Resurrecting Revolution:

Performing the Radical Past in the Twentieth Century

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Table of Contents

Introduction 1

Defining the Canon: Büchner to Present 4
Methods: Production History and Close Reading/Viewing 9

1. "The Marks of a True Genius": *The Danton Case* by Stanisława Przybyszewska 18

Robespierre; or, the Revolution Incarnate 26
A Dialogue with Büchner's *Danton's Death* 31
Decentring Danton 38

2. "The Voice of the Collective": *1789* by Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil 41

Creating "the People" from "the Crowd" 49
The Play's Purpose: Entertainment or Instruction? 54
The Scenario's Insidious Potential 62

3. "Other Bastilles to Take": *An tan révolisyon* by Maryse Condé 67

Repositioning *1789* within *The Time of Revolution* 73
"She Gives Birth to Monsters": Revolution's Gendered Violence 85
Language: In and Against Tradition 88

Coda: Contesting the Revolutionary Scenario 91

Bibliography 94

Table of Figures

Figure 1. Page 31 from "'Une scénographie pour 1789,' by Denis Bablet for Interscaena" in "Coupures de presse," 4-COL-153(24), Fonds du Théâtre du Soleil, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France. 47
Figure 2. "Prospectus-programme, 1973," 4-COL-153(33), Fonds du Théâtre du Soleil, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France. 71

Abstract

Since the preliminary actions of the French Revolution in 1789, its events have been dramatized on- and off-stage. This thesis analyses three twentieth century history plays created by female theatre artists which "resurrect" the eighteenth-century French Revolution, Haitian Revolution, and related liberatory struggles in Guadeloupe. Drawing from performance studies and theatre history, each work is placed in context and connected within a larger genre, the "Revolutionary *Trauerspiel*." Sources analysed include playtexts, historical productions, recorded performances, reviews, archival documents, and intellectual histories. Exploring how the plays employ, subvert, and transform Aristotelian tragic tropes, the thesis demonstrates how these women "reactivate" the past through performance in order to mourn, process, and intervene in the making of history. The historical and theoretical introduction traces the performative legacy of the Revolutionary period and introduces the project's methodological framework. The first chapter interrogates the production history of Stanisława Przybyszewska's little-studied play *The Danton Case* (1929). The second chapter analyses the collectivist approach and subject of *1789* (1973) by Ariane Mnouchkine and the workers' cooperative/theatre troupe, the Théâtre du Soleil. Finally, the third chapter reads Maryse Condé's *An tan révolisyon* (1989) as a powerful example of the radical potential contained in the Revolutionary "scenario."

Abstrait

Depuis les actions préliminaires de la Révolution française en 1789, ces événements ont été joués sur scène et hors scène. Cette mémoire analyse trois pièces historiques du vingtième siècle créées par des artistes féminines de théâtre qui « ressuscitent » la Révolution française, la Révolution haïtienne et les luttes libératoires raccordées menées en Guadeloupe au dix-huitième siècle. S'inspirant des études sur la performance et de l'histoire du théâtre, chaque œuvre est située dans son contexte et dans un genre plus large : le « *Trauerspiel* révolutionnaire ». Les sources analysées comprennent les textes dramatiques, les productions historiques, les représentations enregistrées, les critiques, les documents d'archives et les histoires universitaires. En considérant la manière dont les pièces utilisent, subvertissent et transforment les tropes tragiques aristotéliciens, la thèse démontre comment ces femmes « réactivent » le passé à travers la performance afin de faire le deuil, de traiter l'histoire et d'intervenir dans sa construction. L'introduction historique et théorique retrace l'héritage performatif de la période révolutionnaire et présente le cadre méthodologique du projet. Le premier chapitre interroge l'histoire de la production de la pièce peu étudiée de Stanisława Przybyszewska, *L'Affaire Danton* (1929). Le deuxième chapitre analyse l'approche et le sujet collectivistes de *1789* (1973) d'Ariane Mnouchkine et de la coopérative de travail/troupe théâtrale, le Théâtre du Soleil. Enfin, le troisième chapitre interprète *An tan révolisyon* (1989) de Maryse Condé comme exemple puissant du potentiel véritablement radical contenu dans le « scénario » révolutionnaire.

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When I was conflicted about whether I should get my MA, my parents encouraged me to take the leap because they knew long before I did that it was what I really wanted. I wouldn't have gotten to this stage without their unwavering support.

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Introduction

Performances play out in time. Thus, they are uniquely positioned to probe our relationship to temporality, asking questions about ephemerality and permanence, change and stagnation, breaks and continuities. Meanwhile, drama—"what the writer writes," to quote Richard Schechner—is historical, in a sense, created either in the recent or distant past, a blueprint that can be followed or departed from in any number of ways.[1] The temporal lag between performance and drama makes explicit Freddie Rokem's observation that "any process of telling or writing a version of what has happened is a form of performing history and of *resurrecting* that past."[2] When people perform as historical figures—speaking their words, reenacting their actions, perhaps even approximating their appearances—they are reviving them as a recognizable persona or character within the confines of that performance. Reenacting events that are a matter of historical record makes these events recur, at least momentarily, transposed into a new space and time. As Rebecca Schneider puts it in her study of Civil War reenactments, *Performing Remains*, "reenactment is a form of "then, there" translated to "here, now."[3] What might happen when events as foundational, and as contested, as the French and Haitian Revolutions are resurrected in a history play? And how might developments in scholarship inform the dramatization of history, or vice-versa? These are the guiding questions of my readings of *The Danton Case* (1929) by Stanisława Przybyszewska, *1789* (1973) by Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil, and *An tan révolisyon* (1989) by Maryse Condé.

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[1] For Schechner's explanation of the relationship between drama, script, theatre, and performance, see Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory*, revised and expanded ed., (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 87. Full quotation: "the drama is what the writer writes; the script is the interior map of a particular production; the theatre is the specific set of gestures performed by the performers in any given performance; the performance is the whole event, including audience and performers (technicians, too, anyone who is there)."

[2] Freddie Rokem, *Performing History: Theatrical Representations of the Past in Contemporary Theatre* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002), 10. Emphasis added.

[3] Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 51.

The French Revolution, the Haitian Revolution, and related eighteenth-century liberation struggles, such as rebellions by enslaved people in Guadeloupe against French colonialism, taken together represent a turning point in the course of history, a moment some have positioned as the starting point of our current political age.[4] This history has been reenacted regularly in performances ranging from stage plays (like those discussed in this thesis) to sporting events like the Paris 2024 Olympics, as France forms and revises its national image on the world stage. Attempts to stage and theatricalize the already-spectacular French Revolution were happening even as events were still unfolding. In London, happenings in Paris were mounted onstage as quickly as possible for eager audiences. George Taylor documents a play titled *Paris in an Uproar; or, the Destruction of the Bastille* performed on 17 August 1789, a mere month after the historic dismantling of the Ancien Régime prison took place.[5] Two weeks later, on 31 August 1789, a rival theatre presented its own production, *Gallic Freedom; or, Vive la Liberté*, also depicting the storming of the Bastille.[6] Paul Friedland recounts that in Paris itself by late 1790, people could pay a regular membership fee to come together in a circus tent in the Palais-Royal and "pretend that they were legislators [in the National Assembly] and harangue each other."[7] This was not the only space where spectators could don new roles and become actors; Friedland shows that the changing roles of theatre audiences were profoundly linked to their changing roles in the Republican government.[8] Marvin Carlson began his scholarly career with his 1966 book, *The Theatre of the French Revolution*, in which he demonstrates theatre's use as a barometer of change in Revolutionary Paris.[9] The politics of theatrical tastes were also changing during this period of upheaval. Mechele Leon explores how Molière's shorter,

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[4] See, for instance, Ferenc Fehér, ed., *The French Revolution and the Birth of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).
[5] George Taylor, *The French Revolution and the London Stage, 1789-1805* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 42.
[6] Taylor, *The French Revolution and the London Stage,* 43.
[7] Paul Friedland, *Political Actors: Representative Bodies & Theatricality in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002), 185.
[8] Friedland, *Political Actors,* 180.
[9] Marvin Carlson, *The Theatre of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), vi, 13.

comedic pieces "associated with farce and commedia dell'arte" were performed during the Revolution.[10] Leon posits that Molière's ironic social satires suited the tastes of audiences ready to laugh at the monarchy, aristocracy, and previously entrenched social hierarchies, once taken as sacrosanct. Susan Maslan exposes theatre's role as a tool by which both the people and political representatives attempted to shape France's emerging democracy.[11]

Offstage, too, performance had a unique and crucial place in the Revolutionary project. Many scholars portray revolution itself as a profoundly theatrical and performative process. In place of the Ancien Régime, the Republic came to be sacred through new ceremonies and rituals in which citizens took part. Mona Ozouf's groundbreaking book, *La fête révolutionnaire : 1789-1799* documents major festivals from the early days of the Revolution through its close.[12] In "Choreographing Freedom: Mass Performance in the Festivals of the French Revolution," Kimberly Jannarone continues this work, exploring the government's large-scale mobilization of people through festivals to create a new Republican culture via performance.[13] Jacques Guilhaumou's case study *La mort de Marat* links the ceremony of Jean-Paul Marat's funeral to his canonization as a Republican saint.[14] Daniel Arrasse unpacks the performance of public execution by guillotine in "Le théâtre de la guillotine."[15] Matthew S. Buckley's *Tragedy Walks the Streets* positions drama as a "shared language in which to convey revolutionary political ideas" leading to what he terms "the Revolution's political theatricality."[16] According to Buckley, Georg Büchner's 1834 drama about the French Revolution,

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[10] Mechele Leon, *Molière, the French Revolution, & the Theatrical Afterlife* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2009), 34.
[11] Susan Maslan, *Revolutionary Acts: Theater, Democracy, and the French Revolution* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), vii.
[12] Mona Ozouf, *La fête révolutionnaire : 1789-1799* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988).
[13] Kimberly Jannarone, "Choreographing Freedom: Mass Performance in the Festivals of the French Revolution," *TDR: The Drama Review* 61, no. 2 (Summer 2017), 118.
[14] Jacques Guilhaumou, *La mort de Marat* (Brussels : Éditions Complexe, 1989).
[15] Daniel Arasse, "Le théâtre de la guillotine," in *L'Expérience du regard au siècle des Lumières,* 133-195 (Paris: Éditions du Regard, 2018).
[16] Matthew S. Buckley, *Tragedy Walks the Streets: The French Revolution in the Making of Modern Drama* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press), 4, 10.

Danton's Death, "reappropriated and made available again the radical languages of Revolutionary theatricality."[17]

The Haitian Revolution has also been analysed as an inherently theatrical event, for example by Jeremy Matthew Glick in *The Black Radical Tragic*.[18] Peter Reed, in *Staging Haiti in Nineteenth-Century America*, explores how the in-progress Haitian Revolution was analysed, critiqued, and celebrated at turns in the U.S. through performance; he writes, "Haiti's revolution appears, again and again, a phenomenon built out of theatre's raw materials."[19] VèVè A. Clark establishes that, "From 1796 through 1975, a total of sixty-three plays concerned with the Haitian Revolution were either performed or published," and by reading examples from this canon, she critiques the limitations of Eurocentric depictions of the event.[20] Buckley, Glick, Reed, Clark and others contribute to scholarship that documents the interplay of revolutionary history and theatre history

Defining the Canon: Büchner to Present

A tradition of history plays about the French Revolution comes into sharp focus with Büchner's 1834 play, *Dantons Tod* or *Danton's Death.* American critic Henry Popkin described it as "the prototype," and writes, "'Danton's Death' is considered by many to have inaugurated the modern drama."[21] This is a thread picked up and unspooled further by Buckley, who argues, "it was the Revolution, too, that marked Büchner's initial break with dramatic tradition."[22] John Reddick also identifies the play as a departure from tradition, and claims, "No other German writer before

[17] Buckley, *Tragedy Walks the Streets*, 123.
[18] Jeremy Matthew Glick, *The Black Radical Tragic: Performance, Aesthetics, and the Unfinished Haitian Revolution* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2016), 2.
[19] Peter Reed, *Staging Haiti in Nineteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 2.
[20] VèVè A. Clark, "Haiti's Tragic Overture: (Mis)Representations of the Haitian Revolution in World Drama (1796-1975)" in *Representing the French Revolution: Literature, Historiography, and Art*, ed. James A. W. Heffernan (Hanover: University of Dartmouth Press, 1992): 240.
[21] Henry Popkin, "'Danton's Death' Endures as Political Drama," *The New York Times*, 20 March 1983, https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1983/03/20/034786.html?pageNumber=71.
[22] Buckley, *Tragedy Walks the Streets,* 1-2.

Brecht so vividly catches the modern imagination" as Büchner.[23] *Danton's Death* therefore marks the starting point for a body of Revolutionary history plays that are radical in content as well as form.

Büchner wrote *Danton's Death* while in hiding for revolutionary activities.[24] It was not staged until 1910 and not recognized as a major work until 1916, when it was directed by Max Reinhardt, whose production came to New York in 1927.[25] The play was popular enough in the U.S. that *Danton's Death* was the first play performed at the Vivian Beaumont Theater of Lincoln Center.[26] Rokem's study of American productions of Büchner's play reveals its enduring legacy in Anglophone theatre history, despite it being "problematic to mount on U.S. stages, even when major directors like Orson Welles, Herbert Blau, and Robert Wilson directed it."[27] Part of the difficulty of staging this play may be that *Danton's Death* is written in "32 brief scenes which give a bewildering variety of perspectives on the two main opponents," i.e., Maximilien Robespierre and Georges-Jacques Danton.[28] Indeed, attending a French-language production, *La mort de Danton*, at the Comédie-Française in May 2023, I was struck by the sheer number of locations that a single stage must stand in for through the course of the play, from private apartments and prison cells, to brothels and court rooms.[29] Revolutionary works for the stage seem to encourage an expanded sense of theatrical form, as I will discuss below.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Romain Rolland, a French playwright and staunch Stalinist, wrote a cycle of eight plays on the Revolution over the course of four

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[23] John Reddick, "Introduction" in *Complete Plays, Lenz and Other Writings* by Georg Büchner, trans. and notes by John Reddick (London: Penguin Books, 1993), xi.
[24] Popkin, "'Danton's Death.'"
[25] Popkin, "'Danton's Death.'"
[26] Popkin, "'Danton's Death.'"
[27] Rokem, *Performing History*, 137.
[28] Popkin, "'Danton's Death.'"
[29] *La mort de Danton,* directed by Simon Delétang, with Loïc Corbery as Georges Danton, député, Clément Hervieu-Léger as Robespierre, membre du Comité de salut public, and Gaël Kamilindi as Camille Desmoulins, député, Comédie-Française, Paris, France, 8 May 2023.

decades.[30] His analysis could not be relegated to one single work, though he returned to the same period and set of events to reinterpret them throughout his life. Later in the century, C.L.R. James, a Marxist historian from Trinidad, revised his play on the Haitian Revolution as his thinking evolved, changing even its title from *Toussaint Louverture* in 1936 to *The Black Jacobins* in 1967, to reflect a shift in focus from the revolutionary leader to the collective struggle of the Haitian people.[31] In their introduction to *La Révolution mise en scene*, Francine Maier-Schaeffer, Christiane Page and Cécile Vaissié speculate that "the representation of revolution is dependent on the understanding of the author and the image that they want to offer of it."[32] But what does it reveal when a writer's thinking is itself conflicted, adapting, ever changing? What stable insights can we build atop the ever-shifting sands of revisionist histories and historical dramas?[33]

Perhaps the shifting itself is the insight. History is subject to constant reinterpretation in theatre, the academy, and the collective imagination. Despite the challenges of containment and stability that the historical subject in general, and the Revolutionary subject specifically, entail, those I have mentioned above and others, such as Édouard Glissant (*Monsieur Toussaint*, 1961*)*, Aimé Césaire (*La Tragédie du roi Christophe*, 1963) and Peter Weiss (*Marat/Sade*, 1964), have elected to depict Revolutionary events through drama.[34] Well into the twenty-first century, this subject continues to occupy playwrights and theatre makers. *Notre Terreur,* by a theatre collective called "D'Ores et déjà"

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[30] Francine Maier-Schaeffer, Christiane Page and Cécile Vaissié, "Introduction" in *La Révolution mise en scène*, ed. Francine Maier-Schaeffer, Christiane Page and Cécile Vaissié (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2012), 9.
[31] Glick, *The Black Radical Tragic,* 86.
[32] Maier-Schaeffer, Page, and Vaissié, "Introduction," 9. My translation from French: "la représentation de la révolution est dépendante de la conception de l'auteur et de l'image que celui-ci vise à en donner."
[33] For a definition of "revisionism" and "revisionist histories," see *A Dictionary of Critical Theory*, 1st ed., s.v. "revisionism," accessed 23 April 2024, https://www-oxfordreference-com.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/view/10.1093/acref/9780199532919.001.0001/acref-9780199532919-e-605.
[34] A helpful list of French Revolution plays from 1789 to 1989 (though it excludes Haitian Revolution plays) can be found in the bibliography of *The Danton Case and Thermidor* by Stanisława Przybyszewska, trans. Bolesław Taborski, introduction by Daniel Gerould (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1989), 294-7.

was created in 2009 in Paris.[35] Another new play about the French Revolution, *Pourquoi Camille ?* by Philippe Bluteau, was staged in Paris in 2021 and 2022.[36] Finally, the 2023 production of Büchner at the Comédie-Française also speaks to the immediate relevance of this subject. Playwrights are continuing to dramatize these histories, interpreting and reinterpreting them, and audiences are continuing to watch them.

Maier-Schaeffer, Page, and Vaissié observe that the Revolutionary history plays in their edited collection reveal "a militant function (with a reactivation of ideas) or didactic function (as in, pedagogical or paternalistic)."[37] Not only onstage, and not only in France, is this history mined for militant and didactic ends. The 200-year span between the storming of the Bastille and the fall of the Berlin Wall saw countless attempts to return to and deliver on the Revolutionary legacy all over the world. For example, Jay Bergman has shown how imagery and symbols from the French Revolution were instrumentalized in the formation of a cultural and political identity within the Soviet Union.[38] Popkin observed in 1983 that "[t]he French Revolution has in recent years reasserted its place as the theatre's favorite insurrection, the great paradigm of all revolutions thereafter and a powerful litmus test for the representation of contemporary political issues."[39] Deborah B. Gaensbauer, writing in 2003, found in the 1989 Bicentennial celebrations of the French Revolution "ample evidence of perpetuation of a diversely theatricalized legacy."[40] However, she reflected on "the degree to which

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[35] Serge Aberdam, "Coup de jeune sur le Grand comité « Notre terreur », du collectif *D'Ores et déjà*, mise en scène de Sylvain Creuzevault," *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, no. 364 (June 1, 2011): 244, https://doi.org/10.4000/ahrf.12056.

[36] Marek Ocenas, "Comédie-Nation : Pourquoi Camille ?" *Theatre & Co,* 15 May 2023, https://marek-ocenas.fr/comedie-nation-pourquoi-camille-philippe-bluteau/#:~:text=Nation%20%3A%20Pourquoi%20Camille%20%3F-,Pourquoi%20Camille%20%3F,Com%C3%A9die%2DNation%20(%3E).

[37] Maier-Schaeffer, Page and Vaissié, "Introduction," 8. My translation from French, "fonction militante (avec une réactivation des idéaux) ou didactique (voire pédagogique et paternaliste), mais aussi informative et documentaire."

[38] Jay Bergman, *The French Revolutionary Tradition in Russian and Soviet Politics, Political Thought, and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

[39] Popkin, "'Danton's Death.'"

[40] Deborah B. Gaensbauer, "Protean Truths: History as Performance in Maryse Condé's "An Tan Revolisyon," *The French Review* 76, no. 6 (May 2003): 1139.

the Revolutionary stage also constitutes an arena of exclusion."[41] Indeed, the majority of Revolutionary history plays have been largely France-focused, male-dominated, and overwhelmingly white until the twentieth century, despite Revolutionary France's direct involvement in colonialism and violent plantation slavery in the West Indies.[42] The fight for liberty, equality, and fraternity in Haiti was long overlooked and excluded from narratives about the Revolutionary era; as Michel-Rolph Trouillot puts it, "the Haitian Revolution was unthinkable in the West not only because it challenged slavery and racism but because of the way it did so."[43] Most of the revolutionary plays discussed above—and two of three of my case studies—focus on the French Metropole, reflecting a larger historiographic oversight in our construction and interpretation of this vital history.

Attempting a departure from the status quo canon of Revolutionary history plays, I focus on three female dramatists, all of whom contended with the Revolution onstage, levelled their own critiques, and brought their own unique perspectives to bear on this deeply embattled history. The first chapter of my thesis focuses on Przybyszewska and her epic *The Danton Case* and seeks to explore why performance and dramatic form might be particularly suited to depicting radical history and challenging received notions of power and leadership. The second chapter analyses both the text and filmed version of *1789* by Mnouchkine and her troupe, the Théâtre du Soleil, to test the limits of collective creation and ask where artists might find or overstep their limits when portraying the radical past. The third and final chapter reads Condé's *An tan révolisyon* and asks how radical the canon of Revolutionary history plays really can be when glorifying violent male heroes, prompting us to wonder if we might need new performances and new perspectives to reimagine the Revolutionary moment (or rather, moments). Creating theatre to reflect Adrienne Rich's famous statement that

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[41] Gaensbauer, "Protean Truths," 1139.
[42] See C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, 2nd revised Vintage Books ed. (New York: Random House, 1989), 10.
[43] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 87.

"Re-vision […] is an act of survival," these playwrights revise the tradition of Revolutionary history plays and the history itself, by rejecting the way these events have been handed down to them through education and scholarly sources.[44] They revisit the Revolution to discourse with and contribute to its legacy, transmuting it, and activating it to shape a more equitable present.

Methods: Production History and Close Reading/Viewing

My methodology for this thesis is informed by performance studies concepts, most crucially Diana Taylor's "scenario," defined in *The Archive and the Repertoire* as "a paradigmatic setup that relies on supposedly live participants, structured around a schematic plot, with an intended (though adaptable) end."[45] Taylor conceives of "scenarios as meaning-making paradigms that structure social environments, behaviors, and potential outcomes."[46] She describes how the scenario "haunts our present, a form of hauntology […] that resuscitates and reactivates old dramas."[47] She warns that it "allows for occlusions; by positioning our perspective, it promotes certain views while helping to disappear others."[48] However, she prompts us to consider how scenarios "allow for reversal, parody, and change."[49]

Working with Taylor's definition, one can establish the Revolutionary "scenario" as the set of historical events, figures, and symbols that make up our collective understanding of the social and political upheaval in eighteenth-century France and its colonies. The public becomes familiar with this "scenario" through popular media and grade school curricula, both sites where the "occlusions" Taylor warns of take place. By analysing dramatic works that take up and transmute the

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[44] Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision," *College English*. 34, no. 1 (October 1972): 19, https://doi.org/10.2307/375215.
[45] Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, 3rd printing (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), 13.
[46] Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 28.
[47] Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 28.
[48] Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 28.
[49] Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 31.

Revolutionary "scenario," repositioning audiences to show them another perspective, I demonstrate that this history holds the radical potential to inspire critical reassessments of the past and alter spectators' understandings of themselves and their roles in the present, and that theatre and performance are useful tools for those seeking to access the scenario's multi-temporal potential. Placing the works in their historical and production contexts, exploring the research processes behind the plays, and close-reading key scenes, I show how the playwrights' goals are both advanced and obstructed by the depiction of such a contested, controversial history through theatre.

Because I explore production histories while applying performance studies concepts like Taylor's scenario, Schechner's distinctions between drama, script, theatre, and performance are useful for the purposes of distinguishing the different—yet interconnected—analytical methods at work. When working with the play text, I analyze the dramatic form of the plays, including the characters, stage directions, and physical gestures. When considering the production histories and the filmed or live productions of the plays, I consider performance aspects and the impact of their staging on audiences, to the extent that this is discernible from reviews, footage, and my own reception experience. Theatre scholar Emily Sahakian has analysed the work of two contemporary Caribbean performance artists, LénaBlou and Gilbert Laumord, "as a kind of embodied history that does not recover historical events, so much as reactivate the experiences, bodily comportments, attitudes and strategies for survival and resistance."[50] The idea of "reactivation" through performance is also crucial to the work of Taylor, as well as that of Maier-Schaeffer, Page, and Vaissié. I refer to "reactivation" when considering the aims and achievements of these productions, and I draw from Rokem's "resurrection" when discussing the historical figures performed in these

[50] Emily Sahakian, "LénaBlou and Gilbert Laumord: reactivating history through contemporary Caribbean performance," in *Colonialism and Slavery in Performance: Theatre and the Eighteenth-Century French Caribbean*, ed. Jeffrey M. Leichman and Karine Bénac-Giroux (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2021), 294. Laumord himself performed as Zephyr in Condé's *An tan révolisyon*, as explored in Emily Sahakian, *Staging Creolization: Women's Theater and Performance from the French Caribbean* (University of Virginia Press, 2017), 57, 62, 94, 96.

dramas and their re-embodiment by performers. Joseph Roach's influential concept of surrogation is also crucial to my analysis of the function of historical personae in the plays. Discussing the continuance of social structures vis-à-vis the impermanence of human lives, Roach writes: "Into the cavities created by loss through death or other forms of departure […] survivors attempt to fit satisfactory alternates. Because collective memory works selectively, imaginatively, and often perversely, surrogation rarely if ever succeeds."[51] As the productions analysed here show, the central figures of the Revolutionary moment are lodged firmly in the collective memory, and their replacements are constantly being sought after with varying degrees of success.[52] Surrogation can be seen as the motivation for resurrection, the impetus for reviving influential figures on stage. I posit that surrogation's inevitable failure is one reason why such productions have largely not entered the dramatic repertoire or reached wide audiences.

Because of the temporal overlay taking place within them, history plays are excellent places to see theatrical "ghosting" in action, as defined by Carlson in *The Haunted Stage*: "ghosting presents the identical thing [audiences] have encountered before, although now in a somewhat different context."[53] Through drama, Przybyszewska, Mnouchkine, and Condé summon the ghosts of history, enabling them to pose their unanswered questions to living audiences in a much more immediate way: on the stage, rather than through the page. The "identical thing" in these plays is the scenario, consisting of the familiar figures (Robespierre, Marat, Louverture), the recognizable locations (Paris, Haiti, Guadeloupe), and the known endings (downfall, defeat, suppression). The "somewhat different context" for each of these plays is the unique style, frame, and dramatic technique deployed by the dramatists. Such scenarios recur, but in changing stagings they may yield new insights.

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[51] Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead; Circum-Atlantic Performance* (Columbia University Press, 1996), 2.
[52] An example of surrogation in contemporary France with the figure of Robespierre appears below, on page 29.
[53] Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 7.

As Buckley, Popkin, and Reddick establish, the episodic nature and expansive scope of Büchner's play depart from previous dramas of the Revolution, which adhered more traditional forms and interpretations. Similarly, in all three of the case studies that follow, the Revolutionary subject seems almost to demand an anti-Aristotelian structure, jumping from place to place, time to time, character to character. The female playwrights and theatre directors whose work I examine push the envelope successively, each questioning whether the form of tragedy—based as it is in a male-dominated tradition—is a sufficient structure to convey the massive scale and liberatory impulses of the Revolutionary moment. Even as they base their work in extensive historical study and into the canon of Revolutionary theatre, they depart in crucial ways from traditional and accepted readings of this past. Theatre is particularly suited to revisionist historical thinking because, Gaensbauer says, it "is an intersection of the intellectual and corporeal."[54] Furthermore, as Tracy C. Davis has stated, "Theatre does not have the constraints of history, documentary, or even reenactment to try to cite faithfully."[55] The stage emerges as a space primed for revisionist work.

This aspect of the theatre has been leveraged by radical thinkers since at least the French Revolution. As discussed above, in France theatre and politics have long been intertwined. Jeffrey S. Ravel surveys the "popularity of theater and the theatrical metaphor in French political culture" leading up to and during the early years of the Revolution in his 2018 study *The Contested Parterre*.[56] And, just as the Revolution changed political culture, it changed practices of theatregoing and developments in theatrical form. Buckley has argued that, "it was in and through the dramatic politics of the Revolution […] that tragedy was transformed as a genre, that traditional conceptions

[54] Gaensbauer, "Protean Truths," 1149.
[55] Tracy C. Davis, "Performative Time," in *Representing the Past: Essays in Performance Historiography*, ed. Charlotte M. Canning and Thomas Postlewait (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2010), 156. Project MUSE.
[56] Jeffrey S. Ravel, *The Contested Parterre: Public Theater and French Political Culture, 1680-1791* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), 6.

of genre were rendered obsolete, and that the genre of melodrama was formed."[57] That the Revolution shifted tastes toward melodramatic theatre is corroborated by Cecilia Feilla's reading of plays of the Revolutionary era in *The Sentimental Theater of the French Revolution*.[58] Interestingly, Feilla remarks that the poet "[Marie-Joseph] Chénier's greatest dramatic success […] was not one of his political tragedies but a *drame historique*."[59] Perhaps the playwrights of the Revolution were attempting a similar reactivation of the past in the service of radical change as the artists studied here.

Form is a central concern of this exploration—both where it is consistent with precedents and where it is radically different. In Western thought, Aristotle's definition of tragic form has long held sway. In the *Poetics*, he observes, "A tragedy, then, is the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind brought in separately in the parts of the work; in a dramatic, not in a narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions."[60] Certainly, the revolutionary subject is a serious action, with a magnitude. The plays are mimetic, not narrative. The historical events depicted do often inspire pity and fear. However, as my analysis will show, Przybyszewska, Mnouchkine, and Condé are not dedicated to purging the revolutionary impulse; rather, they aim to reactivate it. Rather than conforming rigidly to Aristotelian tragic conventions, the playwrights analysed here are performing a complex reassessment and revamping of the history they depict.

The connection between revolutionary change and tragedy is prominent throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Rebecca Schneider has observed, glossing Paul Connerton's *How*

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[57] Buckley, *Tragedy Walks the Streets*. 6.
[58] Cecilia Feilla, *The Sentimental Theater of the French Revolution* (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013).
[59] Feilla, *The Sentimental Theater of the French Revolution*, 4.
[60] Aristotle, *The Poetics*, trans. I. Bywater in *The Complete Works of Aristotle, Volume Two: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 2320. Project MUSE All eBooks.

Societies Remember and Karl Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, that "all events, even the seemingly revolutionary, are composed in citational acts and embodied reperformance of the precedent."[61] She connects the citational nature of history to the tragic form itself, writing "even the 'once' of tragedy is, as theatrical form, already a matter of recurrence."[62] Thus, in Schneider's analysis, the tragic form is one way in which the present "cites" the past, and the tragic is a means by which we can order and comprehend history by fitting it into existing, recognisable theatrical structures—whether consciously or unconsciously.

Not only scholarly history, but national history can be reshaped through drama. Glissant posits that, "When a people forms itself, it develops a theatrical expression that 'doubles' its history (signifies it) and takes stock of it."[63] Further, he states, "At its outset, there is no nation without theatre."[64] Frantz Fanon, too, explores how national identity coalesces around drama which, he writes, "becomes part of the common lot of the people."[65] Certainly, through films, television, and events like the 2024 Summer Olympics, France has formed its image as a nation around its Revolutionary past.[66] This is why theatre—specifically, tragic theatre—that questions and critiques the French and Haitian Revolutions has such a powerful destabilising potential: because it strikes at the nation-building myths at the heart of the modern state. Glick shows how a lineage of Black male playwrights, from C.LR. James through to Édouard Glissant, mobilizes the dramatic tragedy form to think through the Haitian Revolution and the relationship between a revolutionary leader and the

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[61] Schneider, *Performing Remains*, 43.
[62] Schneider, *Performing Remains,* 43.
[63] Édouard Glissant, *Le Discours antillais* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1997), 685. My translation from French: "Quand un people se constitue, il développe une expression théâtrale qui « double » son histoire (la signifie) et en dresse l'inventaire."
[64] Glissant, *Le Discours antillais*, 685. My translation from French: "Le théâtre est l'acte par lequel la conscience collective se voit, et par conséquent se dépasse. En son commencement, il n'est pas de nation sans théâtre."
[65] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 241
[66] See the "Coda" on page 91 for further discussion of the 2024 Olympics.

people he leads.[67] As Condé says: "There is no history play without heroes."[68] But, as shown in the final chapter, Condé undermines the valour of male revolutionary heroes by portraying Toussaint Louverture as boastful, shallow, and ultimately corrupt. Tragedy, which shows heroes to be fatally flawed, and to contain the seeds of their own failure, lends itself well to the sort of political challenge these female playwrights are mounting in their theatre, and by adapting the male-dominated tragic tradition, they are able to intensify their critique.[69]

In considering these intertwining legacies, Sean Carney has demonstrated the prevalence of tragic forms in twentieth and early twenty-first century English political dramas, and raises the possibility of decoupling tragic form from some of its historical and conceptual baggage.[70] Carney's analysis shows that leftist political dramatists can apply a tragic lens to think through the pressing socio-economic tensions of society.[71] This lens is not, however, the classical Aristotelian tragic structure, but a postmodern iteration of the form. Carney writes, "the tragic today is concerned with the intersection of humanity's will with situations of the loss of human agency in (apparently) unavoidable, inhuman situations."[72] Thus, contemporary tragedy in Carney's analysis becomes a mode of political analysis, one that stands at odds with conservative dogma. I will demonstrate similarly radical transmutations of tragedy in the works of Przybyszewska, Mnouchkine, and Condé.

In departing from Aristotelian tragedy, the playwrights I analyze make use of forms akin to Walter Benjamin's definition of Baroque "*Trauerspiel*," translated literally from German as "mourning play." Benjamin urges us to wonder "whether the tragic is a form which can be realized at all in the

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[67] Glick, *The Black Radical Tragic,* 2.
[68] Maryse Condé, "Autour d'An tan révolisyon," *Études guadeloupéennes* 1, no. 2-3 (1990): 166. My translation from the French, "Point de pièce historique sans héros."
[69] Aristotle, *The Poetics*, 2325. Full quote: "There remains, then, the intermediate kind of personage […] whose misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice and depravity but by some fault […] e.g. Oedipus, Thyestes, and the men of note of similar families."
[70] Sean Carney, *The Politics and Poetics of Contemporary English Tragedy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 4.
[71] Carney, *The Politics and Poetics*, 6.
[72] Carney, *The Politics and Poetics*, 12.

present time, or whether it is not a historically limited form."[73] In his analysis, the subject matter of the Baroque *Trauerspiel* is history, rather than myth, and its subject is the martyrdom of political leaders, usually monarchs.[74] The Baroque *Trauerspiel* does not map one-to-one onto the Revolutionary history plays explored here; however, using Benjamin's logic brings to light important commonalities between the case studies. For instance, in Przybyszewska's play, the martyred leader could easily be read into her Robespierre character; in Mnouchkine's and Condé's plays, various political leaders step into and out of this role over the course of events. Klaas Tindemans suggests in his study of *Danton's Death* that Büchner's play is "a representation of ruins, in the sense that Walter Benjamín understood the fundamental difference between the tragedy of modernity – the *Trauerspiel* – and the ancient tragedy, which no longer mourned a fragmented, divided world."[75] Extrapolating from Büchner to the tradition of revolutionary history plays as a whole, we can read works of this kind, linked by the historical content they depict, as Revolutionary *Trauerspiels*, rather than Aristotelian tragedies, or even other modern or contemporary forms of tragedy. We can see generic standards and common features emerge. Next, we can ask what it would mean to "mourn" the Revolution as we resurrect it.

Mourning as a means of accessing history has been taken up in philosophy by Rebecca Comay in *Mourning Sickness: Hegel and the French Revolution*. Comay sees Germany "mourning the loss of what it had never experienced," i.e., the French Revolution.[76] Marie-Hélène Huet, in her book *Mourning Glory: The Will of the French Revolution,* explores how mourning manifests through contemporaneous

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[73] Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1998), 39.
[74] Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 62. Full quote: "Historical life, as it was conceived at that time, is its content, its true object. In this it is different from tragedy." For martyrdom concept, see 69: "In the baroque the tyrant and the martyr are but the two faces of the monarch."
[75] Klaas Tindemans, "Représentation théâtrale et representation démocratique ; Notes sur la Révolution française, la théâtralité et la souveraineté populaire" in *La Révolution mise en scène*, ed. Francine Maier-Schaeffer, Christiane Page and Cécile Vaissié (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2012): 116-7. My translation from French, "Une représentation des ruines, dans le sens où Walter Benjamin comprenait la différence fondamentale entre la tragédie de la modernité – le *Trauerspiel* – et la tragédie antique, qui ne portait pas encore le deuil d'un monde fragmenté, éclaté."
[76] Rebecca Comay, *Mourning Sickness: Hegel and the French Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 3.

and subsequent depictions of the Revolution.[77] She quotes Dominick LaCapra's assertion that history "engages, at least discursively, in its own variant of working-through problems represented by mourning."[78] In these plays, the Revolutionary moment recurs not as tragedy or as farce, à la Marx, but as mourning.[79] I argue that the nature of this mourning for the women analysed here is not only "working-through" (looking back and analysing completed events), but also motivating future actions. Linked by their common desire to investigate and analyse the past, they also share a critical perspective on the Revolution, a sense that an event with great liberatory potential fell short, but it need not have. In the vein of Pericles' funeral oration, they both commemorate the dead and instrumentalize them.[80] Whether through reversal, in the case of Przybyszewska; or condemnation, in the case of Condé; or an ambivalent mixture of the two, with Mnouchkine, scenarios are reactivated and historical figures are resurrected to speak directly to spectators, who may eventually pick up where they left off, emulating where successful, improving where needed, but always with the aim of playing it differently this time.

[77] Marie-Hélène Huet, *Mourning Glory: The Will of the French Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997).
[78] Dominick LaCapra, "History and Memory," 1994, unpublished conference paper quoted in Huet, *Mourning Glory,* 4.
[79] For the Marx line, see Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Marx & Engels Collected Works Vol 11: Marx and Engels: 1851-1853* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1979), 103. muse.jhu.edu/book/33013. Full quote: "Hegel remarks somewhere that all facts and personages of great importance in world history occur, as it were, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce."
[80] Thucydides, "Funeral Oration of Pericles," in *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900).

Chapter 1

"The Marks of a True Genius":

The Danton Case by Stanisława Przybyszewska

Hilary Mantel, one of Anglophone literature's foremost historical novelists, observed in her 2015 Reith Lectures (aptly titled "Resurrection: the Art and Craft") that, "An event occurs once. Everything else is reiteration, a performance."[81] Mantel dedicated decades to the composition of *A Place of Greater Safety,* her sprawling, intensely researched novel about the French Revolution.[82] Though Mantel did not herself produce a drama about this history, in *A Place of Greater Safety,* her prose gives way at times to dramatic form, complete with stage directions.[83] She also expressed a scholarly interest in the theatrical potential of the history she had researched for so many years. In another Reith lecture, Mantel discussed the biography and works of Stanisława Przybyszewska, author of *The Danton Case* (1929), an epic play in five acts about the arrest and execution of Georges-Jacques Danton and his allies in April 1794. This young Polish writer worked and lived in the Free City of Danzig, or Gdańsk, where she wrote multiple epic plays about the height of the Terror in France, the radical period spanning 1792 to 1794.[84]

Przybyszewska, born in 1901 in Kraków, Poland, was raised by her mother, Aniela Pajak, in various European capitals. The two lived for a time in Paris, where Przybyszewska developed an interest in history through visits to the Musée Carnavalet, which contains an extensive collection of

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[81] Hilary Mantel, "The Reith Lectures: The Day Is for the Living," 2017, Halle St Peter's, Manchester, UK, MP3, 41:45, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b08tcbrp.
[82] Mona Simpson, "Hilary Mantel, The Art of Fiction No. 226", *The Paris Review,* issue 212 (Spring 2015), https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/6360/the-art-of-fiction-no-226-hilary-mantel. The novel is Hilary Mantel, *A Place of Greater Safety* (London: Fourth Estate, 1992).
[83] For an example, see Hilary Mantel*, A Place of Greater Safety* (London: Fourth Estate, 1992), 198.
[84] Kazimiera Ingdahl, *A Gnostic Tragedy: A Study in Stanisława Przybyszewska's Aesthetics and Works* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1997), 12-13.

French Revolution memorabilia and artefacts.[85] In 1912, Aniela died, and Przybyszewska was sent to be raised by her mother's friends and an aunt in more cities, including Zurich and Vienna, where she became fluent in German.[86] At 18, she reencountered her estranged father, the poet, playwright, and satanist Stanisław Przybyszewski, a transformative and ultimately destructive connection.[87] Before she cut her father off completely, Przybyszewska recorded details of disagreements between them in letters. One incident took place when her father "touched on a very sensitive point for me: the deep respect, almost the veneration, that I felt for a certain man named Robespierre, who died 130 years ago."[88] In response, she writes, "I burst out – and for the first time in my life – I told my father the truth to his face in the most cruel fashion."[89] The "truth" she told pertained to Maximilien Robespierre, a long-dead politician, who had become an idol and avatar for Przybyszewska. She saw in him "versatility, inner harmony and equilibrium that are the marks of a true genius."[90] When describing Robespierre, notorious figurehead of the French Revolutionary Terror, none of these adjectives would be top of mind for most casual or even scholarly students of history. Yet Przybyszewska, who occupied an uneasy middle ground between these two categories, was assertive and confident in her own interpretations. An amateur historian (she studied literature at the university in Poznań and left without graduating), she nonetheless invested herself into study of the French Revolution.[91]

The result, *The Danton Case,* is a historical epic that takes place over a few days in the spring of 1794.[92] It opens not at the beginning of the Revolution, but at the beginning of its end.

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[85] Jadwiga Kosicka and Daniel Gerould, *A Life of Solitude: Stanisława Przybyszewska; A Biographical Study with Selected Letters* (Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1989), 21.
[86] Ingdahl, *A Gnostic Tragedy,* 9.
[87] Ingdahl, *A Gnostic Tragedy*, 8 and Kosicka and Gerould, *A Life of Solitude*, 29.
[88] Kosicka and Gerould, *A Life of Solitude*, 100.
[89] Kosicka and Gerould, *A Life of Solitude*, 100.
[90] Kosicka and Gerould, *A Life of Solitude*, 93.
[91] Ingdahl, *A Gnostic Tragedy*, 12.
[92] Stanisława Przybyszewska, *The Danton Case and Thermidor, Two Plays*, trans. Bolesław Taborski, introduction by Daniel Gerould (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1989).

Przybyszewska drops her viewers and readers directly into the days leading up to and during the downfall of moderate politician Georges-Jacques Danton and his allies. In act 1, Danton returns to Paris after a period of self-exile in the countryside, pushing a sickly Robespierre to action. In act 2, the Committee of Public Safety debates with Robespierre, who does not want to arrest Danton, while Danton manoeuvres through his allies to disrupt the Committee's control of the National Convention. Robespierre and Danton meet clandestinely in a restaurant to try to broker a deal that will divert an outright confrontation; they are unsuccessful. Robespierre goes to Camille, his friend since childhood, and tries to persuade him to denounce Danton and support the Committee. Again, he is unsuccessful. In act 3, Robespierre convenes the Committee and admits the need to arrest Danton and his accomplices, including Camille. Danton and Camille, at Danton's house, discuss their fates. Camille leaves and Danton is arrested. In the morning, the National Convention reacts with horror to the news, before Robespierre and Saint-Just defend the arrest. The Convention votes to indict the Dantonists.

Act 4 opens with the Dantonists in prison, awaiting trial; Camille refuses to see Robespierre, even though he could save him from execution. Lucile, Camille's wife, attempts to stir up support for them but Danton's wife Louise and his ally Legendre both refuse to help her. The trial begins, and the prosecutor, Fouquier, demands help as he worries that the government will lose in the face of Danton's overwhelming popularity. Robespierre and his lover Eleonore confer about the importance of the case and its larger significance for the Revolution, then Robespierre urges Fouquier to subvert the law by refusing to let Danton and his fellow defendants testify. Act 5 begins with the Dantonists in prison again, then moves to the Committee where Robespierre lays out a plan to exclude the accused from the rest of the trial under the pretense that Lucile has conspired to free them from prison. The trial seems to be going Danton's way, before representatives from the

Convention arrive with the order Robespierre requested, ending the trial. Danton and his friends are executed. Robespierre expresses his existential dread to Saint-Just and accepts that he is doomed.

Despite being the play's titular character, Danton serves as a backdrop to the psychological and moral crisis faced by Robespierre, the gnomon around which the drama turns as he remains steadfast, unwavering in his commitment to the Revolution. The play calls for more than 75 roles and features crowds of unspecified size in several scenes, including the decisive courtroom showdown between Danton and the Revolutionary Tribunal. An ornate, maximalist affair, *The Danton Case* leaps across times and places, as the viewer or reader finds herself in entirely new and unfamiliar spaces from scene to scene. It makes itself accessible only to those already well acquainted with the history it depicts, and it offers no apologies for its explicit biases. In short, it is a play written by Przybyszewska, for Przybyszewska—her absorption in her own interpretation of the events could alienate even the most engaged reader or viewer. However, by peering through the fog of Przybyszewska's private concerns and personal idolatry, we attain insights into her dramaturgy and the wider implications of her reimagined Revolutionary scenario. This chapter shows that Przybyszewska modifies the Revolutionary scenario by resurrecting Robespierre as its protagonist and Danton as antagonist, departing from status quo readings and aligning with more radical historiographies. The result, though problematic to stage, is a work of powerful revisionist history.

Przybyszewska's five-act play runs to about five hours, even with cuts to the text. It has not yet been inducted into Polish, German, or other theatre canons.[93] In her lifetime, Przybyszewska's play was performed onstage by two short-lived productions: first, in Lwów in 1931, where it received critical praise but closed after five performances due to logistical issues at the theatre.[94] It was performed again by Warsaw's Teatr Polski in 1933, where it ran for 24 performances.[95]

[93] Kosicka and Gerould, *A Life of Solitude,* 47.
[94] Ingdahl, *A Gnostic Tragedy*, 11.
[95] Kosicka and Gerould, *A Life of Solitude*, 48.

Przybyszewska attended neither because she objected to the directors' uses of her drama to allude to contemporary events. She was particularly outraged by the Warsaw performance as, in an environment of growing right-wing nationalism in Europe, some critics and viewers compared her depiction of Robespierre to Adolf Hitler, then ascending to power in Germany.[96] Her depiction of her hero, the paragon of self-abnegation in the service of the people, was being likened to fascist dictators. As Mantel put it, "What she feared, had happened. Her work had gone out into the world and been misused and contaminated."[97] But the work of a director mounting a production is to take a playtext and interpret it through performance, with the help of actors, prop masters, light operators, and the whole technical apparatus of the stage. Giving up control of the written work is part of the contract between a writer of theatre and a director. Przybyszewska, however, seemed opposed to the endeavour of collective artistic creation on principle. The disjunction between these productions and Przybyszewska's conception of her own drama calls to mind the observation by Schechner that "[g]enerally, it is not possible to do the play in the author's vision anyway" because "the conventions and architecture of the theater make it impossible."[98] This could certainly have been the case for Przybyszewska's work, which makes high demands both of theatre practitioners and of theatregoers.

Revolutionary dramas often prove difficult to mount, not just for Przybyszewska. As Gerould notes, "Although many attempts have been made to dramatize the French Revolution and give theatrical life to its imposing cast of characters, few of these plays have held the stage for long or entered the permanent repertory."[99] Gerould then singles out Büchner's *Danton's Death* as one

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[96] Kosicka and Gerould, *A Life of Solitude*, 48.
[97] Hilary Mantel, "The Reith Lectures: Silence Grips the Town," 2017, Vleeshuis, Antwerp, Belgium, MP3, 3:50, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b08vy0y6.
[98] Schechner, *Performance Studies*, 78
[99] Daniel Gerould, "Introduction: Stanisława Przybyszewska and the Mechanism of Revolution: *The Danton Case* and *Thermidor*" in *The Danton Case and Thermidor: Two Plays* by Stanisława Przybyszewska, trans. Bolesław Taborski, with an introduction by Daniel Gerould (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1989), 1.

possible exception to the rule. Reddick speaks to the drama's general success in Germany and abroad since its premiere in 1902, albeit long after its author's death.[100] Indeed, Rokem dedicates an entire chapter of *Performing History* to an analysis of American productions of *Danton's Death*, studying the relocation of this European classic.[101] Rokem is interested in the pitfalls and failures of Büchner's play as he traces three production histories that received negative responses from critics. Thus, Büchner, too, seems to fall prey to the inevitable failure of Revolutionary history plays. Perhaps the very idea that one could successfully depict the Revolution in dramatic form is flawed.

Yet, the Comédie-Française elected to mount Büchner's play for its 2023 season. Likewise, Przybyszewska's play has also endured in performance despite its many—sometimes insurmountable—challenges.[102] Since her death in 1935, interest in her work has ebbed and flowed. On the world stage, some theatre directors began to discover Przybyszewska's Revolution plays in the 1980s, namely Suzanne Osten, who presented a reimagining/deconstruction of *The Danton Case* in 1985 or 1986 in Stockholm, Sweden.[103] In Poland, renowned director Andrzej Wajda first mounted a stage production of *The Danton Case* and then directed a heavily adapted version for the screen, *Danton* (1982).[104] This film, a co-production between France and Poland, was interpreted as a commentary on the ongoing political struggle in Poland.[105] It allegorizes Robespierre and Danton "as symbolic precursors of the current East-West struggle" and portrays Robespierre as a cold-blooded villain.[106] In the popular imagination, Wajda's ideological valences overshadowed Przybyszewska's own and permanently altered the reception of the play.

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[100] John Reddick, "Notes to *Danton's Death*" in *Complete Plays, Lenz and Other Writings*, trans. and notes by John Reddick (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 210.
[101] Rokem, *Performing History,* 135.
[102] For the Comédie-Française production see Delétang, *La mort de Danton,* 8 May 2023.
[103] Kosicka and Gerould say 1985 (*A Life of Solitude*, 62) while Ingdahl says 1986 (*A Gnostic Tragedy*, 12).
[104] Ingdahl, *A Gnostic Tragedy*, 12.
[105] Huet, *Mourning Glory*, 164
[106] Popkin, "'Danton's Death.'"

In 1986, director Pam Gems staged an abridged—and widely criticized—version of *The Danton Affair* at the Royal Shakespeare Company.[107] Chris Harmon, writing up the play for the *Socialist Worker Review*, speculated that Gems' production was rejected by mainstream critics because Gems "challenges what might be called the 'Danton myth,'" humanising Robespierre while showing the darker side of Danton.[108] Gems was taken both by the play and its author; she later wrote her own play, *The Snow Palace*, about Przybyszewska's final days, in which she offers an explicitly Freudian analysis of Przybyszewska's work. In this production, Danton is a double for Przybyszewska's sexually abusive father, and her political thought is overshadowed by her trauma.[109] Though depicting Danton as an abusive predator seems to be in the vein of Przybyszewska's original vision (as explored in the next section), Gems shifts the focus entirely off the Revolutionary scenario and the resurrected hero Robespierre and makes Przybyszewska herself the tragic hero in the drama. Of the 1986 RSC production, Harmon writes, "It is an intense, intellectually challenging play, which forces audiences to listen and think. No doubt this is why it was hammered by critics who could do neither."[110] Harmon's jab at London's critics aside, it is clear that Gems' production of Przybyszewska's play stirred up the same questions of performability that began in Przybyszewska's lifetime. It seems it was also received by its proponents and its detractors alike as historical education, rather than straightforward entertainment. As the next chapter will show, for other artists reactivating the Revolutionary scenario, these questions remain central. Mnouchkine and her Théâtre du Soleil, too, contend with the difficult balance between the instructive and the entertaining, and they tackle the tough task of compressing centuries of historiographical and scholarly work into a performable and watchable event.

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[107] Kosicka and Gerould, *A Life of Solitude*, 62.
[108] Chris Harmon, "The trials of Danton," *Socialist Worker Review*, no. 90 (September 1986): 29, https://www.marxists.org/archive/harman/1986/09/danton.htm.
[109] Pam Gems, *The Snow Palace* (London: Oberon Modern Plays, 2022), 48-9.
[110] Harmon, "The trials of Danton."

Gem's production of *The Danton Case* was unfavourably compared to Wajda's film, which had come out only three years earlier.[111] One could therefore conclude that Przybyszewska's text lends itself better to cinema, where its expansive scope could be fully realised in the vein of Abel Gance's 1927 epic *Napoléon* (which according to Gerould and Kosicka, Przybyszewska never saw).[112] The play's stage directions, running time, and number of performers all indicate that Przybyszewska was thinking in cinematic detail and scale, trying to direct her actors' performances from her desk.[113] However, Przybyszewska may in fact be more aligned with the documentary theatre movement taking place in her lifetime, rather than with the nascent cinema. Przybyszewska's drama is "documentary in spirit," as Kosicka and Gerould say, as it uses matters of historical record as its basis.[114] Sylvain Diaz has shown how deeply intertwined the documentary form and the Revolutionary scenario truly are, going so far as to describe documentary theatre as "revolutionary theatre in its very essence."[115] Diaz recaps documentary theatre's origins in Germany in the 1920s, led by Erwin Piscator.[116] Piscator urged dramatists to abandon Aristotelian unities in theatre in favour of "montage," which means film editing in French.[117] Przybyszewska also relies on montage techniques, jumping from event to event, time to time, location to location. In short, Przybyszewska's playtext shows a clearer affinity with documentary theatre than with film. Though Piscator integrated film and photography into his plays, Przybyszewska did not go this far; she chose realist theatre as her medium, not cinema or a hybrid form.[118] And her choice to write dramas was

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111 Harmon, "The trials of Danton."
112 Kosicka and Gerould, *A Life of Solitude*, 34.
113 Kosicka and Gerould go so far as to say that she, "derived her notions of the dramatic and her stage techniques […] from cinema" (*A Life of Solitude,* 48-9).
114 Kosicka and Gerould, *A Life of Solitude*, 42.
115 Sylvain Diaz, "Le théâtre documentaire : théâtre de la révolution, théâtre révolutionnaire" in *La Révolution mise en scène* ed. Francine Maier-Schaeffer, Christiane Page and Cécile Vaissié (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2012), 299. My translation from French, "Comment parler de la "révolution mise en scène » sans évoquer le théâtre documentaire, théâtre révolutionnaire dans son essence même ?"
116 Diaz, "Le théâtre documentaire," 299.
117 Diaz, "Le théâtre documentaire," 301.
118 For Piscator's inclusion of film and photography, see Diaz, "Le théâtre documentaire," 302.

not arbitrary, as it afforded her a space where she could undertake embodied theoretical reflection. As André Bazin has observed, "The human being is all-important in the theater. The drama on the screen can exist without actors."[119] Thinking through live performance—even if the performance was never realised—Przybyszewska could resurrect her characters in physical form as she probed questions of gender and the physical enactments of power in the period of Revolutionary change. Przybyszewska's concerns, related to questions of gender and sexuality, work best when the viewer is in the physical "presence" (to quote Bazin) of the performers.[120] As the following close readings will show, the theatrical impact of Przybyszewska's original drama lies precisely in its embodied nature, which the spectral cinema lacks.

Robespierre; or, the Revolution Incarnate

Scholars widely agree that a major historical source for *The Danton Case* was the multi-volume study *La Révolution française* by Albert Mathiez.[121] As the next chapter reveals, the Théâtre du Soleil also drew on Mathiez in their own Revolutionary production. Daniel Beauvois asserts that "the mark of the historian [Mathiez] on the playwright [Przybyszewska] is clear in *The Danton Case*."[122] Mathiez, a Marxist historian, "pioneered the twentieth-century rehabilitation of Robespierre" by presenting a reading of the French Revolution in which Robespierre was a force for good, rather than a bloodthirsty tyrant.[123] Przybyszewska herself praises Mathiez in a letter to her aunt as "open-minded

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[119] André Bazin, "Theater and Cinema," in *Theater and Film; A Comparative Anthology*, ed. Robert Knopf (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 115.
[120] Bazin, "Theater and Cinema," 111.
[121] See Andrzej W. Tymowski, "A Voyage on a Burning Ship": the Political Drama of Stanisława Przybyszewska," review of *A Life of Solitude,* by Daniel Gerould and Jadwiga Kosicka, *Theater* (Winter/Spring 1990), 97. Ingdahl describes how "systematically and thoroughly [Przybyszewska] pursued her research" and lists Mathiez's *La Révolution Française* as a source from Przybyszewska's notes (67).
[122] Daniel Beauvois, "« L'Affaire Danton » de Stanisława Przybyszewska," *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, no. 240 (1980): 297, https://doi.org/10.3406/ahrf.1980.4208. My translation from French, "L'empreinte de l'historien sur le dramaturge éclate dans *L'Affaire Danton*…"
[123] Gerould, "Introduction," 11.

in his psychological judgements" and goes on to praise his defense of Robespierre.[124] We can therefore see a direct link between Przybyszewska's investment in Robespierre and the rise in popularity of Marxist historiography.

In her essay, "Icon and Symbol," literary theorist Ann Rigney explores the ongoing debates focalized around "the figure of Robespierre—that is to say, the retrospective representations of his life."[125] Rigney shows how nineteenth-century historians Michelet and Blanc want their readers "to see the deaths of Danton and Robespierre respectively *as* the death of the Republic."[126] She analyses how their attitudes—and those of other nineteenth-century historians—towards the Revolutionary moment manifest in their physical descriptions of Robespierre himself, whether negative or positive.[127] Mathiez enters Rigney's considerations as well, as she quotes his positive description of Robespierre's thin frame as evidence that he, too, engaged in the type of "figurative history" she interrogates.[128] By virtue of Mathiez's influence over her, Przybyszewska is engaging in a historically grounded and legitimate form of historiographical debate when she chooses to depict Robespierre's physicality, dwelling on details of his appearance as a means of establishing his legitimacy as a political leader and tragic hero. As my subsequent close readings will show, her interest in Robespierre is focalized in her playtext on his physical appearance and gestures. As the 2023 Radio France podcast "Avoir raison avec… Robespierre" shows, debate still swirls over the exact nature of this historical figure. The titles of each of the five episodes speaks to the many different possible interpretations of Robespierre: was he "the embodiment of the Revolution," "the embodiment of the people," "the embodiment of the Terror," "the embodiment of virtue," or, "the embodiment of

[124] Kosicka and Gerould, *A Life of Solitude*, 142.
[125] Ann Rigney, "Icon and Symbol: The Historical Figure Called Maximilien Robespierre," in *Representing the French Revolution: Literature, Historiography, and Art*, ed. James A. W Heffernan (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1992), 108.
[126] Rigney, "Icon and Symbol," 111. Emphasis in original.
[127] Rigney, "Icon and Symbol," 112-3.
[128] Rigney, "Icon and Symbol," 112.

a monster?"[129] Whatever one's personal opinion, it is clear that we continue to feel the impact of his actions and his life, and to debate their meaning. Przybyszewska is not alone in approaching this enigmatic figure with revisionist eyes.

In act 1, she introduces Robespierre as he is being made up after a period of illness: "*The* BARBER *sprinkles the ready coiffure with powder. The patient* [ROBESPIERRE] *lifts up a hand mirror—somewhat suspiciously—and looks at himself in it, then shows in a smile his chalk-white teeth*."[130] Showing him being made up in his first appearance is a proto-Brechtian distancing effect, reminding viewers that the Robespierre before them is an actor costumed to play Robespierre. It is echoed in the Théâtre du Soleil's move of making their audiences walk past the actor doing his makeup in preparation for his performance.[131] This introduction reveals that Przybyszewska was thinking through the convergence of the historical figure Robespierre with the actor physically performing him. It also establishes Robespierre's physical appearance—and its construction—as an essential concern of Przybyszewska's play. Taylor describes how "Embodied practice, along with and bound up with other cultural practices, offers a way of knowing."[132] Like so many before her, Przybyszewska feels that her "way of knowing" Robespierre is based in his physicality, and therefore lends itself naturally to the embodied nature of performance.

Roach's surrogation naturally applies to Robespierre as well as Danton, two continuously debated and contested figures: the leftist versus the liberal, the ascetic versus the hedonist, the despot versus the democratic leader. On and offstage, in France and abroad, society seeks out new

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[129] Emmanuel Laurentin, Laurence Malonda, and Virginie Le Duault, "Robespierre, l'incarnation de la Révolution," "Robespierre, l'incarnation du people," "Robespierre, l'incarnation de la Terreur," "Robespierre, l'incarnation de la vertu," "Robespierre, l'incarnation du monstre," 10-14 July 2023, in *Avoir raison avec…Robespierre*, produced by Emmanuel Laurentin, directed by Laurence Malonda, supported by Virginie Le Duault, published by France Culture, podcast, 28-29 minutes, https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceculture/podcasts/serie-avoir-raison-avec-robespierre.
[130] Przybyszewska, *The Danton Case*, 33.
[131] *1789*, directed by Ariane Mnouchkine and performed by the Théâtre du Soleil (1974; Paris: BelAir Classiques, 2020), https://vimeo.com/ondemand/1789soleil. 0:01:10.
[132] Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 3.

and unsatisfactory replacements for them; one need only look at French tabloids to see leftist leader Antoine Léaument photoshopped into Robespierre's iconic striped suit for an example.[133] As Léaument himself acknowledged when he shared the image on Twitter/X, the comparison was intended by his political rivals as mockery, but he claimed it proudly. Politicians and their critics continuously resurrect the complex of associations and meanings tied to Danton and Robespierre. Mathiez would have taken no issue with this practice, as he was also a proponent of drawing direct links between the past and current events. Kosicka and Gerould point out that he did precisely that when he compared the French and Russian Revolutions in his essay "Bolshevism and Jacobinism."[134] As they put it, Przybyszewska, too, "endeavored to discover what in the past could be of use to the present."[135] And yet, though Przybyszewska clearly idolized Robespierre and the actions he took to transform French society, she was far from following in his footsteps or believing that his actions should be repeated exactly. Never a member of any Marxist organisations, Przybyszewska was involved tangentially in communities deeply invested in Marxist and Communist thought. In 1922, she was arrested and imprisoned in Poznań for working in a Warsaw bookstore that was hosting meetings and publishing Marxist texts for the Communist Worker's Party, illegal in Poland at the time.[136] She was released when it became clear that her involvement had been minimal and that she could offer no information on the members of the Party gathering in the bookstore. This incident has been pinpointed by scholars as a watershed moment in her biography, though as Kosicka and Gerould point out, it did not lead to her getting involved in direct political actions.[137]

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[133] Antoine Léaument (@ALeaument), "C'est censé être une moquerie des macronistes contre moi…" Tweet, 18 February 2023, https://twitter.com/ALeaument/status/1626885096677556224.
[134] Kosicka and Gerould, *A Life of Solitude*, 42. For the essay itself, see Albert Mathiez, "Bolshevism and Jacobinism," trans. Mitchell Abidor in *Le Bolchevisme et le Jacobinisme* (Paris: Librairie du Parti Socialiste et de l'Humanité, 1920), https://www.marxists.org/history/france/revolution/mathiez/1920/bolshevism-jacobinism.htm.
[135] Kosicka and Gerould, *A Life of Solitude*, 42.
[136] Ingdahl, *A Gnostic Tragedy,* 10, and also Kosicka and Gerould, *A Life of Solitude*, 30.
[137] Kosicka and Gerould, *A Life of Solitude*, 30.

Instead, her interest in radical politics pushed her to more creative outlets. Przybyszewska's choice to write historical dramas was an intentional and, I argue, successful move on her part to invest her political arguments with greater force through the embodied resurrection only possible via performance. A key asset of theatre for conveying Przybyszewska's historical vision is the complex blurring of temporal boundaries that occurs when a performer inhabits the role of a historical figure. The actor who walks onstage as Przybyszewska's Robespierre, or Danton, or Camille Desmoulins is donning not only the writer's interpretation of a character, but also the mass of overlapping and contradicting associations connected with these historical figures that exist in the web of our cultural memory. Theatre makes these associations converge briefly onstage for the duration of the play, before they disperse again. The short-lived nature of this surrogation ensures that it fails in the long term—Przybyszewska's Robespierre cannot be resurrected beyond the confines of the page or stage.

Drama's multi-temporal ability to resurrect surrogates was likely unlocked for Przybyszewska by her own obsessive interest in one play text in particular: Büchner's *Danton's Death*, which she read 11 times in succession after first discovering it.[138] She also read Rolland's Revolution plays, but these melodramas appear to have had less impact on her, and she was considerably harsher in her judgment of them, describing his play *Danton* as "feeble."[139] And while she also had a critical stance towards Büchner, whose rendering of events she described as "childish," his play is undoubtedly a major influence on her, as it brought her, by her own admission, to her subject; or, to use Taylor's vocabulary, her scenario.[140]

[138] Kosicka and Gerould, *A Life of Solitude*, 41.
[139] Kosicka and Gerould, *A Life of Solitude*, 154.
[140] For "childish" quote and admission that Büchner inspired her, see Kosicka and Gerould, *A Life of Solitude*, 155.

A Dialogue with Büchner's *Danton's Death*

As Andrzej W. Tymowski points out, "Drama's function is not to mirror reality […] but to intensify reality."[141] While Przybyszewska valued scholarly histories, she was also unafraid to invent the words and gestures shared privately between her characters, details which are not a matter of record. In key moments, her dialogue veers away from political maneuverings and into more personal power dynamics. In this, she is following—and pushing beyond—the example of Büchner. Kazimiera Ingdahl, in her book *A Gnostic Tragedy*, offers a detailed analysis of references to *Danton's Death* in Przybyszewska's work. She writes of the relationship between the two instantiations of Danton as follows: "Przybyszewska's Danton […] is in many respects inspired by Büchner's hero, and not infrequently his monologue alludes to, polemicizes with, or even quotes the discourse of his literary predecessor."[142] Through Ingdahl's reading, an antagonistic relationship takes shape between the two works. Gerould writes of Przybyszewska's play that "[i]t is an instance of the *Gegenstück*, or counterplay favored by Brecht as a critical response to an earlier work."[143] Certainly, seeing Przybyszewska's work as a response to Büchner—and a critical one—is apt. One can even call it a reversal of Büchner's scenario, positioning his antagonist as her protagonist and vice-versa. In her letters, Przybyszewska rebuked Büchner's focus on "a romantic Danton and a pedantic Robespierre," or, in other words, his reduction of years of complex political developments to a conflict of individuals rallied behind clear-cut ideological banners.[144] And yet, we see her align herself wholeheartedly with Robespierre and his cause in her own scenario. Her fanaticism and idolatry prevent her from imagining a scenario that might celebrate democratic direct actions over the singular rule of a "genius" leader.

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[141] Tymowski, "A Voyage on a Burning Ship," 97.
[142] Ingdahl, *A Gnostic Tragedy*, 106.
[143] Gerould, "Introduction," 10.
[144] Kosicka and Gerould, *A Life of Solitude*, 41.

Przybyszewska reverses Büchner's scenario through her attention to physicality. Ingdahl observes that in *The Danton Case*, "Danton's pithy, sensuous discourse contrasts sharply with the lyrical, philosophically colored speech of Büchner's hero."[145] The increased focused on the body supports the argument that theatre was particularly suited to Przybyszewska's corporeal concerns. This is not to say that Büchner's concerns were not physical; on the contrary, his text brims with innuendo, beginning from the very first scene in which two characters discuss sex under the guise of talking about cards.[146] However, whereas Büchner's Danton is portrayed as a poet and philosopher, Przybyszewska's Danton is harsh, vulgar, and interested only in physically controlling those around him. In this way, she makes clear his position as the villain and antagonist of her work.

The predatory nature of Danton's sexuality is exemplified in his relationship with his wife, Louise. Whereas Büchner invents a loyal wife, Julie, who kills herself when Danton is sentenced to death, Przybyszewska opts to skew closer to the historical record, depicting Danton's real-life wife Louise, a teenager almost half his age.[147] In Przybyszewska's dramatization, Louise is a frightened victim of Danton's financial and physical abuse. She says to him, "You bought me like a dog, you raped an innocent and terrified girl! My fright, the torments I suffered obviously gave you special pleasure."[148] As Danton becomes angry, accusing his wife of supporting Robespierre, Przybyszewska orchestrates their interactions with frequent stage directions:

> DANTON […] Ugh! Of course. Robespierre is my enemy, therefore he must be the object of your ardent sympathy…[*across the table*] I suppose you would gladly give yourself to him, eh? [LOUISE *starts to her feet in anger, makes a step forward—he, intense, with electrified hands,*

[145] Ingdahl, *A Gnostic Tragedy*, 109.
[146] Georg Büchner, *Danton's Death* in *Complete Plays, Lenz and Other Writings*, trans. John Reddick (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 5.
[147] For Julie's suicide, see Büchner, *Danton's Death*, 70. For Louise's introduction, see Przybyszewska, *The Danton Case*, 104. For the real Louise and her age of 16 at their marriage, see Hilary Mantel, "He Roared," review of *Danton: The Gentle Giant of Terror,* by David Lawday, *The London Review of Books*, 6 August 2009.
[148] Przybyszewska, *The Danton Case*, 106.

frightens her with a sudden roar] Stand still, or I'll harm you! [LOUISE *withdraws a little, leans back against the table. He walks around her voraciously*] Oh…how happy she is now…how her eyes smile at the prospect of my death![149]

At every turn, the power imbalance between them manifests in Przybyszewska's descriptions of their relative positions. The table, at first a divider, becomes Louise's support as Danton circles her. It is no accident, also, that Danton's words betray his sexual anxieties, his suspicion that his wife would "gladly give [herself] to" Robespierre.

By this same method, Przybyszewska resurrects Robespierre as the moral hero. He is depicted in a mutually respectful relationship with Eleonore, the daughter of his landlord. After he is short with her due to exhaustion, they have the following reconciliation:

ROBESPIERRE [*usual voice*]. Léo.

ELEONORE [*turns to him, relaxed*]. Yes?

Robespierre [*extends one hand to her; he leaves the other on his forehead*]. I am sorry. I'm going insane.

ELEONORE [*clasps his hand with a gay smile*]. Oh, Maxime. In your place I would be the very devil.[150]

This Robespierre is the antithesis of the domineering, threatening Danton. He is respectful of Eleonore's feelings and physical agency. Even the more equal distribution of their lines, with Eleonore being given the room to respond and speak in equal quantities, stands in stark contrast to Danton's paranoid monologue in which Louise has no say, as analysed above. Przybyszewska's preference for Robespierre informs her depictions of their intimate relationships with women.

[149] Przybyszewska, *The Danton Case*, 107.
[150] Przybyszewska, *The Danton Case*, 153.

Przybyszewska reverses Büchner's scenario by critiquing the sexual politics of the Revolution present in his text. In *Danton's Death*, the personification of death begins as first a man sexually violating his victims, then becomes an old, predatory woman: "CAMILLE: If at least he'd rape us and tear his prey from our limbs in the heat of a frenzied struggle! But to die like this with all these formalities, as though we were marrying some ancient crone: […] there's a tug at the bedcovers and in she crawls, slowly seizing us in her cold embrace."[151] But in Przybyszewska, sexual assault is not a metaphor; it is a physical threat. Death is not the sexual predator: Danton is. Robespierre, on the other hand, is kind and non-threatening, solidifying him as a heroic and trustworthy figure.

Rich observed that, "A change in the concept of sexual identity is essential if we are not going to see the old political order re-assert itself in every new revolution. We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us."[152] Przybyszewska revises Büchner's abstract allegory of rape to make it concrete, tangible, visceral. She modulates Büchner's concerns through her own, and produces a feminist reimagining, in which showing sexual respect is a positive attribute of the protagonist, and lacking it is a moral failing in the antagonist. Her copious stage directions demonstrate that she formulates her characters' ideologies through their actions, carefully communicating their relative merits through their physical gestures. Thus, because of her corporeal concerns, performance was particularly suited to Przybyszewska's way of approaching and reversing the scenario of the Revolutionary moment, and to her desire to resurrect her idealised version of Robespierre.

Using physical details and detailed body language cues, Przybyszewska makes Danton out to be a deeply unlikeable character, a fitting villain against her profoundly good Robespierre. This is one way in which she decentres Danton, traditionally the protagonist of the revolutionary scenario,

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[151] Büchner, *Danton's Death*, 57-8.
[152] Rich, "When We Dead Awaken," 18-19.

in favour of her tragic hero, Robespierre. And her female characters are not the only ones who help her do this; she also builds her case for Robespierre through his interactions with the central figure of Camille Desmoulins. Camille is depicted as a volatile, erratic, character who, until now, has maintained homosocial bonds with both Danton and Robespierre. Camille's relationship with Danton plays out similarly to the one between Louise and Danton as both are predicated on physical coercion. When they celebrate Danton's apparent victory over Robespierre in the National Convention, Przybyszewska writes:

> CAMILLE. Danton: I will not allow even you to make such jokes.
>
> DANTON [*grips and squeezes him*]. What, you won't allow it?! [*squeezes him stronger*] You still won't?
>
> CAMILLE [*swooning*]. Mm-n-mm…oh!
>
> [DANTON *lets him go, but holds him by the arms*].[153]

Camille is physically taken up and compressed in Danton's arms. Usually verbose, Camille can only "swoon," as he is dragged along, physically, into Danton's destructive plan.

In a pivotal episode at Camille's home in act 2, scene 5, Robespierre tries to persuade his old friend to abandon Danton. This intimate conversation between the two men strays far from any historical text and has minimal basis in scholarly work. In this scene, Robespierre focuses more on the personal connection between Camille and Danton than on the political matters at stake to try and persuade his old companion to join his side again. He says, "Manly friendship is, perhaps, the noblest manifestation of human relations. But your association with Danton is not, my boy. […] This is an ambiguous partnership, not friendship."[154] The phrases "manly friendship" and "ambiguous partnership" both sound to a contemporary reader like innuendo. This undertone

[153] Przybyszewska, *The Danton Case*, 62.
[154] Przybyszewska, *The Danton Case*, 84.

becomes an overtone when Robespierre admonishes Camille, "I need comrades, my boy. I have no need for friends modeled on Shakespeare's sonnets."[155] Indeed, throughout this scene, Przybyszewska's depiction of the relationship between these two men lends itself to a queer interpretation. Their physical interactions, again carefully imagined and prescribed by Przybyszewska, stand in stark contrast to those between Camille and Danton:

> ROBESPIERRE [*rises soundlessly and snatches him by the shoulders with quiet brutality*]. You hysterical maniac, what is it now?!!
>
> CAMILLE: [*releases himself with a wild jerk; looks into his eyes, from below, furious*]. I have come to understand you at last……dearest. [*he gets up, assumes the arrogant, curved posture of a youth–puts his hand into his pocket, takes a chainlet out and begins to toss it up on his hand, talks with a slightly bent head*] It turns out that…after all, *after all*, I have some value, I, a flunky, a fool, a nonentity? I am worth enough for the Incorruptible one to sacrifice…his human dignity, in order to win me over?...
>
> [*A misunderstanding:* ROBESPIERRE *thinks that* CAMILLE *has seen through his most intimate feelings. He turns pale and gray with anger and fear.* CAMILLE *notices this–and attributes quite different reasons to it.*]
>
> You are afraid…you are afraid of us, you, unyielding, Invincible one! You *are* afraid!! That is why you have degraded yourself like the lowest whore![156]

Where Camille was speechless and pliant in Danton's grasp, here he "releases himself with a wild jerk." He holds the power in this battle of body language, able to distance himself where he could not with Danton. Przybyszewska's stage directions refer to Robespierre's "most intimate feelings,"

[155] Przybyszewska, *The Danton Case*, 87.
[156] Przybyszewska, *The Danton Case,* 88.

and call for his actor to show his "anger and fear" when he thinks they are discovered. Readers of the play text are therefore privy to the cause of Robespierre's anxiety: his fear of discovery.

Robespierre tries one last time to persuade Camille to listen to him, this time accompanying his words with a gentler gesture:

> ROBESPIERRE [*takes him into his arms, almost leans on him*]. Camille…Camille, my child…Camille–have pity…on me…
>
> [CAMILLE *shakes him off brutally*. ROBESPIERRE *leans on the windowframe*.][157]

The physical familiarity and intimacy that Robespierre tries to recall is rebuffed "brutally." Like Louise, Robespierre is left supporting himself on the nearest object as Camille moves freely about the room. When Robespierre asks for pity from his unsympathetic friend, knowing he will be forced to sign the order for his execution if he does not relent, he fully emerges as the tragic hero, and the object of Przybyszewska's mourning in a reversal of Büchner's scenario.

Other critics have commented on Przybyszewska's queer depiction of sexuality and gender. For instance, Gerould writes, "Partly fashioned in her own image, partly conceived according to a Shavian model, Robespierre in *The Danton Case* […] is a transsexual, suprapersonal genius."[158] Elsewhere, Gerould and Kosicka claim that Przybyszewska's Robespierre is in an "almost androgynous state."[159] In a letter to a friend, Przybyszewska wrote that "this cerebral personality of mine is neither female nor male; nor is it a combination of the two; but it has the ability to *comprehend* both of them."[160] An affordance of theatre for Przybyszewska is the ability to embody male characters as well as female, on the page and eventually onstage as alter egos that exists outside the bounds imposed on her by her assigned gender. The experimental space of the theatre also enabled

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[157] Przybyszewska, *The Danton Case*, 89.
[158] Gerould, "Introduction," 11.
[159] Kosicka and Gerould, *A Life of Solitude*, 45.
[160] Kosicka and Gerould, *A Life of Solitude*, 116.

her to graft her own ideas onto the stock of the scholarly history. Her research forms a factual foundation for her personal speculations, paving the way for her to posit the existence of homosocial bonds between historical figures more commonly portrayed as heterosexual. Even in the realist mode of Przybyszewska's play, where staging is traditional, characters are modelled on real figures, and audiences are called upon to invest themselves in the minutiae of a centuries-old political struggle, one discerns radical departures from the status quo Revolutionary scenario.

Yet Przybyszewska's radical thinking has often been misinterpreted. Of Wajda's *Danton,* Huet writes, "sexuality and politics are inseparable, or rather, sexuality serves to emphasize the fact that Robespierre cannot serve the people adequately. Wajda's feminization of Robespierre amounts to an indictment."[161] Whereas Przybyszewska wanted to make Robespierre androgynous as a sign of his sensitivity and transcendence of traditional gender norms, Huet sees Wajda projecting a more hostile interpretation. She goes on to analyse the same conversation above between Robespierre and Camille, but reaches different conclusions: "Wajda's argument, that Robespierre was in love with Camille Desmoulins—made more explicit in a previous scene where Robespierre tenderly puts his arms around Desmoulins' shoulder but does not succeed in moving the journalist—also serves to show two irreconcilable visions of the revolution," i.e., that of Danton's domineering heterosexuality versus Robespierre's repressed queerness.[162] Effectively, Huet shows Wajda flipping Przybyszewska's scenario on its head once again and restoring the former, traditional interpretation.

Decentring Danton

In dwelling so much on the corruption Danton has wrought on the relationship between Camille and Robespierre, Przybyszewska makes clear that Danton is the antagonist of her play,

[161] Huet, *Mourning Glory,* 163.
[162] Huet, *Mourning Glory*, 163.

robbing her hero, Robespierre, of a person he loves. In another key moment, that of the trial, she decentres Danton yet again. This shift in focus occurs not only in her play, but also in Przybyszewska's private reflections. In a letter to her aunt, she wrote, "I remember like yesterday the day on which Danton and his followers were executed […] the sounds of the meeting could be heard through the wide-open windows […] (personally I wasn't able to force my way through)"[163] In this strange and evocative passage, she describes herself as arriving late to an event that took place 107 years before her birth, with particular attention paid to her body's position relative to the action, and the physical impediment of the crowd around her. She hears the meeting but does not see it. Her conception of the past is embodied, based in physical sensation and her role as an excluded audience member—it follows then, that Przybyszewska would want to translate the physical experience of her exclusion into performance. Danton's moment of supposed heroism—his final stand as he speaks against his prosecutors on the Revolutionary Tribunal—becomes an offstage affair in Przybyszewska's play. As the trial begins, the audience is left in "*The Vestibule of the Revolutionary Tribunal. […] FOUQUIER-TINVILLE is reading the act of indictment behind closed doors.*"[164] While unnamed characters, including journalists, court employees, and ordinary citizens listen to and react to the events going on within, the audience is given only vague indications of the matter of historical record taking place inside the courtroom: stage directions tell us that we hear "DANTON'*s stifled shout*" and his subdued voice now and again.[165] As he harangues the crowd and his prosecutors he is still only heard "*From within*" rather than appearing onstage.[166] In this moment, we observe Przybyszewska literally restaging the trial of the Dantonists, focalising it not around the

[163] Kosicka and Gerould, *A Life of Solitude*, 144.
[164] Przybyszewska, *The Danton Case*, 136.
[165] Przybyszewska, *The Danton Case*, 136-8. For the historical record of this trial, see Séries W 342, Archives Nationales, Paris, France, which contains microfiche of the primary documents relating to the arrest and prosecution of the Dantonist faction.
[166] Przybyszewska, *The Danton Case*, 139.

experiences of the men on trial, but around the responses of the excluded ordinary people. Scholars, including Mathiez, have gone over the events of Danton's trial *ad nauseum*. By putting these events out of sight of her audience, Przybyszewska makes explicit that she is shifting perspectives to offer her new perspective. As the next chapter shows, Mnouchkine and the Soleil continue this work of centring the audience in the Revolutionary scenario.

In act 5, as the trial reaches its conclusion, the viewer is given access to the courtroom, at last. At this point, we see Danton interact with the crowd of observers inside the Tribunal, in a surprisingly uninterrupted flow of dialogue: "DANTON [*so calm as to be almost gentle*]. Vile, cowardly mob: no one will change you."[167] Continuing with minimal interruption by stage directions or other characters, Danton draws to a close as he calls the crowd, "you eternal Judas" and declares, "I curse you, rabble, you human litter."[168] Danton is reduced to an accusing, bitter man. Przybyszewska one more undermines his heroic image by showing him disparaging the people he claimed to care about.

Przybyszewska affects one more decentring move when Danton and Camille are being taken to their execution. Instead of showing this moment of great pathos and heroic acceptance of one's fate—as, for instance, Büchner does—here Danton and Camille are disembodied voices.[169] A brief stage direction lets the reader or viewer hear their final moments from within Robespierre's room: "*398 rue Saint-Honoré. The evening of 16 Germinal. ROBESPIERRE alone, lying on the bed, on his back. The noise of the passing convoy outside. The voices of* CAMILLE *and* DANTON: *the first of them shouts out of despair, the other roars curses.*"[170] They are unseen, transitory, distant. Their different emotional states equally futile. All the while, we watch Robespierre, who is still and resigned to his tragic fate. In this moment, we see his apotheosis; he is the true tragic hero of the Revolutionary *Trauerspiel*.

[167] Przybyszewska, *The Danton Case*, 186.
[168] Przybyszewska, *The Danton Case*, 186.
[169] For Büchner's orthodox version, see Büchner, *Danton's Death*, 70-1.
[170] Przybyszewska, *The Danton Case*, 195.

Chapter 2

"The Voice of the Collective":

1789 by Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil

Theatre, with its reliance on multiple people in different roles working toward a common goal, bears resemblance to revolutionary projects. Theatre's resources can also help thinkers broach revolutionary questions and concerns. In his study of Haitian Revolution plays, Glick uses C. L. R. James's dramatic works as a case study to tease out the temporal and philosophical advantages and drawbacks of depicting the Revolutionary moment onstage. He writes, "Dramatic staging, and its vocation of arranging bodies on stage, is well equipped to think […] problems of leadership."[171] A major concern of revolutionary movements and revolutionary dramas alike, Glick argues, is the status of the political leader. "Tragedy," Glick writes, "is, among other things, a way to think and represent the dialectical mediation between leader and mass base."[172] For Glick, James' depiction of revolution is dramatic even when he is writing scholarly history, because the Revolution is inherently tragic in its structure.[173]

Offstage, too, theatre troupes might be seen as a kind of microcosm of a political movement, as they can consist of an ensemble supporting one "leader," usually the director in the Western tradition. In performance, as in life, the relationship between the group and its leader is not always harmonious. Since the 1960s, the left-wing Théâtre du Soleil and its director Ariane Mnouchkine have attempted to democratize dramatic creation and make performance egalitarian by living and working together as a worker cooperative.[174] In their landmark production, *1789*, they make

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[171] Glick, *The Black Radical Tragic*, 2.
[172] Glick, *The Black Radical Tragic*, 2.
[173] Glick, *The Black Radical Tragic*, 7.
[174] Jean-François Dusigne, *Le Théâtre du Soleil : Des traditions orientales à la modernité occidentale* (Paris: Canopé Éditions, 2003), 10

collectivity both their subject and their method as they tell the story of the French (and, fleetingly, Haitian) Revolution. The text of the play, published online in 2017, credits 34 actors who took part either in the original production or in a restaging that took place in 1972, notably including Gérard Hardy and Myrrha Donzenac, a friend of Maryse Condé.[175] This collectively authored document provides helpful insight, as is the case with this written direction which helps a reader understand the troupe's intentions. Soleil actors also held (and continue to hold, as the Soleil is still a working troupe, although its membership has changed over the years) a variety of other logistical and creative roles in the troupe, from cooking to selling tickets and more.[176] The group's profound engagement with revolutionary history is evident even from the subtitle of *1789*: "The revolution must continue until happiness has been perfected."[177] This idealistic quotation from Louis-Antoine de Saint-Just, one of the most notorious figures of the Committee of Public Safety and an ally of Robespierre, asserts that no revolution, from the eighteenth through to the twentieth century, has yet concluded—or can conclude. It prompts us to wonder whether any revolution could achieve such an abstract and utopian end. And yet, as the Soleil demonstrates through a catalogue of historical episodes (real and imagined), people continue to struggle against oppression and towards liberation, and artists continue to retell their efforts and seek to emulate them.

From its earliest reviews, *1789* was widely acknowledged to have an expressly instructional purpose. As one newspaper reviewer put it, the troupe's aim is "to attempt an immediate and continuous, and therefore profound, encounter with today's viewers, by making them confront the social and political reality of a human condition incompatible with the necessary pleasure of the

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[175] Théâtre du Soleil, *1789/1793*, (Paris: Éditions Théâtrales, 2017), Ebook, 96-8. For Donzenac's friendship with Condé, see Emily Sahakian, "The Intercultural Politics of Performing Revolution: Maryse Condé's Inter-Theatre with Ariane Mnouchkine," in *The Methuen Drama Handbook of Interculturalism and Performance*, ed. Daphne P. Lei and Charlotte McIvor (London: Methuen Drama, 2020), consulted online in a version without page numbers. N.B. The playtext represents one version of the play and diverges at times from the filmed version. Both are analyzed in this chapter.
[176] Dusigne, *Le Théâtre du Soleil*, 10.
[177] Théâtre du Soleil, *1789/1793,* 4. My translation of French original, "La révolution doit s'arrêter à la perfection du bonheur."

theatrical event."[178] Indeed, two of tragedy's purposes, as outlined by Aristotle, were to instruct and entertain the viewer.[179] Precisely by leveraging this dual effect, the Soleil positioned and conceived of their creations as existing in solidarity with and support of the political struggle of their day. In the case of *1789*, they dramatized a moment of profound change, immediately following a twentieth century moment of upheaval: the student protests of May 1968. In *Occupying the Stage*, Kate Bredeson explores the profound influence this historic social movement had on the Théâtre du Soleil and other leftist theatre troupes. She writes, "the theatre artists of May '68 questioned theatre as a form and institution. These artists saw theatre innovation as a way to provoke similar changes in society."[180] She goes on to observe that for this group and other radical troupes, these events "determined their courses in the 1970s and beyond."[181] Inspired by the events around them, and the potential for social and political change that performance contained, the Soleil wanted to transform society. This chapter shows that they sought to effect change by recentring the Revolutionary scenario around their audiences, who came to see themselves as key participants.

1789 appeared onto a theatre scene already rife with experimentation in performance spaces and styles—not least by the Théâtre du Soleil themselves. As Bredeson examines, the troupe had already begun to perform on factory floors during the May '68 strikes, "[i]n an effort to reach new audiences and merge their art and political work."[182] However, reviews of *1789* printed in French newspapers largely share a common theme: a sense of amazement at the novelty of this particular

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178 "'Le Théâtre du Soleil fait sa Révolution' by Lucien Attoun in *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*," January 1971, in "Coupures de presse, novembre 1970-juillet 1971" 4-COL-153(1411), Fonds du Théâtre du Soleil, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France, https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc4755d/ca59708829190854, (hereafter cited as "Le Théâtre du Soleil fait sa Révolution," Fonds du Théâtre du Soleil). My translation from French: "de tenter une rencontre immédiate et permanente, donc en profondeur, avec les spectateurs d'aujourd'hui, en faisant se confronter la réalité sociale et politique d'une condition humaine inadmissible au plaisir de la fête théâtrale nécessaire."
179 Aristotle, *Poetics*, 2318.
180 Kate Bredeson, *Occupying the Stage: The Theater of May '68,* 1st ed. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2018), Project MUSE, 65.
181 Bredeson, *Occupying the Stage*, 65.
182 Bredeson, *Occupying the Stage*, 78.

production. As French commentator André Thomann wrote, "If we dwell on the arrangement of the staging, it is only to highlight how new this is. New, the 'stereo' development of movement; new, the role the audience is called upon to play."[183] The production that came to captivate Paris—and, eventually, the wider world—began in Milan, Italy in 1970, after Paolo Grassi, director of the Piccolo Teatro offered the Soleil a stage when they could not find a performance space in France.[184] Previously, the government of Paris had refused the troupe's request to perform in Les Halles, a historic marketplace in the city's centre.[185] The difficulty faced by up-and-coming theatre artists was widespread; now-acclaimed director Patrice Chéreau, too, was working in Italy at the time.[186]

Through continuous workshopping, extensive historical research, and engagement with the dramatic theories then in vogue, Mnouchkine and the troupe created their frenetic fresco of the French Revolution.[187] In the early 1970s, Sophie Moscoso, Mnouchkine's assistant (then also a student preparing her master's thesis on the Théâtre du Soleil) collected notes on the group's development process. She records a day when the group read a firsthand account of the 14th of July

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[183] "'Thonon: « 1789 » : Une étonnante polyphonie scénique' for André Thomann," in "Coupures de presse," 4-COL-153(24), Fonds du Théâtre du Soleil, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France, https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc4755d/ca59708829190853. My translation from French : "Si l'on insiste sur la disposition des lieux, c'est encore une fois pour marquer combien cela est nouveau. Nouveau, le développement « stéréo » de l'action, nouveau, le rôle que le public est appelé à jouer."

[184] "'"1789" à Milan' in *Le Figaro Littéraire*,' 23-29 November in "Coupures de presse, novembre 1970-juillet 1971," 4-COL-153(1411), Fonds du Théâtre du Soleil, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France, https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc4755d/ca59708829190854.

[185] Helen E. Richardson, "Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil: theatricalising history; the theatre as metaphor; the actor as signifier," in *Actor Training*, 2nd ed, ed. Alison Hodge (London: Routledge, 2010), 265.

[186] "Exil à Milan by Caroline Alexander for *L'Express*," November 1970 in "Coupures de presse, novembre 1970-juillet 1971," 4-COL-153(1411), Fonds du Théâtre du Soleil, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France, https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc4755d/ca59708829190854.

[187] For the workshopping and theory, see the notebook preserved in "Notes de Sophie Moscoso," 23 April-6 December 1970, 4-COL-153(1582), Fonds du Théâtre du Soleil, Bibliothèque nationale de France, https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc4755d/cb108. She records notes on group work and writes the titles of works by Meyerhold and Grotowski, among others. For the historical research, see "Cahier de notes d'Ariane Mnouchkine," 4-COL-153(1377), Fonds du Théâtre du Soleil, Bibliothèque nationale de France, https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc4755d/ca19798031 (hereafter cited as "Cahier de notes d'Ariane Mnouchkine," Fonds du Théâtre du Soleil). The handwritten notebook contains notes on the trajectory of the Revolution in France and in Saint-Domingue (Haiti).

by a Parisian watchmaker, and improvised characters using the historical document as a basis.[188] While the group collaborated and improvised together, Mnouchkine's role as director was more intellectual. David Calder observes that, "Mnouchkine's function is to keep in mind the grand political abstraction during the difficult process of its embodiment by the actors."[189] In much the same way as Przybyszewska depicts Robespierre as the prism through which a general desire for liberation and justice can be channelled, Mnouchkine seems to gather and direct the efforts of the Théâtre du Soleil toward answering—or, at least, investigating—meaningful political questions on the nature and motivations of revolution.

In late 1970, after initial success in Milan, *1789* came to Paris.[190] There, at the company's newly requisitioned headquarters, the Cartoucherie de Vincennes outside Paris's city limits, French audiences were presented with a spectacle that quickly came to be touted in newspapers as "the event of the season."[191] Below this eye-catching headline, the production was more ambivalently reviewed in *Le Monde* by Bertrand Poirot-Delpech, the magazine's resident theatre critic for five decades and a member of the Académie Française.[192] Poirot-Delpech reflected on the astonishing audience turnout at this out-of-the-way industrial setting, which he described as "unwelcoming" and

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188 "Textes pour le programme," 4-COL-153(1400), Fonds du Théâtre du Soleil, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France, https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc4755d/ca19944913. Full quote: "Vendredi 14 août: Entre temps ont été trouvées des improvisations très fortes comme celle de la nuit du quatre août, celles concernant la prise de La Bastille paraissent à tous devoir être redécouvertes. / Les comédiens lisent le texte du récit qu'un horloger a fait de sa journée du quatorze juillet dix sept cent quatre vingt neuf, un récit simple, preçis [*sic*] et vivant. Ils essaient donc d'improviser, d'une part à partir des improvisations déjà faites, d'autre part à partir de ce récit: un conteur commence à raconter sa journée puis est rejoint par d'autres." Excerpts from these notes are also printed in "Un exemple du travail au Théâtre du Soleil: Les improvisations,' by Claude Olivier for *Les lettres françaises*," 4 February 1971, in "Coupures de Press," 4-COL-153(23), Fonds du Théâtre du Soleil, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France, https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc4755d/ca59716088346935.

189 David Calder, "Mnouchkine & Co.: Constructing a Collective" in *Women, Collective Creation, and Devised Performance* ed. Kathryn Mederos Syssoyeva and Scott Proudfit (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2016), 111.

190 "Le Théâtre du Soleil Fait sa Révolution," Fonds du Théâtre du Soleil.

191 "'L'événement de la saison : « 1789 » par le Théâtre du Soleil' by Bertrand Poirot-Delpech for *Le Monde*," 14 January 1971, in "Coupures de presse," 4-COL-153(1411), Fonds du Théâtre du Soleil, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France, https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc4755d/ca59708829190854 (hereafter cited as "L'événement de la saison," Fonds du Théâtre du Soleil).

192 Robin Buss, "Bertrand Poirot-Delpech: Academician of 'Le Monde,'" *The Independent*, 5 December 2006, https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-1.html#cg-news.

"hostile."[193] To explain the production's popularity in such a performance space, he described "conditions of uncompromising austerity and secrecy […] that curry favour with young audiences."[194] These "young audiences" may well have overlapped with the students and workers who, just a few years before, occupied their universities and workplaces.[195] Poirot-Delpech's comment might have poked fun by attributing to them an asceticism or joylessness often associated with leftists and political activists. However, it is plausible that such a pared down, spartan choice of venue would have appealed to those who found themselves tired of the offerings available in the upscale, traditional theatres of Paris, and this group may have included former May '68 protestors. One can imagine that entering a disused cartridge factory in a park might be a dislocating experience, even for viewers used to avant-garde performances, and the uniqueness of the location may have played a role either in intriguing or alienating the spectator, as it seems to have done to Poirot-Delpech.

Once there, viewers would participate in the Soleil's innovative use of the factory space. A diagram of the performance space printed in "Une scénographie pour *1789*" by Denis Bablet for the magazine *Interscaena* shows five raised podiums, labelled A through E, arranged around a central space where spectators would stand (Figure 1).[196] As seen in the diagram and explained by Bablet, A, B, and C are connected by a narrow walkway along the perimeter of the rectangular space, while D and E are likewise linked by a separate walkway. The raised path from D to E includes a separate

[193] "L'événement de la saison," Fonds du Théâtre du Soleil. My translation of "ingrat" and "hostile."
[194] "L'événement de la saison," Fonds du Théâtre du Soleil. My translation from French, "Mais ce sont justement ces conditions de dépouillement sans concession et de clandestinité […] qui inspirent des préjugés favorables à tout un jeune public."
[195] For the demographics of '68 protestors, see Bredeson, *Occupying the Stage*, 3.
[196] "'Une scénographie pour *1789*,' by Denis Bablet for *Interscaena,*" Autumn 1971 in "Coupures de presse," 4-COL-153(24), Fonds du Théâtre du Soleil, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France, https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc4755d/ca59708829190853 (hereafter cited as "Une scénographie pour *1789*," Fonds du Théâtre du Soleil).

raised portion F, the highest platform. This space is smaller than the other podiums and actors do not linger on it, using it to transit from D to E.

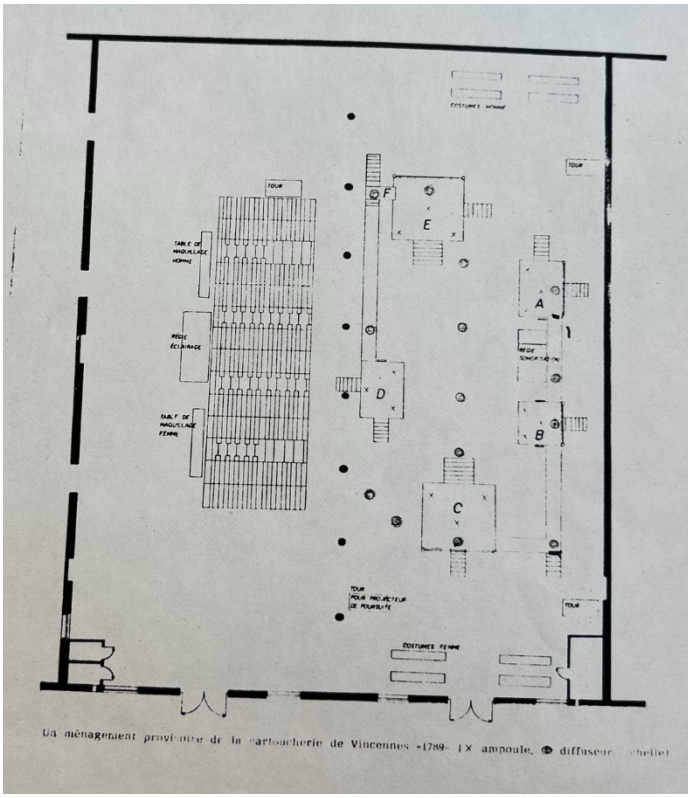

Figure 1. Page 31 from "'Une scénographie pour 1789,' by Denis Bablet for Interscaena" *in "Coupures de presse," 4-COL-153(24), Fonds du Théâtre du Soleil, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France.*

Emily Sahakian notes that "the Soleil used five platforms to split the focus and put the audience in the center of the action."[197] This is the 'stereo' staging commented on by Thomann above. To illustrate Sahakian's point, one can turn to the film version of *1789*, directed by Mnouchkine using footage recorded over the final 13 nights of the production in 1973.[198] We see the house packed with viewers, milling about in the central space, talking and chatting.[199] Some of them lean their elbows on the empty walkways and podiums. Bablet notes that platforms A through C stand at 1.5 m, "the eye level of a man of average stature," while the walkway between them is

[197] Sahakian, "The Intercultural Politics of Performing Revolution."
[198] Mnouchkine, *1789*, 2:23:38..
[199] Mnouchkine, *1789*, 00:05:11.

slightly lower.[200] Not all viewers stand, however; in the film, the camera pans over some tiered stands where spectators sit shoulder to shoulder, looking down on the performance space and their fellow audience members.[201] On screen, the darkened space, with its catwalks and curtains, feels at once ornate and utilitarian, welcoming and alienating. One can imagine how disorienting and exhilarating it could feel to enter a space where performers circulate just above you, sometimes speaking to each other, and sometimes directly to you. The novelty of the space is counterbalanced by the troupe's historically inspired costuming and makeup choices, with many of the performers wearing full clown face paint.[202] This costuming choice makes sense considering the narrative of *1789*: a circus troupe in 1791 is performing immediately following the Champ-de-Mars massacre, ordered by the Marquis de la Fayette, which resulted in the deaths of around 50 unarmed civilians.[203] In response, as a way of mourning those killed in the massacre, the troupe decides to dramatize the social conditions leading up to and following the outbreak of Revolution in 1789 up to their present, in 1791. They perform a series of discrete but interrelated episodes in styles as diverse as mime, puppetry, dance, and as already mentioned, direct speech to the crowd.

The character of Marat, played as a disgruntled and challenging presence by Soleil member René Patrignani is particularly prone to stepping down to the audience's level and addressing them directly.[204] For example, he interrupts a moment of fun and levity happening onstage by appearing on the floor among spectators to exhort them to pay attention to the bourgeois excesses of the emerging middle class. He tries to stir them to action against the new martial law imposed upon the people of Paris in 1791, which the 1972 audience implicitly becomes.[205] The Soleil resurrects Marat

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[200] "Une scénographie pour *1789*," Fonds du Théâtre du Soleil, 31. My translation from French: "la hauteur du regard d'un homme de taille moyenne."
[201] Mnouchkine, *1789*, 0:05:11.
[202] The makeup is foregrounded from the start of the film, as we see a performer putting on his full clown makeup at Mnouchkine, *1789*, 0:01:10.
[203] George Rudé, *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 1959), 89.
[204] For the identification of Patrignani as Marat, see Mnouchkine, *1789*, 02:26:00.
[205] Mnouchkine, *1789*, 2:11:55.

as a confrontational figure prone to anger, even toward the people whose cause he promotes. They attempt to surrogate him, à la Roach, at a moment when they feel people most need such an acerbic figure to inspire them to resist. They also use him as a chorus figure, the person or people who (among other duties) comment upon the plot in ancient Greek tragedies.[206] However, as the narrative moves along, Marat appears less and we understand that this chorus is, like Cassandra, unheeded. The surrogation has failed, as it always must. Actors other than Patrignani move amongst the audience too, representing other historical figures. They attempt to confront the audience with the political complexities of the Revolution by getting onto their level. As I explore below, when the Soleil presents viewers with an "authentic parliamentary debate on the question of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen," multiple members of the troupe step down into the central space.[207] This surrogation, too, comes to an end—but, I argue, it does important confrontational work before concluding.

Creating "the People" from "the Crowd"

In this section, I show that the Théâtre du Soleil surrogates its audience as the collective tragic hero of its production, the "people" of Paris in 1791. Also, by engaging with them at times directly and at other times ignoring them, they show them to be tragically trapped in the thrall of a rotating roster of politicians who manipulate them for their own aims. They achieve these effects through their *mise en scène* choices. The impact of this surrogation is to push audiences into the uncomfortable space of historical analysis.

The energy and atmosphere in the Cartoucherie ebb and flow throughout *1789*. For instance, the piece begins *in medias res*, as a solemn Louis XVI and veiled Marie-Antoinette glide

[206] *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. "chorus," accessed 23 April 2024, https://www.britannica.com/art/chorus-theatre.
[207] Mnouchkine, *1789*, 1:43:56.

around the various platforms of the performance space, pursued by an inescapable spotlight.[208] Eventually, other performers confront them and escort them back to imprisonment and eventual execution in Paris. The entire episode is played in broad, sweeping gestures and slow, ceremonial movements, like a dumbshow.[209] This opening situates us in a ceremony of punishment for the disgraced monarchs. Schechner observes that, "Like the behavior they derive from and elaborate, rituals and dramas are violent and crisis-oriented."[210] Schechner locates the origin of script and drama among Western cultures in ritualized hunting activities, and here we see the Soleil seemingly returning to those roots, showing prey being tracked down, caged, and removed from society. These observations cast a new light on the "hunting" performed in the opening of *1789*. This scene, and indeed the entirety of the production, are nothing if not "violent and crisis-oriented," created as it was in direct response to the political upheavals taking place in France, past and present.

The Soleil utilizes the space differently when the performers retell the storming of the Bastille by dispersing and taking up position "on every platform and in the stands," calling the audience members to come over to them.[211] The performers begin whispering, beckoning, in relative darkness. One woman sits on her platform, with a confused-looking little boy from the audience sitting beside her.[212] Leaning in, conspiratorial, the woman says, "I'm going to tell you how we, the people of Paris, stormed the Bastille."[213] Judging from how the boy moves towards her as she speaks, it seems he feels implicated in her use of "nous," us, and is drawn in by the seeming break from theatre and move into a storytelling mode. This same intimate, informal mode has been adopted by all the performers spread out through the performance space. Gradually, the performers

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[208] Mnouchkine, *1789,* 00:08:45.
[209] *Collins English Dictionary*, s.v. "dumbshow," accessed 21 April 2024, https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/dumbshow.
[210] Schechner, *Performance Theory*, 109
[211] Théâtre du Soleil, *1789/1793,* 47.
[212] Mnouchkine, *1789*, 00:59:30.
[213] Mnouchkine, *1789*, 00:59:49. My translation from French of, "Je vais vous raconter comment nous, le peuple de Paris, on a pris la Bastille."

increase the volume of their speech as they build up to the exact moment that collective action toppled the Bastille, and thus the Ancien Régime. During this episode, Mnouchkine's film jumps from shouting performer to shouting performer, until the audioscape of the film dissolves into a din of shouts punctuated by scattered fragments of sentences and the crescendo of drums beneath it.[214] This continues for more than ten minutes. Stunned audience members look up into the faces of the actors, adults and children equally enraptured.[215] The camera pans through a restless crowd, moving about on the ground.[216]

Suddenly, the singular voice of a ringmaster dominates the scene, capturing the crowd's attention.[217] The lights come on and the tension in the air explodes into a circus, complete with Julius Fucik's "Entry of the Gladiators." An actor in a bear costume comes lumbering out, led on a chain by another performer. The audience takes part in various games, such as spinning a wheel marked with words like, "AMOUR," "FRATERNITE," and "BONHEUR" and guessing the number it will land on.[218] Suddenly, the Cartoucherie is a fairground filled with spectators milling about. The variety of entertainments on display is reminiscent of the "fair theaters" of the eighteenth century, where the most popular entertainments were "opéras-comiques […] acrobats, marionettes, exotic animals, freaks, and exhibitions of mechanical and optical devices."[219] As at a circus, the spectators are permitted to go wherever they wanted in the space. In the playtext of *1789*, the opening staging information tells us that the raised podiums "demarcate a parterre in which standing spectators are invited to move about freely."[220] Was this freedom in some way communicated to the

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[214] Mnouchkine, *1789*, 01:05:39.
[215] Mnouchkine, *1789*, 01:06:32.
[216] Mnouchkine, *1789,* 01:13:20.
[217] Théâtre du Soleil, *1789/1793*, 62. In the playtext, this voice says, "LE PEUPLE EST VAINQUEUR…"
[218] Mnouchkine, *1789*, 01:14:21.
[219] Robert M. Isherwood, "Entertainment in the Parisian Fairs in the Eighteenth Century," *The Journal of Modern History* 53, no. 1 (March 1981): 32, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1877063.
[220] Théâtre du Soleil, *1789/1793,* 4. My translation from French, and full quote reads, "Cinq aires de jeu surélevées, reliées par des passerelles, délimitent un parterre dans lequel les spectateurs debout sont invités à se déplacer librement

audiences as they came in? Or were they meant to guess it from the way the action shifted across different platforms at different moments? I speculate that they were somewhat aware that they might be made to move based on their standing position, but that they were unprepared for the changing pace of the relocations, where sometimes they were left to stay still and other times made to move quickly to new spots around the room. Before the Bastille and circus episodes, audience members do not appear to move about so freely in the filmed version. This sudden change in the dynamic calls into question the role of the audience, as it shifts the relationship between performers and audience members from that of a dramatic performance to that of a fairground circus act, where the spectators are free to participate just as much as the performers. If the people are the heroes of this mourning play, then perhaps their flaw is that they allow themselves to be led so easily, never rebelling against their role, even as Marat tries to get through to them.

In the eighteenth century, as in the twentieth, audiences were prompted to explore performance spaces differently. The "parterre," as the Théâtre du Soleil describe the standing room at the Cartoucherie, has a long history directly linked to the French Revolution. In *The Contested Parterre,* Jeffrey S. Ravel pieces together a portrait of the audiences who occupied this standing-only space. Using police records, he explores the "social heterogeneity of the pit," as a space where people of various social backgrounds and professions "came together to pass judgement on theatre, and implicitly on the political issues of the day."[221] This is also an apt description for the crowd attending *1789* in the 1970s, who were being called upon to judge the spectacle before them as theatre and as political statement. The parterre in the eighteenth century was also a space for audience members who wanted to participate in the drama onstage, or as Ravel dubs them,

tandis que ceux qui souhaitent plus de confort peuvent s'asseoir sur des gradins aménagés à l'extérieur de ce lieu scénique rectangulaire."

[221] Ravel, *The Contested Parterre,* 17-8.

"interventionist spectators."[222] These audience members would react verbally and physically to the events onstage, as they "insisted on collaborating within the playhouse in physically demonstrable and emotional ways."[223] Framing jeers, shouts, gasps, or other responses as "collaboration" is a helpful gloss on the role the theatre audience is intended to play in *1789*. If we read the crowd as the participants in a parterre at an eighteenth-century fair theatre, we can conclude that the Théâtre du Soleil wanted them to "collaborate" in unpredictable, improvisatory ways. The troupe placed importance on the actions and responses of their spectators, who played a role like any of the Soleil actors in directing the course of the events. Indeed, at the end of Mnouchkine's film, a voiceover names the entire creative team one by one, including all of the actors of the collective, as co-creators of the film of *1789*. The final contributor credited is "les spectateurs de la Cartoucherie de Vincennes."[224]

This confluence of the audience and the actors onstage could have a profoundly radical effect on the way people think about their role in the Revolutionary scenario. Ravel observes that successive French governments post-Revolution "have continued to rely on theatrical formulae to legitimize their use of power" but "have often claimed to blur the distinction between the performers and observers on which the legitimacy of the Sun King rested."[225] In other words, though French politicians were still thinking of their power along dramatic lines, they were also more likely to encourage audiences to feel like an equal part of their actions, as their constituents and members of a republic. In short, everyday people became a participatory parterre audience, as essential for the creation of the dramatic spectacle as for the formation of the nation. Whereas

[222] Ravel, *The Contested Parterre*, 56.
[223] Ravel, *The Contested Parterre,* 56.
[224] Mnouchkine, *1789*, 02:32:09.
[225] Ravel, *The Contested Parterre*, 1.

Przybyszewska attempted this switch theoretically, by thinking through the trial from the perspective of an excluded viewer, the Soleil literalizes this shift and therefore achieves a greater effect.

Ravel's history-from-below approach to the parterre exists in an important historiographical stream of writing about the past from the perspective of common people. In 1959, *The Crowd in the French Revolution* by English historian George Rudé shed light on the role played by large collectives of people in key revolutionary *journées*. For example, he pieces together a narrative of the Champ-de-Mars massacre, the inciting incident for the frame narrative of *1789*, through police records and newspaper accounts quoting first-person witnesses of the event.[226] One key source for Rudé is Mathiez who is often associated with the shift to focus on common people and their role in shaping history. In fact, evidence in Mnouchkine's research notebook, maintained as she prepared *1789*, suggests that her sources also included Mathiez, who was also the source of much of Przybyszewska's factual and ideological information for her own play. Mnouchkine's handwritten note cites "Mathiez p 169 à" before cutting off. This notebook, held at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, draws from both older and more contemporary sources on the events of 1789 to 1792, and speaks to the extensive scholarly exploration that went into the creation of this spectacle.[227] The Soleil's reimagined scenario occurs alongside a historiographical shift toward appreciating the importance and agency of the "people," writ large.

The Play's Purpose: Entertainment or Instruction?

Much like Przybyszewska, members of the Théâtre du Soleil and Mnouchkine conducted extensive research into traditional historical texts in preparation for the creation of their work, even drawing from some of the same scholars. But unlike Przybyszewska, this research did not translate

[226] Rudé, *The Crowd in the French Revolution*, 80-94.
[227] "Cahier de notes d'Ariane Mnouchkine," Fonds du Théâtre du Soleil.

into a realist depiction of episodes from the historical record. Instead, it formed a strong factual foundation onto which the troupe grafted their fictional frame narrative, that of a theatre troupe in 1791 looking back with two years of hindsight at the start of an ongoing revolution. Such a frame imbues the drama with a reflective air and a retrospective positioning without removing itself enough so as to be historical. It also puts us in a distinctly commemorative—or, we could say, mournful—mode, as the members of the troupe depict and process the violence committed against the people of Paris through performance. Thus, Mnouchkine and the Soleil can be situated in the genre of Revolutionary *Trauerspiel* as outlined in the introduction.

The Soleil troubles the difference between fact and fiction, and calls attention to the constant process of interpretation and presentation at play when one recounts the past. Within the play, scattered amongst the explosive bursts of fanfare and spontaneous audience interaction, there are moments of verbatim quotation from eighteenth century archival documents. For instance, about two thirds of the way through the play, a political debate is resurrected from the archives and placed onstage.[228] The actors of the troupe take on roles as real deputies of the National Assembly and speak the words they said two centuries earlier. The Soleil engages here with aspects of the documentary genre, intwined as it is with revolutionary theatre (as discussed in the introduction), but still with a theatrical flair. The scene is introduced to the audience as "authentic," i.e., not fabricated: "And now, ladies and gentlemen, you will witness an authentic parliamentary debate on the question of the rights of man and the citizen."[229] This signposting of what the audience is about to see has taken place at other key moments in the text, most notably at the opening, when the episode of hunting Marie-Antoinette is introduced with, "Ladies and gentlemen, we will now perform the

[228] Théâtre du Soleil, *1789/1793*, 70, or Mnouchkine, *1789*, 01:43:56.
[229] Théâtre du Soleil, *1789/1793*, 70, or Mnouchkine, *1789*, 01:43:56. My translation from French: "Et maintenant, Mesdames et Messieurs, vous allez assister à un authentique débat parlementaire sur la question des droits de l'homme et du citoyen." "Assister," has the double meaning of either attending or witnessing an event.

Flight to Varennes for you."[230] These explicit cues, statements of the theatrical nature of the presentation, are a far cry from the subtle meta-moments in Przybyszewska's play. They prepare the audience for what they are about to see and remind them to take up their vital role as viewers.

When the debate begins, the spectators in the filmed version appear to understand their role implicitly, changeable as it is. Where before they were actively moving about the space, playing circus games, and laughing and hissing at the characters onstage, they return to being solemn, silent, and compliant, as they allow themselves to be waved out of the path of an actor who makes his way across the spectator's space.[231] When the debate begins, a group of actors gather on the floor in a circle, in the midst of the crowd who watch with embarrassed smiles as they shift to stay out of the actors' way.[232] As they argue over the place of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen within the nascent French Constitution, they separate, moving to different platforms, cutting through the crowd rather than taking the raised walkways between platforms. As they carry on this debate, each vouching for a different form of government and a different status for human rights within their imagined governments, their lines overlap. They each adopt different styles, some of them speaking with melodramatic intensity, others adopting lighter, more humorous tones. The result is a chaotic soup of political speeches, where it is difficult to pick up one individual thread in the filmed version. In this way, it mirrors the Bastille scene, but with a crucial difference.

Whereas in the Bastille scene the people were invited to approach the platforms with welcoming gestures and words from the common people ready to recount their victory, here the politicians speak over the people's heads. They ignore the audience members, even as they cut through their space while brushing them out of the way. Before, the actors addressed the audience directly,

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[230] Mnouchkine, *1789,* 0:07:10. My translation from French, "Mesdames et messieurs, nous allons vous jouer la fuite à Varennes. Musique."
[231] Mnouchkine, *1789*, 01:44:15.
[232] Mnouchkine, *1789*, 01:44:30.

implicating them in their speeches using plural first person pronouns. Here, they argue with one another and leave no room for audience contributions. Writing on *1789*, Helen E. Richardson posits that "the voice of the collective […] resonates throughout the piece, culminating in the account of the taking of the Bastille."[233] Certainly, the steady build up in volume, and the profusion of activity that follows in the fair scene do appear to constitute a rising action and climax. However, this occurs only about halfway through the filmed version of the production, and it is in fact mirrored by a much more pessimistic, but no less decisive, scene. By mirroring the Bastille scene with the National Convention debate, the Soleil illustrates how, despite their instrumental role in political upheaval, the common people are ignored by those making legislative decisions. Here, the Théâtre du Soleil signals a shift away from a valorisation of the people and toward the play's conclusion, a critique of the bourgeoisie establishment that martyred the "people" and ended the Revolution when it suited them. This makes it all the more interesting that they choose to draw the dialogue for this debate directly from the political archive, whereas their depiction of the Bastille is presented as their own original composition.[234] In so doing, and in performing the archive in such a formal way, they tacitly position the historical record as an exclusionary force, a repository that preserves only the official words of the leaders and omits the people who also contributed to history in ways not preserved in the written record, i.e., through physical actions. Their work here calls to mind Taylor's warning about the exclusions encoded in the scenario; the Soleil offers a similar critique of the oversights inherent to the construction of the Revolutionary scenario.

Despite their claim that all bolded texts are "authentic quotations," the troupe does not read the record exactly. For instance, they include a line from a character named "Deputy Castellanes":

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[233] Richardson, "Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil," 253.

[234] I believe the Bastille episode to be original text from the Soleil, as I did not find historical documents similar enough to their account to be considered a direct citation. Furthermore, the text is not bolded in the script, as is done with lines that the Théâtre du Soleil claims are "citations authentiques" (Théâtre du Soleil, *1789/1793*, 13).

> You claim that a Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen is useless—you go even further, you believe it dangerous in this moment when, all the resources of the government having been exhausted, the multitude gives itself over to excesses that give rise to fear of greater ones. But, Gentlemen, I am certain that most of my listeners will think, like me, that the true way to stop licentiousness is to lay the foundations of freedom. The more men know their rights, the more they love the laws that protect them. [235]

Castellanes' language is formal, using "vous," the collective and polite second person pronoun, but also straightforward, using short clauses joined by commas. It is easy to follow for listeners without the text in front of them. Turning to the archive, we find the conclusion to a long speech recorded in the *Archives parlementaires* from M. le comte de Castellane:

> I responded, it seems to me, to those who think that a Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen is useless: there are those who go even further, and who believe it dangerous in this moment when, all the resources of the government having been exhausted, the multitude gives itself over to excesses that make them fear even greater ones. But, Gentlemen, I am certain that most of my listeners will think, like me, that the true way to stop licentiousness is to lay the foundations of freedom: the more men know their rights, the more they love the laws that protect them, the more they will cherish their fatherland, the more they will fear trouble; and if vagrants still compromise public safety, all the citizens who have something to lose will unite against them.[236]

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[235] Théâtre du Soleil, *1789/1793*, 76. My translation from French : "DÉPUTÉ CASTELLANES. Vous dites qu'une déclaration des droits de l'homme est inutile, vous allez plus loin, vous la croyez dangereuse en ce moment où tous les ressorts du gouvernement étant rompus, la multitude se livre à des excès qui en font craindre de plus grands. Mais, Messieurs, je suis certain que la majorité de ceux qui m'écoutent pensera comme moi que le vrai moyen d'arrêter la licence est de poser les fondements de la liberté. Plus les hommes connaîtront leurs droits, plus ils aimeront les lois qui les protègent."

[236] M.J. Mavidal and M.E. Laurent, ed., *Archives parlementaires de 1787 à 1860,* series 1, vol. 8, (Paris: Librairie Administrative de Paul Dupont, 1875), 321, https://searchworks.stanford.edu/view/1071767. My translation from French, "J'ai répondu, ce qui me semble, à ceux qui pensent qu'une déclaration des droits des hommes est inutile : il en est encore qui vont plus loin, et qui la croient dangereuse en ce moment, où tous les ressorts du gouvernement étant

Unlike the Soleil's version, the historical speech is delivered in longer, more discursive phrases. The troupe chose to read only the conclusion of this speech, and to place it directly between other excerpted texts from the *Archives parlementaires*. In fact, throughout the "authentic debate," we see the troupe pulling from different sections of the transcript, truncating, editing, and constructing a version of the actual debates. Since the Soleil simplifies and cobbles together these "authentic quotations" for their audience, it is natural to wonder whether these quotations are truly authentic. The question of what constitutes historical fact or fiction arises once again. In this way, the troupe blurs the line between a historical event and an interpretation of that historical event. Whereas previously, they made this explicit, in this moment they in fact keep hidden the extent to which they are shaping and promoting their version of the Revolutionary scenario.

One of *1789*'s major subjects is interpretation's role in the recounting of history. Collective action is also a through line, binding the subject and method of the production. But why is the French Revolution specifically an apt setting for a performance with these concerns? In the leftist magazine *Politique-Hebdo*, critic Bernard Dort wrote about the process by which the Théâtre du Soleil arrived at their subject. According to Dort, they first discussed putting on Bertolt Brecht's *Baal*, before changing their minds because "they didn't feel the need to revisit a finalized text. They wanted instead to build on what they had done with the *Clowns*: to create a show and a text at the same time."[237] Also according to Dort, *1789* arose from the Théâtre du Soleil's "desire to share its

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rompus, la multitude se livre à des excès qui leur en fait craindre de plus grands. Mais, Messieurs, je suis certain que la majorité de ceux qui m'écoutent pensera, comme moi, que le vrai moyen d'arrêter la licence est de poser les fondements de la liberté : plus les hommes connaîtront leurs droits, plus ils aimeront les lois qui les protègent, plus ils chériront leur patrie, plus ils craindront le trouble ; et si des vagabonds compromettent encore la sûreté publique, tous les citoyens qui ont quelque chose à perdre se réuniront contre eux."

[237] "'*1789* : Le théâtre du peuple,' by Bernard Dort for *Politique-Hebdo* no. 8, 26," November 1970 in "Coupures de presse," 4-COL-153(1411), Fonds du Théâtre du Soleil, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France, https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc4755d/ca59708829190854 (hereafter cited as "*1789 :* Le théâtre du peuple" Fonds du Théâtre du Soleil). My translation from French: "c'était qu'ils n'éprouvaient pas le besoin de revenir à un texte fixé une fois pour toutes. Ils voulaient plutôt prolonger ce qu'ils avaient fait avec les *Clowns* : construire en même temps un spectacle et un texte."

knowledge with the public through deliberately theatrical means."[238] In Dort's analysis, the Soleil were motivated to create *1789* by its pedagogical ambitions.

Dort also notes that the troupe was considering putting on a Brecht play before turning away from established texts entirely. Even at the time of *1789*'s initial premiere, *New York Times* critic Pierre Schneider pointed out the "Brechtian bracketing of the action (through a narrator)."[239] Brecht's influence on the techniques used by Mnouchkine and her troupe have subsequently been studied by scholars including Agnieszka Karch.[240] Indeed, steeped in what Bredeson terms the "veritable Brecht mania" that had dominated French theatre since the 1960s, the Théâtre du Soleil was deeply invested in ideas of the radical social potential of theatre.[241] Brecht wrote, "the contrast between learning and amusing oneself does not necessarily exist in nature; it has not always existed and need not always exist."[242] In his essay "On Experimental Theatre," he called for "a fusion of the two functions, entertainment and instruction."[243] For Brecht, this is the utility of the *Verfremdung* or V-effect, a form of estrangement that actors can deploy to distance audience members from a characters' actions, rather than inspiring easy identification.[244] This prompts critical thinking and analysis, while still capturing the audience member's attention—it instructs and entertains.

Due to its explicitly educational aims, *1789* fits into the tradition of Brechtian *Lehrstücke*, or learning-plays. Through a palimpsest of theatrical techniques ranging from puppetry to fairground acrobatics, to debates between historical figures, the Théâtre du Soleil put Brecht's theories into

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238 "*1789 :* Le théâtre du peuple," Fonds du Théâtre du Soleil. My translation from French: "la volonté de communiquer, par des moyens délibérément théâtraux, son savoir au public…"
239 Pierre Schneider, "Paris: The Revolution as Inspiration," *The New York Times,* February 8, 1971. https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1971/02/08/91266233.html?pageNumber=39.
240 Agnieszka Karch, "Theatre for the people: the impact of Brechtian theory on the production and performance of *1789* by Ariane Mnouchkine's Théâtre du Soleil," *Opticon1826* 10 (Spring 2011): 1-7, http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/opt.101102.
241 Bredeson, *Occupying the Stage*, 64.
242 Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. Marc Silberman, Steve Giles and Tom Kuhn (London, Bloomsbury Revelations, 2019), 134.
243 Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 161.
244 Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 167-8.

action, presenting educational and entertaining performances for audiences that included many children, who can be seen in the filmed production paying rapt attention.[245] One can detect Brecht's influence on the troupe's choice of character: acrobats, puppeteers, and popular entertainers. Of the V-effect, Brecht observes, "This effort to make the incidence represented appear strange to the public can be seen in a primitive form in the theatrical and pictorial displays that the old popular fair is. The way the clowns speak and the way the panoramas are painted both embody an act of *Verfremdung*."[246] This also helps account for the frame narrative, that of a troupe of street performers looking back at the recent past. Karch identifies the historical setting of *1789* as another instance of V-effect, since it distances the audience from the characters on stage.[247] Indeed, this reading seems borne out by Brecht's own assertion that "*Verfremdung* is […] a process of historicizing, of portraying incidents and persons as historical, that is, as ephemeral."[248] This investment in historicization helps explain why Brecht himself also wrote history plays.[249] He had faith in this form to fulfil the dual purpose of experimental theatre, faith which was shared by the Soleil.

As demonstrated from the sample of reviews quoted above, Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil sent shockwaves through the European theatre scene with their Revolutionary scenario. At the Bibliothèque nationale de France, one can find newspaper articles reviewing *1789* in English, German, Italian, and Russian.[250] The Soleil reached these international audiences through their own travels in France and abroad, spreading Brechtian education and entertainment to as many people as possible. But Brecht's influence on the troupe did not start and end onstage, with an audience

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[245] See for instance, Mnouchkine, *1789*, 01:18:32: the camera shows a child in a Phrygian cap (a symbolic red hat worn by the working-class sans-culottes in revolutionary Paris) who watches a performer juggle fire.
[246] Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 176.
[247] Karch, "Theater for the people," 3.
[248] Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 168.
[249] See endnote by John Willett, trans., in *Brecht on Theatre* (London: Bloomsbury Revelations, 2019): 170, "This was the period of his great parable and history plays."
[250] "Coupures de presse," 4-COL-153(27), Fonds du Théâtre du Soleil, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France, https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc4755d/ca59707634585997.

physically present. As evidenced by the publication of the playtext of *1789*, the Soleil was also clearly invested in gaining a broader audience than just those who could attend their own productions in person. They also authorized the creation of educational books that contained a playtext of *1789*, a timeline of the French Revolution, and "supplementary texts" including everything from portraits of Rousseau and Voltaire to a summary of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen.[251] Published by an educational German press, Diesterweg Neusprachliche Themenhefte, the existence of this text speaks directly to the international audience the company had in mind when creating their didactic production.

1789 had a long afterlife on the world's stages, even when the Soleil itself had moved onto its next productions. Mnouchkine granted rights to secondary school groups to perform versions of *1789*, in France and abroad, including in the USSR and in Québec.[252] In honour of the Bicentennial of the French Revolution in 1989, competitions judged by members of the troupe took place to reward the students who presented the best performance of *1789* with the chance to perform at the Cartoucherie in front of Mnouchkine.[253] Such initiatives helped spread not only the names of the Théâtre du Soleil and Mnouchkine, but also their fresh resurrection of the revolutionary scenario.

The Scenario's Insidious Potential

As Taylor warns, historical scenarios such as the French Revolution encode not only positive, liberatory potential, but also potentially harmful tropes and negative outcomes. These might be subtle biases, or they might be overt exoticisation and exclusionary performance practices.

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[251] "Version en français : Théâtre du Soleil, *1789*, profil d'une œuvre," 1989, 4-COL-153(1434), Fonds du Théâtre du Soleil, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France, https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc4755d/ca59707633592446.

[252] "Célébrations du Bicentenaire de la Révolution française, articles de presse autour du spectacle," 1989, 4-COL-153(31), Fonds du Théâtre du Soleil, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France, https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc4755d/ca59715996345210 (hereafter cited as "Célébrations du Bicentenaire," Fonds du Théâtre du Soleil).

[253] "Célébrations du Bicentenaire," Fonds du Théâtre du Soleil.

For example, when the Théâtre du Soleil turns its gaze to the struggle for liberation of enslaved people in France's overseas colonies, they cast white performers as Black characters, delivering performances that play into racialized tropes. After the parliamentary debate scene, the performance—which has otherwise taken place completely in Metropolitan France—suddenly shifts location to Saint-Domingue, today the nation of Haiti. This change is signalled by a white actor (one of several) running through the crowd wearing messy black face paint and a tignon or tiyon head covering.[254] The women repeatedly ask the crowd to move by saying "Pardon," in an affected accent meant to evoke the speech of Caribbean Francophones. As one of the women in blackface takes the stage, the audience is already primed by her makeup, her stereotypical costume and her parodic accent to view her as a type rather than a character. The music playing throughout this scene contributes to the othering taking place: a drum, a woodblock, and several flutes provide a culturally nonspecific soundtrack that still manages to sound generically "foreign" to a Western ear.[255] The performer's words, too, as she introduces the setting confirm that the troupe is actively playing to the colonial imagination: "My country is also France, you know. But France over there, very, very far away […] We call it, 'Overseas France.' Over there, it's a paradise of exoticism."[256] As the woman says this, she elicits chuckles from the audience. Once she has finished speaking, Hardy, one of the main actors of the Soleil, comes out in the standard white face paint the troupe has used throughout, but his makeup reads differently; this time, it stands in stark contrast to the blackface worn by the actresses playing enslaved people.[257]

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[254] Mnouchkine, *1789*, 01:53:14-01:54:23. Emily Sahakian calls the face paint "streaks of brownface make-up […] which estranges audiences from the convention" ("The Intercultural Politics of Performing Revolution").
[255] Mnouchkine, *1789*, 01:53:14-01:54:23.
[256] Mnouchkine, *1789*, 01:53:38. My translation from French: "Mon pays, c'est aussi la France, vous savez. Mais la France là-bas, très, très loin. […] C'est la France d'outre-mer, on l'appelle. Là-bas, c'est le paradis d'exotisme."
[257] Mnouchkine, *1789*, 01:54:23.

The scene continues with the arrival of a copy of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, which disturbs the dreamy vision of the colonial "paradise."[258] When the women playing enslaved people hear that "All men are born and remain free and equal in rights," they react with excitement, jumping up and down and saying, "Me free, me free."[259] This broken French furthers the profoundly harmful nature of these performances. Though the Soleil intends to modify the revolutionary scenario toward more inclusive values, they bring forward and perform deeply regressive ones, as well. The scene proceeds with the right to property reiterated, and concludes with a harrowing image of the white-painted enslaver and his wife (also played by a white actress in blackface) riding the backs of the enslaved people.[260] Unlike earlier episodes, where actors resurrected historical figures, here the actors lean into tropes and take on flat, unnamed roles. This cannot be said to be an instance of surrogation or resurrection—instead, it is uncritical reactivation of existing prejudices that flatten the personhood of colonial subjects.

As Sahakian notes in her study of the Théâtre du Soleil and Maryse Condé, Mnouchkine is associated with a movement she defines as "intercultural theatre," as opposed to postcolonial theatre. Sahakian writes, "While postcolonial theatre tends to affirm cultural difference in order to counter the cultural and political legacies of imperialism, intercultural theatre is premised on notions of underlying human sameness."[261] Gaensbauer corroborates this reading: "such qualified confidence in a universalizing historical perspective represents a Eurocentric luxury."[262] A mindset of universality explains why the Soleil felt emboldened to have white actors perform in blackface, and why they took the initiative to include this (very brief) sketch in amongst the rest of their performance. While trying to broaden their call for liberty and their critique of the failures of the

[258] Mnouchkine, *1789*, 01:56:09.
[259] Mnouchkine, *1789*, 01:56:44. My translation from French: "Moi libre, moi libre."
[260] Mnouchkine, *1789*, 01:57:42.
[261] Sahakian, *Staging Creolization,* 53.
[262] Gaensbauer, "Protean Truths," 1149.

French Revolution, they in fact perpetuate rather than address racist performance tropes, iconography, and stereotypes.

Following the astronomical success of *1789*, in France and abroad, the Théâtre du Soleil attempted to make lightning strike twice: in 1972, they premiered *1793* at the Cartoucherie de Vincennes.[263] While *1789* ends with the success of the bourgeoisie, who put an end to the Revolution once they have seized wealth and power at the expense of the people, *1793* opens in the aftermath of that success, when the common people are once again starving: "ANGÈLE. There's only meat at the Tuileries, in rich people's homes, in all the bourgeoisie's homes, in the homes of my masters, several times a week."[264] The piece unfolds, like *1789*, in a series of tableaux from the later stages of the Revolution. Reviews for *1793* tend to be tepid, disappointed. One reviewer wrote, "its execution, in almost all aspects, is monotonous and wanting in vitality."[265] Perhaps the revolutionary scenario had been played out for audiences, or maybe further distance from the mass mobilizations of May '68 diminished the French public's interest in ideologically charged theatre. As the descriptions of the reviewer, "monotonous" and "wanting in vitality" convey, the second play was simply less fun. This recalls the dialectic of entertainment and instruction, and Brecht's call to synthesize them. Perhaps here, the Soleil erred too much into pure instruction, and lost sight of the need for fun also.

After some time spent on different subjects, the Soleil once again took up the French Revolutionary scenario for the bicentennial year of 1989. Commissioned by François Mitterrand's socialist government, Mnouchkine and Hélène Cixous wrote *La nuit miraculeuse*, a fantastical made-

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263 Théâtre du Soleil, *1789/1793,* 249.
264 Théâtre du Soleil*, 1789/193*, 112. My translation from French, "De la viande, y en a pas qu'aux Tuileries, y en a chez tous les riches, chez tous les bourgeois, chez mes maîtres, y en a plusieurs fois par semaine."
265 "'1793 – A Rough Year at The Théâtre du Soleil' by Thomas Quinn Curtiss for the *International Herald Tribune*," 31 May 1972, in "Coupures de presse, May-August 1972," 4-COL-153(53), Fonds du Théâtre du Soleil, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France, https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc4755d/ca215.

for-TV movie about a little boy whose imagination brings a collection of human-sized dolls to life.[266] The dolls, part of a commemorative diorama about the early days of the First French Republic, take on the roles of the Revolutionary leaders they were modelled after, so a Marat doll can debate with a La Fayette doll, and a Robespierre doll can break down in hysterics while a Mirabeau doll delivers a stirring speech. The film concludes with real people, many of them from France's immigrant populations, arriving at the Palais Bourbon, the seat of France's National Assembly, to hear the dolls talk and weigh in on the importance of equality before the law, and the values of the Republic. This holiday-themed propaganda played on French television on Christmas Day 1989.[267] Its existence and production history speak to the power inherent in the Revolutionary past: politicians are willing to pay money to try to reactivate histories of revolution and inspire support for their present-day agendas. However, as the case study of Maryse Condé will explore, government bodies are not always prepared for the truly radical potential that reactivated scenarios and resurrected ghosts can unleash.

[266] "La nuit miraculeuse. Cassette de la société "Télétota". TCI 83' + 55' n° BA 12867," 26 July 1990, NUMAV 294045, Fonds du Théâtre du Soleil, https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc4755d/ca59719798085482.
[267] "'Miracle à l'Assemblée,' by Thomas Sotinel for *Le Monde*," 29 August 1989, in "Célébrations du Bicentenaire," Fonds du Théâtre du Soleil.

Chapter 3

"Other Bastilles to Take":

An tan révolisyon by Maryse Condé

When the Théâtre du Soleil approach the French Revolution as a collective struggle, they make assumptions about who is in the "collective" and who constitutes "the people." However, these assumptions can elide crucial differences of class, gender, race, nationality, and other attributes. As seen in the troubling Saint-Domingue episode of *1789*, the majority-white theatre troupe was ill-equipped to confront histories of colonialism, slavery, and anti-Black racism without restoring to harmful tropes, even as their aims were liberatory. To see how one might more effectively leverage the radical scenario in retelling the struggle for liberation from colonial domination, we turn to another playwright: the recently deceased Guadeloupian writer Maryse Condé. This final chapter parses the mix of revisionism and cynicism encoded in Condé's Revolutionary scenario to show that she levels a powerful critique of the gender-based violence that undergirds radical struggles and questions the glorification of violence that so many Revolutionary scenarios replicate.

"We are very different. But we are able to have a dialogue in our difference," Condé said in October 1998, at the Bibliothèque national de France during a roundtable with fellow writers Frankétienne and Jean Métellus.[268] Chaired by another writer, Daniel Maximin, the event explored the theme of "hybridization (*métissage*) in literature."[269] Condé had just finished reflecting on how a cyclone that had devastated her home, Guadeloupe, had also left a trail of destruction in the

[268] "Du métissage en littérature [Enregistrement sonore] : table ronde du 16 octobre 1998 / Colloque Lire en fête, éd. ; Daniel Maximin, interview. ; Maryse Condé, Frank Etienne, Jean Métellus… [et al.], participants," 1998, NUMAV-292402, Conférences de la Bibliothèque nationale de France, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France, 24:30. https://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb425443189 (hereafter cited as "Du métissage en littérature," Conférences de la Bibliothèque nationale de France). My translation of the French, "Nous sommes très différents. Mais, nous arrivons à dialoguer dans la différence."

[269] "Agenda," *Le Monde*, 9 October 1998, https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1998/10/09/agenda_3689585_1819218.html.

Southern United States. The fact of this shared vulnerability to nature impressed upon Condé how people might be able to connect and find common ground in shared experience, all while remaining mindful of their unique cultures and positionalities. As the experiences of people from vastly different cultures and backgrounds converge in the face of largescale experiences such as natural disasters, so we can apply a similar logic to historical events such as revolutions. Though people experience revolutions differently depending on their material conditions and social status, the common experience of living through such a significant period of upheaval can bind them together. It is the desire to find commonality while respecting diversity that animates Condé's 1989 play *An tan révolisyon*, or *In the Time of the Revolution*. This three-act play depicts the Revolutionary struggle in Haiti, Guadeloupe, and France.[270] Its first act, 1789, establishes the optimistic mood of the early days of the Revolution in France, while also highlighting the unequal application of its ideals to enslaved people in French colonies, namely in Haiti and Guadeloupe. The next act, 1794, begins in Haiti, where we meet Toussaint Louverture as he emerges heroic in the fight against France; the struggle against English armies in Guadeloupe, led by Victor Hughes, is bloody but seems to succeed. The final act, 1802, depicts uprisings in Guadeloupe and Haiti after Napoleon has reinstated slavery in French colonies. The play ends with the Storyteller character (analysed in detail below) prompting audiences to decide if "the promises that were made that year [1802] were kept."[271]

Condé's method for dramatic creation relies on collaboration in a different way than Mnouchkine and the Soleil. As Conde wrote the play, she worked closely with her friend Sonia

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[270] Maryse Condé, *An tan révolisyon*, trans. Doris Y. Kadish and Jean-Pierre Piriou (as *In the Time of the Revolution*), with "Fiche d'analyse de *An tan révolisyon,*" by Alvina Ruprecht, trans. Heather Allen (as "Analysis of *An tan révolisyon"*) (Paris: Éditions de l'Amandier, 2015).

[271] Maryse Condé, *In the Time of the Revolution*, trans. Doris Y. Kadish and Jean-Pierre Piriou in *An tan révolisyon* (Paris: Éditions de l'Amandier, 2015), 237. Note that this translation appears in the same edition as the French version, and hereafter will be referenced as Condé, *In the Time of the Revolution* when it is cited, to distinguish it from the original French text.

Emmanuel, for whom she had previously created roles. Emmanuel ultimately directed the first production of the work in November 1989 at Fort Fleur d'Epée in Guadeloupe; Sahakian also cites José Jernidier and the entire troupe of performers who took part in this premiere as collaborators.[272] As Sahakian puts it, for Condé, "A collective work is therefore fed by the different points of view of the director, the actors, the set designers, and the author."[273] However Condé is cited as the sole author of the text, unlike the written version of *1789* which is credited as the collective work of the Théâtre du Soleil. Therefore, while *An tan révolisyon* is certainly a drama created through conversations with others, and one which tackles Glick's questions of the individual versus the collective, I believe its text can be analysed as the work of a single artist, albeit one with a collaborative performance in mind.

Condé is widely recognized in the Francophone literary sphere for her prose works, including more than 20 novels.[274] In the face of the perceived indifference of the people of Guadeloupe to her novels, Condé turned to the theatre because, as Sahakian explains, "For her, the theatre spreads more widely to reach the local public."[275] Despite this intention of reaching a bigger audience, her dramatic works, including *An tan révolisyon*, remain largely underperformed and underrecognized.[276] Regardless, the writer's connections to the Francophone theatre world run deep. In 1959, when Condé sat in on a rehearsal of Jean Genet's *The Blacks* in Paris, she met and began a relationship with the actor Mamadou Condé, who became her first husband.[277] Sahakian writes that

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[272] Emily Sahakian, "Le théâtre de Maryse Condé : Une dramaturgie de la provocation du spectateur" in *Amour, sexe, genre et trauma dans la Caraïbe francophone*, ed. Gladys M. Francis (Paris : Éditions L'Harmattan, 2016), 109. For previous work with Emmanuel, see Sahakian, "Le théâtre de Maryse Condé," 107.
[273] Sahakian, "Le théâtre de Maryse Condé," 106. My translation from French : "Une création collective se nourrit donc des points de vue différents du metteur en scène, des comédiens, des décorateurs et de l'auteur…"
[274] Anderson Tepper, "Maryse Condé, at Home in the World," *The New York Times*, 6 March 2023, https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/06/books/maryse-conde-books.html.
[275] Sahakian, "Le théâtre de Maryse Condé," 106. My translation from French, "En revanche, pour elle le théâtre se porte davantage à atteindre le public local."
[276] Alvina Ruprecht, "Fiche d'analyse de *An tan révolisyon*" dans *An tan révolisyon* (Paris: Éditions de l'Amandier, 2015). Ruprecht observes, "L'écrivaine est sans doute mieux connue pour son œuvre romanesque…" (7).
[277] VèVè Clark and Cecile Daheny, "'I Have Made Peace With My Island': An Interview with Maryse Condé," *Callaloo,* no. 38 (Winter 1989): 99.

during this marriage Condé's artistic life evolved as she was exposed to African theatre and met African dramaturgs such as Wole Soyinka and Ama Ata Aidoo.[278] This personal connection to the drama scene in France, Ghana, and Nigeria helps explain why, six years before publishing her first novel, *Hérémakhonon*, Condé was already writing works for the stage.[279]

Condé's first performed play, *Le Morne de Massabielle*, was staged in 1970 outside Paris, and depicted a young Guadeloupian man struggling with how to help his country.[280] Her next two works as an artist were her "African plays," *Dieu nous l'a donné* and *Mort d'Oluwémi d'Ajumako*, which appeared in 1972 and 1973, respectively.[281] In an interview with VèVè A. Clark in April 1988, Condé described these works as "errors of youth."[282] To Melissa L. McKay, she explained in a 1997 interview that she wrote them because she was "afraid to start writing novels. I thought, well, I was not mature enough yet to write a novel, therefore I believed, writing plays, that's easier."[283] Despite the author's retrospective dissatisfaction with them, they were performed by Francophone troupes all over the world, including in the Caribbean.[284] *Dieu nous l'a donné*, for example, was performed in Martinique at the 2nd Fort-de-France Cultural Festival in 1973.[285] The trifold brochure for this festival, preserved at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, has a small box on its righthand column advertising three performances of *Dieu nous l'a donné* (Figure 2). The five-act play is described in terms of collective action versus the individual hero, Dieudonné. The text asks, "Is he [Dieudonné] really the hero? Doesn't the SOLUTION belong instead to the PEOPLE who we watch evolve in a

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278 Sahakian, "Le théâtre de Maryse Condé," 100.
279 Sahakian, "Le théâtre de Maryse Condé," 99.
280 Christiane P. Makward, "Reading Maryse Condé's Theatre," *Callaloo* 18, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 681, Project MUSE.
281 Ruprecht, "Fiche d'analyse," 9.
282 Clark and Daheny, "I Have Made Peace With My Island," 123.
283 Melissa L. McKay, *Maryse Condé et le théâtre antillais* (New York : Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2002), 120. My translation from French, "j'avais peur de commencer à faire du roman. Je trouvais que bon, je n'étais pas encore mûre pour écrire un roman, donc j'ai cru que, écrire des pièces, c'était plus facile."
284 McKay, *Maryse Condé et le théâtre antillais*, 120.
285 "Prospectus-programme, 1973," 4-COL-153(33), Fonds du Théâtre du Soleil, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France. https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc4755d (hereafter cited as "Prospectus-programme, 1973" Fonds Théâtre du Soleil).

different scenic space, a sort of street-space that is its true domain and that it knows well how to organize."[286] Condé's concerns in her play, then, should remind us of those drawn out by Glick from the works of James and Glissant in *The Black Radical Tragic*, with the crucial difference that, as we will see, women and gender nonconforming people come to the forefront.[287]

Figure 2. "Prospectus-programme, 1973," 4-COL-153(33), Fonds du Théâtre du Soleil, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France.

As Figure 2 reveals, also on this program, in a much larger box across the left and middle fold of the brochure, is a notice about another play on similar themes of the people versus the individual: *1789* by the Théâtre du Soleil.[288] The troupe travelled from France to perform at the same theatre

[286] "Prospectus-programme, 1973," Fonds du Théâtre du Soleil. My translation from French: "Mais est-ce vraiment lui le héros ? La SOLUTION n'appartient-elle pas plutôt au PEUPLE que nous verrons évoluer dans un espace scénique différent, sorte d'espace-rue qui est son vrai domaine et qu'il sait si bien animer."
[287] Glick, *The Black Radical Tragic*, 2.
[288] "Prospectus-programme, 1973," Fonds du Théâtre du Soleil.

festival.[289] They shipped their costumes, props and equipment to Martinique to do so.[290] In the program for the event, we see the Soleil positioning their performance as the true work of popular entertainment. Speaking of the characters in their play, they describe "the innumerable crowds of peasants, small business owners, textile workers, blacksmiths…etc. Constant craftsman of major events, they quickly find themselves the eternal outsiders at the banquet of victory, alongside the multitude of Black slaves from the colonial holdings."[291] They established common ground between their depictions of the majority white proletariat in France and the struggle of the Martiniquais for freedom from French enslavement.

The Martinique performance by the Soleil was documented by photographer Martine Franck. At the Bibliothèque nationale de France, we find a photograph by Franck of Aimé Césaire at the festival performance of *1789*.[292] Césaire had a significant influence on Condé. When asked by Clark if she could recall the first book she read by a Black author, Condé replied, "Of course, it was *Return to My Native Land* by Césaire," and also recounted seeing Césaire speak in Paris in the mid-1950s.[293] Whether or not Césaire also attended *Dieu nous l'a donné*, and whether Condé herself attended the performance of *1789*, we can only speculate at present. However, this confluence of Condé, Césaire, and the Théâtre du Soleil provides the dramatic context in which Condé began to write theatre. The interplay between Condé's dramaturgic œuvre and *1789* only deepened later in

[289] "Prospectus-programme, 1973," Fonds du Théâtre du Soleil.
[290] "Correspondance de Guy-Claude François," 1973, 4-COL-153(50), Fonds du Théâtre du Soleil, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France. https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc4755d/ca208.
[291] "Prospectus-programme," Fonds du Théâtre du Soleil. My translation from French: "la foule innombrable des paysans, petits boutiquiers, ouvriers du textile, forgerons…etc. Perpétuels artisans des grands évènements ils se rendront vite compte qu'ils sont les éternels écartés du banquet de la victoire, rejoints en cela par la multitude des esclaves noirs des possessions coloniales."
[292] "Photographies du spectacle / Martine Franck," 1973, 4-COL-153(1097), Fonds du Théâtre du Soleil, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France. https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc4755d/ca1356.
[293] Clark and Daheny, "I Have Made Peace With My Island," 97.

Condé's career, as she conceived of *An tan révolisyon* as a response to *1789* and *1793*—using Soleil's plays, as Deborah B. Gaensbauer puts it, as "structural models and textual springboards."[294]

Repositioning *1789* within *The Time of Revolution*

Similar to Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil with their 1989 film *La nuit miraculeuse*, Condé was commissioned by the Guadeloupian Regional Council to write *An tan révolisyon* in honour of the bicentennial of 1789.[295] Despite positive responses from audiences, and two sold-out nights of performances, the response from the government and cultural establishment was decidedly negative.[296] For one, the play was not broadcast on the TV or radio.[297] Furthermore, Guadeloupean historians were harshly critical of Condé's less-than-glowing depiction of Toussaint Louverture as an authoritarian who craves power.[298] As Condé puts it, "I'm not lucky in the field of theatre. […] For example, the play that I wrote for the Bicentennial of the French Revolution was performed twice, and we could not get any funding from the French government to go on tour to the other islands."[299] After the first two performances, departmental funding was withdrawn, scrapping plans for a tour that would have extended to Metropolitan France.[300] Alvina Ruprecht attributes the cancellations to "the highly subversive nature of the show: the call to protest running through its political speeches quoted verbatim from existent archive materials."[301] However, while the Soleil were lauded and permitted to perform their radical protest piece for years in France, Condé's work was effectively exiled from the Metropole. Clearly, its message was seen as more threatening to the

294 Gaensbauer, "Protean Truths," 1140.
295 Ruprecht, "Fiche d'analyse," 10.
296 Sahakian, "Le théâtre de Maryse Condé," 110.
297 Sahakian, "Le théâtre de Maryse Condé," 111 and "The Intercultural Politics of Performing Revolution."
298 Sahakian, "Le théâtre de Maryse Condé," 111 and "The Intercultural Politics of Performing Revolution."
299 Barbara Lewis, "No Silence: An Interview with Maryse Condé," *Callaloo* 18, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 546.
300 Ruprecht, "Fiche d'analyse," 10.
301 Alvina Ruprecht, "Analysis of *An tan révolisyon*, trans. Heather Allen, in *An tan Révolisyon* (Paris: Éditions de l'Amandier, 2015), 162.

French nation than that of *1789*. To understand why, we will turn to the playtext itself, its form and content, and examine several key scenes in detail.

Scholars have made much of Condé's "dialogue in difference" with Mnouchkine, fruitfully comparing *1789* and *An tan révolisyon*. In her chapter, "The Intercultural Politics of Performing Revolution: Maryse Condé's Inter-Theatre with Ariane Mnouchkine," Sahakian fruitfully compares the two women's work in order to critique and transcend the dialectic of "intercultural" versus "postcolonial" theatre referenced in the previous chapter.[302] She points out that Condé consulted a videotape of *1789* and other works by the Soleil as she worked on *An tan révolisyon*.[303] Fély Catan shows that the playtext's very structure is part of the challenge to Mnouchkine, as Condé "adds a third dramatic period titled *1802* to contest official historiography that deliberately neglects the revolutionary events taking place in the Antilles (and notably in Guadeloupe) following the reestablishment of slavery by Napoléon."[304] As Sahakian discusses, one passage in Condé's work is taken directly from *1789*, as signaled by a parenthetical: "THE PRIEST: (Excerpt from 1789 by the Théâtre du Soleil.) *(He accentuates his speech by beating a drum like a town crier.)* Brothers! Now is the time for justice! Brothers, our good king Louis XVI, by the grace of God, concerns himself with our condition!"[305] The scene continues to quote *1789* as a peasant couple rejoice at the good news, until the Storyteller comes back in to cut off the performative citation, saying "For us in Guadeloupe, the

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[302] Sahakian, "The Intercultural Politics of Performing Revolution."
[303] Sahakian, "The Intercultural Politics of Performing Revolution."
[304] Fély Catan, "Récrire l'histoire : théâtre et révolution dans *An tan révolisyon* de Maryse Condé," in *Alternative francophone* 2 no. 10 (2022): 101. My translation from French: "elle y ajoute une troisième période dramatique intitulée « 1802 » pour contester l'historiographie officielle qui néglige délibérément les évènements révolutionnaires survenus aux Antilles (et notamment en Guadeloupe) suite au rétablissement de l'esclavage par Napoléon."
[305] Condé, *An tan révolisyon*, 19-21 and *In the Time of the Revolution* 173-3 for English. From the second parenthetical, which starts "Il accentue son discours," I follow the translation by Kadish and Piriou. The text appears identically in Théâtre du Soleil, *1789/1793,* 14. In the recorded version of 1789, the priest's address opens with the much more formal, "Avis à la population" rather than "Frères." However, Condé maintains the original "Frères," suggesting that she consulted not only a videotape of the performance at the Bibliothèque nationale, but also that she had access to a printed copy of the earlier playtext, perhaps even one of the educational publications discussed in the previous chapter. Also of note, the versions that appear in Kadish and Piriou's translation of Condé's quoted text from *1789* are the only translations I am currently aware of that exist of the *1789* playtext into English, while some DVD versions of the 1973 production contain English subtitles of this version.

month of May 1789 is no different than other months."[306] Sahakian posits that Condé "glosses over and truncates scenes borrowed from Mnouchkine's plays, makes fun of them, and transforms their messages."[307] As she demonstrates, through this critique of Mnouchkine's work, Condé effectively "decenters France and relativizes the Soleil's project."[308] Condé achieves this by positioning *1789* as the dominant Revolutionary scenario which she then revises and repositions by exploring the specificity of Guadeloupians' experiences during the Revolution. Axel Artheron corroborates this view in his analysis of Condé's depiction of the Revolutionary moment: "Far from celebrating the Bicentennial of the French Revolution as expected, Condé mounted a chronicle of the Revolution from the margins and the periphery."[309] This thesis contributes to the work of previous scholars by delving into Condé's distinct staging of her historical material and her selection of sources which overlaps with and diverges from those used by Mnouchkine. It also extends into a consideration of Condé's gender politics and her condemnation of the violence encoded in the Revolutionary scenario.

I contend that Condé strengthens her decentring by deploying a similar documentary collage technique as that used by the Soleil, except the subject of her debate is not the form of government that should be used, but rather the status of people of colour in French colonies. In act 1, "1789," she writes: "A MASTER: *(Rising.)* Let's hereby grant free persons of color the same rights, privileges and immunities enjoyed by persons who were born free," a quotation taken directly from the *Code*

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306 Condé, *In the Time of the Revolution*, 174.
307 Sahakian, "The Intercultural Politics of Performing Revolution."
308 Sahakian, "The Intercultural Politics of Performing Revolution."
309 Axel Artheron, "Révolution française, révolutions coloniales dans *An Tan révolisyon* de Maryse Condé," in *Sans fards, mélanges en l'honneur de Maryse Condé*, ed. Laura Carvigan-Cassin (Pointe-à-Pitre: Presses universitaires des Antilles, 2018), 146. My translation from French, "Loin de célébrer le bicentenaire de la Révolution française comme attendu, Condé mit en scène une chronique de la révolution à partir des marges et de la périphérie"

Noir signed by Louis XIV in 1685, which granted equal rights only to Black people who had been freed from enslavement.[310] In response to this line, other characters with the same name speak:

> A MASTER (*Rising.)* Come on! "All or almost all persons of color are the shameful fruits of their masters' licentiousness and I demand that, in deliberating here on their pretentions, we reduce them…"
>
> ANOTHER *(Rising.*) "It would be totally absurd if legislators who claim to be convinced of the necessity of respecting public morality were to grant the most immoral protection to the practice of concubinage, which is unfortunately already so common in the Antilles."
>
> ANOTHER (*Rising.*) "Mulattoes are not true Frenchmen because they have never seen France."[311]

These three lines are taken from a speech by a real historical figure, Abbé Maury, before the National Assembly in May 1791.[312] As the Soleil does with the lines from the National Assembly, Condé shortens Maury's speech when quoted here. Interestingly, Condé has several actors perform Maury's singular speech, giving the words of one real man to multiple fictional and unnamed Masters. She creates polyphony from her historical source, suggesting that these views were held by many French people in the Metropole, not just the man who gave voice to them in the Assembly.

This run of direct historical citations ends with one from 1755, originally said by a colonial official, now spoken by one more Master: "ANOTHER (*Rising.*) 'The colonies are being overrun by these people!'"[313] All three sources, from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, reveal the

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[310] Condé, *In the Time of the Revolution,* 180. Original French appears on Condé, *An tan révolisyon*, 26, as well as in *Le code noir*, as cited by Florence Gauthier, "« Gens de couleur » de 1685 à 1789," *Vacarme* 52, no. 3 (2010): 22.
[311] Condé, *In the Time of the Revolution*, 180-1. Original French given in Condé, *An tan révolisyon*, 26.
[312] M. J. Mavidal and M. E. Laurent, ed. *Archives parlementaires de 1787 à 1860,* series 1, volume 26, (Paris: Librairie Administrative Paul Dupont, 1879): 52-8. https://sul-philologic.stanford.edu/philologic/archparl/navigate/26/2/?byte=473101.
[313] Condé, *In the Time of the Revolution*, 180-1. Original French from the primary source documents appears in Condé, *An tan révolisyon*, 26. The historical source of the quotation is identified by Jacques de Cauna, "Deux grands Bordelais de couleur oubliés : Montbrun et Pétion (fin 18e-début 19e s.)," *Le Blog de Jacques de Cauna Chaire d'Haïti à Bordeaux*, 8

profound racial prejudice at the foundation of the First French Republic. When placed beside the debate scene in *1789*, we see another profound example of the "relativizing" pointed out by Sahakian, Catan, and Artheron. We also see in this resurrection of historical ghosts Condé's mourning and working through because, as Jean-Georges Chali suggests, "Maryse Condé's writing, by taking up social and historical fact, reveals a tragedy from them."[314]

Guiding the audience or reader through this tragic history, instead of the Soleil's frame narrative of a theatre troupe, Condé creates one character, the "Storyteller," whose name is Zephyr.[315] In a footnote to the English translation of Condé's French original text, by Doris Y. Kadish and Jean-Pierre Piriou, Anglophone audiences are given this gloss on the play's narrator: "The storyteller is a mythical character found in tales from the Caribbean. Guardian and dispenser of the island's histories, he is presented by the celebrated writer Jacques Stephen Alexis as flying all night from island to island; hence the name Zephyr."[316] From this, it is clear that the storyteller works as a dramatic through-line and narrative frame for the episodes that will unfold in the piece, as well as a link between the different spaces in which the play takes place, a physical force that can move himself and the audience from place to place quickly and without difficulty.

Condé herself points out that her narrator breaks from tradition. She says that while typically such a figure speaks for the collective, her storyteller "was charged with making the voice of the author heard, and to generate through that voice the protest which alone could save the spectacle from freezing over."[317] Zephyr therefore aligns with neither the collective nor the individual, neither

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September 2020, http://jdecauna.over-blog.com/2020/09/grands-hommes-de-couleur-bordelais-et-aquitains-oublies.html.

[314] Jean-Georges Chali, "Maryse Condé : histoire et fiction. Le cas de Tituba la sorcière de Salem," in *Sans fards, mélanges en l'honneur de Maryse Condé*, ed. Laura Carvigan-Cassin (Pointe-à-Pitre: Presses universitaires des Antilles, 2018), 72. My translation from French, "L'écriture de Maryse Condé, en reprenant un fait social et historique, révèle dès lors une tragédie."

[315] Condé, *An tan révolisyon*, 17.

[316] Condé, *In the Time of the Revolution*, 169, footnote 3.

[317] Condé, "Autour d'An tan révolisyon," 169. Condé's image of a play that would be lifeless without her challenging voice recalls Saint-Just's famous observation in his private papers that "the Revolution is frozen; all the principles are

the audience nor the other characters onstage. The Storyteller expands outside the bounds of traditional drama and temporality. In Catan's analysis, "the storyteller […] substitutes himself on this occasion for the historian."[318] She further writes, "It is by Zephyr (an alter ego of the playwright) that Condé calls her Guadeloupian compatriots to action, as they are pushed to reflect on a Revolution that meant more continuation than rupture for them."[319] Finally, in her analysis, "Zephyr functions in the same manner as the oracle in classical tragedy, he embodies the prophetic vision of the past."[320] While Catan designates the crowd of unnamed characters onstage as the chorus, Artheron identifies Zephyr instead as "an update [*réactualisation*] of the ancient figure of the chorus" and connects Zephyr to Césaire's own "Présentateur-commentateur" in *La Tragédie du roi Christophe*.[321] Between the oracle or the choir, I posit that Zephyr more regularly takes up the choir role, and fulfils it more fully in his three capstone monologues that conclude each of the three acts of the play.[322] Zephyr reflects upon, explains, and critiques the actions of the characters who cross Condé's stage. These extra-diegetic moments of reflection exist outside the historical setting of Condé's drama, and also outside the present-day setting of the spectator—they are spoken by a ghost out of time.

The Storyteller is a multifaceted construction. He is a trope from tragedy, and from Brechtian epic. Filling the chorus role, usually held by many people, here he is compressed into a

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weakened," in Louis Antoine de Saint-Just, *Œuvres de Saint-Just : Discours-Rapports ;* Institutions républicaines ; Organt ; Esprit de la Révolution ; *Proclamations-Lettres,* (Paris : Éditions de la Cité Universelle, 1946), 296. My translation from French, "La Révolution est glacée ; tous les principes sont affaiblis."

[318] Catan, "Récrire l'histoire," 102. My translation from French: "En effet, l'Histoire nous est relatée par le conteur qui se substitue pour l'occasion à l'historien."

[319] Catan, "Récrire l'histoire," 103. My translation from French: "C'est par Zephyr (alter ego of the dramaturge) que Condé interpelle ses compatriotes guadeloupéens, incites à réfléchir à une Révolution qui pour eux signifia la continuation plutôt que la rupture."

[320] Catan, "Récrire l'histoire," 104. My translation from French: "Zephyr fonctionne à la manière de l'oracle de la tragédie classique, il incarne la vision prophétique du passé…"

[321] Artheron, "Révolution française, révolutions coloniales," 154. My translation from French, and full quote: "Sorte de réactualisation de la figure antique de chœur, le conteur n'est pas sans rappeler la figure du Présentateur-Commentateur que l'on retrouve, un peu sous les mêmes traits, dans *La Tragédie du Roi Christophe* d'Aimé Césaire."

[322] For Catan's comparison of the "foule" and the "chœur" see Catan, "Récrire l'histoire," note 3 on page 102. For the three concluding monologues from Zephyr, see Condé, *An tan révolisyon*, 35-6, 57-8, 81.

single figure. He is a mythic being named for a natural force, as well as the representative of the play's human author. Like Przybyszewska's Robespierre, Condé's Storyteller is a male mouthpiece for a female writer; however, Sahakian writes that Zephyr is "a deliberately androgynous character" and that Condé asked Laumord, the actor originating the role, to "feminize his acting style."[323] In her production analysis of the original 1989 performance, Christiane Makward writes, "Zephyr must therefore be ambiguous, to let the feminine in the human appear and to employ this stinging strategy to call into question the social norms of identity."[324] Zephyr can therefore be compared fruitfully to the construction of Robespierre in Przybyszewska's play, who is shown to similarly defy traditional gender categories. Unlike Robespierre, Zephyr is not a specific historical actor, but a culturally important figure whose role has been occupied by countless people over the centuries, along the lines of Roach's surrogation, discussed in the introduction. Whereas Przybyszewska's Robespierre is difficult to take up and identify with because of his cultural baggage, Zephyr is by design an archetypal character, one which audiences in Guadeloupe—Condé's intended spectators—are prepared to identify and understand. From the start, Zephyr is not a straightforward raconteur; instead, he engages his listeners or readers, speaking directly to us. His first line is a question: "Why are people so afraid of death?"[325] He goes on, "I've only known peace since my death, on that night of carnage and blood, a few steps away from here on Sartine Square, that you people call Victoire Square now."[326] Zephyr was killed in a decisive battle between Guadeloupians and the British who sought to gain colonial control of the island.[327] Making Zephyr a ghost killed in revolutionary violence connects him directly to the incidents he is recounting, and makes him a literalization of

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[323] Sahakian, "The Intercultural Politics of Performing Revolution."
[324] Christiane Makward, "Petite histoire de *An Tan Révolisyon,* elle court, elle court la Liberté [1989]," in *Sans fards, mélanges en l'honneur de Maryse Condé*, ed. Laura Carvigan-Cassin (Pointe-à-Pitre: Presses universitaires des Antilles, 2018), 139. My translation from French: "Zephyr doit donc être ambigu, laisser paraître le féminin de l'humain et employer cette stratégie urticante pour remettre en question les normes sociales de l'identité."
[325] Condé, *In the Time of the Revolution*, 169.
[326] Condé, *In the Time of the Revolution*, 169.
[327] Condé, *In the Time of the Revolution*, 169, footnote 2.

Carlson's "haunted stage."[328] Like Marat in *1789*, Zephyr addresses the audience directly. Catan observes that "The spectator is pushed to take on an active role in [Zephyr's] self-reflection out of fear of being mocked himself."[329] He works hand in hand with the location of the first production of the play to confront audiences with their connection to the events onstage.

Unlike the Soleil, which created *1789* abroad before bringing it to Paris and the Cartoucherie, Condé wrote *An tan révolisyon* to be performed in Guadeloupe, and she had a specific location on the island in mind: near the site of a major victory by Guadeloupian soldiers against English colonial forces. She also positioned it close to her own personal history, "a few steps away" from a central square in Pointe-à-Pitre, near where Condé was born and grew up.[330] By reminding her audience members of their physical proximity—and temporal link, through Zephyr—to the events depicted onstage, Condé positions her viewers as what Sandra L. Richards (after Augusto Boal) describes as "specta(c)tors," people who "[alternate] between distanced observation and imaginative self-identification."[331] While they observe the events that occur onstage, they also sit and stand on the same land where these events took place. In act 2, Condé even names the site of the first performance within her text several times: "A VOICE: The English are at Fort Fleur d'Epée!"[332] and "PIERROT: Yes, I was at Fort Fleur d'Epée and God preserved my life."[333] Thos spatial link encourages Condé's audience to see themselves as part of the web of historical events that make up the French Revolutionary scenario, from which they may formerly have felt excluded

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328 Carlson, *The Haunted Stage,* 7.
329 Catan, "Récrire l'histoire," 104. My translation from French, "Le spectateur est poussé à adopter un rôle actif dans cette auto-analyse de peur de n'être lui aussi ridiculisé."
330 Tepper, "Maryse Condé, at Home in the World."
331 Sandra L. Richards, "What Is to Be Remembered?: Tourism to Ghana's Slave Castle-Dungeons" in *Theatre Journal* 57, no. 4 (December 2005), 622.
332 Condé, *In the Time of the Revolution*, 201.
333 Condé, *In the Time of the Revolution*, 210.

by mainstream narratives of history, such as those taught in their schools.[334] As established, she is extending the work begun by the Soleil to include those in the Caribbean.

Condé reminds her audience that the Guadeloupian history she is interested in has been selectively taught, and that erasure from history takes place through the suppression and excision of names. Zephyr expresses surprise that the audience doesn't know his name: "You don't recognize it? Not at all? And yet it appears in some of your history books."[335] Later, a stage direction reads, "(*The storyteller recites like a schoolchild),*" as Zephyr rattles off "What is the Third Estate?," an influential French Revolutionary pamphlet by the Abbé Sieyès.[336] Once done, he demands of the audience, "Do you at least remember this? You all recited it in school."[337] Following this, the modified citation from the Théâtre du Soleil, discussed above, begins. Whereas only "some of your history books," contain Zephyr's name, "[y]ou all," i.e., Guadeloupians, were made to memorize and read aloud this text from the French historical record. Condé shows herself to be interested rather in those who were left out of that record, and so she depicts events that were by and large excluded from the public consciousness through selective education by the French government.

Discussing the differences between the original Guadeloupian production and the American production at the University of Georgia in 1997, Condé singles out how she played on the shared educational background of her Francophone audience.[338] She points to historical lines she included from Mirabeau and Danton and says, "these are clichés to us," meaning those educated by the French school system, as Condé knows her Guadeloupian audience would have been.[339] Reactivating

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[334] As Sahakian shows in "The Intercultural Politics of Performing Revolution," the Théâtre du Soleil chose the French Revolution as its subject specifically because it was taught in all French schools. Similarly, Condé's generation of Guadeloupians would have followed largely the same curriculum as French children.
[335] Condé, *In the Time of the Revolution*, 169.
[336] Condé, *In the Time of the Revolution*, 172. For the Sieyès pamphlet from which Condé quotes, see Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès, *Qu'est-ce que le Tiers-État ?* 3rd ed. (Paris: n.p., 1789).
[337] Condé, *In the Time of the Revolution*, 172.
[338] For a recorded version of the 1997 performance, see *In the Time of the Revolution*, directed by Freda Scott Giles and performed by Bianca Barksdale, Zaklya Sharpe, et al. (1997), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3scZ-8GEBZk.
[339] McKay, *Maryse Condé et le théâtre antillais,* 122. My translation from French : "Ces trucs-là sont les clichés pour nous."

this educational background through famous quotations from history, as the Soleil also did in their piece, enables Condé to create a common ground with her audience, relating to them through a shared understanding of the constructed Revolutionary scenario, before critiquing and subverting it.

Speaking to Stéphanie Bérard in 2002, Condé says of her writing process for *An tan révolisyon*, "I was a visiting professor at UC Berkeley at the time and I had a historian friend who provided me all the historical background because it was essential not to fall into cliché. It was necessary for the play to be true but a little different."[340] She once again uses the word "cliché" to refer to the received wisdom and status quo reading of this history. She makes explicit her desire not to accept without scepticism the narratives we are told about the past. To do this, Condé conducted research into the history she depicts in *An tan révolisyon*, going beyond what she and her fellow French citizens were taught in school. She recounts, "Max Chartol, a historian friend consulted in haste, taught me that there could be a Guadeloupian reading of the Revolution. In the colonies, there were other Bastilles to take."[341] Chartol recommended her books, ostensibly those that study the Revolution from a post-colonial vantage point. She cites one such study in a stage direction left out of the English translation: "[*Anne Perrotin-Dumon, 1985 : "Etre Patriote sous les tropiques".*]"[342]

Condé engaged studies by historians working at the forefront of new trends in scholarship, those seeking to write histories of the Revolution that shift our focus away from the Metropole. Like Przybyszewska, who embraced the Marxist reading of Mathiez, and the Théâtre du Soleil, who examined "histories from below" such as Rudé's that were the latest current, Condé delved into

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[340] Stéphanie Bérard, "Entretien avec Maryse Condé, 2 juillet 2002," *Women in French Studies* 12, issue 1(2004): 120, Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand 8 – Cote : 8° 91 Bul, Bibliothèques patrimoniales, Paris, France, https://bibliotheques-specialisees.paris.fr/ark:/73873/pf0001159440.locale=fr. My translation from French, "J'étais alors *visiting professor* à UC Berkeley et j'avais un ami historien qui m'a fourni tout le bagage historique parce qu'il ne fallait pas tomber dans le cliché. Il fallait que la pièce soit vraie mais un peu différente."

[341] Condé, "Autour d'An tan révolisyon," 165. My translation from the French: "Max Chartol, ami historien consulté en hâte, m'apprit qu'il pouvait bien y avoir une lecture guadeloupéenne de la Révolution. Dans les colonies, il y avait d'autres Bastilles à prendre."

[342] Condé, *An tan révolisyon*, 32.

post-colonial histories like Perrotin-Dumon's, those centred on the events and experiences of people in French colonies. In so doing, she developed a negative view of Toussaint Louverture, and portrays him as, "though certainly a political hero, […] a man corrupted by power."[343] Gaensbauer adds that in the play, "Toussaint's revolutionary image becomes subject to caution."[344] When he arrives on stage, Louverture says, "Brothers and friends, my name is Toussaint Louverture; you may have heard of my name."[345] Whereas Zephyr is shocked that his name has not been remembered, Louverture's cocky "you may have heard of my name," reads as sarcastic since he has been canonized in the scenario of the Haitian Revolution. Zephyr is critical of Louverture and his construction of his name and historical legacy: "The rascally Little Stick, Toussaint Bréda, Toussaint Louverture. For that's the name that has stuck in your memory."[346] Zephyr's bitterness over others being remembered at his expense also comes out earlier, when Condé writes, "THE STORYTELLER *(a little jealous.)* And that's how popular memory rescues some from oblivion, from the ingratitude of your memory. Some live forever."[347] Perhaps his jealousy is why Condé ends her entire play with Zephyr addressing a final plea to the audience: "Remember me. Zephyr. My name is Zephyr."[348] Though he condemns Louverture, Zephyr wishes to be remembered and mourned, too.

When Toussaint dies in act 3, a character named "SECOND GENERAL (*Lamour Dérance)*" say, "The Whites have understood nothing. They took Toussaint. But there are thousands of Toussaints in Saint-Domingue."[349] Condé positions this desire for "thousands of Toussaints" as a

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[343] Sahakian, "The Intercultural Politics of Performing Revolution."
[344] Gaensbauer, "Protean Truths," 1148.
[345] Condé, *In the Time of the Revolution*, 191. The quote given above is from Kadish and Piriou's translation, whereas the original French reads, "Frères et amis, je m'appelle Toussaint Louverture ; mon nom s'est peut-être fait connaître jusqu'à vous" (Condé, 37). The foregrounding of the name in the original French helps explain why Kadish and Piriou translate the line in such an unnatural way, and also further underscores the deep connection between naming and Revolutionary history in Condé's analysis.
[346] Condé, *In the Time of the Revolution*, 193.
[347] Condé *In the Time of the Revolution*, 183.
[348] Condé, *In the Time of the Revolution*, 238.
[349] Conde, *In the Time of the Revolution*, 235.

grave error, and part of the danger of mythologizing this history—if there were thousands of Toussaints along the lines of her critical portrait, Haiti would perhaps be even worse off. In Condé's Louverture, we see her exposing the mechanism of Roach's surrogation, that inherently doomed project. One person's idea of Toussaint is not the same as another's, and thus no replacement will ever be satisfactory to everyone. At this critical moment, we also see surrogation intersecting with Taylor's scenario, which encodes negative as well as positive repetitions; the leader we long to replace in the Revolutionary scenario is this power hungry and self-absorbed man. Condé questions the usefulness of Toussaint as an icon of revolutionary history. She shows that when we seek to resurrect him, we will only end up reinscribing his same flaws in our scenario.

Other historical figures in Condé's play also seem doomed to fail, even if we do not want them to. In one particularly moving sketch, she depicts a pregnant Guadeloupian woman named Solitude, who gave her life to fight in the Revolution. Solitude tells the soldiers who she goes into battle beside that she will have a daughter named "Aimée," and that for her daughter, "The world will change. There will never be any storms or rains ever again; only clear blue skies."[350] Sahakian emphasizes the pessimistic note struck by Solitude and her unborn child, as through her "Condé does not foreclose the possibility of a universalist revolution to come, but she does show how the allegedly universalist ideals of the Revolution were never meant to benefit people in the Caribbean."[351] Indeed, the touching bravery of this historical figure, her staunch optimism that the future will be different than the past, and her ultimate death, all belie Condé's pessimism that our existing Revolutionary scenario can lead to anything but death for those most vulnerable to the violence it brings, viz., women and children. Combining this with the idea of surrogation, the murder of Solitude's child before she could be born makes it impossible for this role to be taken up

[350] Condé, *In the Time of the Revolution*, 230. The name of the daughter, Aimée, could potentially be an homage to Aimé Césaire, who as discussed above was a formative influence on Condé.
[351] Sahakian, *Staging Creolisation,* 63.

and filled again. Condé argues that the wrong figures are being replaced and resurrected time and again, while others, like Aimée, were not given the chance to live even once. They do, however, have names, and can be remembered with them. Unlike the women playing enslaved people in *1789*, Solitude, Aimée, and other enslaved characters in Condé's play represent real people who may be mourned.

"She Gives Birth to Monsters": Revolution's Gendered Violence

In Condé's works death is never the end and deceased figures speak to the living. In her 1986 novel, *Moi, Tituba sorcière*…, translated into English as *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* by her husband Richard Philcox, Condé tackles similar themes to those she analyzes in *An tan révolisyon.* Similarly to how she prepared the play, for her novel she conducted extensive historical research and became deeply immersed in a widely overlooked history. In 1990, she spoke on *Du jour au lendemain*, a French radio show, about her inspiration: a real historical figure, albeit an under-documented one. She explains that Tituba was a woman from the West Indies who was accused of witchcraft in Salem; she asks, "Why was this woman forgotten? Because she was a woman, she was Black […] and a slave. So, I wanted to tell her story, and I made up her story because I didn't have a lot of documents."[352]

During the Mellon Seminar at Occidental College, delivered in April 1986, Condé explains that she came upon Tituba's story by accident while working in the UCLA library with her husband, and then became invested in finding out more about her. But the trail runs cold after Tituba is forced to confess to witchcraft and is sold to another slaveowner. "And there is the racism of the

[352] "Maryse Condé on *Du jour au lendemain* with Alain Veinstein, 7 February 1990," track 8, Box 3-4, Maryse Condé Papers, 1979-2012, Columbia University, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, New York, New York, U.S., 25:30. https://findingaids.library.columbia.edu/ead/nnc-rb/ldpd_10258879. My translation from French, "Pourquoi est-ce que cette femme était oublié ? Parce qu'elle était femme, qu'elle était noire [...] et esclave. Donc j'ai voulu raconter son histoire, et j'ai inventé son histoire puisque je n'avais pas beaucoup de documents."

historian," Condé says. "Because nobody, nobody bothers to find out what happened to Tituba after she was sold […] So she disappears from history entirely."[353] In her novel, Condé depicts Tituba as having magical powers including the ability to speak with the dead. Tituba, the first-person speaker of the novel, observes, "The dead only die if they die in our hearts. They live on if we cherish them and honor their memory, if we place their favorite delicacies in life on their graves, and if we kneel down regularly to commune with them. They are all around us, eager for attention, eager for affection."[354] We can connect this sentiment to Zephyr's eagerness to be remembered and mourned.

Condé's play features mourning as a recurring motif, as shown in a scene that recurs three times after moments of violence and death. As some actors lie prone onstage, their characters having been killed in fighting, "*In complete silence, women dressed in white arrive from staircases leading to the different corners of the stage. They crowd onto the stage, kneel next to the dead men, place lit candles at their feet and sing a cappella."*[355] The same exact scene takes place in 1794, where Condé writes that "this scene should be an exact replica of the one from the preceding period of 1789" and again in 1802, although this time Condé calls for complete silence throughout.[356] By repeating the same "mourning ceremony," as Gaensbauer dubs it, conducted by women for fallen men, Condé makes an important claim: history repeats itself with women as its silenced witnesses.[357] Where once they sang songs of mourning, as waves of violence continue to come, the women fall silent. Having no recourse to sufficient language for this mourning, Condé turns to gesture, instead.

However, Condé specifies that she isn't writing a tragedy: "*This period is obviously less grotesque than the two preceding ones. Nevertheless, it should never be performed in a tragic mode. On the contrary, the*

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353 "Mellon Seminar, Occidental College, Apr-86," track 40 (part 2), Box 3-4, Maryse Condé Papers, 1979-2012, Columbia University, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, New York, New York, U.S., 33:30, https://findingaids.library.columbia.edu/ead/nnc-rb/ldpd_10258879.
354 Maryse Condé, *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*, trans. Richard Philcox (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 10, https://archive.org/details/ititubablackwitc0000cond.
355 Condé, *In the Time of the Revolution*, 182.
356 Condé, *In the Time of the Revolution*, 212 for 1794 and 232 for 1802.
357 Gaensbauer, "Protean Truths," 1143.

presentation should be very sober."[358] In this way, she distances herself from the creative legacy that Glick defines as in *The Black Radical Tragic*, a male-dominated tradition, and aligns more with the Revolutionary *Trauerspiel* as elaborated here. In taking a brief look at Condé's other influences, we can discern her simultaneous admiration for and departure from her literary and dramatic antecedents, and for the Francophone tradition in which she writes. We see her reject the category of the tragedy, even as she mobilizes tragic tropes, in order to set herself apart from the canon she writes in and against. Her Revolutionary *Trauerspiel* resurrects the past even as she seems to show that its resources are spent already by those who control and instrumentalize the history. The women, those traditionally left to pick up the pieces, can only observe, mourn, and depart again.

The symbol of the witch deepens Condé's critique of the gendered nature of the Revolutionary scenario. Witchcraft appears in Condé's novel as well as her play. In act 2, Zephyr says, "I was mistaken. Revolution isn't a woman. It's a witch. She feeds on fresh blood. […] And then, in the colorless hours before dawn, she gives birth to monsters."[359] In 1802, he observes of Napoléon, "Remember, he took that crazy lady, Revolution, who was beginning to frighten everyone, and put her in jail under lock and key."[360] Revolution is personified here in much the same way that Tituba is depicted: supernatural, powerful, female. And just like Tituba, Revolution ends up violently punished for pursuing liberation as, after having freedom so briefly, Guadeloupian people are re-enslaved. In both texts, the problem is not with the witch herself but with the violent response of normative society to her power; through the image of the witch, Condé cements her radical critique of the gendered repression at work in the Revolutionary scenario.

[358] Conde, *In the Time of the Revolution*, 215.
[359] Condé, *In the Time of the Revolution*, 207.
[360] Condé, *In the Time of the Revolution*, 216.

Language: In and Against Tradition

Sahakian notes that, while actors in the original production of the play were encouraged to improvise in Créole while performing, Zephyr, the Storyteller, speaks only in French as a Brechtian distancing effect, and because he "represents the voice of the author," Condé herself, who mostly wrote in French.[361] Condé is adamant enough about his language that she specifies in the setting description of act 2, 1802 that, "Creole can be used whenever the actors want, except for the storyteller."[362] Condé also, notably, titled her work in Créole rather than in French. There exists a barrier—at times rigid and at other times fluid—between the two languages, perhaps inspired by the work of Glissant, whose ideas about nation-building and theatre are discussed in the introduction. To Clark, Condé said, "Glissant, I admire his work very much and particularly in his essay, *Le Discours Antillais*, he shows himself to be one of the most subtle critics of the West Indian mind and cultural life."[363] Glissant's essay critiques "a dogmatic insistence on Creole," which can "conceal a real inadequacy in one's analysis of existing reality."[364] He suggests that writing in "the Créole language" could mean embedding Créole's "assonanced [*assonancé*] rhythm" and "consecutiveness in sound" into whichever language one writes in.[365] This could help explain why Condé punctuates the bulk of the French text of *An tan révolisyon* with lines and improvisations in Créole.

In the roundtable at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Condé pushes back against the idea that postcolonial writers have an obligation to write in Créole instead of French. She asserts, "A writer must write in her own language; I must write in Maryse Condé."[366] To "write in Maryse

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[361] Sahakian, "Le théâtre de Maryse Condé, 110.
[362] Condé, *In the Time of the Revolution*, 215.
[363] Clark and Daheny, "I Have Made Peace With My Island," 117.
[364] Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse* trans. J. Michael Dash (University Press of Virginia, 1989), 218
[365] Glissant, *Le discours antillais*, 720-1. My translation from French, "le rhythme assonancé" and "la consécution dans le son."
[366] "Du métissage en littérature," Conférences de la Bibliothèque nationale de France, 13:45. My translation of the original French, "Un écrivain doit écrire en lui-même, je dois écrire en Maryse Condé." Sahakian also cites Condé using the same formulation ("Écrire en Maryse Condé") at a lecture given at Carleton College in the U.S. (Sahakian, "Le

Condé" means, amongst other attributes, to disregard the strict divisions between languages that Condé was immersed in from birth. However, it also means continuing to rely most heavily on French, while Créole is rarer, and less personal; even as she encouraged her actors to use it, she herself did not. The public face of her work (its title) is in Créole, while its internal face (the character Zephyr who one encounters only when attending a performance or reading the text) operates only in French. By deploying both languages, albeit in different modes, Condé challenges the prescriptive nature of prevailing attitudes toward Créole and French, attitudes which treated them as inherently separate and privileged one over the other.

At the same roundtable event, Condé is also critical of the privileging of the Haitian Revolution over other struggles for liberation. In response to the focus on Haiti by Frankétienne and Jean Métellus, she says, "I think it's important to understand that in the end all countries have lessons to give because all countries have positive parts of their histories […] so this triumphalist discourse around Haiti frightens me a bit."[367] As evidenced by her focus on women mourning, Condé does not find equality or true freedom for everyone in any existing Revolutionary scenario, be it in Guadeloupe, Haiti, or France. While activating the Revolutionary scenario, and by deploying the mixed temporalities and physical proximity with history that performance affords, Condé still does not call for a revolution along the lines of past conflicts. Like Taylor, Condé attempts to warn us of the dark consequences that even the most seemingly positive scenario drags into the present. Zephyr says as much: "Yes, you've already witnessed scenes of despair and mourning. They're the same in the past and still today […] our history consists only of starting all over again."[368] Speaking

théâtre de Maryse Condé," 99, note 78). Clearly, this is a foundational principle for Condé, to write in the writer's idiom, regardless of political implications.

[367] "Du métissage en littérature," Conférences de la Bibliothèque nationale de France, 38:34. My translation from French: "Je crois qu'il faut comprendre que finalement tous les pays ont des leçons à donner parce que tous les pays ont quand mêmes les éléments positives dans leurs histoires […] donc ce discours triomphaliste sur Haïti m'effraye un peu."

[368] Condé, *In the Time of the Revolution*, trans. Kadish and Piriou, 212.

as herself, once again at the roundtable, Condé said, "I am from a completely isolated and unfortunate country. But I think this is a stroke of good luck, actually […] To not be in a state of, of, wonder before the land that bore me, to not be prideful toward the rest of the world and toward the rest of the Caribbean."[369] Not being in a state of wonder enables Condé to deconstruct founding myths and make her own alternative history, in her novels and on her stage.

[369] "Du métissage en littérature," Conférences de la Bibliothèque nationale de France, 20:15. My translation from French, "Je suis d'un pays absolument perdu et malheureux. Mais je crois que c'est une chance justement— […] Mais je crois que c'est une chance, justement. N'étant pas dans un état de, de, d'éblouissements vis-à-vis de la terre qui m'a portée, n'étant pas dans une situation d'orgueil vis-à-vis du reste du monde et vis-à-vis du reste des Caraïbes."

Coda:

Contesting the Revolutionary Scenario

The marathon route for the Paris 2024 Olympics, from Paris to Versailles and back again, claims it will have runners "following in the footsteps of a historic march," the Women's March on Versailles.[370] By transforming Olympic athletes into belated participants of this momentous march (only straggling 235 years behind the leaders of the group), the Paris Olympics Committee is reactivating this historical moment to advertise their edition of the Games and to contribute to the ongoing nation-building project that is the mythologizing of the French Revolution. In other advertising materials for the Paris 2024 games, we can see this history further reified and instrumentalized. For instance, the controversial mascots of the Paris 2024 Olympics, the "Phryges," are anthropomorphised Phrygian caps, symbols of the French Revolution worn by the sans-culottes.[371] The English version of the Paris Olympics website reads, "After featuring on certain flags in Latin America before becoming widely popularised by French Revolutionaries, the Phrygian cap has now become a familiar symbol in France."[372] Glossing over Latin American liberation struggles—and omitting completely that of Haiti, whose present-day flag also features the Phrygian cap—the Paris Olympics Committee lays claim to a revolutionary heritage in service of their publicity campaign for a corporate sporting event. The historical resurrection, mourning, and revision performed by Przybyszewska, Mnouchkine and the Soleil, and Condé, is an essential undertaking in a contemporary moment still beholden to this curated version of Revolutionary history.

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370 "Olympic Marathon Route," Paris 2024, accessed 29 March 2024, https://www.paris2024.org/en/olympic-marathon-route/.
371 Victor Mather, "Liberté, Égalité, Millinery?" *New York Times*, 14 November 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/14/sports/olympics/paris-olympics-mascot-phryge.html.
372 "The Mascots," The Brand, Paris 2024, accessed 25 March 2024, https://www.paris2024.org/en/mascots/.

Each of the women considered in this research performs rich historiographical and critical work through her theatre. The alternate Revolutionary scenarios proposed by Przybyszewska, Mnouchkine, and Condé take as a basis the same historical events, then grow with it along starkly different lines, bending it toward their own ends, to answer their personal questions and raise their unique concerns. In this way, they modify the DNA of the scenario, creating new histories from familiar elements. All three of them share a common interest in the very act of moulding history through drama. In all three productions explored here, the Revolutionary scenario is subverted and modulated—versioned like variations on a theme. Putting the plays and performances together, we can see them as serialized episodes building on and around one another as they contribute to the larger project of resurrecting and reactivating the radical past. The conventions of drama—its creative freedom as well as its political implications—and performance—its multi-layered temporalities and physical immediacy—afforded them the space to theorize their own unique and radical interpretations of the past and resurrect the figures they wanted to emulate and interrogate. As Davis (quoted in the introduction) posits, without the burden imposed on scholars to present dry historical "fact" without emotion, theatre artists forge their strongest and most compelling critiques of the past by activating affective responses in their audiences.[373]

My readings demonstrate that, as predicted by Taylor, the scenario encodes not only the positive, that which we want to bring into the future with us, but also the negative, that which would be best left behind but which is nonetheless carried forward. All three theatre makers explored here encountered this negative side of the scenario, though with varying degrees of self-awareness. For Przybyszewska, a disdain for the "common people" in favour of an idealised vision of a single heroic man belies a classism that has no place in true collective movements. Mnouchkine and the Soleil perform racist tropes in such a way as to Other colonial subjects who were suppressed in their own

[373] For the full quotation, see introduction or Davis, "Performative Time," 156.

struggles for liberation from France, even as French people in the Metropole gained more civil rights under the First Republic. For Condé, the positive gains made through revolutionary struggles are a secondary subject, overshadowed by her critique of the inequitable violence that accompanies such battles.

What is striking in this analysis is how each of the women's viewpoints were at the vanguard of the historiographical approaches that were in vogue during the times they were writing. For Przybyszewska, this was the Marxist reconsideration of Robespierre; for Mnouchkine and the Soleil, collectivist histories from below left their mark on the production; and for Condé, the post-colonial emphasis on the Revolution as it occurred outside the Metropole. Historical drama, then, can be seen as a testing ground for new developments in historiography, a space for trial and interrogation, before those new trends are fully accepted in mainstream scholarship. Performance clearly is an effective asset that can be used to assert a unique viewpoint and shape our collective conception of the past, even and especially for those traditionally left out of debates on historical interpretation.

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