the Erinyes who were particularly known for punishing the crime of matricide. *Norodom* and *Indiade* include scenes in which the Khmer Rouge and Jinnah, respectively, turn their backs on (members of) their families. On both occasions, the abandonment of family marks the characters' complete dedication to an ethically wrong or dubious course of action: the bloody communisation of Cambodia or the partition of India. Those courses of action would still be wrong if they had not necessitated the abandonment of family, but the scenes are not (only) moving because they mark that decision; the actions portrayed are themselves upsetting. Inherent in Jinnah's decision and made explicit by the Khmer Rouge is a denial that one should have a greater duty to care for one's family than to care for others, a denial that family relationships are important. If we are moved by these characters' abandonment of their families then it may be because we feel that this denial is ethically wrong. Nevertheless, the plays do not encourage us to care about our family members to the exclusion of all others, and in *Tambours* Khang appears to be corrupt when he supports his nephew Hun rather than protecting his citizens. Whilst, then, the plays suggest that it is ethically desirable to treat our families and those who we know with particular love, the duty that we have towards these people does not completely negate duties we have towards others, and certainly not the duty not to harm others.

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