

**THE THEATRE OF THE SELF: POETIC IDENTITY IN THE PLAYS OF**

**HELENE CIXOUS AND MARINA TSVETAeva**

by Julia Dobson, MA

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## **THE THEATRE OF THE SELF: POETIC IDENTITY IN THE PLAYS OF MARINA TSVETAeva AND HELENE CIXOUS.**

This comparative study of the theatre of Hélène Cixous and Marina Tsvetaeva proposes a reading of their plays as a coherent corpus engaged specifically with the representation of poetic identity. Tsvetaeva's and Cixous' plays present a diverse range of characters who can be identified as poet-selves and who struggle to assert their identity in hostile environments. An inherent link is established between the thematic and the generic. Cixous' and Tsvetaeva's adoption of the theatre as genre in which to develop their conceptualisations of poetic identity is shown to be important to the thematic contexts in which the poet-selves are constructed. This study defines four elements: language, exile, sexual difference and Greek mythology, which are shown to be common to the representation of poetic identity in Tsvetaeva's and Cixous' plays. Each element is addressed in turn in Chapters Two to Five and its role in both writers' constructions of poetic identity in their individual plays is explored and problematised. The conclusion evaluates the radical nature of Cixous' and Tsvetaeva's dramatisations of poetic identity in the context of the representation of the female poet and discusses the evolution of this theme in a chronological approach to their theatre.



### **Note on Translation and Transliteration**

Russian words are transliterated according to the Library of Congress system.

All translations given in this thesis are mine unless otherwise stated.

## INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a comparative study of the theatre of Marina Tsvetaeva and Hélène Cixous, in which I will discuss the representation of poetic identity in their plays. Through the employment of four main themes: language, exile, sexual difference and mythology, I seek to establish similarities between the two writer's conceptions of poetic identity, and to move towards an assessment of the radical potential of these representations.

Cixous' published fictions and her seminar programme at the *Centre d'Etudes Féminines*<sup>1</sup> construct complex correspondences between her work and that of a small group of chosen writers, amongst whom is Marina Tsvetaeva. This adoptive canon consists of writers with whom Cixous expresses particular affinities, and whose works regularly constitute the majority of primary texts on her seminar programme. They are often referred to in both her fictions and her critical essays. Conley comments on this in her introduction to a selection of critical texts transcribed from Cixous' seminars:

The primary carrier of Cixous' readings is an ongoing interest in poetry attached to the proper name of Clarice Lispector, whose texts are read alongside those of Joyce, Kafka, Kleist and Tsvetaeva. Many of these proper names have crisscrossed Cixous' texts since the beginning of her career as a writer. Lispector has been a concern for a number of years, but the shift towards Eastern Europe is recent.<sup>2</sup>

Other authors appearing in various areas of her work include Jacques Derrida, Ingeborg Bachmann, Thomas Bernard and Jean Genet, and they, along with those mentioned previously represent recurring themes and foci of Cixous' aesthetics. Indeed, Cixous



often includes her own work on the seminar programme, an explicit insertion of herself as correspondence between all these different authors. Cixous clearly perceives affinities between her central concerns and the writing practices of these writers and, I would argue, between these authors and her own writing. This group of authors and their work have subsequently been formed into a complex intertext for the development of Cixous' aesthetics and creative identity.

The work, and indeed the proper name, of Marina Tsvetaeva have entered this canon and since 1985 Tsvetaeva's texts have featured regularly on the seminar programme. Cixous has published several minor pieces on Tsvetaeva, none of which, however, refer to Tsvetaeva's theatre. Cixous' first piece on Tsvetaeva, and indeed the only piece of extended writing by Cixous which focuses solely on Tsvetaeva, discusses Neuf Lettres avec une dixième retenue et une onzième reçue.<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere Cixous examines Tsvetaeva's innovative use of language in the text and meditates on the significance of the letter 'f'.<sup>4</sup> Cixous' interest in Tsvetaeva is more commonly demonstrated through her references to Tsvetaeva's work as an illustration of the relationship between poetry, resistance and history, an interest which extends to other poets of Tsvetaeva's generation, notably Osip Mandel'shtam and Anna Akhmatova.<sup>5</sup> Tsvetaeva appears in such general discussions in Cixous' work alongside other "writers of extremity"<sup>6</sup> and is frequently associated with themes of exile and passion. In Jours de l'an, a text ostensibly about the act of writing itself, Cixous expresses her admiration for Tsvetaeva's courage and assertion of poetry in the face of history and fate.<sup>7</sup>

As is the pattern with other writers who become members of Cixous' idiosyncratic canon, Tsvetaeva's work and biography are drawn upon to illustrate and develop Cixous' concept of the role of the poet and of poetry. As stated earlier, Cixous' inclusion of her own work in this canon implies an association of her own poetic identity, and stature, with these writers. The emphasis on thematic affinities within their work contributes to the definition and development of Cixous' work, and indeed to the projection of Cixous' poetic identity. We can consider Cixous' engagement with other writers as constituting a textual and personal system which ultimately serves to



mythologise her own writing practices and creative persona.

I have chosen to focus on affinities between the representation of poetic identity in the work of Cixous and Tsvetaeva, rather than to investigate potential links between all the writers of Cixous' canon for several reasons. The issue of the importance of the role of gender in representations of poetic identity is important to this study and is engaged with in the context of comparing two women writers. Tsvetaeva and Cixous, I will argue, both turn to the theatre in which to further explore and describe poetic identity.

This comparative study addresses the theatre of H       Cixous and Marina Tsvetaeva in the context of the representation of poetic identity, the specific identity of the female subject and, consequently, that of the creative female subject. The chapters of this study are organised around themes which constitute fundamental aspects in the perceptions of identity for both writers, and which are articulated within their respective writings for the theatre.

Explorations of issues of female identity, and means of voicing or representing that identity are, of course, fundamental to studies of women's self-expression in any medium. Feminist literary theory, informed by many diverse approaches, has affirmed the importance of revealing the ideological content of conventional discourses on women in patriarchal society, and of reading all cultural texts 'against the grain'. Of parallel importance to this activity is the creation of new representations of female experience and subjectivity.<sup>8</sup> I shall address the presence of both activities in the theatre of Tsvetaeva and Cixous.

The prolific output of H       Cixous reflects an unremitting engagement with the representation of subjectivity and intersubjective relationships, preferring '...possibilities of social and subjective transformations.'<sup>9</sup> This concern with the structure and representation of identity is central to Cixous' work and the development of her engagement with this theme will be discussed in relation to her increasing involvement with the theatre. Tsvetaeva's work engages with the problematics of



identity, in particular the voicing of female experience in the context of a predominantly masculine poetic heritage. A number of critics have commented briefly on the importance of the theme of identity in Tsvetaeva's work. In the 1970s and 1980s several articles appeared which adopted a more rigorous textual approach to Tsvetaeva's work and began to address issues of gender representation in her work, although these were not informed by feminist literary theory and did not discuss her theatre.<sup>10</sup> The increased awareness of feminist approaches to Russian literature can be considered as marked by the publication of Barbara Heldt's influential book Terrible Perfection: Women and Russian Literature.<sup>11</sup> Heldt describes the formulation and articulation of a female voice in Tsvetaeva's poetry as subverting the dominant representations of women in Russian and Soviet literature.<sup>12</sup> Critical work on Tsvetaeva which engages with issues of gender and representation in the context of feminist literary theory has increased enormously in the past five years, the majority of such research being based in Russian departments of American universities.<sup>13</sup> However, much detailed research on the representation of identity in Tsvetaeva's work remains unpublished. This unpublished research includes the doctoral research of Laura Weeks which examines Tsvetaeva's poetry in the context of representations of identity, but unfortunately the concept of identity is formulated in very specific terms which are of limited relevance to this study.<sup>14</sup> Irina Kuzminsky includes Tsvetaeva as one of three female poets whom she discusses in the context of the potential identification of gender-specific modes of writing.<sup>15</sup> However, whilst Kuzminsky notes the emphasis on verbal states of becoming and mutable identity in Tsvetaeva's poetry,<sup>16</sup> she does not focus upon the representation of poetic identity. The most systematic and detailed research in this field has been undertaken by Sibelan Forrester whose doctoral thesis addresses the relationship of the speaking self to gender in Tsvetaeva's poetry. Forrester engages successfully with Tsvetaeva's use of female figures from myth and world literature and her adoption of traditional forms of female discourse with the aim of "... redefining poetry as a variety of female experience."<sup>17</sup> This work provides a valuable survey of the female figures with whom Tsvetaeva identified in her poetry.<sup>18</sup>



but focuses on the poetry written between 1915 and 1923. Forrester's work does not at any point discuss Tsvetaeva's writing for the theatre, the specific topic of this present study. My own thesis focuses upon the representation of identity in which gender, although clearly constituting a fundamental part of poetic identity, cannot be perceived as the sole denominator.

It must be noted that the subversion and blurring of generic categories is common to the work of Tsvetaeva and Cixous. Svetlana Boym underlines the extent of this in Tsvetaeva's work:

Tsvetaeva's prose goes beyond all acceptable boundaries of genre and does not allow us to draw comfortable distinctions between criticism and autobiography, prose and poetry, fact and fiction, author and narrator, person and persona.<sup>19</sup>

However, this blurring of generic divisions is not sustained in Cixous' critical writing on the theatre, which discusses the generic singularity of the form and mobilises what she perceives as its particular qualities. Whilst acknowledging the importance of the challenging of categories of genre elsewhere in the work of both writers, I will focus upon the theatre of Cixous and Tsvetaeva in the context of the development of their representations of the female subject and the poet-self in order to assert that it is within their plays that engagement with questions of identity is most clearly and consistently addressed.

Much critical work on theatre engages with questions of identity, producing readings which focus upon the spectator's identification with or alienation from the protagonists. Feminist approaches to theatre, however, stress the importance of viewing the theatre as an ideological apparatus, in which dominant representations of women are sustained and social connotations of gender reified, and in which the position of the female spectator is often problematic.<sup>20</sup> My thesis acknowledges the political importance of deconstructing dominant images of women in the theatre, and will address the representation of sexual difference in the theatre of Cixous and Tsvetaeva.

Whilst maintaining a clear focus on Cixous' and Tsvetaeva's plays, this study



will not foreground analyses of productions of the plays in question, nor will the arguments advanced be situated within the context of contemporary performance theory. It has been established that the relationships between performance and identity are situated at the core of performance-based approaches to theatre, and the fact that there is an important corpus of existing, and developing research in this field must clearly be acknowledged. The interaction between poststructuralist feminist theory and performance theory has produced much original and challenging work over the last decade,<sup>21</sup> and explorations of the textuality of the body and the corporeality of the text can be considered as particularly apposite to the discussion of women's writing for the theatre.

However, a sustained engagement with issues of performance would introduce severe imbalances into this study. The majority of Tsvetaeva's plays have not been performed, but in direct contrast to this, Cixous' plays have been produced by companies and directors who enjoy close collaboration with the author, indeed the published text has often not gone to press until a final stage in production has been reached. A further consequence of the foregrounding of issues of performance in this thesis would be the allocation of a disproportionately important role to the concept of *écriture féminine* which, whilst constituting a major aspect of Chapter Two, 'The Role of Language in the Construction of Poetic Identity', does not underpin the main tenets nor conclusions of this research.

Tsvetaeva's work for the theatre was concentrated in two defined periods of her life. She first wrote for the theatre in 1918, wrote six plays between 1918 and 1919,<sup>22</sup> her later plays were written between 1924 and 1927;<sup>23</sup> she wrote nothing for the theatre after this point. Tsvetaeva's theatre was published in one volume for the first time in 1988,<sup>24</sup> and this publication represents an important development in the reception of these works.<sup>25</sup> Her theatre has not yet been translated into English, although a French translation of *Fedra* has been published.<sup>26</sup> Tsvetaeva's plays were



not performed in her lifetime, and have been rarely performed since, either within Russia or outside. An exception to this is the Actors' Touring Company production of Fedra (Phaedra) which undertook a brief regional tour of Britain in 1990. The last five years have seen increased interest in her other work in France (largely due to the work of the publishing houses *Actes du Sud* and *Mercure de France*), and there have been readings of her prose and a dramatic adaptation of the text, 'Chert (The Devil)'.<sup>27</sup> Such adaptations, whilst increasing knowledge of Tsvetaeva's work have not, however, drawn attention to her theatre.

Tsvetaeva's plays have been largely overlooked in general critical studies of her work and, if addressed, have been considered as long *poemy*. Scant recognition has been shown of Tsvetaeva's theatre as a coherent body of work although the imperative of addressing Tsvetaeva's plays is expressed by Véronique Lossky in her notes on an international conference on Tsvetaeva held in 1992.<sup>28</sup>

Some critics do address the plays, but many studies of Tsvetaeva's work adopt a biographical approach, which leads many critics to posit Tsvetaeva's personal life as the defining source for all her work, and to interpret her plays accordingly.<sup>29</sup> Even research which adopts a more sophisticated critical stance towards Tsvetaeva's poetry tends to rely disappointingly upon biography to undermine the literary significance of her writing for the theatre. Jane Taubman comments:

What then drew her to the theater if its spirit and essence were so alien?  
The answer as almost always for Tsvetaeva was "people" - her own  
ability to value - indeed to overvalue - not only a wide variety of 'souls'  
but also her own love for them.<sup>30</sup>

Biographical readings of Tsvetaeva's work are becoming less common, but even so Tsvetaeva's theatre is often seen in the context of other work written during the same period of her life, rather than in the context of her other plays.

Exceptions to this general approach are Karlinsky who, in his second greatly revised monograph on Tsvetaeva, groups her theatrical texts together for discussion and, whilst he does not closely interrelate the texts, he recognises the importance of



adopting a coherent approach to them.<sup>31</sup> An article by Venelova usefully situates Tsvetaeva's Fedra (Phaedra) in the context of contemporary dramatists' adaptations of Greek mythological tragedy.<sup>32</sup>

Other recent work which addresses Tsvetaeva's theatre focuses on individual plays.<sup>33</sup> The 1992 symposium included two papers on Tsvetaeva's theatre which discussed her plays Ariadna and Fedra (Phaedra), but neither paper addressed Tsvetaeva's writing for the theatre as a set of texts distinct from her poetry: Kahn's paper examines versification in Ariadna in the stylistic context of Tsvetaeva's poems written in the same period.<sup>34</sup> Scotto's paper examines Tsvetaeva's interest in Casanova and focuses primarily on Feniks (The Phoenix) and, although its approach to the play is rooted in biographical interpretation, the paper's conclusion suggests more useful readings of the play.<sup>35</sup> An aim of my thesis is to approach Tsvetaeva's theatre in the context of feminist critical approaches, which form parallels with recent work on her poetry. Importantly however, this thesis undertakes the discussion of Tsvetaeva's theatre as a coherent corpus. In contrast to all previous critics of Tsvetaeva's theatre, I propose to look beyond interpretations which read her plays as simply reflecting her personal relationships with people who were involved with the theatre, to address her attraction to the genre of theatre itself, and the consistent concern in her plays with questions of identity.

Throughout her writing career, Cixous has written for the theatre more consistently than Tsvetaeva, yet it is only in recent years that theatre has come to represent a significant proportion of Cixous' prolific output.<sup>36</sup> Her first published play was performed in 1975<sup>37</sup> and the majority of her plays have been in production at the time of publication of the texts.

There has been little discussion of Cixous' theatre outside the context of her other works or of feminist theory. This, as David Bradby suggests, is perhaps due to the contemporary inclination to perceive writers as specialists in one genre only.



Bradby, on the contrary, likens Cixous to writers of the forties and fifties who were accepted as authors of both prose and drama.<sup>38</sup> Bradby discusses Cixous' collaboration with the Théâtre du Soleil, and contrasts it with the company's earlier projects, but he does not discuss Cixous in the context of contemporary French theatre. Another critic addresses the wider issue of the representation of women in Cixous' theatre, but does not compare this with the work of other French playwrights.<sup>39</sup>

Much early criticism of Cixous' writing focused on her theoretical texts and engaged with the debates surrounding relationships between the body and the text provoked by her work La Jeune Née. This initially hampered expansion of discussions of her more recent texts. Over the past five years, however, work has been moving to assert a more comprehensive approach to Cixous' work and Morag Shiach's excellent study<sup>40</sup> stresses the importance of addressing the developments in Cixous' work, of linking her work in the theatre to earlier texts and attempting to approach her work as a coherent and continuous corpus. As Shiach summarises:

...much of the discussion of her [Cixous'] work in France seems reluctant to take on the transformations in her writing as it has developed over the last twenty years, choosing instead to place her definitively in the 1970s and within the problematic of 'writing the body', to talk about her most recent work, with little attention to earlier texts and earlier literary and political commitments...In Cixous' case, such partial accounts are particularly unhelpful, since it is precisely the modifications of her writing that allow us to assess the validity of her theoretical and critical claims...<sup>41</sup>

Shiach devotes a chapter of her book to Cixous' theatre and, in discussions of both texts and performances of the plays written before 1988, suggests several points which I develop in this thesis. The work of Susan Sellers in translating Cixous' work into English and in editing introductory readers on her work also represents an important contribution to a wider knowledge of Cixous' writing. The most recent of these readers contains translated passages from Cixous' plays L'Indiade ou L'Inde de leurs rêves and L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk roi du Cambodge, encouraging the integration of Cixous' theatre into discussion of her work.<sup>42</sup> In



addition, several anthologies of criticism on Cixous' writing have been published in the last five years, most of which have contained some work on her theatre.<sup>43</sup> yet the majority of texts have continued to address her fictional writing and earlier theoretical works. Other collections have focused on the work of Cixous' seminar and the application of the seminar's approach to other writers and texts.<sup>44</sup> Whilst noting that these readers and anthologies often do not adopt distanced critical stances to Cixous' work, a more coherent approach to Cixous' oeuvre is emerging within Cixous studies. There is, however, little work published which addresses all of her plays. Recent years have seen the publication of numerous articles on her plays, but all of these studies examine one play in isolation.<sup>45</sup> A significant aim of this thesis therefore is to establish the relationships between her plays and to examine ongoing developments within her theatre.

Although this thesis engages with the theatre of Tsvetaeva and Cixous as investigations of the representation of poetic identity, it does not seek to assert the coherent reflection of unified subjectivity, nor indeed solely to identify a projection of the proper names of Cixous and Tsvetaeva and their respective biographical identities into their plays. Identity is perceived rather as a site of competing discourses which are staged and explored within their theatre in terms of the major themes which I discuss in this thesis.

My thesis is structured around aspects of poetic identity which emerge as commonly important to both Cixous and Tsvetaeva. The nature of the themes is such that there are close interrelations between the chapters; these links are reflected in the ordering of the chapters and constitute an accumulative movement towards the Conclusion.

However, before each of these themes can be discussed in individual chapters, it is necessary to explore the contexts of Cixous and Tsvetaeva's writing for the theatre. The first chapter, 'The Approaches of Tsvetaeva and Cixous to the Theatre' establishes



several historical and aesthetic contexts and influences on their theatre. Much critical work on both writers serves to erase the importance of genre in discussions of these texts. This first chapter engages with this erasure and establishes the importance of a different approach to Tsvetaeva and Cixous' writing for the theatre.

In order to contextualise their theatre I examine the influences at work, both upon their aesthetic approaches to theatre and the production of their plays. Discussion of performance will be necessarily limited to Cixous and I shall focus on the importance of Cixous' collaborative work with the Théâtre du Soleil. The aim of the chapter is to address the role of questions of poetic identity in attracting Cixous and Tsvetaeva to write for the theatre. The influences on their plays are reviewed in the context of representations of identity, poetic identity in particular.

The second part of the chapter focuses on the critical writing of Tsvetaeva and Cixous on the theatre, and traces the development of each writer's attitudes towards the theatre. I investigate whether issues of poetic identity are explicitly important to them in their discussions of the theatrical form. Such a discussion of Cixous' writing on the theatre raises questions as to the status of her critical work on the theatre, and on her plays, and this chapter concludes with a problematisation of issues of authorship and interpretation in Cixous' theatre.

The following four chapters on the thesis focus on four areas which, I will establish, are fundamental and common to the construction of poetic identity in the theatre of Tsvetaeva and Cixous. The four areas, explored in chapters two to five are: language, exile, sexual difference and mythology.

The second chapter 'The Role of Language in the Construction of Poetic Identity' explores the importance of language for the formulation of poetic identity in the theatre of both writers. I will discuss common discourses on language expressed by Tsvetaeva and Cixous and examine the importance of these elements to their respective constructions of poetic identity. These elements include Tsvetaeva's and Cixous'



multilingual personal backgrounds, the employment of linguistic innovation and wordplay and the perceived musicality of language. A discussion of the role of language in the formation of identity in the writing of Cixous must engage with issues of *écriture féminine*, which is considered here in the context of her theatre.

The establishment of the importance of language to constructions of poetic identity in the work of both writers leads to an examination of specific plays by Tsvetaeva and Cixous, with the aim of establishing whether language can be considered as formally and thematically central to representations of poetic identity in their theatre.

A recurring issue in Chapter Two is the importance of engaging with language and dominant discourses in order to express an otherwise repressed self. This demonstration of the importance of finding a voice with which to speak is thus followed in Chapter Three with an analysis of the importance of finding a site from which to speak. Chapter Three is entitled 'Exile and Paradises Lost', and discusses the importance of the deployment, by both writers, of the terms of exile through which they represent themselves. Cixous and Tsvetaeva posit the act of writing as a potential resistance to loss, a loss which is inherent in poetic identity. These exiles are, however fundamental, predominantly metaphorical and I will examine the plays of Tsvetaeva and Cixous to ascertain the nature of the scenarios of exile portrayed, and the relationship of figures implicated in such scenarios to representations of poetic identity. Cixous' epic plays<sup>46</sup> draw on actual political historical narratives involving cases of political and cultural exclusion, and I will problematise the use of such narratives to allegorise the notion of a transcendent 'paradise lost'. Cixous' use of these narratives to furnish abstract explorations of identity and otherness is problematised.

The engagement with themes of exile in Tsvetaeva and Cixous' theatre ultimately leads to an exploration of the potential relationship between the concept of exile and the theatre. Can the search for a space from which to express the self be linked to Cixous and Tsvetaeva's desire to write for the theatre?

In the final sections of Chapter Three I examine the role played by notions of



otherness in Tsvetaeva's and Cixous' representations of poetic identity. In Chapter Four I proceed to engage with a specific question of difference, that of sexual difference, and I examine whether sexual difference is an explicit factor in the construction of poetic identity for these two women writers. Do Tsvetaeva and Cixous represent a gendered poetic identity, or is it the very notion of a binary and oppositional structure of sexual difference which is problematised in their theatre?

The potential subversion of such systems by the representation of obscurely gendered or ambiguous characters is examined through a detailed reading of Tsvetaeva's play Prikliuchenie (An Adventure) in the context of concepts of androgyny and Cixous' work on bisexuality. Cixous locates sexual difference at the level of a libidinal economy, rather than that of anatomy, a potentially radical project, but one which is possibly ill-suited to the generic demands of theatre. This approach to sexual difference is addressed in the context of her writing for the theatre, and her marked change in attitude towards the representation of sexual difference in the theatre is discussed. In this discussion Tsvetaeva and Cixous' representations of poetic identity are discussed in terms of their gender specificity.

The final chapter of this thesis, 'Adaptations of Identity: Greek Mythology', examines and compares the writers' engagement with Greek mythology. Greek mythology provides some of the most culturally influential and powerful representations of female subjectivity and I will discuss the importance of Tsvetaeva's and Cixous' reworkings of these myths within their theatre.

Tsvetaeva and Cixous revalorise the role traditionally allocated to the female protagonists within these narratives, and refocalise the tragedy to dramatise the oppression of women within patriarchal society. I propose to proceed from this point to examine the use of narratives of Greek mythology to represent the struggle to locate an expression of poetic identity. It is specifically those plays by Tsvetaeva and Cixous which engage explicitly with such narratives which centre on the role of the poet in the world and the struggle to define a poetic identity. I will discuss these different formula-

tions of the poet's role and rights.

This discussion leads to a reading of Tsvetaeva's plays Ariadna and Fedra (Phaedra) as a strengthening of the role of the female protagonists through an explicit identification with them as representations of poetic identity. I propose a reading of Fedra (Phaedra) as the most coherent and successful representation of female creativity and the woman poet in Tsvetaeva's writing. Cixous' early use of myth similarly uses mythological narratives to dramatise the importance of representing female subjectivity and subverting dominant interpretations of myth. However, her later plays which involve mythological intertexts strengthen mythological narratives in order to establish poetic identity. Rather than reevaluating existing myths as allegories of female creativity, Cixous' later plays can be read as transpositions of her own poetic identity into myth.

The conclusion affirms the central importance of the representation of poetic identity to Tsvetaeva's and Cixous' theatre, demonstrating the centrality of the themes of language, exile, sexual difference and myth to both writers' constructions of the poet self. I engage further at this point with the comparative strategies of both writers; the chronological development of the four themes in their plays is outlined in order to illustrate their shifting prominence. An evaluation of the radical nature of the cumulative representation of the poet self which they achieve in their theatre is then explored in the context of feminist projects of representing a gender-specific creativity and the woman poet.



- (1) This seminar programme is part of the doctoral programme in *Etudes féminines*, founded by Cixous at the Université de Paris VIII.
- (2) Verena Aldermatt Conley, 'Introduction' In Hélène Cixous, Readings: The Poetics of Blanchot, Joyce, Kafka, Kleist, Lispector and Tsvetaeva, trans. and ed. Verena Aldermatt Conley, (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), p. x.
- (3) Marina Tsvetaeva, Neuf lettres avec une dixième retenue et une onzième reçue (Paris: Clémence Hiver, 1988).
- (4) Hélène Cixous, 'Marina Tsvetaeva. Le feu éteint celle...', Les Cahiers du Grif, 39 (1988), pp. 87-96.
- (5) For further details see the transcriptions of Cixous' seminars which discuss these writers in Hélène Cixous, Readings: The Poetics of Blanchot, Joyce, Kafka, Kleist, Lispector and Tsvetaeva, trans. and ed. Verena Aldermatt Conley, pp. 110-151.
- (6) Hélène Cixous, Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing, trans. Sarah Cornell and Susan Sellers (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 34. Pages 88-94 of this text discuss Tsvetaeva's prose.
- (7) Hélène Cixous, Jours de l'an (Paris: des femmes, 1990), p. 161.
- (8) The field of research which engages with feminist literary theory is extremely broad. A comprehensive and accessible overview of the major issues involved in such approaches can be found in Jan Montefiore, Feminism and Poetry (London and New York: Pandora Press, 1987).
- (9) Morag Shiach, Hélène Cixous: A Politics of Writing (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 69.
- (10) Two examples of such work are: Antonia Filonov Gove, 'The Female Stereotype and Beyond: Role Conflict and Resolution in the Poetics of Marina Tsvetaeva', Slavic Review, 36 (1977), pp. 231-255. Anya Kroth, 'Androgyny as an Exemplary Feature of Marina Tsvetaeva's Dichotomous Poetic Vision', Slavic Review, 38 (1979), pp. 563-582.
- (11) Barbara Heldt, Terrible Perfection: Women in Russian Literature (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).
- (12) *ibid.*, p. 135.
- (13) Examples of such work include: Pamela Chester, 'Engaging Sexual Demons in Marina Tsvetaeva's *Devil*: The Body and the Genesis of the Woman Poet', Slavic Review, 53 (1994), pp. 1025-1045; Sibelan Forrester, 'Marina Cvetaeva's self definition as a female poet', DPhil Dissertation, Indiana University, 1990; Stephanie Sandler, 'Embodied Words: Gender in Cvetaeva's Reading of Pushkin', Slavonic and East European Journal, 34 (1990), pp. 139-157; Irina Kuzminsky, 'The Language of Women? A Study of Three Women Writers: Marina Tsvetaeva, Ingeborg Bachmann and Monique Wittig', DPhil Dissertation, University of Oxford, 1989.
- (14) Laura Weeks, 'The Search for the Self: The Poetic Persona of Marina Tsvetaeva', DPhil Diss. Stanford University, 1985. This study employs Jung's model of Persona to examine the evolution of literary masks in Tsvetaeva's poetry. Its conclusions rely upon the assertion of a dichotomy between body and soul, spirituality and sensuality and claim that Tsvetaeva's poetry demonstrates a rejection of the former principles as necessary precursive steps towards the formation of poetic identity.
- (15) Irina Kuzminsky, 'The Language of Women? A Study of Three Women Writers:



Marina Tsvetaeva, Ingeborg Bachmann and Monique Wittig'. DPhil Diss. University of Oxford, 1989.

(16) *ibid.*, p. 160.

(17) Sibelan Forrester, 'Marina Cvetaeva's self-definition as a female poet'. DPhil Diss. Indiana University, 1990, p. 216.

(18) *ibid.*, p. 473.

(19) Svetlana Boym, Death in Quotation Marks: Cultural Myths of the Modern Poet (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 203.

(20) For introductions to this field see: Sue-Ellen Case, Feminism and Theatre (London: Macmillan, 1988); Elaine Aston, An Introduction to Feminism and the Theatre (London and New York: Routledge, 1995); Lizbeth Goodman, Contemporary Feminist Theatres: To Each Her Own (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).

(21) Examples of this field of research include: Laurence Senelick, ed. Gender in Performance. The Representation of Difference in the Performing Arts (Hanover. University Press of New England, 1992); Peggy Phelan, 'Feminist Theory, Poststructuralism and Performance', The Drama Review, 32 (1988), pp. 107-127; Jill Dolan, 'In Defense of the Discourse. Materialist Feminism, Postmodernism, Poststructuralism...and Theory', The Drama Review (Fall 1989), pp. 58-71; Jeanette Laillou Savona, 'French Feminism and theatre: An Introduction', Modern Drama, 27 (1984), pp. 540-545; Cynthia Running-Johnson, 'Feminine writing and its theatrical 'other'', in Women in Theatre. Themes in Drama, ed. J. Redmond, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 179-184; Mary Bryden, 'Samuel Beckett and the Feminine-in-Writing', in Voices in the Air. French Dramatists and the Resources of Language, ed. J. Dunkley and B. Kirton, (Glasgow: University of Glasgow French and German Publications, 1992), pp. 156-170; Josette Féral, 'Ecriture et déplacement: la femme au théâtre', The French Review, 56 (1982), pp. 281-292.

(22) Marina Tsvetaeva, Chervonnyi Valet (The Jack of Hearts), Metel' (The Snowstorm), Fortuna, Kammennyi Angel (The Stone Angel), Prikluchenie (An Adventure), and Feniks The Phoenix were all written in 1918-1919. They are all published in Marina Tsvetaeva, Teatr (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1988).

(23) Marina Tsvetaeva, Ariadna (Ariadne), and Fedra (Phaedra) published in Marina Tsvetaeva, Teatr.

(24) Marina Tsvetaeva, Ariadna and Fedra (Phaedra) in Teatr (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1988).

(25) Laura Weeks notes the value of this volume in her review of the material. Laura Weeks, 'Review: Marina Cvetaeva, *Teatr*', Slavic and East European Journal, 37 (1993), p. 256.

(26) Marina Tsvetaeva, Phèdre, trans. Jean-Pierre Morel (Paris: Actes Sud, 1991).

(27) Marina Tsvetaeva, 'Chert', in Izbrannaia Proza v dvukh tomakh, II (New York: Russica Publishers, 1979), pp. 151-166. A translation can be found in Marina Tsvetaeva, A Captive Spirit: Selected Prose, trans. and ed. J. Marin King (London: Virago, 1983), pp. 295-318.

(28) Véronique Lossky, 'Chronique: Colloques, Marina Cvetaeva: Un Chant de Vie 1892-1941', Revue des Etudes Slaves, 64 (1993), pp. 197-200.

(29) Examples of this include: Maria Belkina, Skreshchenie Sudeb (Moscow: Kniga.



1988); Viktoriia Shveitser, Byt i Bytie Mariny Tsvetaevoi (Paris: Syntaxis, 1988); Anna Saakiant, Marina Tsvetaeva: Stranitsy zhizni i tvorchestva (1910-1922) (Moscow, 1986); Maria Razumovsky, Marina Tsvetaeva: mif i deistvitelnost' (London: Overseas Publications Interchange Ltd, 1983); Veronique Lossky, Marina Cvetaeva v zhizni (USA: Hermitage, 1989); Lily Feiler, Marina Tsvetaeva: The Double Beat of Heaven (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994); Simon Karlinsky, Marina Cvetaeva: Her Life and Art (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966).

(30) Jane Taubman, A Life Through Poetry: Marina Tsvetaeva's Lyrical Diary (Columbus: Slavica Publishers, 1989), p. 121.

(31) Simon Karlinsky, Marina Tsvetaeva: the Woman, her World and her Poetry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

(32) Tomas Venclova, 'On Russian Mythological Tragedy: Vjaceslav Ivanov and Marina Tsvetaeva', in Myth in Literature, ed. Andrej Kodjak (Columbus: Slavica Publishers, 1985), pp. 89-110.

(33) For example, R. D. B. Thomson, 'Tsvetaeva's play *Fedra*: An Interpretation', Slavonic and East European Review, 67 (1989), pp. 342-352.

(34) The paper examines Tsvetaeva's use of classical Greek versification. Andrew Kahn, 'Chorus and Monologue in Marina Tsvetaeva's *Ariadna*: An Analysis of their Structure, Versification and Themes', in Marina Tsvetaeva: One Hundred Years, ed. Viktoriia Schweitzer et al, (Berkeley: Berkeley Slavic Specialties, 1994), pp. 162-193.

(35) Peter Scotto, 'Toward a Reading of Marina Tsvetaeva's *Feniks* in Marina Tsvetaeva: One Hundred Years, ed. Viktoriia Schweitzer et al. pp. 194-201.

(36) Hélène Cixous, Portrait de Dora (Paris: des femmes, 1976).

-----, Le Nom d'Oedipe. Chant du corps interdit (Paris: des femmes, 1978).

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-----, L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk Roi du Cambodge (Paris: Théâtre du Soleil, 1985).

-----, Théâtre (Paris: des femmes, 1986).

-----, L'Indiade ou l'Inde de leurs rêves (Paris: Théâtre du Soleil, 1987).

-----, On ne part pas, on ne revient pas (Paris: des femmes, 1993).

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(37) Hélène Cixous, Portrait de Dora performed at the Théâtre d'Orsay, Paris in 1975.

(38) David Bradby, Modern French Drama 1940-1990 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 260.

(39) Judith Graves-Miller, 'Contemporary Women's Voices in French Theatre', Modern Drama, 32 (1989), pp. 5-23.

(40) Morag Shiach, Hélène Cixous: A Politics of Writing (London and New York: Routledge, 1991).

(41) *ibid.*, p. 2.

(42) Susan Sellers, ed. The Hélène Cixous Reader (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).



(43) For example, Nicole Ward Jouve 'Hélène Cixous: From inner theatre to world theatre', in The Body and the Text. Hélène Cixous, Reading and Teaching, ed. Helen Wilcox, Keith McWatters et al. (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), pp. 41-48; Jeanette L. Savona, 'Portrait de Dora d'Hélène Cixous: à la recherche d'un théâtre féministe'; Mieke Kolk, 'La Vengeance d'Oedipe. Théorie féministe et pratique du théâtre', and Liliana Alexandrescu, 'Norodom Sihanouk: l'inachevé comme lecture shakespearienne de l'Histoire contemporaine', all in Hélène Cixous, chemins d'une écriture, ed. Françoise van Rossum-Guyon and Myriam Diaz-Diocaretz, (Vincennes: Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 1990).

(44) Susan Sellers, ed. Writing Differences, Readings from the Seminar of Hélène Cixous (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1988). Hélène Cixous, Readings. The Poetics of Blanchot, Joyce, Kafka, Kleist and Tsvetayeva, trans. and ed. Verena Andermatt Conley, (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992).

(45) There are several such articles, for example: Liliana Alexandrescu, 'Norodom Sihanouk: l'inachevé comme lecture shakespearienne de l'Histoire contemporaine', in Hélène Cixous, chemins d'une écriture ed. Françoise van Rossum-Guyon and Myriam Diaz-Diocaretz, pp. 187-204; Anne-Marie Picard, 'L'Indiade: Ariane and Hélène's Conjugate Dreams', Modern Drama, 32 (1989), pp. 24-38; Sharon Willis, 'Hélène Cixous' *Portrait de Dora*: the Unseen and the Un-Scene', Theatre Journal, 37 (1985), pp. 287-300.

(46) I refer mainly here to Cixous' plays L'Indiade ou L'Inde de leurs rêves and L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk roi du Cambodge.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE APPROACHES OF TSVETAeva AND CIXOUS TO THE THEATRE

This chapter will engage with the writing of Tsvetaeva and Cixous on the theatre in order to establish their approaches to the genre and its status within the aesthetic development of each writer. It is at this stage that the question of establishment of genre is addressed with reference to the intrinsic generic qualities of the texts. I will examine potential influences on Cixous' and Tsvetaeva's theatre and situate their work in the respective contemporary contexts of theatre. Through a discussion of these closely interrelated areas, I aim to examine the reasons, as far as they can be discerned, which led two writers who were both accomplished and recognised in other genres to turn to the theatre. This chapter will examine Tsvetaeva's and Cixous' writings on the theatre, and the influences on their work in the genre in turn, before producing comparative conclusions which reveal the similarities in their respective approaches to theatre.

#### **Tsvetaeva and the Theatre**

Tsvetaeva wrote for the theatre during two periods in her life: her early plays were written in the years 1918 and 1919, and her uncompleted trilogy based on Greek mythology was written between 1924 and 1927 in Prague. The dates are as follows: Metel' (The Snowstorm) 1918, Fortuna (Fortune) 1919, Kamennyi Angel (The Stone Angel) 1919, Prikliuchenie (An Adventure) 1918-1919, Feniks (Phoenix) 1919.



Ariadna (Ariadne) 1924, and Fedra (Phaedra) 1927. Three further plays were written within the period 1918 to 1919, but the manuscripts have been lost, and it has not been confirmed that the plays were in fact completed. They were entitled Dmitrii Samozvanets (False Dmitrii), Babushka (Grandmother) and Uchenik (The Disciple).

### **Critical Framing: Generic and Thematic Erasure**

Tsvetaeva's writing for the theatre has been "invisible" for a long time as a consequence of predominantly biographical and generically insensitive critical approaches. Her theatre has rarely been addressed and many major critical works on Tsvetaeva refer to it only in passing. Critical studies which do discuss Tsvetaeva's theatre erase its specificity in one of two ways as I shall now discuss.

The paucity of engagement with the thematic content of Tsvetaeva's theatre has had serious consequences, resulting in a lack of coherent readings of her plays, and subsequent selective readings of her creative output in general. Several commentators on Tsvetaeva's work regard her writing for the theatre, particularly her early plays, simply as the result of her personal relationships with people who happened to work in the theatre. Tsvetaeva became friendly with the members of Vakhtangov's Third Studio in Moscow and regularly attended their rehearsals, and these friendships have resulted in Tsvetaeva's early plays being dismissed as solely a personal response to a new-found social milieu, and even as the inconsequential byproducts of misguided personal relationships. An example of this approach is to be found in Jane Taubman's critical biography of Tsvetaeva where she prescribes a narrow field of vision for the early plays. Taubman considers Tsvetaeva's personal relationships as the sole motivation behind her exploration of the genre:

The answer, as almost always for Tsvetaeva, was "people" - her own ability to value - indeed to overvalue - not only a wide variety of "souls" but also her own love for them. The life-style and ethic of these young actors, and of the plays Tsvetaeva wrote for them, were miles removed from the ascetic ideals of her latest poems.<sup>1</sup>



Taubman judges that these plays are important because of their provision of a reflection of Tsvetaeva's personal relationships at the time and views them as irrelevant to her creative development. Such an approach evidently ignores important contexts such as the historical research undertaken by Tsvetaeva, reflected in her notebooks and letters, and undermines the creative input and purpose of the writer.

Several of Tsvetaeva's early plays do indeed contain characters who have been read as modelled on members of Vakhtangov's studio, but these associations cannot be seen as providing definitive interpretations of the plays. One of Vakhtangov's senior pupils was Iurii Zavadskii, with whom Tsvetaeva had a brief relationship, and for whom some roles in her plays were clearly intended.<sup>2</sup> Taubman, however, insists upon the overriding importance of such personal relationships and offers them as explanation for Tsvetaeva's interest in the theatre:

For a poet in love with an actor the logical next step was to write verse drama. Tsvetaeva's first plays were, to paraphrase Clausewitz, "a continuation of the lyric diary by other means", which largely explains their weaknesses as theatre. Tsvetaeva not only wrote them *for* her actor friends, she wrote *about* them - the plots embodied her own private myths about their relationships.<sup>3</sup>

Characters in Tsvetaeva's plays have also been linked to the actor Sofiia Gollidei, who was well-known in Moscow on account of her acclaimed solo performance of a play derived from Dostoevsky's White Nights.<sup>4</sup> The critic Viktoria Schweitzer comments on the friendship between the two women, suggesting that Tsvetaeva's desire to provide "Sonechka" with roles in her plays was the sole motivation for her work in the theatre:

Enchanted by Sonechka's originality, and sharing her resentment that she was passed over by producers, Tsvetaeva wrote play after play in which the female roles were intended for her friend: Rosanetta in Fortuna, the girl in The Adventure, Aurora in The Stone Angel, and Francesca in The Phoenix all resemble Sonechka.<sup>5</sup>

Tsvetaeva may have imagined roles in her plays being filled by actors whom she knew.



and may further have written roles for Gollidei, but this cannot be seen as either determining the thematic content of the plays in question, nor as positing the sole reading of the play as a reflection of the relationships in which Tsvetaeva was involved at this time.

Whilst it would be foolish to deny that there are strong elements of psychodrama in all of Tsvetaeva's plays, Tsvetaeva's theatre involves, as I shall discuss in this thesis, a representation of the identity of the poet, a staging of creativity, desire and writing, and this dramatisation is that of poetic identity and not of the biography of Tsvetaeva herself. Limited contextualisations and consequent reductive interpretations of the plays as dramatisations of Tsvetaeva's personal relationships achieve little except the undermining of the texts.

The critics quoted above find explanations for Tsvetaeva's early theatre within her biography, but they do not address the question of why Tsvetaeva, when living far away from friends in the theatre in 1924, should have embarked upon a second period of writing for the theatre. I suggest that Tsvetaeva's writing for the theatre was sustained beyond friendships with actors and a particular social milieu by her interest in the potential of the genre for her aesthetics.

The erasure of thematic interpretations of Tsvetaeva's plays, resulting from a prioritisation of biographical criticism of her work, has been sustained by an equally limiting tendency to erase the generic difference of her theatre. There has been little attempt to examine the place of theatre in Tsvetaeva's oeuvre, indeed little recognition that her writing for the theatre is generically different in any way from her poetry. This treatment of Tsvetaeva's theatre as generically undifferentiated from her poetry has hampered both the situation of her theatre in a contemporary context and the investigation of specific influences on her writing for the theatre.

Whilst stressing that the plays should be viewed in their generic difference from the lyric poetry, I feel it is vital to establish stylistic and thematic continuities in her work. The establishment of elements present in Tsvetaeva's poetry which can be



associated with the theatrical genre does not, however, imply a conflation of generic categories but rather serves as evidence of Tsvetaeva's stylistic interest in the theatre, and support arguments which posit the use of the theatrical genre as an integral part of the development of her aesthetics.

An examination of Tsvetaeva's poetry demonstrates a strong dramatic tendency, the use of clearly defined characters and voices, the presence of conflictual situations and dramatic scenarios. This continuation of a pre-existing interest and influence is commented on by Pavel Antokol'skii:

В лирике Марины Цветаевой начиная с самых ранних стихов, проступают зачатки драматургической ткани: конфликтная сущность замысла, стремление к передаче характерных особенностей той или другой речи, введение диалога.

In the very earliest of Marina Tsvetaeva's lyric poems, one can see the beginnings of a dramatic fabric in her work: the conflictual basis of ideas, a striving for the communication of characteristic idioms in different forms of speech, the introduction of dialogue.<sup>6</sup>

Antokol'skii also argues that Tsvetaeva's later lyric poetry continues to exhibit an acute sense of dramatic character and role, often drawing on figures from classical dramatic narratives:

... в её лирике тех лет неожиданно проступают новые, отдельные признаки сценизма. Марина Цветаева по-своему, с обычным для неё своевольным упрямством как бы «проигрывает» или «переигрывает» несколько ролей мирового репертуара - Федру, библейских героинь, Эвридику рядом с Орфеем, наконец, саму Офелию. Такие или схожие стихи бывали у многих поэтов до и после Цветаевой. Но Марина договаривает за своих героинь то, о чём умолчали Софокл, Расин, Шекспир...

... in her lyrics from these years, new, individual characteristics of scenarios appear. Marina Tsvetaeva in her own way, with her customary wilful stubbornness, was "playing through" or "performing" (replaying) several roles from a worldwide repertoire - Phaedra, some biblical heroines, Eurydice alongside Orpheus, finally Ophelia herself. Similar poems were written by many poets both before and after Tsvetaeva. But Marina said things for her heroines which Sophocles, Racine and



Shakespeare did not mention...<sup>7</sup>

Tsvetaeva's poems are filled with the animation of different voices and figures, with whom she enters into dialogue. A sense of the dramatic persists, linking the concerns and themes of her plays to the rest of her oeuvre, and establishing the plays as an integral part of her creative development.

Schweitzer comments on some affinities between Tsvetaeva's writing for the theatre and her poetic development: "The genre was new to her, but she mastered it completely".<sup>8</sup> and defines a specific area of interest:

The plays are written in limpid, easily spoken verse. She is not just indulging a caprice, trying her pen in a strange genre. The poet's voice has found new notes... She was obviously attracted by the polyphony of a dramatic work, the opportunity to impersonate characters belonging to different social and cultural levels, speaking a variety of idioms. She could combine the romantic and the sublime with the colloquial and even the coarse.<sup>9</sup>

It is important to recognise Tsvetaeva's interest in different speaking voices, in the combination of different linguistic registers, and in the possibility of creating polyphonic and heteroglossaic forms, which she could expand upon in the theatrical genre. Schweitzer's useful identification of a generic quality of theatre which attracted Tsvetaeva is, however, undermined by the simplistic psychological assumptions which she employs to conclude her discussion of Tsvetaeva and the theatre. These describe Tsvetaeva's writing for the theatre as a practice field for her work in other genres:

The plays were important experimentally: she was trying to master the art of dialogue. Perhaps in an attempt to overcome that feeling of isolation from which she had suffered as a child: the theatre was, after all, a collective endeavour...<sup>10</sup>

This statement denies the importance of the genre of theatre in Tsvetaeva's creative development, and this denial becomes a dismissal of Tsvetaeva's interest in the theatre as a genre, in a decisive statement:



No one can do violence to his own nature and his own character. Tsvetaeva returned to her own ways. Her work is one long tragic monologue. Her disillusion with the theatre was greater than the creative pleasure it had given her....<sup>11</sup>

The description of Tsvetaeva's oeuvre as 'one long tragic monologue' fails to convey the very strong sense of the dramatic and the polyphonic quality of her work, and indeed contradicts her points quoted earlier in this section. Schweitzer gives no details as to the nature of Tsvetaeva's disillusionment with the theatre, viewing it as an experimental indulgence untypical of her oeuvre. She specifically erases the generic difference of Tsvetaeva's later plays: "Her later tragedies on themes from antiquity were not intended for the stage: they were merely long poems in dramatic form".<sup>12</sup> But Schweitzer's interpretation of 'dramatic form' is unclear, and there is no indication of sources which might reveal whether Tsvetaeva intended the plays to be performed on stage or not. However, we do know that during the late 1920s, when living in France, Tsvetaeva wanted to publish her early plays (except Kamennyi Angel (Stone Angel) and Chervonnyi Valet (The Jack of Hearts)) in a single volume entitled Romantika (Romance). This would clearly suggest that Tsvetaeva viewed the plays as a body of work generically separate from her lyric poetry.

Karlinsky is one of the few commentators to engage positively with Tsvetaeva's writing for the theatre, and to situate it within a dramatic context.<sup>13</sup> He contrasts the work of Kuzmin, Gumilev and Tsvetaeva to both Russian realist and symbolist drama, finding their influences in the symbolist drama of the early twentieth century, whilst detecting a "dominant sensibility that goes back to the Romantic age".<sup>14</sup> Karlinsky's article aims to link the theatre of Kuzmin, Gumilev and Tsvetaeva through the creation of a category entitled neo-romanticism. Karlinsky employs four criteria to define neo-romanticism: the influence of miracle and mystery plays; romantic orientalism; an interest in androgyny and the reversal of sex roles; and a Romantic idealisation of the past. He applies these criteria successfully to Tsvetaeva's early plays, Kamennyi Angel (Stone Angel), Prikluchenie (An Adventure), and Fortuna (Fortune) and excludes the



later plays as belonging to a different category in thematic terms, but does not question their genre. Indeed Karlinsky establishes links between Tsvetaeva's plays and other dramatic works, so underlining his acceptance of their genre:

Tsvetayeva's neo-classical tragedies of the 1920s are couched in the manner of modernist neo-classicism in the drama and music of the 1920s and 1930s. Like Cocteau, Giradoux and Stravinsky, Tsvetaeva borrowed the themes and gestures of antiquity to convey a new, twentieth century conception of the classical myths.<sup>15</sup>

## Textual Evidence

The question of genre must clearly be addressed with reference to evidence within the texts themselves which serves as an indication of genre. Whilst the element of performance is fundamental to definitions of theatre, there are other generic pointers to consider. I will first examine Tsvetaeva's own descriptions of the texts, in chronological order.

Chervonnyi Valet (Jack of Hearts) is described as "A play in two acts, in verse"; Metel' (The Snowstorm) is described as "Dramatic scenes in verse." Fortuna is described as "A play in five acts, in verse" and Kamennyyi Angel (The Stone Angel), similarly as "A play in six acts, in verse." These definitions place equal emphasis on dramatic and poetic elements of the texts, forming both generic and structural definitions. The texts are not described as dramatic poems, nor even dramatic studies (*études*) - the *étude* was a term which Pushkin employed to describe his dramatic poetry and Tsvetaeva would have been aware of its potential usage.

Prikluchenie (An Adventure) is simply described as being "In five acts" which clearly indicates the dramatic genre. Feniks (The Phoenix) is "A play in three acts, in verse". The two later plays are described in less ambiguous terms. Ariadna is described as "A tragedy". The classical form of the tragedy is fundamentally dramatic, and inherently linked with the theatre. Fedra has no subtitle, an indication that the narrative and its genre are so well known as to require no further introduction. Tsvetaeva's



descriptions are fundamental in an examination of the texts' genre, at least as a pointer to authorial intent at the time of entitling the plays. If the texts were meant to be dramatic poems, Tsvetaeva could have specified this in the titles.

A closer examination of the texts reveals other essentially dramatic qualities. All the texts contain descriptions of the main characters, details of the setting and décor of each scene, and stage directions indicating to whom speeches are addressed, and in what tone they are to be spoken. Tsvetaeva was clearly considering the characters' physical presence and movement on stage, as well as the effectiveness of their dialogue.

In Chervonnyi Valet (Jack of Hearts) the physical appearance of the main characters is precisely defined:

Костюмы действующих лиц по свету масти... Дама и Короли в больших плащах, Валеты в коротких - как крылья - накидках. Лютня у Червонного валета и острое пики у пикового - в виде сердца.

The characters' costumes are all according to the colour of their suit... The Queen and Kings wear long cloaks, the Jacks wear short cloaks - like wings. The Jack of Hearts has a lute and the point of the Jack of Spades' pike is in the shape of a heart.<sup>16</sup>

The visual impact of the play is obviously very important to an understanding of the text and physical symbols denote the differences between the characters and their functions. The dramatic nature of the text is further demonstrated by the extensive stage directions. In the second scene: "Valet pododvigaet stolik, stavit dve svechki, kladet karty. (The Jack brings in a table, puts on it two candles and a pack of cards)".<sup>17</sup> The directions continue throughout the text, but perhaps the most decisive element in defining its genre are the two silent scenes which come at the ends of Act One and Act Two. These are the directions for the scene at the end of Act One:

Немая цена

Дверь открывается. Валет пик с пикой. Молча вытягивается вдоль стены. При виде его Червонный валет встает. Во время всей сцены стоит у трона Дамы, скрестив руки. За Пиковым валетом - Пиковый король. При виде его Дама поднимает голову и - полузакрыв глаза - столбом - как лунатик - идёт к нему навстречу. Поцелуй.

Занавес.



Silent scene.

The door opens. The Jack of Spades appears with his pike. He silently walks along the length of the wall. At the sight of him, the Jack of Hearts stands up. Throughout the whole scene he stands by the Queen's throne, his arms crossed. Behind the Jack of Spades is the King of Spades. On seeing him the Queen raises her head and - with eyes half-closed - like a statue - like a sleepwalker - goes to meet him. Kiss.

Curtain.<sup>18</sup>

A silent scene cannot be expressed in any other sense than the visual, and there can be no argument as to the intended genre of this text. Again the importance of the movement and relative positioning of the characters on stage is clearly stated. The last scene of the play is also silent.

Metel' again begins with brief descriptions of the main characters:

ДАМА В ПЛАЩЕ, 20 лет, чуть юношественна.

ГОСПОДИН В ПЛАЩЕ, 30 лет, светлый.

СТАРУХА, весь XVIII век.

ТРАКТИРЩИК

ТОРГОВЕЦ      каждый - олицетворение своего рода

ОХОТНИК      занятия

LADY IN CLOAK, twenty years old, quite young.

GENTLEMAN IN CLOAK, thirty years old, fair hair.

OLD WOMAN: the entire eighteenth century.

INNKEEPER}

MERCHANT : each personifying their line of work.<sup>19</sup>

HUNTER}

Each scene of the play is clearly introduced and directions are given as to the physical actions of the characters and the tone of voice in which they address each other. The same is true of Fortuna, where the characters are described and the décor in some of the scenes very precisely noted:

Очаровательный розовый будуар XVIII века. На туалете, у овального зеркала с амурами и голубками, шкатулки, флаконы, пудреницы, баночки румян. На полу, прислоненная к розовой кушетке, гитара с розовыми лентами. Розы на потолке, розы на ковре, розы - гроздьями - в вазах, розы - гирляндами - на стенах, розы - везде, розы - повсюду. Сплошная роза. - На столике два бокала шампанского, в одном - недопитом - роза. Вечер. Горят свечи. Маркиза д' Эспарбэс и герцог Лозэн играют в шахматы.



A charming rose boudoir of the eighteenth century. On the *toilette* by an oval mirror decorated with cupids and doves, are boxes, bottles, powderpots of rouge. On the floor, leaning against a pink couch, a guitar with rose-coloured ribbons. Roses on the ceiling and the carpet, bunches of roses in vases, garlands of roses on the walls, roses everywhere. Nothing but rose. On the table - two glasses of champagne - in one, unfinished, a rose. Evening. Candles lit. The Marquise d'Esparbes and Duc de Lauzun are playing chess.<sup>20</sup>

As in the other plays, the end of each act is signalled by the curtain falling. When we examine the descriptions of the characters in Prikluchenie (An Adventure), however, we are met with very abstract criteria:

ДЖАКОМО КАЗАНОВА, в первой картине 23 года, в последней 36 лет, острый угол и уголь.

АНРИ-ГЕНРИЭТТА, 20 лет, лунный лед.

КАПИТАН, под пятьдесят, вояка.

...

ГОРБУН, как все горбуны.

Giacomo Casanova, in act one - twenty-three years old, in the last - thirty-six. Angle and coal.<sup>21</sup>

Henri-Henriette, twenty years old, lunar ice.

The Captain, about fifty, a warrior.

The Hunchback, like all hunchbacks.<sup>22</sup>

However, the fact that these descriptions are far more poetic than those in Tsvetaeva's other plays cannot be said to diminish the generic status of the text: they provide the reader, or director, with a different descriptive tone on which to base a physical representation. Tsvetaeva sets out clearly the place and date at which each Act takes place, also quoting her sources for the text. The directions at the beginning of each scene are as full as those of her other plays. The first scene begins:

Ночь. Казанова, буйно разметавшись, спит на диване, под картой звездного неба. Видно, что заснул случайно. На полу валяются книги. Свечи в огромном трехсвечнике догорели. Начало картины в полной тьме.

Night. Casanova, tossing violently, is sleeping on a sofa, under a map of the stars. It is obvious that he has fallen asleep accidentally. The floor is strewn with books. The candles in the huge candelabra have burnt out. The scene begins in complete darkness.<sup>23</sup>



In Feniks (The Phoenix) the characters are again described more in terms of their personalities than their physical appearances. This could be seen as a reaction, on Tsvetaeva's part, to the difficulties experienced by Gollidei in securing roles because of her physical appearance: Tsvetaeva avoids excluding actors from roles on the basis of physical description within the text. The descriptions of the characters are a list of their essential qualities, some more flattering than others:

ДЖАКОМО КАЗАНОВА ФОН СЕГАЛЬТ, ныне библиотекарь  
замка Дукс, 75 лет, « Que suis-je? Rien. Que fùs - je? Tout.»

...

ВИДЕРОЛЬ, домашний поэт. Смесь амура и хама. Зол, подл,  
кругл, нагл, 20 лет.

...

ПЕРВАЯ ПРИНЦЕССА

ВТОРАЯ ПРИНЦЕССА, невоспитанные куклы.

GIACOMO CASANOVA VON SEINGALT : present librarian of Dux  
castle, seventy-five years old, "What am I? Nothing. What was I?  
Everything.

...  
VIDEROLE, resident poet. A mixture of amour and lout. Nasty,  
vulgar, round and insolent. Twenty years old.

...  
FIRST PRINCESS

SECOND PRINCESS: Ill-bred dolls.<sup>24</sup>

Once again, the times and settings of the main events in the text are set out below the list of characters, and the text includes directions for movement, decor and tone of voice.

The two later texts, Ariadna and Fedra (Phaedra), have minimal character descriptions. The list of characters at the beginning of Ariadna, simply states who they are: " TEZEI, syn tsaria Egeia. ARIADNA, doch' tsaria Minosa. (Theseus, son of King Aegeus. Ariadna, daughter of King Minos)."<sup>25</sup> The other characters are simply denoted by their names. Because the play is based on a well-known narrative from classical Greek mythology, the need for physical descriptions, or details of age is precluded. The characters and narrative are of such cultural significance that other details are superfluous.

In Ariadna, each scene begins with a brief description of the setting, those



present and their actions, and there are brief stage directions throughout the text. The text is clearly structured in dramatic scenes and there is evidence within the text that it was intended for production and performance. Fedra (Phaedra) is divided into scenes, each of which is described at the beginning. There are far fewer stage directions within the text than in any of the other plays, especially those which indicate in what tone the speeches are to be delivered. However, this may reflect the intensity of the dialogue and its highly poetic nature: there is no need for further description of the characters' emotions and attitudes. The lack of stage directions could also be linked to the strong focus on the psychological conflicts and positions of the characters, as reflected in Tsvetaeva's notes on the play. There is a chorus, a fundamental element of classical tragedy, and inherently dramatic.

This examination of the evidence within the texts themselves of genre is extremely important. Tsvetaeva wrote so little on the theatre as genre that it would be a mistake to conclude that her one expression of dislike for the theatre determines the genre of these works. The texts contain all the material necessary for a production and performance of the texts, and Tsvetaeva clearly created them with attention to dramatic structure, physical appearance and movement on the stage.

In Tsvetaeva's notebooks of 1919 there are several references to the detailed work she undertook in order to create the correct historical setting for the Casanova plays and for Fortuna, which is set in the eighteenth century. This attention to setting, dress and décor implies an interest in the physical appearance of the play and the actors. As she comments in her notes to Feniks:

Я хотела бы окружить себя исключительно знатоками своего дела, чтобы каждый съел по своей собаке - и основательно съел! Так: знатоками в деле фарфорном, в деле ружейном, в деле планетном (...Казанова - широким жестом - указывает в окно на свою звезду - Венеру. - В каком часу восходит Венера в июле?!...) - поклонном - танцевальном - цветочном - морском - военном! военном! военном! (чтобы знали счет пуговиц и разновидность всех погон на всех мундирах мира!) - языковедами - камергерами - лакеями - цыганами - конюхами - музыкантами - и.т.д., и.т.д., и.т.д. ...Все бы они жужжали вокруг моей головы, как огромные шмели, а голова бы умнела, и я писала бы замечательные пьесы, удовлетворяя строжайшим требованиям, и астронома, и



полководца, и учителя фехтования, и повара, и присяжного  
стряпчего, и акробата, и магистра богословия, и гербоведа, и  
садовника, и морского волка, и - и - и... Только одного знатока  
своего дела мне бы не было нужно: - Поэта!

I wanted to surround myself solely with experts in their field, so that I  
had all their knowledge at my fingertips - and thoroughly so! Therefore:  
experts in the field of porcelain, to deal with weaponry, the planets  
(Casanova - with a sweeping gesture - points through the window to his  
star - Venus - at what time does Venus rise in July?!), to deal with  
bowing, dancing, flowers, the sea, the military, the military! the  
military! (then I would know the number of buttons and the different  
epaulettes on all the uniforms in the world!). I need linguists,  
chamberlains, lackeys, gypsies, grooms, musicians, etc., etc.. They  
could all buzz around my head, like enormous bumblebees, and I would  
be the wiser and I would write wonderful plays, satisfying the strictest  
requirements of the astrologist, the field commander, the fencing  
instructor, the cook, the experienced attorney, the acrobat, the master of  
theology and heraldry, the gardener, and the old salt, and, and, and...

There's only one expert in the field that I would not need: - the  
Poet!<sup>26</sup>

The major point to emerge from this passage is the clear recognition on Tsvetaeva's  
part that the considerations involved in writing theatre and poetry are different. Poetic  
skills are helpful and necessary to her plays, yet are not sufficient in themselves. This  
description of preparatory research for a play is quite different from Tsvetaeva's  
descriptions of her creative processes when writing poetry. To 'write wonderful plays'  
the one aspect of creativity required that she already has is poetic skill, but she also has  
to work outside this to achieve the final play. Tsvetaeva does not need to call in an  
expert on poetry because she already is one. The poet and the dramatist are, however,  
not viewed as mutually exclusive identities: Tsvetaeva presents herself as both writer of  
plays and poetic expert.

The question of the 'performability' of a play is a complex and important issue,  
as 'unperformability' is a factor which has been used to explain the lack of production  
of Tsvetaeva's plays, and to classify them as poems. It must be stressed that it was  
often difficult for Tsvetaeva to get any work published. When she wrote the later  
tragedies, she was living in Prague and Paris and this became increasingly the case.  
Without contacts in the theatre, it was impossible to consider a production of



Tsvetaeva's later plays in her lifetime. The lack of productions of the plays cannot therefore be considered as an indication of 'unperformability' inherent in the texts. What does 'unperformability' signify? Does it indicate that the text describes events that would be physically impossible to stage? There is nothing in any of Tsvetaeva's plays that could not be staged. The poetic descriptions of some of the characters, (also present in many of Cixous' plays) call for imaginative interpretation from both director and actor, but do not hinder any aspect of performance. Karlinsky's article contains no problematisation of the generic definition of Tsvetaeva's plays. The piece concentrates rather on the thematic similarities between the plays discussed by the different writers, and draws no conclusions as to the dramatic potential of Tsvetaeva's work, linking the lack of performance of her plays to contemporary trends rather than to authorial intentions. However, Karlinsky ultimately attaches some importance to performance as an indicator of genre:

For the time being, the drama of Kuzmin, Gumilev and Tsvetayeva remains within the realm of Russian poetry. Their stage incarnation is at present unlikely, but by no means inconceivable.<sup>27</sup>

It would seem that Karlinsky regards the plays as poetry because of a lack of performance, yet as he has not problematised the issue of genre elsewhere in his article, this comment seems rather arbitrary. It is extremely difficult to ascertain the reasons why Schweitzer regards the plays either as of little importance in terms of their genre, or simply as long poems, and Karlinsky's reasons for describing these works as plays without discussing the question of genre also requires clarification. The issue of genre is as much an inconvenience for Schweitzer as it is self-evident for Karlinsky, with his focus on thematic aspects of the texts.

Michael Makin addresses the plays in some detail, but does not focus on the issue of genre. He focuses rather on the influence of source texts on the plays and judges their success in terms of their closeness to a source text:

Rather than the spectacle of a poet gaining increasing mastery of a new form with successive works, the reader sees the quality rise and fall

according to whether or not sources are employed.<sup>28</sup>

At no point does he problematise the shifts in genre between source text and play. However, Makin does accept the plays as having been written for the stage and describes Prikliuchenie's "strong dramatic quality".<sup>29</sup> He goes further in commenting on his perception of the genre of the plays:

...the plays themselves are far more tightly bound by the conventional constraints of genre, by the inherited texts of theatrical devices and expectations, than any of her other poetic works.<sup>30</sup>

This acknowledgement of a more influential element in the creation of the plays than the narrative sources Makin rightly identifies is not pursued, but it serves as a recognition of the importance to Tsvetaeva of the genre in which she was writing.

### **Possible Influences on Tsvetaeva's Theatre**

From an early age, the theatre was a constant interest of and influence on Tsvetaeva. Edmond Rostand was one of her favourite authors and, as she was also fascinated by the figure of Napoleon, Tsvetaeva read L'Aiglon many times, finally translating it at the age of eighteen. She was also a great admirer of the actor Sarah Bernhardt whom she had seen perform in Paris.

Tsvetaeva's closest links with the theatre began in 1918 when she met members of the Second and Third studios of the Moscow Arts Theatre, which were under the direction of Mchedlov and Evgenii Vakhtangov respectively. She gave a very well-received reading of her play Metel' (The Snowstorm), to this group in early 1919, a year after the completion of the play. Although roles had been distributed, the play did not go into production as the group broke up later that same year. The remark, made by Tsvetaeva after the reading of Metel' (The Snowstorm) to Vakhtangov's studio and recorded in her own writings, that no one could play the part of the Lady in the Cloak,



as this character represented her soul, could be seen as a reaction to the success of the reading, and surprise at the attempt to allocate roles immediately. The comment also serves to support a reading of the play which associated the Lady with the poet figure.

Tsvetaeva's general interest in theatre can be seen through her engagement with dramatic texts. In 1919-1920, she translated Musset's comedy On ne badine pas avec l'amour for Vakhtangov's studio. Yet it seems that this play did not go into production either. Within the same period, Tsvetaeva was approached to translate Claudel's Tête d'Or, and was asked to do some translation work for a production of Hamlet; these were both for the RSFSR Theatre under the direction of Meierkhol'd. On both occasions it seems that she disagreed with some of the principles of Meierkhol'd's work and disapproved, more strongly, of changes that Maiakovskii (who was involved in the production of Hamlet) had suggested to the gravediggers' scene, changes which would have rendered the production highly political. I would suggest that her refusal to work with Meierkhol'd and Maiakovskii on these projects was founded on political disagreement, and cannot be interpreted as an aversion to working in the theatre.

Tsvetaeva spent many evenings observing the rehearsals and work of Vakhtangov and his studio and her approach to the theatre may have been influenced by his beliefs. Vakhtangov was Stanislavskii's main disciple and a much respected actor and director. He shared Stanislavskii's goal of enabling the actor to construct a living human being on stage by revealing the subconscious through conscious means, by linking the psychological and the physical. Stanislavskii regarded the word as the physical side of psychophysical action, as the equivalent of verbal actions, and therefore as both dynamic and dialogic. Vakhtangov was opposed to all vulgar theatricality, and during the period 1911 to 1918 took Stanislavskii's teachings to possibly their most extreme manifestations. He developed his own theatrical idiom, and his later work is characterised by the creation of magnified characters, who personify the central thematic concerns of the play. However, Vakhtangov was also greatly attracted by the theories of Meierkhol'd, and attempted to develop a middle path between these and the teaching of Stanislavskii. Zograf describes his project as creating



"... a new theatrical world far removed from the realistic verisimilitude of depiction, a world of the anti-everyday."<sup>31</sup> Vakhtangov developed a school of 'imaginative' or 'fantastic' realism, and placed great emphasis on the potential harmony of form and content, often describing this relationship in musical terms. He spoke of one of his productions as: "... a polyphonic vision...the sum of disconnected, multifarious, disassociated voices and consciousnesses."<sup>32</sup>

We can draw parallels between the concerns of Vakhtangov discussed above and some central characteristics of Tsvetaeva's plays. Her theatre exhibits the use of magnified characters to symbolise abstract qualities and conflicts; indeed, none of her plays could be described as realist. Tsvetaeva may have also been drawn to Vakhtangov's studio because, as well as displaying many of the classic concerns of modernism, his work also reflected an interest in the potential of the use of different and dissonant voices, on which I shall comment in the following chapter 'The Role of Language in the Construction of Identity in the Theatre of Cixous and Tsvetaeva'.<sup>33</sup>

We have few clues extrinsic to the texts of the plays as to contemporary influences on Tsvetaeva's theatre. Should we assume that, since she does not mention having been to the theatre in her letters, nor comment on any reviews in her correspondence and essays, that she was unaware of contemporary trends in the theatre? I maintain that it is extremely unlikely that Tsvetaeva was unaware of the work of the most celebrated directors of her day or unaware of contemporary plays. Such questions remain in the realms of hypothesis, yet it would be of great interest to know whether Tsvetaeva was familiar with Tairov's celebrated production of Racine's Phèdre, translated and adapted by Valerii Briusov, which toured Europe in 1923.<sup>34</sup> Alice Koonen played the role of Phèdre and her part incorporated the use of song and chant. The production was praised by both Lunacharskii and Cocteau, yet we do not know whether Tsvetaeva was aware of this production before writing her own play.<sup>35</sup> Despite the lack of precise detail on Tsvetaeva's knowledge of contemporary productions and directors we can assume that she was familiar with much contemporary



theatre at least through the written texts. Both Karlinsky<sup>36</sup> and Makin.<sup>37</sup> point out the influence of symbolist drama on her early plays, and a reference to the theatre of Aleksandr Blok is particularly useful in this respect.<sup>38</sup>

Blok's theatre can, in some respects, be considered as representative of Russian Symbolist theatre and influenced by Maeterlinck, Strindberg and Ibsen. Symbolist theatre was opposed to concepts of naturalism and centred upon the presentation of characters as personifications of abstract ideas, a strategy which is present throughout Tsvetaeva's early plays. Symbolist dramas conveyed a mystical atmosphere, focusing on the helplessness of humankind before fate. Lack of emphasis on development of plot and dénouement produced plays which are "static melancholic tableaux vivants"<sup>39</sup> and Tsvetaeva's early play Metel' (The Snowstorm) matches this description. Symbolist dramas often feature characters who are extensions of the author and this element remains consistently present throughout Tsvetaeva's theatre, although the thematic purposes of such presentations undergo radical change.

Blok became opposed to the idea of static theatre, and his play Balaganchik (The Fairground Booth), which was produced by Meierkhol'd in 1906, contains elements of popular theatre and commedia dell'arte which ironise elements of Symbolist theatre. Blok described his plays as lyrical dramas, which might suggest that they were not intended for the stage, but he did give permission for Meierkhol'd to produce Neznakomka, although this did not happen as the director left to work with another theatre. Blok also gave instructions to the actors of the Moscow Arts Theatre for a production of another of his plays Roza i krest (The Rose and the Cross).

The figure of Aleksandr Blok is of greater importance in this specific context, however, than as an example of a Symbolist playwright. He was one of Tsvetaeva's most admired writers and, as such, it is inconceivable that she would have been unfamiliar with his theatre. The influence of Blok is important in discussing Tsvetaeva's approach to the theatre as he was the writer who represented, for Tsvetaeva, the archetypal, ultimate poet figure.<sup>40</sup> Her mythologisation of Blok is reflected in the many poems dedicated to him which imagine him as quasi-messianic



figure.<sup>41</sup>

The clearest example of the influence of Blok's theatre on Tsvetaeva's plays can be found in Metel' which draws heavily on Blok's play Neznakomka (Incognita) (1906), in which a poet struggles to find and understand his vision of the "unknown lady", his ambiguous muse. The gender reversal enacted in Tsvetaeva's play is discussed in detail in Chapter Four of this thesis ('Sexual Identities in the Theatre of Tsvetaeva and Cixous') but what is important in this context is the thematic focus of Blok's play and its possible influence on Tsvetaeva's theatre. Blok's play represents poetic inspiration in an allegory with which Tsvetaeva engages, using the leitmotif found in Blok's work of the snowstorm as symbol of both creativity and chaos,<sup>42</sup> a leitmotif which she also radically revises in Metel' (The Snowstorm).<sup>43</sup> Metel' (The Snowstorm) should, I suggest, be read as formulating a direct response, both generically and thematically to Blok's Neznakomka. In this way, Blok's influence on Tsvetaeva's early theatre lays the foundation for the consistent exploration of poetic identity.

From 1924 to 1927, Tsvetaeva worked on a trilogy based on the life of Theseus and the women whose fates he sealed: Ariadne, Phaedra and Helen of Troy.<sup>44</sup> The third part of the trilogy, concerning Helen of Troy, was never written. At this time there was renewed cultural interest in classical Greek mythology and plays on these subjects were written by several European writers, including Giraudoux, Anouilh, Cocteau and Shaw. It is not known whether Tsvetaeva was familiar with any of these plays. Greek tragedy did not have a tradition of representation in the Russian theatre, as it had, for example, in the French theatre.<sup>45</sup> However, Greek tragedy was an important theme in the work of the second generation of Russian Symbolists, with Valerii Briusov and Fedor Solugub as its main exponents. Greek theatre was associated with the Symbolist search for a new means of communication between the poet and the crowd, which some thought could be attained through the generic characteristics of theatre. An example of this line of thought can be seen in an essay by Chulkov, in which he states:



The lyric poet, by his choice of the theatre as the medium for his work, shows that the individualism behind which he concealed his longing in the past cannot any longer save him, and he steps out on to the stage with his longing and his summons to the people, to share with them his grief.<sup>46</sup>

The symbolists' desire for an end to the isolation of the poet and the rediscovery of cultural and national community through the theatre was linked specifically to the revival of Greek tragedy in the work of Viacheslav Ivanov, which will be discussed in greater detail in the last chapter of this thesis.<sup>47</sup> I would argue that Tsvetaeva's plays which represent narratives from classical Greek mythology are motivated by the will to represent and problematise the status of the female subject and, further, the woman writer in patriarchal society, and do not reflect Symbolist concerns with the generic potential of theatre. Tsvetaeva's plays Ariadna and Fedra (Phaedra) share many of the characteristics of modernist drama, just as her poetry exhibits elements which could be considered modernist. The inclusion of songs and the very strong rhythms and chants of some of the speeches foregrounds an exploration of the nature of language and communication.

A more rewarding context in which to situate Tsvetaeva's plays Ariadna and Fedra (Phaedra) can be found in the verse tragedies of Innokentii Annenskii which offer more radical interpretations of Greek mythology.<sup>48</sup> Annenskii's tragedies engaged with obscure narratives yet, as Makin points out, employed these narratives as allegories of the role of the poet in society.<sup>49</sup> This focus represents, I would argue, Tsvetaeva's main interest in Annenskii's work and complements the influence of Blok's theatre on her early plays. Both Tsvetaeva's early plays and the later tragedies were in this way influenced by the deployment of the theatre as genre in which to address representations of the poet and creativity.

## **Tsvetaeva on the Theatre**

Tsvetaeva wrote only very briefly on the theatre in the form of prefaces and



notes to individual plays, but a comment written in a letter in 1919 provides a useful insight:

Я стала писать пьесы - это пришло как неизбежность, - просто голос перерос стихи, слишком много вздоху в груди стало для флейты... Пишу, действительно, себя не щадя, не помня.

I have begun to write plays - this has become an inevitability. Simply my voice has outgrown poems, there is too much breath in my breast for flutes. I write, indeed, without sparing myself, forgetful of self.<sup>50</sup>

This brief statement is important for several reasons. Primarily it identifies the texts as plays and it places explicit emphasis upon their generic difference from 'stikhi' (poems). Secondly, Tsvetaeva describes her move to writing theatre as inevitable, as a development of her poetry, and as due wholly to creative rather than social motives. Tsvetaeva's interest in the theatre was perhaps linked to the polyphonic potential of the theatre, to the desire to express herself through a multitude of characters and voices.

Tsvetaeva's prefaces to her plays were often added later on the occasion of publication, and have been regarded by many critics as a demonstration of her dislike of the genre. The most infamous and frequently quoted remark by Tsvetaeva on the theatre seems damning and final on first examination. It was part of a preface, 'Dva slova o teatre' (Two words about the theatre), added to her play Konets Kasanovy (The Demise of Casanova) two years after its completion in 1922:

#### Два слова о театре

Не чту Театра, не тянусь к Театру и не считаюсь с Театром. Театр ( видеть глазами) мне всегда казался подспорьем для нищих духом, обеспечением для хитрецов породы Фомы Неверного, верящих лишь в то, что видят, еще больше: в то, что осязают. - Некоей азбукой для слепых. А сущность Поэта - верить на слово.

Поэт, путем прирожденного невидения видимой жизни, дает жизнь невидимую (Бытие). Театр эту - наконец - увиденную жизнь (Бытие) снова превращает в жизнь видимую, то есть в быт.

Театр я всегда чувствую насилием. Театр - нарушение моего одиночества с Героем, одиночества с Поэтом, одиночества с Мечтой - третье лицо на любовном свидании. И то, что окончательно утверждает правоту Гейне и мою: в минуты глубокого потрясения - или восносишь, или опускаешь, или закрываешь глаза.



«Но пишите же, однако, пьесы!» - Это не пьеса, это поэма - просто любовь: тысяча первое объяснение в любви Казанове. Это так же театр, как я актриса.  
Знающий меня - улыбнется.

#### Two words about the theatre.

I don't respect the theatre, I'm not drawn to the theatre, and I don't consider the theatre. Theatre (seeing with the eyes) has always seemed to me to be a crutch for lowly spirits, a security for cunning types of Doubting Thomas, who only believe in what they can see, or even more, in what they can touch. A kind of alphabet for the blind.

But the essence of the Poet - is to believe in the word!

The Poet through his innate blindness to the visible, gives us the invisible life. The theatre takes this finally glimpsed life and turns it into visible life, that is into everyday existence.

I have always felt the theatre as violence.

Theatre is the violation of my solitude with the Hero, solitude with the Poet, solitude with the Dream, - the gooseberry in a lovers' meeting.

And that which definitively confirms the rightness of Heine and myself: in moments of profound emotion - you raise, or lower, or close your eyes.

"But all the same, you're writing plays!" - This is not a play, but a poem - simply love: the thousand and first declaration of love to Casanova. It is as much theatre, as I am an actress.

Those who know me - will smile.<sup>51</sup>

This preface was added two years after the completion of the play, and its tone and arguments may have been occasioned by the disagreements between Meierhol'd and Tsvetaeva mentioned earlier in this chapter. Antokol'skii begins his introduction to the 1988 edition of Tsvetaeva's theatre by quoting this passage, and immediately refutes it, albeit with anecdotal reference. It is worth quoting his response in detail:

Не сдишком я верю этому отречению от театра! Я был свидетелем противоположного - трогательной тяги Марины Ивановны Цветаевой к театру, к молодому актерскому коллективу, к ученикам Евгения Багратионовича Вахтангова, к маленькой сцене в Мансуровском переулке в 1918 - 1920 годах. Тяга эта возникла не потому, что рядом с Мариной Цветаевой оказались симпатичные ей люди, так или иначе занимательные для неё, да и сами к ней тянувшиеся. Марина была затронута глубже. Она полюбила атмосферу театральных будней, репетиционную страду - весь этот хрупкий и в то же время надежный материал, из которого с трудом, с ошибками, просчетами и простоями рождается в бессонных ночах будущее представление...



Марина Цветаева прониклась интересом и сочувствием к самой природе театрального искусств... Все оно, сложное и разное, впервые увиденное и пережитое, живо волновала в те времена Марину Цветаеву.

I do not have much faith in this renunciation of the theatre! I was a witness to the opposite - the touching attraction felt by Marina Tsvetaeva for the theatre, for the young actors' collective, for the students of Evgenii Bagrationovich Vakhtangov, for the small stage on Mansurovskii Street in the years 1918 to 1920. This attraction did not arise out of the fact that she was surrounded by people she liked, who were interesting to her in one way or another, and also attracted to her. Marina was affected more deeply. She fell in love with the atmosphere of a working theatre, the hard work of rehearsals - all this fragile and, at the same time, sturdy material, out of which with difficulty, with mistakes, errors and interruptions, during sleepless nights, a future production would be born....

...Marina Tsvetaeva was infused with interest and sympathy for the very nature of dramatic art, the most basic and most direct of all the arts. All of it, complex and different, freshly seen and experienced, at this time actively inspired Marina Tsvetaeva.<sup>52</sup>

Antokol'skii's repudiation of Tsvetaeva's condemnation of the theatre is based on his own experiences and observations in the years 1918-1920. He stresses that she was attracted to the creative process of theatre itself, and not only simply to the people involved in Vakhtangov's studio. Whilst Antokol'skii is right to emphasise Tsvetaeva's creative engagement with the theatre above her personal relationships with actors of the studio, he does not ultimately address the content of her statement. The first point she makes is that the theatre is to be scorned as a genre because it privileges sight over sound and language, the visible over the invisible, the physical over the spiritual, turning everything into the 'everyday'. Tsvetaeva was aware of the project of symbolist theatre to represent the invisible, and the co-existence of two worlds (the mundane and the creative). Her own plays consistently represent the conflict between earthly existence and spiritual, creative freedom, therefore undermining her statement that the theatre would be incapable of such representation. Tsvetaeva's theatre can be seen as a conscious exploration of this question, of how to represent creativity and poetic identity outside the discourse of the poet.

Tsvetaeva then states that, for her, theatre constitutes an unwelcome presence, a disturbance of the creative relationship between herself and her, poet and dream. This



could be a continued reference to the physical and visual nature of theatre, which Tsvetaeva regards as disturbing the reader's intimate relationship with the text, and to the power of the imagination unrestricted by physical representation. The passage ends with several contradictions and ambiguities, as is common in Tsvetaeva's work. If Konets Kasanovy was not intended to be performed on stage, then the suggestion, put forward by several critics, that one of the main reasons for the writing of these early plays was to provide roles for Gollidei and Zavadskii, is invalidated. The very last comment of the passage would seem to be ironic. Tsvetaeva had several close friends in the theatre, yet refers to the profession of acting as somehow deceitful, as if it designated a capacity for falseness. These comments can be read as a specific retort to Zavadskii who had ended their relationship, rather than a rejection of the genre of theatre. Tsvetaeva thus presents herself, the poet, as the opposite of falsity and reliance on the visual. Antokol'skii's commentary on this passage disputes its status as definitive text on Tsvetaeva's attitude towards the theatre and it is important to note that Tsvetaeva's main objections to theatre as genre are indeed the issues which she consistently addresses in her plays.

More general points about Tsvetaeva's attitudes towards the theatre from 1918-1920 can be gauged from 'Povest' o Sonechke (The story of Sonechka)'. Tsvetaeva wrote this piece in 1936 on hearing of Gollidei's death, and it relates events which took place at the time of the writing of the early plays. Tsvetaeva recounts that she resented what she perceived as a superficial concern for physical appearance used by directors in casting, which resulted in a lack of opportunities for Gollidei. She describes her reading of Metel' (The Snowstorm), and the positive reactions of the studio, and refers to Vakhtangov as brilliant but cold. Tsvetaeva seems to have more respect for Stakhovich, who was not a director but an advisor to the Moscow Arts Theatre on matters of etiquette, and indeed recounts a student's description of his lessons. The overall tone of the text is one of enthusiasm and fascination with the training and theory of the theatre groups, tempered by a continuing mistrust of certain elements of dramatic art



(notably the concept of taking on a role).<sup>53</sup>

Tsvetaeva's plays were not performed in her lifetime, so we have no clues as to her possible preference for a director, nor of the influence she might have exerted over productions of her plays. This question of authorial control is one which is central to a consideration of Cixous' theatre, to which I will now turn.

### **Cixous and the Theatre: Early Approaches**

Cixous' approach to the theatre is, unlike Tsvetaeva's, very well documented. However, before examining her writing on the theatre it is important to refer back to La Jeune Née in order to note her use of spatial metaphors which prefigure her explicit engagement with the theatre, and can be read as indications of the potential of theatre to her aesthetics. Cixous has consistently explored the potential of writing to articulate less repressive structures of intersubjective relationships: "Je cherche donc...une scène où se produirait un type d'échange qui serait différent...",<sup>54</sup> and does not imagine this utopian site as simply a text but as a dramatic space. Cixous' later essays on the theatre recognise the potential employment of the theatre as radical space, but her first explicit discussions of the theatre constitute a critique of the genre.

Cixous' article 'Aller à la Mer', published in 1977, centres on the specific status of female characters in patriarchal drama and the compromised position of the female spectator.<sup>55</sup> Cixous reiterates several of the central arguments of La Jeune Née which address the cultural representation of Woman, and she defines her engagement with the theatre as politically motivated, forming a continuum with demands in her early essays. In 'Aller à la Mer' Cixous' approach to the theatre is specifically that of a female subject, and the article begins with an explicit questioning of the theatre in this context:

Comment, femme, peut on aller au théâtre? Sauf à s'y trouver en complicité avec le sadisme dont les femmes y sont l'objet. A se voir



invitée à prendre dans la structure familiale-patriarcale, que le théâtre reproduit à l'infini, la place de la victime.<sup>56</sup>

The theatre is singled out as "... une construction ordonnée par la demande fantasmique des hommes" <sup>57</sup> and the core of the article criticises the theatrical form itself as governed by patriarchal structures of voyeurism and exhibitionism which exclude the representation of the female subject. Cixous illustrates the narrative function of woman as victim in the theatre:

Qui est elle? Toujours la fille-du-père, son objet à sacrifier, gardienne du phallus et support du fantasme narcissique à l'aide duquel le père pare à la menace de castration. Electre ou Antigone. Éliminée. Ou Ophélie trois fois condamnée à être enterrée vivante, par les trois pères jaloux (Polonius-Laerte-Hamlet) qui ne s'entendent qu'à lui faire la loi: "Femme-toi, sois folle de moi, enferme-toi au couvent." Coffrée. Si elle est Ophélie, le corps interdit, l'âme violée, elle n'aura jamais vécu. Et si elle trouve la force de Cordelia pour affirmer une féminité non asservie au rôle de miroir du délire paternel, elle mourra. Car il y a en tout homme un roi Lear découronné qui exige de sa fille qu'elle l'idéalise à coups de mots gros d'amour, et l'érige, si aplati soit-il, tel qu'il veut être vu: "Dis moi que je suis le plus grand, le plus moi, le plus roi; ou je te tue."<sup>58</sup>

Cixous describes the fate of woman in the theatre with reference to classical Greek mythology and to Shakespearean characters, which prove to be important references in her own plays. What she finds in these theatrical texts is either the reduction of woman to the function of sacrifice in order to glorify the actions of patriarchy, or woman as passive reflector of man's glory and achievements. Women who attempt to exceed these functions, to claim and articulate their subjectivity and desire, are enclosed in punitive narratives. However, although the female characters and narratives to which Cixous refers can be seen as archetypal, they represent a relatively restricted field. Indeed throughout her work on the theatre, Cixous fails to engage directly with contemporary dramatic theory and does not discuss modern dramatists. She has not entered into debate with other contemporary French playwrights and her main references remain those of Greek tragedy and Shakespearean drama.

Cixous continues to focus on the traditional function of women characters in patriarchal narratives:



Il faut toujours qu'une femme soit morte pour que la pièce commence. Le rideau ne se lève que sur sa disparition: à elle la place du refoulé, tombeau, asile, oubli, silence. On ne la trouve que perdue, en exclusion ou dans une salle d'attente. Elle n'est aimée qu'absente, abimée. Fantôme ou trou fascinant. Dehors: hors d'elle-même aussi. Voilà pourquoi je n'allais plus au théâtre: pour ne pas assister à mon propre enterrement: parce qu'il ne donne pas lieu à une femme vivante ni, ce n'est pas un hasard, à du corps ni même à de l'inconscient.<sup>59</sup>

According to Cixous, the structure of the patriarchal theatre demands that female characters function as specular fantasy, remaining repressed and silent, forever on the margins of the central drama or tragedy. The female spectator is thus obliged to identify with the marginalised female characters, and Cixous focuses on a critique of mimesis:

Parce que ce Vieux Jeu est encore celui du Rôle, ancien régime de la représentation, du spéculaire; lieu privilégié d'une double perversion voyeuriste-exhibitionniste, d'une division du travail et de la jouissance (qui "fait" du - le, - théâtre, qui travaille, qui est exploité par qui?), d'un renforcement de l'opposition réel/imaginaire qui profite à ceux qui ont intérêt au simulacre. Figure de tous les cirques, tribunaux et autres scènes du social où les hommes vont se faire voir et s'en mettre plein la vue, le Vieux en remet d'ailleurs ce temps-ci, grande époque des maîtres-en-scène, du côté de la parade: surinvestissement du decor, du lèche-l'oeil, de l'accessoire.<sup>60</sup>

Cixous' representation of theatre remains severely limited and does not recognise modes of theatre which do not manifest such qualities. In this sense her early work on the theatre fails, paradoxically, to address generic specificity and would seem to share mutual concerns rather with feminist film theory of the same period, which draws upon psychoanalysis to theorise the structures of spectatorship. In the above extract Cixous describes the regime of the specular, and the investment in this of a voyeuristic power structure. These considerations are fundamental to Laura Mulvey's seminal essay on the representation of woman in narrative cinema.<sup>61</sup> Mulvey examines the ways in which patriarchal society is founded upon the representation of woman as castrated and other in order to organise a normalised world view around male subjectivity.



Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning.<sup>62</sup>

Woman is object and fetishised symbol, not subject of her own world,<sup>63</sup> which leaves little option for the female spectator who can only feel alienated by the object she is presented with or repress her difference and identify with the male hero as subject.<sup>64</sup>

The basic principles of Mulvey's critique can be paralleled with Cixous' criticisms of the structure of patriarchal theatre, and both articles culminate in an expression of the political importance of working to change such structures:

Aller au théâtre maintenant, il me faut le faire politiquement, dans le dessin de changer, ensemble avec des femmes, ses modes de production et d'expression. Temps enfin que les femmes rendent au théâtre sa chance, sa raison d'être, sa différence: qu'il y soit possible de faire passer du corps, réel, parlant...<sup>65</sup>

Cixous' suggestion that radical change is possible in the theatre relies upon the collective will of women to engage with the theatre. In her later writing on the theatre, however, particular anxieties about the status of the female spectator disappear and an approach to the theatre which considers sexual difference as central is no longer considered.

The generic potential of the theatre is inferred in this article, but is not explicitly discussed. Cixous suggests that the physical presence of the actors can work to undermine the importance of role and traditional character in the theatre, thus creating more complex and valuable intersubjective relations between spectator and actor. She asserts that this would need to be coupled with a refocalisation of narratives to include female subjects and the expression of their desires:

`...geste d'urgence pour que soit d'abord entendue une voix féminine qu'elle ait pu crier: "ce n'est pas moi qui suis muette, je suis tue par ta surdité".<sup>66</sup>

This presence would, in turn, bring about a rejection of dominant conceptions of space



and representation in the theatre:

Si la scène est femme, ce sera pour *déthéâtraliser* cet espace. Elle voudra être corps-présence; il s'agit donc de travailler à faire sauter tout ce qui fait "spectacle", à déborder la rampe-barre; à défaire le primat du visuel et insister sur l'auditif: apprendre à aiguïser toutes nos oreilles, surtout celles qui savent saisir les battements de l'inconscient, entendre les silences et au-delà. Pas de "distanciation", au contraire, cette scène-corps n'hésitera pas à approcher, approcher à (se) mettre en danger, mais de vie. Corps en travail.<sup>67</sup>

Cixous claims that an assertion of woman's physical and subjective presence, and an emphasis on the spoken word rather than the visual image, is capable of frustrating voyeuristic consumption and of problematising the position of the spectator. In parallel to this, the refusal of the naturalistic creation of theatrical illusion establishes a dangerous proximity between the actor and spectator which could underline the physical presence of the actors and break down the distance which facilitates scopophilic power structures.

Cixous' essay moves on to examine the importance of the female body in these new relationships, positing this body as text which is calling to be heard:

Ce sera un texte, un corps qui se déchiffre, s'appelle, d'un seul lent élan; chant de la mise au monde des femmes; de l'infinie patience d'une femme en attente de Femme. Il suffit d'une femme qui se tienne au-delà de l'interdit, se vivant nombreuse. Ensemble de celles qu'elle a été, qu'elle aurait pu être, qu'elle voudra être, allant toujours plus lentement, plus vite qu'elle même, s'anticipant. Il y a cette arrivée, elle se fait, je l'entends de si loin, et pas d'autres scènes que cet espace à cent scènes simultanées où, plusieurs elle va, elle n'est pas arrêtée en ce lieu ouvert par cette allure, cette écoute, et si cette scène est mouvement, si elle s'entend là où *toute* arrive, où ça ne se joue pas, ça se vit, les femmes pourront y aller, se sentir aimer, aimées, écoutées, entendues, par bonheur, comme elles vont à la mer.<sup>68</sup>

Emphasis is on the desire to represent the female subject as plural and in process, not as a fixed and marginalised symbol of alterity. Cixous suggests that the theatre could join with the actor in becoming both body and text, the site in which a whole new narrative could unfold, in which women could recognise themselves as subjects.



coinciding with the representations they witness, as part of that text themselves. This encouragement of a female Imaginary, would allow women to see and to be seen, to listen and to be heard, not to be alienated from the representation or text that is traditionally displayed as Woman. However, the passage seems to suggest that the presence of a female subject on the stage would allow all women to experience identification rather than alienation and, although foregrounding the importance of plurality, implies a relative homogenisation of the female spectators.

The issues explored in 'Aller à la mer' constitute the central formal and thematic concerns of Cixous' first plays Portrait de Dora<sup>69</sup> and Le Nom d'Oedipe. Chant du corps interdit.<sup>70</sup> Portrait de Dora, was first produced as a radio play and this form is extremely interesting in its potential for dealing with issues of voyeurism and representation.<sup>71</sup> A radio play allows a mobility of voice not normally possible on the stage, and also has the potential to disrupt the traditional construct of character and role which Cixous criticises in Aller à la Mer. The radio play can restore the female speaking subject as Cixous demands, whilst avoiding the predominant power structures evoked in the display of a female character on stage.

However, Cixous remained determined to demonstrate the radical rethinking of representation within the theatre. The intrinsic linking of body and text is found in Cixous' play Portrait de Dora which had gone into production before 'Aller à la mer' was published. The thematic focus of the play is on the representation and repression of female subjectivity and it relies upon its close intertextual links with Freud's first case study, that of a hysteric, Dora.<sup>72</sup> The hysteric can also be regarded, within the bounds of this discussion, as ultimately theatrical, her voice silenced and her body fetishised by the structures of psychoanalysis. Cixous, in a later essay describing her first attempt at writing for the theatre, makes several essential points which link the figure of Dora and the theatre:

Parce qu'elle a *fait une scène* à Freud. Quand nous faisons une scène, nous faisons, sans le savoir, du Théâtre. La scène que fit Dora à Freud réunit, je le vois maintenant, un certain nombre d'éléments qui sont les



ressorts cachés du théâtre: aveuglement, malentendu, ambivalence.  
indécision, rapport de forces, ironie tragique...

Dora joue est jouée par Freud joueur joué.<sup>73</sup>

There has been great interest in the case of Dora. Much of the critical attention afforded the case study engages in narrative theory, and addresses Freud's narrative technique in this, his first case study.<sup>74</sup> Portrait de Dora can be seen as a response to Freud's narrative framing of the case, and an attempt to demonstrate the suitability of theatre, rather than narrative, to represent subjectivity. Cixous refocuses Freud's case study, both to represent Dora differently and to disrupt the conventional representation of character by staging multiple images of each character, all dislocated from their voices. These aims are integrally linked to Cixous' experimentation with the form of theatre, creating links between the theatre and psychoanalysis in their insistence upon the power of the gaze.<sup>75</sup> Cixous works within the basic tenets of the theatre in order to question its power structures, and calls upon it to meet the challenge of representing the subject in flux. As Shiach points out, this results in a comparison of the mechanisms of psychoanalysis and the theatre :

...its [the play's] main focus is the presentation of the disruptive potential of feminine subjectivity and the female body for the familial structures of patriarchy, and for the specular relations of theatre.<sup>76</sup>

Cixous' work in the theatre has always been influenced greatly by the directors with whom she has worked. The collaborations which dominate her writing for the theatre have both reflected and influenced the thematic and theoretical development of her work in the genre. Portrait de Dora was produced by Simone Benmussa,<sup>77</sup> who articulated a parallel interest in stretching the theatrical form to represent pluralities of subjectivity, and was working on projects which viewed the stage as a non-realistic space for the dramatisation of desires and dreams. Benmussa clearly states the proximity she perceives between psychoanalysis and the theatre which underlies her production of Portrait de Dora:



In 'stage work', just as in 'dream work', a situation, or desire, is projected into space by a word or a gesture: stage work produces images. The stage is the reflecting surface of a dream, of a deferred dream.<sup>78</sup>

Benmussa integrated other media into the play to emphasise the different spaces and times which are simultaneously present on stage, and the resulting multiple interpretations:

The play may be broken up into four different levels, which must always remain 'readable': the levels of memory, of the real, of the dream, and of fantasy. Then why should we not use different styles of 'writing': theatrical, novelistic, cinematographic and choreographic?<sup>79</sup>

Benmussa's production contained several separate but interacting sites on stage. As the dream scenes (film sequences directed by Marguerite Duras) were projected on an overhead screen, the characters concerned were on stage, so presenting the audience with plural subjects whose voices and actions did not coincide either spatially or temporally. The rupture created between the scene/seen and the spoken increased the difficulty of identification for the spectator. Ballet sequences heighten the sense of repetition and ritual of the patriarchal exchange mechanisms revealed, and a series of slides were used to illustrate the ease of substitution of the women in the narrative.

The accumulation of anti-naturalistic devices employed in Benmussa's production results in a radical disruption of narrative time and space and the spectator's position. S/he can find no unified character with whom to identify, but cannot maintain a clear sense of distance from the characters due to the lack of voyeuristic potential achieved through the lack of consistency between image and voice. The combination of Cixous' explicit thematic concern with the status of the female subject in patriarchal discourse and Benmussa's radical production aroused much critical interest. The figure of Dora remains extremely ambiguous as feminist heroine, but Portrait de Dora has been acclaimed by some critics as a model for new feminist theatre practice:



...a bold feminist venture aimed at arousing in the audience a new way of looking which is rooted neither in voyeurism nor in fetishism derived from the male fear of castration.<sup>80</sup>

Le Nom d'Oedipe. Chant du corps interdit, saw a continuation of Cixous' simultaneous explorations of the discourses of psychoanalysis and the theatre, as well as enacting an important refocalisation of a primal cultural narrative, that of Oedipus.<sup>81</sup> However, in this play the devices which serve to emphasise the plurality and fluidity of the subjects are primarily textual. Le Nom d'Oedipe. Chant du corps interdit is an operatic text, with two actors on the stage to represent each character, one performing the parts of the text which are sung, the other performing the spoken sequences. This oral and visual doubling works in much the same way as the doubling of images in Portrait de Dora: it undermines the spectator's desire to identify with a character, and encourages an interpretation of the narrative as emblematic of the universal impossibility of a radical reappraisal of difference within a patriarchal framework.

Portrait de Dora and Le Nom d'Oedipe serve as illustrations of the complexity of Cixous' first approaches to theatre and should be addressed in the context of the article 'Aller à la mer' and her collaboration with Benmussa on Portrait de Dora. In these two plays, Cixous seeks to reveal and deconstruct the traditions of patriarchal theatre whilst searching for a means of reclaiming what she is beginning to articulate as the genre's potential for representing the subject in flux.

From this point on, Cixous' espousal of the theatrical genre becomes far more wide-reaching and her writing on the theatre embraces the genre with no further questioning of its structure. This change in approach can be attributed to several elements which include the strategic use of the genre to develop Cixous' theoretical work on the representation of alterity, and the influence on her work of the director Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil.

It is important at this stage to investigate the relationship between Cixous' essays on the theatre and the plays themselves. The staging of each of her plays has



been accompanied by the publication of an essay or interview and, in some cases, the essays have been published in the same volume as the play.<sup>82</sup> The publication of such material alongside the text clearly constitutes an attempt by the author to control meaning and interpretation of the play.

It is remarkable that all productions of Cixous' plays have been undertaken in close collaboration with the author, including her attendance at rehearsals,<sup>83</sup> a factor which further emphasises the extent to which Cixous retains authorial control over the text in performance. The explicit associations between the plays and Cixous' essays on the theatre assist the assimilation of her radically evolving attitudes towards the theatre, but subsequently problematise the status of the play. The essays overdetermine interpretation both of the play concerned, and of Cixous' use of the theatre, and can be seen to encourage a reading of the play as simply an illustration of the development of Cixous' aesthetics. In much the same way as Cixous' choice of writers for the seminar programmes reflects wider concerns associated with her own creative identity, such generic choices form part of a larger aesthetic project. As Shiach points out:

... Cixous' writing on the theatre, as on other things, is always strategic. She uses the theatrical as a space in which to develop her critique of the forms of subjectivity and representation that dominate contemporary life.<sup>84</sup>

### **The Embrace of the Theatre and the Suspension of Self**

Much has been made of the thematic shift in focus of Cixous' plays which took place in the eighties, a shift which can be variously described as moving from the personal to the historical, from inner space to outer world, from definitions of difference within the subject to examinations of political and ethnic alterities.

This change is accompanied by a radical change in Cixous' approach to the theatre, which elevates theatre to a privileged generic status and distinguishes it clearly from her work in other genres. As discussed in the preceding section, 'Aller à la mer'



refers briefly to the lost potential of theatre to represent the female subject, and in her essays of the mid eighties, which constitute the main body of her thought on the theatre. Cixous develops her thought on its potential. However her motivation is no longer linked to the rethinking of sexual difference, nor to the representation of a gender specific subjectivity, but recreates the theatre as utopian site, analogous to her descriptions of the site of writing in La Jeune Née, as the place in which the representation of difference can be rethought.

The tone and language of these essays is radically different from that of 'Aller à la Mer', and the theatre is no longer subjected to critical analysis, but described in mystical and spiritual terms. As the essays contain much repetition as well as some development of thought, I shall address them together. The major pieces in question are; 'Le chemin de légende',<sup>85</sup> 'Le lieu du crime, le lieu du Pardon', 'L'Incarnation'<sup>86</sup> and an article which summarises and encapsulates the arguments of the preceding essays; 'De la scène de l'Inconscient à la scène de l'Histoire: Chemin d'une écriture'.<sup>87</sup> I shall also refer to minor interviews and references from the seminar archives.<sup>88</sup>

This body of work introduces a new emphasis which has since remained constant whenever Cixous writes or speaks about the theatre. The central concern of Cixous' approach to the theatre is displaced from an attack on the politics of representation to an interest in the repercussions for subjectivity of writing for a different genre.

In the same way in which Tsvetaeva described a different relationship of author to text when writing for the theatre, Cixous introduces clear distinctions between writing for the theatre and her writing in other genres: 'Je ne suis pas née écrivain de théâtre...Il y a un certain chemin à faire...'.<sup>89</sup> A concern with the subjective relationships between author and text, and author and characters was not new to Cixous' work of this period in other genres, nor to her seminars, but it had not previously been applied to the theatre.<sup>90</sup>



The primary focus of her interest is the distancing from the self which Cixous experiences when writing for the theatre:

Ecrire pour le théâtre: il faut s'éloigner de soi, parler, voyager longtemps dans l'obscurité, jusqu'à ne plus savoir où l'on est, qui l'on est, c'est très difficile... jusqu'à se réveiller, métamorphosé en quelqu'un que je n'ai jamais rencontré, en mendiant, en divinité naïve, en veillard avisé.<sup>91</sup>

Cixous' writing in other genres reflects work towards a *connaissance* of the self, centred around its inscription in writing; indeed, *La Jeune Née* calls to women to write in order to assert their subjectivity. In these essays, however, such activities are presented as a necessary apprenticeship undertaken by Cixous which leads to a reformulation of intersubjective relations in which the authorial self is displaced. Cixous describes the theatre as an explicit and distinct development of her aesthetics:

J'ai dû écrire quelques textes pour ordonner les chambres et apaiser le moi.<sup>92</sup> Une fois la paix obtenue, dans l'oeuvre comme dans la vie, on peut espérer que le moi va faire silence, laisser le terrain au monde. Amoindri, grandi, qu'il s'éloigne jusqu'à l'effacement, et l'immense plage nue sur laquelle il faisait ses bruyants exercices revient enfin aux hôtes étrangers, aux non-moi, aux passants, à l'humanité. Entrent alors les Autres! J'ai l'honneur d'être la scène de l'autre.<sup>93</sup>

The loss of self, described by the Cixousian neologism of 'démôisation',<sup>94</sup> thus enables the author to become the site of the other, her characters providing a 'consolation enivrante'<sup>95</sup> to compensate for the self's loss of centrality. This engagement with the role of the other in the writing process constitutes a further development of Cixous' attempts to rethink and reformulate the representation of difference. Cixous, when writing for the theatre, claims that she is taken over by the other, a displacement of self which undermines dialectical structures of difference reliant upon the binary opposition of self and other.

However, such an effacement of the self seems rather arbitrary and may lead us to the simplistic conclusion that Cixous' other work is only to be interpreted as a projection of her own subjectivity into the texts. The concept of the self becoming a



passive and neutral space for the inhabitation of another character is relatively superficial. Indeed, one could argue that Cixous' employment of the figure of the Indian beggarwoman is far from passive and mimics the mechanisms of colonisation rather than self effacement. It is also unclear why this inhabitation should be seen as particular to the theatre and not generically possible in a novel.

An explanation for this seemingly arbitrary claim for the distinctive intersubjective relations in the theatre can be found in Cixous' attention to the work of the actors. The effacement of the self which she experiences when writing for the theatre is paralleled in her descriptions of the actors' art, as they sublimate, and sacrifice their own personalities to those of the characters they are portraying: 'Acrobates, les comédiens sautent par dessus le vide laissé par le moi. Un tel détachement de soi pour rejoindre l'autre auquel on se prête tout entier...' <sup>96</sup> Theatre enables Cixous to experience this transport to other lands: '...le théâtre c'est ce voyage même, cet arrachement, ce transport vertigineux...' towards the other. <sup>97</sup>

The suspension of authorial self described by Cixous results in radically different approaches to writing from those expressed in her earlier work, and underlines the distinction she makes between writing for the theatre and writing in other genres. Cixous recounts the reasons which prevent her from creating male characters in her fiction:

Parce que j'écris avec le corps et que je suis une femme, et un homme est un homme et de sa jouissance je ne sais rien. Et un homme sans corps et sans jouissance, je ne peux pas faire cela. <sup>98</sup>

This link between writing and the authorial libidinal economy, fundamental to Cixous' aesthetic in *La Jeune Née* and her exposition of *écriture féminine*, is seemingly bypassed by the effacement of self when writing for the theatre:

Au départ je suis obligée de me tuer, de m'éliminer. Si je veux donner naissance à un personnage strictement masculin, je n'ai rien à faire de



moi. Je peux supprimer, je peux abolir, je peux suspendre. comme on suspend son souffle, je peux suspendre moi..<sup>99</sup>

The support given by Cixous for this development relies on specific textual material from which she makes a generic argument:

Le théâtre n'est pas la scène de la jouissance sexuelle. Roméo et Juliette s'aiment mais ne font pas l'amour. Ils le chantent. Au théâtre, c'est le coeur qui chante, la poitrine s'ouvre, on voit le coeur se déchirer. Le coeur humain n'a pas de sexe.<sup>100</sup>

In a somewhat contradictory passage, Cixous then states that she does not have to inscribe the sexual difference of her characters as it is present in the physical realia of the actors' bodies. The libidinal economy of the writer is effaced, to be replaced not by that of the character represented, but by the anatomy of the actor:

Le comédien, la comédienne nous donnent tout le corps que nous n'avons pas à inventer. Et tout est vécu et tout est vrai. C'est le cadeau que le théâtre fait à l'auteur: l'incarnation. A l'auteur homme, il permet de créer des femmes qui ne seront pas feintes, et à l'auteur femme il accorde la chance de créer des hommes parfaitement constitués!<sup>101</sup>

This 'incarnation', which relies upon the supposedly authentic marker of sexual difference, the anatomy of the actor, enacts one of a series of effacements of difference which appear in Cixous' writing on the theatre of this period. Indeed the gender-specific approach to theatre which was so prominent in 'Aller à la mer', and disputed the visual elements of theatre, the narrative function of female characters and the politics of spectatorship is conspicuously absent from the essays written after 1982.

The apparent simplification of the creative process and the relative directness of the theatre are central to the further distinctions drawn by Cixous between theatre and other genres. The theatre is asserted as more authentic and direct than narrative texts, in terms of its relationship both to the author and the audience. Cixous likens the process of writing for the theatre with the position of the spectator:



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 que c'est déjà le théâtre et je ne suis pas seule.<sup>102</sup>

This creative spectatorship repeats emphasis on the passivity of the author, and valorises emotional responses over rational or intellectual activity. This implied directness of impact is a motif of Cixous' writing on the theatre and the quality which she cites as ensuring a greater impact on the audience is that of the spoken word:

Au théâtre résonne ce qui reste silencieux dans la réalité et dans l'écriture livresque: la Parole. Rien de plus orale, rien de plus nu que cette langue. Des Paroles. Il me faut écrire comme parle le corps parlant.<sup>103</sup> il faut que les paroles livrées par l'auteur au personnage soient les paroles mêmes que les lèvres vivantes et pensantes pétrissent et insufflent. Il faut tirer la parole droit au coeur du public.<sup>104</sup>

Emphasis on the spoken word is important to Artaud's concept of the 'Théâtre de la cruauté', but Cixous' statement does not seem to carry the same arguments. Artaud argued for a diminishment of the importance of the written text in theatre and an emphasis on language as dramatic element, employing song, incantation and rhythm.<sup>105</sup> Cixous' criteria clearly also depends on performance of the text for its fulfilment yet, whilst it does not differentiate between different modes of discourse, it seems to express the desire for a simplification of language, a desire which is not borne out in her plays. An examination of the role of the spoken word in the theatre leads Cixous to revise her own descriptions of creativity:

J'écris à l'oreille: l'oreille tendue vers les musiques du coeur. Cela bout là-dedans. Ce sont les passions, les pulsions. Un jour j'ai fait la liste des passions: liste que je n'avais jamais eu besoin de faire pour un de mes textes.  
J'écoute et je traduis. Ma traduction des passions doit être d'une extrême fidélité.<sup>106</sup>

The theatre for Cixous has become the genre which she claims as the site par excellence of alterity, where writer, actor and spectator can enjoy a new and unproblematic



relationship to the other:

Le théâtre est le palais d'autrui. Il vit du désir de l'autre, de tous les autres. Et du désir du désir des autres: du public, des comédiens.<sup>107</sup>

### **`Histoire' and the Humanitarian Force of Theatre**

The formal suspension of authorial self facilitated when writing for the theatre is paralleled, by Cixous, with a thematic widening of scope and the suspension of the dominance of subjectivity as thematic core. A proclivity for more conventional narratives is suggested:

J'ai besoin d'un certain théâtre, dont le prénom était Shakespeare ou Verdi, ou Schonberg ou Rossini. J'ai besoin que ce théâtre me raconte des histoires, et qu'il me les raconte comme lui seul peut les raconter légendairement et cependant droit dans les yeux.<sup>108</sup>

As the title of *'De la scène de l'Inconscient à la scène de l'Histoire'* demonstrates, Cixous comes to regard the theatre as capable of not only delivering *'histoires'* but *'L'Histoire'*. The staging of the scene of the other enables the solving of her stated dilemma:

Et l'Histoire? Question terrible qui m'a hantée sans cesse. Longtemps elle a résonné pour moi comme l'écho de la faute...Comment unir Histoire et texte?.<sup>109</sup>

Cixous states her belief that history can only be represented poetically in the form of the epic or legend, and rejects any doubts as to contemporary applicability of such a term: *'Au théâtre oui. C'est encore un lieu où il y a de l'épopée, où il y a encore ce que l'on pourrait appeler de la légende'*.<sup>110</sup> History, as occurs problematically in Cixous' plays, is conflated with epic and legend:

Le Théâtre a gardé le secret de l'Histoire que Homère avait chanté: l'Histoire est faite d'histoires de maris, d'amants, de pères, de filles, de



mères, des fils, de jalousie, d'orgueil, de désir. Et il y a des visages qui lancent des flottes de mille voiles et détruisent les villes.<sup>111</sup>

These remarks could be interpreted as a defence against criticism of her plays on the recent history of Cambodia and India, encouraging a more metaphorical reading of the texts.

The realisation of characters with very different histories from that of the author encourages Cixous to discover potential in the theatre for a celebration of common humanity:

Après coup, le sentiment bouleversant que, si je puis me déplacer, mon âme ou moi, jusqu'en Inde, et jusque dans des êtres étranges, cela signifie que nous ne sommes pas, nous les êtres humains, si séparés et si imperméables que cela. Nous sommes des étincelles du même feu.<sup>112</sup>

This ability to bring about recognition of the unity of humanity becomes an enormously significant element of the theatre for Cixous. However this eulogy to the rediscovery of human emotions to be achieved via the theatre is linked problematically throughout this essay to the setting of the play, with which it was published, La Prise de L'école de Madhubaï, that of India:

Un rideau, un plateau, une caravane, des hauts plateaux. Arrivent: des destins. Des destins!? Nous n'avons que des existences! Et nous oublions que nous avons le droit aux destins. Mais le théâtre peut et doit nous rappeler qu'en redevenant "indiens", nous pourrions à nouveau prétendre à nos chances. A être le héros de nos histoires.<sup>113</sup>

The positing of a more authentic subjectivity and simple existence is present in the essays which accompany L'Indiade ou l'Inde de leurs rêves in which Cixous employs metaphors of a mythologised India to evoke the utopian generic space of theatre.<sup>114</sup> Cixous claims humanitarian qualities for theatre, notably its power as healing social ritual:



Les gens qui sont sur scène communiquent avec ceux qui sont dans la salle, sans réserve, sans interruption. Dans la ville, nous nous tournons le dos, nous nous évitons. Ici, c'est face à face, âme à âme. Nous sommes tous là parce que nous l'avons voulu et c'est d'un commun accord que nous allons faire ensemble, ce monde: le théâtre.<sup>115</sup>

This clearly echoes the approach to the theatre of many cultural movements, including Russian symbolist theatre, as discussed earlier in this chapter. The theatre is described as a temple to our humanity, holding the potential to rediscover communal will. Cixous expresses no hesitation here as to the positive potential of this mutual communication. There remain no traces of the pitfalls of representation, and the inherent power structures of traditional theatre are no longer addressed. Such sentiments are pushed to extremes of interpretation as Cixous claims that good deeds may come as a result of confronting our own humanity within the space of the theatre:

Pour commencer, prenons le théâtre au sérieux. Je veux dire: il est bon d'y aller sérieusement, comme des enfants. Parce qu'on peut faire semblant d'aller écouter un opéra. Et alors rien ne se passe. Mais si l'on participe à Woyzeck ou au Roi Lear, avec le coeur simplifié, découvert, et si par chance on verse des larmes, alors peut-être sur la terre une femme sera sauvée, un prisonnier sera libéré, et peut-être un innocent justifié, et un oublié sera rappelé.<sup>116</sup>

The suggested opposition between going to *listen* to opera yet participating in theatre is problematic in itself, yet remains undeveloped. The impact of theatre now seems to depend upon our attitude as spectators, rather than an intrinsic characteristic of the genre.

It is extremely difficult not to be struck by the naïve language, and the sentimentality of the arguments. Indeed, it seems at times that Cixous sees herself reborn through the theatre:

J'avoue que le Théâtre est une forme de religion: je veux dire que l'on y éprouve ensemble, dans le re-ligere, le recueillement des émotions. Je dis "j'avoue" parce que c'est une des raisons pour lesquelles il m'arrive de résister à l'appel du Théâtre: par anti-religion. Par besoin d'individualisme.

Mais je déclare que nous avons besoin de ces temples sans dogme et sans doctrine (mais non sans un grand nombre de dieux) où se jouent nos affres et surtout nos aveuglements.<sup>117</sup>



Cixous claims that the theatre returns to us an essence of humanity, that we have lost amidst our 'avare banalité quotidienne':

...d'abord les droits primitifs aux espoirs; et d'abord l'espoir que les choses, qui nous servent d'Histoire et d'existence, et qui sont si implacablement programmés par les grandes machines sociales, échappent à toute prévision; et s'offrent à la chance, à l'humain.<sup>118</sup>

And again in a later essay:

Car si ce Théâtre est nécessaire c'est parce qu'il nous permet de vivre ce qu'aucun "genre" ne nous permet: le mal que nous avons à être humains. Le Mal. Ce qui se passe au théâtre, c'est la Passion, mais la passion selon Oedipe, selon Hamlet, selon vous, selon Woyzeck, selon moi, selon Othello; selon Cléopâtre, selon Marie, selon cet être humain énigmatique, torturé, criminel, innocent que je suis, je qui est toi ou vous.<sup>119</sup>

Cixous suggests that the theatre holds a unique value in that the fact that two performances of the same play can never be exactly the same provides some resistance against the banal repetitiousness of mass culture. This, coupled with the fact that the spectator is drawn into a dramatic recognition of the present, 'Quelle heure est-il? C'est la question clé du théâtre',<sup>120</sup> experiencing the narrative within the same time and space as the actors. This leads Cixous to claim that the theatre unites the audience:

Le Théâtre est (au) Présent. Doit toujours être au présent. C'est sa chance. A chaque moment le présent éclate. Le présent est d'un noir brillant. On avance le coeur battant de ne pas savoir ce qui va arriver. Et cet imprévisible qui nous tient en haleine, nous soulève, nous transporte au-dessus de nous-mêmes, c'est la vie même. Au théâtre le public n'en sait pas plus que le personnage sur lui-même. Personne ne précède. Ensemble on ne comprend pas. Ensemble on hésite. Cela crée entre tous l'obscur et frémissante complicité archaïque.<sup>121</sup>

Cixous' earlier criticism of the concepts of role and fixed identity, engaged with in her early plays, could be developed here to ascribe to the theatre the potential of representing the subject in process, as fluid in time and space. However, she comments rather on the power of the theatre to suspend the audience in intradiegetic time and



space and so encourage catharsis:

Et la substance magique du théâtre: le Temps. Du vrai temps, avec toutes les secondes (non, il n'y a pas de temps dans la fiction, donc pas de suspens terrifié). la sensation du "ça va arriver!", du "il est encore temps!", du "ça pourrait encore ne pas arriver": et toujours le pas léger de la mort qui approche, l'imminence, - et puis: le coup! Ah!<sup>122</sup>

The terms of analysis are vague and the theatre is, once again, posited as genre of authenticity. The suspension of disbelief referred to above as symptomatic of all theatre relies upon a model of linear chronology and is clearly not applicable to all theatre, least of all to Cixous' plays Portrait de Dora and Le Nom d'Oedipe which militate against such notions of temporal unity.

Cixous' presentation of an undifferentiated humanity and utopian assertions of the power of theatre to enable us to realise and reformulate intersubjective relationships is far removed from the gender-specific criticism which accompanied her first plays. A process of homogenisation fails to register differences between male and female characters and male and female spectators. This is a point which Anne-Marie Picard makes:

Mais la question qui pourrait me construire, moi-sujet féminin, est celle de l'adresse: où suis-je inscrite dans L'Indiade? Comment cet allant-devenant-sexué du sujet...laisse-t-il la possibilité de m'insérer spectatrice?<sup>123</sup>

Several of Cixous' quasi-mystical articles on the theatre leave behind questions of inequality of power in representation, voyeurism and psychoanalytic critiques of the structure of theatre itself - all issues which formed a fundamental part of her original approach to the theatre. This is made very clear:

Au théâtre, l'auteur n'est d'aucun parti sauf de celui du Théâtre, (ou Dieu, ou la Vérité humaine). Et la vérité c'est: bonté, méchanceté. Tout le monde sous le regard du Théâtre est de chance égale.<sup>124</sup>



The criticism in 'Aller à la mer' of the power structures at play in theatrical representation, and the awareness of the repression and lack of equality of the other have been replaced by a humanist belief in the social ritual of theatre. The state of 'selflessness' attained by author, actor and spectator also entails a loss of political specificity.

### **Influences on the Theatre of Cixous: Artaud and Mnouchkine**

Cixous' essays on the theatre do not refer explicitly to any body of dramatic theory nor do they acknowledge contemporary influences on her work. There is a distinct lack of detailed critical engagement with major theorists of the genre, however, as I will now discuss, references are made which point us towards possible influences on her work.

Cixous' assertion of the theatre as a regenerative, humanitarian experience recalls the work of Antonin Artaud, whose work was published in the thirties but was not fully acclaimed until the sixties, and who foregrounded an approach to the theatre as a challenging, revolutionary, communal experience:

Une vraie pièce de théâtre bouscule le repos des sens, libère l'inconscient comprimé, pousse à une sorte de révolte virtuelle et qui d'ailleurs ne peut avoir tout son prix que si elle demeure virtuelle, impose aux collectivités rassemblées une attitude héroïque et difficile.<sup>125</sup>

Artaud's 'heroic' theatre acts as a mobilising force towards spiritual and social change through collective inspiration. Cixous' association of the theatre with cruelty must also be seen as an oblique reference to Artaud:

Cruauté: le théâtre est toujours cruellement magnifique ou cruel, paroxystique. Il nous donne la chance de rencontrer la cruauté, qui est une partie de l'existence. Il faut du courage pour la voir. Et pour la montrer: cela c'est la mission du comédien.<sup>126</sup>



However, it is difficult to establish parallels between her limited use of the term and Artaud's detailed conception of the 'théâtre de la cruauté' as prescribed in his manifesto of 1932.<sup>127</sup> Artaud states that 'Sans un élément de cruauté à la base de tout spectacle, le théâtre n'est pas possible'.<sup>128</sup> Cixous' use of the term seems to refer to a general sense of fear and revelation which must be faced by both spectator and actor. Artaud defined his use of the term in letters published with the manifesto:

Ce mot de cruauté doit être pris dans un sens large...de point de vue de l'esprit cruauté signifie rigueur, application et décision implacable...La cruauté est avant tout lucide, c'est une sorte de direction rigide, la soumission à la nécessité.<sup>129</sup>

Artaud, like Cixous, acclaims the theatre as free from repetition as every performance must be different, yet this point prefaces an attack upon 'la poésie écrite'<sup>130</sup> in opposition to performance, an argument not developed by Cixous. We can detect many further similarities between the language and imagery with which Cixous and Artaud discuss the theatre. They share the use of quasi-religious terms with which to describe the theatrical experience, Artaud describes the theatre as capable of overcoming rationality and releasing mystical, primal physical and spiritual forces.<sup>131</sup>

The presence of Artaudian discourse in Cixous' work, and equally the lack of detailed engagement with it, can arguably be interpreted as symptomatic of Cixous' writing on the theatre. Both Shiach and Birkett refer to Derrida's essay on Artaud as a possible context for Cixous' writing on the theatre, but clear responses or references are difficult to establish.<sup>132</sup> Her contact with dramatic theory has consistently been mediated by the work of others, notably that of Ariane Mnouchkine. Consequentially, Cixous' writing on the theatre often appears to constitute a collage of loose references from a wide range of approaches, which have been chosen solely in terms of their strategic usefulness in supporting her current projects in the theatre.<sup>133</sup>

The principle of collaboration has figured largely throughout Cixous' work: La



Jeune Née was written with Catherine Clément, and the recent Hélène Cixous: Photos de racines is a collaborative text, written with Mireille Calle-Gruber.<sup>134</sup> No collaboration has been more influential on Cixous' work in the theatre than that with Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil. Indeed Cixous refers to the element of collaboration she perceives as rewardingly central to the relationship between author and theatre:

Il [l'écrivain] écrit quelque chose et puis il attend son autre comme une âme qui attend son corps... L'instinct de propriété de l'auteur est inhibé et c'est une bonne chose. Par contre l'instinct d'amitié est développé.<sup>135</sup>

The level of collaboration between Cixous and Mnouchkine on the plays produced at the Théâtre du Soleil was high and is articulated very strongly in interviews given at the opening of the play. The sense of harmony in the production is referred to several times:

Il y a eu une fois une différence d'interprétation, à propos d'une scène qu'Hélène voyait comique et qui est devenue au fur et à mesure du travail, tragique. Mais c'est le seul cas. Les conditions de travail étaient idéales: la troupe du Soleil a trouvé un écrivain qui était là en permanence; l'écrivain avait une troupe avec laquelle il pouvait vérifier si son matériau était jouable.<sup>136</sup>

Mnouchkine's influence on Cixous is extensive and can be recognised in both the thematic concerns of Cixous' plays and her writing on the theatre, as discussed above. I would argue that Mnouchkine's personal influence on Cixous' theatre remains more resonant than that of the Théâtre du Soleil's approach to theatre. However, it is important to address Mnouchkine's influence in the context of the company which has produced several of Cixous' plays.<sup>137</sup>

Since the eighties, much media attention on the Théâtre du Soleil has focused on Mnouchkine as enigmatic leader, often without acknowledgement of the lack of traditional power structures in the company. This is partly due to the contemporary status of directors in France and their replacement of writers and actors as the



perceived stars of French theatre.<sup>138</sup> Mnouchkine remains the only woman amongst their number and, as Kiernander suggests, media coverage of her role in the company often reveals both gender stereotyping and ideological attacks.<sup>139</sup>

The Théâtre du Soleil, which is based at La Cartoucherie, an old munitions factory outside Paris, was founded in 1964 by a group of Parisian graduates. From its origins its distinctive status in French contemporary theatre (it has been described as "...the most important adventure in the French theatre since Jean Vilar and his T.N.P."<sup>140</sup>) has rested upon the strong social and political principles espoused by the company. David Bradby describes its radical approach:

Its importance is due to the fact that it has repeatedly called everything into question: the status of the play text, the role of the various theatre workers, the shape of the performance space and the actor-audience relationship. Most remarkable of all, the company has enjoyed a string of popular successes, despite its resolutely experimental stance and its location in a distant and unfashionable suburb of Paris.<sup>141</sup>

The company functions as a co-operative and has managed to keep many of its original idealistic principles,<sup>142</sup> maintaining many of its original organisational policies. All members of the company are paid equally and undertake set design, construction and general maintenance work.

The company's approach to the theatre is resolutely anti-naturalistic: 'Theatre is seeming, it is art, chemistry, illusion, metaphor. If it is realist it dies.'<sup>143</sup> Mnouchkine's statement clearly echoes Artaud in militating against the dominance of psychological drama in the theatre and describing the alchemic qualities of theatre.<sup>144</sup> However, it would be wrong to consider the company's work solely in the context of Artaud, as it also shares the didactic motivation of Brechtian theatre and the Théâtre Populaire, including the will to encourage social responsibility and mobilise political awareness through the theatre:

We desire a theatre in direct contact with social reality, one which presents not just a statement but an incitement to changing the conditions



in which we live.<sup>145</sup>

The element of communal will is equally evident in the company's methodology, that of the 'création collective'. A basic idea, or script is proposed and the actors work on the roles which appeal to them, improvising and experimenting with gesture, make-up and costume at this very early stage in the production. Stage directions and movements are also decided on an improvisational basis, as well as non-verbal aspects of performance which have become increasingly important to the company over recent years. Cixous' attendance at rehearsals provided the inspiration for her discussion of the relationship between character and actor as examined earlier in this chapter. It is important to note that Cixous' L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk roi du Cambodge<sup>146</sup> was commissioned by Mnouchkine for the company and reflects Cixous' influence upon the company. Although the company had moved away from the collaborative text in its work with Shakespeare's historical dramas, the furnishing of a complete text from a living writer located outside the company problematises some of the central principles of création collective.

The relationship between Cixous and the Théâtre du Soleil is born primarily of striking coincidences of interest between Cixous' aesthetics and the development of the company's direction. Cixous' interest in theatre as a genre in which it would be possible to address questions of history was preceded by the Théâtre du Soleil's productions which sought new ways of portraying historical narratives, focused upon the role of participant communities, rather than the deeds of great men. The most well-known of these productions is the highly successful 1789 which, in its staging of the events leading to the French Revolution, created a sense of history as moved not by the deeds of great men, but the common desires of a people.<sup>147</sup> Shiach describes the ways in which the physical space of the sets was designed to enhance this idea of community:

The action took place on a number of small platforms, linked by catwalks, round which the audience could move quite freely. The aim



was to involve the audience in the dynamic unfolding of events, to offer them a choice in the way they interpreted or reacted to their own history.<sup>148</sup>

Mnouchkine's interest in Asian modes of theatre draws influence from Artaud's work on Asian theatre, and her extensive travels in Asia before joining the company.<sup>149</sup> The fleeting references to Japanese theatre in Cixous' writing must be seen as reflecting the influence of Mnouchkine.<sup>150</sup> Cixous mentions the principles of Noh theatre, cites Zeami,<sup>151</sup> and refers to the use of masks,<sup>152</sup> though she does not discuss the specific differences of Asian theatre, nor how they might influence her work in the theatre. Asia remains a problematically metaphorical context, enabling Cixous to move directly from a rather banal quotation from Lispector, remarking that 'La vie est orientale', to a simplistic evocation of the benefits of a simpler non-materialistic existence which Cixous posits as inherently Asian.

In 1982, Mnouchkine turned to Shakespeare's historical plays in order to explore further ways of staging history. Despite Cixous' employment of Shakespearean characters and narratives to illustrate the restricted narrative function of women in patriarchal theatre, Cixous now claims Shakespeare as the ultimate influence on her work in the theatre:

...et puis au commencement et à la fin il y a Shakespeare, qui est la terre, mon père, ma mère, et mon premier jardin de mots.<sup>153</sup>

The influence claimed by Cixous is of language, not of theatrical form or thematic content, but this change in her approach to Shakespeare is typical of her strategic use of primary cultural references. The Théâtre du Soleil's productions of Shakespeare enabled it to further explore the relationship between the individual and History. This interest, articulated immediately prior to the production of L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk roi du Cambodge, is reflected in Cixous' play as Sihanouk is compared to Shakespearean characters and quotes from Shakespeare within the text. Mnouchkine describes in an interview how these different influences converge



in the play:

J'ai essayé d'écrire un spectacle sur ce sujet bien avant le cycle des Shakespeare. J'étais allée au Cambodge en 63, de retour de mes pérégrinations en Asie. J'avais donc le sujet en tête mais je n'arrivais pas à l'écrire, je tombais dans des travers didactiques et idéologiques.<sup>154</sup> Nous avons donc décidé de retourner à l'école de Shakespeare avant de tenter l'aventure. Ensuite chacun s'y est mis pour retrouver la documentation existante, des textes, des photos, des films, pendant qu'Hélène travaillait sur le texte.<sup>155</sup>

The plays concerned received much criticism on account of their perceived political naïvety, which I will discuss at greater length in Chapter Three, and the plays were also criticised in the context of the Théâtre du Soleil's previous approaches to History:

...the work of Mnouchkine and Cixous in the second half of the 1980s appears to have degenerated into a simplistic programme for setting up a pantheon of secular saints, whose mawkish oversimplifications are all the more astonishing in view of the vigorous critique of received historical images that had been mounted by the work of the Théâtre du Soleil in the 1970s.<sup>156</sup>

Such evident change in the work of the Théâtre du Soleil demonstrates the mutual influence of Mnouchkine and Cixous on each other's work, creating for good or ill arguably the closest collaborative dramatic projects in contemporary French theatre.

Cixous' theatre is intrinsically connected with and influenced by the directors with whom she has worked. Benmussa's interest in the representation of subjectivity in the theatre and in the relationship between spectator and character both coincide with Cixous' early theatre, and informs the development of her thought on theatre. However, this focus has not remained prominent in Cixous' work with other directors.

Over the past five years, the direction of Mnouchkine and Cixous' work has developed increasingly in tandem. The influence on Cixous' theatre can be seen in the thematic content of her plays and in the radical evolution of her approach to the genre of theatre. When compared with Cixous' early plays, in which a conscious effort was made to subvert the traditional narrative and visual structures of theatre, the plays



produced with the Théâtre du Soleil appear conventional:

Her [Cixous'] exposition is near-classical, plunging the audience *in media res*, with all the elements in the final solution already laid out, stylised and ordered, in the exposition given in the first scene. The audience is confronted with all the variant languages of Cambodia, jockeying, apparently, for a dominance which Cixous has already allocated.<sup>157</sup>

Changes in thematic focus are evidently linked. Following the production of L'Indiade ou l'Inde de leurs rêves, Mnouchkine decided to return to an investigation of the potential of classical Greek theatre and to further develop her work:<sup>158</sup> this change of direction was followed by Cixous' play La Ville parjure ou le reveil des Erinyes, which employs characters and narratives from classical Greek mythology to represent contemporary events, and was produced by the Théâtre du Soleil in 1994.<sup>159</sup>

The discussion of Tsvetaeva's theatre undertaken earlier in this chapter refuted the interpretation of her theatre as the result of personal relationships with actors, as this interpretation undermines both the author's creativity and the importance of the genre of theatre to Tsvetaeva. I do not suggest that Cixous' theatre can be read solely as a response to the current interests of Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil, but the extent of this mutual influence should not be underestimated when considering the direction of Cixous' theatre.

## Parallel Approaches

This chapter has demonstrated the very different factors which drew Tsvetaeva and Cixous to write for the theatre, but clear common concerns in the two writers' approaches to theatre have also emerged.

Both writers were associated at some stage in their writing careers with a theatre company and, although the levels of collaboration between author and company are dissimilar, their approaches to theatre were informed by experience of the working



methods of directors and actors.

In their early engagement with the theatre, Tsvetaeva and Cixous both express a mistrust of theatre's privileging of the visual, albeit for different reasons. Tsvetaeva regards it as marking the genre as inferior to poetry which she perceived as capable of evoking the invisible, whilst Cixous voiced her condemnation of the voyeuristic tendencies of theatre which encourage the representation of Woman as object and specular fantasy. These criticisms of the genre did not ultimately deter either author from writing for the theatre and their subsequent plays constitute attempts to address the faults perceived in the genre. Tsvetaeva's theatre explores the representation of the invisible and searches for narratives and figures through which to articulate poetic identity. Cixous' plays, considered as a body of work, constitute a far less consistent response to her initial critique of the theatre, but Portrait de Dora and Le Nom d'Oedipe are stylistically and thematically informed by issues of voyeurism and gendered spectatorship.

A second convergence of approach is the emphasis articulated by Cixous and Tsvetaeva on the generic difference between their theatre and their other writing. This aspect is arguably more striking in the case of Cixous, as she explicitly resists the traditional generic categorisation of her other works, preferring to call them 'fictions' rather than novels, or even prose. The generic differences they express originate in the creative process. It is writing for the theatre which is described by both Tsvetaeva and Cixous as unlike writing for any other genre.

This difference located in the creative process is paralleled in the common thematic motivation for Tsvetaeva's and Cixous' approaches to the theatre: an exploration of subjectivity and identity. Both Tsvetaeva and Cixous express the difference of writing for the theatre in terms of a need to suspend the self. Cixous' appraisal of the revisions of intersubjective relationships and structures of identity involved in writing for the theatre lead her to claim that the suspension of the self in favour of the other, is inherent to all experiences of theatre ( those of the writer, the



actor and the spectator). It is this interest in the potential of theatre to undermine dominant dialectical structures of identification which motivated Cixous to continue working in the genre. Her interest in the representation of identity in the theatre develops into an exploration of poetic identity in her later plays.

Tsvetaeva was also primarily interested in the theatre in the context of representation of subjectivity and identity. The principal influences on the thematic content of her theatre identified in this chapter engage with the representation of creativity and poetic identity.

Their approach to the genre is thus focused upon its relationship to the creative process and, as I will demonstrate in the chapters that follow, the association of theatre with questions of creativity and poetic identity is equally apparent in the thematic content of their plays.



- (1) Jane Taubman. A Life Through Poetry: Marina Tsvetaeva's Lyric Diary (Columbus: Slavica Publishers, 1989), p. 121.
- (2) The cycle of poems 'Komediants' (1919) was also linked to Zavadskii, and the character of the stone angel in the play of the same name is widely considered to represent him.
- (3) Jane Taubman. A Life through Poetry: Marina Tsvetaeva's Lyric Diary, p. 123.
- (4) Tsvetaeva wrote about their relationship in 'Povest' o Sonechke (The Story of Sonechka)' much later, in 1937, after receiving news of Gollidei's death. This work provides us with a picture of Tsvetaeva's personal relationships involving the theatre in 1918-1919. She clearly knew many people who worked within the theatre and remained in contact with some for many years. indeed she lists names and describes what became of them all at the end of the text. Marina Tsvetaeva, 'Povest' o Sonechke' in Sochineniia, II, pp. 120-251.
- (5) Viktoria Schweitzer, Tsvetaeva (London: Harvill, 1992), p. 159.
- (6) Pavel Antokol'skii, 'Introduction' in Marina Tsvetaeva, Teatr (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1988), p. 6.
- (7) *ibid.*, p. 16.
- (8) Viktoria Schweitzer, Tsvetaeva, p. 151.
- (9) *ibid.*, p. 152.
- (10) *ibid.*, p. 152.
- (11) *ibid.*, p. 153.
- (12) *ibid.*, p. 153.
- (13) Simon Karlinsky, 'Kuzmin. Gumilev and Tsvetayeva as Neo-Romantic Playwrights', in Russian Theatre in the Age of Modernism, ed. Robert Russell and Andrew Barratt, (London: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 106-122.
- (14) *ibid.*, p. 107.
- (15) *ibid.*, p. 109.
- (16) Marina Tsvetaeva, Chervonnyi Valet, p. 26.
- (17) *ibid.*, p. 29.
- (18) *ibid.*, p. 33.
- (19) Marina Tsvetaeva, Metel', p. 42.
- (20) Marina Tsvetaeva, Fortuna, p. 62.
- (21) This is a play on words in the Russian as 'angle' - ugol and 'coal' - ugol' are only differentiated by the last letter.
- (22) Marina Tsvetaeva, Prikluchenie, p. 133.



- (23) *ibid.*, p. 134.
- (24) Marina Tsvetaeva, Feniks, p. 169.
- (25) Marina Tsvetaeva, Ariadna, p. 236.
- (26) Marina Tsvetaeva, Teatr, pp. 362-363.
- (27) Simon Karlinsky, 'Kuzmin, Gumilev and Tsvetayeva as Neo-Romantic Playwrights', p. 120.
- (28) Michael Makin, Marina Tsvetaeva: Poetics of Appropriation (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 65.
- (29) *ibid.*, p. 76.
- (30) *ibid.*, p. 97.
- (31) Nikolai Zograf, Vakhtangov (Moscow: 1939).
- (32) Nick Worrall, Modernism to Realism on the Soviet Stage (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 42.
- (33) In 'Povest' o Sonechke' (The Story of Sonechka)', written some years later, Tsvetaeva showed an awareness of Vakhtangov's approach to theatre, albeit through a reported complaint of Sonechka's: "...no one understands...not even Evgenii Bagrationovich with his celebrated fantasy." Marina Tsvetaeva, Sochineniia, II, p. 210.
- (34) Tairov was interested in reviving a 'theatre of ecstasy' with Dionysian influences, something which would have interested Tsvetaeva and been compatible with her own aesthetics.
- (35) For further details on this production see Nick Worrall, Modernism to Realism on the Soviet Stage, pp. 25-27.
- (36) Simon Karlinsky, Marina Cvetaeva: Her Life and Art (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), pp. 240-241.
- (37) Michael Makin, Marina Tsvetaeva: Poetics of Appropriation, pp. 65-67.
- (38) Symbolist drama also marked a move away from realist drama and introduced themes of fantasy, mythology and archetypal narrative structures, all themes more attractive to Tsvetaeva's aesthetic.
- (39) Jenny Stelleman, Aspects of Dramatic Communication: action, non-action, interaction (A.P.Chekhov, A.Blok, D.Kharms) (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1992), p. 108.
- (40) For further discussion of the Tsvetaeva's mythologisation of Blok see Véronique Lossky, 'Marina Cvetaeva et Alexandre Blok: La Création d'un Mythe Poétique', Revue des Etudes Slaves, 54 (1982), pp. 733-744 and A. Saakiantz, 'Marina Tsvetaeva ob Aleksandre Bloke,' in V mire Bloka, ed. A. Mikhailov and S. Lesnevskii (Moscow, 1981), pp. 416-440.
- (41) Tsvetaeva's cycle of poems 'Stikhi k Bloku', written in 1916 and 1921 demonstrate both his great influence on her work and her representation of him as an unearthly creative spirit. Marina Tsvetaeva, 'Stikhi k Bloku' in Sochineniia. I, pp. 65-74.
- (42) Blok's poem 'Dvednadsat' (The Twelve)' was written in 1918 and its impression



on Tsvetaeva must have been strong at the time of writing of Metel'.

(43) The Conclusion of this thesis suggests a more detailed reading of Metel' (The Snowstorm) in the context of representation of poetic identity in the theatre of Marina Tsvetaeva.

(44) The question of the sources employed by Tsvetaeva when writing these two plays is addressed in the last chapter of this thesis.

(45) Makin discusses several Russian neo-classical dramatists but finds no evidence to support their influence on Tsvetaeva's plays. Michael Makin, Marina Tsvetaeva: Poetics of Appropriation, pp. 263-264.

(46) Chulkov, 'Printsipy teatra budushchego', in Teatr. Kniga o novom teatre, quoted in James West, Russian Symbolism: A Study of Viacheslav Ivanov and the Russian Symbolist Aesthetic (London: Methuen, 1970), p. 142.

(47) This chapter addresses the possible thematic influences on Tsvetaeva's plays Ariadna and Fedra (Phaedra) of Ivanov's and Nietzsche's writings on tragedy.

(48) Innokentii Annenskii, Stikhotvoreniia i tragedii (Leningrad: Biblioteka poeta, 1959).

(49) 'This story [Annenskii's *Famira-kifared*] provides a rather obvious commentary on the role and situation of the artist as perceived by the Symbolists.' Michael Makin, Marina Tsvetaeva: Poetics of Appropriation, p. 266.

(50) Marina Tsvetaeva, Teatr, p. 342.

(51) Marina Tsvetaeva, Teatr, p. 360.

(52) Pavel Antokol'skii, 'Introduction' in Marina Tsvetaeva, Teatr, pp. 5-6.

(53) Marina Tsvetaeva, Sochineniia, II, p. 159.

(54) Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, La Jeune Née, p. 143.

(55) Hélène Cixous, 'Aller à la Mer', Le Monde, (28 April, 1977), p. 19.

(56) *ibid.*, p. 19.

(57) *ibid.* p. 19.

(58) *ibid.*, p. 19.

(59) *ibid.*, p. 19.

(60) *ibid.*, p. 19.

(61) Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', Screen, 16, No.3 (Autumn 1976), pp. 6-18.

(62) *ibid.*, p. 7.

(63) Mulvey points out the frequency with which it is women who are portrayed as such objects:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze



projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact, so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. *ibid.*, p. 11.

(64) Since this time, feminist film theorists have expressed dissatisfaction with the status, and universalisation, of the female spectator as prescribed in Mulvey's article, and have sought to imagine a more positive and active role for the female spectator. These developments are addressed in several essays included in The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality, ed, John Caughie and Annette Kuhn. (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).

(65) Hélène Cixous, 'Aller à la Mer', p. 19.

(66) *ibid.*, p. 19.

(67) *ibid.*, p. 19.

(68) *ibid.*, p. 19.

(69) Hélène Cixous, 'Portrait de Dora', in Théâtre (Paris: des femmes, 1976).

(70) Hélène Cixous, Le Nom d'Oedipe: Chant du corps interdit (Paris: des femmes, 1978).

(71) Brecht encouraged the use of radio as a communicative rather than distributive medium, yet did not associate this with the development of dramatic forms. Bertold Brecht Brecht on Theatre, trans. and ed. John Willett, (London: Methuen, 1964), pp. 51-52.

(72) The character of Dora, and Cixous' symbolic use of the female hysteric is discussed further in Chapter Four 'Sexual Identities in the Theatre of Cixous and Tsvetaeva'.

(73) Hélène Cixous 'Théâtre enfoui', Europe, 726 (October 1989), pp. 72-77, p. 72.

(74) Charles Bernheimer and Claire Kahane, ed, In Dora's Case. Freud, Hysteria, Feminism (London: Virago, 1985).

(75) For an extensive analysis of the possible links between theatre and psychoanalysis see; R. S. Koppen, 'The Furtive Event: Theorizing Feminist Spectatorship', Modern Drama, vol. 35 (3), (September 1992), pp. 378-394.

(76) Morag Shiach, Hélène Cixous. A Politics of Writing (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 112.

(77) Portrait de Dora was first performed at the Théâtre d'Orsay in 1976 under the direction of Simone Benmussa.

(78) Simone Benmussa, Benmussa Directs (London: John Calder. 1979), p. 9.

(79) *ibid.*, p. 12.

(80) J.L.Savona, 'In Search of a Feminist Theatre: *Portrait de Dora*', in Feminine Focus: The New Women Playwrights, ed, E. Brater, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 97-98.

(81) Hélène Cixous, Le Nom d'Oedipe. Chant du corps interdit (Paris: des femmes,



1978). The play was first performed at the Cour du Palais des Papes d'Avignon. mise-en-scène Claude Regy. 26-28 July 1978.

(82) The main examples of this are the essays: 'Le Chemin de Légende', published alongside the plays 'Portrait de Dora' and 'La Prise de l'école de Madhubaï' in Hélène Cixous, Théâtre (Paris: des femmes, 1976), pp. 7-11, and 'Ecrits sur le Théâtre' in L'Indiade ou L'Inde de leurs rêves (Paris: Théâtre du Soleil, 1987), pp. 247-278.

(83) The one exception to this is the production of Cixous' play Voile noire voile blanche which was produced in Britain. This play however, has never been published as a separate volume. It is available in a bilingual text: Hélène Cixous, 'Voile noire voile blanche/ Black sail white sail' trans. Catherine MacGillivray, New Literary History, 25 (1994), pp. 219-354.

(84) Morag Shiach, Hélène Cixous: A Politics of Writing, p. 109.

(85) Hélène Cixous, 'La Prise de l'Ecole de Madhubaï', in Théâtre (Paris: des femmes, 1986).

(86) Hélène Cixous, L'Indiade ou L'Inde de leurs rêves (Paris: Théâtre du Soleil, 1987).

(87) Hélène Cixous, 'De la scène de l'Inconscient à la scène de l'Histoire' in Hélène Cixous, chemins d'une écriture, ed. Françoise van Rossum-Guyon and Myriam Diaz-Diocaretz, (Vincennes: Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 1990), pp. 15-34.

(88) These archives contain the transcription of the majority of Cixous' seminars from the past decade, they are created and maintained by Marguerite Sandré.

(89) Hélène Cixous, 'De la scène de l'Inconscient à la scène de l'Histoire', p. 24.

(90) Much of Cixous' work on the Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector explores the perceived relationship between author and other in her texts. See 'Apprenticeship and Alienation: Clarice Lispector and Maurice Blanchot', in Hélène Cixous, Readings: The Poetics of Blanchot, Joyce, Kafka, Kleist, Lispector and Tsvetayeva, trans. and ed. Verena Aldermatt Conley, (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), pp. 74-109.

(91) Hélène Cixous, 'Le Chemin de Légende', p. 7.

(92) This image can be seen as an intertextual reference to Tsveteva's short story 'The Demon', a 'coming-to-writing' narrative in its own right, and one which Cixous has both worked on in her seminars and written on.

(93) Hélène Cixous, 'L'Incarnation', p. 260.

(94) Hélène Cixous, 'De la scène de l'Inconscient à la scène de l'Histoire', p. 28. This neologism conjures two linguistic connotations: 'démoisir' to de-stagante or render fluid, and 'moisson' harvest, the archetypal celebration of abundance.

(95) Hélène Cixous, 'L'Incarnation', p. 265.

(96) Hélène Cixous, 'L' Incarnation', p. 265.

(97) Hélène Cixous, 'Le Chemin de Légende', p. 8.

(98) Hélène Cixous, 'De la scène de l'Inconscient à la scène de l'Histoire,' p. 31.

(99) Hélène Cixous, unpublished seminar archives, (4.3.1989).



(100) Hélène Cixous, 'De la scène de l' Inconscient à la scène de l'Histoire', p. 31.

(101) *ibid.*, p. 31.

(102) Hélène Cixous, 'L'Incarnation', p. 261.

(103) The reference to a *corps parlant* is interesting as this can be read as referring to the figure of the hysteric, yet Cixous' purpose no longer seems to be an investigation of the slippage between image and voice, but rather the strengthening of the coincidence of image and voice.

(104) Hélène Cixous, 'L'Incarnation', p. 261.

(105) See Antonin Artaud, 'Le théâtre de la cruauté (premier manifeste)', in Le théâtre et son double (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), pp. 135-152, p. 138.

(106) This passage evokes such striking similarities with Tsvetaeva's descriptions of her creativity and approach to writing poetry that some influence must be acknowledged. Hélène Cixous, 'L'Incarnation', p. 262.

(107) Hélène Cixous, 'L'Incarnation', p. 260.

(108) Hélène Cixous, 'Le lieu du Crime, le lieu du Pardon', p. 253.

(109) Hélène Cixous, 'De la scène de l'Inconscient à la scène de l'Histoire', p. 26.

(110) *ibid.*, p. 28.

(111) Hélène Cixous, 'Lieu du Crime, lieu du Pardon', p. 255.

(112) Hélène Cixous, 'Le Chemin de légende' p. 7.

(113) *ibid.*, p. 10.

(114) The 'orientalisation' of India, both in these plays and in the accompanying discourse on the theatre, is further critiqued in Chapter Three of this thesis 'Exile and Paradises Lost in the Theatre of Tsvetaeva and Cixous'.

(115) Hélène Cixous, 'Le Chemin de Légende', p. 8.

(116) Hélène Cixous, 'Le Lieu du Crime, le lieu du Pardon,' p. 259.

(117) *ibid.*, p. 256.

(118) Hélène Cixous 'Le Chemin de Legende', p. 9.

(119) Hélène Cixous, 'Le lieu du Crime, le lieu du Pardon', p. 253.

(120) Hélène Cixous, unpublished seminar archive, (4.3.1989).

(121) Hélène Cixous, 'Le Chemin de Legende', p. 10.

(122) Hélène Cixous, 'A Quoi Bon Le Théâtre?', Théâtre Ouvert: Vingt Ans, (July 1991), p. 32.

(123) Anne Marie Picard, 'L'Indiade ou L'Inde de leurs rêves', Dalhousie French Studies 17 (1989), pp. 17-26, p. 23.

(124) Hélène Cixous, 'L'Incarnation', p. 97.



(125) Antonin Artaud, Le Théâtre et son Double, p. 39.

(126) Hélène Cixous, 'De la scène de l'Inconscient à la scène de l'Histoire', p. 30.

(127) Antonin Artaud, 'Le théâtre de la cruauté' in Le théâtre et son double. (Paris : Gallimard, 1964), pp. 135-152.

(128) *ibid.*, p. 151.

(129) *ibid.*, pp. 153-154.

(130) *ibid.*, p. 119.

(131) *ibid.*, p. 42. and Hélène Cixous, 'Le lieu du Crime le lieu du Pardon', p. 256.

(132) Jacques Derrida, 'La Parole Soufflée' in L'Ecriture et la différence (Paris: Seuil, 1967), pp. 253-292. Noted in Jennifer Birkett, 'The Limits of Language: The Theatre of Hélène Cixous' in Voices in the Air: French Dramatists and the Resources of Language, ed, John Dunkley and Bill Kirton, (Glasgow: University of Glasgow French and German Publications, 1992), pp. 171-186, p. 186. Morag Shiach Hélène Cixous: A Politics of Writing, p. 108.

(133) Artaud employs an image often used by Cixous, that of the sun which she associates, traditionally, with life forces and energy. Artaud describes it as the very element of theatre: '...une sorte d'étrange soleil, une lumière d'une intensité anormale ou il semble que le difficile et l'impossible ... deviennent notre élément normal.' This image is found in the name of the theatrical company with whom Cixous has collaborated on several plays, the Théâtre du Soleil

(134) This text is a series of exchanges between Cixous and Calle-Gruber and falls uneasily between critical study and homage to Cixous. Hélène Cixous: Photos de Racines (Paris: des femmes, 1994).

(135) Hélène Cixous, 'De la scène de l'Inconscient à la scène de l'Histoire', p. 32.

(136) 'L'Histoire terrible: le pari du réel'. Untraced interview included in the press file on Mnouchkine held at the Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand, Paris, p. 49.

(137) Hélène Cixous, L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk roi du Cambodge, performed at the Cartoucherie in 1985 L'Indiade ou l'Inde de leurs rêves, 1987-1988 and La Ville Parjure ou le reveil des Erinyes, 1994-5.

(138) Figures such as Daniel Mesguich and Peter Brook are presented in this way.

(139) It is also possible that to acknowledge the contribution of all these people would undermine the conventional belief that non-hierarchical power structures are unworkable and that the collective structure of the Théâtre du Soleil is a hypocritical fiction. Adrian Kiernander, 'The Role of Ariane Mnouchkine at the Théâtre du Soleil', Modern Drama, 34 (1990), pp. 322-332, p. 323.

(140) Denis and Marie-Louise Bablet, Le Théâtre du Soleil (Paris: C.N.R.S. Diapolivre, 1979), p. 88.

(141) David Bradby, Modern French Drama (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 191.

(142) Kiernander describes an excessive example of this: 'For a brief period they thought of retreating into the countryside and combining the practice of theatre with the raising of sheep. This idea was quickly abandoned as being impractically romantic and



idealistic, but the idyllic utopianism which it suggests has remained part of the company legend, and the impulse has been realised in other ways.' Adrian Kiernander. 'The Role of Ariane Mnouchkine at the Théâtre du Soleil'. p. 323.

(143) Mnouchkine quoted in Adrian Kiernander. Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 35.

(144) See Antonin Artaud, Le théâtre et son double, pp. 69-72.

(145) Le Théâtre du Soleil, L'Age d'Or (Paris: Stock, 1975), p. 14.

(146) Hélène Cixous, L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk roi du Cambodge (Paris: Théâtre du Soleil, 1987).

(147) For further details of this production see David Bradby, Modern French Drama 1940-1980, pp. 197-205.

(148) Morag Shiach, Hélène Cixous: A Politics of Writing, pp. 124-125.

(149) See Antonin Artaud, 'Sur le théâtre balinais' in Le théâtre et son double, pp. 79-102.

(150) Hélène Cixous, 'De la scène de l'Inconscient à la scène de l'Histoire', p. 33.

(151) Zeami (1363-1443) was arguably the most well known dramatist of Noh theatre, the stylised Japanese theatre.

(152) *ibid.*, p. 33.

(153) Hélène Cixous, 'Interview' La Quinzaine Littéraire, 532, (16-31 mai 1989), pp. 22-25, p. 23.

(154) For Mnouchkine these pitfalls would encourage a naturalistic approach to the subject.

(155) Ariane Mnouchkine, L'Histoire Terrible: Le Pari du Réel, p. 46.

(156) David Bradby, Modern French Drama 1940-1990 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 267.

(157) Jennifer Birkett, 'The Limits of Language: The Theatre of Hélène Cixous', p. 182.

(158) This resulted in the Théâtre du Soleil's production of Les Atrides in 1990.

(159) Hélène Cixous, La Ville parjure ou le reveil des Erinyes (Paris: Théâtre du Soleil, 1994).



## CHAPTER TWO

### THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF POETIC IDENTITY

The role of language in the representation of identity constitutes a vast area of study, which has been articulated in different discourses, amongst them sociolinguistics and psychoanalysis, and is one which, clearly, I cannot aim to cover exhaustively in this chapter. Language is also inevitably a fundamental concern of each chapter in that it is inherent in textual analysis. However, in this chapter, I will address the role of language in representations of identity in the theatre of Tsvetaeva and Cixous.

The chapter begins with an exploration of Tsvetaeva's and Cixous' strikingly similar discourses on language and identity, before turning to a detailed engagement with representations of the subject's relationship to language as described by Cixous in her writing on *écriture féminine*. An examination of the main attributes of *écriture féminine* is followed by the application of this concept to Tsvetaeva's aesthetics, and I argue that the use of language in much of her work corresponds to Cixous' project. I then briefly discuss possible relationships between *écriture féminine* and the theatre. *Ecriture féminine* is not a genre-specific term, and it can be suggested that several generic qualities of theatre make it an ideal context in which to illustrate and problematise many of the former's core concerns. This investigation of the generic suitability of the theatre for addressing issues of identity and language is complemented by a discussion of Tsvetaeva's and Cixous' plays which foreground issues of language and identity. These plays are approached in the context of *écriture féminine* and their comparative interpretations form the basis of this chapter's conclusion.



## Similar Experiences of Language

There are striking similarities between Tsvetaeva's and Cixous' descriptions of their early relationships with language and how this influenced their respective aesthetic developments.

A multilingual family background and childhood is common to both writers. Cixous was born in Algeria, where she was surrounded by speakers of Arabic, but was educated in French. Her father's Jewish family had left Spain for Morocco and then settled in Algeria, whilst her mother's family, German Jews, originated from Austria. Cixous recalls her father's family speaking Arabic, French and Spanish; her mother and grandmother, who lived with them, often spoke German in the home.<sup>1</sup> Cixous refers to this presence as an important element in her relationship with language:

La langue qui me chantait aux oreilles? C'était des langues: l'espagnol, l'arabe, l'allemand, le français. Tout sur cette terre vient de loin, même le proche. J'écoutais toutes les langues. J'ai chanté en allemand. J'ai aussi caqueté avec les poules.<sup>2</sup>

Cixous describes her multilingual consciousness as an independent geography, more important to her than conventional concepts of place.<sup>3</sup> Tsvetaeva's mother was also of German descent,<sup>4</sup> and as a child Tsvetaeva accompanied her on holidays and convalescent trips throughout Europe. Tsvetaeva's and Cixous' childhood exposure to different languages, I suggest, encouraged a fascination with etymology, and an awareness of the relation of language to difference; a fascination which did not in either case result only in a desire to translate from one to another, but to explore and juxtapose a plurality of languages. Cixous expresses this relationship to different languages in a metaphor which suggests both exhilaration and control, and stresses the importance of the simultaneous coexistence of languages:

We are strangers when we read a book, in every way; we are strangers too when we write a book, in every way. We write mostly in one



language, which is pervaded with other languages. All writers in foreign languages and most writers who are really inspired by language or by linguistic elements and have an ear for music, write as if they were riding in a chariot drawn by several horses and those horses are different languages.<sup>5</sup>

Cixous and Tsvetaeva describe their early experiences of language as fundamental forces in their creative developments and approaches to writing. The early experience of different languages and different sounds perhaps encouraged an appreciation of the rhythmic and phonetic qualities of words, qualities which exist independently of their ascribed meaning. Language does not only communicate meaning, but provides scope for pleasure which transcends this. In Tsvetaeva's poetry attention is paid to associations between sounds and to the rhythms of language, and language is not solely a mechanism of communication. Makin describes Tsvetaeva's use of language, suggesting that: '...no longer a transparent (and therefore passive) conveyor of meaning, language itself is a sensual object to be enjoyed in its own right on its own terms.'<sup>6</sup> Cixous' approach to Tsvetaeva's texts in her seminars has predominantly referred to the playful awareness of language which she perceives in Tsvetaeva's texts:

Ces textes jouent avec la langue comme avec des souris. La souris s'en va, le chat la rattrape d'un coup de patte, le tout est que la souris reste longtemps vivante pour que le chat puisse encore jouer à la laisser partir et la rattraper. Le texte joue avec la matière de la langue comme de la souris.<sup>7</sup>

Cixous highlights the materiality of Tsvetaeva's language, the body of the mouse. Cixous' comments rely upon the proximity of the verbs *jouer* and *jouir* to evoke the combined pleasures of manipulation and creation, of reading and writing Tsvetaeva's text, and through her own wordplay Cixous illustrates her similar use of language. This quotation also illustrates the criteria for her selection of authors for the seminar programme, authors whom, Cixous suggests, display aesthetic concerns similar to her own. A concern with the materiality of language is one of these. Cixous' texts are permeated by neologisms, puns which frequently rely on associations with other languages, and an exploitation of the sensual impact of language. It is correct to claim



that:

Language, for Cixous, is not simply a medium for the expression of ideas and images which have their origins elsewhere. Rather, language is a material form, where signifiers, and particularly sounds, create meanings that proliferate, exceed the resources of the descriptive, offer recognitions and pleasure.<sup>8</sup>

In her autobiographical prose, as I shall now discuss, Tsvetaeva describes her acute awareness as a child of language and rhythm. Clearly such childhood memories (evoked by both Tsvetaeva and Cixous) have undergone revision and mythologisation: the adult poet both projects her creativity on to memory and presents these memories as anticipating her later aesthetic concerns. However, these accounts can be read not only as a transposition of their mature linguistic awareness on to past experiences, but also as an indication of the importance with which both writers invest these elements in the context of both creative development and sense of self.

Cixous' and Tsvetaeva's employment of music illustrates the preceding point and directs us towards a further similarity between the representations of their relationship to language. In her essay 'Mat' i muzyka (Mother and music)', Tsvetaeva relates how she found a mechanism which enabled her to remember the musical scales which her mother, an accomplished pianist, taught her:

Это до-ре (Доре), а ре - ми - Реми, мальчик Реми из Sans Famille, счастливый мальчик, которого злой муж кормилицы (estopié, с точно спиленной ногой: pied), калека Père Barbarin сразу превращает в несчастного, сначала не дав блинам стать блинами, а на другой день продав самого Реми бродячему музыканту Виталису, ему и его трем собакам: Капи, Зербино и Дольше, и единственной его обезьяне, Жоли Кёр, ужасной пьянице, потом умирающей у Реми за пазухой от чахотки. Это ре-ми. Взятые же отдельно: до - явно белое, пустое, до всего, ре - голубое, ми - желтое (может быть - midi?), фа - коричневое (может быть, фатовое выходное платье матери, а ре - голубое - река?) - и так далее, и все эти «далее» - есть, я только не хочу загромождать читателя, у которого *свои* цвета и *свои* на них резоны.

That's do-re (Doré) and re-mi is Remy, the boy Remy from 'Sans Famille' a happy boy whom his nurse's wicked husband (a cripple, with a club foot), the cripple Père Barbarin, promptly makes unhappy, first



by not letting the pancakes be pancakes, and the next day by selling Remy to a wandering musician, Vitalis, with his three dogs, Capi, Zerbino and Dolce, and his one monkey, Joli Coeur, an awful drunkard who later dies of consumption on Remy's breast.

...That's re-mi, but taken separately: do - is clearly white, empty, *do vsego* "before everything else", re is blue, mi is yellow (maybe *midi*), fa is brown (maybe mother's faille outdoor dress) and re is blue ( *reka* - river?) - and so on, and all these so ons - do exist, only I don't want to overburden the reader who has their own colours and their own reasons for them.<sup>10</sup>

The first section demonstrates translingual awareness and an association of the sounds represented in the musical scale with similar sounding words, associations which manufacture meaning. The second paragraph liberates the words representing the scale from their purely musical correspondence, but posits visual connotations for sound, so stressing the combinations and sensual value of the sounds above their commonplace meaning.<sup>11</sup> Later in the same piece, Tsvetaeva identifies herself with the chromatic scale<sup>12</sup> which has greater importance for her than the basic scale and the rules of grammar, thus evoking (through the dual meaning of chromatic) the visual and the aural senses.

Music, Tsvetaeva claims, influenced her writing style. A striking aspect of her poetics is the idiosyncratic punctuation, which highlights the proximity of her texts to spoken language. The most idiosyncratic feature of this is her use of the dash, a device which signals ellipsis and represents the missing term, or rather the meaning which transcends linguistic expression. Tsvetaeva maintained the musical origins of the dash:

Когда я потом, вынужденная необходимостью своей ритмики, стала разбивать, разрывать слова на слога путем непривычного в стихах тире, и все меня за это, а редкие - хвалили (и те и другие за «современность») и я ничего не умела сказать, кроме: «так нужно», я вдруг однажды глазами увидела те, младенчества своего, романсные тексты в сплошных законных тире - и почувствовала себя омытой...поддержанной, подтвержденной и узаконенной - как ребёнок по тайному знаку рода оказавшийся - родным, в праве на жизнь, наконец!

When later on, forced to it by the necessity of my own rhythmic patterns, I began breaking up and dividing words into syllables using a dash, unusual in poetry, for years everyone scolded me for it, and a few praised me (both the former and the latter for 'modernity'), and I didn't manage to say anything except: 'That's how it has to be'. Then one day I



suddenly saw with my own eyes those romances of my youth with their lawabiding dashes continuing all through the text, and I felt that I was cleansed, supported, affirmed and legitimized, like a child who because of a secret birthmark proves to be a blood relative - confirmed in my right to life, after all.<sup>13</sup>

The discovery of the legitimising origins of the dash reinforces the association of language and music, again as implicitly linked to the mother.

Cixous expresses the advantages of music, with its emphasis on sound and rhythm over language, grammar and syntax. She speaks of the liberation of expression possible in music and poetry, their ability to convey the mystery of the self:

This mystery is easier to convey through music than through writing, because music is not subject as the text is to the fearful imperatives of language that force us to construct sentences with grammatical correctness, to attribute genders properly; writers of fictional texts are called to account. It is in the poem, hybrid of music and language, that something of mysterious and unstoppable life can be produced, with subverted grammar, with liberties in the bosom of language, in the law of genders, in dance, the dans, the dancing of the poem... the poem playing with language more than it speaks, chanted expression of drives...<sup>14</sup>

Tsvetaeva's experience of music and the chromatic scale is inherently linked to her mother and in Cixous' texts the primal experience of language is described as originating from the voice of the mother:

Dans la parole féminine comme dans l'écriture ne cesse jamais de résonner ce qui de nous avoir jadis traversé, touché imperceptiblement, profondément, garde le pouvoir de nous affecter, le *chant*, la première musique, celle de la première voix d'amour...<sup>15</sup>

The association between the mother, language and music is fundamental to Cixous' highly poetic and personal account of her own relationship to language and writing:

Dans la langue que je parle, vibre la langue maternelle, langue de ma mère, moins langue que musique, moins syntaxe que chant de mots...L'allemand maternel est le corps qui nage dans le courant, entre mes bords de langue...Ma mère allemande à la bouche, au larynx, me rythme.<sup>16</sup>



The mother is not universally a positive influence in terms of Cixous' relationship to language and her construction of identity, and Tsvetaeva's account of the demanding and often dispiriting piano lessons with her mother, arguably support Tsvetaeva's conclusion that she became a poet despite her mother's influence.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, it remains the case that the specific association of the mother with another language and with the musicality of language serve as a common background to Tsvetaeva's and Cixous' approaches to language and identity.

### Inscribing Identities: *Écriture Féminine*

Language is the medium through which we construct our subjective perceptions of the world and through which our identities are constructed by cultural and social discourses. The pervasion of our lives by language clearly has ideological and political consequences:

....no political reflection can dispense with reflection on language, with work on language. For as soon as we exist, we are born into language and language speaks (to) us, dictates its laws, a law of death: it lays down its familial model, lays down its conjugal model, and even at the moment of uttering a sentence, admitting a notion of 'being', an ontology, we are already seized by a certain kind of masculine desire that mobilizes philosophical discourse.<sup>18</sup>

The recognition of the ideological power of language is fundamental to Cixous' work, and is reflected in the emphasis she places, both in her own texts and in those studied in her seminars, on the manipulation and disruption of traditional discourse. The most influential example of Cixous' engagement with language in the context of the construction and representation of identity is found in her writings of the mid-seventies where she first articulates the potential of *écriture féminine*. *Écriture féminine* has been variously, and unsatisfactorily, translated as 'women's writing', 'feminine writing',



`writing the feminine' or `writing the body'.<sup>19</sup> In the context of this chapter, *écriture féminine* is important in its articulation of the possibility of reformulating female identity through language and writing, rather than as a set of criteria with which to address other texts. However, it is useful to establish some characteristics of what Cixous considers to be *écriture féminine*.

Cixous' essay `Le Rire de la Méduse',<sup>20</sup> and her expansion of it in the collaborative text La Jeune Née<sup>21</sup> were regarded as manifestos which call upon women to reclaim their subjectivity and true identities through a specific engagement with language and writing.

The historical and political contexts which now frame these writings are important. The texts had a great impact on the extremely divergent groups and debates involved in feminist discourse in post `68 France. Cixous' work has been published mainly with the `des femmes' publishing house which was closely associated with the group Psych et po (Psychanalyse et politique). This group addressed women's oppression through an engagement with psychoanalytic theory and were, unsurprisingly perhaps, regarded as elitist and removed from practical feminist struggles by many other groups in France.<sup>22</sup> French feminist theories of the period were also presented as the continental `other' of Anglo-American feminist discourse which was perceived as engaging more explicitly with the representation of women in cultural discourse, notably issues of stereotyping and pornography. These contexts continue to colour the reception of Cixous' texts although she has recently seemed to distance herself both from these debates and from an association with other contemporary French feminist theorists.<sup>23</sup>

Cixous' writing on *écriture féminine* posits a fundamental link between representation of women, identity and language, asserting the power of patriarchal discourse to exclude or repress the female subject and the potential of different discourses to provide new identifications for the female subject. This post-Saussurian view of language considers it as a historical and social contextualising discourse



through which and in which all identities are constructed. Language is revealed as a bearer of ideology, and not a transparent medium of communication.

La Jeune Née is a politically projective text made up of several complementary movements. The two upon which I will now focus are present in the multiple meanings of the book's title. 'Là je n'est' refers to the female subject's exclusion from dominant cultural discourse, and the first part of the text constitutes a gender-specific engagement with the powerful cultural discourses through which identity is constructed and maintained. Cixous begins a critique of Western culture's hierarchised binaries through which identity is defined, decrying the Hegelian dialectic as 'l'impitoyable cercle vicieux'.<sup>24</sup> For example, Cixous states that woman has been defined, through the opposition nature/culture, as inherently associated with nature, and inferior negative of man's culture. Woman is defined through a masculine discourse of identity as 'other', and through dominant cultural discourses as passive or invisible.<sup>25</sup> Cixous foregrounds the repression of possible matriarchal social structures and phallogentric insistence upon the father as defining origin. Cixous' illustrates her arguments with readings of major narratives of Western literature and culture,<sup>26</sup> and claims that, in these narratives, woman functions as the repressed. Her description of the feminine as constituting 'le Continent noir' is an ironic reference to Freud's use of the term. However, her extended use of analogies of colonisation remain problematic as they ultimately maintain a metaphorical use of issues of real discrimination.<sup>27</sup> Cixous states that her own childhood illustrates the difficulty of self-identification for the female subject, defined as 'other' on several levels: French in the colonial context of Algeria, Jewish both in Algeria and later in France, and woman in all patriarchal societies.<sup>28</sup> Later sections of La Jeune Née reiterate the influence of patriarchal cultural discourse through an extremely dense and detailed engagement with cultural meta-narratives, particularly those of Greek mythology.<sup>29</sup> I do not propose to discuss these interpretations here; however the level of analysis is problematically uneven, and Shiach comments upon the illustration this provides of Cixous' ineffaceable cultural and intellectual investment in such discourse. Shiach refers to the inaccessibility of parts of the text and states that:



'The feeling of swimming in cultural mud is almost palpable...' <sup>30</sup>

The autobiographical elements of the text lead Cixous to propose literature as a possible escape from the oppression she claims to have felt as a child under such hierarchies of identity:

Tout le monde sait qu'il existe un lieu qui n'est pas obligé économiquement, politiquement à toutes les bassesses et tous les compromis. Qui n'est pas obligé de reproduire le système. Et c'est l'écriture. S'il y a un ailleurs qui peut échapper à la répétition infernale, c'est par là où ça s'écrit, où ça rêve, où ça invente les nouveaux mondes. <sup>31</sup>

This escape is short-lived as Cixous and the reader soon realise the gender-specific problems of identifying with patriarchal narratives and male heroes, <sup>32</sup> but the focus on the potential of writing remains to form the basis of the reinscription of the female subject. Cixous' attention turns from a critique of existing narratives, in which woman is already overdetermined, to the creation and process of writing. This second movement describes the potential open to the female subject through reclaiming language and inscribing the self, and is represented in the title of the text by 'Là je nais' ; the rebirth of the female subject. <sup>33</sup> The utopian vision of writing which Cixous suggests inscribes a radical revision of difference, one founded on plurality and inclusion rather than hierarchy and repression and confounds the dialectic structures of identity:

L'écriture, c'est en moi le passage, entrée, sortie, séjour, de l'autre que je suis et je ne suis pas, que je ne sais pas être, mais que je sens passer, que me fait vivre... <sup>34</sup>

The concept of *écriture féminine* has a complicated relationship with gender identity. The articulation of a plurality of gender identity in the text is linked with a 'bisexuality' which Cixous defines as an openness to the other within the self. Again it is unclear whether the term is employed in a metaphorical sense, or whether Cixous is advocating bisexual identity. Cixous does not locate textual definitions of *écriture féminine* at the



level of sexual identity of the author, the level of anatomy, as this would entail binary exclusions, but sites difference in the context of an inscribed libidinal economy:

Mais la différence sexuelle n'est pas simplement déterminée par le rapport fantasmé à l'anatomie...non, la différence c'est au niveau de la jouissance qu'elle se fait à mon avis le plus nettement pulsionnelle d'une femme n'est pas identifiable par un homme ni référible à l'économie masculine...

"Comment je jouis?" Qu'est-ce que c'est - la jouissance féminine, où ça se passe, comment ça s'inscrit au niveau de son corps, de son inconscient? Et alors comment ça s'écrit?<sup>35</sup>

For reasons which remain unclarified, Cixous states that in the present socio-historical context women have greater access than men to such a conception of difference.<sup>36</sup> An aspect of the text which has problematized the concept of *écriture féminine* for many feminist critics resides in the fact that the authors whom Cixous cites as enacting such a writing are all male (Kleist, Shakespeare and Genet)<sup>37</sup> and would seem to reflect a personal identification on the part of Cixous with these writers, rather than close textual analysis of their work. Cixous suggests that the female subject identifies with these writers, not as a consequence of the representation of women in their texts (indeed in 'Aller à la mer' Cixous criticises several female roles in Shakespeare), but due to rather ephemeral aspects of their style.

Paradoxically, however, after an approach to sexual difference criticised for abstraction, Cixous presents a consequence of inscribing the female subject in writing as the construction of a closer relationship between writing and the body, a body that seems resolutely female. The images employed by Cixous throughout the text, maternity and milk, suggest links between the female anatomy and writing. Cixous exhorts women to write their bodies, to assert a close link between the body and the text:

Ecrire, acte, qui non seulement "réalisera" le rapport dé-censuré de la femme à sa sexualité, à son être-femme, lui rendant accès à ses propres forces; qui lui rendra ses biens, ses plaisirs, ses organes, ses immenses territoires corporels tenus sous scellés...Ecris-toi: il faut que ton corps se fasse entendre.<sup>38</sup>



Writing is suggested as reconnecting woman with her identity, through a more direct relationship to the body. Such passages have attracted accusations of biological essentialism, and defining women in the same way that patriarchy has defined us - through our bodies.<sup>39</sup> However, such accusations underestimate the complexity of Cixous' project of reclaiming the body as text, and her insistence on a reformulated relationship between body and language should not be reduced to a Cartesian attitude to the body as source of writing. Barbara Freeman defends this point:

Perhaps Cixous' critics and traditional metaphysics can both be charged with a certain logocentrism, since they share not only the belief that bodies can be isolated from the language that describes them, but that language exists apart from a relationship to the body.<sup>40</sup>

Reactions to Cixous' writing which accuse her of essentialism also highlight a general reluctance within feminism to use the female body as metaphor, on the grounds that this would be a dangerous 'return to origins' and the parameters of biological essentialism. Cixous, however, insists upon a deconstruction of the very nature of metaphor itself, refusing to distinguish between referent and image, body and text.

Cixous presents *écriture féminine* as consciously non-prescriptive:

Impossible à présent de définir une pratique féminine de l'Écriture, d'une impossibilité qui se maintiendra car on ne pourra jamais théoriser cette pratique, l'enfermer, la coder, ce qui ne signifie pas qu'elle n'existe pas. Mais elle excèdera toujours le discours qui régit le système phallogentrique; elle a et aura lieu ailleurs que dans les territoires subordonnés à la domination philosophique-théorique. Elle ne se laissera penser que par les sujets casseurs des automatismes, les coureurs de bords qu'aucune autorité ne subjuguera jamais.<sup>41</sup>

Her reluctance to describe *écriture féminine* exacerbates the ambiguities of the texts and averts critical engagement. 'Always becoming, it never becomes the system, the recipe to be applied';<sup>42</sup> however, it retains a utopian tone which refuses recuperation



by other discourses. Cixous does, however, define some aspects of an *écriture féminine*:

Mais on peut commencer à parler. A designer quelques effets, quelques composantes pulsionnelles, quelques rapports de l'imaginaire féminin au réel, à l'écriture. Ce que j'en dirai aussi, parce que ces traits m'affectent puissamment d'emblée, n'est qu'un commencement. La fémininité dans l'écriture je la sens passer d'abord par: un privilège de la voix: écriture et voix se tressant se trament et en s'échangeant, continuité de l'écriture / rythme de la voix, se coupent le souffle, font haleter le texte ou le composent de suspens, de silences l'aphonisent ou le déchirent de cris.<sup>43</sup>

Proximity to the rhythms of spoken language and a certain disruption of syntax emphasise such elements of spoken language as breathing, silences and cries. The role of voice in Cixous' work is important and represents both an affirmation of identity and liberation:

Voix! c'est aussi se lancer, cet épanchement, dont il ne revient rien. Exclamation, cri, essoufflement, hurlement, toux, vomissement, musique. Elle part, elle perd. Et c'est ainsi qu'elle écrit, comme on lance la voix, en avant, dans le vide.<sup>44</sup>

She has also commented on the importance of voice in her own texts: 'What is important is the vocal element, language at its most archaic and, at the same time, most elaborate level'.<sup>45</sup>

The excessive quality of *écriture féminine*, which creates both disruptive and creative movements, is best illustrated through Cixous' own metaphor: 'Voler, c'est le geste de la femme, voler dans la langue, la faire voler'.<sup>46</sup> As the verb '*voler*' means both 'to steal' and 'to fly', *écriture féminine* is women's reappropriation of language and the resulting transcendence of the constraints of phallogentric discourse.

Thus, the method offered by Cixous for undoing the hierarchical and inflexible definitions of female identity lies within language and writing. An escape through writing from the ideological systems at work would prevent the female subject from



being colonised by dominant patriarchal discourses. The poetic nature of the text and the ambiguities surrounding much of Cixous' terminology, not least the slippage between her use of 'la femme', the abstract category of Woman, and 'les femmes', women as social subjects, are clearly problematic. When analysed in a conventional manner, the notion of an *écriture féminine* can indeed collapse around such ambiguities and lack of specific definitions. The text is also heavily reliant upon the reader's knowledge of other critical discourses, particularly psychoanalytic terminology. Nevertheless, it can be argued that the text remains important as an inspirational and seductive body of writing and offers new (albeit utopian) images of the relationship between the self and writing which are open to women.

Cixous' assertion that her employment of *écriture féminine* is non-prescriptive is problematic since, as discussed above, she does proceed to define some elements of such a writing. Whilst these descriptions are certainly not exhaustive they act as a filter which serves to eliminate some writing from consideration. Cixous' definition of *écriture féminine* is extremely poetic, making it difficult to construct a model which could be isolated and transposed to another piece of writing. I do not therefore propose to read Tsvetaeva as practising *écriture féminine*. Such a step would ignore the specific political context of Cixous' project, one with which we have no evidence that Tsvetaeva would concur. I will instead point out several striking parallels and convergences in the writing practices of Tsvetaeva and Cixous, and suggest a reading of Tsvetaeva's theatre in the light of the main concerns and stylistic directions of *écriture féminine*. I shall examine some of these similarities briefly before considering specifically their relevance to the theatre. I do not wish to suggest that elements of *écriture féminine* are present only in Cixous and Tsvetaeva's work for the theatre - they are also to be found in their fiction and poetry. However, in the context of this research, an examination of the specific relationship of between *écriture féminine*, and the role of language in representing identity in their theatre is required.



The most detailed study of the work of Marina Tsvetaeva in relation to language and identity is that of Irina Kuzminsky: The Language of Women? Three Women Writers.<sup>47</sup> Kuzminsky draws on the theories of Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray, to examine feminine and masculine impulses present in Tsvetaeva's poetry. These are based on Kristeva's definitions of the feminine and masculine principles in language. Kuzminsky discusses the importance of the relationship between masculine and feminine elements in Tsvetaeva's literature, language and life, and proposes a reading of Tsvetaeva's poetics as transcending such binaries.

Tsvetaeva's work contains no theory of women and writing comparable with *écriture féminine*. Her only written recognition of a relationship between sexual difference and writing is 'Zhivoe o zhivom' (A Living Word about a Living Man) about the poet Max Voloshin. Tsvetaeva relates how Voloshin had helped a female poet to publish by suggesting that she adopt a pseudonym in order to conceal her true identity, inventing a far more 'exotic' persona. When the subterfuge was revealed many commentators claimed that the poems were Voloshin's work. Tsvetaeva argues that this would have been impossible:

Нет обратнее стихов, чем Волошина и Черубины. Ибо он, такой женственный в жизнь, в поэзии своей - целиком мужественен, т.е. голова и пять чувств, из которых больше всего - зрение. Поэт - живописец и ваятель, ... никогда не лирик, как строй души.

Nothing could be more antithetical than the poetry of Voloshin and Cherubina.<sup>48</sup> Because, so like a woman in life, in his poetry he is entirely like a man, that is, a head with five senses of which the most important is sight. A poet-painter and a philosopher, never a lyric poet, an articulator of the soul.<sup>49</sup>

Tsvetaeva expresses a line of thought recurrent in feminist theory which considers the visual to be the dominant masculine sense, while attributing greater attention to sound



and touch to the feminine. This passage would, at first reading, seem to suggest direct links between creativity and the sex of the poet, but there is some slippage as Voloshin is described as so like a woman in life. Interestingly, Tsvetaeva is not using the terms of masculine and feminine here as referring to sexual difference, but as descriptions of attitudes unrelated to the sexual identity of the subject. She does not clarify what it is which makes Voloshin 'so like a woman' in life, yet it is clear that she perceives of two modes 'feminine' and 'masculine' which transcend sexual difference. Precise comparisons are difficult as there is so little detail in Tsvetaeva's statement, yet this passage suggests that Tsvetaeva considered the terms useful in describing aesthetic practices, in a similar mode to Cixous' discussion of masculine and feminine economies.

I shall now discuss elements of Tsvetaeva's writing which are closely related to those of *écriture féminine*, primarily the importance allotted to speech and listening in Tsvetaeva's descriptions of her own creativity. In 'Poet o Kritike (The Poet on the Critic)' she states:

Все мое писанье - вслушиванье... Точно мне с самого начала дана  
вся вещь - некая мелодическая или ритмическая картина её -  
точно вещь, которая вот сейчас пишется...

Верно услышать - вот моя забота. У меня нет другой.

All my writing is careful listening... As though from the very outset the  
complete work is given to me - a certain melodic or rhythmic sketch of  
it - as though the work which is now being written or writing itself...

To listen faithfully - that is my task. I have no other.<sup>50</sup>

Tsvetaeva describes her writing in terms of attentive listening to a higher source, of attempting to transcribe a rhythmic, musical pattern into words. She stresses the importance of sound and rhythm over intentionality and logos. As Karlinsky points out, the word as signifier is secondary for Tsvetaeva to the word as sound and carrier of a higher expression:



Tsvetaeva by her own admission, writes from the voice, reading what she writes out loud, or even just forming the words with her lips. The more closely she associates with the work, the more pronounced this vocal/aural element becomes...<sup>51</sup>

Tsvetaeva expressed this in a letter to Pasternak:

—  
For me - the word - is the transmission of voice (not at all a meaning I had intended). But I listened to the voice, then it dawned (dawn) of the word. I understood everything.<sup>52</sup>

References to this process of attentive transcription continue throughout her work: Tsvetaeva emphasises that the role of the poet is to translate transcendent sounds into words, to privilege rhythm and rhyme over established meaning. It can be seen to parallel the importance placed in Cixous' exposé of *écriture féminine* on the rhythms of spoken language, and the foregrounding of phonetic and rhythmic elements over those of standard meaning. Tsvetaeva refers to her task, as poet, of expressing the unrepresentable in language. Karlinsky goes some way towards linking this with a concept of the feminine:

This whole aspect of what language contains and points to yet cannot say, and which she brought so brilliantly and aurally into her poetic speech - is it not this which is meant by the 'feminine' as defined by traditional ideology.<sup>53</sup>

However Karlinsky does not investigate the fundamental difference between the feminine as defined by traditional ideology, and a more positive conception of it, and Tsvetaeva's conception of the feminine was firmly outside that of traditional ideology and expressed in different terms.

Combined with the concept of nonverbal communication in Tsvetaeva's work is the utilisation of vernacular speech forms and a fidelity to the syntax of spoken speech which evoke oral traditions of storytelling, frequently linked with a female genealogy of narrative. Taubman comments on this:



...living female speech, as opposed to the written language, was the basis for her poetry. It may be the case that these 'devices of linguistic compression' are in fact characteristic not of silence but of female speech and art.<sup>54</sup>

I shall examine the linguistic devices referred to here later in this chapter. Tsvetaeva places emphasis on the oral structures of language through the use of repetition, exclamation, pause and silence - many of the elements that Cixous mentions when she speaks of 'making the text breathe'. This style demands that the readers listen to the text and construct meaning, while they are addressed directly, as in speech. Taubman points out:

Her characteristic diction grows not from the syntax of the written language, but out of Russian oral utterance: one-to-one speech, with its often incomplete thoughts, its anaphoric (that is, beginning several lines with the same word) parallel phrases, enjambement and internal rhymes.<sup>55</sup>

These elements combine to render a text of spoken syntax, animating the text's relationship to spoken language through an insistence on their proximity, and insisting on the privilege of sound over logos. This emphasis on oral forms of language necessarily incorporates a subversion of traditional syntax. Most critics writing on Tsvetaeva discuss her extremely unusual syntax, indeed this is one of the factors which makes translation of her work so difficult. Contemporary critics of Tsvetaeva were often offended by her manipulation of syntax, judging it symptomatic of her inferiority as a poet. Karlinsky states:

When hostile critics write of Cvetaeva's trans-sense language (zaum'),<sup>56</sup> of her incomprehensibility, of her 'poor command of Russian', they are most likely thinking of the difficulty of her syntax.<sup>57</sup>

Taubman also refers to Tsvetaeva's disruption of syntax: 'Tsvetaeva doesn't remake syntax - she simply does without it altogether. Hers is the oral language of exclamations, of unfinished sentences.'<sup>58</sup> Karlinsky likens Tsvetaeva's use of syntax to that of Emily Dickinson and Virginia Woolf, who experimented with new syntactical



forms in order to express innovative relationships between text and author, and indeed a comparison of the syntax of Dickinson and Tsvetaeva reveals many parallels. Taubman links Tsvetaeva's wordplay and use of neologisms with a feminine tradition:

Tsvetaeva's use of wordplay, in the effort to discover ancient, buried meanings of words and connections between them finds a curious echo in the writing style of Mary Daly (author of *Gyn/Ecology*) who also looks to the ancient female wisdom of witches for an answer to the violence and repression of the male dominated sado-society.<sup>59</sup>

Taubman associates Tsvetaeva's syntax with an explicitly political feminist text in which linguistic forms are reworked to provide a radical and specifically anti-patriarchal discourse. I would argue that such a parallel overdetermines a reading of Tsvetaeva's aesthetic, erroneously inferring a specific intentionality. Tsvetaeva regarded the wordplay she practised as a vital to the poet's task, a tradition of craft using the material of words. It was by manipulating language through the perfection of such a craft that the nonverbal voice Tsvetaeva spoke of as her creativity could find expression in language. Refuting fixity of meaning, liberating discourse from unilinear patterns of causality and meaning, allowing play, and deferral of meaning amongst signifiers are only some of the effects of Tsvetaeva's writing style. Tsvetaeva describes this process very clearly:

А что есть чтение - как не разгадывание, толкование, извлечение тайного, оставшегося за строками, за пределом слов... Чтение - прежде всего - сотворчество.

For what is reading - if it is not deciphering, interpreting, revealing the mystery which remains beyond the verses, beyond the boundary of the word. Reading - is above all else - cooperation in creation.<sup>60</sup>

Another characteristic of Tsvetaeva's work is paranomasia, the juxtaposition of words which contain similar sounds yet are etymologically unrelated. Tsvetaeva's use of paranomasia can also be seen as a reflection of her awareness of the generative link between the phonetic and the semantic, and as a means of encouraging the same



awareness in her reader.

The use of diaphora in Tsvetaeva's work is referred to by several critics. Diaphor is the juxtaposition of two images the link between which is left unelucidated, for the reader to construct. This structure is different from the more traditional form of metaphor, or epiphor, in which a referent is linked to a secondary image. Diaphor does not rely on hierarchical mechanisms as neither image is primary. Diaphor is one of the fundamental devices used in Cixous' writing and its structure is important to her concept of *écriture féminine*. An illustration of diaphor is her linking of images of the female body and writing: she refuses to posit one as the origin of the other, and exploits the imaginative potential of juxtaposing the two terms.

The comparison of the role of language in the construction of poetic identity in Tsvetaeva's and Cixous' writing reveals the many similarities between their aesthetics, similarities which can, in turn, be paralleled with the concept of *écriture féminine*.

I would argue that the formation of a model of *écriture féminine*, although disclaimed by Cixous, serves the promotion of her own aesthetics well. These rather nebulous descriptive criteria, although now somewhat divorced from their original political impetus, continue to function as markers for the texts and writers who feature in her seminars, and form one of many devices which ensure Cixous' own inclusion in this canon of texts. Tsvetaeva's work has appeared on the seminar programme for several years, and this is perhaps a consequence of Cixous' perception of the similarities between their aesthetics, especially their use of language as documented in this chapter. This suggestion does not, however, diminish the similarities between their writing but demonstrates further the importance of language to Cixous' construction of poetic identity. Cixous' seminars have not discussed either her own theatre or that of Tsvetaeva, and it is to an exploration of the possible affinities between *écriture féminine* and the theatre to which I shall now turn.

Many of the devices I have mentioned could be seen as characteristic of modernist writing practices. Yet, as stated earlier, I propose that there are more



specific textual strategies, evoked in *écriture féminine*, in the work of Tsvetaeva and Cixous which led them both to write for the theatre.

### **Ecriture Féminine and the Theatre**

Cixous now regards the theatre as the natural generic direction for her work, but does not associate theatre explicitly with her earlier engagement in *écriture féminine*. Several critics have traced a progression in Cixous' work towards her writing for the theatre, but few address the move in terms of genre. Cynthia Running-Johnson claims the value of a critical approach informed by *écriture féminine* to examine performance, as she comments:

'Ecriture féminine', with its emphasis upon transformation and profusion and its reference to the corporal, provides a clarifying perspective through which to view performance...<sup>61</sup>

Running-Johnson's analysis of aspects of theatrical performance which can be related to *écriture féminine* is overstated and illustrates the difficulty of transposing the ambiguous terms of the concept on to other contexts.<sup>62</sup> However, some affinities which she identifies necessitate comment. Theatre can facilitate exploration of the relationships between body, voice and text and between actor, performance and language: revealing the potential of articulating the corporality of a text and the textuality of the body. The female, speaking, desiring subject has the potential of being heard and seen in theatrical performance, of challenging dominant power structures through an articulation of subjectivity which defies the masculine scopic economy. The element of voice is described by Cixous as fundamental to *écriture féminine*:

D'une certaine manière l'écriture féminine ne cesse de résonner du déchirement qui est pour la femme la prise de la parole orale, - "prise" qui est effectuée plutôt comme un arrachement, un essor vertigineux et un lancer de soi, une plongée.<sup>63</sup>



The similarities present between the above quotation and Cixous' description of theatre are striking:

Au théâtre résonne ce qui reste silencieux dans la réalité et dans l'écriture livresque: La Parole. Rien de plus oral, rien de plus nu que cette langue. Des paroles.<sup>64</sup>

Whilst such parallels may have led to Cixous' work in the theatre, they are not consistently foregrounded within it. Her early plays engage specifically with the repression of the female subject; however, she was at this point also consciously working against the dominant discourses of theatre (as criticised in 'Aller à la mer') to achieve this. Her later theatre, post 1980, does not articulate these concerns. In the context of the second quotation Cixous does not present theatre's affinity with the spoken word as advantageous to the portrayal of the female subject<sup>65</sup> and, as her engagement with the theatre loses its gender-specificity, the terms of *écriture féminine* as described in La Jeune Née become irrelevant to her theatre. This disjuncture prevents further exploration in Cixous' theatre of the potential generic compatibility of theatre with *écriture féminine*, an exploration which, I would argue, can be more consistently demonstrated in Tsvetaeva's plays.

### **Language, Exclusion and Silence: Le Nom d'Oedipe**

I will now argue that the inscription of female identity in writing is central to much of Tsvetaeva's and Cixous' theatre, and I will discuss Cixous' Le Nom d'Oedipe, Chant du corps interdit and Tsvetaeva's Fedra in this context, with brief references to other plays. These two plays foreground questions of language and identity in specific relation to the female subject.

An important context invoked in Cixous' Le Nom d'Oedipe, Chant du corps interdit,<sup>66</sup> and less explicitly in La Jeune Née, is that of Lacanian psychoanalysis and its attention to the role of language in identity formation. I shall address this discourse



mainly through the work of Luce Irigaray.<sup>67</sup> and it is necessary to briefly discuss the contexts of both Lacan's and Irigaray's work. This textual analysis represents an engagement with complex and contentious discourses in a narrow context; however, I will reference terms and indicate further reading wherever possible.

Lacanian theory derives its structure from the Freudian Oedipal complex,<sup>68</sup> but the attainment of identity in Lacanian terms is inextricably linked to the acquisition of language, as all representations of selfhood are formed in and by language.<sup>69</sup> Language is considered as analogous to the unconscious in that it is a signifying system which relies upon absence, substituting the sign or word for the material object referred to and maintaining an illusory sense of plenitude. The child in its pre-oedipal stage, referred to by Lacan as the Imaginary, has an uncomplicated identification with the mother. The child then begins to distinguish itself from the mother through the intervention of the father who represents both the phallus and social and linguistic individuation, the Symbolic.<sup>70</sup> In Lacanian terms, the female child cannot identify with the phallus and so does not successfully enter the realm of the Symbolic, remaining in the Imaginary. Lacan posits the Symbolic as the sphere of social being. Therefore his claim that Woman remains outside it means that she cannot construct herself successfully as social or linguistic subject and therefore remains the objectified other of male desire. Female subjectivity is thus represented by silence or psychosis.

Feminist engagement with Lacanian theory covers an extremely wide range of interpretation.<sup>71</sup> I will focus on Irigaray's dialogue with Lacanian psychoanalysis, particularly the concept of the Imaginary, through which I will address the plays under discussion here.<sup>72</sup> Irigaray's work engages with Lacan's location of woman in the Imaginary,<sup>73</sup> and explores the possibility of constructing a non-patriarchal, female imaginary to articulate a female subjectivity not defined as other.<sup>74</sup> Irigaray states that the creation of such an Imaginary (necessarily collective and politicised) would depend upon the cultural revalorisation of the mother-daughter relationship<sup>75</sup> and the reconstruction of relationships between women to overcome the *déréliction* caused by the lack of means through which to symbolise such relationships.<sup>76</sup> Woman as object in



patriarchal discourse can only choose between mimicry and silence:

De ce qui se trouve réduit au silence pour les femmes de leurs désirs premiers en fonction d'une culture qui ne permet pas de les dire. Impuissance à "dire" à laquelle le complexe d'Oedipe va ajouter la loi de se taire.<sup>77</sup>

Irigaray's notion of *parler-femme*,<sup>78</sup> translated by Whitford as 'speaking (as) woman',<sup>79</sup> would only be possible in the context of a female imaginary and thus is consciously non-prescriptive as there are no terms available in the present with which it could describe itself. Irigaray's work is important here as a further exploration of the relationships between female subjectivity and language. I will now discuss Cixous' Le Nom d'Oedipe in the context of these relationships.

Shiach describes Cixous' theatre (in particular her early plays such as Le Nom d'Oedipe) as "part of Cixous' own engagement with a politics of the symbolic".<sup>80</sup> Cixous' play refocalises the Oedipal narrative (a cultural metanarrative in the contexts both of mythology and psychoanalysis) in order to illustrate the difficulty of speaking as a female subject and of representing female desire in language. The dramatic focus in Le nom d'Oedipe is placed upon Jocasta's struggle against the silence imposed on her desire, a struggle which, Cixous argues, is undertaken by all women:

Jocaste, Oedipe ne sont jamais que les prénoms occasionnels de toute femme jamais femme de tout homme toujours fils... Que la femme soit reléguée à la place de la mère... Toutes les femmes, interdites de corps, de langue, interdites d'être femme, sont Jocaste.<sup>81</sup>

This passage states the multiple repressions evident in Cixous' text: alienation from the body, the consequential repression of the expression of female subjectivity and reduction to maternal function, as m/other figure. The Oedipal drama in Cixous' play revolves around questions of language and identity, around the struggle of the female subject, Jocasta, to articulate her identity within a patriarchal structure of language



which will neither recognise nor accept her. Le Nom d'Oedipe: Chant du corps interdit thus addresses the issues raised in La Jeune Née and parallels the critical movement described earlier in this chapter, denouncing patriarchal discourse for its repression of the female subject. However, as I shall show, the second utopian movement, in which the female subject inscribes herself in language and writing, is not present in the play.<sup>82</sup>

The theme of identity is central to the play, as demonstrated in the title, not Oedipe as unproblematic given but Le Nom d'Oedipe, which places emphasis on the cultural and linguistic process of naming. The connotations of the proper name bestowed upon Oedipus and his readiness, or otherwise, to assume it ultimately decides Jocasta's fate. Cixous underlines this point explicitly:

Oedipe peut faire l'amour avec sa "mère", tant qu'elle n'est pas nommée, tandis que Jocaste celle qui sait au-delà de tout savoir, et qui vit par delà des mots, tente de délivrer l'amour des noms qui font la Loi. Le sort tient à un fil(s), un nom...<sup>83</sup>

The linear chronology of the Oedipus narrative which traditionally follows the trajectory of Oedipus' quest for his origins and the origin of the plague besieging the city, is disrupted as Cixous' play begins with Oedipus' realisation of his identity. Flashbacks then present a time when mutual identification between Jocasta and Oedipus was fluid. This can be read as the pre-Oedipal or Imaginary in Lacanian terms. The dramatic coexistence of the two periods (before and after Oedipus' discovery of his identity) emphasises Jocasta's struggle to keep Oedipus from taking on his name and serving "la Ville",<sup>84</sup> the entrance into the Symbolic which will ensure their separation. As Morag Shiach points out, the contrast and tension between past and present underline the ensuing conflictual opposition of the Imaginary and the Symbolic.<sup>85</sup> The flashbacks represent Jocasta and Oedipus struggling to undermine the Symbolic in order to preserve their relationship. In these passages Jocasta and Oedipus address each other with a bewildering array of names and social titles, including those of mother and



son, refusing any fixity of social identity or role within the symbolic:

Oedipe:

Promets-moi jamais d'autre amant que moi.

Moi seul ta force, ton enfant, moi

ton père si tu veux, moi-même

ton époux mère, ton amant

Promets-moi jamais d'autre roi.

Jocaste:

Toi, ma vie, mon jour, ma lumière, je te promets.

Non, je ne te promets pas. Je veux que tu me demandes

encore, encore et chaque fois, dis-moi que tu es pour

moi.

Oedipe:

Si tu veux je serai ton élan, toi ma grace, moi

ta force nouvelle, ta danse. Si tu veux je serai

ta mère et ensuite je serai ton enfant.

Toi mon enfant d'abord si tu veux.<sup>86</sup>

Jocasta's and Oedipus' terms of address are subversively interchangeable and prevent Oedipus from establishing her as his definitive other. Moreover, Cixous foregrounds the subversive use of familial relationships, through which the pattern of identification of the Freudian Oedipal complex is attacked: the terms 'mère', 'père', 'fils', 'amant', 'roi' become entirely interchangeable and lose their cultural significance. Oedipus and Jocasta assume these terms as freely as the abstract signifiers of dance, spirit or force and refuse to comply with the social realm of the symbolic.

However, Oedipus' identity as defined in terms of his crimes and familial relationships must be established in order for the curse to be lifted from the city. The forces of social law demand that Oedipus take on his name with all its associated guilt and the oracle functions as the purveyor of language and the symbolic, which demands that Oedipus recognise himself in language and before the law. Oedipus' entrance into the Symbolic can thus be seen to follow the Lacanian model as it entails the distinction of himself from the mother and his ultimate rejection of her. Cixous locates Jocasta's struggle precisely within these terms. It is a struggle to express herself, as female



subject, within a culture and language which does not allow the female subject to speak autonomously. To achieve this she must maintain a link with Oedipus, and escape the designated role as objectivised other by attempting to keep them both in the pre-Symbolic realm:

Jocaste:

J'aurais voulu le délivrer des noms.  
Tous les noms qui se font prendre pour des dieux.  
Par feinte, par fraude, se font adorer.  
Obéir. Passer pour des êtres purs:  
Père, mère, vérité, vivre, tuer, faute, dette, épouse, vérité,  
Mari, roi, origine, quel homme peut dire lequel il est?  
Ce sont les noms qui gouvernent.  
Je voulais le libérer.<sup>87</sup>

The Chorus supports her aims, sensing the tragic results of Oedipus' search for his name and the oppression of language as symbolic signifier:

Ne dis pas amour,  
Ne dis pas mien, notre,  
mon amour, notre chambre,  
notre chance, ma lumière.  
Ne dis pas les mots sinistres  
Ne dis pas enfant, père, famille  
Qu'on n'entende pas les mots.  
Sans merci, familiers.<sup>88</sup>

It is the inevitability of Oedipus' accession into the symbolic and the consequent abandonment of Jocasta which are at the core of Cixous' revision of the tragedy. Oedipus cannot continue to act without names, but even as he is on the verge of discovering his crimes before the law, Jocasta pleads with him to renounce the patriarchal symbolic, recognising that the locus of power is within language:

Jocaste:

Tu peux me tuer  
Avec un mot, tu peux  
Nous séparer, nous ravir  
La vie, la mort,  
D'un seul mot, tu pourrais  
Nous garder, tu  
Décides  
Seul, comme si tu étais dieu.



Et que j'avais cessé d'être  
Toi.<sup>89</sup>

The last phrase of this passage illustrates the centrality of identity and separation to the tragic dénouement, and Oedipus expresses the oppositional relationship which now comes into force between them: 'Tout est noir maintenant! J'ai si grand besoin de lumière!... Puisse-je sortir de ce monde, et me retrouver ailleurs.'<sup>90</sup> The naming of Oedipus of the play's title is associated through the homophones 'nom' and 'non': the refusal of Jocasta and negation of her status as subject. Oedipus abandons Jocasta, a state which can be read as analogous to the Irigarayan notion of *déréliction* discussed earlier, and his integration into the symbolic is reported by the Chorus:

Il était en ville avec la foule.  
Avec des inconnus,  
En fusion, avec elle,  
La ville toute entière  
J'entendais les mots  
S'échapper de sa gorge  
Il parlait, il répondait,  
Le corps droit,  
Elle le courtisait,  
J'ai entendu sa voix  
Il riait.<sup>91</sup>

Jocasta's solitude is accompanied by a loss of subjectivity and silence replaces dialogue: 'L'absence est devenue l'absence. Ce silence ne chante pas. Ce silence me prend à la gorge.'<sup>92</sup> Her death is described in terms of a loss of language:

Jocaste:  
Seule  
Je descends le temps  
...  
Il n'y a pas de place pour moi  
En haut  
...  
Seule  
Descendre le silence  
Par degrés  
Entrer, s'enfoncer  
Par phrases tues,  
Mot à mot perdre  
La pensée,  
Dans le silence intérieur



The last scenes of the play are crucial to a reading of the play in terms of the female subject and the status of the Imaginary. Mieke Kolk's reading of the play criticises what she perceives as Jocasta's ultimate submission to Oedipus, and a capitulation to patriarchy's exclusion of her.<sup>94</sup> Kolk's critique of the play insists that Jocasta's desire to die symbolises the negative outcome of her struggle to express her desire for Oedipus in language:

Le refus de Jocaste d'entrer en rapport avec le silence d'Oedipe en fait un "autre" solitaire, elle s'avère incapable de partager son "alterité" et reste enfermée dans son propre univers intérieur. De ce fait, sa force émancipatoire revêt un aspect étouffant.<sup>95</sup>

I would argue that Jocasta's final refuge, described by Kolk as her "propre univers intérieur", can be aligned with the Imaginary; however, such a reading requires further problematisation. Jocasta has been abandoned by Oedipus who now serves the realm of the Symbolic, "la ville"; Jocasta is thus left in the pre-Symbolic, the Imaginary. This reading is supported by the details of Jocasta's death and relies upon an association of the Imaginary with the mother and music. As Jocasta lies dying she asks Tiresias to sing to her and, although much of the text is sung, this is the only explicit reference to song within it.<sup>96</sup> In Cixousian aesthetics, as discussed in the first section of this chapter, song is closely linked to the mother, and Jocasta's desire for song represents a return to symbiosis with the mother. The connection is explicit in the text:

Jocaste:  
Chante-moi une chanson. Tu veux bien?  
Une chanson d'enfance.  
Comme quand j'étais petite. La voix grave de ma  
mère.  
Je me tournais vers le mur. Le mur devenait la  
mer.  
Des vagues soulevaient mon lit. J'étais bien.<sup>97</sup>



The association with the Cixousian mother figure is heightened through the autobiographical intertext revealed in the insistence upon the German language of the desired song:

Jocaste:  
Elle chantait  
Dans une langue étrangère.

Choeur:  
Chante lui.  
La chanson.

Tiresias:  
Dors. Je vais la chanter  
(Chante la chanson de l'énigme  
Dans une langue étrangère: Erbkönig  
ou bien Die Gedanken sind frei).<sup>98</sup>

In Lacanian discourse a return to the Imaginary constitutes regression of the subject, and a refusal to leave it results in psychosis. Irigaray's discussion of the Imaginary does not suggest it as a 'feminine' space. Indeed it is difficult to read Jocasta's refuge as celebratory as she is about to die. This return to the mother may, however, represent some consolation and imply an albeit unrepresentable alternative Imaginary. The female imaginary alluded to by Irigaray and the concept of *écriture féminine* share an as yet unrealised potential, represented in the *chanson de l'énigme*.<sup>99</sup> An association of the song with *écriture féminine* is further encouraged by the presence of the figure of Tiresias at Jocasta's side. Tiresias features in traditional interpretations of the Oedipus myth as prophet, however, I would argue that his presence at this point in the play is important to Cixous' reworking of the narrative on account of his ambiguous gender: having been both man and woman, he is representative of the libidinal plurality described in *écriture féminine*.<sup>100</sup> Tiresias is contrasted to Oedipus whose refusal to sing to Jocasta is mentioned.<sup>101</sup> His presence may, however, reflect the problematic links between female subjectivity and *écriture féminine* as it is Tiresias who articulates this song, not Jocasta. She is passively soothed by it but cannot express her subjectivity or identity through it.

A more positive reading of the play is suggested by the final scene, where an



unmutilated Oedipus returns to Jocasta. He claims to have overcome the name which threatened to define him completely, and that his perception of her has not been recodified by the social laws of 'la ville':

Oedipe:  
Oedipe est là. Je t'avais dit  
Prends ma voix! Prends mon souffle.  
Viens. Je t'appelle Oedipe.  
Je ne pouvais pas revenir plus vite.  
D'entre les mots. D'entre les morts.<sup>102</sup>

The impact of such a validation is indisputably weakened, however, by Jocasta's death, particularly as Cixous allows Oedipus to survive as fully constituted social and linguistic subject, arguably to reclaim his status as hero of the narrative. Cixous' undermines her own refusal of the punitive narrative in which Oedipus' self mutilation atones for his sins.

Le Nom d'Oedipe. Chant du corps interdit dramatises the repressive structures of patriarchal culture which provide impoverished representations of the female subject, and allow her no discourse in which to articulate her identity. However, the projections of change and utopian tone so important to La Jeune Née are noticeably absent as Jocasta is abandoned to silence and has no combattant recourse to language. Jocasta's plight is that described by Cixous in La Jeune Née:

C'est en écrivant depuis et vers la femme, et en relevant le défi du discours gouverné par le phallus, que la femme affirmera la femme autrement qu'à la place à elle réservée dans et par le symbolique, c'est-à-dire le silence. Qu'elle sorte du silence piégé. Qu'elle ne se laisse pas refiler pour domaine la marge ou le harem.<sup>103</sup>

Such an exposition of the repressed female subject can arguably be presented as cathartic, but seems far removed from Cixous' project of providing the female spectator with female subjects and positive identifications, as described in 'Aller à la mer', as Jocasta is silenced and absent at the end of the play.

Cixous' play Portrait de Dora<sup>104</sup> also addresses the struggle of a female subject



to articulate her identity in patriarchal society. The play draws heavily on Freud's first case study Dora: A Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria.<sup>105</sup> and examines the figure of the hysteric and her relationship to language and the body.<sup>106</sup> I want to focus here on Cixous' representation of the role of language for articulation of the female subject.<sup>107</sup>

The eighteen-year-old Dora was brought to see Freud by her father, on the recommendation of a family friend, Herr K. The father was concerned about Dora's increasingly disruptive behaviour, coughing fits, bouts of aphonia and severe depression. Her father pleaded ignorance as to the cause of her distress, but it appeared to be linked to her accusations that Herr K. had attempted to seduce her. Dora's father was having an affair with Frau K., thus implementing Dora in a system of exchange between the two men. In his analysis of Dora's case, Freud adhered to the Oedipal framework, according to which Dora desires her father, but transfers her affections to Herr K. as a reaction to her father's affair with Frau K.

Much of Cixous' play focuses on questions of articulation and silence, which Cixous considers fundamental to the liberation of the female subject. Cixous suggests that the hysteric is a symbol of the silencing and alienating effect of patriarchal discourse on the female subject. This is expressed in terms of access to language:

Et cette fille qui, comme toutes les hystériques, était privée de la possibilité de dire ce qu'elle percevait en direct... a eu quand même la force de le faire savoir. C'est l'exemple nucléaire de la force contestatoire des femmes. Ça c'est passé en 1899, ça se passe aujourd'hui là où les femmes n'ont pas pu parler autrement que comme Dora, mais ça a une efficacité telle que ça fait voler la famille en éclats.<sup>108</sup>

Cixous' text contains many directions for voice and Dora's is variously described as: "enfantine, lasse, méprisante, coupante, haletante, une voix qui tombe sur Freud de très haut et de très loin". Her first speech is made in "une voix qui déchire un silence - ton entre la menace et la demande, - s'écoute."<sup>109</sup> In the text, "Freud"'s voice represents the authority of the dominant discourse and is the voice which Dora attempts to disrupt,



interrupt and mimic. However, like Jocasta's, Dora's challenge to patriarchal discourse is ineffectual, and the play dramatises the 'scene' of psychoanalysis in which this repression is reinforced. Cixous posits the hysteric as an as-yet-unrealised, site of change:

L'hystérique à mes yeux, c'est la femme-type dans toute sa force: une force qui était retournée contre Dora, dans son cas, mais qui, si la scène tourne et si la femme commence à parler autrement, serait une force capable de démolir ces structures là.<sup>110</sup>

In the context of Cixous' early work, 'parler autrement' can be read as analogous to *écriture féminine*. However, within the play 'Dora' is not able to move from a textually subversive to a textually productive role. She fails to express her subjectivity in language, and in writing. The motifs of inscription and writing appear throughout the play. Of particular interest is 'Dora''s account of a dream which Cixous invents as it does not feature in Freud's case study.<sup>111</sup> In the dream 'Dora' cuts the throat of an unknown man who seems to be threatening her:

Longtemps après je sens encore la résistance de la gorge. *Comme si je le faisais encore* je sens la densité de cette résistance. Je me servis de ma main gauche, et je tirai comme un trait de gauche à droite.<sup>112</sup>

This violent inscription can be interpreted as a metaphor of castration, but the insistence on the direction of the cut must be noted and encourages a reading of the scene as a Cixousian allegory of the difficulty experienced by the female subject in using discourse and writing. This is suggested by Jeanette Laillou Savona:

...il semble indiquer le début d'une écriture possible et l'aspiration à la créativité...On a ici une inversion de la métaphore habituelle de l'écriture masculine qui passe par la mutilation du corps féminin.<sup>113</sup>

The struggle for discourse between 'Freud' and 'Dora' is central to Cixous' play. 'Freud''s reaction to 'Dora''s premature termination of her treatment is strong, and results, Cixous implies, from his frustration at being unable to complete his narrative



about Dora.<sup>114</sup> 'Freud' expresses this in the play: 'Vous ne m'avez pas laissé la possibilité de m'exprimer jusqu'au bout!... Jamais je n'ai senti telle violence.'<sup>115</sup> Cixous shows that 'Freud' is obsessed with constructing his own narrative, and not primarily concerned with enabling Dora to articulate hers. Immediately after 'Dora''s account of her dream, 'Freud' associates her with writing, referring to postcards she has sent him, and 'Dora' mentions letters she sent to Herr K. (which he read as suicide threats). However, these writings are linked to the two male protagonists and can be seen as further examples of Dora's hysteric mimicking of their desires and constructions of her identity. Her only writing which is not 'addressed' to them, remains imagined, projected only in her dreams and explicitly shown to be impossible within patriarchal discourse. As 'Dora' leaves, in a further addition to the case study,<sup>116</sup> 'Freud' asks her to write to him:

Freud:  
 Donnez-moi de mes nouvelles (il fait un lapsus de  
 telle manière qu'on peut ne pas le remarquer).  
 Écrivez-moi.

Dora:  
 Écrire?...Ce n'est pas mon affaire.<sup>117</sup>

'Freud''s verbal slip is important here in the context of Cixous' emphasis on language and writing. He asks for 'mes nouvelles', his own news, as if 'Dora' can only articulate her identity in terms of his interpretation of her as patriarchal and psychoanalytic object. 'Dora''s reply expresses her alienation, indeed her refusal of such a writing. In parallel to the ending of Le Nom d'Oedipe. Chant du corps interdit, we witness the exit of a repressed and silent female subject.

I have shown language to be a fundamental consideration in Cixous' representations of identity, and one of the major themes of both Le Nom d'Oedipe. Chant du corps interdit and Portrait de Dora. Language continues to be important in Cixous' later theatre,<sup>118</sup> but the concern with the importance of inscription in language to the construction of identity is no longer primary. The specific struggle of the female



subject to express her identity is not present in Cixous' plays after 1980.

### **Towards an Inscription of the 'Feminine': Tsvetaeva's Fedra**

An approach to Tsvetaeva's dramatic oeuvre which enquires into the relationship between the female subject and language, and adopts the conceptual framework of *écriture féminine* is a rewarding one. I will discuss other plays only briefly before engaging with Fedra (Phaedra) as the ultimate expression of these issues in her work.

In Prikliuchenie (An Adventure) the ambiguous character Henri/Henriette, who appears as both man and woman in the play, does not speak differently according to his/her gender identity. However, Henriette is often misunderstood by the men around her who make their own interpretations of her character and fail to grasp her riddles.

Although she fails to communicate and express her true self within the text, Henriette reveals her ideal medium of communication to be that of music. Having proclaimed her solidarity with the musician/artist in the play, she entrances those around her with an impromptu performance on the cello. When asked what she is playing, she replies: 'Svoe, - Sebia' My own - myself'<sup>119</sup> asserting her independent creativity through an association with music. This element of the play reflects the importance of music to Tsvetaeva's perception of language and poetic creativity.

In Ariadna, as Ariadne prepares to express her desire to Theseus, the direction 'in a singing voice' appears in the text, again implying an association between female identity, desire and music.<sup>120</sup> As I will discuss shortly with reference to Fedra, in Tsvetaeva's theatre, women's language and women's creativity, are inextricably associated with attempts to express desire. This can be read in Ariadna. Theseus does not understand Ariadne's speeches and his replies repeatedly refer to clichéd masculine qualities. Dialogue is impossible:



Ариадна:  
Тайнопись - дева:  
Надобен ключ.

...

Умысел - дева:  
Надобен слух.

Тезей:  
Внял, но не понял.  
Брось - соловьем!  
К басням не склонен,  
В льстях не силен.

Любишь - так следуй  
В свет и во мрак!

Ariadne:  
Woman is a cryptogram  
You need a key.

...

Ariadne:  
Woman is intention  
You need to listen.

Theseus:  
I've listened but not understood.  
Stop - this nightingale's song!  
I'm not keen on fables,  
I'm no good at flattery.

You love, so follow  
Into light and darkness!<sup>121</sup>

Ariadne can only speak of female subjectivity in riddles which draw upon images of language and communication, but her words fall upon deaf ears, Theseus' lack of comprehension revealing him as an unsuitable partner for Ariadne. When Bacchus demands that Theseus give up Ariadne to him, he does not enter into dialogue with her,<sup>122</sup> but his function is important in terms of language and identity. Bacchus does not physically appear in the play, he is denoted in the text simply as a voice - *golos*. The power of this disembodied voice is emphasised and parallels might be made



between the function of Bacchus in Ariadna and the role of Tiresias in Cixous' Le Nom d'Oedipe. Chant du corps interdit. Both figures represent a linguistic superiority in the context of Cixous' and Tsvetaeva's aesthetics (as song and pure voice respectively), and both figures imply a transcendent future in which the female subject may be heard and understood but which remains unrepresented in the plays.

Lack of communication between male and female characters, is also present in Fedra. However, the play is important for its representation of female identity because it combines stylistic and thematic elements which can be discussed in the context of *écriture féminine*.<sup>123</sup> Tsvetaeva refocuses the classical narrative to represent Phaedra's articulation of desire for Hippolytus in terms of her relationship to language and writing.

Cixous' descriptions of an *écriture féminine* and its demonstration through her own writing, suggest an emphasis on sound and rhythm. Fedra is dominated by sound repetition and internal rhymes. The following is a crucial example:

Федра:

Началом

Взгляд был. На путях без спуска  
Шаг был. Ошибаюсь: куст был  
Миртовый - как школьник в буквах  
Путаюсь! - началом звук был  
Рога, перешедший - чаш звук -  
В чаш звук! Но меднозвучащих  
Что - звук перед тем, с незримых  
Уст! Куст был. Хруст был. Раздвинув  
Куст, - как пьяница беспутный  
Путаюсь! - началом стук был  
Сердца, до куста, до рога,  
До всего - стук, точно бога  
Встретила, стук, точно глыбу...  
- Сдвинула! - началом ты был,  
В звуке рога, в звуке меди,  
В шуме леса...

Ипполит:

Коль не бредишь...

Федра:

Ты - сквозь ветви, ты - сквозь вежды,  
Ты - сквозь жертвы...



...Ты - так брежу

Я.

Fedra:

At the start  
Was the glance. On paths with no way down  
There was a step. I'm mistaken: there was a bush  
A myrtle - like a schoolboy I'm muddling  
My letters! - the first thing was the sound  
Of a horn, turning into the sound of the woods, became  
The sound of cups! but what of a bronze  
sound - The sound before that, from invisible  
Lips! There was a bush. There was a crunch.  
Parting  
The bush - I'm confused  
Like a wayward drunk!  
At the start was a beat  
Of the heart, before the bush, before the horn,  
Before everything - a beat, as if I had met  
A god, a beat, as if I had moved  
A boulder! -  
The first thing was you,  
In the sound of the horn, in the sound of bronze,  
In the sound of the forest...

Hippolytus:  
If you are not delirious...

Fedra:  
You - through the branches, you - through my  
eyelids,  
You - through sacrifices...

Hippolytus:  
You - now I begin to rave as well.<sup>124</sup>

This passage is based on several complex sound associations and rhymes as Fedra struggles to express her desire for Hippolytus. Fedra draws attention to the illogical nature of these associations. She substitutes for glance *`vzgliad'* a step *`shag'*, for bush *`kust'* and a sound *`zvuk'*. Bush *`kust'* is then associated through rhyme with lips *`ust'*, and crunch *`khrust'*.<sup>125</sup> Eyelids *`vezhdy'*, branches *`vetvi'* and sacrifices *`zhertvi'* are also primarily linked through their homophonic qualities. Logos is undermined as sound associations dominate the progression of the text and Hippolytus cannot understand her speech.<sup>126</sup> The sound patterns reach their peak as Fedra finally, and fatally, attempts to assert her desire in language.

Cixous' descriptions of *écriture féminine* refute any direct association of a mode



of writing and the sex of the author, and Tsvetaeva's discussion of Voloshin examined earlier in this chapter also shares this view. However, many of the concerns of *écriture féminine* can be seen in the difference that develops in Tsvetaeva's drama between the speech of the female characters and that of the male characters, a difference which reaches its height in Fedra. Often the sole aspect of the play commented upon by critics is the variety of linguistic registers used by all the characters within it.<sup>127</sup> These range from the colloquialisms and dialectal forms used by Fedra and the Nurse, to the archaic tone of Theseus' and Hippolytus' speeches:

In both tragedies, archaic Russian and Church Slavic forms are widely used to convey the atmosphere of Greek antiquity (Church Slavic being traditionally used in Russian poetry to suggest Greek, Latin or Hebrew).<sup>128</sup>

Karlinisky does not interpret the mixture of registers in the play, but is not alone in noting it:

The slavization, not yet too marked in Ariadna, borders on excess in Fedra. Fedra is filled with vivid colloquialisms, even vulgarisms, with a folkloristic as well as a Church Slavonic vocabulary. Moreover Cvetaeva does not avoid dialectal forms and at times appeals to material from Slavic languages other than Russian (Czech, Polish). The grammatical inventory of Fedra, the inventory of syntactical models, rhythms and intonations, coincides to a significant extent with the inventory of Russian folk songs, laments and charms.<sup>129</sup>

Whilst Venclova's comparison of Tsvetaeva's poetics in Fedra with folk songs is useful because it emphasises the incantatory musical qualities of the text, he considers that the language of Fedra has a negative impact and describes it as containing:

...harsh clashes of stylistic layers, verging on the grotesque, combinations of the incompatible, connection of the unconnectable - high and low, praise and abuse: in the poetics of frenzy, of going beyond bounds (especially on the level of syntax and meter); in the sound and rhythmic fabric of the verse, which strays into patter and glossolalia.<sup>130</sup>

Patter refers to the song-like quality of the text, but in a dismissive fashion. Glossolalia



is the gift of tongues, abnormal utterances which take place under religious influence or in a trancelike state, akin to the delirious mutterings of Fedra at the beginning of the play. The term can also be seen as dismissive in the context of Venclova's critique. Contemporary critics were at best bewildered, and at worst outraged by the syntactical and lexical innovations of the play. Karlinsky catalogues Veidle describing the play as having: 'a total absence of feeling for words as responsible and meaningful logos'. Khodasevich described it as an 'inexcusable and tasteless confusion of styles' and lastly, Adamovich wrote that the play 'is howled and screamed rather than written.'<sup>131</sup> The subversion of logos is read as inappropriate and a sign of the incompetence of, rather than innovation by, the writer.

Venclova's description of the 'harsh clash of stylistic layers' and the 'poetics of frenzy' bring to mind descriptions of the subversive powers of the carnivalesque in Bakhtinian dialogics. Bakhtin described this combination of registers, as a potential site of liberation from the hierarchies of rank and status within discourses, capable of subverting any discourse which claims universality and projects a monological view of the world:<sup>132</sup>

Carnival celebrates temporary liberation from the prevailing truth of the established order; it marks the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed.<sup>133</sup>

Several of the elements which Bakhtin ascribes to the carnivalesque form parallels with Conley's description of *écriture féminine*, "always becoming, it never becomes the system". But the temporary nature of Bakhtin's carnivalesque, easily recuperated by dominant discourses, illuminates one of the core problems of *écriture féminine*, which, if it remains undefined, is impossible to locate, yet if a prescriptive model emerged it too could be recuperated.

In Fedra it is Phaedra and the Nurse whose language functions in terms of the carnivalesque, especially that of the Nurse, who encourages Fedra to express her



sexuality and speak as female subject, outside the definitions of women provided in Theseus' patriarchal discourse and Hippolytus' overtly misogynist speeches. Bakhtin linked the carnivalesque with traditions of folk literature, and it is in dialectal forms, through frequent use of colloquialisms and folk idioms that Fedra and the Nurse express themselves. The colloquial language is characteristic only of the speeches of Nurse, the serving maids, and Fedra herself in moments of stress and emotion. Karlinsky does not propose any other reading of the different register used by the female characters, other than an association of such registers with the expression of 'earthy' desires.<sup>134</sup> The use of such mixed register and folk idiom is also present in Tsvetaeva's poetry of this period, but Fedra is striking due to its combination of stylistic and thematic focus, a focus on the relationship of the female subject to language and writing. In Fedra the Nurse represents the voice of female desire. It is she who persuades Fedra to speak her desire for Hippolytus, and then, importantly, to translate this desire into writing. An example of the frankness and idiom of her speech can be found in the long address in which she questions Fedra's love for Theseus:

Федра:

Так, матушка.

*Прислужницы выходят.*

Кормилица:

Издали, издавна поведу:

Горькие женщины в вашем роду, -

Так и слава вам будет в будущем!

Пасифая любила чудище.

Разонравился царь, мил зверь.

Дщерь ты ей иль не дщерь?

Материнская зла кровиночка!

Ариадну супруг твой нынешний

Богу продал во время сна.

Ариадне - сестра,

Дважды: лоном и ложем свадебным.

Только с богом не больно сладили:

Не понравился бог, мил прах:

Там-то страсть, а тут страх.

Федра:

С богоравною сестрой

Мне равняться мудрено.

Кормилица:

Дети матери одной,



Пасифайны дщери горькие.  
Ариадна с твоим погодками  
Были. Было бы ей - ай вру? -  
Ну-кость? - сколько царю?  
... Федра:  
Видно за сорок.

Кормилица:  
Сильно за сорок:  
На пятидесяти стоит.  
А с царем-то - с лица старик! -  
Не закрашивай, не замасливай, -  
Федра - счастлива ль?

Fedra:  
Well then my dear.<sup>135</sup>  
(the servants leave)

Nurse:  
From far away and ages past: I tell that  
There have been wretched women in your line, -  
So I suppose that will be your future glory too!  
Pasiphae loved a monster.  
The king lost his charms, the beast was dearer.  
Are you her daughter or not?  
Yes, a wicked drop of mother's blood!  
Your husband bartered Ariadna  
With a god, while she was asleep.  
Ariadna - your sister.  
Twice over: bosom and wedding bed.  
Only she and the god didn't hit it off too well:  
She didn't like the god, dear heart:  
Passion on his side, but fear on hers.

Fedra:  
To my god-like sister  
It's difficult for me to compare.

Nurse:  
You're children of the same mother.  
Wives of the same husband -  
Pasiphae's wretched daughters.  
Ariadna, well there was a year between you  
Now then she would be? -  
Well then? - how old's the king?  
...

Fedra:  
Obviously, past forty.

Nurse:  
Well over forty.  
More like fifty I'd say!



And with this here king - with this old face! -  
Now don't paint over, don't grease over!  
Fedra - are you happy?<sup>136</sup>

This passage contains many colloquialisms and dialectal forms which are very difficult to render in translation. Russian lexis is used throughout in preference to Church Slavonic forms, except for the notable exception of `dshcher' (daughter). It maintains a brisk pace and strong rhythm and, as with all the Nurse's speeches, forms a strong contrast to the language of Hippolytus, a contrast which is clearly illustrated in their exchange as the Nurse delivers Fedra's letter. She addresses Hippolytus using diminutive forms, such as *razumnichesk* - clever little one, *ushko* - ear, and *brazhnik* - reveller, typical of the language of folk songs and also undermine his traditionally higher status as son of the king.<sup>137</sup> Her speech is full of exclamations, pauses and changes in tempo. Hippolytus' reaction to the letter is extremely measured and balanced. Even in times of emotion and anger, he uses Church Slavonic vocabulary to give his speech an aura of authority and reason. Hippolytus' speech, scattered with archaic forms and Church Slavonic vocabulary, has a classical, almost biblical tone: *odr* - bed, *pisets* - writer, *voditsa* - water, *progovarivat'sia* - to murmur, *se* - behold!, *navet* - slander, *kozni* - intrigues, and *rechet'sia* - to speak.<sup>138</sup> Hippolytus refers to himself by name and asks rhetorical questions, further asserting his authority and status, and clearly contrasting himself to Fedra. His speech conveys a very straightforward rhythm and rhyme scheme, with the use of anaphora in the repetition of *iavno* followed by a reflexive verb at the beginning of six of the lines.<sup>139</sup> Thus, Tsvetaeva's representation of female speech in the play, intrinsically linked to the expression of desire, has striking similarities with Bakhtin's carnivalesque. It disturbs and punctuates the dominant discourse and undermines the primacy of moral law and logos, as represented by Hippolytus. These characteristics of this speech can be paralleled with those of *écriture féminine*, as strategies for representing the voice of the female subject as different from her representation as object in the language of other discourses.



This reading of the stylistic aspects of the play is reinforced by the main concerns of Tsvetaeva's narrative, namely Fedra's attempts to speak, and then to write her desire, which encourages a reading of the play as female 'coming to writing' as suggested in *écriture féminine*.<sup>140</sup> Fedra's desire first manifests itself in the body, through a figurative fever and delirium and it is towards the articulation of this desire, this new relation to the body that Fedra strives. It is the Nurse who persuades Fedra to recognise her desire and to first enunciate it in speech and then to inscribe it in writing to Hippolytus.<sup>141</sup> Fedra is thus persuaded to translate her feverish dreams and seemingly hysterical behaviour into writing. This enacts a Cixousian refusal of silence and an inscription of desire and the body. Other elements of the play recall aspects of *écriture féminine*. This reading of the play is encouraged by the shared metaphorical use of images of milk and suckling by Tsvetaeva and Cixous to represent the power of female creativity. The Nurse insists, throughout the play, upon the importance and power of the relationship between herself and Fedra through the bonds of milk and suckling. Her appeals to Fedra to share her desire focus upon this link between them:

Кормилица:

Тайны, скорби, беды - с плеч их  
Сбрось! Мне - на сердце! Все грусти!  
Грудь не знает перегрузки.  
Без извилистых  
Троп, клятв приторных -  
Все кормилица  
Я, все выкормыш -  
Ты! Ведь мать тебе, ведь дочь мне!  
Кроме кровного - молочный  
Голос - млеку покоримся! -  
Есть: второе материнство.  
Два над жизнью человека  
Рока: крови голос, млека  
Голос. Бьющее из сердца  
Материнство, уст дочерство  
Пьющих. Яд течет по жилам -  
Я - в ответе, я - вскормила.

Nurse:

Secrets, sorrows, troubles -throw them  
From your shoulders! On to my heart! All your  
griefs!



My breast cannot be overloaded.  
Without tortuous paths, cloying vows -  
I'm still the nurse -  
You're still the nursling.  
I'm a mother to you, you a daughter to me!  
As well as the voice of blood - there is the voice of  
Milk - let's obey it!  
There is a second motherhood.  
Two fates rule people's lives:  
The voice of blood and the voice of milk.  
Motherhood that spouts from the heart  
To daughterhood's drinking lips.  
Poison runs in your veins,  
I - am answerable, I suckled you.<sup>142</sup>

Tsvetaeva stresses the role of the Nurse, and the bonds of milk over those of blood, in order to refute common readings of the Phaedra narrative which relate Phaedra's desire for Hippolytus to the fatal inheritance from her mother, Pasiphae, whose desire for and seduction of a bull led to the birth of the minotaur. Pasiphae's desire is represented as monstrous and, by playing down the direct links between Phaedra and Pasiphae, Tsvetaeva refuses to depict female desire as inherently monstrous. However, by asserting the fundamental role of the Nurse, Tsvetaeva maintains the conceptual framework of a female genealogy which leads to writing. The Nurse's references to the creative and liberating power of human milk and suckling in this context can be read in relation to Cixous' metaphorical use:

Texte, mon corps: traversée de coulées chantantes; entends-moi, ce n'est pas une "mère" collante, attachante; c'est, te touchant, l'équivoque qui t'affecte, te pousse depuis son sein à venir au langage. qui lance *ta* force; c'est le rythme qui te rit; l'intime destinataire qui rend possible et désirable toutes les métaphores, corps (le? les?) pas plus descriptible que dieu, l'âme ou l'Autre; la partie de toi qui entre toi t'espace et te pousse à inscrire dans la langue ton style de femme. Voix: le lait intarissable.<sup>143</sup>

Cixous does not posit milk or the female body as the source of writing, but reclaims the body as a metaphor for female subjectivity and an entrance into inscription of the female subject in writing. It forms an image which revalorises the links between the (maternal) body and women. In Fedra, the Nurse appeals to this bond and, through the



combination of empowerment with her frank denial of any 'monstrosity' in Fedra's desire, opens the way to writing and the expression of female desire in language. A female succession is perhaps continued through the 'Khor podrug', a specifically female chorus, who praise Fedra after her death.<sup>144</sup> I suggest that the play can therefore be read as an allegory of the relationship between women and language.

## Conclusions

This chapter demonstrates that both Cixous' and Tsvetaeva's theatre is concerned with the relationship between the female subject and language, and it reveals major linguistic and thematic features which correspond to the concerns of *écriture féminine* as described by Cixous in La Jeune Née. Tsvetaeva's theatre is permeated with the theme of the relationship between woman and language and the problematics of representing the female subject and expressing female desire in language. The use of the expression of female desire as a metaphor for creativity is a strategy Tsvetaeva shares with Cixous, and is one which further strengthens the association in their work of writing and the body. However, whilst neither Tsvetaeva nor Cixous posits the body as an essentialised source of language or writing, they insist on the power of the relationship between the two, a relationship which must be revalorised in order for woman to represent herself in language as a speaking, desiring subject.

The plays discussed in this chapter successfully and forcefully dramatise the female subject's repression by patriarchal discourse, by attempting to articulate her exclusion and paradoxically articulating the repressed voice of the female subject. Cixous describes theatre as particularly advantageous for the representation and challenging of taboos:

Je me dis le pire - au public. Enfin une fois dire à haute voix ce qui est interdit! Pour cela il faut le public. En fiction, Phèdre pourrait dire tout ce qu'elle veut, mais il n'y a plus le public, donc ni interdit, ni fracas. L'interdit, on ne se le donne à entendre qu'au théâtre.<sup>145</sup>



The impact of these voices depends upon the presence on the communal will of the public as witnesses to the struggle of the main female protagonists: here Jocasta, Dora, Ariadne and Fedra, to express themselves as subjects in the discourse available to them. However, they are all ultimately silenced by dominant patriarchal discourse and it is debatable whether their clear function as sites of resistance and rebellion remains the chief impact of the plays. The audience may hear the voice of the female subject, but also ultimately witnesses the ability of the dominant discourse to silence it. Fedra inscribes her desire in writing, but only to see it both rejected by Hippolytus and to face the consequences of her writing before social law. In the face of these paradoxical assertions of silence it is unclear whether the discourse, however radical, employed by the female protagonists under discussion here can express anything but martyrdom. Neither *écriture féminine* nor Irigaray's female Imaginary can be prescribed or created until the discourse, or corresponding Symbolic realm, which facilitates this is in place. 'Dora''s dream remains the only example of an inscription of female subjectivity which avoids punitive closure.

Both Tsvetaeva and Cixous use the theatrical form to represent woman as subject in language and to examine the limitations to be overcome in the language concerned, and in the culture it reflects. The choice of the theatrical form to explore these issues is common to both writers, and perhaps is perceived by them as the appropriate form in which to imagine and present 'elsewheres' which would facilitate the articulation of the female subject. It is this relationship between displacement and the theatre which constitutes one of the main elements of the next chapter.



(1) This background is further described in detail in the recent Mireille Calle-Gruber and Hélène Cixous, Hélène Cixous, Photos de racines (Paris: des femmes, 1994), pp. 183-184.

(2) Hélène Cixous, 'De la scène de l'Inconscient à la scène de l'Histoire', in Hélène Cixous, chemins d'une écriture, ed. Françoise van Rossum-Guyon and Myriam Diaz-Diocaretz, (Vincennes: Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 1990), pp. 15-34, p. 16.

(3) This spatial displacement is explored further in Chapter Three

(4) This lineage is documented in Viktoria Schweitzer, Tsvetaeva (London: Harvill, 1993), p. 14.

(5) Hélène Cixous, "Difficult Joys", in The Body and the Text: Hélène Cixous Reading and Teaching, ed. Helen Wilcox et al, (New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), p. 11. This essay was written in English.

(6) Michael Makin "Text and Violence in Tsvetaeva's Molodets" in Discontinuous Discourse in Modern Russian Literature, ed. Catriona Kelly, Michael Makin and Shepherd, (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 125.

(7) Hélène Cixous, 'Marina Tsvetaeva, Le feu éteint celle...', Les Cahiers du Grif, 39 (1988), pp. 87-96, p. 87.

(8) Morag Shiach, Hélène Cixous: A Politics of Writing, pp. 69-70.

(9) The story Tsvetaeva refers to is Hector Malot, Sans Famille, published in 1878.

(10) Marina Tsvetaeva, 'Mat' i muzyka' in Izbrannaia Proza v dvukh tomakh, II, pp. 172-190, p. 172.

(11) This passage is echoed rather bizarrely in the cover notes to Mireille Calle-Gruber and Hélène Cixous, Hélène Cixous, Photos de racines, as Calle-Gruber describes Cixous' aesthetics. 'De livre en livre, Hélène Cixous s'est construit tout un ensemble de registres et de clefs. Toute une gamme: à jouer, à monter et à descendre. Gamme de possibles, gamme musicale. Do ré mi fa sol la si... do - la folie, l'abîme...ré - la récollection depuis la perte, le réveil, mi - par le milieu, toujours déjà commencé, fa - voix des nymphes, l'an neuf, la sève nouvelle, sol - là où l'âme fait terre dans la langue, la - le don, la différence, si - l'infini...'

The passage is clearly signed Calle-Gruber, yet in the context of this collaborative text it must be seen as indicative of Cixous' employment of the work of other poets to construct her own poetic identity.

(12) Marina Tsvetaeva, 'Mat' i muzyka', p. 177. The chromatic scale is a twelve note scale including all the semitones of the octave.

(13) Marina Tsvetaeva, 'Mat' i muzyka', in Izbrannaia Proza v dvukh tomakh, p.182.

(14) The passage proceeds to refer to Tsvetaeva as one such poet: '...but here I am evoking only the poem that invents the other tongue within the tongue, the dreamtongue; only this poem breaks free from its moorings, spurts from the silence



churning with Rimbaud, with Celan, with Mandelshtam, with Tsvetaeva...smashes the windowpanes...' Hélène Cixous, 'The Author in Truth' in Hélène Cixous, Coming to Writing and Other Essays (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 136-182, p. 148. This essay was written in English.

(15) Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, La Jeune Née, p. 172.

(16) Hélène Cixous, 'La venue à l'écriture' in Entre L'écriture (Paris: des femmes, 1986), pp. 9-69, p. 31. (This essay was first published in 1976).

(17) Marina Tsvetaeva, 'Mat' i muzyka', p. 190.

(18) Hélène Cixous, 'Castration or Decapitation' trans. A. Kuhn, Signs, 7 (1981), pp. 41-55, p. 45.

(19) The connotations inherent in the English adjective 'feminine' render it unsuitable as translation. I shall refer to the concept as *écriture féminine* throughout.

(20) Hélène Cixous, "Le Rire de la Méduse". L'Arc, 61 (1976), pp. 39-54.

(21) Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, La Jeune Née (Paris: Union Générale d'Editions, 1975).

(22) Perhaps the strongest criticism of Psych et po's stance was articulated through the journal Questions féministes which attacked the biological essentialism they saw as inherent in psychoanalytical discourse. 'Psych et po' appropriated the 'MLF' (Mouvement de libération des femmes) logo for their publications, thus further alienating other groups. Feminist debate in France became polarised and the discourses of all groups involved was reduced to unhelpfully simplistic and often deeply personalised arguments. For further discussion of these differences see Chapter four of Claire Duchén, Feminism in France: From May '68 to Mitterrand (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986).

(23) Cixous describes her role as protector of 'une imagination poétique, rather than guardian of women's rights - a role she says is safe with Antoinette Fouque. When asked how she feels about her early work being grouped with that of feminist theorists Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray, Cixous disavows her status as theorist and posits a seemingly regressive division between theory and women: '... il est plus facile de se faire admettre comme théoricienne, c'est-à-dire moins femme.' Hélène Cixous and Mireille Calle-Gruber, Hélène Cixous, Photos de racines, pp. 15-17.

(24) Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, La Jeune Née, p. 144.

(25) *ibid.*, p. 118.

(26) 'Les belles dorment dans leurs bois, en attendant que les princes viennent les réveiller. Dans leurs lits, dans leurs cercueils de verre, dans leurs forêts d'enfance comme des mortes. Belles, mais passives... Ce sont les hommes qui aiment jouer à la poupée. Comme on le sait depuis Pygmalion. Leur vieux rêve: être dieu la mère.' *ibid.*, p. 120.

(27) *ibid.*, p. 124.

(28) *ibid.*, pp. 127-132. 'Qui suis-je?...Je suis juive. Pendant vos guerres et vos révolutions, dans quel ghetto suis-je parquée? Je veux me battre. Quel est mon nom?...Qui "je"? Où est ma place? Je cherche. Je fouille partout...Je commence à parler, quelle langue est la mienne?', p. 130.

(29) *ibid.*, pp. 191-243.



- (30) Morag Shiach, Hélène Cixous: A Politics of Writing. p. 15.
- (31) Hélène Cixous, La Jeune Née, pp. 131-132.
- (32) 'Mon corps ne sert plus innocemment mes dessins. Je suis une femme.' *ibid.*, p. 136. The increasing role of male heroes in Cixous' theatre is addressed in Chapter Four.
- (33) A third interpretation of the title - 'la Genet' refers to Jean Genet, a writer Cixous suggests as demonstrating the potential of *écriture féminine*, and is feminised here to represent an affinity with *écriture féminine*.
- (34) *ibid.*, p. 158.
- (35) *ibid.*, p. 151.
- (36) *ibid.*, p. 156.
- (37) *ibid.*, pp. 182-184
- (38) *ibid.*, pp. 179-180.
- (39) Examples of such criticism are: Donna Stanton, 'Difference on Trial: A Critique of the Maternal Metaphor in Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva', in The Thinking Muse. Feminism and Modern French Philosophy, ed. Allen, Jeffner and Young, (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1989), pp. 156-179. Diane Griffin Crowder, 'Amazons and Mothers?: Monique Wittig, Hélène Cixous and Theories of Women's Writing', Contemporary Literature, 24 (1983), pp. 70-78.
- (40) Barbara Freeman, 'Plus Corps donc Plus Ecriture: Cixous and the mind-body problem', Paragraph, 2 (1981), pp. 58-70, p. 61.
- (41) Hélène Cixous, La Jeune Née, pp. 169-170.
- (42) Verena Aldermatt Conley, Hélène Cixous: Writing the Feminine (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), p. 6.
- (43) Hélène Cixous, La Jeune Née, p. 170.
- (44) *ibid.*, p. 173.
- (45) Françoise Von Rossum-Guyon, 'Entretien avec Hélène Cixous', Revue des Sciences Humaines, 168 (1977). pp. 479-493, p. 489.
- (46) Hélène Cixous, La Jeune Née, p. 178.
- (47) Irina Kuzminsky, 'The Language of Women? Three Women Writers. Ingeborg Bachmann, Monique Wittig and Marina Tsvetaeva,' DPhil Diss. University of Oxford, 1989.
- (48) Cherubina was the pseudonym chosen for the woman poet.
- (49) Marina Tsvetaeva, 'Zhivoe o Zhivom', in Izbrannaia Proza v dvukh tomakh. II, pp. 27-79, p. 40.
- (50) Marina Tsvetaeva, 'Poet o Kritike' in Izbrannaia Proza v dvukh tomakh. I (New York: Russica Publications Ltd, 1979). pp. 221-241. p. 231.
- (51) Simon Karlinsky, Marina Cvetaeva: Her Life and Art (Berkeley: University of



California Press, 1966), p. 34.

(52) Marina Tsvetaeva, Neizdannaia Pis'ma (Paris: YMCA Press, 1972), p. 272.

(53) Simon Karlinsky, Marina Cvetaeva: Her Life and Art, p. 169.

(54) Jane Taubman, A Life Through Poetry: Marina Tsvetaeva's Lyric Diary, p. 9.

(55) *ibid.*, p. 8.

(56) 'Zaum' was a new language created by the Futurists, and associated mainly with the work of Aleksei Kruchenukh and Khlebnikov, whereas Tsvetaeva's neologisms are based on existing words.

(57) Simon Karlinsky, Marina Cvetaeva: Her Life and Art, p. 183.

(58) Jane Taubman, A Life through Poetry: Marina Tsvetaeva's Lyric Diary, p. 183.

(59) *ibid.*, p. 9.

(60) Marina Tsvetaeva, Izbrannaia Proza v dvukh tomakh, I, p. 237.

(61) Cynthia Running-Johnson, 'Feminine Writing and its Theatrical Other' in Themes in Drama, XI, ed. J. Redmond, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 177-184, p. 177.

(62) She suggests an interpretation of elements as varied as the role of the critics, the stage directions and the process of rehearsal in terms of the 'feminine' and the 'maternal', *ibid.*, pp. 180-181.

(63) Hélène Cixous, La Jeune Née, p. 170.

(64) Hélène Cixous, 'L'Incarnation' in L'Indiade ou l'Inde de leurs rêves, p. 261.

(65) Indeed many of Cixous' later plays feature male 'heroes', an issue which is discussed further in Chapter Four.

(66) Hélène Cixous, Le Nom d'Oedipe. Chant du corps interdit (Paris: des femmes, 1978).

(67) Luce Irigaray is a leading French theorist whose work combines feminist analysis with the discourses of linguistics, philosophy and psychoanalysis.

(68) Sigmund Freud, 'Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality' (1905), in On Sexuality, The Penguin Freud Library Vol. 7, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), pp. 45-169. Freudian oedipal theory depends on the fear of castration being instilled in the male child, to ensure his progression to the phallic stage of development, and his 'proper' entrance into society. This fear necessitates the definition of the mother as not having the phallus, as negative, as lack. She becomes the primary negative from which the male child can distinguish himself, and align himself with the model of the father. Freud interpreted the narrative of Oedipus as a basic representation of this process, and used the image of the hero who blinds himself on realising that his love-object is his mother as a symbol of the threat of autocastration which looms if the male subject fails to successfully negotiate the oedipal complex.

(69) For detailed exposition of these terms see Jacques Lacan, Ecrits, I, (Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1966), pp. 80-109, particularly 'Le stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du jeu', pp. 89-97.



(70) Lacan does not equate the phallus with the penis yet the inherent link and the consequential emphasis on the female body as lacking reinforces such an association, and encourages a critique of phallogocentrism.

(71) For examples of these debates see: Teresa Brennan, ed. Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis (London and New York: Routledge, 1989); Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, eds. Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne. Feminine Sexuality (New York: Pantheon, 1982); Jane Gallop, Reading Lacan (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); Susan Sellers, Language and Sexual Difference: Feminist Writing in France (London: Macmillan, 1991); Eleanor Ragland-Sullivan, Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

(72) I am greatly indebted to Margaret Whitford's ground-breaking work on Irigaray which clarifies many of the issues explored here. Margaret Whitford, Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), particularly chapters 2 and 3, Margaret Whitford, 'Rereading Irigaray', in Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis ed. Teresa Brennan (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 106-126.

(73) Luce Irigaray, Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1977).

(74) Luce Irigaray, Ethique de la différence sexuelle (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1984), pp. 140-145.

(75) In Le corps à corps avec la mère (Montreal: Editions de la pleine lune, 1981) Irigaray describes the matricide represented in Freudian psychoanalysis.

(76) The notion of a female imaginary has been criticised as essentialist, and as celebrating the pre-symbolic as a 'feminine' domain. Whitford argues convincingly for the role of such a concept as an empowering catalyst, asserting Irigaray's thought as an intervention which allows future change to take place. Margaret Whitford, Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine, pp. 89-91.

(77) Luce Irigaray, Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un, p. 134.

(78) Luce Irigaray, Sexes et parentés (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1987) and discussed in detail in Margaret Whitford, Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine, pp. 39-49.

(79) Margaret Whitford, Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine, p. 49.

(80) Morag Shiach, 'Their "symbolic" exists, it holds power - we, the sowers of disorder, know it only too well' in Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis, ed. Teresa Brennan, pp. 153-167.

(81) Hélène Cixous, Le Nom d'Oedipe. Chant du corps interdit, backcover notes.

(82) The play is in fact an opera, and the formal presence of song (in relation to La Jeune Née) might encourage articulation of female subjectivity, yet all the characters have some sung parts, not only Jocasta.

(83) *ibid.*, back cover.

(84) 'La Ville' refers immediately to the city and its inhabitants, yet also signifies social and patriarchal law to which Oedipus must conform.

(85) Morag Shiach, Hélène Cixous: A Politics of Writing, pp. 69-70.

(86) Hélène Cixous, Le Nom d'Oedipe. Chant du corps interdit, p. 67.



(87) *ibid.*, p. 57.

(88) *ibid.*, p. 57.

(89) *ibid.*, p. 38.

(90) *ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

(91) *ibid.*, p. 76.

(92) *ibid.*, p. 72.

(93) *ibid.*, p. 76.

(94) Mieke Kolk, 'La Vengeance d'Oedipe', in Hélène Cixous, chemins d'une écriture, pp. 177-186.

(95) *ibid.*, p. 179.

(96) Clearly the use of song is fundamental to the text, enabling a doubling of characters through the spoken and sung parts of the text as discussed in Chapter One.

(97) Hélène Cixous, Le Nom d'Oedipe. Chant du corps interdit, p. 80.

(98) *ibid.*, p. 80.

(99) The reference to mysterious and powerful song recurs in Cixous' play L'Histoire (qu'on ne connaîtra jamais) where the main theme of passion and loss is represented in an enigmatic song.

(100) Tiresias became a woman after separating two fighting serpents only to become a man again some years later after having separated two mating serpents on the same spot. See Pierre Grimal, The Penguin Dictionary of Classical Mythology (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1951), pp. 439-440.

(101) Jocaste:

C'est étrange, lui  
Il n'a jamais jamais  
Voulu chanter pour moi.  
Pas une seule fois.  
Sa voix était belle  
Et grave pourtant.

Hélène Cixous, Le Nom d'Oedipe, p. 80.

(102) Hélène Cixous, Le Nom d'Oedipe. Chant du corps interdit, p. 81.

(103) Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, La Jeune Née, pp. 171-172.

(104) Hélène Cixous, Portrait de Dora (Paris: des femmes, 1976).

(105) Sigmund Freud, 'Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria' in Case Histories I. The Penguin Freud Library, VIII, (1925; rpt. Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1977), pp. 35-166.

(106) The innovative aspects of the production of this play and the repercussions of these on the representation of identity are discussed in Chapter One.

(107) The figure of the hysteric is discussed in the context of the representation of



sexual difference in Chapter Four.

(108) Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, La Jeune Née, pp. 282-283.

(109) Hélène Cixous, Portrait de Dora, p. 9.

(110) Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, La Jeune Née, p. 284.

(111) Hélène Cixous, Portrait de Dora, pp. 25-27.

(112) *ibid.*, p. 27.

(113) Jeanette Laillou Savona, '*Portrait de Dora* d'Hélène Cixous. A la recherche d'un théâtre féministe,' in Hélène Cixous, chemins d'une écriture, pp. 161-175, p. 166.

(114) The fact that this was Freud's first case study written in narrative form is clearly important here.

(115) Hélène Cixous, Portrait de Dora, p. 99.

(116) In the case study, Freud records Dora's unexpected termination of the treatment quite briefly. Sigmund Freud, '*Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria ('Dora')*', p. 146. It is interesting that Cixous chooses not to invent a new ending for '*Dora*' and no further identification for the female spectator.

(117) *ibid.*, p. 103.

(118) As noted in Morag Shiach, Hélène Cixous: A Politics of Writing, pp. 165-167.

(119) Marina Tsvetaeva, Prikliuchenie, p. 154.

(120) Marina Tsvetaeva, Ariadna, p. 262.

(121) *ibid.*, p. 263.

(122) Tsvetaeva's interpretation of the figure of Bacchus is discussed further in Chapter Five.

(123) A more specific engagement with the play as representing Tsvetaeva's own creative processes is undertaken in Chapter Five.

(124) Marina Tsvetaeva, Fedra, p. 325.

(125) This last association, and the image of the bush are fundamental to my reading of the play which will be discussed in detail later in chapter Five.

(126) This lack of comprehension between male and female characters is common in Tsvetaeva's theatre. In Ariadna Theseus does not comprehend Ariadne's speech nor understand her riddles. Indeed he ridicules Ariadne's words as mere prattle:

Тезей:

Темной речи

Уясни

Смысл.

...

В бурях и в бедах

Лепится дух.

В девах несведущ,



Theseus:  
Of this dark speech  
Explain  
The meaning.

...

Theseus:

In storms and in troubles  
The spirit is shaped.  
I am ignorant of maidens  
I am deaf to prattle.

...

Theseus:  
I heard, but don't understand.  
I've had enough of this nightingale!  
I don't like fables  
I'm not inclined to flatter.

Marina Tsvetaeva, Ariadna, p. 262.

(127) Tsvetaeva's poetry of the same period demonstrates her interest in folk idiom.

(128) Simon Karlinsky, Marina Cvetaeva: Her Life and Art, p. 263.

(129) Tomas Venclova, 'On Russian Mythological Tragedy: Vjaceslav Ivanov and Marina Cvetaeva' in Myth in Literature, ed. Andrei Kodjak. (Columbus: Slavica Publishers, 1985), pp. 89-110, p. 102.

(130) *ibid.*, p. 106.

(131) All these comments are quoted from Simon Karlinsky, Marina Cvetaeva: Her Life and Art, p. 264.

(132) The carnivalesque cannot be viewed in isolation: it is a part of the dialogical whole in which every utterance is defined by its social context, by preceding intertexts, and anticipated response. Therefore the form of the carnivalesque will define itself in relation to the dominant discourses. Bakhtin discusses the carnivalesque in relation to the works of Rabelais, and it should be noted that most of his work on the carnivalesque referred to the novel.

(133) Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and his World (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986), p. 109.

(134) 'In Fedra, the language of carnal passion is made deliberately earthy and salty by an extensive use of colloquial and dialectal forms, so that certain passages suggest nineteenth century Russian countryside rather than ancient Greece'. Simon Karlinsky, Marina Cvetaeva: Her Life and Art, p. 264.

(135) 'Matushka can mean mother, but is used more commonly as an affectionate term



of address. The dual meaning is relevant here as Tsvetaeva plays down the role of Pasiphae in deciding Phaedra's fate.

(136) Marina Tsvetaeva, Fedra, pp. 306-7.

(137) *ibid.*, p. 322.

(138) *ibid.*, pp. 322-323.

(139) *ibid.*, pp. 322-323.

(140) A more specific discussion of the play as representing the female poet and Tsvetaeva's own creativity is suggested in Chapter Five and the Conclusion of this thesis.

(141) Fedra's words are, like Ariadna's, addressed to an unappreciative reader in Hippolytus, who criticises her with his own transparent misogyny, dismissing her words as delirious ravings and her behaviour as unseemly. After listening to her passionate speech, the only response from Hippolytus is 'Gadina!' (Vermin!). Marina Tsvetaeva, Fedra, p. 327.

(142) Marina Tsvetaeva, Fedra, p. 311.

(143) Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, La Jeune Née, pp. 172-173.

(144) Marina Tsvetaeva, Fedra, pp. 332-334.

(145) Hélène Cixous, 'A Quoi bon le Théâtre?' Théâtre ouvert, (July 1991), pp. 17-18, p. 17.



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## CHAPTER THREE

### EXILE AND PARADISES LOST

This chapter explores the formal and thematic importance of displacement to the representation of poetic identity in Tsvetaeva's and Cixous' theatre. The evocation of lost places echoes the sense of a potential linguistic, utopian site linked to representations of the Imaginary in the previous chapter.

The pain of exile, the loss of origins, and the trope of the border, together with glimpses and projections of unattainable and magical "elsewheres", are fundamental to an understanding of the theatre both of Marina Tsvetaeva and of Hélène Cixous, and to their respective constructions of poetic identity. This chapter will cover many aspects of the writers' employment of the trope of exile to articulate the status of the poet and the source of creativity. However, all this must be consistently read through the tension and ambiguity involved in such an employment of the trope of exile. I shall begin from the comparative basis of the emigration of both writers and then proceed to discuss their metaphoricisation, both of their countries of origin and of the status of exile. I shall briefly consider the status of the woman writer as exiled from patriarchal traditions of writing, before discussing and problematising the themes of separation, exile and loss in plays by Cixous and Tsvetaeva. The conclusion suggests parallels between the structures involved in theories of exile, the process of writing for the theatre, and the experience of theatre itself.

What does the term 'exile' evoke? Tabori, in his extensive study of exile, provides a useful list of synonyms including: displacement, exclusion, eviction,



ejection, deportation, expatriation, extradition and excommunication.<sup>1</sup> These terms imply force or violence and maintain a strict division between outside and inside so that identity is defined in terms of position within the spatial divisions. However, Tabori also shows that exiles uncomfortably belong neither to one place nor the other, and are separated from their origins and alienated from the surrounding environment. Tabori provides a further definition which is helpful to this study: 'An exile is someone who inhabits one place and remembers or projects the reality of another.'<sup>2</sup> This discussion of exile takes up issues of exclusion, displacement and difference or otherness.

### **From Geography to Metaphor**

Before turning to address the specific representations of exile in the theatre of Tsvetaeva and Cixous, it is important to reveal the centrality of the trope to their definitions of personal and poetic identity. This is particularly important in the work of Cixous, as the role played by exile increases in her later work in parallel with her increased engagement with the theatre.

Physical exile has played a fundamental role in the lives and work of both Tsvetaeva and Cixous. Neither was forcibly exiled from her country of origin, but both consider separation and the ensuing experiences of otherness as important to their writing. Hélène Cixous was born in Oran, Algeria in 1937. Her mother was Jewish, of Austro-German descent, and her father was also Jewish, his family originating from France but arriving in Algeria via Spain and Morocco. This diasporic tradition was continued when the family left Algeria in 1955 at the onset of the Algerian war of independence, and moved to France. Cixous' representation of herself as exiled from Algeria is problematic, since her family would have been regarded as part of the colonising body, and a political awareness of the colonial context provides a consistent critique of the use and status of Algeria in her work. Separation, however, is rarely discussed in Cixous' work in terms of an engagement with the political situation in



Algeria; rather, Algeria acts as a metaphor for other losses or as a myth of origin. Algeria is linked to the death of her father, who died when she was eleven, but is also associated by Cixous with an abstract maternal origin, 'la disparition du corps maternel'.<sup>3</sup>

Algeria is important to Cixous as a mythical site of origin which provided her with experience of several languages,<sup>4</sup> and, through her first recognitions of the violent oppression of difference, as the beginning of her engagement with notions of alterity. Cixous often uses Algeria as a metaphor for her 'paradise lost', an origin which is defined in part by its very absence. She describes this directly:

A Oran, j'avais un très fort sentiment de paradis, alors même que c'était la guerre et que ma famille était atteinte de partout... Mon père a été interdit d'exercer la médecine, nous avons perdu la nationalité française, je ne suis pas allée à l'école publique d'où nous étions exclus.<sup>5</sup>

The war referred to here is the Second World War, and Algeria represents both Paradise and exclusion, on this occasion on account of Jewishness and not French nationality. Cixous constructs complex relations of exclusion through her status as a French Jew in a French colony:

Cette logique de nationalité s'accompagnait de comportements qui m'ont toujours été insupportables. La nation française était coloniale. Comment aurais-je pu être d'une France qui colonisait le pays algérien alors que je savais que nous-mêmes juifs allemands...étions d'autres arabes. Je n'avais rien à faire dans ce pays. Mais je ne savais pas non plus où j'avais à faire.<sup>6</sup>

The relationship between colonised and coloniser is not explored in Cixous' work in explicit terms, and, whilst her identity remains marked by her Jewish background, Algeria remains the wholly symbolic site of the birth of her writing. It is interesting to compare Cixous' representation of Algeria with that of Marie Cardinal, who also left Algeria with her family at the outbreak of the war of independence.



Rather than mythologising Algeria, Cardinal engages with the colonial situation and explores the implication of her family's identity as *pied noir* in colonial actions and discourse.<sup>7</sup> In an analysis of the representation of Algeria in La Jeune Née, Sue Thomas regards Cixous' failure to engage with the political reality of Algeria as an 'ideologically interested foreclosure' which represses the negotiation of Algeria as historical and cultural site.<sup>8</sup> Thomas also criticises Cixous' equation, through images, of the female subject with the colonised and black peoples' struggle as '...a piece of bathos tactless in its appropriation of the historical resonances of particular signs'.<sup>9</sup> I shall develop Thomas' arguments further in my critique of Cixous' plays which represent specific historical events in India and Cambodia.

For Cixous Algeria remains a metaphorical space, and she employs the trope of exile to construct her identity as a writer. This is illustrated through her wordplay on the name of the town in which she was born: 'ORAN - HORS - EN ORAN JE'<sup>10</sup> encompasses elements of subjectivity (je), exclusion (hors), inclusion (en) and the creative fruit of these combinations (orange) which is writing.<sup>11</sup> Cixous does not consider this experience of separation and loss to be harmful to the process of writing - quite the contrary:

J'ai eu la chance d'avoir pour temps et lieu de naissance l'étrangeté,  
l'exil, la guerre, le souvenir fantôme de la paix, la douleur, le deuil... Et  
j'ai su qu'existait le déracinement...<sup>12</sup>

It must, however, be recognised that she has not met with the financial and political problems frequently faced by writers in exile, neither does she encounter other consequences faced by writers in exile such as lack of public recognition and difficult access to publication.<sup>13</sup> Cixous describes the positive consequences of exile, which, far from resulting in an enforced silence, allows the writer to find an alternative space, an alternative relation to the other, from which to speak. Writing is remembrance of absence but also resistance to loss, and the inscription of presence. Indeed, Cixous



suggests that loss and grief constitute the necessary foundations of all writing:

Je crois que l'on ne peut commencer à avancer dans le chemin de la découverte d'écriture ou d'autre chose, qu'à partir du deuil et dans la réparation d'un deuil. A l'origine le geste d'écrire est lié à l'expérience de la disparition, au sentiment d'avoir perdu la cle du monde, d'avoir été jeté dehors.<sup>14</sup>

Cixous presents writing as recuperation and reconstitution, asserting the presence of paradises which are lost or absent through the inscription of grief.

The references to war and exile in many of the quotations given in the preceding section refer to the exile of Jewish families during the Second World War, an exile which was clearly positive in the context of the fate of many who were unable to leave their homes. It should be noted that fundamental to Jewish history is ejection from the Promised Land, a pattern repeated in the enforced exile and persecution of Jews in the Second World War. Despite the images of rootlessness contained in the passage above, and the rejection of national identities, Cixous' Jewish origin is the prime element in her self-identification and recurs throughout her work. Whilst Algeria provides her with narratives of origin for her writing and with her recognition of the complexities of alterity, Cixous expresses no empathy with the country or its fate. Cixous implicitly ascribes her sense of temporal and spatial nomadism to her Jewish background, which, rather than fixing her identity, supplies her with a metaphorical space from which to approach writing and reading, that of the margins: 'Quant au "milieu", je n'ai jamais appartenu au "milieu", je suis plutôt un être de bord.'<sup>15</sup>

During civil war in Russia and after a period of severe poverty which had led to the death of her younger daughter from starvation, Tsvetaeva left Russia in 1922, at the age of thirty. Her husband, Sergei Efron, had served in the defeated White Army, and Tsvetaeva emigrated to join him in Berlin, where they lived briefly before moving to Prague for three years. She then moved to Paris. In 1939, after her husband's dramatic change of allegiance and espousal of the Soviet cause, Tsvetaeva followed her husband



and daughter back to the Soviet Union, where she committed suicide two years later.<sup>16</sup>

Tsvetaeva was not forcibly exiled from Russia. Emigration brought extreme financial hardship and reduced opportunity to publish, which caused her great suffering. Tsvetaeva's years in Prague were, however, very productive, and a grant from a Czech literary fund meant that, for the first time in years, she could devote herself to her writing. The family enjoyed a hectic literary and social life in Prague: Tsvetaeva gave readings and edited the poetry section of a journal, and Efron, keen to become an actor, set up a dramatic studio. This latter activity is scarcely documented but must be one of the factors which maintained Tsvetaeva's links with the theatre, since she planned the 'Theseus' trilogy at this time.

Tsvetaeva's years in Paris were more difficult. She gave several successful poetry readings, but was not popular in emigré circles, mainly due to her ambiguous attitude to the Soviet Union. Her admiration for Maiakovskii's work, which she expressed in an open letter, did not endear her to those who regarded him as a symbolic hero of a hostile Soviet state. As she was considered an outsider by those who controlled the emigré publishing houses, Tsvetaeva published only one book in fourteen years in Paris. She did, however, have more success with emigré journals such as Sovremennye zapiski (Contemporary Notes) and Versty (Mileposts), which Efron helped to run.

There are similarities between the status of Algeria in Cixous' work and that of Russia in Tsvetaeva's writing. Tsvetaeva expressed an ambivalent attitude to Russia, which held more importance for her in terms of her displacement as a metaphor for loss than as an absent physical space. She was opposed to the 1917 Revolution and felt the loss of the artistic heritage of Russia under pressure from the new Soviet state, and its aesthetics. Tsvetaeva did not regard any one country or geographical space as her practical or spiritual home: she represented herself as an outcast in all surroundings, and felt no less at home in the emigré circles of Paris than she had done in Russia.

Russia is often associated in her writing with contact with other Russian writers and with her literary heritage. In the essay 'Poet i vremia (The Poet and Time)'



Tsvetaeva describes an eternal, essentialised Russia, which serves as a cultural and spiritual site rather than a geographical or political reality:

Россия никогда не была страной земной карты. И ехавшие  
отсюда ехали именно за границу: видимого.

На *эту* Россию ставка поэтов. На Россию - всю, на Россию  
- всегда.

Russia was never a country on the earthly map. And those who went  
there from here really went over the frontier: of the visible.

It's on *that* Russia that poets stake their bets. On Russia entire, Russia of  
all time.<sup>17</sup>

Tsvetaeva's poem of 1934 'Longing for the Motherland' does not express a longing to  
return to Russia; indeed, the concept of essential national identity is ironised:

Тоска по родине! Давно  
Разоблаченная морока!  
Мне совершенно все равно -  
Где совершенно одинокой

Быть, по каким камням домой  
Брести с кошелкою базарной  
В дом, и не знающий, что - мой,  
Как госпиталь или казарма.

...

Не обольщусь и языком  
Родным, его призывом млечным.  
Мне безразлично, на каком  
Не понимаемой быть встречным!

...

Так край меня не уберег  
Мой, что и самый зоркий сыщик  
Вдоль всей души, всей - поперек!  
Родимого пятна *не* сыщет!...

Longing for the motherland. A mystery  
Whose laws I've long ago penetrated.  
Now it is all the same to me  
Where I find myself isolated.

Over which stones, quite alone,  
I trail my way home with my bazaar bag  
To some house that doesn't know it's mine.  
A house like a hospital or a barracks.

...



And I'll not let the milky call  
Of my own native language cheat me -  
Whichever language I'm misunderstood in is all  
The same to me, and to those I meet.  
...

So it is my country couldn't keep me safe from harm,  
And the most clever detective,  
Studying my soul, however deeply,  
Won't discover my hidden birthmark....<sup>18</sup>

The indifference to geographical location in the face of greater exclusions displayed in ignorance and the banality of everyday life is recompensed by the speaker's ability to transcend the boundaries of space and time which are imposed on others. The only marker important to her is that of her own poetic creativity.

Cixous' and Tsvetaeva's discourses about exile avoid direct engagement with the turbulent contemporary politics of their countries of birth, and focus on the evocation of an abstract site which represents the origin of their writing. For Cixous, writing is encouraged by the existence and repression of difference she describes in her childhood in Algeria, but stronger affinities are expressed with her Jewish family background, another autobiographical element which is mythologised in her writing. Despite the serious consequences of emigration from, and return to, Russia, Tsvetaeva represents Russia as predominantly a spiritual and literary context with which she can be associated whilst in any geographical location.

## **The Poet as Exile**

The personal expressions of identity demonstrated in Cixous' and Tsvetaeva's employment of the trope of exile are extended in their work to a suggestion of exile as a definitive component of poetic identity. It is this universalisation which informs my reading of their theatre. Throughout the work of both Tsvetaeva and Cixous there is an acute sense that the poet is outcast or exile. This is a common trope in West European literature in which:



...the post-Romantic condition of exile as a metaphor for the alienated or marginalized consciousness whereby individuals are alienated not only from the place they inhabit, but also from the things they do or the things they are.<sup>19</sup>

However, I suggest that Tsvetaeva and Cixous, in employing the exile as a representation of the writing self, go beyond traditional images of alienation. Cixous and Tsvetaeva identify themselves as exiled, and exile is fundamental to their aesthetics, but both writers also regard all poets as necessarily living in a state of metaphoric exile. Tsvetaeva describes poets (and all artists) as suffering a specific separation (for which even Russia cannot compensate):

Но и России мало. Всякий поэт по существу эмигрант, даже в России. Эмигрант Царства Небесного и земного рая природы. На поэте - на всех людях искусства - но на поэте больше всего - особая печать неуютa, по которой даже в его собственном доме - узнаешь поэта. Эмигрант из Бессмертья в время, невозвращенец в *свое* небо. Возьмите самых разных и мысленно выстройте их в ряд, на чьем лице - присутствие? Все - там... Перед той эмиграцией - что наша!

But even Russia isn't enough. Every poet is essentially an *émigré*, even in Russia. Emigré from the Kingdom of Heaven and from the earthly paradise of nature. Upon the poet - upon all who belong to art, but most especially upon the poet - there's a particular mark of discomfort, by which you'll know him even in his own home. An *émigré* from immortality in time, a non-returner<sup>20</sup> to *his own* heaven. Take the most various of them, line them up in your mind: whose face shows presentness? ... Next to that emigration, what is ours?<sup>21</sup>

The poet suffers the demands and constraints of everyday material existence although they are incompatible with this realm. Tsvetaeva's dismissal of reality as a suitable context for poetic existence leads in her work to the suggestion of immortality as the poet's optimum state. This does not simply represent a perception of the realm of art (evidence of the poet's immortality) as a truer reflection of poetic identity than the poet's worldly existence. Tsvetaeva's writing on Blok, whom she considered the ultimate poet, presents his death as a liberation from the burdens of life.<sup>22</sup>



Cixous considers that the poet is exiled from all that is common to human kind: 'Un poète se vit comme soit en réalité exilé, en réalité tragique, comme expulsé, jeté dehors, repoussé jusqu'aux frontières de l'univers.'<sup>23</sup> Cixous presents the poet here as an absolute exile and outsider, pushed violently to the very edge of existence, and forced to exist in a constant position of marginality.

Tsvetaeva and Cixous both employ the specific image of the Jew to symbolise the poet: Tsvetaeva speaks of the poet as Jew, indeed she uses the term 'yid',<sup>24</sup> and Cixous has often described herself as a 'juifemme'. Cixous' use of the term is not only metaphorical as her parents were of Jewish descent, but both writers use this metaphor to give an image of the poet as traditionally and historically excluded from society, a universal figure of martyrdom and suffering with whom they align themselves.

In similar vein, Tsvetaeva refers to poets as 'negroes', describing the poet Pushkin in terms of his blackness, with which she identifies: '...russkii poet - negr, poet - negr...(Bozhe, kak sbylos'! Kakoi poet iz byvshikh i sushchikh *ne* negr...) (The Russian poet - is a negro, the poet - is a negro...(Oh God, and then it all made sense! What poet, past or present, is *not* a negro...').<sup>25</sup> The images of exile and negro are tellingly combined as Pushkin's grandfather came to Russia from North Africa and the slave trade enforced exile on many black communities. In La Jeune Née, Cixous refers to the revolutionary potential of the female subject (associated explicitly in this text with writing) by associating blackness with the female subject: 'nous sommes "noires" et nous sommes belles.'<sup>26</sup>

The image of the poet as oppressed and marginalised in society is one which both writers adopt, but this adoption is clearly problematic in terms of the specific actual exclusions of both blacks and Jews. Such adoptions arguably do not revalorise the status of the Jew or black, through a supposed allegiance with the poet, but trivialise and de-politicise the specific discourses of oppression involved.

## Language as Refuge

The metaphors through which Tsvetaeva and Cixous represent the writing self



are extremely similar. and this is also true of the responses which they posit to exile. Cixous and Tsvetaeva both suggest that language and writing are a salvatory refuge for the poet. Cixous describes her escape from persecution as a Jewish child in Algeria into books and language:

Je prends des livres, je quitte l'espace réel colonial. je m'éloigne...Je ne vais pas lire pour lire, pour oublier - Non! Pas pour m'enfermer dans quelque paradis imaginaire. Je cherche: il doit y avoir quelque part mes semblables...<sup>27</sup>

Cixous denies mere escapism into the textual realm, yet the sense of distancing remains very clear although the displacement is active not passive. The search for her 'semblables' through reading develops into an inscription, through writing, of her own identity amongst them. Writing is suggested as a utopian site of liberation from oppressive discourses, colonial and patriarchal: 'S'il y a un ailleurs qui peut échapper à la répétition infernale, c'est par là, où ça s'écrit, où ça rêve, où ça invente les nouveaux mondes.'<sup>28</sup> Language is described as a country to be discovered, the place which the poet can make her own territory:

Tout est perdu sauf les mots. C'est une expérience d'enfant: les mots vont vers tous les autres mondes. A un certain moment, pour qui a tout perdu, que ce soit d'ailleurs un être ou un pays, c'est la langue qui devient pays. On entre au pays des langues...C'est un pays où vivent les poètes.<sup>29</sup>

The dispossessed poet has the site of language in which to seek sanctuary and, equally, it is in the realm of language that the condition of exile must be confronted and symbolised. It must be stressed that Cixous does not consider that writing is capable of cancelling exile, or enabling the acquisition of a unified identity for the writer. Writing is presented in her work as a fundamental form of resistance to separation and loss. Tsvetaeva also describes how the poet finds refuge in language, how language breaks down the boundary of the individual, subjective self. The country of language is thus accessible to all poets, and consequently common ground is shared with other poets



who inhabit the realms of language.<sup>30</sup>

The common refuge of all poets in language is complemented in the work of both Cixous and Tsvetaeva by a belief in a community of poets which extends across boundaries of time, space and language. Tsvetaeva asserts her faith in this community as a potential alternative environment which transcends all other categorisations of human kind:

Почвенность, народность, национальность, расовость, классовость - и сама современность, ... все это только поверхность, первый или седьмой слой кожи, из которой поэт только и делает, что лезет... По существу все поэты всех времен говорят одно. И это одно так же остается на поверхности кожи мира, как сам зримый мир на поверхности кожи поэта.

Characteristics of origin, nationality, ethnic group, race or class - and even of contemporaneity - all these are only superficial, the first or seventh layer of skin, out of which the poet has only to climb.... In essence all poets of all ages speak as one. And that one remains on the surface of the earth's skin, as the whole visible world is on the poet's skin.<sup>31</sup>

The concept of a community of poets, in which she is amongst equals and finds those equal to her poetry, recurs throughout Tsvetaeva's work, and was exemplified by her correspondence with other poets, particularly Rilke and Pasternak. In their letters the three poets speak to each other across frontiers of language, politics and geography.<sup>32</sup> This site serves as a model of Tsvetaeva's ideal country, in which everyday material restrictions are left behind. Vitins describes it in terms of flight:

It is away from this all too material earth, this place of exile and confinement, that the poet continually strove to escape and fly back to her original home, to the other worlds of poetry, correspondence and timelessness.<sup>33</sup>

Cixous speaks of the same continuum between writers, a communication or *correspondance* that exists outside time and space and depends solely on the boundaries of the text:



Et pour pays: la distance... Il y a ce pays Distance, échos dans le corps, écho dans l'espace...Et pour terre: absences, absences avec présence, absences sans oubli, avec évocation.  
Sans terres, sans toit, mais jamais sans texte. Voilà le secret.<sup>34</sup>

Indeed, Cixous' text Jours de l'an presents in great detail the themes of finding a safe site within texts and of contact with other poets through the writing and reading of literary texts. These intertexts form a utopia, the country of writing itself, in which all borders are overcome:

En ce pays s'effacent les frontières spatiales terrestres géographiques et aussi les frontières du temps. D'un siècle à l'autre, on communique et on transmet. C'est l'oeuvre de tous ceux qui pratiquent un art. Là tout est exil et rien n'est exil. Se fait une correspondance à trois, à mille...<sup>35</sup>

Cixous alludes specifically ('...une correspondance à trois') to the letters exchanged between Tsvetaeva, Rilke and Pasternak, which appear consistently on the reading lists for her seminars. Indeed, Cixous' seminar programmes themselves bear witness to the way in which she has gradually selected and adopted the texts of a canon of writers to form her own poetic community, as she states: '... j'ai adopté une nationalité imaginaire qui est la nationalité littéraire'.<sup>36</sup> Many of the writers included in the seminar programme, although from different literary periods and traditions, share and articulate experiences of exclusion and exile.<sup>37</sup> Cixous describes the sense of community and affinity which she gains through reading, forming her own contemporaneity outside the normal criteria:

Tous ceux que je lis, qu'ils soient morts il y a un ou trois siècles ou bien vivants, présents ou non, sont de mon temps. Et pas seulement dans la lecture, mais aussi dans le siècle et le monde où je pense, sens, crains, espère. Qui? Clarice Lispector, Kafka, Rilke, Tsvetaeva, Akhmatova, Kleist, Derrida, Osip et Nadejda Mandelstam. Il m'amuse d'être brièvement contemporaine de Rimbaud. Discrètement, au désert, de Celan. Parfois, pendant quelques mois de Dostoïevski. Et une saison sur six de Genet. J'ai une colère de Thomas Bernhard. Et des admirations



proches de celles de Brodski.<sup>38</sup>

This contemporaneity revolves around Cixous as reading subject as she chooses her adopted colleagues in a narcissistic reflection of her own aesthetics. Verena Andermatt Conley rightly charges Cixous with self-indulgent escapism in her focus on such writers:

Cixous' increasing desire to be associated with a group of timeless poets, amidst a Pléiade of limit-writers, appears to underscore the futility that the individual artist cannot help finding when he or she looks at the abyss between real issues that determine the conditions of the world and the writer's lack of power in being able to change them. From writing elsewhere that makes possible, she has shifted to writing elsewhere, but in the space of the impossible.<sup>39</sup>

The concept of the poet as an exile, but capable of creating their own contemporaries is present throughout all Cixous' work. It first appears in her doctoral thesis, later published as L'Exil de James Joyce ou l'art du remplacement.<sup>40</sup> Her more recent book Manne aux Mandelstams aux Mandelas<sup>41</sup> also focuses on this. In Manne Cixous creates parallels between the biographies of Osip and Nadezhda Mandel'shtam and Nelson and Winnie Mandela, based on situations of personal, poetic and political exile and isolation. The text begins: 'Quand la terre terrestre est perdue, reste la terre céleste.'<sup>42</sup> This text suggests the importance of resistance through writing to boundaries and exile, separation and loss. Cixous describes the situation: 'Ils ont en commun le rejet, le bannissement, l'enfermement, la perte de corps, perte de terre, de temps humain, mais aussi la résistance à cette perte.'<sup>43</sup> Manne provides us with a clear example of the way in which Cixous regards writing as a means of ensuring that people are not forgotten, of inscribing their memory in the present experience of both writing and reading:

Ecrire est un geste ambivalent. Ecrire sépare, isole, retire. Mais il y a aussi nécessité à inscrire pour résister à la mort, à l'effacement, au silence... Il s'agit de mettre une borne à l'oubli. Nous ne devons pas écrire pour oublier, mais pour nous rappeler de rappeler.<sup>44</sup>



Thus, writing for Cixous allows the trace of absence. It is capable of both resisting and expressing loss: 'Il ne faut pas oublier. L'écriture ce n'est qu'au fond qu'un anti-oubli.'<sup>45</sup> This combination of gain and loss, projection and memory is also posited by Tsvetaeva as the foundation of all art: 'Ibo chto zhe vse iskusstvo, kak ne nakhozhden'e poteriannykh veshchei, ne uvekovechenie - utrat? (What is all art if not the finding of lost things, the immortalization of things lost?)'.<sup>46</sup> Tsvetaeva asserts that all art serves memory, whereas Cixous refers specifically to writing, but the statements remain strikingly similar in their definitions of the main purpose of art, and demonstrate the significance of loss and memory to the aesthetics of both Tsvetaeva and Cixous.

### **The Further Exile of the Woman Writer**

Before considering the representation of exile and separation in the plays of Tsvetaeva and Cixous, it is helpful to discuss a further instance of isolation, that of the woman writer. Women writers often use the trope of the boundary, reflecting their position as outsiders in many spheres of life. The trope has been recognised to such an extent that it also informs critical approaches to women's writing.<sup>47</sup> The image of the boundary or border in feminist literary theory commonly demonstrates the presence of a 'poetics of displacement' in work by many women writers.<sup>48</sup> Exile from dominant discourses is experienced by all women to some degree; however, the woman writer and the female voice have often remained outside traditional literary canons. The woman writer often perceives the lack of a female literary heritage, which may exclude her from literary tradition and history, even within the sacred land of writers described by Tsvetaeva and Cixous. Cixous recognises this specific isolation:

There is something of a foreignness, a feeling of not being accepted or of being unacceptable, which is particularly insistent when, as a woman, you suddenly get into that strange country of writing where most inhabitants are men and where the fate of women is still not settled...<sup>49</sup>



However, Cixous' descriptions of a community of poets do not reflect any such concerns. Indeed, it is difficult to reconcile her statement of the specific obstacles faced by women when approaching writing with the transcendence of sexual difference she claims for some writers, and the untroubled identification amongst writers which she asserts.

Standard theories of tradition and lineage in poetry do not provide the woman writer with her own space, and assume that influences upon her are the same, and structured in the same way, as those of male writers. An example of this is Harold Bloom's The Anxiety of Influence,<sup>50</sup> which draws upon Freudian oedipal theory to explain the influence exerted by one poet over another.<sup>51</sup> Obviously the place of the woman writer in this schema is problematic: there is no place for her in the paternal-filial lineage. In Bloom's terms she cannot experience rivalry with the father-poet, and there is no equivalent mother-poet with whom she can identify. Indeed, if a mother-poet were inserted into this oedipal discourse she would be a debilitating influence, robbing the woman writer of power, as the latter is forced to recognise the 'lack' of creative power of the mother, and to desire the male pen, the phallic representation of paternal creativity. Bloom's theory illustrates the double exile of the woman writer, whose entry into language and writing is represented in patriarchal tradition as lacking genetic and symbolic inheritance or maternal genealogy.

Cixous describes a situation of displacement, or illegitimacy, of having no territory in which to represent herself in writing, and no pattern to follow:

Toutes les raisons pour lesquelles je croyais n'avoir pas le droit d'écrire,  
les bonnes et les moins bonnes, et les vraies fausses: - je n'ai pas de lieu  
d'où écrire. Aucun lieu légitime, ni terre, ni patrie, ni histoire à moi.<sup>52</sup>

In the word *patrie*, the continuation of images of an absent land coincides with a sense of isolation within traditional, patriarchal discourse. Tsvetaeva also expresses this feeling of exclusion and homelessness in her work. 'Poet' written in 1923, is a forceful example.<sup>53</sup> The poem asserts that the poet is unable to locate a place,



discourse or culture within which to be understood. Tsvetaeva considers that the poet exists outside all such contexts, demanding the impossible from everyday life and remaining unquantifiable in any earthly measure.

Both Tsvetaeva and Cixous assume that language and poetry provide a sanctuary for the writer which is capable of transcending exclusions. In this instance, they present language as an equally accessible and neutral realm for the expression of female subjectivity and poetic identity. This suggestion has been questioned in Chapter Two, and is clearly contested in other areas of Cixous' work. However, the utopian notion of a community of poets capable of sustaining individual poetic identity would seem to erase questions of gender specific relations to language. Language does not provide a neutral territory and must be perceived as a construct which inevitably reflects the dominant mechanisms of exclusion of the culture in question. The female subject, and thus women writers, find themselves located on its margins:

It is a specific social and cultural structure which deprives women of their desire and of the possibility of their expressing it, viz., because language and the systems of representation cannot 'translate' that desire. According to this, women are effectively totally lost, "outside of themselves" ...<sup>54</sup>

There are potentially many different levels of exile at work here. Woman is exiled from the mother by the fear of also being defined as 'lacking', which results in a paucity of representations of female-female bonds. She is also exiled from her own body, as it represents lack and is given no value. Thus a suggestion that the woman writer experiences further estrangement from her own subjectivity and from traditional literary contexts problematises the concept, articulated by Tsvetaeva and Cixous, of a community of writers which transcends all criteria of difference.

The preceding sections explored Tsvetaeva's and Cixous' use of the trope of exile in their respective articulations of poetic identity. I have explored both the tendency of the metaphorical use of exile to erase specific political situations, and the response of a relocation into language which is presented as universally accessible and suitable. Having established important aesthetic and critical contexts, I will now



examine the consistency of Tsvetaeva's and Cixous' engagement with notions of exile in the articulations of poetic identity present in their theatre.

## Exile and Paradises Lost in Tsvetaeva's Theatre

Whilst Tsvetaeva's theatre does not offer representations of political or geographical exile, the themes of separation, isolation and loss recur throughout. As in Cixous' theatre, an abstract, yet ever present, paradise lost underpins these works.

The paradises in question, as I shall discuss in relation to specific plays, are ideal but ultimately absent worlds. The late eighteenth century, one of Tsvetaeva's many "elsewheres",<sup>55</sup> is a romanticised past, a temporal paradise lost. The eighteenth century functions in Tsvetaeva's work as a site of pre-revolutionary hedonism. The revolution in question here is clearly the French Revolution; however I would argue that parallels are drawn with the Russian revolution. Tsvetaeva creates protagonists who represent elements of her ideal community, including an acceptance of the non-fixity of gender, an overriding respect for poetry, and freedom from culturally encoded patriarchal ideology. As I shall later show in relation to Cixous' theatre, the evocation of such paradises is an integral component in the dramatisation of poetic identity.

In his recent work on Tsvetaeva, Makin points out a common element of her early plays:

Several of them address the dying of an age, the loss of grandeur, the painful passage of time: the prominence of the late eighteenth century - Tsvetaeva's favourite historical analogy for the Russian Revolutions and the frank nostalgia for a disappearing nobility (both social and personal)...<sup>56</sup>

References to the eighteenth century are consistent in Tsvetaeva's early theatre.<sup>57</sup> Prikluchenie (An Adventure), Fortuna (Fortune) and Feniks (The Phoenix), which were written in close succession, all have their sources in eighteenth-century memoirs. Fortuna is based on the memoirs of the Duc de Lauzun, the others on the memoirs of



Casanova. Both these people were flamboyant adventurers, travellers and lovers who encapsulate the essence of the eighteenth century for Tsvetaeva. Their lives were not restricted by material limitations, in contrast to Tsvetaeva's own existence at the time of writing the plays.

However, the eighteenth century is not only an unattainable ideal world in Tsvetaeva's writing of this period. As Makin comments, the eighteenth century serves as a means through which Tsvetaeva can express her attitudes to social change in contemporary Russia, and this is clear in Fortuna. After a series of romantic adventures and political manoeuvres, the Duc de Lauzun is sentenced to death for having joined the loyalist rebellion in revolutionary France. The final scene shows his last hours before execution and can be read as an allegory of Tsvetaeva's attitudes towards the Russian Revolution. The Duc de Lauzun faces death with extravagant aristocratic gestures, ordering a lavish meal and crying 'Vive la reine' before his executioner.<sup>58</sup> The play evokes the pre-revolutionary past as an "elsewhere" in which greater personal and social freedoms were permitted (albeit for the wealthy few), and Tsvetaeva aligns herself with de Lauzun against the revolutionary forces.

I will now examine several of Tsvetaeva's plays in the context of exile, focusing in each on the representation of different states of isolation and suggesting that the characters placed in such exiles are the poet-figures of Tsvetaeva's theatre. Metel' (The Snowstorm) (written in 1918) is set in 1830, but one of the characters, denoted simply as 'Starukha' (Old Woman) is described in the *dramatis personae* as 'ves' XVIII vek (the whole of the eighteenth century)'. She reminisces about the luxury and vitality of the days of her youth.<sup>59</sup> The theme of the eighteenth century is not developed in detail in this play, but informs the contrasts constructed between the vulgarity and superficiality of the present day, represented by the other guests at the inn, and the past, glimpsed through the romantic memories of the Old Woman. The contrasts in this play form a pattern replicated throughout Tsvetaeva's theatre and which centres upon the plight of a figure trapped in, and restricted by, the everyday material world, whilst aspiring to transcend it.



Metel' (The Snowstorm) is constructed around these contrasts: however I would argue that a more coherent understanding of the play can be reached through the linking of such contrasts with a representation of poetic identity. This combination (discussed earlier in this chapter in terms of Tsvetaeva's aesthetics) first appears in her theatre in this play and remains consistently central to her plays. In Metel' (The Snowstorm) an anonymous woman, apparently having left her husband, enters an inn alone on New Year's Eve. The innkeeper and his few customers attempt to entertain her, but she is repelled by their vulgarity and sits alone by the window. An old woman recounts her memories of past years and past loves. A mysterious gentleman arrives and joins the Lady by the window. He interprets her flight from her husband as representative of a greater dissatisfaction with the superficiality of human existence. Having hypnotised the Lady to prevent her from remembering their meeting, he disappears back into the raging snowstorm.

The Lady is immediately exiled from her vulgar environment, and further displaced by the revelation that she has just left her husband and home. The mysterious Gentleman represents an ultimately inaccessible world. As discussed briefly in Chapter One, the play was clearly influenced by the figure of Blok's 'Neznakomka (The Unknown Lady)' who, at different stages of Blok's poetic evolution, served as erotic ideal and powerful muse figure.<sup>60</sup> The Gentleman, however, is poet and not muse. He arrives out of and departs into the snowstorm with which he is associated, and immediately prior to his appearance, the Lady is staring intently out of the window into the snowstorm.<sup>61</sup> References to Tsvetaeva's iconography in the Gentleman's introduction suggest that he is presented as ideal poet figure. He presents himself as: 'Kniaz' Luny, Rotondy kavalier - i Rytsar' Rozy (Prince of the Moon, Cavalier of the Cloak, - and Knight of the Rose)',<sup>62</sup> the rose, moon and cloak are elements associated with poetic creativity and the figure of the poet in Tsvetaeva's work.<sup>63</sup> The Gentleman, as poet figure, represents the idyll of poetry and its fleeting appearance amidst the vulgarity and banalities of everyday life. The innate compatibility of the two main characters is symbolised through the cloaks which they both wear, the fact that



they are both mysterious travellers in the snowstorm and their position opposite each other close to the window, and distant from the other bawdy characters. Rather than joining in the New Year celebrations, they toast each other as kindred travellers and pilgrims. This compatibility remains, however, unarticulated within the narrative of the play as the Gentleman ensures that she will not remember their meeting,<sup>64</sup> and thus Tsvetaeva emphasises the impossibility of the existence of this other realm in the here and now. I would argue that the fading sound of the distant bells of the Gentleman's carriage can be read as signifiers of the Lady's as-yet-unattainable land of poetry. This association is encouraged by the implicit allusions to Blok in the play (discussed in Chapter One), and it is revealed through reference to one of Tsvetaeva's poems dedicated to Blok in which she evokes identical imagery:

...  
Он поет мне  
За синими окнами,  
Он поет мне  
Бубенцами далекими,  
...  
He sings to me  
Through the pale blue windows  
He sings to me  
Like distant bells<sup>65</sup>

The Lady continues to carry the traces of her affinity with this paradise lost, namely her cloak and the courage to travel in the snowstorm; however, the idealised and absent country of poetry remains sorrowfully absent from her immediate temporal and spatial environment.

Throughout her work Tsvetaeva presents the poet as an exile from another world, forced to live amongst mundane routine and the incomprehension of inferiors around them. In Tsvetaeva's theatre we are presented with a series of extraordinary individuals who are superior to those around them and ill at ease in their earthly surroundings. All of them aspire to transcend this existence in some way, even if such transcendence can only ultimately be achieved through death.

One such figure is Casanova, who was associated for Tsvetaeva with the



eighteenth century and an idealised past.<sup>66</sup> In Prikliuchenie (An Adventure) he leads a carefree and often scandalous existence, surrounded by the luxurious lifestyle of the European aristocracy, although we sense a gentle irony in this portrayal as the character of Henri/Henriette remains the clear focus of the play.<sup>67</sup> In the later Feniks (The Phoenix)<sup>68</sup> Tsvetaeva presents a very different and much older Casanova, now employed as a librarian in the Castle of Dux in Bohemia. His symbolic importance as a personification of the eighteenth century is much greater in this play, as illustrated by Tsvetaeva's specific description of the character in the notes to scene three of the play:

Ничего от развалины, все от остова. Может в какую-то секунду рассыпаться прахом. Но до этой секунды весь - формула XVIII века.

Nothing like a ruin; exactly like a skeleton. At any moment he could turn to dust. But until that second he remains very much - the formula of the eighteenth century.<sup>69</sup>

The figure of Casanova also attracted Tsvetaeva's attention for his extensive reading and writing in later life (in addition to his memoirs he wrote several broadly philosophical and historical texts).<sup>70</sup> His predicament in Feniks is that of the displaced and misunderstood poet, condemned to everyday vulgarity and the insults of imposters. The play describes Casanova's life in the castle as he is subjected to the malicious ridicule of the servants who mock his clothes, manners and age. More importantly, he is also faced with petty rivalry from the trite resident poet.<sup>71</sup> The appropriately named Viderol (explicitly 'vide rôle') improvises verses on request for the Count's guests, and they praise him rapturously. Casanova expresses a rather different view, however:

Младенческое пустословье!  
Как барабанной перепонке  
Не треснуть от такой трухи?  
(Видеролю.)  
Стишонки, сударь, не стихи!  
Стыдитесь!

Infantile verbiage!  
How can our eardrums  
Fail to pop from such trash?  
(to Viderol)



These are ditties, sir, not poems!  
You should be ashamed!<sup>72</sup>

It should be noted that Casanova's five-line speech contains assonance and alliteration, forming a contrast to the predictable rhythms and exact rhymes of Viderol's 'ditty'.<sup>73</sup> Casanova defends poetry against this young pretender, and is consequently ostracised, as all others present are convinced of Viderol's genius.

Many of the details of Casanova's humiliation at their hands are taken directly from Casanova's memoirs. However, the main detail relevant to this chapter is the ending of the play. The third and last scene has important timing: 'Poslednii chas 1799 goda. Rev novogodnei meteli. (The last hour of the year 1799. The roar of a New Year's snowstorm)'.<sup>74</sup> Casanova makes his final dramatic exit from Tsvetaeva's theatre as the eighteenth century comes to a close with the ironic declaration 'S novym vekom! (Happy New Century!)'.<sup>75</sup> The directions in the text clearly point to the symbolic importance of this moment: 'Poslednie slova sovpadauiut s pervym udarom polnochi. (These last words coincide with the first stroke of midnight)'.<sup>76</sup> Casanova had in fact died before 1799, but Tsvetaeva deliberately associates his demise with the arrival of the new century. His refusal to be part of it is symbolised by his exit into the snowstorm, presumably never to be seen again. The snowstorm again represents the otherworldly and the poetic, into which Casanova escapes.

The theme of the alienation and solitude of the poet in the material world is also important to Prikluchenie (An Adventure). However, here it is not Casanova but Henri/Henriette who is presented as belonging to another world (in striking similarity to the mysterious Gentleman in Metel') and is associated with elusive moonlight throughout the play. Other characters try to categorise Henri/Henriette in terms of gender, class or nationality yet s/he is unfixable.<sup>77</sup> When s/he leaves the dramatic scene, s/he disappears into a moonbeam,<sup>78</sup> and this elsewhere can be seen as a development of the creative maelstrom of the snowstorm, a development which articulates the play's focus on the transcendence of gender categories.<sup>79</sup>



Tsvetaeva's Ariadna (Ariadne) and Fedra (Phaedra), also foreground the themes of isolation, separation, dissatisfaction with earthly situations, and the potential transcendence of these through a different, and arguably negative existence as immortal or dead. Both plays are haunted by the distant possibility yet inaccessibility of paradise, and the mutual incompatibility of personal happiness and immortality. In Tsvetaeva's dramatisation of the Ariadne narrative the scene in which Theseus relinquishes Ariadne to Bacchus is structurally and thematically central. The encounter is presented as a conflict between two separate worlds, that of mortal love and its frailty (represented by Theseus), and transcendent immortality (offered by Bacchus). The first time we see Ariadne, she is playing with Aphrodite's ball of golden thread which will lead Theseus safely out of the labyrinth. As she throws the ball higher and higher she expresses a desire to escape from mortal existence:

Ариадна:  
«Золотой невестин  
Дар - подальше спрячь!...»  
От земли не вечной  
Выше, выше, мяч!

The golden gift of brides  
Fly further!...  
From this mortal earth  
Higher, higher, ball!<sup>80</sup>

Once reunited with Theseus after he has slain the Minotaur, she declares her love for him and they leave for Naxos. However, while Ariadne sleeps, the voice of Bacchus commands Theseus to surrender her to him and to her greater destiny, mocking the limitations of mortal love.<sup>81</sup> The immortality of Bacchus and his power to transcend earthly limitations is reinforced throughout this scene by the images of death and decay which he employs to taunt Theseus. However, the transcendence of mortality offered by Bacchus is problematic, since it is engineered without Ariadne's consent. She sleeps throughout these discussions and Theseus notes the injustice of deciding her fate without consulting her.<sup>82</sup> Ariadne's immortality is thus achieved only through the sacrifice of love and disregard of the desires she voiced so frankly earlier in the play.



Human love and immortality are presented as incompatible, indeed mutually exclusive.

The Nurse's inquisition of Fedra at the beginning of Tsvetaeva's Fedra reveals the latter's entrapment within a loveless marriage,<sup>83</sup> and Fedra's attempts to transcend this through the poetic and spiritual expression of her desires results in Hippolytus' misogynistic rejection of her and finally her death. Fedra's immortality is clearly only achieved through her sacrifice and death and, in a similar pattern to that revealed in Ariadna, transcendence is problematically attained.

As I shall suggest in Chapter Five, Fedra is the strongest representation of the poet in Tsvetaeva's theatre. As such, she cannot survive in exile, without an understanding reader, and without communication. Fedra is exiled from the dominant patriarchal discourse, as shown by her dialogue with Theseus and by Hippolytus' misogynistic speeches, and separated from her desire by her social definition as wife and stepmother which deprive her of autonomous status.<sup>84</sup> Fedra has no alternative to this imposed silence: the only means of transcending the denial of her desire and her language is death. However, Tsvetaeva presents Phaedra's death as inspirational in some senses, and the all-female chorus vow to glorify her and ensure her immortality.<sup>85</sup> But the transcendence represented in both Ariadna and Fedra coexists with punitive narrative closures (women who transgress do not survive) and should, I argue, be read more negatively than Tsvetaeva's earlier abstract yet positive elsewhere, which were chosen by the poet-figures in her plays in preference to their everyday surroundings.

These central characters from Tsvetaeva's theatre dramatise different scenarios of isolation in their respective metaphorical exiles from ideal worlds. The Lady in Metel' is isolated in contemporary banality, desiring both the elegance of the eighteenth century (as portrayed by the Old Woman) and the glimpse of romantic and creative inspiration represented by the Gentleman. Casanova is misunderstood and humiliated by his contemporaries and through his refusal to enter the new century and praise the inferior poet Viderol, he maintains his association with the idyllic space of the



eighteenth century and the defence of true poetry against imposters. Henri/Henriette defies boundaries of fixed identity, particularly gender categories (as I will show in Chapter Four) and asserts her creativity. She cannot continue in the society portrayed and leaves into the elsewhere symbolised by the moonbeam. Ariadne and Fedra achieve ultimate transcendence, because the restrictions forced upon them by patriarchal society and misogyny render their survival impossible. All these characters exit from their respective scenes into mysterious "elsewheres" which are unrepresentable and inaccessible to the audience.

### **Exile and Paradises Lost in Cixous' Theatre**

Exile is a constant theme of Cixous' theatre. The exiles represented are predominantly metaphorical; however, several plays present specific historical contexts, such as the struggle for power in Cambodia or the partition of India, which involve the actual exile of individuals or, indeed, whole peoples. As I will demonstrate in the following section, narratives of separation, loss, exclusion, and the responses to them dominate Cixous' theatre. The dual inscription of loss and resistance to it are fundamental themes and motivations of her plays.

The previous chapter showed that structures of exclusion constitute the central focus of *Portrait de Dora* and, in the form of patriarchal and psychoanalytic structures, is presented by Cixous as preventing 'Dora' from asserting her subjectivity and taking control of her life. Cixous represents 'Dora's' exclusion in terms of physical disorientation and feelings of displacement. 'Dora' says 'Si seulement je savais simplement où je suis maintenant, dans quel pays je pourrais commencer à croire.'<sup>86</sup> 'Dora' suffers multiple exiles, patriarchal family structures have distanced her from her mother, and prevent her from expressing her sexual desires: her hysterical symptoms demonstrate exile from her own body and subjectivity. Within the play there is no



transcendence of this exile and no suggested paradise. 'Dora' leaves the psychoanalytic realm of her consultations with 'Freud', yet does not enter other more positive realms. Le Nom d'Oedipe. Chant du corps interdit also represents a female subject exiled and alienated from her own desires and the expression of them. This play reveals the multiple exiles experienced by the female subject, exiles inflicted by patriarchal society, and arguably by psychoanalysis. These include the separation of woman from man, woman from her own body and from sexual desire, subject from language, mother from son. Cixous demonstrates that these separations combine to construct the fundamental exile of woman (represented here by Jocasta) from society and language. The impossibility of remaining in a pre-Symbolic relationship with Oedipus condemns Jocasta to a fatal isolation:

Jocaste:  
J'étais nous. Je suis personne. Je suis ce désert...

Hier...  
Des joies m'enlèvent, me portent  
Par-dessus les terres, autour du monde.  
Il y a un mur, j'arrive,  
Un rire de feu sort de ma bouche,  
Le mur s'ouvre, je passe, entre les temps,  
J'avance, je parcours l'Espace sans fond...<sup>87</sup>

The last lines of this passage contain a spatial metaphor for Jocasta's impending death, but they also describe her ejection from the paradise of the past relationship with Oedipus, the communal 'nous'. Transcendence of the social and cultural restrictions which separate Jocasta from her desires results only in emptiness and eternal solitude. Cixous' two plays engage with separations of enormous cultural and mythical significance. Through the figures of Dora and Jocasta, Cixous shows how the female subject is exiled within, and by, dominant cultural discourses. But Cixous' later plays engage with narratives of real historical and political exile. La Prise de l'école de Madhubai<sup>88</sup> represents a transitional phase in which the exile of the female subject, as presented in Cixous' earlier plays, is combined with a pre-existing narrative of exile.



This narrative concerns an individual woman, not an entire people, but the political consequences are clear. Based on an Indian legend, the play centres on the relationship between two women, Sakundeva and Pandala. Sakundeva, the leader of a group of guerillas, is in hiding from government forces and has been in enforced exile from her home for many years. She returns to her village and to Pandala, a maternal prophet-figure, in order to decide whether to surrender on her own terms (which include the provision of a school for girls in the region) or whether to refuse all negotiations with the government. Sakundeva's life story is revealed through her conversation with Pandala, and is portrayed as a series of exclusions and losses inflicted by patriarchal society. As a female child she was excluded from formal education, to serve as virtual slave to her father, who abused her. She was then sold to a repugnant elderly relative who raped her.<sup>89</sup> She became an outlaw unable to remain in any one place for long, but her close relationship with Pandala represents an idyllic escape from censure and persecution. The escape from her past suffering is achieved through action and rebellion, but the end of the play offers little optimism as to the results of her struggle.

### **Reframing History: Legends of Exile**

I will discuss Cixous' next two plays in tandem as they raise similar problems connected with the employment of historical events to symbolise metaphorical narratives of exile and paradise lost. L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk Roi du Cambodge,<sup>90</sup> the first of Cixous' two 'historical' plays, deals with the turbulent period in Cambodian history from 1955 to 1979. A sense of the combination of the historical and the metaphorical is already apparent in the dedication to the Cambodian people: '...qui sont devant la mort et sous les canons, dans l'exil, des chefs-d'oeuvres de légèreté et fidélité.'<sup>91</sup> The play describes the struggle for control of Cambodia between the monarchy and the Khmer Rouge, within the context of the self-interested interventions of the United States and the Soviet Union, amongst



others. Prince Sihanouk struggles to preserve his people and culture, first against the Americans who are looking for strategic investments near Vietnam, and then against the Khmer Rouge. Cixous describes her main motives for choosing this subject: 'Pourquoi le Cambodge? Par souci pour ce qui est précaire',<sup>92</sup> and she expresses the wish to preserve Cambodian culture and national identity, to ensure it survives, and to reinscribe it in the present of the theatre.

It is clear, however, that the "Cambodian self" is inextricably linked to Cixous' own poetic agenda, which exploits historical and political narratives for purely metaphorical purposes. Both this play and L'Indiade have been criticised for their naive treatment of political figures and situations.<sup>93</sup> Indeed, the play presents a highly subjective view of Cambodia and of Sihanouk himself which may originate in part from the background to the play's conception. Having visited Cambodia in the seventies, Mnouchkine had wanted for some time to write a play on its recent history, and finally commissioned a play from Cixous on this subject. Another factor important to the tone of the play is Mnouchkine's work on Shakespeare's historical plays prior to the production of L'Histoire terrible... which encouraged her to embark upon historical narratives. Mnouchkine's enthusiasm for Shakespeare's portrayal of history, a History decided by the deeds of great men and feudal kings, is in stark contrast to the representation of history in earlier plays by the Théâtre du Soleil, as discussed in Chapter One. The combination of Cixous' desire to portray symbolic meanings through the representation of Cambodian history and Mnouchkine's romanticisation of many of the central figures result in a neglect of the political details of events:

... in the last analysis, it is Cixous herself who determines the final fate of Cambodia - the version that her audience carries away from the theatre. What she authorises is an account unified and closed...an account reduced for the Parisian stage and fatally over-simplified.<sup>94</sup>

One example of over-simplification is the problematic portrayal of a heroic Sihanouk, which is clearly influenced by Mnouchkine's 'disconcerting nostalgia for the feudal



concept of regal power'.<sup>95</sup> The grief resulting from separation in the play emerges from Sihanouk's personal situation. He spends much of the play in exile, travelling from one country to another in search of political and financial allies. He consistently presents his mission as the protection of his people and their culture, and his speeches are naive and paternalistic:

Sihanouk:  
O mon peuple. O mes enfants!...  
Ah! Mais où est mon peuple?  
Où va mon peuple?  
Et moi, où vais-je? Quand le retrouverai-je?...<sup>96</sup>

Cixous presents Sihanouk's separation from the Cambodian people as undermining his identity, an identity which is shown as coinciding simplistically with that of the Cambodian nation. Indeed, he laments his exile in terms of their loss:

Sihanouk:  
O mon Cambodge, on nous sépare, on m'enlève à toi,  
On t'exile de moi, on nous traite comme des esclaves.<sup>97</sup>

The whole of Cambodia is thus seen as exiled from Sihanouk, who describes himself in terms of a defining origin, unproblematically equated with the population. The Prologue to the second part of the play, entitled 'Deuxième Epoque', foregrounds this figurative exile and encourages a reading of the character of Sihanouk as the personification of the struggle and pain of his people:

le Choeur:  
Maintenant le Prince est à Pékin.  
Et le Cambodge est tout éperdu  
Il ne sait plus où il se trouve,  
Ou à Pékin ou à Phnom Penh,  
A l'intérieur ou en dehors de lui-même,  
Ni qui il est, ni de quel bord,  
Ni de quel genre, ni comment il s'appelle.  
...  
Ni dans quelle langue étrangère  
A quels dieux s'adresser, à quels maîtres.<sup>98</sup>



In the play Sihanouk is a highly poetic figure, presented through implicit and explicit analogies with Shakespearean characters.<sup>99</sup> He quotes from Shakespeare and from Western literature and this literariness distinguishes him from the cynical politicians who manipulate Cambodia for their own interests, but also aligns him with the West through the evocation of his Western education. He frequently makes highly clichéd statements: 'Les étoiles, je les adore! Elles sont les images divines de nos desirs',<sup>100</sup> which may be deliberately trite on Cixous' part. However, such statements are in fact reminiscent of Cixous' own style and indeed recurrent images from elsewhere in her work appear in Sihanouk's speeches. The ambiguity of Sihanouk's discourse and persona persists as he is presented as foolish and deluded yet deserving of our sympathy and superior to those around him. The play achieves no distance from Sihanouk's paternalistic and ultimately self-serving claims on the Cambodian people, and the portrayal of this powerful character as a holy fool trivialises the suffering of the ordinary population.

The theme of a paradise lost from which Sihanouk is exiled permeates the representation of Cambodia in the play. The country is presented as an abstract, eternal land, serving as a contrast to the war-mongering, exploitative, highly politicised nations with which it comes into contact. Sihanouk describes it in highly poetic and intertextual terms:

Mais je suis là, Sihanouk est là, le Cambodge existe! Nous sommes là, à la pointe de la grande Asie! Vous voyez? *là!* Le fer de lance de la neutralité, l'étendard blanc, ni bleu, ni rouge; le glorieux havre de toutes les fiertés, this other Eden, this demi-paradise, c'est nous, this happy breed of men, this little world, this blessed plot, cette forteresse qui s'est bâtie la Nature contre la contagion du monde et le bras de la guerre...

101

The presentation of Cambodia as Sihanouk's lost heroic idyll, and of Sihanouk as poet are combined in Sihanouk's response when asked what he will do in exile. He replies: 'J'écirai l'histoire de mon pays. Premier épisode: Paradise Lost.'<sup>102</sup> This enacts the final identification between Cixous and Sihanouk, united in the necessary exile of the



poet, but also suggests that Sihanouk, perhaps like Cixous, uses a real political exile as a metaphor for his own creative projects.

Cixous does not accord the Cambodian people, evicted from their towns and villages into the Khmer camps and suffering internal exile, the luxury of inscribing their loss in writing. Indeed, their exile is seen as secondary to that of the lost paternal ruler. However, we witness the meetings of a group of women who provide an alternative commentary on events. These women, La Reine Kossomak (Sihanouk's mother), Madame Mom Savay (a friend of the queen), Madame Khieu Samnol (shopkeeper and mother of Khieu Samphan, a member of the Khmer Rouge), and Madame Lamné (a Vietnamese woman), accept and overcome their differences in nationality, politics, religion and language whilst also keeping alive the memory of those who have died. The solidarity of the four women reaffirms life in the face of separation and death, and their exile is far more painful than Sihanouk's. However, they too describe Cambodia in idyllic terms. Khieu Samnol has the power to contact the dead and they recall Sihanouk's father, Sumarit. However, it is not possible to read the women as constructing an alternative definition of Cambodia to that of its ruler because they plead with Sumarit to contact his son and deliver the country.<sup>103</sup> Sumarit borrows a bicycle in order to cycle to Peking and see his son. The voyage is clearly unrealistic, but in addition to its surreal nature it unfortunately fetishises the 'Orient' through the image of the bicycle which carries Sumarit to Peking despite American tanks, bombers and Khmer Rouge patrols.

The play ends with a conversation between the group of women, now also dead, and Sumarit the dead king, and focuses on the pain of exile: 'Voici l'heure du Grand Exil. La douce terre du Cambodge n'est plus le pays des Khmers.'<sup>104</sup> The Khmer language, described as 'notre source, notre liberté, notre terre sublime, notre survie, notre mémoire et notre fierté'<sup>105</sup> is suggested as a means of maintaining their links with the identity of Cambodia. The ultimate suggestion that language is a refuge for exiles echoes Cixous' aesthetics of exile discussed earlier in this chapter. However, hope for the future is associated not with political development and resolution in



Cambodia, but with the perpetuation of an eternal, immutable vision of Cambodia expressed by Sumarit, the dead king: 'Et lorsqu'un jour enfin une mince ouverture se fera dans la haute paroi de l'exil, alors nos descendants s'élanceront vers l'éternel Cambodge...' <sup>106</sup>

L'Indiade ou L'Inde de leurs rêves <sup>107</sup> must be seen as the culmination of Cixous' employment of historical scenarios of separation and exile to represent metaphorical exiles. She selects a historical instance of separation - the partition of India - to symbolise intersubjective relations and attitudes to the other. The play treats a traumatic period of Indian history, the struggle for independence, leading to the assassination of Gandhi in 1948, and the partition of India which led to death and displacement for whole communities. Partition is described in dramatic terms in Cixous' introduction to the play: 'Tout est séparé, population, villages, fleuves, communautés...En un jour dix millions d'êtres sont déracinés.' <sup>108</sup> The first character we encounter in the play is Haridasi, a nomadic Bengali woman, who provides a prologue to the play in the form of her mystical evocation of a paradise lost. The very fact that Haridasi has no land of her own and no territorial claims aligns her with Gandhi and spiritual belonging, rather than geographical division and political allegiance. Her evocation depicts India as a site where once even the most fundamental divisions did not exist:

Haridasi:  
Moi? Moi je suis Haridasi.  
Mon village: L'Inde entière.  
Tout homme est mon frère.  
Toute femme est ma soeur.  
Qu'est-ce que je fais ici?  
Je suis ici me demandant comment l'Inde a commencé.  
Quand il n'y avait ni Anglais ni hindou ni musulman ni masculin ni féminin  
D'où vient ce pays, je me demande... <sup>109</sup>

This clear mythologisation of India as land of undifferentiated origin replicates the awkward combination of the mythical and the historical seen in L'Histoire terrible...



As in Cixous' portrayal of Sihanouk, in L'Indiade ou l'Inde de leurs rêves certain characters' experiences of exile are foregrounded, and these characters are clearly associated with the poet-figure in Cixous' aesthetics. Gandhi and the poet, Mohammed Iqbal, express the pain of exile and the loss of an authentic and whole India most vividly. Iqbal describes his experience of exile in a speech that recalls the mood of Sihanouk's statements:

Je suis dans mon pays à mille kilomètres de moi-même. L'exil est pénétrant. Il imprègne ma langue, mon goût, mes vêtements. Me voilà dehors, moi et mes poèmes...<sup>110</sup>

Such speeches can be read as Cixous' projections of her own experience of exile and her construction of the creative self. It is implied that poems help both to heal and to record the pain of this exile by serving as a constant companion to it.

We are introduced to the representatives of the political and religious groups involved in the negotiation of partition, yet the issues at the core of Cixous' play are resolutely metaphorical. Gandhi dominates the play in a manner similar to, although less politically problematic, than Sihanouk's in L'Histoire terrible..., and is a saintly figure who struggles to unite the groups and avoid partition. Gandhi's attitude to the other is contrasted with that of those around him. He advocates love for the other rather than definitions of difference based on political and religious alliances, and values cooperation and integration more than personal ambition and political gain. Mountbatten's description of Gandhi as a saintlike but politically impotent figure, could be seen to construct a reductive and negative division between the spiritual and the political:

Mountbatten:

Je pense à lui [Gandhi], antique déité sans dents, vieille mère sans mamelles, dernière preuve de l'existence des dieux et de leur impuissance à faire admettre leurs prophètes dans notre siècle politique...<sup>111</sup>



However, Cixous' play does not encourage a critique of such views, indeed its mythologisation of India and the figure of Gandhi serve to implicitly support them. The extent to which Cixous employs the narrative of the partition of India as vehicle for warnings about the harmfulness of fundamental attitudes to the other which refuse to accept difference, causing the fundamental separation of self and other which Cixous challenges throughout her writing, dominates the play. Shiach suggests that:

Perhaps this text can be better understood and appreciated as a text about *our* dreams: the versions of otherness we need in order to sustain political and cultural struggle, and the possibility of an identity based on the recognition of difference.<sup>112</sup>

Thus Cixous' use of the trope of exile and separation develops in L'Indiade ou L'Inde de leurs rêves to achieve an association between the poet-figure (Gandhi) and the advocacy of non-excluding representations of difference. The partition of India serves to symbolise what she perceives as the prevalent conception and exclusion of the other which obstructs positive intersubjective relationships. However, Shiach's assertion that such interpretation leads to a better comprehension of the play overlooks the necessity of engaging with other important consequences of Cixous' employment of these historical narratives.

### Identity and Orientalism

Cixous' symbolic use of historical events is problematic. The portrayal of Cambodian history coexists uneasily with Cixous' employment of the narrative to illustrate her concepts of exile and the role of the other. Indeed, the combination of Cixous' simplification of events, subjective portrayal of central protagonists and use of poetic language serve to transform history into legend. As Conley remarks:

The plays take place in spheres of a historical sublime and not in those of so-called realism. The desire to turn quotidian historical struggle into the



sublime has been criticised as naive idealism. Cixous does aestheticise poverty and misery in the name of impoverishment as real riches, or of spiritual wealth as true wealth....the poetic picture of Asia that disengages itself is mostly couched in a resonantly Western voice.<sup>113</sup>

In developping Conley's point I will demonstrate that the portrayals of Cambodia in L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk, roi du Cambodge and India in L'Indiade ou l'Inde de leurs rêves are both open to further criticism in the context of Orientalism. Orientalism is a term first used by Edward Said to describe the discourse through which the West defines and represents other cultures.<sup>114</sup> Such discourse asserts the Western viewpoint as the self-reflexive origin of knowledge and views other cultures as eternal and unchangeable. This approach is exemplified in Cixous' introduction to L'Indiade ou l'Inde de leurs rêves:

Le trait inouï de cette histoire, c'est qu'en plein 20ème siècle ont vécu près de nous des êtres qui appartenaient à des époques spirituelles révolues pour nous depuis siècles et millénaires. Bibliques et comparables à Abraham sont des hommes comme Gandhi et Abdul Ghaffar Khan, qui ont pour interlocuteurs également les hommes et leurs Dieux. Et comme ils se conforment dans leur vie terrestre à la loi céleste, ils sont parfois aussi incompréhensibles que les étoiles...O âge d'or de la loyauté et du respect!<sup>115</sup>

The suggestion of a pre-colonial essentialised Indian history and identity, and the isolation of the figures of Gandhi and Ghaffar Khan from their political contexts are clearly problematic. The poetic speeches of Mountbatten also serve to foreground an allegorical view of events and suggests a Western omniscience which reinforces colonial tropes:

Mountbatten:  
O India, grosse de tempêtes et de merveilles,  
Tu attends le coup en tremblant  
Comme une bête qui ne sait pas son sort.  
Permetts-moi de passer ma dernière nuit d'innocence avec toi...  
C'est par de telles nuits que dans les pièces de Shakespeare  
s'embrassaient les amours condamnées.  
C'est par de telles nuits que les rois devinaient la défaite, les reines



sentaient venir la mort....

Haute nuit, qui balances comme des branches d'acacias tes milliards de lustres au-dessus de l'Enfer et du Paradis<sup>116</sup>

The replication of the Hegelian dialectic in which the self is defined in terms of a binary opposition to the other is fundamental to the mechanisms of orientalism as the relationship between coloniser and colonised is naturalised. It is notable that whilst Cixous actively resists the determination of her own identity by discourses of nationality and ethnicity, she imposes these categorisations upon the characters in her plays. Cixous' work ostensibly aims to undermine exactly these types of identity construction. In La Jeune Née she condemns the binary construction of difference which predicates that: 'L'autre n'est là que pour être réapproprié, repris, détruit en tant qu'autre'.<sup>117</sup> But, paradoxically her plays reinforce such structures on several levels.

In an article written in 1992 Spivak moves towards a positive reconsideration of some aspects of Cixous' work; however, she regards Cixous as following classical European romanticism in these plays:

When she [Cixous] writes her Indian and Indonesian plays, her take on the complexity and hybridity of so-called postcolonial nations is shaky...Her work with the Theatre of the Sun can unfortunately be seen as perpetuating a kind of inspired, too admiring ethnography.<sup>118</sup>

I would argue that Thomas' critique, discussed earlier in this chapter, of the 'slippages between universalised western metaphors and their colonial and orientalist significance'<sup>119</sup> which she detects in La Jeune Née can clearly be extended to a critique of these plays and continues to undermine Cixous' discourse of alterity.

This critique of L'Indiade ou l'Inde de leurs rêves is supported by Mnouchkine's comments on the origins of the play:

L'Inde, c'est si vaste que notre prétention n'est jamais que de traduire une parcelle de l'Inde, magnifique et terrible. Le Cambodge, c'était un moineau broyé entre deux hippopotames. Là, c'est un troupeau d'animaux, furieux, doux, royaux, misérables, dont nous comprenons les rêves.<sup>120</sup>



The essays which accompany the published text demarcate the context in which Cixous desires the texts to be understood. However, her strategic use of India as metaphor is difficult to justify and her descriptions of an essentialised Indian self are indistinguishable from traditional colonial discourse:

... tout indien est interlocuteur personnel de l'humanité....les indiens, qu'ils soient probes ou hâbleurs, sont d'une merveilleuse franchise.<sup>121</sup>

The title of the play, L'Indiade..., suggesting an epic poem, further encourages a treatment of India as an allegory or symbol allowing the exploration of other themes. Cixous' description elevates Gandhi to the status of saint and indeed the play focuses on the India envisioned by Gandhi, and the struggle between conflicting abstract values and economies of difference, rather than on the actual political details of events. Anne-Marie Picard describes three main strands within the play: a historiographic dimension, in which we relive the historic events; a theological aspect, as we are invited to speculate on elements of the divine in human kind, and an ontographical element. Picard describes this third strand in greater detail:

L'être-indien se constitue sous nos yeux dans une réponse à la question: "Où suis-je? Que suis-je?" L'ontos est alors un être dans une cartographie...le je-indien est impensable sans la nomination de soi effectuée par l'autre: Hindou, Musulman, Punjabi, Bengali...le nom de l'Autre me nomme. La territorialisation me constitue dans une négativité sanglante: où est l'autre, je ne suis pas.<sup>122</sup>

I would concur with Picard's definitions, but argue that this third strand dominates the play to the extent that it virtually erases the other two and ultimately negates the historical context and content of the play.

An orientalist critique of these plays can be extended to the representation of different times and spaces (so important to concepts of exile, real and figurative) in the



context of the production details of L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk roi du Cambodge and L'Indiade ou L'Inde de leurs rêves. Both plays were staged at the Cartoucherie which was decorated and rearranged to suggest Cambodian and Indian environments respectively. As with many of Mnouchkine's productions at the Cartoucherie, the actors served at the bar and in the café in full costume, and the building was decorated with maps and traditional images of the two countries. The principle of assuring contact between actors and audience to demystify the structure of theatre has, however, different consequences in the context of these two plays. The actors in Indian and Cambodian costume can be seen to reinforce stereotypes of the servant in relation to the Western audience, and could seem offensive. The attempt to evoke the environment of the country in question beyond the defined stage area represents, according to Kiernander, the creation of Asia as the normal space and the marginalisation of the normally dominant West, thus enacting an apparent reversal of orientalism.<sup>123</sup> However, this reading plays down the inequality in cultural status of the two discourses, and a combination of the contained nature of the space and the presentation of the orient as spectacle encourages comparison with the limited representations found in theme parks, rather than questioning the audience's relationship to the space of the other.

The metaphorical use of 'India' becomes extreme as it seems it can then be used to signify anything which Cixous views as representative of a positive approach to difference. This includes her generic adoption of the theatre, as she states 'L'Inde entière est un théâtre'<sup>124</sup> and asserts that we as audience can rediscover this undefined and mystical quality within ourselves: 'Le théâtre peut nous rendre notre vraie dimension, nos profondeurs, nos hauteurs, nos Indes intérieures'.<sup>125</sup> In both the production details and Cixous' comments, the space and identity of India is not maintained in its difference but framed and appropriated as an extension of ourselves, as audience and subjects of an orientalist spectacle.

India and its partition were intended to become an extended metaphor for the



dangers of dominant divisive structures of subjectivity. The allegorisation of difference leads, however, to the repression of real differences:

... [The *Indiade*'s] avoidance of the burning question of alterity: a sexed, raced, social and economic alterity which is diffused into pretty clouds during the escape to the "platonian" skies of light blue pantheism...Differences are made but mere phenomena, incidents due to chance, variable forms animated by the divine will.<sup>126</sup>

As a consequence of this, the figurative exile which Cixous represents through the allegorisation of Cambodian and Indian history undermines her project of building parallels between intersubjective and historical processes, and ultimately represses the real differences existing within that history:

What becomes of history in this play [*L'Histoire terrible...*] is what becomes of the feminine subject in patriarchal discourse. Colonised, expropriated, made up and over into the mirror of more powerful others.<sup>127</sup>

An alternative to the figurative exile, that of each human subject from the other, which Cixous perceives as enforced through Western binary concepts of difference, is represented in the solidarity of the diverse group of Cambodian women and Gandhi's profound opposition (presented as founded in spiritual not political beliefs) to partition. Such allegories project Cixous' intellectual debates on to political and historical situations and result, paradoxically, in the reinforcement of a movement associated with colonial discourse, one which places the Western intellectual's crisis of self-reflexivity in opposition to an uncomplicated other identity. As Spivak comments in a further discussion of orientalist discourse:

... the theoretical problems relate only to the person who knows. The person who *knows* has all of the problems of selfhood. The person who is *known*, somehow seems not to have a problematic self....only the dominant self can be problematic; the self of the other is authentic without a problem...This is very frightening.<sup>128</sup>



Exile is seen to be a core experience of those identified as poet-figures within the plays, yet on an extra-diegetic level. Cixous' poetic identity (defined through association with these poet-figures) is ultimately constructed through the essentialisation of the traditional oriental other.

## Exile and Writing

The plays I shall now examine mark an important progression in the concept of exile in Cixous' theatre. Until the late Eighties her plays contain characters implicated in various situations of exile who, I would argue, are associated with the poet figure. The two plays I shall now discuss foreground the explicit relationship between exile and the poet in Cixous' aesthetics.

Voile noire, voile blanche<sup>129</sup> focuses on the Russian poet Anna Akhmatova and her struggle to preserve her poetry during the Stalinist persecution of 'anti-Soviet' writers. The play evokes exile and separation on several levels. Firstly there is the separation of the living from the dead, and the desire to sustain those who have died through the power of memory. Cixous constructs a parallel assurance of remembrance through the play itself, as Catherine MacGillivray comments in her preface to the translation: 'Cixous documents the landscape of twentieth century history in order to provide poetic refuge for events and peoples in danger of being forgotten.'<sup>130</sup> Akhmatova and Nadezhda Mandel'shtam are presented, as were Gandhi and Sihanouk, as living on a separate and higher plane than those around them. Their lives revolve around poetry, and they struggle to preserve censored poems and the memory of poets destroyed by the regime. The themes of memory and loss are foregrounded throughout the play, alongside the power of poetry to record and counter that loss.<sup>131</sup>

The list of characters at the beginning of the text includes some who do not appear and divides them all into two categories, *Les Absents-présents* and *Les Présents-absents*, thus inscribing the basis of exile and constructing a community which persists



despite death and separation. Osip Mandel'shtam, Nadezhda's husband and poet, and Nikolai and Lev Gumilev, Akhmatova's poet-husband and son, all of whom were imprisoned or had been killed at the time this narrative is set, are listed in the first category. They are physically absent, yet their spiritual presence is felt throughout the play, as Nadezhda Mandel'shtam and Akhmatova constantly refer to them and their work. The only figure in the second list is Boris Pasternak, presumably judged by Cixous as a traitor, as he is presented in the play as not having done all he could to support his contemporaries.

The play presents a clear example of the intersection of history and poetry within one narrative, and dramatises the survival of self and writing despite exclusion, isolation and death. The status of internal emigré and the aesthetic exile of the poet who is refused publication, access to readership, and public recognition, are presented as both powerful and painful. Akhmatova is excluded from publishing and has to translate the work of others to earn a living. The role of the poet as public conscience is thus denied, and an episode in which Akhmatova misplaces her identity card is used by Cixous to symbolise the loss of identity as poet which results from this.<sup>132</sup>

Poetry provides resistance to loss. Akhmatova's friends ensure that her poems are retained in their memories until they can be safely committed to paper and publication becomes possible, offering the 'éternité du papier' as consolation for the grief suffered in their own lifetimes.<sup>133</sup> Akhmatova reflects on the dangers of relying on the memories of others:

Qui garde qui je ne sais pas. Nos poèmes, interdits de livres, errent dans  
les rues comme des ombres sans lyre. Certains leur donnent asile.  
Certains les vouent à l'exil.<sup>134</sup>

The importance of inscription is the focus of the very last speeches of the play as Akhmatova and Nadezhda address the audience directly:

Akhmatova:  
(Au public)  
Vous qui vivez plus tard, avez-vous entendu parler d'Osip et de sa  
femme ici présente? Et d'Anna Akhmatova?



J'aimerais tant le savoir. Il faudrait mourir, sauter un siècle. et revenir.

Nadezhda:

Ou recevoir un télégramme de l'avenir. Poèmes bien arrivés. Signé: le rivage du 21ème siècle.

Akhmatova:

Et dites-moi, vous qui vivez plus tard, savez-vous qui fut vraiment Mandelstam? Akhmatova? Et Pasternak? Goumilev? Tabidzé? Tsvetaeva?

Savez-vous qui d'entre nous fut loyal, qui fut trahi, qui fut traître, qui vit s'ouvrir les portes d'air? Cela se voit-il plus tard dans nos poèmes?

L'Histoire de la Vérité a-t-elle commencé?<sup>135</sup>

Cixous again asserts the power of writing, in this instance that of her own play, to counter exclusion and to ensure that specific figures are not forgotten. The inscription of loss constitutes both the main theme and the proposed function of the play. Cixous suggests the power of writing (both Akhmatova's and her own) to transcend the multiple exiles and separations presented in the play, and it is the role of the poet which is foregrounded rather than the structure of exile.

The role of the poet in countering loss and separation also constitutes the central theme of L'Histoire (qu'on ne connaîtra jamais).<sup>136</sup> This play is based on the Scandinavian legends 'Edda' and 'The Song of the Niebelungen', which were transcribed by the Icelandic poet Snorri Sturlusson in the thirteenth century, although the 'Song of the Niebelungen' is arguably more familiar in the form of Wagner's opera. The narrative of the Niebelungen concerns the manipulation of the relationship between Sigfrid and Gunther, the rulers of two neighbouring kingdoms. Sigfrid meets and instantly falls in love with Brunhild, but at the court of Gunther (who wants to marry Brunhild) he is tricked into drinking a potion which erases all memory of her. Gunther marries Brunhild and Sigfrid marries Gunther's sister, Kriemhild. The narrative centres on a visit by Sigfrid and Kriemhild to Gunther's court and the emotional and political tensions which result.

Cixous maintains this central narrative, but radically alters its function through the introduction of Snorri Sturlusson, the poet. In the first scene of the play the gods



order Sturlusson to bring them a story from the world below, demanding a narrative that ends in revenge, violence and death. Sturlusson is to act as messenger both to the gods and the audience and is invested with the power to divert events. He can prevent the traditional closure of this narrative.

The concept of exile and its importance, in Cixousian aesthetics, to the process of writing are revealed through Barout, with whom Sturlusson is associated throughout the play. Barout, a symbolic wandering rabbi<sup>137</sup> represents the Jew and the exiled in the play, and is identified with the poet-figure through his explicit Jewishness and his sympathy with exiles: 'J'ai rêvé tous les rêves de tous les exilés.'<sup>138</sup> Barout accompanies the poet on his search for the truth of the narrative, and often has greater knowledge or understanding of events than Sturlusson. The strong identification between the two characters is marked consistently throughout the play. Their observations on the meeting of the two queens, Brunhild and Kriemhild, display this theme:

Barout:

Entre vous et moi, Snorri Sturlusson, il m'a semblé entendre passer entre ces femmes une obscure musique de compassion.

Snorri:

Entre nous, Barout, j'ai cru l'entendre aussi.<sup>139</sup>

The ambiguity of Snorri's response allows us to assume a "obscure musique de compassion" passing between him and Barout also. As Snorri decides to reject the gods' demands for a vengeful narrative and to attempt a peaceful resolution, it is to Barout that he turns:

Snorri:

C'est ce que je veux faire  
Rabbin, veux tu m'aider à recommencer le monde?

Barout:

Si Dieu veut.<sup>140</sup>

Ultimately, however, Snorri is tainted by other narratives. He is about to depart,



regarding his work as finished. but his manuscripts vanish:

Snorri:  
Mes manuscrits! On m'a volé mon récit!  
Au secours! Mon oeuvre c'est ma chair, on m'a volé mes organes, mon  
coeur, mon cerveau!

Arminius:  
Regarde le rabbin, il est assis là-bas, devant le feu  
Qu-a-t-il donc entre les mains?

Snorri:                     —  
Lui!  
(Il se jette sur Barout et le frappe)  
Rends moi ça! Voleur! Traître!<sup>141</sup>

Barout dies claiming his innocence and shaming the poet:

Barout:  
Quel dommage! Nous aurions pu faire quelque chose de beau ensemble!!  
Pour moi c'est fini!  
Dans ton livre, n'oublie pas Barout.<sup>142</sup>

Barout's death is presented as a further injustice against Jews, the innocent victims of the workings of "L'Histoire" (importantly both History and the narrative) and it also represents the self-mutilation of the poet, since Sturlusson kills part of himself - his conscience.<sup>143</sup> Sturlusson's failure to recognise his need for Barout and thus the fundamental role of exile in writing brings about his demise.

Another element of the play which engages with the power of memory and the dangers of forgetting concerns Brunhild's memory of and desire for Sigfrid, which is represented in the play by a song which is repeated at several points.<sup>144</sup> Brunhild describes this song which remains powerful but unattainable and associates herself with Barout in her question to him about exile:

Brunhild:  
Est-ce que ça existe aussi fort que la Réalité, et tout semblable en chair,  
en terre en éléments? Et où l'on croit vivre heureux dans un pays  
semblable à un pays natal?<sup>145</sup>



She becomes increasingly distressed as the power of memory and recognition of loss undermines the present:

Brunhild:

Ni présent, ni passé, où vivre?

Il faut oublier, trancher la vie au collet, faire comme s'il n'y avait jamais eu la vie, trancher le morceau vivant et recoudre le corps, comme si jamais...

Aujourd'hui je me retire de cette scène, avec ma blessure inconnue pour histoire.

...

Le miroir qui me souriait s'est brisé. Je suis sans visage.

...

Après notre disparition, vous aussi vous survivrez.

Cette histoire va continuer.

Oubliez-moi. Vous m'avez oubliée?<sup>146</sup>

This speech contains striking resonances of that made by Jocasta in Le Nom d'Oedipe. Chant du corps interdit, and discussed earlier in this chapter. Brunhild's lost paradise is symbolised by the song, and the denial of its validity leaves her in a similar state of lost identity and isolation, expressed in the speech quoted above in temporal rather than spatial terms. The centrality of the theme of loss and separation is described in the programme: 'Une étrangeté, une incertitude, un oubli douloureux pèsent sur les coeurs des personnages.' The role of the poet in L'Histoire reflects Cixous' purpose in writing the play, namely investigating the role of the poet, attempting to represent loss and inscribing exile. Brunhild disappears because her loss (of Sigfrid's love) cannot be recognised; this censorship dissolves her identity.

## Exile and the Theatre

In L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk, roi du Cambodge the Chorus states: 'Cette époque est déchiquetée, cette nation est mise en pièces. Le théâtre a mission de les rassembler...'.<sup>147</sup> clearly reflecting Cixous' belief in the theatre as positive force, and associating exile with the theatre. She has defined the role



of writing as formulating a positive response to loss through the construction of an alternative site which can compensate for the pain of an, albeit figurative, exile. Cixous claims that this relationship lies at the very heart of her own poetic identity:

... l'exil fait terre/taire. Mais je ne veux pas que l'exil fasse taire, je veux que l'exil fasse terre, je veux que cet exil qui est en général producteur de silence, d'extinction de voix, d'essoufflement, produise son contraire. Je sens que cette tension, ce rapport contradictoire entre l'exil et la terre, est quelque chose pour moi de fondateur, mais je ne le sens qu'après. C'est tellement mon sol que je suis dessus sans m'en rendre compte.<sup>148</sup>

Cixous' adopts the theatre as the genre in which intersubjective relationships can be differently experienced, by writer, actor and audience, and in which the other can be accepted outside traditional binary oppositions of self and other.<sup>149</sup> Her strategic use of the theatre in the search for a mode of writing in which difference is best expressed is especially relevant to the theme of exile, indeed her own experience of writing for the theatre is expressed in spatial terms: 'Au théâtre on ne peut arriver qu'avec un moi qui s'est presque volatisé, qui s'est transformé en espace.'<sup>150</sup> The motivation behind Cixous' writing for the theatre is also spatially represented as she expresses a desire to become: 'le lieu, l'occasion de l'autre.'<sup>151</sup>

Within Cixous' aesthetics, if theatre allows the representation of the other then it can, by implication, both represent and resolve figurative exile. The theatre can be seen as a strategic means of embodying many of the themes of exile, through Cixous' emphasis upon its inherent generic capacity to represent differences, languages and identities. Theatre, writing for the theatre, and experiencing the theatre as spectator are perceived by Cixous as encouraging an acceptance of the other, the unfamiliar, the non-same. Indeed the theatrical performance depends upon a dialogic situation which celebrates presence and multivoicedness. Nicole Ward-Jouve claims that theatre gives freedom to the expression of repressed voices:

Through theatre, the voice that was once threatened by hysteria, that had to articulate itself out of its inward-looking state, becomes many voices



talking to many. From the self-knowledge grown out of a long struggle against the forces of death in the body, in the psyche, is born the capacity to imagine and body forth the struggle between the forces of life and the forces of death at large in the world.<sup>152</sup>

An association can also be constructed between Cixous' articulations of a paradise lost and the theatre. She states that '... le Paradis c'est arriver à vivre le présent'<sup>153</sup> and this is a specific quality which she attributes to the theatre:

Le théâtre est (au) présent. Doit toujours être au présent. C'est sa chance. A chaque moment le présent éclate...Au théâtre le public n'en sait pas plus que le personnage sur lui-même. Personne ne précède.<sup>154</sup>

If the theatre is suggested as a form capable of both representing and resolving temporal and spatial structures of exile, it is arguably a strategically appropriate form in which to represent the exiles discussed in this chapter. However, Cixous' claim for the appropriateness of the theatrical form is undermined by the reductive representations of the other which problematise her thematic use of exile in her plays on Cambodia and India.

The plays of Tsvetaeva and Cixous discussed in this chapter reveal the increasingly central role played by the concept of exile in their respective representations of poetic identity in the theatre. The poet-figures identified in their plays are implicated in a range of situations of exile and exclusion and therefore the dramatisation of the poetic self (although differently imagined by Cixous and Tsvetaeva) involves the concept of exile and the search for a paradise lost.

Tsvetaeva's poet-figures are haunted by a utopian site which they cannot reach and which stands in stark contrast to their immediate environment. These utopias are at first represented as temporal (the eighteenth century) or as spatially defined (the snowstorm). However, the alternative site becomes increasingly associated solely with creativity and poetic identity, and the exile of the poet in mundane reality can only be



overcome by a sacrificial transcendence of worldly existence. In Tsvetaeva's theatre the poet does not gain creative inspiration from exile but struggles unsuccessfully to resolve the separation of two mutually exclusive realms before leaving the scene for other unrepresentable spaces.

The poet-figures involved in scenarios of exile in Cixous' early theatre replicate this pattern. Jocasta and Dora remain excluded from their environments and do not successfully create alternative worlds through writing. However, as the poet-figure becomes more explicit in Cixous' plays, so the association of poetic identity with a positive, creative exploitation of exile and exclusion becomes stronger. The poets in her later plays are able to represent loss through their writing and so assert territories and communities of their own which transcend boundaries of geography, time and even mortality.

Therefore in addition to the use of theatre to represent exile, the form becomes the generic paradise for the expression of Cixous' own poetic identity. Tsvetaeva and Cixous engage with the space of the theatre as ground or site in which to give voice to the exiled or marginal characters in their plays and to develop the presentation of the poet as exile, in the creative displacement of the theatre. It is useful to return to a definition of exile: 'If exile dis-places an individual, the reaction will be to try to replace or re-locate the self.'<sup>155</sup> Tsvetaeva's and Cixous' theatre performs a relocation of the representation of poetic identity into the theatre, constructing a parallel of the displacement which is central to both writers' conceptions of poetic identity itself.



- (1) Paul Tabori, The Anatomy of Exile: A Semantic and Historical Study (London: Harrap, 1972).
- (2) *ibid.*, p. 19.
- (3) Hélène Cixous, 'De la scène de l'Inconscient à la scène de l'Histoire' in Hélène Cixous, chemins d'une écriture, ed. Françoise van Rossum-Guyon and Myriam Diaz-Diocaretz, pp. 15-34, p. 16.
- (4) Chapter Two contains discussion of the importance and mythologisation of Cixous' multilingual childhood.
- (5) Hélène Cixous and Mireille Calle-Gruber, Hélène Cixous: Photos de racines (Paris: des femmes, 1994), p. 196.
- (6) *ibid.*, p. 206.
- (7) See Marie Cardinal, Au pays de mes racines (Paris: Grasset, 1980). Even the title can be contrasted with Cixous' and Calle-Gruber's Hélène Cixous: Photos de racines which asserts a metaphorical framing of the exploration of identity.
- (8) Sue Thomas, 'Difference, Intersubjectivity and Agency in the Colonial and Decolonizing Spaces of Hélène Cixous's *Sorties*', Hypatia, 9 (1994), pp. 53-69, p. 66.
- (9) *ibid.*, p. 61.
- (10) Hélène Cixous, 'De la scène de l'Inconscient à la scène de l'Histoire', p. 16.
- (11) These associations form the starting point for Cixous' text Vivre l'Orange (Paris: des femmes, 1979) which focuses on the role of writing in constructions of subjectivity.
- (12) Hélène Cixous, 'De la scène de l'Inconscient à la scène de l'Histoire', p. 16.
- (13) It is clearly essential to avoid a conflation of real and figurative exiles. This point is further developed in Winifred Woodhull, 'Exile', Yale French Studies, 82 (1993), pp. 7-24, p. 8.
- (14) Hélène Cixous, 'De la scène de l'Inconscient à la scène de l'Histoire', p. 19.
- (15) Hélène Cixous, 'Je suis plutôt un être de bord', La Quinzaine littéraire, 532 (16-31 May 1989), p. 53.
- (16) For further biographical details of these periods see Viktoria Schweitzer, Tsvetaeva (London: Harvill Press, 1993), pp. 219-271.
- (17) Marina Tsvetaeva 'Poet i vremia' in Sochineniia, II (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia Literatura, 1988), pp. 357-374, p. 363. The translation is 'The Poet and Time' in Art in the Light of Conscience, trans. Angela Livingstone, (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1992), pp. 94-95.
- (18) Marina Tsvetaeva, 'Toska po rodine' in Sochineniia, I, pp. 303-304.
- (19) Michael Seidel, Exile and the Narrative Imagination (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986), p. xi.
- (20) 'Non-returner (nevozvrashchenets)' is the term normally used for those who left



Russia as a consequence of the 1917 Revolution.

(21) Marina Tsvetaeva, 'Poet i vremia (The Poet and Time)' in Sochineniia. II. pp. 363-364.

(22) This is a recurrent theme in Marina Tsvetaeva, 'Stikhi k Bloku', in Sochineniia. I. pp. 65-74, notably the sixth poem in the cycle, p. 68.

(23) Hélène Cixous, unpublished seminar archives, seminar of 29.4/1989.

(24) This particular term can be found in 'Poema Kontsa (Poem of the End)', Marina Tsvetaeva, Sochineniia, I, p. 436.

(25) Marina Tsvetaeva, 'Moi Pushkin (My Pushkin)' in Izbrannaia Proza v dvukh tomakh, II, pp. 249-279, p. 250. An adoption of blackness as a metaphor for creativity can also be linked to Tsvetaeva's description in 'Mat' i muzyka (Mother and Music)' of her aesthetically formative experience of seeing her reflection from within the depths of her mother's polished black piano.

(26) Hélène Cixous, La Jeune Née, p. 126. As Thomas points out, Cixous is engaging with Freud's use of colonial discourse to describe female sexuality, but the validity of her use of the terms also remains ambivalent. Sue Thomas, 'Difference, Intersubjectivity, and Agency in the Colonial and Decolonizing Spaces of Hélène Cixous's "Sorties"', p. 61.

(27) Hélène Cixous, La Jeune Née, p. 132.

(28) *ibid.*, p. 132.

(29) Hélène Cixous, 'De la scène de l'Inconscient à la scène de l'Histoire', p. 19.

(30) It must be stressed that neither Cixous nor Tsvetaeva refers to any specific national language but rather to an abstract language of poetry.

(31) Marina Tsvetaeva, 'Poet i Vremia' in Sochineniia, I, p. 364.

(32) These letters have been published in English as Letters Summer 1926. Correspondence between Pasternak, Tsvetayeva, Rilke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), trans. and ed. Margaret Wettlin and Walter Arndt. Much of Tsvetaeva's correspondence with other writers has survived and has been published.

(33) I. Vitins, 'Escape from Earth: A Study of the Four Elements and Their Associations in Marina Cvetaeva's Work,' Unpublished DPhil Diss. University of California, 1974, p. 24.

(34) Hélène Cixous, Jours de l'an (Paris: des femmes, 1990), p. 212.

(35) Hélène Cixous, 'De la scène de l'inconscient à la scène de l'Histoire', p. 21.

(36) Hélène Cixous and Mireille Calle-Gruber, Hélène Cixous: Photos de racines, p. 207.

(37) The seminar reading list for Spring 1994 included Ingeborg Bachmann, Jacques Derrida, Thomas Bernard, Clarice Lispector, and Marina Tsvetaeva.

(38) Hélène Cixous, 'Je suis plutôt un être de bord', La Quinzaine littéraire, 532 (16-31 May 1989), p. 10.

(39) Verena Aldermatt Conley, Hélène Cixous (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester



Wheatsheaf Press, 1992), pp. 130-131.

(40) Hélène Cixous, L'Exil de James Joyce ou l'art du remplacement (Paris: Grasset, 1968).

(41) Hélène Cixous, Manne aux Mandelstams aux Mandelas (Paris: des femmes, 1988).

(42) *ibid.*, p. 7.

(43) Hélène Cixous, quoted in Rossum-Guyon. 'Deux hommes, deux pays, deux continents', La Quinzaine littéraire, 513 (15-31 July 1988), p. 42.

(44) Hélène Cixous, 'Poesie e(s)t Politique?', Des Femmes en Mouvement (30 November 1979), pp. 29-33, p. 30.

(45) Hélène Cixous, 'De la scène de l'Inconscient à la scène de l'Histoire', p. 22.

(46) Marina Tsvetaeva, 'Dom u starogo Pimena (The House at Old Pimen)' in Izbrannaia Proza v dvukh tomakh, II, pp. 215-246, p. 219.

(47) A useful summary of such usage is contained in the introduction to Maggie Humm, Border Traffic: Strategies of Contemporary Women Writers (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1991). Another excellent anthology of critical essays which focuses on women writers and exile explores the use of concepts of exile and expatriation by women writers to represent externalisations of internal exile: Women Writing in Exile ed. Mary Broe and Angela Ingram. (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1989).

(48) *ibid.*, p. 1.

(49) Hélène Cixous, 'Difficult Joys' in The Body and the Text. Hélène Cixous, Reading and Teaching, ed. Helen Wilcox, Keith McWatters, Ann Thompson and Linda R. Williams, (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), p. 12.

(50) Harold Bloom, The Anxiety of Influence (London, 1975).

(51) Bloom asserts that the poet is strongly influenced or repressed by a father-predecessor poet. The later poet perceives himself as rival to his predecessor and attempts to rework the latter's poems. Only the 'strong' poet can break away sufficiently to create his own poetic identity, but all poetry can be seen as revision of earlier works.

(52) Hélène Cixous, Entre l'Ecriture (Paris: des femmes, 1986), p. 24.

(53) Что же мне делать, слепцу и пасынку,  
В мире, где каждый и отч и зряч,  
Где по анафемам, как по насыпям,  
Страсти! - Где насморком  
Назван - плач!

Что же мне делать, ребром и промыслом  
Певчей! - Как провод! загар! Сибирь!  
По наважденьям своим - как по мосту!  
С их невесомостью  
В мире гирь.

Что же мне делать, певцу и первенцу,  
В мире, где наичернейший - сер!  
Где вдохновенье хранят, как в термосе!



С этой безмерностью  
В мире мер?!

What am I to do, sightless and fatherless,  
In this world where all have sight, a paternal home,  
Where the passions must brave anathemas  
Like trenches ! Where weeping is  
Called a head cold !

What am I to do, I who by my nature, and work.  
Live to sing - like cables ! tan ! Siberia!  
Over my infatuations as over a bridge !  
With their weightlessness  
In a world of weights.

What ever am I to do, singer and first born,  
In a world where grey is the blackest that's found !  
Where inspiration is kept in thermos flasks !  
With this limitlessness  
In a world of limits.

Marina Tsvetaeva, Sochineniia, I, p. 221.

(54) Luce Irigaray, 'Women's Exile': Interview with Luce Irigaray', Ideology and Consciousness, vol. 1, (1977), pp. 62-76, p. 71. The work of Luce Irigaray is clearly relevant in a discussion of exile from patriarchal discourse, however, these issues were addressed in the primary context of language and identity in Chapter Two.

(55) This term is used by Vitins in her article 'A Study of Marina Tsvetaeva's "Elsewheres"', Slavic Review, 36, no. 4 (December 1977), pp. 644-657.

(56) Michael Makin, Marina Tsvetaeva: Poetics of Appropriation, p. 63.

(57) The eighteenth century is recalled explicitly in most of Tsvetaeva's early plays through devices ranging from the use of literary sources and detail dating from this period, to the description of a character as a personification of the eighteenth century itself.

(58) Marina Tsvetaeva, Fortuna, p. 91.

(59) Marina Tsvetaeva, Metel', p. 44.

(60) The adjective 'neznakomyi (unknown)' is used several times in the play to define the relationship between the Lady and Gentleman. For example the Lady states: 'My neznakomy, sudar'. Ni obid, Ni izvinenii net - ot neznakomykh. (We are strangers. There is no offence taken, And no need for apology - between strangers)'. 'Metel'' in Marina Tsvetaeva, Teatr, p. 49.

(61) A study of the use of the image of the window in Tsvetaeva's work is rewarding. It represents an opening into another world, albeit imaginary. In Prikluchenie it is also thanks to the window that Henri/Henriette remains inscribed in the narrative after her/his physical exit from the scene. For some further discussion of this topic see E. O. Eisenshtein, 'Simvolika "stekla" v tvorchestve M. Tsvetaevoi', Filologicheskie nauki, 6 (1990), pp. 10-17.

(62) Marina Tsvetaeva, Metel', p. 50.

(63) I will return to the importance of the symbol of the moon to constructions of poetic



identity in Tsvetaeva's theatre in Chapter Four.

(64) *ibid.*, p. 54.

(65) Marina Tsvetaeva, 'Stikhi k Bloku (Poems to Blok)' in *Sochineniia*, I, pp. 65-74, p. 65. Also note the image of looking through a window for inspiration as repeated in 'Metel'.

(66) Some critics have connected the representation of the older Casanova in Tsvetaeva's theatre with A.A. Stakhovich, a former actor who worked with the Third Studio, instructing actors in classical gestures and deportment. Tsvetaeva held him in great affection, as shown by her sadness at his suicide and written recollection of his funeral. Marina Tsvetaeva, 'Iz dnevnika. Smert' Stakhovicha (From a diary. The death of Stakhovich)', in *Izbrannaia Proza v dvukh tomakh*, I, pp. 72-81. As discussed in my Introduction, I consider that the predominance of such biographical interpretations of Tsvetaeva's theatre obscures coherent approaches to her dramatic oeuvre.

(67) The character of Henri/Henriette is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.

(68) Tsvetaeva wrote a play entitled *Konets Kasanovy (The Demise of Casanova)* in 1919, the last scene of which was published separately in 1922. However, in 1924 the full play was published and retitled *Feniks (The Phoenix)*.

(69) Marina Tsvetaeva, *Feniks*, p. 195.

(70) As noted by Scotto, the attitude to Casanova changed considerably in the early twentieth century and interest in his work developed beyond his reputation as sexual adventurer. Peter Scotto, 'Towards a reading of Tsvetaeva's *Feniks*' in *Marina Tsvetaeva: One Hundred Years*, ed. Viktoria Schweitzer, Jane Taubman, Peter Scotto and Tatyana Babyonyshev, (Berkeley: Berkeley Slavic Specialties, 1994), pp. 194-201, p. 195.

(71) Marina Tsvetaeva, *Feniks*, pp. 186-188.

(72) *ibid.*, p. 184.

(73) The notes in *Teatr* provide us with valuable insight into Tsvetaeva's intentions for the character of Viderol. Her notebooks of 1924 illustrate her desire for a negative portrayal of this character and the thought which she put into the deliberate triteness of his verses which are anathema to her own poetic aesthetics. Marina Tsvetaeva, *Teatr*, p. 364.

(74) *ibid.*, p. 195.

(75) *ibid.*, p. 232.

(76) *ibid.*, p. 232.

(77) Marina Tsvetaeva, *Prikluchenie (An Adventure)*, pp. 148-151.

(78) *ibid.*, p. 159.

(79) This aspect of the play is discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

(80) Marina Tsvetaeva, *Ariadna*, in *Teatr*, p. 250.

(81) *ibid.*, p. 273.



(82) *ibid.*, pp. 275-276.

(83) Marina Tsvetaeva, 'Fedra', in Marina Tsvetaeva, Teatr, pp. 306-310.

(84) A reading of Ariadna and Fedra which engages with the restrictions placed on women in patriarchal society is expanded in Chapters Four and Five.

(85) *ibid.*, pp. 332-334.

(86) Hélène Cixous, Portrait de Dora, p. 99.

(87) *ibid.*, pp. 73-74.

(88) Hélène Cixous, La Prise de l'école de Madhubai (Paris: des femmes, 1986).

(89) *ibid.*, pp. 30-32.

(90) Hélène Cixous, L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk Roi du Cambodge (Paris: Théâtre du Soleil, 1987).

(91) *ibid.*, p. 34.

(92) Hélène Cixous, 'De la scène de l'Inconscient à la scène de l'Histoire', p. 33.

(93) See in particular Anne-Marie Picard, 'L'Indiade: Ariane's and Hélène's Conjugate Dreams', Modern Drama, 32 (1989), pp. 24-38.

(94) Jennifer Birkett, 'The Limits of Language: The Theatre of Hélène Cixous', in Voices in the Air: French Dramatists and the Resources of Language, ed. John Dunkley and Bill Kirton (Glasgow: University of Glasgow French and German Publications, 1992), pp. 171-186, p. 182.

(95) David Bradby and David Williams, Directors' Theatre (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 104

(96) Hélène Cixous, L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk Roi du Cambodge, p. 158.

(97) *ibid.*, p. 170.

(98) *ibid.*, p. 184.

(99) For a detailed discussion of the similarities between characters in the play and Shakespearean types see Liliana Alexandrescu, 'Norodom Sihanouk: l'inachevé comme lecture Shakespearienne de l'histoire contemporaine', in Hélène Cixous, chemins d'une écriture, ed. Rossum-Guyon and Diaz-Diocaretz, pp. 187-204.

(100) Hélène Cixous, L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk, roi du Cambodge, p. 67.

(101) *ibid.*, p. 57.

(102) *ibid.*, p. 384.

(103) 'Si vous voyez Monseigneur Papa, votre oncle, vous lui dites de faire l'impossible, de la part de Samnol...?' *ibid.*, p. 195.

(104) *ibid.*, p. 385.



(105) *ibid.*, p. 387.

(106) *ibid.*, p. 388.

(107) Hélène Cixous, L'Indiade ou L'Inde de leurs rêves (Paris: Théâtre du Soleil, 1987).

(108) *ibid.*, p. 12.

(109) *ibid.*, p. 20.

(110) *ibid.*, p. 33.

(111) *ibid.*, p. 148.

(112) Morag Shiach, Hélène Cixous: A Politics of Reading, p. 135.

(113) Verena Andermatt Conley, Hélène Cixous, p. 98.

(114) The work of Edward Said includes: Orientalism, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), The World, the Text and the Critic (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), and Culture and Imperialism (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993). Other important critics working in this field are Homi Bhabha, ed. Nation and Narration (London and New York: Routledge, 1990) and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Questions of Multiculturalism', in Women's Writing in Exile, ed. Mary Lynn Broe and Angela Ingram, (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), pp. 412-420.

(115) Hélène Cixous, L'Indiade ou l'Inde de leurs rêves, pp. 14-15.

(116) Hélène Cixous, L'Indiade ou l'Inde de leurs rêves, pp. 147-148.

(117) Hélène Cixous, La Jeune Née, p. 130.

(118) Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'French Feminism Revisited: Ethics and Politics', in Feminists Theorise the Political, ed. Judith Butler and Joan Scott (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 54-85, p. 71.

(119) Sue Thomas, 'Difference, Intersubjectivity and Agency in the Colonial and Decolonising Spaces of Hélène Cixous's "Sorties"', p. 53.

(120) 'L'Indiade: un troupeau d'animaux furieux', Le Matin, 28 September 1987, p. 18.

(121) Hélène Cixous, 'Qui es-tu?' in L'Indiade ou L'Inde de leurs rêves, pp. 267-278, p. 276-277.

(122) Anne-Marie Picard, 'L'Indiade ou L'Inde de leurs rêves', Dalhousie French Studies, 17 (1989), pp. 17-26, pp. 17-18.

(123) Adrian Kiernander, Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 126. Chapter 9 of this study is entitled 'The Orient and the Feminine', in which Kiernander states that '...the theatrical Orient without virility, still holds, in its combination of alterity and femininity, a sort of power which continues to be unsettling.' (p. 124) The chapter contains a rather loose approach to the subject which requires considerable further problematisation.

(124) Hélène Cixous, 'Qui es-tu?' in L'Indiade ou L'Inde de leurs rêves, pp. 267-277, p. 277.



(125) Hélène Cixous, 'Le Chemin de légende' in La Prise de l'école de Madhubai, pp. 7-11, p. 9.

(126) Anne-Marie Picard, 'L'Indiade: Ariane's and Hélène's Conjugate Dreams', Modern Drama, 31 (1989), pp. 24-38, p. 34.

(127) Jennifer Birkett, 'The Limits of Language: the Theatre of Hélène Cixous', p. 183.

(128) Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Sneja Gunew, 'Questions of Multiculturalism', in Women's Writing in Exile, ed. Mary Broe and Angela Ingram, (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), pp. 412-420, p. 420.

(129) Hélène Cixous, 'Voile noire, voile blanche: Black sail white sail', trans. Catherine A. F. MacGillivray New Literary History: A Journal of Theory and Interpretation, 25 (1994), pp. 219-354. The title is clearly a reference to the mythological narrative of Theseus' voyage to slay the Minotaur. As Theseus left a black sail was flown on the ship as recognition of Theseus' possible fate, he was provided with white sails which were to be flown if his mission was successful. Theseus in his grief at having abandoned Ariadne to Dionysus on Naxos forgot to change the sails on his return. Aegeus saw the black sail and, assuming his son to be dead, threw himself from the cliffs to his death. Cixous' play describes the alternations of hope and despair felt by the women writers. The publishers' politically informed demands and changing attitudes are seen as as arbitrary and potentially fatal as the colour of Theseus' sails.

(130) *ibid.*, p. 219.

(131) Elsewhere Cixous recounts a story of Akhmatova as one of her favourite illustrations of the role of the poet. The passage in question is the prologue to Akhmatova's poem Requiem. Akhmatova is queueing outside a prison, when another woman, having recognised her, asks her if she could describe this in her writing. Akhmatova answers yes, affirming the power of writing to inscribe and record loss and injustice. Hélène Cixous, 'De la scène de l'Inconscient à la scène de l'Histoire', p. 23.

(132) Hélène Cixous, Voile noire, voile blanche, pp. 256-258.

(133) *ibid.*, p. 250.

(134) *ibid.*, p. 230.

(135) *ibid.*, p. 350.

(136) Hélène Cixous, L'Histoire (qu'on ne connaîtra jamais) (Paris: des femmes, 1994). The play was first performed at the Théâtre de la Ville, Paris in a production by Daniel Mesguich, May 1994.

(137) During her seminar on the 27th May 1994 Cixous, in response to several questions on the play, revealed that the character of Barout is based upon a Jewish salesman who lodged at her grand-mother's house. He went on to become a rabbi and was killed by Nazi forces in the Second World War. Cixous also commented that the inclusion of this Jewish figure in the play was to counter what she perceived as Nazi interpretations of Wagner's work.

(138) *ibid.*, p. 104.

(139) *ibid.*, pp. 114-115.

(140) *ibid.*, p. 116.



- (141) *ibid.*, p. 147.
- (142) *ibid.*, p. 148.
- (143) *ibid.*, p. 148.
- (144) The importance of song to Cixous' aesthetic is discussed in Chapter Two.
- (145) *ibid.*, pp. 104-105.
- (146) *ibid.*, p. 145.
- (147) Hélène Cixous, L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk, roi du Cambodge, p. 184.
- (148) Hélène Cixous, 'A propos de *Manne*'. Entretien avec Hélène Cixous', in Hélène Cixous, chemins d'une écriture, pp. 213-234, p. 215.
- (149) This aspect of Cixous' aesthetics is discussed in detail in Chapter One, in the section entitled, 'The Suspension of Self'.
- (150) Hélène Cixous, 'De la scène de l'Inconscient à la scène de l'Histoire', p. 24.
- (151) *ibid.*, p. 25.
- (152) Nicole Ward-Jouve, 'Hélène Cixous: From Inner Theatre to World Theatre', in The Body and the Text. Hélène Cixous, Reading and Teaching, Helen Wilcox et al, ed. (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), pp. 41-48, p. 46.
- (153) Hélène Cixous, 'De la scène de l'Inconscient à la scène de l'Histoire', p. 22.
- (154) Hélène Cixous, 'Le Chemin de Légende', p. 10.
- (155) Mark Millington, 'Out of Chile', Renaissance and Modern Studies, 34 (1991), pp. 64-77, p. 65.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### SEXUAL IDENTITIES AND THE POET

This chapter will address the representation of sexual difference in the theatre of Tsvetaeva and Cixous, and the different strategies which they employ to undermine traditional images of women and culturally constructed connotations of gender. Clearly issues of sexual difference are central to the representation of a female poetic identity and as such are implicated to different degrees in each chapter. Discussion here will centre on the function and representation of the female characters in plays by both writers, and the treatment of sexual difference in their plays. Firstly, I will examine the the changing function and status of female characters in Cixous' theatre, changes which correspond to her changing attitudes towards the theatre as genre, and question their importance to her construction of poetic identity. My discussion of the representation of sexual difference in Tsvetaeva's theatre centres on her disruption of categories of sexual difference, and culminates in a detailed reading of her play Prikliuchenie (An Adventure).

The importance of the cultural representation of sexual difference underlies major areas of literary criticism. Such representation constitutes an intensely political arena, and can arguably be seen as the main motivating force behind feminist criticisms of cultural discourses, including writing and the theatre. The ways in which women are traditionally represented in dominant cultural discourses reflect and strengthen patriarchal constructions of meaning, and provide major obstacles to women's



independent constructions of identity, which could provide enabling, positive representations of women. We are surrounded, in all areas of life, by socially established images and definitions of 'Woman', the accepted functions through which she should contribute to patriarchal society, and the codes through which she should physically present herself. Within this structure, Woman's value is defined by her societal relationships to Man, ie. primarily as mother, wife, or daughter. She is further defined as Man's other, providing a symbol of alterity, from which his qualities are distinguished. Cixous describes Western culture's construction of values around sexual difference:

Où est-elle?  
Activité / passivité,  
Soleil / Lune,  
Culture / Nature,  
Jour / Nuit,

Père / Mère,  
Tête / sentiment,  
Intelligible / sensible,  
Logos / Pathos.  
Forme, convexe, marche, avance, semence, progrès. Matière, concave,  
sol - sur lequel s'appuie la marche, receptacle.

Homme

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Femme <sup>1</sup>

Western ontology's reliance upon hierarchical binaries results in a fixity of difference, from which all variations are seen as socially deviant. These constructions of difference permeate all cultural discourse, purporting to be objective and universal. As Cixous writes:

Toujours la même métaphore: on la suit, elle nous transporte, sous toutes ses figures, partout où s'organise un discours. Le même fil, ou tresse double, nous conduit, si nous lisons ou parlons, à travers la littérature, la philosophie, la critique, des siècles de représentation, de réflexion.<sup>2</sup>

It is the dominance of such ideologically motivated representations of women which Cixous decries in her early texts, and the potential subversion of which I will examine in the following sections of this chapter.



## The Representation of Sexual Difference in Cixous' Theatre

As discussed in Chapter One, Cixous' approach to the theatre was originally undertaken in the context of the representation of women, and her article 'Aller à la mer'<sup>3</sup> attacked both the cultural representation of women in the theatre, and the structure of theatre itself, which she perceives as supporting the dominant scopic economy and repressing the female subject.<sup>4</sup>

In Portrait de Dora and Le Nom d'Oedipe. Chant du corps interdit, Cixous engages with existing narratives in order to explicitly address repressive structures which have disempowered the female subject. The plays redistribute thematic priorities and aim to give an autonomous voice to the female characters, Dora and Jocasta, within a dramatisation of their situation as female subjects. Portrait de Dora is discussed in detail in terms of Cixous' subversion of the theatrical form in Chapter One and, whilst acknowledging that the combination of formal subversion and thematic assertion lie at the heart of Cixous' work for the theatre at this point, I wish to focus here upon Cixous' engagement with the representation of women through the character of 'Dora'. The implications of the case study in this context are recognised; it has been described as:

... a paradigmatic text of patriarchal assumptions about female desire that still carry cultural authority and a vivid record of the construction of those assumptions as they emerge from the desire of the interpreter.<sup>5</sup>

The problematisation of such patriarchal assumptions lies at the core of Cixous' adaptation of Freud's case study, and her attempt to offer new interpretations aims to displace the dominant discourse:

In Freud's text, two subjects may be perceived, a demiurgic male subject whose analytic eye is ubiquitous and centralizing, and a secondary



female subject who speaks often but whose desire is expressed only through the mediating narration of the primary male subject.<sup>6</sup>

Cixous refers to her work on Dora as a first step towards reclaiming the theatre for women through an assertion of the voice of the female subject: '*Le Portrait de Dora*, c'était pour moi le premier geste d'un long travail: geste d'urgence pour que soit d'abord entendue une voix féminine...'<sup>7</sup> Cixous' reframing of the narrative involves a focus upon the patriarchal assumptions illustrated in 'Dora''s familial relationships, and those which she perceives as central to Freud's interpretation of the case. Cixous selects elements which are existant in the case study and which inform Freud's analysis, and introduces a different set of priorities to reveal her reading of the case study. For example, Cixous refers consistently to an unspoken exchange system operating between 'Dora''s father and Monsieur K. in which Dora is offered as sexual consolation for her father's affair with Madame K.<sup>8</sup> 'Dora' refuses to accept the pernicious substitution of one woman for another which permeates the narrative, and the denial of subjectivity to women. This substitution is revealed in the text through the use of repetition as 'Dora' registers her disgust at Monsieur K.'s words: "Vous savez que ma femme n'est rien pour moi",<sup>9</sup> and Monsieur B. repeats the phrase to 'Freud': "Les rapports entre ma femme et ma fille sont très peu affectueux. Ma femme n'est pas grande chose pour moi".<sup>10</sup> Monsieur B. suggests that Dora could directly replace Madame K. in her accepted function: "Elle aurait pu leur tenir lieu de mère".<sup>11</sup> *Portrait de Dora* engages further with the status of women through the attention Cixous gives to comments in the case study on the role of the governesses attached to both families whom she presents as emblems of the patriarchal view of women as sexually available and easily replaced. In the case study, Freud suggests that Dora has identified with the governess's acceptance of Herr K.'s approaches,<sup>12</sup> as she cuts short her analysis, announcing to Freud that she had decided two weeks ago that this would be her last visit. Freud reads this as analogous to the notice given by a governess of her departure, and as constituting a form of revenge on Dora's part.<sup>13</sup> This would seem to affirm Dora's role as servant, yet an analysis of the economics of the situation could posit Freud as



servant, and Cixous suggests that this move constitutes rather a dismissal of 'Freud' by 'Dora', a move which arguably enables a more positive reading of 'Dora's' exit and future.<sup>14</sup>

Cixous perceives the case study as representative of the power of dominant discourses to define the female subject, and engages with Freud's prioritisation of heterosexual desire in his original interpretations of the case. Freud considered that Dora's hysteria had been caused by her desire for her father, her resultant jealousy towards Frau K., and transferred, but repressed, desire for Herr K. Although aware of her father's invested interest in 'curing' Dora's behaviour, Freud did not question the intentions of Herr K.; indeed he seems to regard his behaviour as perfectly acceptable, and assumes that in normal circumstances Dora should have been attracted to him. Whilst concentrating on Dora's assumed repressed desire for Herr K., Freud, in his original interpretation of the case, paid scant attention to Dora's expressions of desire for Frau K.<sup>15</sup> As Freud developed his theory of transference (as explained in a postscript to the case study) he realised that he had overlooked the role of Frau K. and added notes which supply a reinterpretation of the case and acknowledge Dora's desire for Frau K.<sup>16</sup> Cixous' character 'Freud' is not, however, permitted retrospective analysis of the case and his discourse remains inflexible in its exclusion of 'Dora's' desire. Cixous counters this exclusion by reinterpreting Dora's dream of standing transfixed before a painting of the Madonna<sup>17</sup> as the direct articulation of her desire for Madame K.:

Dora: Laissez-moi vous donner cet amour.

Son corps, d'une blancheur ravissante. Des seins tout petits, la peau du ventre très lisse.

...

C'est une femme intelligente, supérieure aux hommes qui l'entourent, et d'une adorable beauté!... comme votre dos est blanc! comme votre peau! Comme je vous aime!

Vous ne pouvez pas imaginer comme je vous aime: si j'étais un homme, je vous épouserais, je vous enlèverais et je vous épouserais, je saurais vous plaire.<sup>18</sup>

The repeated first person pronoun reflects the importance of this desire to 'Dora's



identity, but it remains censured by the dominance of the conditional tense. The poetic tone of these passages is markedly different from the dialogue in the rest of the play, and adds a new dimension to the adaptation of the case study. Jane Gallop comments on the impact of these passages in the context of the definitions of sexual identity which are prevalent in the rest of the play:

...the 'more' I have to say is about the beauty, the eroticism, the affirmative quality of that love, a side brought out particularly by Cixous' *Portrait*. And somehow beauty and affirmation, sexuality as pleasure and joy rather than as murderous assimilation.<sup>19</sup>

The emphasis on 'Dora''s desire can be read as an attempt to assert her voice and to disrupt the representation of female desire which dominates the case study. The case study and the figure of Dora are thus employed in *Portrait de Dora* to illustrate patriarchal social structures which preclude female autonomy for all women and the investment of such structures in a dominant heterosexual discourse of sexual difference. Cixous attempts to disrupt this discourse through emphasis on 'Dora''s sexual identity and her perception of her own situation.

Cixous has suggested that the hysteric, and Dora in particular, represents the potential power of women, as the marginalised, to speak outside patriarchal structures. The title page of the text sets out quite clearly the way in which Cixous posits the figure of Dora as Everywoman:

PORTRAIT DE DORA  
de Hélène Cixous  
des femmes

Whilst 'des femmes' is the name of the publishing house (and, as such, represents a very specific group of women) the title page encourages a universalisation of Dora's situation. Cixous insists upon this point on the back cover notes: 'Il y eut une autre fois, en 1899, à Vienne, une jeune fille de 18 ans appelée Dora... Elle était aussi un peu moi et un peu toute femme...'. Cixous' problematic term 'toute femme' first



appears in relation to Dora, but then recurs throughout her work. The adoption of the hysteric as an emblematically 'feminine' figure is potentially dangerous, given that for centuries the label of hysteric has been loosely, but consistently, employed to define women as mentally and emotionally unstable. An association of women and hysteria originates in the belief of the Ancient Greeks that hysteria was caused by the womb ('hyster' in Greek) travelling around the body, and so influencing women's behaviour. In mediaeval times hysterics were regarded as witches and dealt with accordingly. Only in the eighteenth century was hysteria recognised as a mental condition though it still carried negative moral connotations, particularly of sexual promiscuity. Although Freud treated male hysterics, the condition remains associated in cultural discourse with women. Cixous' adoption of the hysteric as symbolic of all women risks restricting expressions of female subjectivity to pathological behaviour. However, she claims further significance for Dora, whom, she considers, crystallises the predicament of all women, and offers a potentially disruptive model of response:

Dora m'est apparue comme celle qui résiste au système, celle qui ne peut pas supporter que la Famille et la société soient fondées sur le corps des femmes, sur des corps méprisés, rejetés, humiliés une fois employés. Et cette fille qui, comme toutes les hystériques, était privée de la possibilité de dire ce qu'elle percevait en direct... elle a eu quand même la force de le faire savoir. C'est l'exemple nucléaire de la force contestataire des femmes. Ça c'est passé en 1899, ça se passe aujourd'hui là où les femmes n'ont pas pu parler autrement que comme Dora, mais ça fait voler la famille en éclats.<sup>20</sup>

However, Cixous' play contains no further indications of 'Dora' breaking familial or social structures than are present in the case study. Indeed, the postscript to the case study can be seen to offer a more positive view of Dora's future than Cixous' play as Freud recounts that how Dora had confronted the K. family and asserted her version of events.<sup>21</sup> The vindication of 'Dora's' claims and assertion of her subjectivity do not appear in Portrait de Dora, and this perhaps reflects Cixous' resistance to some details of the case study in order to maintain her universalisation of



it. Cixous' dramatisation of the case can therefore be compared with Freud's case study; Dora is dramatised rather than narrated, but the employment of her as object of study for the illustration of others' theories is similar. The voice that emerges is not that of an 'authentic' Dora, but of a metaphorical hysteric.

Cixous' adoption of the hysteric is challenged by Catherine Clément in an exchange at the end of La Jeune Née. Clément argues that the power of the hysteric, even if used only as a metaphorical model, is limited:

L'analyse que je fais de l'hystérie passe par une réflexion sur la place des déviants dans l'ensemble social, qui ne sont pas seulement les hystériques: mais aussi les clowns, les baladins, les fous... Tous occupent des places de contestation prévues par les corps sociaux, des fonctions de contestation prévues par toutes les cultures, ça ne change pas les structures, au contraire cela les conforte.<sup>22</sup>

Clément considers the hysteric easily recuperable by dominant social structures 'toujours refermable, toujours refermé',<sup>23</sup> and Dora's rebellion as '...strictement individuel et limité'.<sup>24</sup> I would argue that it is this impression of 'Dora' which dominates the play. Despite Cixous' adaptation of the case study and the addition of radically different scenes (such as those in which 'Dora' articulates her desire for Madame K.), she does not introduce any notion of 'Dora's future nor indeed of her existence outside the psychoanalytic sessions which define her. Cixous concedes that 'Dora' achieves little: 'L'hystérique, à mes yeux, c'est la femme-type dans toute sa force: une force qui était retournée contre Dora, dans son cas...'.<sup>25</sup>

The repression of female desire and the representation of the female subject are themes which are also central to Le Nom d'Oedipe. Chant du corps interdit. The play was discussed in Chapter Two in the context of the female subject's relationship to language. However, I will briefly examine the character of Jocasta here in order to foreground the similarity between Cixous' employment of the figure of Dora and her portrayal of Jocasta's plight. The refusal of dominant discourse and society to recognise Jocasta's autonomous desire, is presented by Cixous as the situation of all women:



`Jocaste', `Oedipe', ne sont jamais que les prénoms occasionnels de toute femme jamais femme de tout homme toujours fils. L'invivable du `couple'...  
Toutes les femmes, interdites de corps, de langue, interdites d'être femme, sont Jocaste.<sup>26</sup>

The play dramatises Jocasta's struggle to express herself and her desires within a society which has constructed her as monstrous, and we are encouraged to see Jocasta as a site of potential resistance and struggle against the dominant discourses which define women. Again, however, despite her radical alterations to the narrative (Oedipus does not blind himself), Cixous does not remove the punitive closure for Jocasta who faces death. Cixous' Jocasta, despite the posthumous validation of her stance by Oedipus' return to her, does not differ from the archetypal representation of women as dependent on male figures.

The two plays display similar problems in their representation of female identity and claims to represent the situation of all women. Some critics accept Dora as `...l'archetype de tant de femmes, évidemment même de nos jours'.<sup>27</sup> However, Cixous' notion of `toute femme' is open to criticism because of its erasure of important differences between women (those of class, race and sexuality) and undermines the representation of specific female subjects. Whilst Portrait de Dora and Le nom d'Oedipe. Chant du corps interdit retain their status as important critiques of the repressive mechanisms of patriarchal society and the impact of this on the female subject, they do not follow the pattern Cixous advocates in `Aller à la mer' to counter such mechanisms through the theatre. The figures of Jocasta and Dora offer little hope of exceeding the `place de la victime',<sup>28</sup> and indeed are clearly confined to `...la place du refoulé, tombeau, asile, oubli, silence'.<sup>29</sup> This continues to be the case for many of Cixous' female characters who end their respective narratives in silence (Brunhild<sup>30</sup> and Dora), or death (Jocasta, the five Cambodian women, the Mother and Night). Cixous' essay had called for the theatre to represent `[un] mouvement de femmes vers la vie...',<sup>31</sup> but the main female protagonists of these plays remain static, and ultimately passive, recipients of patriarchal discourse. The female spectator has



little choice but to identify once more with the victim, or to repress her own difference and attempt to identify with the more positive trajectories of the main male characters.<sup>32</sup>

A more positive identification is available in La Prise de l'école de Madhubai,<sup>33</sup> as the bandit leader Sakundeva exacts revenge for the crimes committed against her. Cixous employs Sakundeva's life as a microcosm of the suffering inflicted upon women. As Santellani comments:

...elle rassemble toutes les injustices subies par les femmes depuis la nuit des temps: l'esclavage au sein de la famille, la trahison et l'abandon par le père, la vente de sa virginité, l'exploitation de son corps, l'exclusion des écoles et enfin le viol atroce irréparable.<sup>34</sup>

The text was published alongside Portrait de Dora,<sup>35</sup> and Cixous links the two main characters in her notes. However, the response to dominant discourse of sexual difference is far more successful in the later play. The majority of scenes take place between Sakundeva and her aunt Pandala, and a further reinforcement of female solidarity within the play is achieved as Sakundeva demands the establishment of a school for girls, in return for her surrender to government representatives.

### **Transcending Sexual Difference?**

The shift in focus which occurred in Cixous' theatre in the mid-eighties (discussed in Chapter One), and the radical change in her priorities had direct consequences for the representation of sexual difference and women in her plays. The motivation of representing women as subjects in the theatre, so eloquently expressed in 'Aller à la mer', is replaced by her advocacy of theatre as the site in which abstract, and non-gender-specific differences can be represented.<sup>36</sup> Cixous moves from an engagement with the representation of women in the theatre to a 'fictionalisation of difference and unabashed metaphorisation of the female body'.<sup>37</sup> In stark contrast to



the perception of theatre as a voyeuristic, patriarchal mechanism. Cixous now claims affinities between woman and the theatre through the use of traditional maternal metaphors to describe all those involved in the theatre:

L'acteur est toujours un peu saint, un peu femme: il lui faut donner la vie en se retirant. D'ailleurs tout est femme au théâtre: femme le metteur en scène, metteur au monde des personnages *et* des comédiens.<sup>38</sup>

—

This 'feminisation' of the theatre is founded upon the assertion of a generic propensity to an effacement of the self and adoption of the other at all levels of participation, writer, actor, and spectator (see Chapter One) and reinforces traditional notions of women as passive and self-effacing. The attack on the structure of theatre which Cixous had previously described as harmful to the representation of women: 'l'ancien régime de la représentation, du spéculaire; lieu privilégié d'une double perversion voyeuriste-exhibitionniste...',<sup>39</sup> is no longer evident in her writing. Indeed, theatre becomes a genre in which issues of sexual difference need no longer be important to the writer, as Cixous states:

Le théâtre n'est pas la scène de la jouissance sexuelle. Roméo et Juliette s'aiment mais ne font pas l'amour. Ils le chantent. Au théâtre, c'est le coeur qui chante, la poitrine s'ouvre, on voit le coeur se déchirer. Le coeur humain n'a pas de sexe. Le coeur sent de la même manière dans une poitrine d'homme et dans une poitrine de femme. Cela ne signifie pas que les personnages sont des demi-créatures qui s'arrêtent à la ceinture. Non, nos créations ne manquent de rien, ni de pénis, ni de seins, ni de reins, ni de ventre. Mais cela, je n'ai pas à l'écrire. Le comédien, la comédienne nous donnent tout le corps que nous n'avons pas à inventer. Et tout est vécu et tout est vrai. C'est le cadeau que le théâtre fait à l'auteur: l'incarnation. A l'auteur homme, il permet de créer des femmes qui ne seront pas feintes, et à l'auteur femme il accorde la chance de créer des hommes parfaitement constitués.<sup>40</sup>

Cixous thus claims that theatre, with its focus on an undifferentiated human heart,<sup>41</sup> enables her to bypass her authorial libidinal economy, which prevents her from creating male characters in her other writing.<sup>42</sup> Sexual difference is represented directly by the



physical reality of the actors' bodies within this apparently universal and egalitarian structure. Cixous' rather trite employment of the Shakespearean example fails to illuminate her point on theatre as genre, indeed it seems to trivialise it. Shiach refers briefly to this statement in relation to Cixous' attraction to theatre as a genre:

She describes theatre as the space not of sexuality but of the heart, by which she means that it can find forms to move beyond the exploration of subjectivity towards the exploration of the intersubjective structures of ethical and political relations.<sup>43</sup>

Shiach concludes that this change in focus enables Cixous to address wider themes and implications of difference in her work, but Shiach does not address the apparent incompatibility of this project with a continued engagement with the representation of sexual difference and of women in the theatre.

These changes in approach are reflected in Cixous' plays, which now use a wider range of characters. Most of the central protagonists in her theatre are now male. The problematic use of historical events to allegorise notions of difference (discussed in the previous chapter) encourages an interpretation of Cixous' characters as representations of abstract qualities rather than individual subjects. Since 1986, this is particularly true of Cixous' female characters who are associated with traditional 'feminine' characteristics. L'Indiade ou L'Inde de leurs rêves (1987) and L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk roi du Cambodge (1985) are dominated by male characters, and the female characters (minor in terms of their speeches and relative presence on stage) are posited as markers of abstract values. In L'Indiade ou l'Inde de leurs rêves, the Bengali woman Haridasi, a quasi-mythical figure who acts as chorus throughout the play, represents a utopian and mythical India. Similarly L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk, roi du Cambodge is centred on the actions and thoughts of the 'heroic' character of Sihanouk, but it is a group of women (Madame Lamné, Madame Khieu Samnol and Madame Savay) who overcome political and racial divisions to function as symbol of a utopian, unified Cambodia:



These women become emblematic of the possibility of a social order that would respect difference, without referring it to a hierarchical structure. Religious difference, national difference, and class difference are all acknowledged, but the relationship between the women survives despite such differences and manages even to erase the ultimate difference between the living and the dead.<sup>44</sup>

Although they are employed by Cixous to symbolise the possible erasure of divisive differences, it is at the cost of their own specificity as female subjects. Santellani describes their universal significance as positive: '[elles] ne sont que des variations de cette même figure de "femme toute" généreuse et forte, rempart contre les tempêtes de l'Histoire';<sup>45</sup> however, the values which she claims that they represent constitute clichéd and restrictive representations of women's role. These include a love of cooking, hospitality and the qualities of nurturing and tenderness in the face of cruelty. The women endure sacrifice and exist on a higher moral and spiritual plane than their political leaders, but they remain marginal to the main action of the play and exist within the traditionally 'feminine' realms of life as indicated above: '...dans *Sihanouk*, on a affaire à une oasis féminine, apolitique qui reste marginale et inefficace'.<sup>46</sup>

In L'Histoire (qu'on ne connaîtra jamais)<sup>47</sup> the two queens Kriemhild and Brunhild are represented as the only figures capable of ensuring a peaceful resolution of the 'histoire'. They demonstrate their capacity to reject the narratives of jealousy and revenge in favour of acceptance and forgiveness, thus effacing their own desires. Again, the representation of the female characters as morally superior relies upon the reassertion of traditionally 'feminine' characteristics.<sup>48</sup> The poet figure in the play is clearly Sturlusson, and it is with him that the audience is ultimately encouraged to identify.

In contrast to other plays, La Ville Parjure ou le réveil des Erinyes<sup>49</sup> is dominated by central female characters: the mother who demands justice for the murder of her two sons, the Erinyes, and 'la déesse de la Nuit'. The mother, who attempts to confront government and institutional corruption and hypocrisy, is an eternal and



universal mother figure: 'Quand les pays seront passés, il y aura encore des mères pour aimer la Justice au-dessus de tous les royaumes.'<sup>50</sup> The battle between truth and betrayal, principle and expediency presented in this play is often drawn along lines of sexual difference,<sup>51</sup> foregrounded by the dialogue of the accused which has frequent recourse to traditional attacks upon their female opponents. The lawyers comment: '...ce que les femmes sont capables d'inventer dès qu'un deuil vient à les détraquer',<sup>52</sup> and the accused doctors refer to the alliance of Aeschylus and the mother as: 'Ratés vétustes et sanguinaires, ligue de l'hystérie et de la sénilité, association des dingues...'<sup>53</sup> Similarly, the woman doctor, Madame Lion, who had foreseen the dangers of the continued sale of contaminated blood, is ostracised by the male medical community which rejects her ethical arguments with clichéd pejoratives: 'On ne va pas se laisser dicter une conduite par une hystérique. Tu veux te faire une beauté morale sur notre peau.' Such deployment of traditional cultural discourse against women coexists uneasily with the continued employment of female characters to represent positive abstract qualities often associated in traditional discourse with the 'feminine'. The female characters in this play also function as guardians of 'truth' and memory and, accordant with the fate of Cixous' female characters, they are ultimately framed in a utopia which is removed from real existence.<sup>54</sup>

The loss of concern with the representation of sexual difference in the theatre which has been apparent in Cixous' plays since 1986, and the appearance of ungendered discourses of abstract difference, have resulted in a paucity of female characters and an employment of those that remain as representatives of abstract qualities. The consequences of this for the female spectator are remarked upon by Picard in reference to L'Indiade ou l'Inde de leurs rêves, but are pertinent to all of Cixous' later plays:

Mais la question qui pourrait me construire, moi-sujet féminin, est celle de l'adresse: où suis-je inscrite dans L'Indiade? Comment...laisse-t-il [le sujet] la possibilité de m'insérer spectatrice?<sup>55</sup>



The situation of the female spectator in the theatre is no longer considered specific, as Cixous' posits undifferentiated spectators, ready to reassert their common humanity and able to identify with all characters equally. Silverstein has described Cixous' work on the representation of female characters as: "extracting the (corpo)Real from the snares of the Symbolic".<sup>56</sup> However, I would argue that her approach to female characters in her later plays reverses this process. The repeated presentation of female characters as mouthpieces for abstract and essentialised qualities works against an assertion of the female subject. It is hardly helpful to claim that these figures are allied to familiar categories of an eternal feminine, and these later figures are far removed from the representation of the female subject-in-process that is so thematically and formally radical in Cixous' first two plays.

It is paradoxical that, at the stage when Cixous' plays begin to dramatise figures closely associated, in her aesthetics, with poetic identity, the role of female characters in her plays should be diminished. Cixous' identification of the poet with tropes of exile and love of the other neglects specific representation of the relationship between sexual difference and poetic identity. Through her selection of Gandhi, Sturlusson, and Sihanouk, masculine heroes, as poet figures bearing the central narrative and symbolic focus of her plays, Cixous separates the representation of poetic identity from that of female identity, and does not engage with representations of female creativity. In L'Indiade ou l'Inde de leurs rêves, the female poet Sarojini Naïdu demonstrates the potential of combining writing and political action. However, as Picard points out, references to her sex and female solidarity were not included in the production of the play.<sup>57</sup> Voile noire, voile blanche, may appear to contradict the mutual exclusion of woman and poet figure as it portrays the struggle of the Russian poet Anna Akhmatova, and the writer and widow of poet Osip Mandel'shtam, Nadezhda Mandel'shtam to preserve and defend poetry against the enforced compromise of sanctioned publication in the Soviet Union. The female protagonists are presented as the guardians of culture (here specifically poetry) and 'truth'. All the characters who appear in the play are



women and the sense of female solidarity and common sacrifice is heightened by the fact that even the potential spy Paulina harbours immense affection for Akhmatova. The women's solidarity, despite personal differences, is reminiscent of that between the group of Cambodian women in L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk, roi du Cambodge. Sexual difference does not, however, appear to be a central aspect of Cixous' representation of poetic identity in the play and the other poets whose geniuses are explicitly acknowledged in the play are two men, Boris Pasternak and Osip Mandel'shtam. Osip Mandel'shtam's status as absent metapoet in the play undermines the representation of Akhmatova's own creativity.<sup>58</sup> Cixous' choice of subject for the play can, once again, be seen to be determined by the association of exile (here, internal exile) with the poet, rather than an attempt to represent female creativity or a female poetic identity.

Cixous' work has always expressed an interest in the representation of sexual difference rather than an exclusive focus upon female characters or writers. However, the movement I have described in her theatre from a focus upon the social constructions of sexual difference, and the resultant repression of female subjectivity, to a reinstatement of unproblematised traditional constructions of 'femininity' is striking. The combination of this reinstatement with an increased interest in her plays on the representation of a universalised poetic identity results in a lack of exploration of a gendered poetic identity. Thus the problematics of representing female poetic identity remains unaddressed in her theatre. I will argue that it is in the theatre of Tsvetaeva that a female poetic identity is successfully articulated.

### **The Representation of Sexual Difference in the Theatre of Marina Tsvetaeva**

Tsvetaeva was indifferent to organised or institutionalised feminism, and voiced her dislike of attention to the sex of individuals and the grouping of individuals (especially poets) on the basis of their sex alone:



... есть в поэзии признаки деления более существенные, чем принадлежность к мужскому или женскому полу, и отродясь, брезгуя всем, носящим какое-либо клеймо женской (массовой) отдельности, как-то: женскими курсами, суффражизмом, феминизмом... всем пресловутым женским вопросом, за исключением военного его разрешения: сказочных царств Пенфезилен - Брунгильды... Женского вопроса в творчестве нет: есть женские, на человеческий вопрос, ответы, как-то: Сафо - Иоанна д' Арк - Св. Тереза...

There are, in poetry, criteria of classification more essential than one's membership of the male or female sex, and, from birth I have avoided everything that bore any stamp of feminine separateness, such as: female causes, suffragism, the celebrated "woman question", with the exception of its military solution: the legendary kingdoms of Penthesilea, Brunhilde... There is no woman's question in art - there are women's answers to human questions, like Sappho, Joan of Arc, Saint Teresa...<sup>59</sup>

However, this passage, far from constituting a denial of any female specificity, refuses the limitations traditionally imposed on women's interest and influences, and claims their ability to offer specific responses to any question.

Similarly, Tsvetaeva's refusal to categorise people primarily in terms of their sex (a refusal which reflects her general hatred of oppositional modes of thought) did not prevent a consistent engagement with the relationship between poetic identity and sexual difference. There has been increasing interest, in recent years, in this engagement in studies of her lyric poetry.<sup>60</sup> As a woman poet writing in a predominantly masculine tradition and with a male literary heritage, Tsvetaeva adopted several strategies to enable the development of her own poetic voice. It must also be noted that she was working in a gendered language in which the lyrical 'I' of the poem is traditionally male and, as Taubman shows, her early lyrics are often addressed to others, thus avoiding the need to linguistically define the gender of the speaker/poet.<sup>61</sup> Tsvetaeva's later poems are far less ambiguous and direct attention specifically to the speaker as a female poet.

The assertion of female voices can also be seen as the motivation for Tsvetaeva's adoption, throughout her work, of diverse female personae from literature



and classical mythology. They include Joan of Arc, Phaedra, Ariadne, Helen of Troy, Ophelia, the Amazon warrior and the Sybil, none of whom reflects traditional definitions of the 'feminine'.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, these figures are traditionally framed within punitive narratives which respond to their 'deviance' or unacceptable behaviour in defying gender definitions. Tsvetaeva identifies strongly with all these characters:

Tsvetaeva allies herself with femininity, Ophelia against Hamlet, Phaedra against Hippolytus, Lilith against Adam, Helen of Troy against the whole tradition which blames her for the Trojan War. Her heroines of myth and tradition are rescued from their portraits as either destructive or victimised beings - the familiar dual interpretation of masculine tradition, - to be reclaimed as new female self-definitions.<sup>63</sup>

Heldt uses the term 'femininity' here, not in reference to a traditional social construct, but rather to women's struggle against the roles allocated to them by such social constructs. In the context of representations of sexual difference, the re-telling of culturally established narratives from a differently gendered viewpoint (the voice of Lilith or Ophelia) is subversive because it disrupts the normalised identification with a masculine voice, presented as objective and universal. This strategy is continued in Tsvetaeva's theatre and corresponds to Cixous' attempts to refocalise existing narratives on to the figures of Dora and Jocasta. In addition to her adoption of figures who defy traditional interpretations of 'femininity', Tsvetaeva's poetry contains much disruption of established representations of sexual difference through a rejection of the roles traditionally allocated to the 'feminine'. This rejection is often expressed as a necessary condition for female creativity, as illustrated in the poem 'V maiskoe utro (On a May morning)' in which the speaker rejects traditional images of woman and motherhood to valorise the vibrant, rhythmic creativity of playing the drum, which prevails over her social definition as wife and mother.<sup>64</sup> In 'Koli milym nazovu (If I call you loved one)' the female speaker asserts her autonomy and mocks attempts to categorise her as wife, widow, or fiancée.<sup>65</sup>

The disruption of dominant representations of sexual difference is further



reinforced in Tsvetaeva's poetry by the reworking of existing narratives to subvert the existing codes of sexual difference and create radically different representations of female identity. This is apparent in Tsvetaeva's poem Molodets.<sup>66</sup> This poem retells a well-known narrative from Russian folk literature. In the original tale a naïve country girl falls unwittingly in love with a vampire, and, in order to protect his true identity she sacrifices her family, and social standing, to his desires. She is traditionally presented as a betrayed victim, and the narrative contains traditional moral interpretations of sexual identity (the girl's loss of virginity is linked to her ultimate loss of moral judgement and social happiness). Tsvetaeva's reworking of the tale, however, undermines these codes, presenting the heroine as agent of her active desire for the vampire (whom she chooses in preference to an aristocratic husband). Tsvetaeva's *Marus'ia* is not a victim, and the poem subverts dominant representations of women as sexually passive. Makin underlines the importance of these changes: 'A tale which provides a myth of sexual repression and male fantasy ...has been reversed by the very features which might have been expected to elaborate the basic myth.'<sup>67</sup>

The disruptive strategies identified here in relation to Tsvetaeva's poetry are also evident in her theatre. Indeed, I would argue that the majority of her plays engage primarily with the representation of sexual difference. Tsvetaeva's plays foreground a critique of the cultural representation of sexual difference and the position of women in patriarchal society, one which she perceives as debilitating and as destructive to the realm of poetry. The Lady in Metel' (The Snowstorm) (a play in which the two main characters are defined mainly by their sex) expresses her recent realisation that she no longer loves her husband,<sup>68</sup> and seems caught in a limbo between rejected domesticity and mortal love, and the realm of the snowstorm and poetry represented by the Gentleman.

Detailed discussions of Tsvetaeva's plays Fedra (Phaedra) and Ariadna are undertaken in Chapter Five. Tsvetaeva's choice of narratives is, however, important in the context of representations of sexual difference.<sup>69</sup> Tsvetaeva's engagement with



these narratives can be likened to Cixous' adoption of female figures in her early plays, and the refocalisation of these narratives serves to give voice to Phaedra and Ariadne, whose desires remain traditionally either unheard or are defined solely by dominant, and often hostile, discourses. In Tsvetaeva's plays, the restrictive codes prescribing female roles and behaviour in society, and the social dependency of women upon their relationships with men is a central theme. Both Phaedra and Ariadne are silenced at the end of the plays, as in the original narratives, yet Tsvetaeva achieves a dramatisation of the difficulties of speaking as a desiring woman from within the crippling confines of patriarchy's construction of Woman. Phaedra is traditionally condemned for her breach of the taboo of incest, her desertion of the primary role of mother, her infidelity to the king, and her 'hysterical' behaviour. In this she is defined by her relationships to men: as third wife of the much older Theseus (following ominously in her sister Ariadne's footsteps) and stepmother of Hippolytus. Phaedra's desire for her stepson contravenes patriarchal social codes, as her function as wife and (step)mother are perceived as incompatible with autonomous sexual desire. Tsvetaeva's Fedra is dominated by the characters of Phaedra and the Nurse, and between them they work towards an articulation of female desire, the very desire which has defined Phaedra as monstrous in so many commentaries on the myth:

Theseus' weakness of soul sacrifices helpful love for perverse seduction and leads him towards his fate. Phaedra represents perverse and impure choice. She is not, as is Medea, a demonic woman, a sorceress who casts a spell over a man and destroys him. Phaedra represents a different kind of perverse and impure allurements: the neurotic woman, hysterical, incapable of just and moderate feeling, whose love-hate at times exalted, at times inhibited, wears down the soul's strength by the capricious and quarrelsome nature of her demands.<sup>70</sup>

Phaedra is perceived as an anti-model, an example of anti-social excess and perversion, a punishment sent to plague Theseus. Commonly neither representations of the narrative nor critiques of it credit her with the subjective capacity to formulate her own desires, she is often presented as either insane or inhuman. Importantly, however, Tsvetaeva removes the grounds for the traditional criticisms of Phaedra from her play:



in Fedra she is childless, and so not a bad mother; the tragic flaw of the play is Hippolytus' misogyny not Fedra's desire. The Nurse is represented as a stronger influence on Fedra than any inheritance of her mother Pasiphae's 'monstruous' desire.<sup>71</sup> Fedra is thus repressed and ultimately crushed by the unwillingness of patriarchal society to recognise her desires and autonomy.

Tsvetaeva employs a similar strategy in her version of Ariadne's narrative, which positions the focus clearly on the injustice done to Ariadne by Theseus. The scene in which Theseus and Bacchus debate Ariadne's fate over her sleeping body constitutes a symbolisation of the enforced powerlessness of the female subject.<sup>72</sup> Ariadne speaks her desire in frank and direct terms, and is represented as neither passive nor naive.<sup>73</sup> In these two plays, Tsvetaeva engages with the unequal status and restrictive position of woman in society and revises the cultural representation of women which relies upon patriarchal definitions of sexual difference. In Fedra and Ariadna patriarchal definitions remain ultimately unshaken. However, I will now discuss Tsvetaeva's further engagement with the very divisions which inform traditional representations of sexual difference.

### **The Disruption of Gender: Prikliuchenie (An Adventure)**

The most radical response in Tsvetaeva's theatre to representations of sexual difference is to be found in Prikliuchenie (An Adventure)<sup>74</sup> which subverts the oppositions upon which cultural constructions are founded. Tsvetaeva's long poem Tsar'-Devitsa, written shortly after the completion of the play Prikliuchenie (An Adventure), also undoes the fixity of sexual identity. The Tsar-Maiden is a giant amazonian warrior<sup>75</sup> who chooses a prince who constitutes her opposite in that he is characterised by the traditionally 'feminine' traits of small hands and golden curls. However, Tsvetaeva goes beyond the potentially reductive stage of simply exchanging traditional characteristics of masculine and feminine, to further problematise their



identities. The critic Gove remarks:

Since neither protagonist quite fits the masculine or the feminine stereotype, the author invites readers to suspend rational categories and draw their own conclusions about the Tsar-Maiden and the Tsarevich. The author's own preferred solution seems to be that the whole issue of sexual identity is an illusion.<sup>76</sup>

Gove reads the poem as an attempt to completely dismiss sexual difference, but I would argue that the poem and Prikluchenie (An Adventure), rather than denying the existence of sexual difference, disrupt the binary and oppositional structures around which it is traditionally represented.

The concept of androgyny has recurred in philosophical and literary history in various guises and invoking different terminologies since the writings of the ancient Greeks. Inevitably, the concept is employed and interpreted according to the contemporary political, moral and aesthetic contexts. Consequently, amongst the questions to be addressed here are the importance of androgyny to Tsvetaeva's writing and the use of the concept by writers contemporary to her. The impact of a concept which upsets the binary representation of sexual difference cannot be overstated:

Biological determinism is a particular way of viewing causes of social structures. It offers a specific, scientifically-based model for the existence of social hierarchy and social inequality by postulating that differences in innate biology lead to differences in behaviour, which in turn lead to differences in social position.<sup>77</sup>

The concept of androgyny is therefore potentially disruptive of patriarchal definitions of sexual identity and gender. Carolyn Heilbrun defines androgyny as: 'A condition under which the characteristics of the sexes, and the human impulses expressed by men and women, are not rigidly assigned. Androgyny seeks to liberate the individual from the confines of the appropriate.'<sup>78</sup> However, this analysis fails to problematise the initial labelling of characteristics as 'feminine' or 'masculine', leaving the cultural notations of sexual difference undisturbed. In such manifestations androgyny cannot be perceived



as a subversive notion: 'something like John Wayne and Brigitte Bardot scotch-taped together - as if two distorted halves could make a whole.'<sup>79</sup> Here binary definitions of female and male, masculine and feminine are reinforced and the concept does not subvert social constructions of sexual difference:

Feminist theories and feminist inquiry based on the notion of essential difference, or focussed on demonstrating difference, are doing feminism a disservice. They ultimately rely on the defensively constructed masculine models of gender that are presented to us as our cultural heritage, rather than creating feminist understandings of gender and difference that grow from our own politics, theorizing, and experience.<sup>80</sup>

It is therefore vital, in the contexts of feminist critical theory and the politics of representation, to create a concept of androgyny which does not involve the reification of existing categories. In La Jeune Née, Cixous discusses different conceptualisations of androgyny or bisexuality<sup>81</sup> in her search for reconfigurations of sexual difference. Whilst remaining aware of the impossibility of erasing existing usage,<sup>82</sup> Cixous insists upon the potential radical consequences of disrupting the binary:

...la "féminité", la "masculinité", inscriraient tout autrement leurs effets de différence, leur économie, leurs rapports à la dépense, au manque, au don. Ce qui apparaît comme "féminin" ou "masculin" aujourd'hui ne reviendrait plus au même. La logique générale de la différence ne serait plus agencée dans l'opposition encore dominante maintenant. La différence, serait un bouquet de différences nouvelles.<sup>83</sup>

When discussing conceptualisations of androgyny, Cixous makes a clear distinction between reductive and positive concepts of bisexuality. The reductive remains too closely associated with traditional concepts of oppositional sexual difference:

La bisexualité comme fantasme d'un être total qui vient à la place de la peur de la castration, et voile la différence sexuelle dans la mesure où celle-ci est éprouvée comme marque d'une séparation mythique, trace donc d'une sécabilité dangereuse et douloureuse. C'est l'Hermaphrodite, d'Ovide, moins bisexué qu'asexué, composé non pas des deux genres.



mais de deux moitiés. Fantasma donc d'unité.<sup>84</sup>

The second definition of bisexuality which Cixous proposes remains highly abstract and solipsistic:

A cette bisexualité fusionnelle, effaçante, qui veut conjurer la castration, j'oppose *l'autre bisexualité*, celle dont chaque sujet non enfermé dans le faux théâtre de la représentation phallocentrique, institue son univers érotique. Bisexualité, c'est à dire repérage en soi, individuellement, de la présence, diversement manifeste et insistante selon chaque un où une, des deux sexes, non-exclusion de la différence ni d'un sexe, et à partir de cette 'permission' que l'on se donne, multiplication des effets d'inscription du désir, sur toutes les parties de mon corps et de l'autre corps.<sup>85</sup>

This conception of bisexuality recognises difference at many levels, but is non-exclusive, and would perhaps be better described as plurisexuality. The concept of a utopian mass of equal differences has been expressed in similar terms by Derrida:

What if we were to reach... the area of a relationship to the other where the code of sexual marks would no longer be discriminating? The relationship would not be asexual, far from it, but would be sexual otherwise: beyond the binary difference that governs the decorum of all codes, beyond the opposition feminine/masculine, beyond bisexuality as well... I would like to believe in the multiplicity of sexually marked voices... this indeterminable number of blended voices, this mobile of non-identified sexual marks whose choreography can carry, divide, multiply the body of each 'individual', whether they be classified as 'man' or 'woman' according to the criteria of usage.<sup>86</sup>

This sexual *différance*<sup>87</sup> conceptualised by Cixous and Derrida provides a theoretical framework to my reading of Tsvetaeva's Prikliuchenie (An Adventure). It is also necessary, however, to examine the cultural context of androgyny contemporary to the writing of the play. The concept of androgyny had been common in Russian literature at the beginning of the twentieth century, and was a prominent feature of many of the writings associated with German Romanticism which enjoyed great popularity at this time. Olga Matich links the resurgence of interest in the figure of the androgyne to



periods of societal upheaval, stating that: 'For this generation of Russians, androgyny was an escape from the intolerable polarized world around them, polarized on the basis of sex and class.'<sup>88</sup> However, it should be noted that sexual polarisation was considerably weaker in the 1920s than at arguably any other time in Russian history, and an interest in the concepts of androgyny may reflect the more liberated sexual behaviour of some.

Early twentieth-century Russian literature provides several examples of work which engages with concepts of androgyny. The work of Vladimir Solov'ev expresses a belief in platonic love which transcends sexual difference to achieve spiritual harmony through the combination of masculine and feminine principles. Fedor Sologub also employs the terms of androgyny, invoking the androgyne as a reversion to an asexual childlike state of innocence. There was also a revival of the cult of Sophia (an androgynous figure linked to the idea of a perfect humanity). Sergei Bulgakov was planning to publish a text which presented an ambiguously gendered Christ figure<sup>89</sup> and Blok's *Dvenadtsat'* (*The Twelve*), published in 1918, had already done this. Decadent writers such as Zinaida Gippius also took up the figure of the androgyne as a model of sexual and aesthetic perfection.

Tsvetaeva did not discuss the concept of androgyny in her prose or letters. There is also little criticism of Tsvetaeva's writing which relates specifically to concepts of androgyny: as mentioned earlier, most commentators on her work refer more generally to a tendency in her work to undermine traditional gender categories. Anya Kroth's article 'Androgyny as an Exemplary Feature of Marina Tsvetaeva's Dichotomous Poetic Vision'<sup>90</sup> supports the view expressed by June Singer who '...finds little need to link androgyny to the contemporary political and social climate and instead looks for and finds manifestations of the androgynous principle throughout human cultural history.'<sup>91</sup> Kroth's position also plays down the importance of representation and its effect upon cultural discourse. In reference to Tsvetaeva's work, Kroth finds the use of the concept of androgyny as '...not so much a reaction to the social, political and cultural context of her [Tsvetaeva's] time...as an intrinsic quality of



her artistic method.<sup>92</sup> I would argue that this is the case. However, Kroth's definition of androgyny follows the pattern of Cixous' reductive model:

... the term 'androgynous' will be used in reference to a condition which suggests a spirit of reconciliation between the sexes, or a condition wherein opposite elements (masculine and feminine) lie in the matrix of one.<sup>93</sup>

This definition is founded upon traditional concepts of sexual difference, and the lack of subversion in Kroth's employment of androgyny is evident when she describes the seemingly tautological example of the 'male' androgyne in Tsvetaeva's work:

By admixing feminine or nonmasculine characteristics - such as emotional sensitivity, physical delicacy, states of physical and psychological repose, and so forth - in her male personae, Tsvetaeva elicits recognition of them as androgynous.<sup>94</sup>

I would argue that it is the very definition of such characteristics as 'masculine' or 'feminine' which Tsvetaeva undermines in her writing. Prikliuchenie is the most radical illustration of this. Tsvetaeva's Prikliuchenie (An Adventure) is based upon the memoirs of Casanova and refers to several meetings with Henriette, a woman in male disguise escaping from the choice between an unacceptable marriage, or forced entrance to a convent.<sup>95</sup> Scotto attributes the general change in moral attitude towards Casanova at this time as: 'bound up with the explosive redefinition of sexuality in European culture that swept through the fin-de-siècle and into the decades beyond'.<sup>96</sup> However, Tsvetaeva's focus in Prikliuchenie is not on Casanova, but on Henri/Henriette, who is a far more sexually ambiguous figure<sup>97</sup> in Tsvetaeva's play than in Casanova's memoirs.

Tsvetaeva's dramatisation of part of Casanova's memoirs is interesting in light of their stylistic qualities. She may have been struck by their dramatic quality, as documented by Lahouati in one of the few articles that addresses questions of style in the memoirs.<sup>98</sup> Lahouati comments on the frequent use of theatrical imagery:



`Casanova décrit son existence comme une succession de scènes de théâtre auxquelles il assisterait tout en tenant le rôle principal.'<sup>99</sup> Lahouati expands further:

... en tant que héros, il en a été l'ordonnateur: en tant qu'écrivain il a écrit, pour son lecteur-spectateur, la pièce à laquelle sa mémoire et son imagination le faisaient assister. La mise en forme de L'Histoire de ma Vie est une mise-en-scène, sur un théâtre imaginaire.<sup>100</sup>

These qualities are also explicitly referred to by Casanova:

A l'âge de trente-huit ans, ce fut la clôture du premier acte de ma vie. Celle du second se fit à mon départ de Venise l'an 1783. Celle du troisième arrivera apparemment ici où je m'amuse à écrire ces mémoires. La comédie sera alors finie, et elle aura eu trois actes. Si on sifflera j'espère que je ne l'entendrai dire de personne.<sup>101</sup>

If Casanova's memoirs serve several purposes: `...sa matière ne serait pas seulement le souvenir d'expériences, mais aussi la projection, dans l'écriture, des désirs, des fantasmes, des obsessions et des phobies qui sont la matière des rêves',<sup>102</sup> I would suggest that Tsvetaeva's adaptation of these events can be interpreted in a parallel fashion, centred on her desire to rework representations of sexual difference.

Tsvetaeva's Prikliuchenie consists of five acts, the first four of which are loosely based on episodes from the memoirs, whilst the fifth is wholly of Tsvetaeva's invention. Karlinsky, whilst describing the play as a `romantic escapist comedy', outlines several major divergences from the original memoirs:

From the vast panorama of Casanova's book, Tsvetaeva selected what is probably its most appealing episode, his brief love affair with the mysterious cello-playing Frenchwoman known only as Henriette. In Casanova's description, she was a sweet, modest person, who wore male attire in order to escape from the custody of her repressive family. In Tsvetaeva's play, she is turned into an ambiguous being called Henri/Henriette, who can function as either man or woman and be alternately a brawling hussar, a seductive and erudite beauty or a virtuoso musician.<sup>103</sup>



Tsvetaeva's play establishes a very different focus from the memoirs. In Casanova's memoirs the episode begins as Casanova is disturbed from sleep in his hotel by a group of the local police, who are demanding to know whether one of the guests is sleeping with his wife or his mistress. Casanova takes it upon himself to defend this guest from the police, eventually obtaining an apology and the offer of compensation for the incident. However, Casanova's ulterior motives are clear from the outset: he intended to make a good impression on the woman concerned. Although the woman in question is disguised as a man, Casanova does not hesitate in defining her sex: *'...je vois sortir de dessous la couverture une tête échevelée, riante, fraîche, et séduisante qui ne me laisse pas douter de son sexe...'*<sup>104</sup> Casanova never entertains the slightest doubt as to Henriette's sex. Rather than being fascinated by the ambiguity of the character, as Tsvetaeva suggests in Prikliuchenie, Casanova in his memoirs is simply attracted by the sight of a woman in male attire.<sup>105</sup> Indeed, Henriette's disguise and the reasons behind it encourage Casanova to view her as a challenge to his powers of seduction.<sup>106</sup> Tsvetaeva excludes Casanova's apparent certainty of Henriette's sexual identity, indeed, the naming of the character as Henri/Henriette is an important aspect of Prikliuchenie. Named as such in the list of characters at the head of the text, Henri/Henriette is denoted in the text as the Hussar, Henri and finally Henriette. The changes in name correspond to the sexual identity that he/she chooses to adopt at that point, and reflect the ambiguity and fluidity of identity represented by him/her.

The narrative of the first meeting between Casanova and Henriette is radically changed by Tsvetaeva. In the first act of the play an unidentified hussar enters Casanova's room as he lies sleeping, and looks around the room, listening to Casanova talking in his sleep and finally waking him as a drop of oil falls from his lamp on to Casanova's face. The power relationships are very different from those represented in the first scene of the memoirs: here it is the sleeping Casanova who is observed by an intruder, whereas in the memoirs Casanova secretly observes the sleeping woman. The hussar listens to Casanova's dreams and comments ironically on them:



Два женских имени за пять  
Секунд - и всё чего-то шарит!  
Не весело, должно быть, спать  
С одною картой полушарий!  
(Наклоняет светильник к самому лицу спящего)  
Души и ветрености смесь!  
Над скольких Ев невинных - змеем,  
Над скольких Ариадн - стою - Тезеем?!

Two women's names in five seconds.  
And all the time fumbling!  
It's not amusing, perhaps, to sleep  
With only a map of the hemispheres!  
(leans the lantern over the sleeping face)  
A mixture of soul and emptyheadedness!  
Over how many innocent Eves - like a serpent,  
Over how many Ariadnes - do I stand - like Theseus?!<sup>107</sup>

Eve and Ariadne are both figures whom Tsvetaeva defends elsewhere, but the emphasis here falls on the hussar's identification of himself with Theseus which feminises Casanova and again suggests a reversal of power structures. Casanova is woken by a drop of oil which falls from the hussar's lantern on to his face, clearly a reference to Psyche's fateful awakening of Eros.<sup>108</sup> Tsvetaeva employs the mythical intertext to further confuse gender identities as the hussar is associated equally with the biblical serpent who tempts Eve, with Theseus and with Psyche. Casanova's anxious search for definitions begins on awakening as he questions the hussar's identity:

Казанова:  
Так вы не муж?

Гусар:  
Не муж.

Казанова:  
Не вор?

Гусар:  
Не вор.

Казанова:  
И вы не кредитор?



Гусар:  
Едва ли!

Казанова:  
Не муж, не вор, не кредитор, -  
Зачем же вы сюда попали?  
По звону шпор и по шнуровке  
Гусар, очарование дам.  
Умалишенный - по речам,  
И... ангелочек - по головке!

Гусар:  
И ложь, и правда...

Casanova:  
So you're not a husband?

Hussar:  
Not a husband.

Casanova:  
Not a thief?

Hussar:  
Not a thief.

Casanova:  
And you're not a creditor?

Hussar:  
Hardly!

Casanova:  
Not a husband, not a thief, not a creditor.-  
So why have you turned up here?  
By the sound of your spurs and laces,  
A hussar, charmer of women.  
A madman - judging by your speech,  
And...an angel - judging by your looks!

Hussar:  
In that there is both truth and lies...<sup>109</sup>

Tsvetaeva first indicates the androgynous nature of the hussar through the reference to an angel, a traditionally asexual figure to which Tsvetaeva refers specifically in terms of its androgyny at the end of Tsar-Maiden. The hussar then describes himself as a moonbeam, which reinforces the description given of the Henri/Henriette in the *dramatis personae*: `lunnyi led (lunar ice).<sup>110</sup> This reference to the moon appears to



encourage conventional connotations of the feminine and further comment on the role of the moon in the play is vital to a reading of the character Henri/Henriette.<sup>111</sup> There are two words in Russian for moon, one masculine *mesiats* and one feminine *luna*. Tsvetaeva uses the potential double gender of the moon to represent the double gendered character of Henri/Henriette and this is reflected in Casanova's use of the symbol of the moon as he abandons his attempts to clarify the hussar's sexual identity:

Казанова:  
Все в мире - только имена!  
Кто скажет: месяц, кто: луна...  
Анри - сегодня, завтра - Генриэтта...

Casanova:  
Everything in the world - is only names!  
One says: moon, another: lune...  
Henri - today, tomorrow - Henriette...<sup>112</sup>

Casanova links the two possible genders of 'moon' with the designation of sexual identity through names. The Hussar associates himself immediately with the moon:

Гусар:  
Как спутница Земли - Луна,  
Я - вечный спутник Казановы.  
А для людей - гусар Анри,  
Грош, по рукам еще не стертый...

Казанова:  
Но всё ж, дитя, какого черта  
Сюда явились?

Анри:  
- На пари!

Казанова:  
Пари?!

Анри:  
(кладя ему руку на плечо)  
Казанова, взгляните в окно!  
Как в мире безумно от лунного света!  
Все минет, все канет... Не все ли равно:  
Пари - или нежность. Анри - Генриэтта



Казанова:  
(прозревая)  
Анри? - Генриэтта?  
(Вскакивает)

Анри:  
Оставьте! Не тронь!

Казанова:  
(вне себя)  
Пари - или нежность?

Анри:  
(смеясь)  
Какое бесстыдство!  
Ни то, ни другое. В страшнейший огонь  
Гусаров и женщин ведет - любопытство.

Hussar:  
As the earth's companion - is the Moon,  
So I am - the eternal companion of Casanova.  
But for other people - I'm hussar Henri,  
A penny, not yet worn by hands...

Casanova:  
All the same, child, why the devil  
Have you appeared here?

Henri:  
- For a wager!

Casanova:  
A wager?!

Henri:  
(Putting his hand on Casanova's shoulder)  
Casanova, look out of the window!  
How the world is made mad by moonlight!  
Everything passes, everything vanishes...is  
it not all the same:  
A wager - or tenderness. Henri - Henriette.

Casanova:  
(animated)  
Henri? - Henriette?  
(jumping up)

Henri:  
Leave me alone! Don't touch me!

Casanova:  
(beside himself)  
Wager - or tenderness?

Henri:



(laughing)

What brashness!

Neither one, nor the other. Into the terrible furnace

Curiosity leads both hussars and women.<sup>113</sup>

The hussar is the more active of the two characters here, persisting with riddles and teasing comments which only serve to confuse Casanova further. The hussar speaks of his potential multiple sexual identities: indeed his identity as denoted by the written text (his speaking name) changes halfway through this speech, from The Hussar to Henri. Hussars are then linked with women in the final line of the speech quoted. Tsvetaeva ensures that the character's first appearance establishes an ambiguous sexual identity, an ambiguity which goes beyond mere disguise. It must be noted that this play has never been put into production, so there are no precedents for representing Henri/Henriette onstage. Karlinsky describes Prikliuchenie as: '...an unconvincing play when read and it must be almost impossible to perform on the stage with any degree of success.'<sup>114</sup> Karlinsky does not clarify why it would, in his opinion, be impossible to stage, but much of the perceived difficulty must lie in the practical representation of Henri/Henriette. The physical presence of an actor of either gender in the role would not, however, lessen the ambiguity, indeed it would serve to further undermine gender fixity as the actor would only be of corresponding gender to Henri/Henriette for some of the scenes. The use of two actors for the role would be highly unsatisfactory, as it would undermine the consistent ambiguity of Henri/Henriette throughout the play and evoke connotations of comedy and farce rather than the intense romanticism of the play. Another striking difference between these opening scenes and the memoirs is the voice of Henri/Henriette. In Casanova's memoirs Henriette's speech is not referred to until much later in the text, indeed her silence is remarked upon.<sup>115</sup>

The second act of Prikliuchenie opens with Casanova and Henri sitting together, in an 'endless dialogue',<sup>116</sup> and Casanova's declaration 'I love you!', to which Henri does not reply, continuing to talk in riddles.<sup>117</sup> Henri mocks Casanova and demands money, his soul, and his Turkish pistol in return for love, none of which is in the



original text.<sup>118</sup> Henri suggests a change of sexual identity in the near future:

Анри:  
(серьезно)

Слушайте, дружочек!  
Бог дивный мир свой сотворил в неделю.  
Женщина - сто миров. Единым духом -  
Как женщиной мне стать в единый день?  
Вчера гусар - при шпорах и при шпаге,  
Сегодня - кружевной атласный ангел,  
А завтра - может быть - как знать? Кто знает?!

Henri:  
(seriously)

Listen, my friend!  
God created his wonderful world in a week.  
A woman - is a hundred worlds. A single spirit.  
How can I become a woman in a single day?  
Yesterday a hussar - with spurs and sword,  
Today - a lace and satin angel,  
And tomorrow, perhaps, how can we tell? Who knows?!<sup>119</sup>

After being fitted with dresses by a local fashion house, Henriette makes her grand entrance, stunning both Casanova and the captain with her beauty.<sup>120</sup> She is now referred to in the feminine in the text, but her appearance has been immediately preceded by the captain's description of the hussar's fight over a woman, which again complicates the relationships between appearance and sexual identity in the play.

In the memoirs, a series of meetings and exchanges of letters lead to Henriette's recognition by a distant relative and her enforced return to her family. Casanova accompanies her on the initial stages of her return journey to France, during which they stay at the hotel 'Aux Balances'.<sup>121</sup> In the memoirs Henriette demands that Casanova should never contact her nor speak if they meet again.<sup>122</sup> There is no lengthy farewell in the memoirs and it is only later that Casanova discovers a message etched on a windowpane.<sup>123</sup> Casanova sees Henriette again in 1763, and, without recognising her, in 1769. Tsvetaeva again takes the basis of the scene directly from the memoirs, but refocuses it on issues of sexual difference. Henriette describes herself as a soldier awaiting death and the question of her identity is foregrounded again:



Казанова:  
Нет у тебя души!

Генриэтта:  
Должно быть - нет.

Казанова:  
А в жилах - лунный свет.

Генриэтта:  
Быть может - да,  
Быть может - нет.

Казанова:  
Скажи мне на прощанье:  
Бес или ангел ты?

Генриэтта:  
Чужая тайна.  
Оставим это.

Casanova:  
You have no soul!

Henriette:  
Probably - not.

Casanova:  
And in your veins - moonlight.

Henriette:  
Maybe - yes,  
Maybe - no.

Casanova:  
Tell me as we part:  
Are you a demon or an angel?

Henriette:  
Someone else's secret.  
Let's leave it.<sup>124</sup>

Ambiguity persists and there is no final scene of resolution as to Henri/Henriette's gender. Indeed, Casanova calls out to her: `Moi mal'chik! Genrietta! Posledniaia mol'ba k tebe! (My boy! Henriette! One last request!'.<sup>125</sup> appealing to Henri and Henriette, masculine and feminine. Henriette writes on the window with her ring and prepares to leave. The stage directions at this point indicate that Henriette replies to



Casanova's remark as Henri.<sup>126</sup> It is impossible to determine how this fluctuation in identity could be represented on the stage, for it is clear that Tsvetaeva is pointing out, even at this stage in the play, that Henriette and Henri are not mutually exclusive identities. Henriette's disappearance underlines the sexual ambiguity further as she steps into a shaft of moonlight, in a culmination of the consistent use of the moon as metaphor for androgyny throughout the play:

Казанова:  
Скажи мне!

Генриэтта:  
(*качая головой*)  
Все под большой луной  
Играем втемную.  
(*Исчезает в полосе лунного света.*)

Casanova:  
Tell me!

Henriette:  
(*shaking her head*)  
Everything under the great moon  
Is played blind.  
(*disappears in a shaft of moonlight*).<sup>127</sup>

In an earlier version of the memoirs possibly used by Tsvetaeva, Casanova notes revisiting the hotel some years later, and seeing the words: 'You will even forget Henriette' still etched on one of the windowpanes.<sup>128</sup> Tsvetaeva, however, constructs an entire scene from this brief reference, a scene which serves to contrast the limited traditional representations of sexual difference with the (albeit absent) figure of Henri/Henriette. Scene Five presents Casanova, thirteen years later, preparing to seduce a young girl, his thousand and first conquest. The tone of the scene is markedly different from the other four: Casanova behaves in a patronising manner towards the girl, using clichéd images of femininity. The girl, although forthright and frank in her sexual desires, is mainly concerned with material gains and forms a strong contrast to the ambiguous, ethereal figure of Henri/Henriette.<sup>129</sup> The dialogue is clearly intended



to form an ironic contrast to Henriette's speeches, as the girl continues to chat about babies and christenings, and sings popular songs. This is interrupted when the girl remarks upon the sight of the moon through the window and reads out Henriette's message. Casanova reacts violently, throws down the girl's doll (an icon of traditional 'femininity') and smashes the windowpane. He calls out to his past love, but not in the name of Henriette:

Казанова:  
(В окно.)  
Моя любовь! Мой лунный мальчик!  
...  
Тринадцать лет, Анри, в каком аду!  
Платонова родная половина!  
Здесь кто-то плачет? - В лунной полосе  
Взойдешь, как сон... как сон... и бог  
рассудит...

Casanova:  
(through the window)  
My Love! My moon boy!

Casanova:  
Thirteen years, Henri, in such hell!  
Like Plato's dear half  
Is someone crying there? - In the moonbeam  
You will rise, like a dream..like a dream...and god  
will judge...<sup>130</sup>

Our recollections of the last appearance of Henriette, as we witnessed her writing on the windowpane, are disturbed by the terms which Casanova uses as he calls to his 'moon boy' and to Henri, rather than to Henriette. Identity is still fluid and sexual difference is not the factor which Casanova uses as a main signifier as he remembers Henri/Henriette. Casanova's reference to Plato recalls Plato's Feast in which he describes the existence of a race of people who originally combined feminine and masculine in one being but whom the gods divided into two halves, scattering them throughout the world. These halves then spent their lives in search of each other. This philosophical explanation of Eros is invoked as Casanova likens Henri to his other half. Whilst Plato's model could clearly be read as a parallel with a more reductive vision of androgyny (as described earlier in this chapter), this is undermined by the fact that

Casanova calls out to Henri, rather than to a heterosexually defined 'opposite' half.

Having demonstrated that Tsvetaeva's adaptation of Casanova's memoirs focuses emphatically upon an androgynous disruption of sexual difference, I would suggest that Prikliuchenie (An Adventure) constitutes her most radical engagement with the representation of sexual difference. The character of Henri/Henriette can be read as an example of Cixous' second, liberating model of androgyny, one which celebrates the fluidity of difference rather than maintaining binary divisions. Some critical attention has been given to these aspects of the play, but they do not achieve radical interpretations. Karlinsky, referring only briefly to Prikliuchenie, gives the following description of Henri/Henriette:

This ambiguous, almost hermaphroditic character is the most frank embodiment of Cvetaeva's indistinct dream of love and intimacy based on personal worth, which would exceed the limitations of one particular sex.<sup>131</sup>

The hermaphrodite traditionally possesses the sexual characteristics of both male and female, although the emphasis for Karlinsky would seem to be less on combination and duality, than on the exceeding and subverting of gender altogether. Kroth uses the concept of androgyny to describe Henri/Henriette:

A striking example of a female androgyne, depicted in a fashion similar to her treatment of male androgynes, can be found in the short play Prikliuchenie. The play is based on an episode from Casanova's memoirs and features the female character Henri/Henriette, in whom feminine and masculine elements coexist conspicuously.<sup>132</sup>

The description of an androgyne as 'feminine' remains problematic as does the unproblematised qualification of principles as 'feminine' or 'masculine'. She continues:

Tsvetaeva thus achieves an androgynous depiction of Henriette by an



admixture of the masculine element in the description of her attire and speech, past and present actions, and in her dramatic characterization.<sup>133</sup>

Such a definition does not engage with the fluidity of sexual identity represented in the play and overlooks the importance of Tsvetaeva's naming of the character as Henri/Henriette. At no point in the text does Tsvetaeva encourage the allocation of characteristics as either 'masculine' or 'feminine', indeed the characters who use such definitions (including Casanova in Scene Five) are clearly mocked. Kroth's examination of the play offers no interpretation of the fifth scene, which is vital in its formulation of an ironic representation of traditional gender roles and fixed sexual difference. This scene forms a strong contrast to the rest of the play, in which Henri/Henriette has the more dominant role, regardless of apparent or grammatical gender. Henri/Henriette achieves the inscription of an erotic desire unrestricted by binary configurations of sexual difference. Casanova falls in love with Henri, thus subverting the normative representation of sexual identity and desire in the memoirs, where it is clear that Casanova is tantalised by a woman he knows to be merely temporarily disguised as a man. Kroth's conclusion proposes that Tsvetaeva's employment of the concept of androgyny is representative of her 'dichotomous poetic vision'.<sup>134</sup> However, it is precisely the inflexibility and binary foundations of dichotomy which fail to represent the extent of Tsvetaeva's subversion of representations of sexual difference. Svetlana Boym, in a discussion of the subversion of gender roles in Tsvetaeva's poetry, argues rightly for a more fluid interpretation:

They (her poems) stage multiple gender roles and introduce many unusual transvestites, challenging the very notions of reconciliation and transcendence of conflicts.

...Tsvetaeva's gender theatre is not necessarily 'dichotomous' or 'dualistic' but rather truly dramatic, characterized by - to use Bakhtin's term - heteroglossia, what we might call sexual multivoicedness or polysexuality.<sup>135</sup>

Boym's description refers to Tsvetaeva's lyrics, not to her drama, but the theatrical metaphors are particularly striking and pertinent, as it is in her theatre that Tsvetaeva's



subversion of the representation of sexual difference finds its fullest expression.

### **Sexual Difference and Poetic Identity in Tsvetaeva's Theatre**

The consistent focus upon the representation of sexual difference in Tsvetaeva's theatre is allied with her dramatisations of poetic identity, and the majority of figures who can be identified as representatives of a poet-self are women. Tsvetaeva's representation of the Lady in Metel' (The Snowstorm), Ariadne and Phaedra<sup>136</sup> foreground the restrictive influence of patriarchal discourse about sexual difference and identity on all women, but can be further interpreted in the context of the specific restrictions placed on the female poet.

The main example of the association of poetic identity with sexual difference in Tsvetaeva's theatre is found in the character of Henri/Henriette, who is associated with the poet throughout the play. In the memoirs, Casanova mentions his surprise at Henriette's knowledge and wit, which disrupts his image of her, yet ultimately dismisses her intelligence.<sup>137</sup> Indeed he digresses later in the text to express his views on the suitability of conversation topics for women,<sup>138</sup> and her considerable artistic talent is represented as secondary to Casanova's own narrative skills.

The third scene of Tsvetaeva's play is of immense importance to the interpretation of Henri/Henriette as poet-figure. Tsvetaeva based the scene on an episode from the memoirs in which Casanova and Henriette attend a musical evening at a villa outside Parma. During the evening Henriette unexpectedly decides to play the cello, an idea which astounds Casanova.<sup>139</sup> However, he is overcome with emotion on hearing the quality of her playing and asks further questions about her identity: 'Qui est donc Henriette? Quel est ce trésor dont je suis devenu le maître?'<sup>140</sup> Tsvetaeva uses this scene in Prikliuchenie, but employs it solely to suggest Henriette's creativity and association with the poetic identity. The third scene, entitled 'Violonchel' (Cello)',



begins with long discussions between French and Spanish guests about Henriette's identity and nationality, during which Henriette is likened to Diana, the Tenth Muse, Venus and Queen of the Heart, culminating in the Hunchback's description of her: 'Vos'moe chudo mira - nashu Muzu! (The eighth wonder of the world - our Muse!)'<sup>141</sup> Such a traditional definition of woman as muse and inspiration for the male artist is responded to emphatically by Henriette's demonstration that she is herself the poet/musician,<sup>142</sup> and not merely the passive source of inspiration for others' work. Tsvetaeva specifies that she plays her own music, not that composed by others.<sup>143</sup> Tsvetaeva stresses the affinity between Henriette and the musician Sandro, and Henriette shows compassion for the young cellist who is in no mood to perform and suffers the pejorative comments of other guests:

Горбун:  
Диковинные люди - музыканты!  
Проси хоть час, хоть год, хоть век...

Генриэтта:  
(*глядя на Сандро, нежно*)

На сих  
Причудников нельзя сердиться, ибо  
Как женщины - играют, *как хотят*,  
*Когда хотят - кому хотят...*  
(*Протягивая руку Сандро.*)

- Маэстро,  
Вы мой союзник...

Hunchback:  
Eccentric people these musicians!  
You can implore them for an hour, a year, a century...

Henriette:  
(*glancing tenderly at Sandro*)  
With such  
Genius you must never be angry, for  
Like women - they play, *how they want*,  
*When they want, - to whom they want...*  
(*holding out a hand to Sandro*)

Maestro,  
You are my ally...<sup>144</sup>

Through the association in Tsvetaeva's aesthetics of music with poetry (discussed in

Chapter One) this scene completes the identification of music, poetry and women to construct a representation of female poetic identity. Henriette's music is described purely metaphorically as *son* (dream) so increasing its symbolic otherworldliness. The scene clearly recalls Tsvetaeva's descriptions of her own creative processes, in which she describes poetry as sounds and music which she hears and then transcribes. A particularly resonant phrase occurs earlier in the scene when the hunchback exclaims "*Sin'ora khochet zvukov*, The signora wants sound". The word *zvuk* used here is often used by Tsvetaeva in describing her own writing processes. Tsvetaeva has completely changed the emphasis of this scene in order to address the creation of a self-image as woman-poet. The sexually ambiguous figure of Henri/Henriette represents poetic identity, thus associating untraditional representations of sexual difference with poetic identity. It is crucial, however, that when Henri/Henriette is most clearly linked to poetic identity and involved in scenes which represent creativity, (playing music and writing on the windowpane), it is as Henriette. The play thus represents a poetic identity which is dependent upon an openness to sexual differences, yet reaches its fullest expression through the female poet.

## Conclusion

The analyses undertaken in this chapter demonstrate that both Tsvetaeva and Cixous employ the theatrical form to question dominant cultural representations of sexual difference and its consequences for the female subject.

The centrality of questions of sexual difference to Cixous' theatre has diminished greatly since 1986, and the articulation of abstract values through female characters enacts a return to problematically essentialised representations of women. Cixous' approach to theatre advocates a transcendence of sexual difference which denies the sexual specificity of female characters and spectators, contradicting the dramatisation of the repression of the female subject by dominant discourses of sexual



difference which is so thematically and formally central to her first plays. Accordingly the emerging representations of poetic identity in Cixous' theatre could be considered to transcend gender. However, it would be erroneous to infer a transcendence of sexual difference when the most striking poet-figures in Cixous' theatre remain male, and function as traditional male heroes in their respective narratives. Sexual difference is not a criterion for the representation of poetic identity, and thus leads to a sense of erasure rather than liberation. In contrast, Tsvetaeva's theatre maintains a focus on the constraints placed upon the female subject by patriarchal society, constraints which are also imposed upon the female poet. This combination of concerns results in multiple representations of poetic identities which are specifically defined by sexual difference. In their theatre, Tsvetaeva and Cixous aim to disrupt traditional representations of sexual difference, but it is the assertion of differently configured differences in Tsvetaeva's theatre which proves more radical than the ultimate rigidity of sexual difference which results from Cixous' adoption of unspecified concepts of alterity.

- (1) Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, La Jeune Née, pp. 115-116.
- (2) *ibid.*, p. 116.
- (3) Hélène Cixous, 'Aller à la mer', Le Monde, 28 April 1977, p. 19.
- (4) Cixous' critique of the structure of theatre is discussed in Chapter One and I will not reiterate the issues concerned here.
- (5) Claire Kahane, 'Introduction: Part Two' in In Dora's Case: Freud, Hysteria, Feminism, ed. Charles Bernheimer and Claire Kahane (London: Virago, 1985), pp. 24-25.
- (6) Jeanette Laillou Savona, 'French Feminism and the Theatre: An Introduction', Modern Drama, 27 (1984), pp. 540-545, p. 543.
- (7) Hélène Cixous, 'Aller à la mer', p. 19.
- (8) 'Dora: ...Papa profite des occasions que lui laisse monsieur K. Monsieur K. profite des occasions que lui laisse papa. Tout le monde sait s'arranger.' Hélène Cixous, Portrait de Dora, p. 67.
- (9) *ibid.*, p. 16.
- (10) *ibid.*, p. 20.
- (11) *ibid.*, p. 11.
- (12) Sigmund Freud, Case Histories I, p. 148.
- (13) *ibid.*, p. 150.
- (14) A full discussion of the ambiguity of this situation and an excellent analysis of the role of the governess can be found in Jane Gallop, 'Keys to Dora', in In Dora's Case: Freud, Hysteria, Feminism, ed. Charles Bernheimer and Claire Kahane, pp. 200-220. See also Maria Ramas, 'Freud's Dora, Dora's Hysteria', pp. 149-180 in the same collection.
- (15) This blind spot has been read as indicative of Freud's resistance to being implicated in a structure of transference in which Dora would transfer her desire for Frau K. on to Freud.
- (16) 'I failed to discover in time and to inform the patient that her homosexual (gynaecophilic) love for Frau K. was the strongest unconscious current in her mental life...Before I had learnt the importance of the homosexual current of feeling in psychoneurotics, I was often brought to a standstill in the treatment of my cases or found myself in complete perplexity'. Sigmund Freud, Case Histories I, The Penguin Freud Library, VIII (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. 162.
- (17) Hélène Cixous, Portrait de Dora, pp. 35-36. This representation of repressed lesbian desire has, however, been problematised due to its implied reassertion of a normative heterosexual model: '...la contradiction entre une économie lesbienne réprimée et l'omniprésence imposée du schéma hétérosexuel font souvent partie de l'appropriation que font les féministes de la théorie psychanalytique.' Jeanette Laillou Savona, 'Portrait de Dora d'Hélène Cixous: A la recherche d'un théâtre féministe' in Hélène Cixous, chemins d'une écriture ed. Françoise van Rossum-Guyon and Myriam Diaz-Diocaretz, pp. 161-175, p. 170.
- (18) Hélène Cixous, Portrait de Dora, pp. 37-39.



- (19) Jane Gallop, 'Keys to Dora' in In Dora's Case: Freud, Hysteria, Feminism ed. Charles Bernheimer and Claire Kahane. pp. 200-220, p. 217.
- (20) Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, La Jeune Née. pp. 282-283.
- (21) 'She [Dora] made it up with them, she took her revenge on them, and she brought her own business to a satisfactory conclusion. To the wife she said: 'I know that you have an affair with my father'; and the other did not deny it. From the husband she drew an admission of the scene by the lake which he had disputed, and brought the news of her vindication home to her father. Since then she had not resumed her relations with the family'. Sigmund Freud, Case Histories, I. p. 163.
- (22) Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, La Jeune Née, pp. 285-286.
- (23) *ibid.*, p. 287.
- (24) *ibid.*, p. 289.
- (25) *ibid.*, p. 284.
- (26) Hélène Cixous, Le Nom d'Oedipe. Chant du corps interdit (Paris: des femmes, 1978), backcover notes.
- (27) Violette Santellani, 'Femmes sans figures et figures de femmes' in Hélène Cixous, chemins d'une écriture, ed. Françoise van Rossum-Guyon and Myriam Diaz-Diocaretz. pp. 149-160, p. 155.
- (28) Hélène Cixous, 'Aller à la mer', p. 19.
- (29) *ibid.*, p. 19.
- (30) Brunhild, who has been unable to express her desire for Siegfried retires, nobly, into silence and the forgotten rather than assert her desire. Hélène Cixous, L'Histoire (qu'on ne connaîtra jamais) (Paris: des femmes, 1994). p. 146.
- (31) Hélène Cixous, 'Aller à la mer', p. 19.
- (32) Kolk's essay points out the failure of Cixous' version of the oedipal myth to displace the traditional male hero, and will be discussed in Chapter Five. Mieke Kolk, 'La Vengeance d'Oedipe: Théorie féministe et pratique du théâtre' in Hélène Cixous, chemins d'une écriture, ed. Françoise van Rossum-Guyon and Myriam Diaz-Diocaretz. pp. 177-186.
- (33) Hélène Cixous, 'La Prise de l'école de Madhubai' In Théâtre (Paris: des femmes, 1986). The play was first performed in 1983 at the Petit Odéon.
- (34) Violette Santellani, 'Femmes sans figures et figures de femmes' in Hélène Cixous, chemins d'une écriture, ed. Françoise van Rossum-Guyon and Myriam Diaz-Diocaretz. pp. 149-159, p. 156.
- (35) Hélène Cixous, Théâtre (Paris: des femmes, 1986).
- (36) The main texts which illustrate these changes in Cixous' approach are: 'Ecrits sur le théâtre' in L'Indiade ou l'Inde de leurs rêves, pp. 247-278; 'Le Chemin de légende', in Théâtre, pp. 7-11; and 'De la scène de l'Inconscient à la scène de l'Histoire', in Hélène Cixous, chemins d'une écriture, ed. Françoise van Rossum-Guyon and Myriam Diaz-Diocaretz, pp. 15-34.
- (37) Anne-Marie Picard, 'L'Indiade: Ariane's and Hélène's Conjugate dreams'.



(38) Hélène Cixous, 'L'Incarnation', p. 265. The maternal metaphor is explicit when Cixous discusses the actors: 'La vie qu'ils ont donné aux personnages, nul ne peut la reprendre. C'est comme l'amour maternel, l'absolument donné... Les comédiens sont des mères. Et les mères sont bonnes ou mauvaises comme d'habitude.' *ibid.*, p. 263.

(39) Hélène Cixous, 'Aller à la mer', p. 19.

(40) Hélène Cixous, 'L'Incarnation', pp. 265-266.

(41) This reference to the heart as universal symbol recurs: '...c'est ainsi qu'il m'est arrivé de distinguer 'le sexe' et 'le coeur'; disant que ce qu'il y a de commun entre les sexes, c'est le coeur. Il y a une parole commune, il y a un discours commun, il y a un univers d'émotions qui est totalement échangeable et qui passe par l'organe du coeur. Le coeur, l'organe le plus mystérieux qui soit, justement parce qu'il est le même pour les deux sexes. Comme si le coeur était le sexe commun aux deux sexes. Le sexe humain.' Hélène Cixous and Mireille Calle-Gruber, Hélène Cixous, Photos de racines, p. 40.

(42) 'Je n'ai jamais osé créer dans des textes de fiction un vrai personnage d'homme. Pourquoi? Parce que j'écris avec le corps, et que je suis une femme et un homme est un homme et de sa jouissance je ne sais rien. Et un homme sans corps et sans jouissance, je ne peux pas faire cela.' Hélène Cixous, 'L'Incarnation', p. 265.

(43) Morag Shiach, Hélène Cixous: A Politics of Writing, p. 130.

(44) *ibid.*, p. 129.

(45) Violette Santellani, 'Femmes sans figures et figures de femmes', p. 157.

(46) Jeanette Laillou Savona, 'Portrait de Dora d'Hélène Cixous: à la recherche d'un théâtre féministe', p. 173.

(47) Hélène Cixous, L'Histoire (qu'on ne connaîtra jamais) (Paris: des femmes, 1994).

(48) The other main female character, Edda, described simply as 'la Vieille' in the *dramatis personae*, and as *pythonisse* (prophet) in the text, has a double function. She represents the existing narrative ('Edda', the twelfth-century Norse poems collected by Sturlusson) which must be changed, and a quasi-comic witch.

(49) Hélène Cixous, La Ville Parjure ou le réveil des Erinyes (Paris: Théâtre du Soleil, 1994).

(50) *ibid.*, p. 182.

(51) However, not all women are united. The Queen is shown to be disillusioned with the King's policies and demonstrates moral sensibility and sympathy with the mother, but she ultimately offers compromise in the shape of improved hospitals and health funds in return for the mother's silence on the eve of elections. When this compromise is rejected she retorts: 'Femme effrayante! Elle a tourné vers moi un miroir infamant. Je ne sais même pas ce qu'elle attend... Ah! Femme impossible!' *ibid.*, p. 182.

(52) *ibid.*, p. 24.

(53) *ibid.*, p. 73.

(54) The mother and Aeschylus die, only to rejoin La nuit and the dead sons in an idyllic 'ville de velours noir', p. 215. The mother states her relief at leaving the scene



of her grief: 'Comme il est délicieux de ne plus être un personnage principal dans un atroce drame', p. 217.

(55) Anne-Marie Picard, 'L'Indiade ou l'Inde de leurs rêves', Dalhousie French Studies, 17 (1989), pp. 17-26, p. 23.

(56) Marc Silverstein, 'Body-Presence: Cixous's Phenomenology of Theatre', Theatre Journal, 43 (1991), pp. 507-516, p. 515.

(57) Anne-Marie Picard, 'L'Indiade: Ariane's and Hélène's Conjugate Dreams', p. 27. A version of Act V, Scene 2 of L'Indiade appears in the published text but was not performed, p. 180.

(58) Anna and Nadezhda argue over who was present when Mandel'shtam read or composed certain poems, and over who was his strongest inspiration.

(59) Marina Tsvetaeva, Izbrannaia Proza, I, p. 199.

(60) These studies include: Sibelan Forrester, 'Marina Cvetaeva's Self-Definition as a Female Poet', DPhil dissertation, University of Indiana, 1990; Laura Weeks, 'The Search for Self: the Poetic Personae of Marina Tsvetaeva', DPhil dissertation, University of Stanford, 1986; and the more recent Jane Taubman, 'Tsvetaeva and the Feminine Tradition in Russian Poetry' in Marina Tsvetaeva: One Hundred Years, ed. Viktoria Schweitzer et al, pp. 77-90.

(61) Jane Taubman, 'Tsvetaeva and the Feminine Tradition in Russian Poetry', in Marina Tsvetaeva: One Hundred Years, ed. Viktoria Schweitzer et al, pp. 77-90, p. 84.

(62) For examples of these see 'Sivilla (The Sibyl)', written in 1922-3, in Marina Tsvetaeva, Sochineniia, I, pp. 189-191; 'Ofeliia: V zashchitu korolevy (Ophelia: In Defence of the Queen)' in *ibid.*, p. 209, and 'Fedra (Phaedra)' (1923), *ibid.*, pp. 210-11. The figure of Sappho is important to Tsvetaeva's self-image as a poet, but we should also consider her choice of Joan of Arc as relevant to the image of the poet, as her inspiration by voices which encouraged her to act forms a parallel to Tsvetaeva's description of her own creative processes.

(63) Barbara Heldt, Terrible Perfection: Women and Russian Literature (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 131.

(64) Marina Tsvetaeva, 'V maiskoe utro (On a May morning)':  
On a May morning rock the cradle?  
My proud neck in a noose?  
To the prisoner - her spinning wheel, to the shepherdess her pipe.  
To me - my drum.

A woman's duties do not attract me:  
Boredom scares me - but not wounds!  
I have everything, - even power and honour  
From my drum!

The sun has risen, trees are in flower,  
All those unknown lands!  
Let all sorrow be thrown to the wind,  
Beat, my drum!

To be a drummer! Leading you all!  
All the rest - is rubbish!  
What can conquer hearts on the way,



Like my drum?

(65) 'Koli milym nazovu...' in Marina Tsvetaeva. Sochineniia. I. p. 64.

...

Коль похожа на жену - где повойник мой?

Коль похожа на вдову - где покойник мой?

Коли суженого жду - где бессонница?

Царь-Девичество живу, беззаконницей!

...

...

If I appear to be a wife - where's my headscarf?

If I am a widow - where's my late husband?

If I'm waiting for my intended - where's my sleeplessness?

I'm the Tsar-Maiden - I live outside the law!

...

(66) Marina Tsvetaeva, 'Molodets' in Sochineniia. I. pp. 345-409.

(67) Michael Makin, 'Text and Violence in Tsvetaeva's 'Molodets'' in Discontinuous Discourses in Modern Russian Literature, ed. C.Kelly, M. Makin and D. Shepherd (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 125.

(68) Marina Tsvetaeva, Metel' (The Snowstorm). p. 52.

(69) The third part of the projected dramatic trilogy, about the life of Theseus was to have centred on another woman, Helen of Troy, a character who, like Phaedra, is defended in Tsvetaeva's poetry against dominant representations of her.

(70) P.Diel, Symbolism in Greek Mythology (London: Shambala Press, 1980), p. 163.

(71) Chapter Two contains a reading of the play as an allegory of the female subject's relationship to language.

(72) Marina Tsvetaeva, Ariadna. pp. 274-279.

(73) *ibid.*, pp 265-267.

(74) Marina Tsvetaeva, 'Prikluchenie' in Teatr, pp. 132-166.

(75) The figure of the amazon warrior appears frequently in Tsvetaeva's poetry. Representing a radically different version of female identity, the amazon has no social links with men, nor traditional social responsibilities. This image appealed to Tsvetaeva as analogous to her perception of the woman poet, who had to renounce traditional femininity in order to write, and assume an identity as a poet.

(76) Antonia Filonova Gove, 'The Feminine Stereotype and Beyond: Role Conflict and Resolution in the Poetics of Marina Tsvetaeva'. Slavic Review, 36 (1977), pp. 231-255, p. 243.

(77) M. Lowe, 'The Dialectic of Biology and Culture' in Woman's Nature: Rationalisation of Inequality ed. M. Lowe (New York: Pergamon Press, 1983), p. 54.

(78) Carolyn Heilbrun, 'Androgyny and the Psychology of Sex Differences', in The Future of Difference, ed. Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1987), p. x.



(79) Mary Daly, 'The Qualitative Leap Beyond Patriarchal Religion', Quest, 1 (4), p. 31.

(80) Nancy Chodorow, 'Gender, Relation and Difference in Psychoanalytic Perspective', in The Future of Difference ed. Hester. Eisenstein and Alice Jardine (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1987), pp. 15-31, p. 16.

(81) There is a tension in Cixous' use of the term between reference to an individual's sexual relationships with partners of both sexes, and a more abstract use of the term to represent an undefined and abstract openness within the self to the other sex.

(82) 'Prédire ce qu'il adviendra de la différence sexuelle dans un autre temps (dans deux ou trois cents ans?) est impossible. Mais il ne faut pas se méprendre: hommes et femmes sont pris dans un réseau de déterminations culturelles millénaires d'une complexité pratiquement inanalysable: on ne peut pas plus parler de "la femme" que de "l'homme" sans être pris à l'intérieur d'un théâtre idéologique où la multiplication des représentations, images, reflets, mythes, identifications transforme, déforme, altère sans cesse l'imaginaire de chacun et rend d'avance caduque toute conceptualisation.' Hélène Cixous, La Jeune Née, p. 152.

(83) *ibid.*, p. 153.

(84) *ibid.*, p. 155.

(85) *ibid.*, pp. 155-156.

(86) Jacques Derrida, 'Choréographies. Interview with Christie V. Macdonald', Diacritics, (1982), pp. 66-77, p. 76.

(87) The term *différance* is used by Derrida to express a combination of difference and deferral, and envisages a ontological process governed by a ceaseless chain of signifiers. This non-teleological process, with no commanding entity or 'Truth', enables differences to multiply outside binary structures, and enables them to be celebrated rather than repressed.

(88) Olga Matich, 'Androgyny and the Russian Silver Age', Pacific Coast Philology, 14 (1979), pp. 42-50, p. 45. See also Olga Matich, 'Androgyny and the Russian Religious Renaissance', in Western Philosophical Systems in Russian Literature ed. A. M. Mlikontin (Los Angeles: University of South California Press, 1981), pp. 165-175.

(89) Sergei Bulgakov, The Wisdom of God. A Brief Summary of Sophiology (New York, 1937).

(90) Anya M. Kroth, 'Androgyny as an Exemplary Feature of Marina Tsvetaeva's Dichotomous Poetic Vision', Slavic Review, 38 (1979), pp. 563-582.

(91) *ibid.*, p. 564.

(92) *ibid.*, p. 564.

(93) *ibid.*, p. 565.

(94) *ibid.*, p. 567.

(95) As discussed in Chapter Three, Tsvetaeva had a great interest in Casanova, possibly due to her idealisation of the eighteenth century, and her recognition of his status as writer in later life (as demonstrated in Tsvetaeva's other play based on the memoirs, Feniks (The Phoenix)).



(96) Peter Scotto, 'Toward a Reading of Tsvetaeva's *Feniks*', in Marina Tsvetaeva: One Hundred Years, ed. Viktoria Schweitzer et al. pp. 194-201, p. 195.

(97) Karlinsky detects a link between this play and Tsvetaeva's expressed fascination with Rostand's play *L'Aiglon*, which she translated in 1908. The latter play centres on Napoleon's son, but includes an amazonian figure, played in the production seen by Tsvetaeva by Sarah Bernhardt. Simon Karlinsky, Marina Cvetaeva: Her Life and Art, p. 248.

(98) Many articles on the memoirs concentrate on trying to extract factual information on the characters represented. A typical example of this occurs in relation to the very episodes referred to in *Prikluchenie*, as critics instigate a *cherchez la femme* exercise on the identity of Henriette. For example: Helmut Watzlawick, 'Fata Viam Invenient or Henriette Forever', L'Intermediare de Casanovistes, 6 (1989). pp. 1-14.

(99) Gérard Lahouati, 'Le Spectateur Immobile. Esthétique littéraire et mise en scène des souvenirs dans *L'Histoire de ma Vie*', Europe: Revue Littéraire Mensuelle, 697 (1987), p. 74.

(100) *ibid.*, p. 74.

(101) Jacques Casanova de Seingalt, L'Histoire de ma Vie IX, (Paris and Wiesbaden: Edition Brockhaus-Plon, 1960), p. 315.

(102) Gerard Lahouti, 'Le Spectateur immobile: Esthetique littéraire et mise en scène des souvenirs dans *L'Histoire de ma Vie*', p. 76.

(103) Simon Karlinsky, Marina Cvetaeva: Her Life and Art, p. 90.

(104) Jacques Casanova de Seingalt, Histoire de Ma Vie, II, p. 14.

(105) He further uses this as an example to define female beauty: 'Toute femme qui se croit belle parce qu'étant habillée en homme tout le monde la prend pour un homme, n'est pas belle femme', *ibid.*, p. 16.

(106) 'Sa conquête ne me paraissant pas difficile, je pensais aux moyens que je pouvais employer pour la faire.' *ibid.*, p. 19.

(107) Marina Tsvetaeva, *Prikliuchenie*, p. 135.

(108) Psyche had been persuaded by her jealous sisters to hide a lamp so that she could glimpse her mysterious husband, Eros. A drop of oil fell from the lamp, waking Eros, who then fled.

(109) *ibid.*, p. 136.

(110) *ibid.*, p. 133.

(111) Casanova is also described in abstract terms as an angle and coal (based on wordplay in the Russian between angle 'ugol' and coal 'ugol'). The coal could be seen as forming an opposite to the 'lunar ice', but this is not sustained in the text.

(112) *ibid.*, p. 138.

(113) *ibid.*, p. 137.

(114) Simon Karlinsky, Marina Cvetaeva: Her Life and Art, p. 249.

(115) Jacques Casanova de Seingalt, Histoire de ma Vie, II, p. 15.



(116) Marina Tsvetaeva, Prikliuchenie, p. 138.

(117) Казанова:  
Я вас люблю!

Анри:  
У вас прелестный голос!

Казанова:  
А вы меня не любите!  
Анри:  
Не всё  
Так просто под луною, Казанова!  
Семь ступеней у лестницы любовной...

Казанова:  
Я на восьмой тогда!  
Анри:  
И сотни тысяч,  
И сотни тысяч верст меж «да» и «нет».  
Казанова:  
Еще ни разу не поцеловали!

Анри:  
Не все дороги в Рим ведут.  
Казанова:  
(насторжившись)  
Нет, Рим  
Нам может быть опасен. Едем в Парму!  
Я вас люблю!  
Анри:  
Прелестные слова!

Казанова:  
А вы меня не любите!  
Анри:  
...И губы...

Казанова:  
Я никогда так страстно не любил,  
Так никогда любить уже не буду...

Анри:  
(глубоко-сербезно)  
Так - никогда, тысячу раз - иначе:  
Страстнее - да, сильнее - да, страннее - нет.

Casanova:  
I love you!

Henri:

You have a wonderful voice!

Casanova:  
But you don't love me!

Henri:  
Not everything  
Is so simple in the moonlight. Casanova!  
The ladder of love has seven steps...

Casanova:  
Then I am on the eighth!

Henri:  
And hundreds of thousands  
Hundreds of thousands of miles between "yes" and "no".

Casanova:  
We haven't yet kissed once!

Henri:  
Not all roads lead to Rome.

Casanova:  
(cautious)  
No, Rome  
Could be dangerous for us. Let's go to Parma!  
I love you!

Henri:  
What wonderful words!

Casanova:  
But you don't love me!

Henri:  
...And lips..

Casanova:  
I have never loved so passionately,  
And will never love so again...

Henri:  
(profoundly)  
So - never, a thousand times differently:  
More passionately - yes, more strongly - yes,  
but more strangely - no.

ibid., p. 139.

(118) One could argue for a psychoanalytic reading of Casanova's pistol, in that the loss of it is a symbolic castration which undermines his traditionally dominant sexual role.

(119) ibid., p. 141.

(120) This scene also appears in the memoirs, where it is Casanova who goes out to buy underwear for her, and indeed chooses the dresses to be made. Tsvetaeva's character asserts her identity and chooses her own abstract colours for her clothes, the



colours of the moon, time and dawn, signifying that these constitute essential elements of her identity.

(121) The hotel, in Geneva, is famed for its guests which included Goethe, Schopenhauer and Stendhal. Tsvetaeva retains the name 'Vesy'.

(122) 'Henriette pour calmer ma douleur ne me flatte de rien. Elle me pria de ne pas m'informer d'elle et de faire semblable de ne pas la connaître, si voyageant jamais en France je la trouvais quelque part.' Casanova de Seingalt, L'Histoire de ma Vie, p. 75.

(123) 'J'ai vu écrit sur une des vitres des deux fenêtres qu'il y avait: Tu oublierais aussi Henriette. Elle avait écrit ces mots à la pointe d'un petit diamant en bague que je lui avais donné.' *ibid.*, p. 76.

(124) *ibid.*, p. 156.

(125) *ibid.*, p. 156.

(126) Казанова:  
Понял.  
Любовь и долг, но это так же ново...

Генриэтта:  
(на секундочку Анри)  
Как белый волк - и верный Казанова!...

Casanova:  
I've understood.  
Love and duty, but this is as new to me...

Henriette:  
(for a second Henri)  
As a white wolf - and a faithful  
Casanova!...

*ibid.*, p. 157.

(127) *ibid.*, pp. 158-159.

(128) Reference to this point is found in the notes to Tsvetaeva, Teatr, p. 359.

(129) Казанова:  
Чего бы ты хотела?

Девочонка:  
Дом, - Часы, -  
Лакея в золотом и мно - го денег!

Казанова:  
Зачем тебе они?

Девочонка:  
Зачем?  
Была ничем, а буду всем.  
(Сентенциозно)  
Как цвет нуждается в поливке,  
Так нужно денег, чтобы жить, -  
Хотя бы для того, чтоб пить



Не сливки в кофий по утрам, а кофий в сливки!  
(Трепая на себе юбки.) *Тобь к чертам вот эти тряпки!*  
Чтобы катать в своей коляске!

...

Моя кровать была бы голубая,  
Нет, - алая! А в головах - Амур,  
И чтобы ямочки везде, - ну пухлый-пухлый!

Casanova:  
What would you like?

Girl:  
A house. - clocks -  
A servant dressed in gold and lots of money!

Casanova:  
Why would you need them?

Girl:  
Why?  
I was nothing, but will be everything.  
(sententiously)  
Like a flower needs watering,  
So I need money, to live, -  
Even if it's just so that I can pour  
Not cream into my coffee in the mornings.  
But coffee into my cream!  
(pulling at her skirt)  
So that I can throw these rags to the devil  
So that I can ride in my own carriage.  
...  
My bed would be blue.  
No, scarlet! And at the head Cupid,  
And cushions everywhere. - yes, comfy, comfy.

ibid., pp. 161-162.

(130) ibid., pp. 164-165.

(131) Simon Karlinsky, Marina Cvetaeva. Her Life and Art, p. 249.

(132) Anya Kroth, 'Androgyny as an Exemplary Feature of Marina Tsvetaeva's Poetic Vision', p. 567.

(133) ibid., p. 568.

(134) '...combining both characteristics of divided sexual domain and reconciling them in one being, the result being the androgynous natures of her poetic personae, captures the dichotomous nature of Tsvetaeva's perception and self-expression, as well as the defiant aspect of her personality.' ibid., p. 582.

(135) Svetlana Boym, Death in Quotation Marks: Cultural Myths of the Modern Poet (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 218. Boym's reference to Bakhtin and the concept of 'multivoicedness' forms a striking parallel to Derrida's image of a deconstruction of sexual difference resulting in a 'multiplicity' of sexually



marked voices'.

(136) This point is discussed in a detailed analysis of Tsvetaeva's Ariadna and Fedra in Chapter Five.

(137) 'Les longs dialogues se firent entre Henriette et moi sur cent propos tous agréables, dans lesquels j'ai admiré dans elle un esprit tout à fait nouveau pour moi, qui n'avais jamais conversé avec une Française. La trouvant toujours charmante, et ne pouvant la supposer qu'aventurière, je m'étonnais de lui trouver des sentiments qui me semblaient ne pouvoir être le fruit que d'une éducation très recherchée; mais quand cette idée me venait je la rejetais'. Casanova de Seingalt, L'Histoire de ma vie, p. 21.

(138) 'Dans une femme la science est déplacée; elle fait du tort à l'essentiel de son sexe, et, encore, elle ne va jamais au-delà des bornes connues. Nulle découverte scientifique faite par des femmes. Pour aller plus ultra il faut une vigueur que le sexe féminin ne peut pas avoir.' *ibid.*, p. 50.

(139) 'Le concert commença par une superbe symphonie; puis les acteurs chantèrent le duo, puis un écolier de Vandini donna un concerto de violoncello, qu'on applaudit beaucoup. Mais voilà ce qui me causa la plus grande surprise. Henriette se lève, et louant le jeune homme qui avait joué la solo, elle lui prend son violoncello, lui disant d'un air modeste et serein qu'elle allait le faire briller davantage. Elle s'assied à la même place où il était, elle prend l'instrument entre ses genoux, et elle prie l'orchestre de recommencer le concerto. Voilà la compagnie dans le plus grand silence; et moi mourant de peur'. Casanova de Seingalt, L'Histoire de ma vie, p. 60.

(140) This quotation also reflects Casanova's description of their relationship with him as 'maître' and Henriette as 'trésor'. The tone of the scene is further changed as Henriette reveals how she was not permitted to play the cello when younger because of the required posture which was considered indecent. *ibid.*, p. 61.

(141) Marina Tsvetaeva, Prikliuchenie, p. 151.

(142) The association of poetry and music in Tsvetaeva's aesthetics is discussed in Chapter One.

(143) *ibid.*, pp. 154-155.

(144) *ibid.*, p. 154.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### ADAPTATIONS OF IDENTITY: GREEK MYTHOLOGY

This chapter will focus on the employment and adaptation of narratives and figures from mythology, predominantly classical Greek mythology, in Tsvetaeva's and Cixous' theatre, and will lead to conclusions on the role of classical mythology in the representation of poetic identity in their theatre. Myth constitutes a cultural metadiscourse through which ideologically founded social and cultural attitudes are expressed and maintained. As such, the narratives of Greek mythology selected by Cixous and Tsvetaeva can be seen to serve as paradigms of patriarchal discourse, within and against which they strive to represent the female subject. The discussion will centre on Cixous' plays Le Nom d'Oedipe, Chant du corps interdit, La Ville parjure ou le réveil des Erinyes<sup>1</sup> and L'Histoire (qu'on ne connaîtra jamais),<sup>2</sup> and Tsvetaeva's two plays Fedra and Ariadna. All these works involve engagement with and refocalisation of narratives of Greek mythology, they also provide specific contexts in which the writers' respective aesthetics are developed.

Tsvetaeva and Cixous both privilege the question of representing the female, desiring subject when engaging with these narratives, which contain arguably the best-known female characters of classical Greek mythology: Jocasta, Ariadne and Phaedra. The myths can be read as representing female sexuality as a monstrous and harmful other (Jocasta and Phaedra), or as representing the fate of woman as of secondary

importance to the perceived focus of the tragic narrative (Jocasta and Ariadne). The value of addressing narratives of such cultural weight and their consequences for the representation of women, cannot be overstated. In her book, Women in Greek Myth,<sup>3</sup> Mary Lefkowitz denies the role of feminist critiques and interpretations of Greek mythology by stating that these narratives were not intended to provide a reflection of actual attitudes towards women's function and status in ancient Greece, and so should not be read from a feminist approach. The powerful images of women contained in the narratives, however, retain their influence as cultural representations, and are therefore ideologically and politically relevant to all women. Lefkowitz demonstrates this blind spot through her own assumptions:

We may only suggest that the Greeks knew how to describe basic human sexual instincts, both male aggression and female submission, and believed that these must be recognised, but also controlled if human beings of both sexes are to live together in harmony and understanding.<sup>4</sup>

The positing of such stereotypical gender characteristics, can be revealed and challenged through the reinterpretation of these cultural representations. The function of Woman is also formalised in classical mythology:

They play the role of catalysts, agents, instruments, blockers, spoilers, destroyers, and sometimes helpers or saviors for the male characters... When elaborately represented they may serve as antimodels... and concomitantly, their experience of suffering or their acts that lead them to disaster regularly occur before and precipitate those of men.<sup>5</sup>

Such a pattern is avoided, indeed revealed and deconstructed, through Cixous' and Tsvetaeva's constant emphasis on the female figures' centrality to the narratives, and the foregrounding of their tragedies, independent of that of the male hero.

This approach to classical mythology remains a prominent point of comparison between the theatre of Cixous and Tsvetaeva. However, there are other specific



contexts which both strengthen and, in some instances, disrupt the construction of parallels. Both writers have also consistently worked to create their own, alternative mythologies, around other writers with whom they claim specific affinities, and around their own poetic and personal identities.

### **Tsvetaeva and Greek Mythology: Contexts and Sources**

Classical Greek mythology constitutes one of the main intertexts of Tsvetaeva's poetry.<sup>6</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, the reclaiming of female figures from myth, history and literature is a central characteristic throughout the work of Marina Tsvetaeva. Many of these figures are from classical mythology and include Phaedra, Ariadne, Ophelia, the Sibyl, and Helen of Troy. Tsvetaeva presents these figures as speakers in several poems, or has another speaker defend them as wronged or misrepresented woman:

Her heroines of myth and tradition are rescued from their portraits as either destructive or victimised beings - the familiar dual interpretation of masculine tradition - to be reclaimed as new female self-definitions.<sup>7</sup>

This reclamation is achieved by attributing a voice and subjectivity to the characters, a move which also encourages a reading of them as representations of poetic identity and allies of the poet self.

The poems from Posle Rossii provide evidence of Tsvetaeva's engagement with narratives from classical Greek mythology, during the period immediately before she wrote her classical tragedies, and reveal several elements which are central to her dramatisations of these narratives.<sup>8</sup> The core aspects are the adoption and defence of female characters, the employment of their situations to represent the status of female poetic identity, and the development of the inherent conflict in classical mythology between the mortal and immortal, not gods against mortals, but the freedom of immortality as opposed to the constraints of existence. Tsvetaeva's collection Remeslo



(Craft),<sup>9</sup> although containing many poems which refer to literary sources other than Greek mythology (notably the Bible and Russian folklore) includes many poems which depict figures from Greek mythology, and creates a dialogue between them and the speakers of the poems. These poems also serve as illustrations of the increasingly dramatic qualities of Tsvetaeva's verse.

The figure of the Sibyl recurs throughout Tsvetaeva's work and is fundamental to her representation of poetic identity,<sup>10</sup> The myth relates how the Sibyl, a prophet who delivers her prophecies in verse, asked Apollo to grant her eternal life but omitted to ask for eternal youth, thus, as she aged and became more frail, she wished for death to liberate her from her physical form. Finally she became simply a voice, able to deliver her prophesies but commanding no physical presence. This figure appealed to Tsvetaeva as an image of poetic identity which transcends the restrictions of mortality and physical reality to attain a pure state of voice. The verse cycle 'Sivilla (The Sibyl)'<sup>11</sup> presents an celebration of the Sibyl's freedom and 'divnyi golos (wondrous voice)' which has risen from the ashes.<sup>12</sup> The poem reveals an interest in the relationships between mortality, freedom and poetry which will dominate Tsvetaeva's Ariadna. The cycle 'Fedra (Phaedra)',<sup>13</sup> should also be examined in the context of Tsvetaeva's play of the same name. The poem has two parts, the first entitled 'Zhaloba (complaint)' and the second 'Poslanie (epistle)' which, as Makin points out, further demonstrate Tsvetaeva's unacknowledged familiarity with classical Greek forms.<sup>14</sup> The poems also act as precursors to the play Fedra in their tone as Phaedra addresses Hippolytus directly and defiantly, evoking sensual and physical images of fever and heat to represent her passion. Another poem in the book Posle Rossii (After Russia) which engages more radically with classical Greek mythology is 'Evridika - Orfeiu (Eurydice to Orpheus)',<sup>15</sup> in which Tsvetaeva's Eurydice implores Orpheus not to retrieve her from Hades as she would rather remain there than return to the banality of mortal existence.

Michael Makin's recent book, which establishes and discusses the literary sources of Tsvetaeva's work, is extremely helpful in this context. Makin comments on



the use of literary sources in Tsvetaeva's collection Remeslo (Craft), and specifically on Tsvetaeva's comparison of her poetic self with that of Sappho:

...the dismembered fragments of a literary inheritance (predominantly male) are 'caught' by Tsvetaeva, and transformed into new works. The implicit association of Tsvetaeva with Sappho is a reminder that the transgression of traditional literary codes (the rewriting of sources) is also connected with the transgression of sexual and social codes...<sup>16</sup>

This is an important example of the connection in Tsvetaeva's work between the rewriting of sources and the deliberate project of righting perceived injustices within the sexual and social codes represented.

This chapter will focus upon Tsvetaeva's original treatment of the myths in question; however, it is also important to enter into some discussion of her sources. The sources are the critical focus of Makin's study, and are particularly interesting in the context of Tsvetaeva's knowledge and use of classical Greek mythology as the status of Tsvetaeva's sources for Ariadna and Fedra is not entirely clear. Tsvetaeva herself stated that she had used a collection of the most well-known narratives by Gustav Schwab<sup>17</sup> which was intended for children.<sup>18</sup> However, this is a rather unconvincing, and arguably consciously misleading claim, as Tsvetaeva knew several writers and scholars, not least her father, who had published translations or undertaken scholarly research in the field of classical Greek mythology. Her use of verse forms and conventions of classical Greek tragedy also implies a detailed knowledge of texts other than Schwab's.<sup>19</sup> Tsvetaeva was familiar with Nietzsche's The Birth of Tragedy, which constitutes a rewarding context for an analysis of Ariadna. Makin points out that she also knew Vladimir Nilender, a translator of several Greek narratives, and provides further evidence of her enthusiasm for the Greeks, but does not conclusively identify specific influences on her plays.<sup>20</sup> The interest in Greek mythology amongst Tsvetaeva's contemporaries, and its place in Russian literary and philosophical history, must also be addressed. Despite Tsvetaeva's statement that she relied solely on Schwab's versions of the Greek myths in her research for the plays. I would suggest



that we can establish several other influences which act upon her treatment of the narratives.

Greek tragedy did not have a tradition of presentation in the Russian theatre, as it had, for example, in the French theatre. However, as discussed in Chapter One, Greek tragedy was an important theme in the work of the second generation of Russian symbolists.<sup>21</sup> There were well-known writers who produced translations and texts based on Greek mythology at this time, including Fedor Sologub, Valerii Briusov and Innokentii Annenskii. Makin suggests that these texts form the main literary context in which to view Tsvetaeva's 'classical' plays.<sup>22</sup> However, there does not seem to be any clear direct influence on Tsvetaeva's plays from these texts, although the widespread interest in Greek tragedy and mythology sustained by these texts may have encouraged Tsvetaeva in her choice of projects.

Tsvetaeva was familiar with Nietzsche's Birth of Tragedy,<sup>23</sup> a text which had great influence in Russian literary circles at the turn of the century. There are many elements of Tsvetaeva's aesthetic which find correspondences both in symbolism and in Nietzsche's writings, including his positing of music as the fullest embodiment of art. Nietzsche's interest in Greek tragedy focuses on a desired revival of the Dionysian strand within the form to create the foundations for a revival of national culture.<sup>24</sup> Nietzsche defined two opposing strands within Greek tragedy: the Dionysian, which represents the forces of chaos, fertility and ecstasy; and the Apollonian, which represents structure and order. For Nietzsche, an understanding of the dialectic between these two strands is essential to any representation of tragedy and human existence. Nietzsche regarded Greek tragedy as an ideal model of artistic creation as it achieved a balance between the Dionysian and the Apollonian. He also placed great emphasis on the function of the chorus as representative of musicality and the interaction between the gods and the people.<sup>25</sup> The Dionysian elements remain fundamental to tragedy, and in The Birth of Tragedy, Nietzsche charted what he regarded as the decline of Greek tragedy with the growing dominance of the Apollonian elements, and the rational analysis of mythological narratives rather than the celebration of Dionysian ritual.



Nietzsche then applied his analysis of Greek culture to other cultures, and employed it to demonstrate the decline of his own national culture in these terms.<sup>26</sup>

However, Nietzsche's influence on Tsvetaeva's classical theatre is, I would argue, indirect, and mediated through the work of Viacheslav Ivanov, which includes two classical plays.<sup>27</sup> Ivanov was heavily influenced by Nietzsche's writings on the nature of tragedy, and in his essay of 1904 'Ellinskaia religiiia stradaushchego boga (The Hellenic religion of the suffering god)' he expresses his desire for cultural and spiritual revivals based on Dionysian principles.<sup>28</sup> An important aspect of the Dionysian ritual involved the attainment of higher glory through suffering. Ivanov, like Nietzsche, lamented the poverty of contemporary theatre, blaming the disappearance of Dionysian elements and particularly the diminished role of the chorus, for this. He considered that the chorus was no longer the representative of the people as active participants in the drama, and had become merely the passive reporter of the narrative and a powerless spectator. He looked for cultural regeneration through a revival of choral drama, in which both chorus and audience would be given an active part in the drama. The concept of theatre as collective ritual was fundamental to Ivanov's aesthetic, and through it he sought an opportunity to represent what he perceived as the fundamental conflict inherent in human existence, that between inner and outer life.<sup>29</sup> He believed that an increased role for the chorus would reintroduce a religious concept into theatre with Dionysus as god. He even later described the Slav peoples as specifically Dionysian in nature.<sup>30</sup> Attention to the conflicting Dionysian and Apollonian principles also brought Ivanov to connect the rising dominance of the Apollonian principle to the decline in women's status. Apollo is linked to the traditionally masculine symbol of the sun, as opposed to the traditionally 'feminine' lunar elements.<sup>31</sup>

It remains unclear to what extent Tsvetaeva was familiar with Ivanov's essays on Dionysian drama: she does not allude to them in her correspondence or articles. However a cycle of poems, written in 1920 is explicitly dedicated to Ivanov and reflects a knowledge of the main concerns of his work.<sup>32</sup> In this cycle Ivanov is



presented as a Christ-like mentor figure, and the speaker, his disciple, becomes increasingly anxious as he tries to read his writing in the sand, as daylight fades and reading becomes difficult. In the third part of the poem, the speaker adopts the role of Mary Magdalene, a (strongly gendered) disciple to Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane. The poem was written at Easter and combines themes of prophecy and the devotion to a greater artistic or spiritual being, with central themes of sacrifice and the divide between the mortal and the immortal.

Despite these clear indications of Tsvetaeva's engagement with Ivanov's work, some critics, even whilst themselves acknowledging this engagement, have played down any comparisons between the projects of Tsvetaeva and Ivanov:

Whatever her admiration for the classical plays of Vyacheslav Ivanov and Innokenty Annensky, Tsvetaeva did not attempt to compete with these erudite men on their own ground.<sup>33</sup>

Makin also suggests a contrast between the scholarly Annensky and Ivanov, and the, 'intuitive, even naïve Tsvetaeva.'<sup>34</sup> I would argue that the presence of the themes of sacrifice and immortality in Ivanov's work constitutes the major influence on Tsvetaeva's classical theatre, and that these same themes are fundamental to a reading of Ariadna. The critic Venclova also argues for Tsvetaeva's knowledge of Ivanov's work.<sup>35</sup> Tsvetaeva combines this interest with her own allegories and concerns involving the representation of the female poet, and the conflict between worldly and creative life, between mortal passion and spiritual existence. This assertion of relevant philosophical contexts beyond those sources claimed by Tsvetaeva for her own work, enables a more rewarding and coherent analysis of the plays than currently exists.

### **Myth and Poetic Identity: Ariadne and Phaedra**

Ariadna was written in Prague in 1924,<sup>36</sup> and work on the play was interrupted by the writing of the two long poems, 'Poema gory (Poem of the Mountain)' and 'Poema kontsa (Poem of the End)' which also form an intertext with the play. The play



is divided into five acts, 'Chuzhestranets (The Stranger)', 'Tezei u Minosa (Theseus with Minos)', 'Labirint (Labyrinth)', 'Naksos (Naxos)' and 'Parus (The Sail)'. The five titles demarcate familiar stages within the narrative, but Tsvetaeva's play does not place equal emphasis on all stages. The fourth act, in which Theseus abandons Ariadne to Bacchus on the island of Naxos, is the focus of dramatic attention, which centres particularly on the debate between Bacchus and Theseus over Ariadne's fate.

Throughout the play emphasis is placed on conflict, not however on the physical combat between Theseus and the Minotaur, which is unseen, but on the conflict between masculine and feminine and between the physical and the spiritual, or mortal and immortal. I shall read these conflicts in the context of the representation of the female poet in the play. When we first see Ariadne she is playing with a golden ball, a gift from Aphrodite which she is to give to her love. Ariadne encourages it to reach from mortal surroundings to greater heights:

Ариадна:  
Выше, выше! Пробивши кровлю -  
К олимпийцам, в лепную синь!  
Мой клубок золотой и ровный,  
Дар прекраснейшей из богинь!  
...  
«Золотой невестин  
Дар - подальше спрячь!...»  
От земли не вечной  
Выше, выше, мяч!

Ariadne:  
Higher! Higher! Burst through the roof  
Towards the Olympians, into the blue!  
My smooth and golden ball,  
Gift of the most beautiful of goddesses!  
...

"A golden gift from the bride  
Fly further into the distance!..."  
Away from this mortal earth,  
Fly higher, higher, ball!<sup>37</sup>

Her desire to throw the ball higher and higher represents a desire for escape from

mortality, a desire frustrated by the return of the ball. Makin reads the scene as an example of 'the incorporation of ...everyday details'<sup>38</sup> which, in his view, distinguish the play from Ivanov's tragedies and align it with those of Sophocles and Euripides. However, I would argue that this scene establishes one of the major conflicts in Tsvetaeva's play, and can be compared to the work of Ivanov and Annenskii in its employment of myth to engage with questions of poetic identity. A reading of this scene as the establishment of Ariadne as poet figure is encouraged by Svetlana Boym in her comments on the symbolism of flight in Tsvetaeva work, Boym refers to 'the feminine self flying away from traditional feminine roles.'<sup>39</sup> The ball's inability to escape warns that stronger forces will prevail to control Ariadne's own creative flight.

The theme of the inadequacy of mortal love recurs throughout the play and informs the central debate between Theseus and Bacchus. It is combined with the theme of the irreconcilable differences between the masculine and the feminine, between men and women. After Theseus has killed the Minotaur, with Ariadne's help, there is a long discussion between them as to whether Ariadne should leave with Theseus. The debate serves as a demonstration of the differences between them, and at first, Theseus does not understand Ariadne's words:

Ариадна:  
Тайнопись - дева:  
Надобен ключ.

Тезей:  
Красным гранитом  
Взрос и окреп.  
В снах не испытан,  
К отсветам слеп.

Угль затвердый -  
Муж, а не пух!

Ариадна:  
Умысел - дева:  
Надобен слух.

Тезей:  
Внял, но не понял.  
Брось - соловьем!  
К басням не склонен,  
В льстях не силен.



Любишь - так следуй  
В свет и во мрак!

Ариадна:  
Занавес - дева:  
Надобен знак.

Ariadna:  
A maiden is a cryptogram:  
You need a key.

Theseus:  
Like handsome granite  
I grew up strong.  
I'm inexperienced in dreams,  
And blind to reflection.

A man is made of solid coal  
Not fluffy down.

Ariadna:  
Woman is intention:  
You must listen.

Theseus:  
I've heard, but not understood.  
Leave it for the nightingales!  
I'm not keen on fables,  
Not skilled at flattery.

You love - so follow  
Into light and darkness!

Ariadna:  
Woman is a curtain:  
You need a sign.<sup>40</sup>

Ariadne defines her mode of communication as different to that of men and Theseus evokes traditional 'masculine' characteristics to support his attitudes. This lack of successful communication is foregrounded as Ariadne proceeds to cast doubt on the strength of Theseus' love and encourages him to depart without her.<sup>41</sup> At this point the Chorus appears and, through their praise for Theseus, persuades Ariadne to leave with him. The last word we hear Ariadne utter consciously is her own name. Up to this point, Theseus had been unaware of her identity, and this simple stating of her name to end the third act asserts the mythological strength of the narrative and reminds us of

Ariadne's predestined fate.

The entire scene of the debate between Theseus and Bacchus takes place over Ariadne's sleeping body. This is clearly important to the dramatic and physical structure of the scene and emphasises both Ariadne's powerlessness before the demands of the gods, and her status as object of exchange between Theseus and Bacchus as she remains dependent on the actions and decisions of the male characters around her. The scene can be interpreted as further evidence of Ariadne's status as poet figure. The critic Faryno, in his discussion of the image of sleep in Tsvetaeva's work, suggests an analysis which is particularly apt to this scene. Discussing a specific poem, 'Bessonnitsa (Insomnia)', he remarks:

In this watchful sleep 'I' starts on a journey, a trip to the other world. But first it gets rid of all names, next of all family and friendly ties, the angel-like body is weightless and becomes a visitor in a certain 'heavenly country'.<sup>42</sup>

Ariadne's sleep prepares her for the transition from the mortal to the immortal, enabling her to attain a truer poetic identity. She will leave behind the limitations of her physical self to transcend the world represented by Theseus, thus sacrificing mortal love for immortal creativity.

Bacchus does not appear on stage, and is present only as a voice. His lack of physical presence further emphasises the difference between the two dominant figures of this scene, and encourages an association of Theseus with mortal, physical love and Bacchus with spiritual transcendence and immortality. Such distinctions are maintained as Theseus employs romantic clichés, likening Ariadne to a pearl and a crumpled rose.<sup>43</sup> Bacchus asserts himself as Ariadne's predestined bridegroom and uses this argument to persuade Theseus to give her up. Bacchus was often represented as an androgynous figure, thus able to transcend the irreconcilable conflict between the masculine and the feminine, which dominates the discussions between Theseus and Ariadne. Bacchus cruelly mocks mortal love in a direct attack on Theseus:

Голос:



О, как мало и плохо любят!  
Любят, рубят - единый звук

Мертвенный! И сие любовью  
Величаете? Мыш игра -  
И те боле! Бревна дубовой  
И топорнее топора.

О, как тупо и неуклюже:  
Ложе - узы - подложный жар  
Крови...

Voice:  
Oh, how little and poorly they love!  
Love, destroy - it's the same deathly

Sound!<sup>44</sup> And how do they honour  
This love? A game of muscles -  
And nothing more! Thicker than an oak beam  
And cruder than an axe.

Oh, how blunt and clumsy:  
A bed - bonds - the false heat  
Of blood...<sup>45</sup>

The superficiality of mortal love is the focus of Bacchus' derision, indeed when Theseus questions why Bacchus permitted Ariadne to spend a night with him, Bacchus reaffirms their polarity: `Daby raznitsu znala, Mezhdubom i dnom. (So she should know the difference, Between the heavens and the depths).'<sup>46</sup> Bacchus' description<sup>47</sup> of the resultant changes in Ariadne's identity, focus primarily on the five senses and imply a different relation and outlook on the world, one perhaps more closely associated with the poetic than with reality. In her preparatory notes for the play Tsvetaeva stated: `Osmyslit' Dionisa... Po mne: Dionis - muzhskoe iavlenie Afrodity, ee edinstvennyi i istinnyi brat...*Para*... (What about Dionysus...In my thoughts Dionysus is the male embodiment of Aphrodite, her only, true brother...A pair...)'.<sup>48</sup> As Ariadne is presented as the mortal incarnation of Aphrodite, and Aphrodite's favourite, it would seem that Tsvetaeva is indeed suggesting that Bacchus is Ariadne's rightful partner. Theseus' weakness, rather than signalling an existential dilemma or character flaw in a tragic hero, represents the inadequacy of mortal love when faced

with the force of destiny, an inadequacy which Ariadne, albeit apparently against her will, transcends. Tsvetaeva's brief notes support this reading: `Tezei ne cherez spiashchuiu Ariadnu shagaet, a cherez zemnuiu - lezhachuiu liubov' *lezhachego* sebia... (Theseus has not stepped over the sleeping Ariadne, but over the earthly - recumbent love of his recumbent self).'<sup>49</sup>

Ariadne, as woman poet, cannot maintain both mortal love and Dionysian creativity represented by Bacchus. Thus she reaches transcendence through suffering, a progression Dionysus himself was seen to represent. Bacchus is clearly delineated within the Tsvetaevan aesthetics of poetic identity through the stressing of his androgynous nature and transgression of boundaries, his representation as pure voice, which echoes Tsvetaeva's use of the figure of the Sibyl, and his association with both Aphrodite and Dionysus.

Tsvetaeva's representation of Ariadne as poet figure is also important in the context of the employment of the Ariadne narrative and the trope of the labyrinth in other writing.<sup>50</sup> Whether such intertextual references to the labyrinth have focused on Theseus as archetypal hero engaged on a teleological quest, or whether they have (as is the case in many modernist texts) employed the image of the labyrinth as a *mise en abyme* of narrative form itself, most texts encourage an identification with the position of Theseus (victorious or lost), or Daedalus (creator of the labyrinth). The figure of Ariadne has been employed to represent a female muse.<sup>51</sup> Tsvetaeva's Ariadna is radical in its suggestion of Ariadne as the poet figure. Indeed if the labyrinth is posited as an allegory of writing, then she can be seen to possess its key, the thread.

Tsvetaeva's Fedra witnesses a continuation of the engagement with classical mythology to represent the domains of mortality and creative immortality, and a clarification of the representation of the female protagonist as poet. The figure of Phaedra is traditionally associated with transgression and excess, the transgression of social and familial norms, through her love for her stepson, and the excess of of her uncontrollable desire. As discussed in the previous chapter, Tsvetaeva follows the



example of Euripides and Racine in making several changes to the narrative which lessen Phaedra's guilt and the harshness of her character. The analysis of Fedra undertaken in Chapter Two of this thesis, interprets the play in the context of representations of women's relationship to language. In this discussion, I will concentrate on the representation of Phaedra as poet.

In her brief discussion of the play, Boym is correct to read Fedra as staging 'the conflict of the female artist'.<sup>52</sup> However, she identifies this conflict as located between Aphrodite and Artemis, between dependent passion and amazonian independence. I would argue that the conflict of the female artist is indeed the thematic focus of the play, but that this conflict resides between the mortal and the immortal, between sacrifice and transcendence. Boym does not refer to the representation of creativity itself within the play, which must dominate a reading of Fedra as female artist, as I shall now discuss. Few critical works refer to Fedra in any detail and those which discuss the play tend to focus upon stylistic analysis or identification of sources.<sup>53</sup> The critic R.D.B. Thomson is an exception, however, in his interpretation of the sexual elements of the play:

In Fedra the sexual element functions primarily as a metaphor for artistic creativity, but this does not imply any 'sublimation' of the theme. Rather it reintroduces it at another level, for it raises the issue of a woman poet in a world traditionally dominated by men. It has, after all, been male critics who have been most scathing about Tsvetaeva's last and greatest play.<sup>54</sup>

I wish to develop several of these points in my reading of Phaedra as female poet.

Tsvetaeva's descriptions of Fedra's struggle to express her desire for Hippolytus form an allegory of poetic creation. It is interesting to note that some commentaries on the myth have reached entirely negative conclusions as to the place of Phaedra's creativity and writing within the narrative:

Writing is a metaphor, as in the *Trachinae*, for the deviousness that female sexuality brings into the world. Communication between



Phaedra's realm of feverish desire inside the house and the males outside is by indirection.<sup>55</sup>

A more positive association of writing and female sexuality is present in Fedra. Segal describes Phaedra's desire as devious because of its communication through the letter; however, in Fedra the transmission of the letter fails and Fedra declares her desire directly to Hippolytus.<sup>56</sup> Tsvetaeva's play can thus be seen to counter the representation of female creativity as a negative and harmful force.

An analysis of the representation of creativity in Fedra must also acknowledge the specific similarities between Fedra's struggle for self-expression and Tsvetaeva's descriptions of her own writing process, and I shall refer to this aspect of the play in my conclusions. After her brief meeting with Hippolytus in the forest,<sup>57</sup> Fedra falls into a state of apparent delirium and none of her servants can make sense of her speech.<sup>58</sup> Throughout the play, great emphasis is placed on the imagery which Fedra uses in her attempts to convey her desire. In her delirium Fedra chants: 'Slyshu, slyshu konskii skok! (I hear, I hear a horse galloping!)'<sup>59</sup> This image serves as a clue to the source of her fever as it evokes Hippolytus, through the etymology of his name (and also his death, as he is trampled by horses). However, it also serves as an image of rhythm, intensified through Fedra's repetition of the phrase, and reinforced by her evocation of a hammer against her temple, again beating out a rhythm: "Molotom v visok!".<sup>60</sup> Her delirium disappears when Hippolytus' name is mentioned and the Nurse, after a long speech on Fedra's happiness, and the unsuitability of her older husband, finally discovers the course of Fedra's distress and attempts to persuade her to express her desire. Fedra's response can be read as the inhibition of the female poet in the context of traditional literary heritage: 'Zvuk, kotorogo ne slyshu! Zvuk, nemyslimyi iz ust chistikh (A sound, which I don't hear. A sound, unthinkable from pure lips)'.<sup>61</sup> Phaedra writes a letter which the Nurse passes to Hippolytus, but he does not understand it and Phaedra attempts to speak her desire. This passage, in which Fedra recounts her desire to Hippolytus constitutes the most extensive allegory of creativity in Tsvetaeva's theatre:



Федра:  
Началом  
Взгляд был. На путях без спуска  
Шаг был. Ошибаюсь: куст был  
Миртовый - как школьник в буквах  
Путаюсь! - началом звук был  
Рога, перешедший - чаш звук -  
В чаш звук! Но меднозвучащих  
Что - звук перед тем, с незримых  
Уст! Куст был. Хруст был. Раздвинув  
Куст, - как пьяница беспутный  
Путаюсь! - началом стук был  
Сердца, *до* куста, *до* рога,  
До всего - стук, точно бога  
Встретила, стук, точно глыбу...  
- Сдвинула! - началом ты был,  
В звуке рога, в звуке меди,  
В шуме леса...

Phaedra  
At the start  
Was the glance. On paths with no way down  
There was a step. I'm mistaken, there was a bush.  
A myrtle - like a schoolboy I'm muddling  
My letters! The first thing was the sound  
Of a horn, turning into - the sound of the forest -  
Became the sound of cups! But what of a bronze  
sound - The sound before that, from invisible  
Lips! There was a bush. There was a crunch.  
Parting  
The bush, - I'm confused!  
Like a wayward drunk!  
At the start was a beat  
Of the heart, *before* the bush, *before* the horn,  
Before everything - a beat, as if I had met  
A god, a beat, as if I had moved aside  
A boulder! -  
The first thing was you,  
In the sound of the horn, in the sound of bronze,  
In the sound of the forest...<sup>62</sup>

Fedra's attempt to express the origins of her desire can be read as a detailed description of the origins of poetic creativity. The 'vzgliad (glance)' is introduced only to be dismissed which is wholly compatible with Tsvetaeva's dismissal of the visual in terms of artistic representation and inspiration, and criticism of oculocentric approaches. Fedra then refers to paths and steps which are equally dismissed and can be interpreted as representing guides or literary schools of thought. She then recalls the myrtle, which

recurs several times within this passage and, as I shall argue later in this chapter, is associated in Tsvetaeva's work with Dionysus and creativity. The alphabet provides no foundation for creativity either, and Fedra evokes the true origins of her desire which are expressed as sounds. The specific word 'zvuk (sound)' used in this passage is the term used elsewhere by Tsvetaeva to describe the elementary sounds of the genesis of her poetry. Poems began as a collection of sounds which she heard and then attempted to transcribe into words. The image of the bush is interesting in any study of Tsvetaeva's writing, and alludes to more than the Biblical association of the burning bush with inspiration. In the passage above Fedra turns to this image to describe the beginning of her passion/creativity, and this image is found in a cycle of poems entitled 'Kust (Bush)',<sup>63</sup> in which the bush represents a creativity that governs the speaker's life, increasing her dissatisfaction with worldly things and mortal existence. Within the poem, the bush, as signifier of creativity, inspires her, but also abandons her, refusing to respond and leaving her to silence. The speaker expresses her attempts to make sense of her own words. The use of the image of the bush in Phaedra's speech encourages a reading of her desire as analogous to poetry and creativity. The 'nezrimikh ust (invisible lips)' can be read as a suggestion of a muse figure, but this image is not maintained and the word 'ust' serves to heighten the sound patterns in this passage. Rhythm (present at the inception of Phaedra's desire in the sound of the galloping horse) is represented here by the beat of Phaedra's heart which precedes the individual sounds, such as the horn, to be identified and transcribed. This image provides a fundamental association between creativity (rhythm), subjectivity (represented by the individual heartbeat) and desire. Fedra's declaration of love for Hippolytus, her ultimate transgression and source of her tragic fate, is thus reframed by Tsvetaeva as an allegory of poetic creativity.

Hippolytus responds to Fedra's declaration with incomprehension, describing her speech as delirious ramblings. However, as her intentions become clearer, so he becomes more hostile, and finally dismisses her pleas with a single word in response:



`Gadina! (vermin!).' <sup>64</sup> Hippolytus' lack of comprehension and dismissive attitude to Phaedra's statements clearly reflect his misogyny, but also represent the response of a hostile critic. In parallel to Hippolytus' reactions to Fedra's `creativity', critics were hostile to Tsvetaeva's Fedra, Venclova commenting on the:

...harsh clashes of stylistic layers, verging on the grotesque, combinations of the incompatible, connections of the unconnectable - high and low, praise and abuse: in the poetics of frenzy, of going beyond bounds (especially on the levels of syntax and meter): in the sound and rhythmic fabric of the verse, which strays into patter and glossolalia. <sup>65</sup>

Venclova's criticisms serve as an example of those accorded Fedra by critics who seemed at best bewildered, and at worst outraged by the linguistic diversity of Tsvetaeva's text.

Fedra's creativity has thus been decried, and the possibility of transcending her present inadequate existence through mortal love destroyed. Fedra's suicide represents her ultimate attainment of immortality, and the image of sleep in which mortal burdens are left behind recurs here:

Но под брачным покрывалом  
Сна с тобой мне было б мало.  
Кратка ночка, вставай-ёжься  
Завтра ж, и опять день-буден.  
О другом, о непробудном  
Сне - уж постлано, где лечь нам -  
Грежу, не ночном, а вечном,  
Нескончаемом, - пусть плачут! -  
Где ни пасынков, ни мачех,  
Ни грехов живущих в детях,  
Ни мужей седых, ни третьих  
Жен...

But beneath a wedding blanket  
My sleep with you would have been little.  
The night is short, get up and shiver!  
What is this sleep, when you awake  
It's Tomorrow already, and another ordinary day.  
It's of *another* sleep, a sleep without waking -  
Already the bed is made for us -  
That I dream of, not nocturnal, but eternal dreams.

Unending - let them weep!  
A place where there are no stepsons, no stepmothers.  
No sins living on through children,  
No grey-haired husbands, no third  
Wives...<sup>66</sup>

Fedra's image of an eternal sleep is maintained as the Nurse describes Fedra's dead body as sleeping.<sup>67</sup> Tsvetaeva's descriptions of Fedra's final transcendence into the poetic can be read in the context of other myths of creativity. Venclova's perceptive reading of the play suggests similarities between many of the images used by Tsvetaeva in Fedra and the images associated with Shamanism, comparing Phaedra's fever and delirium with the Shamans' rites of initiation.<sup>68</sup> The shaman is traditionally both mystic and poet, and the oldest representations describe them as female. Mircea Eliade describes shamanistic rites, and the mystic purpose of the trance which constitutes a rewarding comparison with Phaedra's fever:

...obtaining a 'second state' that provides the impetus for linguistic creation and the rhythm of lyric poetry. Poetic creation still remains an act of perfect spiritual freedom.<sup>69</sup>

Other images in Fedra can also be associated with shamanism (the horse symbolises death in shamanistic imagery). However, the most interesting, in the context of an interpretation of the play as representing poetic identity, is that of the cosmic tree, through which the shaman is able to ascend to another world. In Fedra, Fedra commits suicide by hanging herself on a myrtle tree, and images of trees permeate Fedra's discourse.<sup>70</sup> Phaedra's final transcendence is thus reached through the tree, associating her mortal sacrifice with the attainment of creative and spiritual ecstasy.

Tsvetaeva's specific designation of the myrtle tree is also relevant as it is associated in Greek mythology with Dionysus, who bargained for the return of his mother from the underworld by offering Hades his favourite plant, the myrtle: 'Dionysus gave up the myrtle, and this is said to be why initiates into Dionysus' mysteries wore crowns of myrtle.'<sup>71</sup> The Nurse's discovery of Fedra's body refers



specifically to the myrtle: `Dal mirtovyi kust Nevedomyi plod...(The myrtle bush has brought forth, A strange fruit...)'<sup>72</sup> inferring that Dionysian passion and ecstasy has brought about her death. Phaedra's immortality is closely linked with the myrtle as, in a lengthy and clearly important passage, the female Chorus.<sup>73</sup> does not provide an objective commentary on events but lavishes praise on the myrtle tree in the immediate creation of a shrine to Phaedra:

Станьте, станьте древа вокруг!  
Славьте, славьте Федрин сук!  
Федры - повесть,  
Федры - совесть,  
...  
Станьте, станьте древа под!  
Славьте, славьте страшный плод!  
Федры - робость,  
Федры - доблесть,  
Федрин подвиг, Федрин пот.  
Две вечности, две зелени:  
Лавр. Мирт. Родства не предали!

...  
Доколе только мир стоит,  
И утро есть, и вечер есть...  
Честь веточке, честь миртовой!  
Не смертная спишь, - вечная.

Вкруг сука, который спас,  
Утвердимте новый пляс  
Федре в память.  
Да не канет  
Федры - танец, Федры - пляс!

Get up, get up. Gather around the tree!  
Glory, glory to Phaedra's bough!  
It's Phaedra's story,  
It's Phaedra's conscience...

Get up, get up from underneath the tree!  
Glory, glory to the terrible fruit!  
It's Phaedra's shyness,  
It's Phaedra's valour,  
Phaedra's victory, Phaedra's sweat.  
Two eternities, two green trees:  
The laurel.<sup>74</sup> The myrtle. They have not betrayed their line!...

As long as the world continues,  
As long as there are mornings and evenings...  
Honour to this small bough, honour to the myrtle!

Not a sleeping mortal - but eternal.

Around the branch, your saviour.

We celebrate a new dance

In memory of Phaedra.

So shall

Fedra's dance not disappear. Fedra's dance!<sup>75</sup>

The Dionysian ecstasy, evoked earlier in the play in Phaedra's feverish communications, is now symbolised in the myrtle tree, and it is through Dionysian suffering that Phaedra (as Ariadne before her) has transcended mortal desire. Her ascent of the myrtle tree thus implies transcendence through creativity in the contexts of both Dionysian and shamanistic symbolism. It is important to note that Bacchanalia, the Dionysian rituals and processions, are widely considered to be sources for the development of theatre. Tsvetaeva, in adopting the form of the theatre, both creates her own rituals and inscribes female creativity in association with the Dionysian.

Tsvetaeva's plays Ariadna and Fedra engage in an informed and radical manner with classical Greek mythology. The plays redeploy the narratives as representations of creativity and the female poet through their reframing of the traditional conflict inherent in classical mythology of the individual and the immortal within Tsvetaeva's aesthetics.

### **Cixous: Reclaiming Mythology**

Since her first published works, Cixous has sustained an engagement with classical Greek mythology,<sup>76</sup> but this engagement has undergone many strategic changes. Her own reflection on this emphasises the status of myth as metadiscourse fundamental to the defence of social authority and representation:

I work a lot on the level of myths...In reality, myth was that which took the place of analysis in former times...One knew that something stronger than the social existed...One never questions enough the traditions of interpretation of myth, and all myths have been referred to a masculine interpretation. If we women read them, we read them otherwise. That is why I often nourish my texts, in my own way, at those mythic sources.<sup>77</sup>



Cixous' work, like Tsvetaeva's, is heavily, often overpoweringly, intertextual, and some of the most common intertexts which recur throughout her work are narratives of classical Greek mythology. They provide both models of dominant discourses to be read against the grain' and powerful sources for her own metaphors and allegories.

Shiach comments on Cixous' strategic use of myth:

Her allusive use of myth...allows her to call on the resources of the dominant culture without being trapped within it. Milton, Dante, Shelley, Ariosto and the Bible offer her narratives and images which she combines within a collage of voices that subvert their authority, while acknowledging their intellectual and emotional power.<sup>78</sup>

Myth permeates all of Cixous' work and is subject to a constant process of unpacking, reformulation and adoption, a process which is extended to the projection of her own identity as poet:

For her, myth is really the medium in and through which she develops her ideology, and... enacts her own unified persona of woman-teacher-scholar - writer...The mythopoetic process is, for Cixous, a process of recovery and re-formation, as the 'old' myths are spirited away from their dead, oppressive contexts, and rejuvenated...in newly found female contexts.<sup>79</sup>

The motivation behind Cixous' earliest attention to narratives of classical mythology was a revision of the representation and function of the female protagonists ('Je n'aurais pas pu être Ariane...Mais j'aurais risqué d'être Didon'<sup>80</sup>) in order to reinterpret them as empowering myths of female identity. The constant presence of a mythological intertext in Cixous' writing nourishes the creation of her own system of myths, which combine figures from classical mythology, other writers whom she has mythologised, and the mythologisation of her own personal identity and autobiography. In a description relevant to many of Cixous' texts, Conley refers to Cixous' early text Le Troisième Corps<sup>81</sup> as:

... a two-hundred page metaphor that the reader is called upon to decipher. Cixous' mixture of biography and passages from other texts and Greek myths leads her to create her own myth. At the juncture of ancient times and the contemporary world, Cixous creates her own cosmogony.<sup>82</sup>

An indication of the consistency and function of Cixous' employment of Greek mythology is necessary before addressing its specific role in her theatre. 'L'aube du phallocentrisme' which constitutes a major section of La Jeune Née is founded on an extensive analysis of the myth of Orestes, as symbolising the shift from matriarchy to patriarchy in Western culture.<sup>83</sup> Within this analysis the figure of Electra is recuperated and claimed as a positive female figure. The same movement is to be found in Illa,<sup>84</sup> as the narrator searches for existing narratives which she can reread so as to bestow a heroic nature on the figures of her choice. In this case the Orpheus narrative is interwoven with that of Demeter and Persephone. 'Le Rire de la Méduse',<sup>85</sup> Cixous' most polemical statement of the concepts of *écriture féminine*, undertakes a reclamation of one of mythology's symbols of the fear and consequent repression of the feminine. Le Livre de Promethea<sup>86</sup> offers a female version of Prometheus, the powerful figure who was said to have created humankind from clay and stolen fire from Zeus to give to mortals. The assertion of a female Prometheus, as personification of creativity, enables the narrator of Le Livre de Promethea to inscribe her own subjectivity in writing. These examples illustrate Cixous' constant employment of myth and, more specifically, demonstrate her reframing of mythological narratives and adoptions of female figures to provide representations of creativity and poetic identity.

## Greek Mythology and Cixous' Theatre

Myths become culturally established through the sharing of them in formalized



rituals, most commonly religious ceremonies or theatre as communal ritual, and the majority of classical Greek myths have been represented primarily in the theatre. French theatre has always had a particular relationship with mythological narratives which have been reviewed and interpreted in diverse contemporary contexts. The most extensive resurgence of interest in classical mythology was manifested amongst post-First World War writers who looked to the tragedies to articulate the apparent helplessness of humankind in the face of greater powers.<sup>87</sup> Sartre particularly, presented Greek myth in the theatre as capable of representing both the tragedy of modern existence and communal ritual, thus providing models of existential dilemmas and political commitment.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, Sartre considered Greek tragedy as offering ideal scenarios of conflict between individual will and freedom or the higher power of fate and others. The French New Theatre and the aesthetics of the Absurd marked a distinct move away from a reliance upon classical narratives to express the human condition, and the adaptation of classical mythology by contemporary writers has diminished since the 1960s.<sup>89</sup>

It is difficult to place Cixous' use of Greek mythology in her plays within the wider context of its status in French theatre, as her deployment of such narratives in the theatre is, I would argue, influenced primarily by her own work in other genres. This is the case with Cixous' first engagement with Greek mythology in the theatre, Le Nom d'Oedipe. Chant du corps interdit. Shiach associates the play with Sophocles' 'Oedipus the King' through its emphasis on confused origins and the importance of naming.<sup>90</sup> However, Cixous' disruption of the linear chronology of the play, and her insistence on a diminishment of the centrality of Oedipus' teleological quest, would seem to refute the importance of this association. As discussed in Chapter Two, the play engages primarily with the Freudian appropriation of the oedipal narrative, and its influence as cultural paradigm, rather than the status of the narrative as classical mythology.<sup>91</sup> Cixous' play constitutes a dramatised critique of the repression of the female subject in patriarchal discourse and is, as such, a continuation of her engagement with Greek mythology in La Jeune Née. The employment and attempted reworking of such a



primary narrative, and dramatic text is not wholly successful. Miller compares Cixous' use of the figure of Oedipus with that of Cocteau,<sup>92</sup> describing Oedipus as 'the locus ... of thought about social justice and responsibility, sexual attachment and heterosexual love, self knowledge and self destruction.'<sup>93</sup> Her comparison of the two writers' engagement with the Freudian intertext leads her to conclude that Cixous' play produces a positive hero, the unblinded Oedipus, with whom the audience can identify.<sup>94</sup> However, such an assertion of Cixous' Oedipus as reclaimed classical hero overlooks the play's significant shifting of tragic focus on to Jocasta,<sup>95</sup> and the retention of her punitive fate. The spectator's persistent identification with Oedipus undermines the centrality of Jocasta's plight, and, despite Cixous' radical intentions, reinstates a more traditional interpretation of the myth.<sup>96</sup> Whilst Cocteau's play encourages a reading of Oedipus as poet,<sup>97</sup> Le nom d'Oedipe. Chant du corps interdit does not connect any of the characters with poetic identity. The play represents Cixous' early engagement with classical mythology which is motivated by her desire to reveal the ideological content of dominant discourses and their subsequent consequences for the female subject.

## Disabling Mythologies

The change in focus of Cixous' theatre has been discussed in different contexts in other chapters. One of the major motivations for this change, as articulated by Cixous, is the wish to discover ways of representing contemporary political and historical events in the theatre without reverting to traditional realist models. She claims the theatre as the genre capable of such representation:

J'ai toujours pensé que l'Histoire ne pouvait être traité que poétiquement dans le texte...qu'elle devait être chantée, qu'elle devait être une épopée comme l'Iliade. L'Histoire<sup>98</sup> avec sa figure humaine: le Destin.<sup>99</sup>

Cixous considers that the classical intertexts elevate the tragic impact of contemporary



events through their association with scenarios of culturally recognised tragedy, and she regards the incorporation of references to classical mythology as a defence against the anaesthetic effects of mass media coverage of contemporary tragedies. Cixous insists on the potential mythic stature of contemporary historical events, regretting the absence of a modern mythology capable of representing ethical absolutes, as symptomatic of modern societies' restricted discourse: 'En attendant la retraite, nous oublions que nous avons le droit au destin...A être les héros de nos histoires...' <sup>100</sup>

Cixous' use of classical mythology in this context no longer entails a critique of the narratives, but rather relies upon their established interpretations in order to lend impact and meaning to her plays, and reinstates them as metanarratives. This strategy can be seen to operate in the mythologisation of modern history in L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk, roi du Cambodge and L'Indiade ou L'Inde de leurs rêves.<sup>101</sup> These plays rely heavily upon an intertext of Shakespearean, rather than classical Greek tragedy, but serve as illustrations of the increasingly blurred boundary between myth and history in Cixous' theatre.<sup>102</sup> In a discussion of the text Manne aux Mandelstams aux Mandelas, Shiach problematises the dynamic of myth and history which emerges in Cixous' work, but her comments are equally pertinent to these plays:

The ambiguity surrounding the status of the text, however, remains: if it is a fiction, to what extent does its factual accuracy matter? If it is a history, can it also, productively, be a myth? Can the emotional power of a mythic text be the means of transforming our historical knowledge, or does it simply supplement or refine it?<sup>103</sup>

Cixous' intention of investing contemporary events with tragic status through the use of Shakespearean, and later, classical mythology, thus producing a politically empowering cathartic response from the audience, is undermined to some extent by other consequences of mythmaking which she does not engage with in her work. Whilst the use of myth may result in a reconsideration of events in a wider cultural context, it



may also deprive them of all contemporary specificity, thus removing the political agency of catharsis. This interpretation of the demobilising potential of myth is clearly articulated in Barthes' seminal study of the semiotic structure and function of myth. He states that myth supports '...l'universalisme, le refus d'explications, une hiérarchie inaltérable du monde'.<sup>104</sup> The use of mythological intertextuality renders its object timeless, and Barthes opposes the concept of myth to history: 'Le mythe prive l'objet dont il parle de toute Histoire'.<sup>105</sup> The mythologisation of recent events in Indian and Cambodian history to provide allegories of poetic identity and structures of alterity, diminishes the political impact of the plays,<sup>106</sup> and this consequence of Cixous' foregrounding of metanarratives continues in her most recent plays.

In the same way that the Shakespearean influence on her plays of the eighties had been guided by the Théâtre du Soleil's work on Shakespearean historical plays, so Cixous' return to Greek mythology in La Ville parjure ou le réveil des Erinyes<sup>107</sup> must be seen as partly influenced by the company's recent reappraisals of classical theatre. Mnouchkine wanted to reexamine Greek tragedy in her search for forms of theatre which foreground ritual and performance above psychological realism and dialogue.<sup>108</sup> The company undertook a series of productions of Greek tragedies in the early nineties,<sup>109</sup> and, importantly, their production of Aeschylus' 'The Eumenides (or The Erinyes)' was based on a translation by Cixous. Her work on the translation clearly developed into the thematic core of La Ville parjure ou le réveil des Erinyes, and her inclusion of the figure of Aeschylus in the play. This play also constitutes the most explicit combination of myth and recent history in Cixous' theatre.

La Ville parjure ou le réveil des Erinyes refers explicitly to the political and ethical scandal in France concerning the distribution of contaminated blood which resulted in the deaths of hundreds of haemophiliacs. The prefatory essay to the published text<sup>110</sup> refers indirectly to these events, but a note in the programme of the 1994 production states the link more explicitly: 'Nous remercions Anne-Marie Casteret, pour son livre 'L'affaire du sang' qui nous a été très précieux'. The



programme notes establish the mythical tone of the piece through an extensive glossary of terms which Cixous suggests as the underlying *points de repères* of the play. They include; 'contamination', 'conscience', 'shame', 'justice', and 'perjury' and 'blood'. Such emphasis on the etymological and mythological origins of the terms isolates them from everyday usage.

The play centres on the grieving mother of two children who have died after being given infected blood, and it is her grief and anger which summons the mythical figures of the Erinyes to demand revenge. She seeks refuge in the cemetery, which was once a centre of dissidence against the city authorities but is now virtually deserted except for Aeschylus, the guardian of the cemetery, and implied protector of those unjustly killed. Political, legal and medical institutions are represented as corrupt and self-serving and all are deaf to the mother's demands for justice. Aeschylus, the mother and the Erinyes demand an admission of responsibility from the authorities, but are drowned when the cemetery is flooded to silence their dissent.

The importance of Greek mythology to the play is marked at the very beginning of the text with a quotation from Eumenides and Cixous' comment upon it: 'Le sang versé ne se reverse pas. Irréversible est la perte du sang répandu par l'assassinat. C'est cette irréversibilité qu'Eschyle chantait et dénonçait.'<sup>111</sup> In positing Aeschylus as model, Cixous thus aligns herself with him, as poet, through the inferral of her parallel denunciation of contemporary corruption. The scale of these twentieth-century crimes is indicated by the awakening of the Erinyes (or Eumenides), who had remained under the earth. These figures were beyond the control of the gods and were feared by all in their hunger to avenge crimes, especially those committed against children. The principle of violent retribution, is contrasted with the Mother's refusal to encourage their desire for revenge and more death. The first name which appears in the glossary of important reference points for the play is that of Athena, and Cixous encourages an identification of the mother with Athena, as personification of a justice based on ethical judgement.<sup>112</sup> The Erinyes' primary function in the text, however, is to emphasise the enormity of the crimes committed. They express their dismay at the lack of progress



evident in modern society:

J'arrive! J'arrive!  
Mais je vois que rien a changé!  
Tout a changé en apparence  
Mais, depuis cinq mille ans que nous n'étions  
pas remontées dessus la terre,  
Rien n'a changé, ni en Bien ni en Mieux,  
Dans la musique humaine.  
Toujours les mêmes grincements intolérables pour mes dents.  
Les larmes des mères coulent encore.<sup>113</sup>

The final, and most abstract, figure associated with mythology is Nuit, described simply in the programme as 'la personnification et la déesse de la nuit'. She protects the mother and Aeschylus through her control of nightfall and also acts as a guide as they enter a utopian afterlife at the end of the play. These mythological figures are contrasted with the lawyers, doctors and politicians who strive to avoid all moral and ethical responsibility for the deaths. Cixous emphasises the importance of the cultural *témoignage* of moral bankruptcy and corruption in contemporary events, reminding us that we accept the representation of such events in myth, yet do not recognise the scale of atrocity of contemporary tragedies:

Et comment et pourquoi un crime si impensable? Surtout dans nos pays  
fièrement avancés, et où la mode est à répéter le mot 'ethique' toute la  
journée?  
Et si ce crime étrange et monstrueux était justement né de notre époque?  
Justement des nombreuses injustices et injustesses enchevêtrées de notre  
propre temps? N'est-il pas le symptôme de la nouvelle maladie du  
royaume?  
Tous les parfums de l'Arabie n'adoucirait pas les blanches mains  
souillées. Mais dans nos royaumes certains ont peut-être inventé les  
moyens de dévitaliser les nez.  
Mais ceci n'est pas une fable.<sup>114</sup>

Her description of the narrative in mythical terms with reference to Macbeth serves to strengthen the impact of the crime, but the final phrase asserts the real contemporary context of her play. This mixture of metaphorical and realist discourse is symptomatic



of the play and can be seen to obstruct both the articulation of a moral message and the dramatic success of the play. Whilst the employment of mythological characters is clearly intended to raise the ethical impact of the crimes committed, Barthes' critique of the disempowering capacity of myth is highly relevant to this play. The reference to contaminated blood evokes the deaths of haemophiliacs in France and the issue of HIV and Aids. Cixous' prefatory essay 'Nos mauvais sangs' examines the power of the metaphor of blood and the way it has been used to symbolise purity of race, particularly in the context of antisemitism.<sup>115</sup> The essay draws our attention to the pernicious use of metaphor, yet paradoxically Cixous maintains such usage in her juxtaposition of a brief reference to 'le fléau du Sida' and the statement that 'les mêmes effrayés n'ont pas très peur de la contamination de l'âme par...les mauvaises fréquentations. Contre la peste morale on ne prend pas beaucoup de précautions'.<sup>116</sup> The use of plague imagery, encouraging a metaphorical representation of Aids as an abstract force visited on the population and transcending issues of individual responsibility is problematic, as is the subsequent use of the extended metaphor, linking this to moral imperatives.

The coexistence of mythological and realist elements in the play (for example Aeschylus' inscriptions for Anne Frank and Stephen Biko in the cemetery, the political manoeuvring of an elected king in his symbolically dysfunctional castle) creates similar problems. Despite the play's unsympathetic portrayal of politicians and lawyers alike, the edifices of authority are strengthened as the mythological tone of the play encourages a reading of them as unassailable powers, against which the individual remains helpless. The abstraction of the central figures obstructs audience identification with them and makes it difficult to interpret the play as imparting a political or moral message. This is despite the Mother's final address to the audience through which Cixous attempts to transfer the moral imperative on to the audience:

La Mère:  
 Que dire?  
 La pièce est finie. Je me retrouve assise avec mes amis sur des rochers  
 d'or et d'argent.  
 Et maintenant, je le comprends, il faut se taire  
 Mais pour vous qui demeurez dans les salles d'en-bas  
 Que puis-je faire?



...Par la suite je vais construire pour vous  
 Un temple avec du silence  
 Un tribunal avec du silence  
 Un théâtre avec du silence  
 Mais si moi je fais tous ces silences  
 Qui, parmi vous, va crier?  
 Je vais mettre mes mots, mes pensées, mes fureurs  
 En terre, sous vos pieds.  
 Mais il faut que toutes ces terres grosses de mes secrets  
 Pousse l'arbre du cri. Sinon  
 Plus jamais d'être humain aux yeux pleins de lumière  
 Ne mûrira dans ce pays.  
 Notre pièce est finie. Mais que la vôtre commence.  
 A votre tour obstinez-vous à vouloir que le juste Advienne justement.<sup>117</sup>

The lack of clarity in the play results in part from the problematic mythologisation of recent events, but it is confounded by the dual thematic focus of the play. The advisability of Cixous' mythologisation of the contaminated blood scandal in itself can be questioned. However, I would argue that the contextualisation of these events is exploited by Cixous for other aesthetic purposes, namely as an allegory of poetic identity and responsibility.

The moral battle between the bereaved mother and the institutions responsible for her children's deaths is represented as a struggle for dominance between different discourses and the versions of events which they disseminate. One of the lawyers representing the accused doctor expresses his wish for a particular version of the narrative to survive:

Brackmann:

Mais demain, quand les vents qui tourbillonnent cette affaire  
 Sens dessus - dessous seront tombés,  
 L'Histoire, reprendra son vrai visage  
 Et par l'éternité nous en rédigerons le récit, dis-je  
 Ce sera une version délivrée des passions  
 Qui distordent horriblement les scènes encore trop fraîches.  
 Je m'y emploierai  
 Voilà ce que je disais à mon client.<sup>118</sup>

The dual meaning of *histoire* as history and narrative which is used consistently in



Cixous' most recent theatre is important here. It is precisely this dispassionate, corporate view of history that Cixous implicitly rejects, positing the mother's emotion and moral superiority as preferable to such discourse. The role of Aeschylus, the poet figure in the play, and defender of the unjustly oppressed, is to ensure the communication of other voices:

Eschyle:  
C'est une histoire inouïe  
Jusqu'à présent, sans voix, sans vérité, sans fin.  
Des victimes sans nombre, sans nom...  
Histoire peuplée de sourds, de muets, de bâillonnés,  
Pleine d'étouffements de cris, d'assèchements de sangs,  
De tétanies de langues.<sup>119</sup>

His recording of events reaches parodic levels as he searches frantically for a pencil with which to note down a description of his own death.<sup>120</sup> Cixous suggests a parallel between the role of Aeschylus in the play, and her own role in bringing contemporary injustice to the attention of her theatre audience. In the essay accompanying the published text (a piece which also appears in the programme notes), Cixous refers to canonical writers:

Au bord de la rivière au destin angoissant se sont penchés tous les poètes impuissants à retenir la vie qui s'en va, et ils regardaient courir, de siècle en siècle, le fil de l'horreur tragique. Entendez-les gémir l'hymne indigné, Eschyle, Shakespeare, Balzac, Hugo, affreusement fascinés par les carnages dont l'homme est l'auteur, avec la cité. Dans les rues on enfonce jusqu'aux chevilles dans la boue rouge.<sup>121</sup>

Cixous' evocation of the role of the writer in recording tragedy and injustice, juxtaposed so closely with her own written and performed text, implies an inclusion of her own name alongside those mentioned, and the use of the mythologisation of contemporary events to assert the credentials of her own poetic identity on several levels.

Cixous' employment of myth to inscribe poetic identity in the theatre continues



in her most recent play L'Histoire (qu'on ne connaîtra jamais).<sup>122</sup> Aeschylus is superseded by another writer of myths. Snorri Sturlusson, and the play engages with intertexts from Icelandic saga rather than classical Greek mythology. The play is based on the legend of Sigfrid and Brunhild, a narrative perhaps better known from Wagner's Niebelungen. In Cixous' play the gods send the poet and historian Snorri Sturlusson back in time to the court of Gunther and Brunhild, in order to recount the events caused by the state visit of Sigfrid and Kriemhild.<sup>123</sup> Interpretations of the myth itself remain secondary to the dramatisation of poetic identity, and, ultimately a projection of Cixous' own relationship with *l'histoire* and myth. Through the foregrounding of tropes of exile and in her comments on the play, Cixous clearly allies herself with the figure of Snorri Sturlusson: 'Ce que veut le poète: retrouver la vérité. Mais à la chercher, il se voit pris lui-même dans la toile qu'il regarde se tisser.'<sup>124</sup> Cixous also joins poetic forces with Sturlusson, not only to attempt to avert the traditional tragic dénouement of the narrative within the play, but to revalorise the legend after what she considers to have been Wagner's appropriation of it for propaganda purposes. She asks:

Pourquoi un poète ne changerait-il pas l'Histoire? Et si seulement Snorri Sturlusson avait survécu aux événements dont il était lui-même l'acteur et historien, nous aurions un récit bien différent de celui que la tradition nous a présenté jusqu'ici sous le titre des Niebelungen.<sup>125</sup>

Cixous deconstructs the process of myth-making by presenting the audience with the unfolding of the narrative. Myth-making is seen as a powerful cultural and political activity; the tragic denouement of the saga is caused by the impact of an untold narrative (that of Sigfrid and Brunhild's love), the gods attempt to impose their desired version of the narrative. Snorri Sturlusson is (re)writing the narrative but has no omniscient knowledge. It is through this process of demystification that Cixous constructs and embellishes her own mythologisation of the poet, as represented here by Snorri Sturlusson and his companion Barout.<sup>126</sup> Sturlusson fails in his attempt to control and appropriate the narrative for himself, his manuscripts are lost and he can



only observe the final scenes in which he is now character, not author. However, Cixous reminds the audience of her role in delivering the play: 'Edda: Et personne pour raconter notre histoire. Snorri: C'est une tragédie'<sup>127</sup> and posits herself as metapoet, reviser of established myth and instigator of new mythologies of creativity and the poet. Finally her representation of myth in her theatre has combined with her mythologisation of her own poetic identity.

## Conclusion

Tsvetaeva's Ariadna and Fedra and Cixous' Le Nom d'Oedipe. Chant du corps interdit engage with established mythological narratives, originate in very different contexts and approaches to mythology, yet the thematic parallels between the plays are very strong. The plays contain a double movement, firstly to symbolise restrictive situations or discourses through the employment of mythological narratives, and subsequently to bestow mythical significance and cultural status on representations of the female subject, and reformulate the nature of the tragedy presented.

The treatment of mythology in their plays diverges, however, when considered in the context of representations of poetic identity. Tsvetaeva engages directly with mythological narratives in order to represent poetic identity, that of the woman poet. She exploits conventional central concerns of classical mythology, the conflict between the individual and fate, between mortality and immortality and adapts it to signify the plight of the poet as perceived in her aesthetics. Ariadna and Phaedra are striking figures of poetic identity and Tsvetaeva's plays achieve both a coherent representation of creativity and the poet, and an assertion of the cultural status of the woman poet through her insertion in established mythology and the refocalisation of those myths around her. Cixous' employment of mythological narratives to construct representations of poetic identity, results not in an assertion of the status of the poet (never a female poet) through the refocalisation of myth, but in an inscription of the poet author.

Cixous, as more powerful mythmaker than her Greek and Icelandic forbearers, subsuming classical mythology in her own mythologisation of the poet, represented in her own persona.



- (1) Hélène Cixous, La Ville Parjure ou le réveil des Erinyes (Paris: Théâtre du Soleil, 1994).
- (2) Hélène Cixous, L'Histoire (qu'on ne connaîtra jamais) (Paris: des femmes, 1994).
- (3) Mary Lefkowitz, Women in Greek Myth (London: Duckworth Press, 1986).
- (4) *ibid.*, p. 14.
- (5) Froma Zeitlin, 'Playing the Other, Theater, Theatricality and the Feminine', in Nothing to do with Dionysus? ed. Winkler and Zeitlin. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 10.
- (6) For a specific and indicative study see Aminda Dykman, 'Poetical Poppies: Some Thoughts on Classical Elements in the Poetry of Marina Tsvetaeva', in Studies in Slavic Literatures and Poetics, XX, ed. Baak, Grubel et al. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1993), pp. 163-176.
- (7) Barbara Heldt, Terrible Perfection (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 131.
- (8) Tsvetaeva wrote two poems based on the narrative of the Trojan wars: 'Akhill na valy (Achilles on the Ramparts)' and 'Tak tol'ko Elena... (Thus Helen alone...)', both written in 1923. Tsvetaeva's interest in this narrative is linked to the plays in question, as she originally planned a trilogy centred on the life of Theseus and the women he married, the third of these being Helen of Troy. The third part of the trilogy was, however, never written.
- (9) Marina Tsvetaeva, Remeslo (Craft) (Berlin, 1923).
- (10) Marina Tsvetaeva, Izbrannaia proza v dvukh tomakh, I, p. 229.
- (11) Marina Tsvetaeva, 'Sivilla'(1923) in Sochineniia, I, pp. 189-191.
- (12) For a more detailed reading of these poems see Olga Peters Hasty, 'Cvetaeva's Sibylline Lyrics', Russian Literature, 19 (1986), pp. 323-340.
- (13) Marina Tsvetaeva, 'Fedra' in Sochineniia, I, pp. 210-211.
- (14) The term 'epistle' is also used in Ovid's Heroides in which abandoned or wronged women address their absent lovers. Makin notes that Ovid's epistles have clear dramatic qualities, qualities which I propose are important to Tsvetaeva and inform her choice of this narrative. Michael Makin, Marina Tsvetaeva: Poetics of Appropriation, p. 227.
- (15) Marina Tsvetaeva, 'Evridika - Orfeiu' (1923) in Sochineniia, I, p. 219.
- (16) Michael Makin, Marina Tsvetaeva: Poetics of Appropriation, p. 190.
- (17) Gustav Schwab, Sagen des klassischen Altertums (Wiesbaden, not dated).
- (18) Marina Tsvetaeva, 'Pis'ma Ivasku' in Russkii literaturnyi arkhiv ed. M. Karpovich and D. Chizhevskii, (New York, 1956), p. 209.
- (19) These are noted by Makin, Marina Tsvetaeva: Poetics of Appropriation, pp. 280-284, and Kahn 'Chorus and Monologue in Tsvetaeva's *Ariadne*: An Analysis of their Structure, Versification and Themes', p. 167.



- (20) Michael Makin, Marina Tsvetaeva: Poetics of Appropriation, pp. 263-264.
- (21) A thorough study of the field can be found in C.C. Amiard, 'L'antiquité et l'esthétique théâtrales des symbolistes russes', Revue des Etudes Slaves, 51 (1978), pp. 9-16.
- (22) Makin's excellent chapter on Tsvetaeva's 'classical plays' contains a far-reaching survey of the possible influences and sources of Tsvetaeva's later plays, see particularly pp. 265-267.
- (23) Friedrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy (first published 1872) (New York: Dover Publications, 1995).
- (24) *ibid.*, p. 34.
- (25) 'The history of the rise of Greek tragedy now tells us with luminous precision that the tragic art of the Greeks was really born of the spirit of music, with which conception we believe we have done justice for the first time to the primitive and astonishing significance of the chorus'. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
- (26) He called for the regeneration of German mythology, positing Wagner as a creative spirit capable of starting this. The idea of a national spirit supported and presented in national culture was, of course, common in German Romanticism.
- (27) Viacheslav Ivanov, Tantal (Tantalus), (Moscow: 1905), and Prometei (Prometheus), (Moscow: 1916).
- (28) These ideas are further detailed in Viacheslav Ivanov, 'O Dionise i kul'ture (On Dionysus and Culture)' in Po zvezdam (Through the stars), (St Petersburg, 1909).
- (29) These ideas are developed in his essay of 1916, 'O sushchestve tragedii (On the Essence of Tragedy)', in Borozdy i mezhi, (St Petersburg, 1916).
- (30) For further details on the aesthetics of Viacheslav Ivanov see: Lars Kleberg, 'Viacheslav Ivanov and the Idea of Theater' in Theater and Literature in Russia 1990-1930: A Collection of Essays, ed. Lars Kleberg and Nils Ake Nilsson, (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1984), pp. 57-70. More general information can be found in Vyacheslav Ivanov: Poet, Critic and Philosopher, ed. R. Jackson and L. Nelson, (New Haven: Yale Russian and East European Publications, 1986), and James West Russian Symbolism: A Study of Viacheslav Ivanov and the Russian Symbolist Aesthetic, (London: Methuen, 1970).
- (31) See Ivanov's essay of 1908 'O dostoinstve zhenshchiny (On the Dignity of Woman)'.
- (32) Marina Tsvetaeva 'Viacheslavu Ivanovu (To Viacheslav Ivanov)', in Sochineniia, I, pp. 114-116.
- (33) Andrew Kahn, 'Chorus and Monologue in Tsvetaeva's *Ariadna*: An Analysis of Their Structure, Versification and Themes', in Marina Tsvetaeva: One Hundred Years. Papers from the Tsvetaeva Centenary Symposium, 1992, (Berkeley: Berkeley Slavic Specialties, 1994), pp. 162-193, p. 163.
- (34) Michael Makin, Marina Tsvetaeva: Poetics of Appropriation, p. 268.
- (35) 'She undoubtedly knew his tragedies; what is more she was familiar with Ivanov's theory of Dionysianism....The letters of Cvetaeva also reveal a familiarity with those philosophico-mythological systems on which Ivanov based himself....' Tomas Venclova, 'On Russian Mythological Tragedy: Vjaceslav Ivanov and Marina



Cvetaeva', in Myth in Literature. ed. Kodjak and Pomorska. (Columbus: Slavica Publishers, 1985), pp. 89-110, p. 103.

(36) It was first published in the journal Versty in Paris in 1927.

(37) Marina Tsvetaeva, 'Ariadna' in Teatr, p. 250.

(38) Michael Makin, Marina Tsvetaeva: Poetics of Appropriation. p. 278.

(39) Svetlana Boym, Death in Quotation Marks: Cultural Myths of the Modern Poet. p. 211.

(40) *ibid.*, pp. 262-263.

(41)  
Дым -  
Страсть твоя. Костер из стружек -  
Страсть твоя! Двоим не служат,  
Муж!...  
...  
Прочь не пастбище, а пустошь -  
Страсть! - Опустись! - Опустись!  
Выпустишь! Цветком из рук  
Выронишь!

Ariadne:  
... Like smoke -  
Your passion. Like a fire made from filings -  
Your passion. Man cannot serve two.  
...  
Not a pasture, but a wasteground -  
Is your Passion! You will give yourself up! - Give up!  
You will go! You will drop the flower  
From your hands!

*ibid.*, p. 267.

(42) Jerzy Faryno, Mifologism i Teologism Cvetaevoi (Vienna: Wiener Slavistischer Almanach, 1985), p. 43.

(43) *ibid.*, p. 269.

(44) In Russian the verb forms of 'to love' *liubiat* and 'to destroy' *rubiat* form close rhymes and thus are closely associated with each other in this passage.

(45) Marina Tsvetaeva, 'Ariadna'. in Teatr, pp. 272-273.

(46) *ibid.*, p. 277.

(47)  
Вакх:  
У *моей* Ариадны  
Будет новая чуть...

У *моей* Ариадны  
Будет новая ошуть...

у моей Ариадны  
Сих не будет очей...

Новый облик, и новый  
Взгляд, и новая поступь...

Bacchus:  
My Ariadne  
Will have new feelings...

My Ariadne –  
Will have a new sense of scent...

My Ariadne  
Will have a new touch...

My Ariadne  
Will not have those eyes...

A new appearance, and  
A new gaze, and new gait...

ibid., pp. 276-277.

(48) Marina Tsvetaeva, Teatr, p. 372.

(49) ibid., p. 373.

(50) A thorough discussion of the trope of the labyrinth in Western European literature can be found in David Meakin, Hermetic Fictions (Durham: University of Durham Press, 1996).

(51) In André Breton's Nadja, Nadja as the narrator's guide to a surreal topology of Paris is likened to Ariadne. The narrative defines her explicitly as muse, indeed the punitive closure (she is taken to an asylum) denies her the status of artist. André Breton, Nadja (Paris: folio,).

(52) Svetlana Boym, Death in Quotation Marks: Cultural Myths of the Modern Poet, p. 234.

(53) See Michael Makin, Marina Tsvetaeva: Poetics of Appropriation, pp. 285-288.

(54) R. D. B. Thomson, 'Tsvetaeva's play Fedra: An Interpretation', Slavonic and East European Review, 67 (1989), pp. 335-352, p. 352.

(55) Charles Segal, Interpreting Greek Tragedy (Cornell and London: Cornell University Press, 1986), p. 101.

(56) Neither does Tsvetaeva's Phaedra remain in the house as feminine realm, but ventures into the forest where she twice encounters Hippolytus.

(57) Marina Tsvetaeva, Fedra, pp. 300-301.

(58) Comparisons can be made between Phaedra's delirious words and Ariadne speaking when asleep - both indicate an altered state as necessary preparation for creativity.



(59) *ibid.*, p. 302.

(60) *ibid.*, p. 303.

(61) *ibid.*, p. 313.

(62) *ibid.*, p. 325.

(63) Marina Tsvetaeva, 'Kust (Bush)' (1933) in Sochineniia. I. pp. 300-302.

(64) Marina Tsvetaeva, Fedra, p. 327.

(65) Tomas Venclova 'On Russian Mythological Tragedy: Vjaceslav Ivanov and Marina Cvetaeva' in Myth in Literature, ed. Kodjak and Pomorska. (Columbus: Slavica Publishers, 1985), pp. 89-110, p. 102.

(66) Marina Tsvetaeva, Fedra, pp. 326-327.

(67) *ibid.*, p. 328.

(68) Tomas Venclova, 'On Russian Mythological Tragedy: Vjaceslav Ivanov and Marina Cvetaeva', pp 89-110.

(69) Mircea Eliade, Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), p. 510.

(70) Different versions of the myth have presented Phaedra's suicide variously as achieved with poison or even Hippolytus' own dagger. Tsvetaeva clearly chose to hang her Phaedra in the context of her own reading of the play and to heighten the symbolism of the tree. Extra-textual parallels with Tsvetaeva's own suicide may be helpful in understanding her suicide, but cannot be considered as relevant to a reading of the play.

(71) Pierre Grimal, Penguin Dictionary of Classical Mythology, p. 129.

(72) Marina Tsvetaeva, Fedra, p. 327.

(73) It is important to note that the female chorus appeals specifically to women to celebrate:

Двадцатая ль, тридцатая ль,  
Весна, жена ли, девица ль -  
Пусть каждая, хоть всякая,  
Дары забрав, под деревце  
Спешит победу праздновать  
Лба женского - дном чашечным! <sup>1!</sup>

Whether twenty, or thirty years old,  
Whether women or girls -  
May each one, may every one  
Bringing gifts, hurry under the tree  
To celebrate the victory  
Of woman's brow/mind - drink a toast!

*ibid.*, p. 333.



(74) The laurel signifies achievement and recognition of Phaedra's poetic creativity.

(75) *ibid.*, pp. 332-333.

(76) Shiach interprets Cixous' text La as foregrounding figures from Egyptian mythology in order to undermine the cultural hegemony of classical Greek myth in Western cultural discourse.

(77) Hélène Cixous, quoted in Verena Aldermatt Conley, Hélène Cixous: Writing the Feminine (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), pp. 155-156.

(78) Morag Shiach, Hélène Cixous: A Politics of Writing, p. 100.

(79) Tilde A. Sankovitch, French Women Writers and The Book: Myths of Access and Desire (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1988), p. 146.

(80) Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, La Jeune Née, p. 140.

(81) Hélène Cixous, Le Troisième Corps (Paris: Grasset, 1970).

(82) Verena Aldermatt Conley, Hélène Cixous (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), pp. 21-22.

(83) Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, La Jeune Née, pp. 192-208.

(84) Hélène Cixous, Illa (Paris: des femmes, 1980).

(85) Hélène Cixous, 'Le Rire de la Méduse', L'Arc, 61 (1975), pp. 39-54.

(86) Hélène Cixous, Le Livre de Promethea (Paris: Gallimard, 1983).

(87) Camus' Caligula was first performed in 1945. Sartre maintained an interest in Greek tragedy and the creation of modern myths: Les Mouches was performed in 1943 and his last play was a version of Euripides' Trojan Women Les Troyennes, performed in 1964.

(88) See Jean Paul Sartre, Un théâtre de situations (Paris: Gallimard, 1973).

(89) An exception is perhaps found in the work of Vilar in the late sixties. His Antigone reflected upon the status of de Gaulle and the events of the Algerian War. See David Bradby, Modern French Drama 1940-1990, p. 103.

(90) Morag Shiach, Hélène Cixous: A Politics of Writing, p. 116.

(91) Cixous may also intend to encourage a perception of Freudian psychoanalysis as modern myth, but her play maintains a more consistent focus on the Freudian intertext.

(92) Jean Cocteau, La Machine infernale (Paris: Gallimard, 1932).

(93) Judith Miller, 'Jean Cocteau and Hélène Cixous: Oedipus', Themes in Drama: Drama Sex and Politics, ed. J. Redmond, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 203-211, p. 204.

(94) 'Cixous' project is more in line with the long standing notion of the mythic hero as one who privileges the possibilities of life rather than its limits'. *Ibid.*, p. 211.

(95) In her study of Le Nom d'Oedipe, Merope Pavlides recognises the importance of the shift of the tragic focus on to Jocasta, but misreads the nature of the tragedy. She states 'The tragedy of Jocasta and the fatal flaw which she carries is not the denial of



Fate, but rather the denial of Self. Through attempting to become the perfect woman Oedipus idolizes, Jocasta has allowed him to consume her identity.' Merope Pavlides, 'Restructuring the Traditional: Myth in Selected Works of Cixous, Chedid, Wittig and Yourcenar.' Unpublished DPhil diss. University of Wisconsin, 1986, p. 54.

(96) A different development of this argument can be found in Mieke Kolk, 'La Vengeance d'Oedipe: Théorie féministe et pratique du théâtre' in Hélène Cixous, chemins d'une écriture, ed. Françoise van Rossum-Guyon and Myriam Diaz-Diocaretz, pp. 177-186.

(97) This association is reinforced in his film Orphée (1950). It is interesting that an examination of the film suggests a rewarding comparison with Tsvetaeva's Fedra in its reworking of the myth to represent the writer's own aesthetics of creativity.

(98) Throughout her work Cixous exploits the double meaning of *histoire* as 'history' and 'narrative' in order to inscribe the poet self into history through writing.

(99) Hélène Cixous, 'De la scène de l'Inconscient à la scène de l'Histoire', p. 28. See also 'Le lieu du Crime, le lieu du Pardon' in L'Indiade ou l'Inde de leurs rêves, p. 255.

(100) Hélène Cixous, 'Le droit du légende', L'Avant-scène Théâtre, 745 (1984), p. 5.

(101) Cixous herself problematises the combination of myth and history, yet this awareness is not communicated in the plays: 'Mais quand ces personnages aux âmes taillées dans l'étoffe du mythe, rencontrent la réalité, qu'est-ce que cela donne? La sainteté de Gandhi croisant avec le calcul politique? L'idéalisme de Nehru avec les contradictions historiques qu'est-ce que cela donne?' Hélène Cixous, programme notes to L'Indiade ou L'Inde de leurs rêves.

(102) Chapter Three contains detailed discussions of the mythologisation of historical events and figures in these two plays.

(103) Morag Shiach, Hélène Cixous: A Politics of Writing, p. 105.

(104) Roland Barthes, 'Le Mythe, aujourd'hui' in Mythologies (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1957), pp. 191-247, p. 239.

(105) *ibid.*, p. 239.

(106) These points are discussed in Chapter Three, in the context of Cixous' use of the tropes of exile and paradise lost in constructions of poetic identity.

(107) Hélène Cixous, La Ville parjure ou le réveil des Erinyes (Paris: Théâtre du Soleil, 1994).

(108) See Adrian Kiernander, Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 135.

(109) The company performed Euripides' Iphigenia in Aulis in 1990, Aeschylus' Agamemnon in 1990, The Choephoroi in 1991, and The Eumenides in 1992.

(110) Hélène Cixous, 'Nos mauvais sangs' in La Ville parjure ou le réveil des Erinyes, pp. 5-7.

(111) *ibid.*, p. 5.

(112) At the trial of Orestes, Athena opposed the Erinyes' demand for retribution.

(113) *ibid.*, p. 52.

(114) *ibid.*, p. 7.

(115) *ibid.*, p. 6.

(116) *ibid.*, p. 6.

(117) *ibid.*, pp. 218-219.

(118) *ibid.*, p. 24.

(119) *ibid.*, p. 70.

(120) `Eschyle: Mon carnet! Mon crayon! Il faut que je note. C'est la première fois que je meurs! Voilà! Qu'est-ce que je disais?...' *ibid.*, p. 214.

(121) *ibid.*, p. 5.

(122) Hélène Cixous, L'Histoire (qu'on ne connaît jamais) (Paris: des femmes, 1994).

(123) Legend tells how Sigfrid met Brunhild by a river and fell instantly in love. However Gunther wanted to marry Brunhild himself, and was keen to match Sigfrid with his sister Kriemhild. He tricked Sigfrid into drinking a potion which made him forget that he had ever seen Brunhild. Brunhild remained unaware of this and assumed that Sigfrid had simply abandoned her. The action of the play centres on the first state visit of Sigfrid and Kriemhild to the court of Gunther and Brunhild, and the emotional and political repercussions of the forgotten episode.

(124) Hélène Cixous, programme notes to L'Histoire (qu'on ne connaît jamais).

(125) Hélène Cixous, programme notes, L'Histoire (qu'on ne connaît jamais).

(126) For further discussion of the function of Barout in constructions of poetic identity see Chapter Three.

(127) *ibid.*, p. 184.



## CONCLUSION

This thesis has demonstrated the central importance of the representation of poetic identity for a coherent reading of the theatre of both Tsvetaeva and Cixous. Through the detailed analyses of individual plays and contextualisations of their writing for the theatre (both within and outside of their respective oeuvres), I have revealed the striking similarities between the major elements employed by Tsvetaeva and Cixous in the construction and representation of poetic identity: language, exile, sexual difference and myth. The elements function as thematic and structural topoi within their plays and have also been shown to play an important role in the attraction of both writers theatre as a genre in which to represent poetic identity. The thematic and generic similarities between Cixous' and Tsvetaeva's configurations of poetic identity have been discussed, but distinct divergences in their employment of these common elements have been noted along with the problematics of poetic identification in their plays.

The main body of this thesis has adopted a thematic approach to the representation of poetic identity in the theatre of Cixous and Tsvetaeva, an approach that has been fundamental to the comparative structure of the thesis and which has revealed the two writers' employment of the same tropes. However, having demonstrated the importance of language, exile, sexual difference and myth to Tsvetaeva's and Cixous' conceptions of poetic identity, I will finally examine the shifting prominence of these elements in a chronological overview of the representation of poetic identity in their plays.

Such an investigation will lead me to posit that the final play of each author, Tsvetaeva's Fedra (Phaedra) and Cixous' L'Histoire (qu'on ne connaîtra jamais), constitutes the most developed and explicit representation of poetic identity demonstrated in their work. I will compare the nature of these cumulative articulations

of poetic identity as presented in the two plays. This final section of the conclusion will address the radical potential of Cixous' and Tsvetaeva's engagements with poetic identity for feminist projects of representing female subjectivity and creativity.

### **Elements of Poetic Identity: Language, Exile, Sexual Difference and Myth**

Having demonstrated in Chapter One that the foundations of Cixous' and Tsvetaeva's original interests in the theatre lay in the desire to explore representations of subjectivity and poetic identity, the four chapters which follow constructed coherent analyses of their plays as engagements with elements which are central to their conceptions of poetic identity. Readings of their plays which overlook the importance of theatre as genre to the development of their respective aesthetics have been refuted through the establishment of influences which led Cixous and Tsvetaeva to engage with the representation of subjectivity and poetic identity in the theatre. Chapter One revealed the association of the generic and the thematic in the focus of Tsvetaeva's and Cixous' plays on the construction and representation of poetic identity.

In Chapter Two, I demonstrated the striking similarities present in the role of language in Tsvetaeva's and Cixous' representations of creativity and constructions of poetic identity. The chapter's analysis of their plays demonstrated the thematic centrality of the relationship between female subjectivity, poetic identity and language. Whilst Cixous represents the role of language in the creation of subjectivity itself, and Tsvetaeva examines the necessity of reshaping and controlling language in order to express poetic identity, the plays of both writers foreground the repression of the female subject and poet as she attempts to assert her voice. The theatre of Tsvetaeva and Cixous reflects their common recognition of the importance of engaging with the relationship between the female speaking subject and the language which she must use in order to express herself.



Such patterns of repression and exclusion were addressed in a different context in Chapter Three's study of the employment of the trope of exile in Tsvetaeva's and Cixous' conceptions of poetic identity. The chapter illustrated the importance of the theme of exile for an understanding of the plays of Cixous and Tsvetaeva. Both writers' engagements with this element have been shown to go far beyond the Romantic trope of the artist as alienated and exiled from society, to posit exile as a fundamental creative force. The spatial and temporal utopian 'elsewheres' which are consistently evoked in their plays suggest a revalorisation of the marginal and its role at the core of poetic identity. The necessary response of the poet-self to exile differs, however, in Tsvetaeva's and Cixous' constructions of poetic identity. The character identified with the Tsvetaevan poetic identity is exiled from the creative realm of poetry itself and so must (through the sacrifice of a worldly existence) transcend mortal existence in order to attain poetic identity. Cixous has been shown, through the analysis of her allegorisation of actual exiles, to consider exile as an inspirational force behind creativity. This exile must not therefore be transcended but must be expressed as a fundamental aspect of poetic identity. In addition to this Chapter Three has indicated that Cixous posits theatre itself as a paradise found through her euphoric texts on the genre as a fusion of thematic and generic searches for a space in which subjectivity can be fully represented. I demonstrated the function of displacement in the generic characteristics of theatre as an important factor in the work of Tsvetaeva and Cixous.

Chapter Four established the differing status of sexual difference in Tsvetaeva's and Cixous' representations of poetic identity. I argued that Cixous' representation of an increasingly abstract and essentialised 'Everywoman' constitutes a problematic reversal of the specificity of female subjectivity represented in her early play, and ultimately achieves an erasure of difference. Tsvetaeva's theatre is shown to address the female subject and her relationship to poetic identity in a far more consistent manner. Moreover her play Prikluchenie (An Adventure) adopts a radical approach to the representation of sexual difference as the central character enacts a subversion of the binary opposition traditionally prescribed between male and female and so explodes the



cultural connotations associated with such categories. This is an aim often stated in Cixous' early writings and one which is realised to a certain extent in her text 'Tancrède continue',<sup>1</sup> but one which, as demonstrated in Chapter Three, is noticeably absent from her recent theatre.

The strategic employment of other narratives to strengthen the representation of identity has been discussed in the final chapter of this thesis, 'Adaptations of Identity: The Role of Greek Mythology'. It is clear that both writers have in certain plays used narratives from Greek mythology to dramatise the limitations placed upon the female subject in patriarchal society. The Chapter showed the manner in which Cixous' employment of mythology has evolved from a critique of the representation of female subjectivity perpetuated in such metanarratives,<sup>2</sup> to the employment of such narratives to add cultural status to her construction of a metapoet closely associated with her own personal identity.

In contrast to this, Tsvetaeva adapts the traditional foci of narratives from Greek mythology in order to assert different tragic interpretations of the female poet struggling to attain subjectivity and immortality. My analysis of her plays Ariadna and Fedra reveal their eponymous heroines to constitute not simply female subjects, but female poets, marked by their creativity and will to express their own desires.

Tsvetaeva's and Cixous' last plays, which engage with such intertexts, provide arguably the clearest portrayals of poetic identity in their work. I shall now discuss the chronological development of the representation of poetic identity in their work before concluding with a comparative analysis of these last two plays, L'Histoire (qu'on ne connaît jamais) and Fedra (Phaedra). Such a discussion is doubly important as it emphasises the coherence provided by reading their theatre as concerned primarily with the representation of identity, and establishes the changing prominence of the four elements in the more explicit representations of the poet-self which occur in the later plays of Tsvetaeva and Cixous.



## Tsvetaeva: The Identity of the Woman Poet

The representation of poetic identity in the plays of Marina Tsvetaeva is consistently and almost exclusively associated with the representation of female subjectivity. The most powerful representations of poetic identity in her work are achieved through female protagonists and her plays foreground the specific struggles for identity and expression of the female poet. An examination of the development of the representation of poetic identity in her theatre reveals an increasingly explicit interest in the poet as female subject.

There are two possible interpretations of Metel' (The Snowstorm) in the context of dramatisations of the relationship between the female subject and poetic identity. The play can be seen to enact a reversal of the traditional genders of poet and muse: the disillusioned Lady is visited fleetingly by a mysterious male muse. However, this reading cannot fully accommodate the clear identification evoked in Tsvetaeva's play between the Gentleman and the poet which somewhat undermines a reading of the visitor as muse.<sup>3</sup> I would argue that the poetic intertext of Blok's play is radically reformulated and that the relationship dramatised in this play is that of the female poet to her literary heritage. The Lady is an outsider in the context of the inn partly because of class difference, but the difference which is foregrounded, often by the Gentleman's remarks, is that of sexual difference.<sup>4</sup> The female poet remains caught in a limbo between the lack of acceptance of her as equal by the male poet and her obvious isolation amongst mundane existence which denotes her poetic identity. In Metel' (The Snowstorm) Tsvetaeva's female poet is not yet ready to assert her identity and enter the snowstorm of creativity indicated in the play's title.

Tsvetaeva's next play Prikliuchenie (An Adventure) portrays a more confident female poetic identity. As discussed in Chapter Four, the fluid sexual identity of the central protagonist of Prikliuchenie (An Adventure), is presented by Tsvetaeva as a positive, creative force. Henri/Henriette as poet-figure creates and modifies his/her



own identity, mocking all attempts at classification of his/her existence whilst asserting both its mobility and her control of its metamorphoses. However, it is specifically as a woman that Henri/Henriette expresses her creativity, through her virtuoso cello performance in the third act and her signatory inscription on the hotel window which returns to haunt the final scenes of the play. In this play there is no implied muse figure; Henrietta certainly finds no inspiration in the figure of Casanova and acknowledges no influences, playing her own musical compositions. She is also uninterested in the reactions or desires of her audience and plays for herself. Prikliuchenie (An Adventure) reinforces the premise introduced in Metel' (The Snowstorm) that the realms of mortal love and poetic creativity are mutually exclusive. However, Tsvetaeva's female poet is now able to assert her choice of creativity over love and realise her poetic identity. The Lady in Metel' can only stare out of the inn window, unable to join the male poet or to leave the superficial and banal environment of the inn for the danger of the snowstorm. She remains conscious of the existence of a more fulfilling elsewhere, but unable to act on this knowledge. Henriette, however, is not content to look through the window and inscribes her name into the glass, an act which both inscribes her identity and ensures her memory survives. She has gained access to her chosen elsewhere (creativity represented here by the moonlight) and transcends the inadequacies of mortal existence and love (shown in the stark contrast between our memory of her character and Casanova's mocked seduction). Henrietta has identified herself in writing and her memory lives on through this act, thus the poet's ultimate reward is the immortality granted by their work. The poet's isolation and inevitable exile from mortal concerns are presented as ultimately preferable to a life of compromise and confinement.

Tsvetaeva's second play about Casanova (which was written very shortly after Prikliuchenie (An Adventure)) also clearly posits a poet figure, but in this instance the poet is male. In Feniks (The Phoenix) the older Casanova escapes mockery, vulgarity and the advent of the nineteenth century by following the exit of the Gentleman of Metel' into the snowstorm. Feniks presents Tsvetaeva's perception of the experience of



persecution suffered by all true poets who find themselves isolated in a society which neither values nor comprehends poetry. The foregrounding of a male poet-figure is not typical of Tsvetaeva's theatre and clearly stems from her interest in the figure of Casanova. It constitutes an attempt to defend his status as writer against the predominating images of him (including her own in Prikluchenie (An Adventure)) as flamboyant but shallow adventurer. Not only does the play transform Casanova into a poet-figure, but, I would argue centres on the representation of creativity and the shallow attitudes of society towards it. One of the pivotal moments in the play is Casanova's recounting of a bizarre childhood anecdote which Tsvetaeva took from the memoirs.<sup>5</sup> The young Casanova has a severe nosebleed and is taken to a witch who locks him away until the bleeding has stopped. He recalls being visited by Venus who, despite his young age, undertakes his sexual initiation. In his study of Feniks, Scotto interprets Tsvetaeva's use of the tale as unchanged from Casanova's memoirs, as representing sexual initiation. In a somewhat reductive reading of the play he links this focus to Tsvetaeva's biography.<sup>6</sup> However, in the light of my argument in this thesis it is clear that the episode is chosen and reframed by Tsvetaeva to represent poetic rather than sexual initiation. Her use of the image of the cloak to denote poetic identity has been noted in earlier discussions of Metel', thus when Casanova describes how he is wrapped in Venus' cloak<sup>7</sup> it must be seen to signify his initiation as poet above all else.

Despite the employment of Casanova as poet-figure in Feniks, Tsvetaeva's theatre does not proceed to explore a common struggle of all poets, both male and female, to assert their poetic identities in the face of uniform hostility. When she returns to writing for the theatre in 1924 her focus is clearly on the representation of the female poet. Tsvetaeva's plays Ariadna and Fedra (Phaedra) constitute engagements with the plight of the woman poet faced with the conflict between her allotted social role as daughter, mother or wife and the desire to inhabit a freer world of creativity. The issue of gender is fundamental to these plays and Tsvetaeva articulates the



particular difficulties of, and restrictions placed upon, the woman poet through the two central female characters. Tsvetaeva transposes the battle between mortal and immortal powers which is inherent to an understanding of Greek mythology, as relevant to the situation of the woman poet, who cannot attain poetic identity in a mortal existence which defines her as incapable of artistic creativity. Tsvetaeva's engagement with narratives from classical Greek mythology reveals her desire to elevate the status of female creativity and to inscribe the figure of the female poet in such metanarratives.

The confidence of Henriette is echoed in the frank speeches in which Ariadne expresses her sexual desire. However, in order for the female poet to attain transcendence a greater sacrifice must now be made. In Ariadna, Ariadne is represented as having to sacrifice all to attain immortal creativity. Bacchus is designated as her rightful partner through his association with creativity, and she accedes to the higher realm of poetry. However, the representation of Ariadne as poet-figure is rather muted when compared to the explicit personifications of poetic identity found in Tsvetaeva's other plays. Ariadna does, nevertheless, repeat the foregrounding of the disillusion of female characters with the limitations of mortal life and love, a failure which recurs as a preoccupation of Tsvetaeva's following play Fedra (Phaedra) which integrates this specific disillusion into her ultimate representation of the female poet.

Fedra (Phaedra) provides the most coherent and the most gender-specific representation of poetic identity in Tsvetaeva's theatre and it must be read as a dramatisation of the female subject's inscription in writing. The play draws upon Tsvetaeva's personal poetic iconography (as discussed in Chapter Five) but addresses a range of issues which are fundamental to discussions of a female creativity and poetic identity. Fedra engages with the cultural expectations of women (Fedra's role as wife and stepmother) and the repression of expressions of identity which fall outside of these roles. The play enacts a powerful allegory of the relationship between desire, writing and sexual difference and Hippolytus' rejection of Fedra's desire represents the hostility towards female creativity and conflicts between female poetic identity and cultural



notions of authority. This dramatisation insists upon the specificity of gender of the woman poet through the representation of a female desiring subject and the emphasis on the role of the Nurse in constituting a woman-centred model of creativity.

However, Tsvetaeva's pessimism over the possibility of asserting a female poetic identity in the realm of sociocultural reality is reflected in the punitive endings which enclose these later female poet-figures. Transcendence and immortality are attained, but only through sacrifice and death. Fedra as female poet inspires a female chorus to praise her, so affirming a female poetic heritage, but remains absent herself from the creative possibilities of the future. The ultimate elsewhere evoked in which female poetic identity can be imagined is that of immortality which, whilst demonstrating the woman poet's creative talents, and, importantly, positing a realm in which poetry is freed from worldly concerns, is achieved precisely through an expansion of the exile discussed in Chapter Three, the necessary removal of any interaction with the world.

If Fedra provides the most coherent and successful representation of poetic identity in Tsvetaeva's theatre, it is also the representation which forms the clearest parallels with her own writing and creative practices. The presence of several elements of Tsvetaeva's personal poetic iconography - the burning bush, the fever, the laurel tree - encourages an association of Fedra with the author herself, but such a reading remains ultimately secondary to the consistent representation and dramatisation of female creativity in Tsvetaeva's theatre. Her plays dramatise an evolving female poetic identity which does not rely upon an intertext of authorial biography in order to be appreciated as a coherent focus of her work.

### **Cixous: The Identity of Authority**

The theatre of Hélène Cixous has focussed consistently on the representation of subjectivity and identity. Her early plays reflect her belief in the importance of writing



in the construction and representation of female subjectivity, but do not constitute explicit representations of a female poetic identity. Cixous defined her own engagement with the theatre as being politically motivated and as striving to undermine the dominant thematic and generic elements of theatre which excluded and obstructed positive representations of the female subject.

I would argue that the representation of poetic identity in Cixous' theatre traces an inverse movement to that shown to be present in Tsvetaeva's plays. The female characters in Cixous' early plays, Portrait de Dora and Le Nom d'Oedipe: Chant du corps interdit are excluded from self-expression and presented as Everywoman with no specific references to questions of poetic identity. If Cixous' writing on *écriture féminine*, particularly in the texts, La Jeune Née and 'La Venue à l'Ecriture' constitutes an invitation to women to reclaim their subjectivity and "come to writing", then these two early plays present dramatisations of the restrictions and taboos which prevent women from answering this call.

Theatre was originally explored by Cixous in terms of its potential and perceived capacity for representing subjectivity in process, and for retaining the fluidity and mobility of subject positions which Cixous attempts to dramatise in her early plays. The female subject commands centre stage, but she is not associated with creativity, unlike the predominantly male central protagonists of Cixous' later plays.

As discussed in several chapters of this study, the nature of the representation of poetic identity in Cixous' theatre changes in accordance with the shifting concerns of her own creative projects and her changing perceptions of the role of the poet. Throughout her theatre, however, the representation of poetic identity comes to reflect the construction and projection of her own persona as poet. The emergence of a preoccupation with the nature of poetic identity and the role of the poet coincides with a commensurate rehabilitation of the theatrical form as the genre through which to explore and represent this role. As Cixous the poet embraces the theatre, so her theatre in turn explores the role of the poet in representations of increasing specificity.



Representations of poetic identity in Cixous' theatre from the 1980s onwards are dominated by the trope of the poet as exile in relation to an allegorical 'paradise lost'. It is in this context that Sihanouk and Gandhi are presented as poet-figures, existing in different scenarios of exile and resisting separation and division. This role becomes the central focus of her work on poetic identity and overshadows any concern with the role of sexual difference in definitions of poetic identity. The primary criterion employed to establish poetic identity is that of an openness to the other and acceptance of difference. Gandhi accedes to the realms of the poet through his insistence on fighting the partition of India. Paradoxically, however, Cixous' positing of poetic identity as rooted in an acceptance of the other is undermined by the representations of the other in these two plays, which fix 'India' and the 'Indian self' as immutable, transcendental others. This essentialised India, its differences frozen and recuperated through Cixous' allegorisation of the historical and political events portrayed, provides useful metaphors for the construction of poetic identity, yet ultimately its subjectivity is denied. Cixous' adoption of Gandhi as poet figure seems less an insistence on the potential role of the poet in advocating peaceful change or in inspiring a population, than the mobilisation of a powerful context and a central protagonist through which she is able to voice her exploration of approaches to alterity.

Clearly, it must be noted that the two central protagonists of these allegorical narratives are male; in direct opposition to the movement which has been traced in Tsvetaeva's theatre, Cixous' representations of poetic identity forge no links with the representation of female subjectivity. However, the only play in which Cixous represents female creativity is in fact the most explicit representation in this study of poetic identity. Her play Voile noire, voile blanche is discussed in Chapter Three in terms of its representation of exile, and the predominant trope which defines poetic identity in the play remains that of exile and exclusion. The poet Akhmatova's internal exile in the Soviet Union and the reiteration of Cixous' concept of a community of poets are of more importance to the representation of poetic identity in the play than gender-specific narratives of creativity. It can also be argued that the dominant poetic



presence in the play is that of Osip Mandel'shtam. He remains physically absent from the stage yet his poems and his opinions are evoked in every scene, and Akhmatova and Nadezhda Mandel'shtam compete in their desire to remember and appropriate his work.<sup>8</sup> Akhmatova is presented as principled and moral in her quest for publication, but as fickle and demanding in her relationships with the four other female characters. This again contrasts greatly with the idealised pictures of Mandel'shtam woven by the two women.

It is at this point that Cixous foregrounds an almost Heideggerian model of the function of the poet as bearer of an essential 'Truth' and guardian against disjunctions between the individual and the world.<sup>9</sup> In *Voile noire, voile blanche* the poet Akhmatova is presented in terms of her potential as the purveyor of truth, the keeper of memory and the conscience of the people. Cixous emphasises the importance of solidarity between poets, and her play is posited as mirroring Akhmatova and Nadezhda Mandel'shtam's task of ensuring that the truth survives and that poets are not forgotten. Through the implicit suggestion of such parallels, Cixous excludes Pasternak from her definitions of poetic identity. His refusal to help Akhmatova erases him from Cixous' canon, but she inserts herself as fellow poet engaged in the preservation of both poetry and memory through the very writing of this play. This proposal becomes more explicit in the last scene of the play in which Akhmatova and Nadezhda Mandel'shtam express their hopes for the future:

Akhmatova: (au public)  
 Vous qui vivez plus tard, avez vous entendu parler d'Ossip et de sa  
 femme ici présente?  
 Et d'Anna Akhmatova?  
 J'aimerais tant le savoir, il faut sauter un siècle, et revenir.  
 ...  
 Et dites moi, vous qui vivez plus tard, savez-vous qui fut vraiment  
 Mandelstam? Akhmatova? Et Pasternak? Goumilev? Tabidzé?  
 Tsvetaeva?  
 Savez-vous qui d'entre nous fut loyal, qui fut trahi, qui fut traître...  
 Cela se voit-il plus tard dans nos poèmes?  
 L'Histoire de la vérité a-t-elle commencé?<sup>10</sup>

This direct address to the audience reminds them of the overall author-ity of the play.



that of Cixous. It is through her work that we may have learnt of Akhmatova, Mandel'shtam and Pasternak, and consequently Cixous achieves an assertion of her own poetic identity through the stating of an alliance between herself and the poet-figures represented onstage.

Cixous' La Ville parjure ou le réveil des Erinyes,<sup>11</sup> which went into production in 1994, demonstrates the continuation of the representation of the poet as moral and cultural safekeeper.

The character of Aeschylus, the guardian of the cemetery, clearly evokes the classical Greek dramatist of the same name, and he is portrayed as a poet-figure in this play. His work in protecting the excluded and the dead also marks his association with the poet, and the task which he performs in several scenes, that of inscribing the names of outcasts and martyrs in stone on the cemetery walls, serves as an analogy to Cixous' belief in the role of the poet as guardian of memory and conscience.<sup>12</sup> In her prefatory essay published alongside the text, Cixous recalls the great writers who have documented contemporary horrors and corruption:

Au bord de la rouge rivière au destin angoissant se sont penchés tous les poètes impuissants à retenir la vie qui s'en va...Entendez-les gémir l'hymne indigné, Eschyle, Shakespeare, Balzac, Hugo, affreusement fascinés par les carnages dont l'homme est l'auteur avec la cité.<sup>13</sup>

Aeschylus is included in Cixous' brief list and the assumption is again present that, through the writing of this play and the specific association with Aeschylus, Cixous is inserting her own poetic persona into this group. Aeschylus fulfills the role of poet as protector and defender of those wrongly persecuted and excluded, and his status as poet is emphasised through the inscription of martyrs on the cemetery walls and his desire to note down events and sensations, ultimately even to note down a description of death as he passes into immortality at the end of the play.<sup>14</sup> Aeschylus provides another example of Cixous' use of male poet-figures as heroic characters. The focus of the play may appear to centre on the mother's search for justice for the murder of her children, but it is the poet's role in communicating this to the world, here explicitly the theatre



audience, which is asserted at the end of the play.

The explicit insertion of Cixous' poetic persona returns in force in the last play analysed in this thesis and Cixous' last play to date L'Histoire (qu'on ne connaîtra jamais).<sup>15</sup> The play continues the movement towards an increasingly explicit portrayal of poetic identity in her theatre however it develops the representation of poetic identity through the staging of the scene of writing itself and an exploration of the poet's relationship to writing and to the theatre. Through the dramatisation of a writing self, the poet Sturlusson, the play also problematises the inherent tensions between Cixous' adoption of the theatre as privileged site of the other, and the projection of a specific poetic identity, that of the authorial self.

Sturlusson's search for the meta-narrative, the lost story, represents Cixous' concept of the poet's quest for truth. Sturlusson, as character in the play, is thus a participant in the unfolding narrative, and capable of altering the course of events, but is charged with the delivery of a closed narrative. The projection of Sturlusson into this scene represents an explicit insertion of the writing self and poetic identity into the scene of writing and the scene of the theatre which the poet experiences in its spatial and temporal immediacy. Sturlusson does not possess authorial omniscience, and dramatic tension is maintained in the play as he attempts both to observe and participate in the narrative. In the programme notes Cixous ostensibly discusses Sturlusson, but implies that this dilemma is experienced by all poets:

Ce que veut le poète: retrouver la vérité. Mais à la chercher, il se voit pris lui-même dans la toile qu'il regarde se tisser. Le passé qui était son objet de désir, le cède au présent... le voilà lui-même personnage du récit qu'il comptait faire. L'Histoire qu'il espérait raconter se jette sur lui et l'emporte.<sup>16</sup>

Poetic identity, as is consistently true of Cixous' later plays, is determined by an association with the exiled and the outcast, to the exclusion of other concerns and, as discussed in Chapter Three, the rabbi Barout represents this association in the play. However, the introduction of an explicit Jewishness also encourages an association of poetic identity with Cixous. Barout's presence is presented as vital, both fundamental to



the creative process, and necessary for a recuperation of the narrative (implicitly History itself).<sup>17</sup> When Barout departs violently from the scene as he is murdered by Sturlusson in a fit of rage, the rabbi's fate could arguably be read as a simplistic allegorisation of the fate of the Jew in History. However, a reading of the murder scene in the context of the representation of poetic identity is more rewarding.

Sturlusson's anger is roused by the loss of his written text which is delaying his departure from a narrative which he considers closed. This represents an attempt by the poet to appropriate the narrative, to assert authorial control and attain textual fixity within the flux of the dramatic narrative of the play. Sturlusson's crime in murdering Barout is to deny the importance and presence of the other whom Cixous describes throughout her work as essential for poetic creativity.<sup>18</sup> Sturlusson is horrified by his own actions and describes the murder in terms of a self-mutilation. He loses all control of the narrative and indeed renounces any hope of authorial control:

Snorri:  
Comme je suis fatigué de penser à nous  
Etres humains incertains violents...  
Nos mystères sont escarpés  
Et je ne sais même plus qui est le personnage principal  
De mon récit.<sup>19</sup>

Sturlusson is then murdered by one of the main agents of evil in the play, but remains on stage in his role as immortal commentator and guardian against the revengeful denouement demanded by the Nordic gods. Cixous' staging of the death of the author serves to banish all notions of Sturlusson's control: he is participant in the final scene and, as such, is caught up in the flux of the dramatic narrative but has no authority to influence the course of events. I would argue that this opposition can be read as that between the text and the theatre: Sturlusson's commissioned narrative is usurped by the spatial and temporal immediacy of the play over which he can maintain no prescriptive omniscience.

Cixous thus dramatises her perception of the poet's misguided approach to

writing and to the other, a warning of the dangers of a misconception of the role and nature of poetic identity. However, the denouement also serves to foreground a tendency which has become increasingly prominent in Cixous' last three plays, that of the assertion of her own authority over the poetic identities represented in her theatre.

Sturlusson's narrative is seen as inferior to that of the play in which it is framed, suggesting a potential superiority of the approach to writing of the author of that play, Cixous. As the final lines of Voile noire, voile blanche, discussed earlier in this conclusion, draw the audience's attention toward the authorial presence behind the play, so the last lines of L'Histoire (qu'on ne connaîtra jamais) emphasise both Sturlusson's failure and Cixous' inferred success. Sturlusson laments: 'Personne ne racontera jamais notre histoire',<sup>20</sup> yet the audience must contest this as they have been privileged to witness it. Cixous has managed to recount this story and her titling of the play paradoxically serves to remind us of her achievements. Sturlusson, powerless poet-figure on the stage, defers to a higher authority. Any intradiegetic effacement of poetic identity and deconstructions of authorship are reversed by Cixous' assertion of her own authorial control of this dramatic text. Cixous may have sacrificed the poet and questioned the function of poetic identity on the stage, yet the demise of authorial presence is ultimately illusory. The evolving representations of poetic identity in Cixous' theatre thus serve as a projection of her own poetic identity which she validates through an association of heroic figures with the poetic, and implicitly with herself, and an assertion of her own authority over the characters in her later plays and over the narratives themselves.

### **A Gendered Poetic Identity?**

This exploration of the chronological development and final representations of poetic identity in the theatre of Tsvetaeva and Cixous reveals that, despite the common tropes and themes important to the two writers' perceptions of the poet, the resulting movements and evolving trajectories are strongly divergent.



As discussed above, poetic identity in the theatre of Tsvetaeva becomes increasingly gender-specific as both the repression and the expression of female creativity is staged. In assessing the nature of Cixous' and Tsvetaeva's respective representations of poetic identity the question of gender remains an important consideration for feminist readings of their work. The repression and misrepresentation of female creativity is well documented,<sup>21</sup> and the status of the female poet, often designated as diminutive and secondary as "poetess", remains particularly problematic.

As Svetlana Boym infers in her clear and far-reaching discussion of the cultural and literary connotations of the term "poetess", Tsvetaeva was familiar with the traditional undermining of female creativity.<sup>22</sup> This is accurately observed in Tsvetaeva's description of a `vecher (sic) poetess (An Evening of Poetesses)' organised by the poet Briusov in Moscow.<sup>23</sup> Briusov's introduction of the women poets was clearly offensive to Tsvetaeva:

Женщина. Любовь. Страсть. Женщина, с начала веков, умела петь только о любви и страсти. Единственная страсть женщины - любовь. Каждая любовь женщины - страсть. Вне любви женщина в творчестве, ничто...

Woman. Love. Passion. Woman, since the beginning of the century, has only known how to sing of love and passion. The single passion of woman is love. Every woman's love is passion. Outside of love woman, in art, is nothing...<sup>24</sup>

The cultural connotations of gender are in force here and Tsvetaeva recognises that "na vecher(sic) poetess delo uzhe ne v stikhakh (at an evening of poetesses the interest is not in the poetry)".<sup>25</sup> Such are the issues at stake for the assertion of a female poetic identity, issues which Tsvetaeva recognised and placed at the foreground of her theatre. Her representations of poetic identity are gender-specific, and they demonstrate the restrictions placed upon female subjectivity and the woman writer, and stage positive representations of female creativity. Her final play Fedra (Phaedra) employs established narrative, that of classical Greek mythology, to reveal dominant perceptions of women's writing as repressive and to insist upon the valid cultural status of the woman



poet. Fedra constitutes a startlingly thorough dramatisation of many issues which are fundamental to any consideration of the relationship between female subjectivity and poetic identity, issues which remain conspicuously absent from Cixous' theatre.

Cixous' representations of poetic identity become increasingly explicit in a different direction. Her changing notions of poetic identity are reliant upon the projection of correspondences and similarities between the poetic criteria personified by the poet figures in her plays and her own poetic persona. Cixous' strategic insertion of her own poetic identity which dominates the ending of her most recent play enacts a very different relationship to mythology from that of Fedra (Phaedra). The staging of poetic identity also coincides in Cixous' theatre with the employment of other mythological narratives, but it is not the status of the woman poet, or even an ungendered poet which is asserted as heroic male poet-figures are constructed and reinstated. Rather it is the status of Cixous' own poetic identity and status as equal to the poets represented in her theatre which is suggested, and a personal mythologisation which is projected on to the characters in her plays. This homogenising process undermines the representation of difference and defines all poets through their similarities with each other, and importantly, with Cixous. The representation of an ungendered and undifferentiated poetic identity relies on the use of the other, often a female other, as allegory through which poets define themselves. The emergence of a monolithic concept of poetic identity, existing as it may in contemporary India or ancient Iceland does not imply a more liberating conception of poetic identity in terms of the status of the female poet. Whilst Cixous' earlier work explored the politics of cultural representations of female subjectivity, the presence of this concern cannot be detected in her recent theatre. Cixous' projection of her persona as analogous with poetic identity does not include an engagement with her own female subjectivity as an important element of poetic identity.

Cixous' recent writing in other genres displays an increasing level of self-referentiality and whilst the self can be presented as text, as a discursive site, it can be



seen in Cixous' case as encouraging increasingly reductive readings of her texts which rely on intertextual references to her life and work and to her personal mythologies.<sup>26</sup>

This thesis has shown the representation of poetic identity to be central to the theatre of Tsvetaeva and Cixous and to provide a rewarding frame through which to approach their theatre as a coherent generic body of work. Both writers employ the genre of theatre to project the poet-self and dramatise their own creativity. The representation of poetic identity in Tsvetaeva's theatre remains more radical in its portrayal of female creativity and dramatisation of the relationships between body, text and language which must underlie women's relationship to writing and the structure of their theatre.

- (1) Hélène Cixous, 'Tancrède continue' in Entre l'écriture (Paris: des femmes, 1986), pp. 139-168.
- (2) This is clearly the function of the mythological narrative in Le Nom d'Oedipe.
- (3) As discussed in Chapter Three, the character evokes the figure of Aleksandr Blok as meta-poet. The second poem in Tsvetaeva's 'Stikhi k Bloku (Poems to Blok)' refers to 'nezhnyi prizrak (a gentle ghost)', 'snegovoi pevets (snow singer)', and the 'bubentsami dalekimi (distant sleigh bells)'. Marina Tsvetaeva, Sochineniia, I, pp. 65-74.
- (4) Marina Tsvetaeva, Metel' (The Snowstorm), p. 54.
- (5) Jacques Casanova de Seingalt, Histoire de ma Vie, II, pp. 40-51.
- (6) Scotto's reading is most unsatisfactory. He suggests that Tsvetaeva was attracted to this episode of the memoirs because of Casanova's young age at the time of the recounted seduction: "In *The Phoenix*, the child Casanova's encounter with Venus may reflect the older Tsvetaeva's attraction to the child-like Sonechka Gollidei." Andrew Scotto 'Toward a reading of Tsvetaeva's *Feniks*' in Marina Tsvetaeva: One Hundred Years ed. Viktoria Schweitzer et al. pp. 194-201, p. 197.
- (7) Kasanova "...nam plashch svoi priotkryla vlazhnyi (she opened her damp cloak to us)". Marina Tsvetaeva, Feniks, p. 194.
- (8) Hélène Cixous, Voile noire, voile blanche, p. 258.
- (9) See Martin Heidegger, 'What are Poets For?' in Poetry, Language, Thought trans. Albert Hofstadter, (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), pp. 91-142. Another clear example of Cixous' focus upon the poet (herself) as revealer of truths can be found in the concluding paragraphs of one of her recent texts as she entreates the reader to find the hidden truth in her text. Hélène Cixous, L'Ange au secret (Paris: des femmes, 1991), pp. 255-257.
- (10) Hélène Cixous, Voile noire, voile blanche, p. 350.
- (11) Hélène Cixous, La Ville parjure ou le réveil des Erinyes. (Paris: Théâtre du Soleil, 1994).
- (12) The names engraved range from Steven Biko to Anne Frank and represent the victims of different regimes of political and racial oppression.
- (13) Hélène Cixous, 'Nos Mauvais Sangs', *ibid.*, p. 5.
- (14) Hélène Cixous, La ville parjure ou le reveil des Erinyes, p. 214.
- (15) Hélène Cixous, L'Histoire (qu'on ne connaîtra jamais) (Paris: des femmes, 1994).
- (16) Hélène Cixous, programme notes to L'Histoire (qu'on ne connaîtra jamais), 1994.
- (17) The play maintains the ambiguity of the French 'histoire' meaning both story and history, emphasising Cixous' focus on the responsibility of poets and historians alike to recount the 'truth'.
- (18) The murder of the other is of course fundamental to Cixous' thought in a much wider context than that of creativity. Her early analyses of the repression of female subjectivity define the denial of alterity as one of the founding principles of patriarchal thought. Indeed such repression is referred to as 'le meurtre de l'autre', a sub-heading



used in Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément. La Jeune Née. (Paris: Union Générale des Editions, 1975). p. 127.

(19) Hélène Cixous, L'Histoire (qu'on ne connaîtra jamais). p. 164.

(20) *ibid.*, p. 184.

(21) In texts as varied as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. The Madwomen in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination (Yale University Press, 1979) to Christine Battersby Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics (London: The Women's Press, 1989).

(22) Svetlana Boym, Death in Quotation Marks: Cultural Myths of the Modern Poet. pp. 192-194.

(23) Tsvetaeva's sarcastic descriptions of the evening and of Briusov's attitude to women poets can be found in Marina Tsvetaeva, 'Geroi Truda' in Izbrannaia Proza y dvukh tomakh, I, pp. 197-210.

(24) *ibid.*, p. 202.

(25) *ibid.*, p. 204.

(26) The final section of a recent text written by Cixous with Mireille Calle-Gruber acts as a continuation of the mythologisation of Cixous' own identity. Mireille Calle-Gruber and Hélène Cixous, Photos de Racines (Paris: des femmes, 1994).

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