

THREE DIFFERENT JOCASTAS BY RACINE, COCTEAU, AND CIXOUS

by

KYUNG MEE JOO

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Major Professor: Julia Listengarten

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## ABSTRACT

This study is about three French plays in which Jocasta, the mother and wife of Oedipus, is shared as a main character: *La Thébaïde* (*The Theban Brothers*) by Jean Racine, *La Machine Infernale* (*The Infernal Machine*) by Jean Cocteau, and *Le Nom d'Oedipe* (*The Name of Oedipus*) by Hélène Cixous. Jocasta has always been overshadowed by the tragic destiny of Oedipus since the onset of Sophocles' works.

Although these three plays commonly focus on describing the character of Jocasta, there are some remarkable differences among them in terms of theme, style, and stage directions. In *The Theban Brothers*, Racine's 17<sup>th</sup> century play, Jocasta is described as a deathlike mother, while Cocteau's Jocasta, in *The Infernal Machine*, is portrayed as an "extravagant, liberal, and hilarious" lady. In *The Name of Oedipus*, Cixous portrays Jocasta as a woman possessing hermaphroditic characteristics, ushering in a new era of resistance to the age-old paternal hierarchy.

As for style, Racine's neoclassical play shows a strict respect for the three unities of time, space, and action. Cocteau's avant-garde play neglects all these rules, while Cixous goes even further by destroying the order of languages, as illustrated by her "feminine writing." Freed from Western orthodoxy, Cixous wants to contribute to the creation of cosmic unity. Her deconstructionist play intends to regenerate the world by establishing a new order and new point of view towards universality. The stage directions of these plays are also an important key to better understanding theatrical evolution. It is through the stage directions, indicated both implicitly and explicitly in these three plays,

that enables us to appreciate the theatrical transformation in terms of visualization as well as metaphysics.

In sum, the transformation of theme, style, and stage devices in portraying their own Jocasas demonstrates that while these three plays are deconstructional to one another, each denying the existing value and orders of their respective time periods, they are also constructional in that they all attempt to open a new horizon of theatre.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Following the Oedipus-based trilogy of Aeschylus - *Laius*, *Oedipus*, and *Seven Against Thebes*, - Sophocles also wrote three Theban plays, *Antigone*, *Oedipus the King*, and *Oedipus at Colonus*, in 4 BC. Since then, the myth of Oedipus has been retold in numerous versions throughout the world. The theme of Oedipus, including the notion of the Oedipus complex introduced by Sigmund Freud in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has become an archetypal motif in literature and theatre as well as in film and other audio-visual arts across the world.

This study concerns three different French plays which revive this eternal theme of Oedipus: Jean Racine's *The Theban Brothers* (*La Thébaine ou Les Frères ennemis*, 1663), Jean Cocteau's *The Infernal Machine* (*La Machine Infernale*, 1934), and Helene Cixous' *The Name of Oedipus* (*Le Nom d'Oedipe*, 1978). Although they shape the same subject of Oedipus and his mother and wife, Jocasta, these plays are largely different from one another in terms of themes, styles, and stage directions.

Racine, strongly influenced by Sophocles and Euripides, wrote several tragedies based on Greek mythology, such as *The Theban Brothers*, *Andromaque* (1667), *Iphigénie* (1674), and *Phèdre* (1677). Throughout his tragedies, *The Theban Brothers* may be considered his darkest drama in terms of theme and scenic atmosphere. In this play, Oedipus is already dead before the play starts and his absence emphasizes the unfortunate existence of Jocasta and the lamentable fate of her two sons equally destined to death by the oracle. The character of Jocasta is described as the darkest and most deathlike mother, persecuted by the oracle, a symbol of paternal hierarchy.



Cocteau, an avant-garde artist, famous for his omnifarious coverage of all art forms including poetry, music, film, and painting, authored *The Infernal Machine*, a piece considered his most compound work of art. As seen in *Testament of Orpheus* (1960), one of his most successful films, this play demonstrates Cocteau's interdisciplinary imagination and creativity. This surrealist play shows a much more liberal and independent Jocasta than the persecuted Jocasta in the tragedy of Racine. The character of Jocasta is shown here as a revolutionary, scandalous, and decadent woman. The heroine is liberal enough not to care about the guiltiness caused by her relationship with Oedipus.

Cixous wrote *The Name of Oedipus* in 1978. Known for her "feminine writing," Cixous introduces a totally new portrait of Jocasta that pushes the boundary of masculinity and femininity even further. Susan Sellers writes that for Cixous "sex difference is important in the role it plays in determining gender behavior, with its capacity to uphold and challenge the existing order," as opposed to solely an "anatomical difference" (Reader, xxviii). Cixous' deconstructionist writing destroys the existing order, the taboo constructed by the paternal hierarchy since *King Oedipus* by Sophocles. In her text, the duel between the dominant and the dominated is rather a tool to "understand the world" and to construct a new order over a dichotomy of the two opposite values of the terms, "masculine" and "feminine." She wants to write through her body and this "body-that-writes is retrieving woman from age-old constructs" while searching for the perturbation of the order of languages (Wilcox 44).

Even though they share the same myth of Oedipus, and focus not on Oedipus but on Jocasta, a scarcely illuminated character in literature or theatre, these plays

demonstrate totally different versions of Jocastas. However, they still share a commonality: an emphasis on the feministic aspect of Jocasta. More importantly, it is that through the differing viewpoints and different approaches in style and staging, a theatrical evolution is explicitly noticed.

This study will discuss, in deeper detail, how and through which viewpoints these three plays portray each respective “Jocasta,” and how various distinct approaches to style are employed to reveal the intentions of the plays. Furthermore, this study will compare and analyze the difference in stage directions for each play exemplifying the theatrical evolution and progressive transformation of theme and style.

## CHAPTER TWO: THEME – FROM PATRIARCHAL PREDOMINATION TO TRIUMPH OF THE FEMININE BODY

### 1. Jocasta by Racine: Dark-imaged mother suffering from her fatal pain

In the seventeenth century, Jean Racine introduced the theme of Oedipus in his first play *The Theban Brothers*, which was performed in 1663 by Molière's company. Under the reign of Louis XIV, the playwright wanted to enhance the Sun King's domination by depicting him in luminous images. To support the sovereignty, Racine introduced dark images of motherhood in contrast with luminous patriarchal power. Consequently, the maternal images appear as a dark sinner condemned to death. The contrast of these two images is key to the tragedy's drama and dynamism. For this reason, Racine, influenced by Sophocles' "tragic spirit" (Stone 11), is said to be a "more dramatic" technician than his preceding playwright.

Known in the U.S. by its English title, *The Theban Brothers*, *La Thébaïde* was originally inspired by Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes*, in which Oedipus' two sons, Eteocles and Polynices, kill each other while warring over the throne. The play begins with Jocasta's recognizing that her two sons are poised to fight against each other.

"Olympias, they have set out? Mortal pain!  
What sobs my moment's sleep is going to cost me!  
For six months, tears have kept my eyes awake,  
Must slumber close them at his perilous hour?  
Ah, would that death might close them evermore  
And stop my witnessing the darkest crimes!  
But are they yet at grips?"(1.1)

In this dialogue, Racine focuses on the dark, feminine characters in his plays. Even Sophocles' Antigone does not possess such an important portion of the play as Jocasta of Racine. (His original French title, *La Thébaine*, means *The Theban Woman*, not *The Theban Brothers*.) This original feminine title suggests that the play will be propelled by Jocasta, not by the Theban brothers.

The presence of Jocasta is frequent and remarkable; she becomes the protagonist. Indeed in this tragedy, Jocasta dominates the entire play with outstanding monologues and frequent appearances, though she is not leading the plot itself. It is Jocasta who arranges her sons to meet in her palace, ultimately manipulating their killing each other. This mother thus can be considered the catalyst of her two sons' death.

“Then HURRY, savages, to tear by breast;  
Begin your monstrous plan by MURDERING me.  
Do not consider me to be your mother,  
Consider I am mother of your brother.  
If you are questing for your brother's BLOOD,  
Quest for its source in my unhappy WOMB;  
I am the common enemy of both,  
Since the enemy of each took life from me.  
This enemy without me would not breathe!” (4.3)

Here, the image of “womb” corresponds with the interior of the palace. Even if the paternal domination is respected by this new adaptation of Sophocles' play, Racine contrasts it with the darkness of Jocasta, a mother despaired by the tumultuousness of Oedipus' two sons. Since Oedipus is dead even before the beginning of the play, a “father” is undoubtedly absent. It is Jocasta, “mother” of these two “monsters” and wife of Oedipus, who takes full responsibility for the sin that she commits involuntarily. Left alone after the death of Oedipus, she is suffering between the hope and despair caused by

their two sons, who are drunken in their frenzy of fratricide. In the end, she commits suicide. In *The Theban Brothers*, the playwright accentuates Jocasta's pain and suicide, which is "a direct threat against the oppressor" (Stone 31). This revolt against the oppression of gods is emphasized as a main axis for the plot.

"Full well thou knowest, since I cringed undone,  
When I found myself wife of my own son,  
How the mildest TORMENT, that in my heart swell,  
Equal all evils that are borne in HELL." (3.2)

As Roland Barthes indicated, the "disturbance, defection, and disorder" (Barthes 15), caused by Jocasta's pain and suicide, are essentially observed in Racine's plays. His plays can be viewed as less metaphysic and more corporal than those of Sophocles, in which the body of a hero is "given as an Apollonian object" which becomes "a statue, that is, a glorified, arranged past" (Barthes15). In *The Theban Brothers*, the body of the heroine is described as a substantial and perceptive subject in which the pain is live and constantly present. It is exceptional that the main issue of this seventeenth century play concerns the pain of a feminine body and not that of an Apollonian hero. Up to that time, it was rare that a female character had occasion to express her feelings and her pain with such depth and detail.

This implied feminist aspect in Racine's play makes its female characters more corporal and substantial to the text itself and, at this point, the play largely approaches modern drama. Nevertheless, the focus on the feminine character in Racine does not reach the ultimate point of feminism. Even if Racine's play shows a strong feminist aspect, this femininity is associated with darkness and pain rather than power and glory.

Similar to the Greek tragedies, Racine's tragedy is still immersed in the tendency toward patriarchal domination, reflected by an oracle. The maternal darkness creates a strong "Coincidence of Opposites" with its illustrious counterpart of paternal and divine force. The lamentation of Jocasta explicitly demonstrates this contrast while she is suffering from her darkness against the powerful light of the sun.

"O thou, Sun, thou, who giv'st the world its light,  
Why hast thou not left it in deepest night!" (1, 1)

Racine focuses on "maternal" sin, which reinforces the tragic aspect of the tragedy. The emphasis on Jocasta's darkness in this play is paradoxically used to enhance paternal and divine glory. In this way, Racine might join the Apollonian plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles, in which the apotheosis of paternal order reigns.

"And must, O gods, an unintended crime  
Draw down on us your anger for all time?  
Did I know, alas! the son I wed?  
Yourselves, you led him to my very bed.  
Your spite, it was, that brought me to the abyss;  
The vaunted justice of the gods is this!  
They lead our footsteps to the edge of crimes  
They make us perpetrate, unpardoned paradigms!" (3.2)

The cruelty of the gods is demonstrated in the illustriousness which contrasts with the darkness of a mother who is in pain. Here Jocasta is completely passive: specifically as she realizes that there is no way to escape from her destiny or to change her situation. All she can do is complain to the gods in profound despair. Here the image of mother juxtaposes with that of death and tombs.

It is mother herself who solicits to commit the fratricide at the end. Immersed in despair, Jocasta encourages her sons to kill each other. Dominated by the oracle and the patriarchal order, the characters fulfill their miserable destiny after their mother offers an example for them.

“Go, run, surpass your father’s crimes by far;  
Show, as you kill, how brotherly you are:  
The greatest guilt has given you your breath,  
An equal crime must in its turn bring death.  
No more do I condemn your furious passion;  
No more for my blood have I sweet compassion;  
Your conduct teaches me no more to sigh;  
And I go, knaves, to teach you how to die.” (4.3)

In sum, the feminism in Racine can be defined as somewhat illusive. The focus on Jocasta functions to accentuate the miserable destiny of Laius’ family while respecting the paternal hierarchy. Far from being a fecund and protectoral mother, Racine’s protagonist is strongly connected to the image of death and darkness. The limit of Jocasta, protagonist of this play, can be found in its negative femininity which is related to pessimism and passivity.

Here, Racine’s Jocasta represents “the oppressed innocence.” The notion emphasized by Jansenism such as “original sin, human depravity, the necessity of divine grace, and predestination” can be found in this play of Racine who is strongly influenced by the Jansenist theology (Bruneau 87). The relationship between the humanity and the universe is adopted as the archetypal theme through which the diversification of the theme takes place. The divinity at times presents itself cruel and sometimes protective of the man in the darkness who is torn between one’s passion or worldly desires and one’s virtue. The paternal hegemony, however, is contrasted with the negation of the mother who is origin of the sin.

The thematic associations are fixed by the overall network of poetic images. The “great mythic (and theatrical) combat” between Darkness and Light, in the sense of Roland Barthes (26), will be realized by the combat of the imagery which is at the same

time concrete and profound and which solidifies in the internal structure and also confirms the external evolution of the themes. There is the clear triumph of the paternal strategy in the plays by Racine, based on “the patriarchal monotheism coded with feminine and maternal aspects” (Bruno 138).

In sum, the imaginary world of Racine, as well as his thematic associations, is built upon *coincidentia oppositorum*. This notion of *coincidentia oppisitorum*, *unity of opposites*, first suggested by Heraclitus, a pre-Socratic philosopher, profoundly impacts the spirit of 17<sup>th</sup> century. According to this notion, every element is connected to its opposite. Then, it is not strange to observe “a constant war of opposites” in the plays of Racine who represents the neo-classical French Theatre. It will be interesting to observe how Cocteau and Cixous neglect this classical notion supported by Western Exigency for a long time and even to analyze how they deconstruct it in order to construct new values of humanities through their works.



## 2. Cocteau's Jocasta: A liberal and sensitive woman and healing mother

Just as in Racine's *The Theban Brothers*, Jean Cocteau also focuses on the role of Jocasta in his avant-garde play, *The Infernal Machines*. Here is found a huge evolution in terms of feminism. In contrast with Racine's Jocasta persecuted by paternal hierarchy, Cocteau offers a Jocasta who is much more liberal, hilarious, and even "largely comic" (Oxenhandler 143). Furthermore, Cocteau's Jocasta ignores the oracle and dominates male characters using her own senses and healing power.

From the beginning of the play, the appearance of the queen, accompanied with the great prophet, is contrasted with that of her dead husband, who is portrayed as a powerless and ridiculous ghost. As Oxenhandler mentions, in Cocteau's surrealist world, Jocasta seems to be "the type of extravagant woman to be found in the casinos of Monte Carlo or in the most expensive loge at the Opera in Paris or Milan"(144). This "extravagant woman" even takes a superior place over Tiresias, who is representative of the oracle. Moreover, the great prophet venerated in Sophocles's tragedy is here described as an old and almost "blind" man, no longer powerful and authoritative. She even calls him "Zizi," an inappropriate name for a great prophet, without realizing that it would provoke blaspheme from a masculine dominated society.

"What is the use of your third eye? Tell me that. Did you find the Sphinx? Did you pacify the people?"(1)

"I can feel things, better than any of you. I feel them here."

*She lays her hand on her stomach. (1)*

The feeling of Jocasta largely overwhelms the power of the prophet. As is seen in this conversation, the “stomach” of a woman has more significance than does a high priest’s “third eye.” Thus, the feminine body is described as superior to the high spirit of the prophet, which is representative of the gods’ message. The feminine body is no longer described as a “dark source of life,” as seen in Racine. Here it is presented as a powerful device which produces prediction better than a prophet can. Through a huge mockery vis-à-vis the great prophet, Jocasta commits a serious blaspheme against the oracle and the gods.

“I don’t trust your SILLY method. Exploring CHICKENS’ insides –ugh!-RIDICULOUS! I know more than all of you, because I sense things. I can sense that Laius is suffering and wants to speak to us.” (1)

Jocasta believes more her own senses than the oracle’s, which seems even “ridiculous” for her. There is a tremendous difference between Jocastas, rendered by Racine and Cocteau’, respectively. Compared with the first, who mortally suffers from the sin and feels guilty for it, the latter claims she is innocent. Furthermore, Jocasta is now seeking her own identity and power. Cocteau’s protagonist has no more of the dark femininity dominated by paternal hierarchy and she holds even greater power than that of the high priest.

“I’m going to talk to this guard MYSELF. This is MY wish, and I’m your QUEEN.” (1)

The queen is very liberal and wants to respect her own desires and to pursue her personal happiness according to her arbitrary will. Seeing the young soldier who reports the apparition of Laius, she is rather amazed by the physicality of the young man compared with her husband's situation. The fact that the soldier is "exactly the same age" as her son whom she abandoned a long ago predicts that Jocasta will fall in love with Oedipus in Act II.

"The same age. He'd be exactly the same age. How good-looking he is! Come a little nearer. What muscles, Zizi, look! And what darling knees! Fine knees are a sign of breeding. He would be very much like this. Isn't he handsome, Zizi? Look at this bicep – like iron." (1)

In this description, a young soldier's superb "muscles" and "bicep-like iron" make an interesting contrast with the weakness of Laius' ghost. When this ghost calls her, she cannot hear his voice since she is too interested in the young soldier who is live and visible. This liberal queen is completely excited by the body of the young soldier and deeply attracted to him.

"Heaven knows what he's thinking, poor boy... he's blushing. How adorable he is! And nineteen years old." (1)

Her admiration for the young soldier's body emphasizes, once again, the weakness and ineffectiveness of the old prophet and the ghost of the dead king. Jocasta gives her confidence to this young and "good-looking" soldier rather than to the "quite blind... and old" prophet.

"You see, Zizi, with all your chickens and your stars, how much do you know? Listen to this child!" (1)

For Jocasta, the young soldier who saw the ghost of Laius seems more confident than the oracle. Here, the visible apparition is considered more powerful than the invisible beliefs. Cocteau implies that the visible apparition and the senses are superior to the “logic” of the grand prophet. In this play, feminine sensibility triumphs over paternal authority.

“You’re an unbearable cynic. Always breaking the mood and shattering MIRACLE with your LOGIC. Let me question this boy on my own. You can lecture me later.” (1)

Here the “miracle” takes an opposite side of the “logic.” In Cocteau, the miracle belongs to feminine sensibility rather than “logic,” which represents the patriarchal hierarchy. At this point, Jocasta is considered a real rebel who stands for her own senses against the order of gods and society. Not only does she commit such a sacrilege vis-à-vis the grand prophet, but she also gains authority from the high priest. Furthermore, Tiresias passively gives advice to the officer to obey the queen: “You’d better not argue when the Queen wants her way.”

The passage in which Jocasta asks the “captain” to let his soldier stay alone with her explicitly shows she is decadent and disobedient against the mores of society established by the paternal hierarchy: “That’s a change. It’s usually the men who are hurt, not the officers.” According to Jocasta, Tiresias with his chickens and oracles cannot clearly foresee anything, only wasting their time.

“And why not, when King Laius, the dead King Laius, has himself spoken in front of these men? He didn’t speak to you, Zizi, nor to Creon.

He didn't show himself in the temple, He showed himself on this patrol path, to these men... to this boy of nineteen, who is so good- looking and reminds me of –" (1)

Cocteau insinuates that the body of Jocasta is much more perceptible than all the signs of masculine society. Here again the feminine sensibility surpasses male logic. Through the physical pain in her shoulder, she predicts "terrifying disasters" and even her own death.

"Yes, it's true, I am excited. And no wonder! The tensions, the phantom, the music, the smell of decay... and there's a storm coming up; I can feel it, my shoulder is aching. Zizi, I'm suffocating!" (1)

Cocteau introduces a strong sensuality in Jocasta who is standing in front of the young soldier. In Act 1, Jocasta is still young enough to be desired by the younger soldiers. When interrogating the soldier, she feels a strong sensuality touching the young body. It is through this sensual feeling that the queen foresees her fatal contact with Oedipus in 17 years, according to Cocteau.

"If I had a son he would be handsome, he'd be brave, he'd solve the riddle, kill the Sphinx, and return as a conqueror." (1)

In contrast to Racine's Jocasta who laments the incest predicted by the oracle, Cocteau's Jocasta wishes that this taboo, the marriage of a son and a mother, would be realized.

"All the little boys say, "I want to be grown up so that I can marry my mother," It isn't so foolish, Tiresia. Is there a liaison sweeter, more cruel, and yet more proud, than that of a son and a young mother? When I touched that soldier a moment ago, who knows what he thought, poor boy; as for me, I

almost swooned. He would be nineteen, now, Zizi, the same age. Do you think Laius appeared to him because of the resemblance?" (1)

To justify the marriage of Jocasta and Oedipus in advance, Cocteau evokes the Oedipus complex by Freud. This passage openly demonstrates a fundamental desire in which a young son desires to kill his father to marry his mother. Jocasta "naturally" desires the union of a son and a mother without feeling any guilt.

Even if she is mourning the death of Laius, Cocteau's Jocasta doesn't seem to suffer as much as Racine's character. She feels no physical pain in response to his death, although she is so sensitive that she can feel things with her stomach. As the ghost of Laius is extremely impuissant and not able to directly communicate with her, the presence of her dead husband is unable to impact Jocasta's mind. Her interest is rather on the "music" heard from the city which makes her nervous. After interrogating the soldier, who reported seeing the ghost of Laius, this queen wants to see "the night life" of the city and to savor the pleasure of life like others.

"The music makes me ill. Zizi, why don't we go back through the upper town, along the back streets? We can see the night life."

"My dove, you're not serious?" (1)

In Cocteau's version, Jocasta is in mourning, wearing her "veils," but not taking her husband's death seriously. She blames Tiresias, whose character is only "infuriating" her and impeding her own right to enjoy life like others: "Other people can laugh and dance and enjoy themselves. But not the Queen."

Even if Cocteau wished to make this play a "boulevard farce" (Oxenhandler 143), he ended up creating a tragedy in the classical manner of Sophocles. At the end of the

play, the feminine sensitivity turns into a maternal power. This maternal power is demonstrated as a healing and protectoral power in Cocteau. When she finds the scar on the feet of Oedipus, she “utters a cry of horror,” but quickly overcomes her panic by “explaining her terror with a lie” (140). This “lie” functions as camouflage to prevent the eventual direct conflict with Oedipus, while altering her own story.

“My – linen maid. When she and I were eighteen, we were both expecting a child. She worshiped her husband and wanted to bear him a son, But the oracles foretold so terrifying a future for the child that, after giving birth to a boy, she hadn’t the courage to let it live.” (3)

This lie could be considered a disloyal action. However, Cocteau might have wanted to introduce this deceitful action to indicate that others might react like her linen maid and like her and her husband Laius, in the face of such a horrible oracle. Although she realizes “nothing can save them” (141), she tries to cover it with an incredible calmness and affection. After recognizing all the situations, Jocasta tries to console herself, asking Oedipus for a goodbye kiss before going to die. The kiss is a farewell for her lover and her son that she has lost a very long time.

Jocasta: “Oedipus, please kiss me.”  
Oedipus: “Yes, my love.”  
Jocasta: *Tenderly* “You’re a child.”  
Oedipus: “I’m not a child.” (3)

Jocasta hides her bewilderment in front of Oedipus without demonstrating any regret toward the gods, while she “sits beside him, stroking his head with one hand and with the other rocking the tiny muslin cradle.”(141). She quickly understands and accepts the solution provided by the oracle, the suicide. This voluntary death could be differently

interpreted from the suicide of Racine's Jocasta on the grounds that Cocteau's Jocasta commits suicide before Oedipus hurts himself, while in Racine, Jocasta finishes her days after the death of Oedipus. In Cocteau, Jocasta disappears without leaving any sign of her suicide in order to come back as a phantom. Here, Jocasta's suicide is estimated to be the action of a protector mother against the severe gods who would torture Oedipus.

Oedipus: "Do not touch me, wife!

Jocasta: Your wife is dead, Oedipus... hanged. I am your mother. I have come to help you. How would you ever get down these steps alone, my poor child?

Oedipus: My mother!

Jocasta: Yes, my child. Things that seem monstrous to men are not important in my world. If you only knew how trivial they are." (4)

In contrast to Jocasta in Racine, who incites her sons to commit the fratricide, the phantom of Jocasta in Cocteau tries to console her lover-son and take him far away to where she lives, a utopian place where there exists nothing but "pure hearts." The images of a "fountain," where Jocasta washes the body of wounded Oedipus, and the "stairs," through which Jocasta wants to take him to the bottom of the world, remind us of images of the "womb." In this case, the womb represents the center of a peaceful place, utopia. The maternal source should be considered, at the same time, a primitive and protective energy which dominates Cocteau's play. Cocteau's feminism might be confirmed with this dominant woman-mother's image which triumphs over the presence of Creon relatively neglected throughout the play. Jocast's comment about Antigone adds force to Cocteau's feminist aspect, suggesting the young girl is ready to "lead" and "guide" her father and providing the image of a protective mother.



“Antigone is proud: she wants to be your guide. Let her think she is. Take her with you. I’ll look after you both.”  
“Let us leave. Take hold of my dress. Don’t be afraid.  
We have the platform to cross first...” (4)

Here, the image of mother regains the title of protector of her children, allowing them to “pass safely through the city,” to reach where “glory” gives them “shelter.” As Tiresias says, they are “outside” of Creon’s “authority.” Jocasta guides them, as a protector, “to the people, to poets, to pure hearts” to whom they belong. There is no longer nervousness caused by her “fatal scarf” which menaces her from the beginning of the play. She has already paid for it with her life. Jocasta now offers her dress to her children in order to guide them to the world of peace and purity. In this finale, which is “infinitely touching and real” (Oxenhandler 143), the power of the maternity of mother largely triumphs over the paternal hierarchy, confirming the feminism in Cocteau’s avant-garde play. The femininity and maternity fully triumph over the paternal hierarchy supported by the authentic value of *coincidentia oppositorum*, unity of opposites, which dominated Western Exigency since the Ancient Greek period, as previously mentioned.

### 3. A bisexual and deconstructionist Jocasta by Cixous

In *The Name of Oedipus* written by Cixous, whose name is “most often associated with that of feminine writing” (Susan, Reader xxix), denegation of paternal power and strong feminism reign throughout entire play. Compared with the two plays mentioned above, Jocasta dominates more actively “a play based on a Greek tragedy revolving around a man” (Freeman 2). The father’s absence takes importance in the play, as

Christiane Olivier remarks in her *Jocasta's Children*. Nevertheless, the notion of the father is commented on several times and is shown as a fragment of childhood memory in an impuissant “silence” and a dark and “distant” feature. If the father is shown as a ghost in Cocteau’s *The Infernal Machine*, here the father appears from memory as a shimmer of unconsciousness.

J. “There is a silence in my story./ That I can’t forget anymore./ This last silence of my father./ The night fell down./ I crossed the garden of childhood./ An agony stopped me./ I saw there my father staggering./ It was him, from far./ I guessed./ I knew that I saw him worst./ A silence to spread./ He tensed up./ I heard him to grasp to breath./ The body was bended forward, in a immobile wait./ It was a young and severe man, who watched his death./ I was stood up AT THE CORNER OF CHILDHOOD, before a tree, in a whole silence./ This tree looks like him, slender and skinny, all in momentum, with stretched hands towards the sky which turned down, went down./ The agony took my root./ I did not see his new face. I cannot tell that. / This face, suddenly, this face.”(17)

Impuissant as the father is in Cocteau’s play, Cixous’ image of the father is connected more profoundly with darkness and death than with light and glory. Curiously, it is not Laius that Jocasta mentioned. It is her own father, a father who is struggling in her deep memory. This “young and severe man, who watches his death” can be considered any father or human being. The “face” of the father in “agony” even seems disfigured. Here, the “sky” represents falling down, a destructive image, and it appears weak and not helpful for the father’s needs. Unlike Racine’s tragedy, there is no glorious and luminous image of sky and father in Cixous’ text. Abandoned without being supported by the sovereignty of gods, the father loses his power and significance in a disastrous situation. The personal experience of Cixous’ childhood is also imprinted here.

“Without screaming, without crying his name,/ Without expecting,  
without opening my lips, I don’t see him anymore/ I went out, I was  
outside, I just lost his life.”(18)

Even if the father is already “lost,” the image of a dying father appears over and over again in memory. In *The Name of Oedipus*, “the father is present in the mother and also in the son,” as Freeman remarks, but not in the same way of Racine’s *The Theban Brothers*. While Racine’s tragedy is dominated by the paternal exigency, Cixous’ Jocasta obtains a dominant power as well just as Cocteau’s Jocasta does. Furthermore, this Jocasta becomes more puissant in order to fundamentally deny the masculine power and to be free from it, although she has “fear” for it.

A name coming from the father is denied on purpose of the denegation of the paternal hierarchy, while the feminine senses become more profound and powerful. The denegation of the father hierarchy is expressed by a refusal of names. In *The Name of Oedipus*, Cixous constantly tries to “break the power of name” (Freeman 2) in denying the name of Oedipus, the name of “origin”:

“I wanted to free him from names/All the names which masquerade as  
gods, /Objects of worship, through deception and fear /Command  
obedience. Pass as pure. /Mother, father, truth, living, killing, fault, debt,  
wife, truth /Husband, King, origin, which man can say which he is?  
/ Name rules. /I wanted to release him” (p.56)

Contrary to Racine’s Jocasta who accepts the oracle in the name of the father without any resistance except doing her lamentations, and compared with Cocteau’s Jocasta who neglects the oracle itself even if she finally accepts it with bitterness,

Cixous' Jocasta wants to "release" Oedipus, to "free" him from "names," from "oracles." Instead of describing the sin of a woman and her miserable situation, Cixous tries to explore Jocasta herself more profoundly, far even than Cocteau does. As she calls "write yourself" or "write through body" in terms of "feminine writing", she wants to explore Jocasta herself in considering her a human being without any prejudgement caused by the difference of sex, culture and languages:

"(...) a series of future feminist writings that will (...)surpass the limits of the narrowly ideological work of agonistic stamp characterizing much of the woman's liberation- writings that will appeal to genres of feminism unaware of the conceptual patterns dictating empirical practice." (Conley 52)

Her attempt to release the characters from the agonies evoked by the name goes far beyond the simple fighting against the paternal hierarchy. She introduces an unknown fear which replaces the vacancy caused by loss of the paternal hierarchy.

"The fear came again./ It was a new fear / I heard the city, to cry. The world "fear."/To resound. Fear, fear, fear. To be melted with names, calls of tenderness and adoration, and I heard his gentle and audacious voice, the tireless call of his passion, the word fear, fear, (...) A fear penetrated me. It was an unknown fear." (Conley 20)

It is a different kind of fear than what Racine's Jocasta suffers. It is not a fear of the oracle and its order established by the paternal exigency. This new fear comes rather from the "absence of father." This absence provokes an immense fear similar to that which an absence of god would evoke in a believer. And this absence needs to be replaced by the realm of a new value. Through her all strength, Jocasta wants to free

Oedipus from “names” although she is constantly menaced by the fear dominating the play:

“Jocasta’s fear is not the fear of discovery, either being discovered or discovering her own fault, it is fear without guilt, without shame, for she already knows what Oedipus is yet to learn, and it has no significance for her except that it is significance for him will destroy their couple. She is afraid that the law of the father will take Oedipus over once they part-as long as they are one body, she in him and he in her, they will be safe.”(Freeman 242)

Through “the fear without guilt, without shame,” Jocasta demonstrates her love for Oedipus. The mother who expressed her love to her husband-son is already seen in Cocteau’s Jocasta. Nonetheless, here, the declaration of love is more directly and more strongly done “in all the senses, in all time”: “Oedipus!/I love you, Oedipus!/ Oedipus! Oedipus!”

Like Jocasta of Racine, Jocasta of Cixous finds herself in deep agony. Still, she is, at the same time, free, even freer than that of Cocteau, from paternal exigency. This wife-mother is strong enough to deconstruct the old value and construct new value while she is talking about her body, desire and hope throughout her “fear.”

In fact, Cixous explicitly enhances the triumph of maternal power, through her “feminine writing.” Here the image of mother is related to that of the “sea,” “immense water,” feminine, and primitive source, which can demolish the “wall” constructed by the “name” of the father, the logos.

O: (...) To swim in your flesh, which is your sea Your spaces roll me. Say to me the sea”

J: "I say to you the sea, the sea, the sea As soon as you pronounce this word, I AM ON YOU, DOUBLE YOU, IN YOU, I am unfurled in you me entirely But it is in me that you, the sea completely is rocked.

J: Unwind my spaces, one after another, completely in you, me the sea, my bare streams, my languages, my fingers, my tears my hands on you."(68)

Jocasta's song might be considered "the most forbidden of bodies, that of the mother desirous of the son; she sings of incest, unashamed of lying with the child to whom she gave birth" (Freeman 242). In this opera-play, we recognize the bisexuality about which Cixous explores in her essay, "The Laugh of the Medusa."

J: " I smell a sleep to earn. Bath me.  
A huge cordiality to take me in the arms.  
Rock me. It is strange.  
It is a being. It is not a man  
It is not a woman  
However I smell the arms to carry, my lips on the skin,  
My mouth on a huge breast,  
Ah! it is you! it is you!  
It is it, it is definitely you? yes  
I am not deceived, it is it,  
This sleep, which delight.  
I smell a dream to try to find myself,  
(...)  
I am definitely, finally, I am definitely. "(80-81)

Here is evidence of the bisexuality in Cixous' world that Freeman mentions. In this case, Cixous wants Jocasta to be "truly bisexual not in the sense which does away with sexual difference thereby producing neutrality, but in the sense that male and female are both omnipresent, exchanging, intermingling, enriching each other" (242). Cixous' feminism arrives at its culmination when, "freed from the constraints of conventional

binary opposition, male and female are able to unite, divide, multiply in an almost endless expansion of possibilities.”(242)

In fact, in *The Name of Oedipus*, an intimate correspondence is found between a son and a mother approaching bisexuality. The image of the water and the sand melt into a unified body, one that opens itself to the immensity of the universe. The “flesh” representing the maternal source prevails beyond the logos, the world of father and gods. Through her strong hermaphroditic images, Cixous presents a grand overture of a new world and a new era of human beings.

J: “And you fall on my flesh  
As the night sun  
On the sun of day  
Our lips are frozen  
But our languages are burning  
It is you my night which erupts  
On me  
And it is definitely me this sea  
Silent who has just opened  
His flesh so that you pour out  
And we enter the one in other one,  
My mother,  
My child.  
My flesh is calm here.  
I am going to cease suffering.  
I have just forgotten everything.  
I do not know which to die.” (68)

The imagery of Cixous where pictures of sand, sea, fire, and air unite in happiness totally contrasts to that of Racine. Cixous’ Jocasta even takes an adventure more metaphysical and carnal than Cocteau’s Jocasta. Here, Cixous implies the bisexuality in a woman, as she already mentioned in her *Newly Born Woman*:

For historical reasons, at the present time it is woman who benefits from and opens up within this bisexuality beside itself, which does not annihilate differences but cheers them on, pursues them, adds more: in a certain way *woman is bisexual* – man having been trained to aim for glorious phallic monosexuality. (Sellers 41)

Cixous develops this reflection on “bisexuality” against “monosexuality” in a woman in her theatrical work, *The Name of Oedipus*. Through her feminine writing which permits Cixous to write “through the body”, the author announces the birth of a new myth in which we not only see the collapse of patriarchal hegemony, but also the establishment of a new world dominated by a pure and transcendental conscience, one that is freed from all the proceeding experiences of Western exigency. In sum, there is an explicit theatrical and interpretational evolution among the three Jocastas presented by Racine, Cocteau and Cixous in terms of the theme, from paternal hierarchy to maternal triumph, and to the bisexuality which largely covers the precedent male values.



## CHAPTER THREE: FROM NEO-CLASSICAL TRAGEDY TO AVANT-GARDE AND TO NEW THEATRE

### 1. A Racinian neoclassic play: Unities of Time, Place and Action

While the three plays, Racine's *The Theban Brothers*, Cocteau's *The Infernal Machine*, and Cixous' *The Name of Oedipus* explicitly demonstrate differences in terms of each theme, their styles vary largely from one to another. First, they belong to three different periods. Racine's play is a typical neoclassic tragedy while Cocteau's play is considered as a representative work for avant-garde period. Cixous's play is known as "feminine writing" or a new generation theatre. Also, they represent the period to which they belong. An analysis of the styles of each respective play could reveal how they reflect the historical, cultural, and social background of the time to which they belong.

Racine is considered one of the most important playwrights of 17<sup>th</sup> century France along with counterparts Corneille and Molière. All belonged to the period of Neoclassicism, a period of power and perfection. The French, under the Sun King, Louis XIV, strived to imitate the ancient Classical period in order to enhance their political power and cultural pride. Racine, among his other contemporary dramatists, is the most "faithful" to the neoclassical tradition:

"Of the three great dramatists of the century, he is the most faithful to the neoclassic tradition, though as a practicing playwright, he recognized the necessity of certain flexibility in the interpretation of the rules. He takes great care to show how the plays accord with historical fact, but Racine does not, like Corneille, consider historical accuracy important in

itself. Rather, he is concerned with a close adherence to what the general public accepts as history, the more important goal being verisimilitude.”(Carlson 106)

Racine faithfully follows his contemporary neoclassical tradition carefully adhering to historical fact and mythological background, but, at the same time managing his plays in a great “verisimilitude”--trying to make it look as real as possible for readers and audiences. Nevertheless, he “does not normally link this emphasis on verisimilitude, as do many neoclassic writers, with moral purpose,” because for him, “the chief rule in tragedy is ‘to please and move’ and all others are subordinate to that” :

“To achieve this pleasure, the action must be great and the actors heroic, the passions must be aroused, and everything in the drama must partake of a majestic sadness.”(Carlson 106)

The characters in Racine’s tragedy are strongly dramatized according to this “majestic sadness.” As in the case of Jocasta, the feminine characters suffer a dark and heavy sentiment of guilt contrasted by the luminous aspects of paternal power. Racine focuses on provoking the pain and pity in the mind of spectators in order to evoke a catharsis from them.

Racine respects the unities of time, place and action. At first, the setting of the play is explicitly marked as “a room in the royal palace” in Thebes and this precise place corresponds with the unity of the location. Compared to Corneille, “who presents a month’s worth of action in a single day,” the action of *The Theban Brothers* is intensive and “appropriate for a single day” (107). The simplicity of plot in this play is oriented to the climax when the characters kill themselves, fulfilling the prophecy of the oracle. This

“simplicity of plot is required by the unity of time” and the unity of time is also explicitly respected. In the case of *The Theban Brothers*, the play begins in the morning, with the lamentation of Jocasta as she is awoken from her sleep. She finishes at the end of day, with the death of her two sons.

The plot focuses on the action of the two brothers who want to kill each other. The two axes of the plot are the hope and despair of Jocasta. At the beginning of the play, Jocasta, in her despair, tries to find a solution to avoid her two sons of killing each other. Nevertheless, it is she who incites them to accomplish their ultimate action. When she realizes that all her efforts to reconcile her two sons are useless, she disappears to let them “learn how to die.” Her action is followed by that of her sons.

Respecting the unities of time, place and action, Racine logically links all scenes to one another, making a complete story and never failing to maintain the dynamism and profoundness of the play. Although his contemporary critics unfairly complained about his “simple and straightforward construction” (106) in his plot, Racine succeeds in achieving the perfection of the play through this very simplicity. For instance, in the course of the action, Racine contrives that the fatal meeting between the two enemy brothers should take place in the royal place, and not outside the city, as was the case in his source (Maskell 18):

“Just before the brothers meet there, Racine makes Eteocles say that the obstinate hatred’ of the warring brothers was in them even at birth. Jocaste rejoices that her sons are now reunited “in the same palace in which they are born.” (Maskell 19)

Here Racine ingeniously juxtaposes the image of the room with the image of a womb which they shared and a tomb where they again find themselves.

“If you are questing for your brother’s blood,  
Quest for its source in my unhappy womb:  
I am the common enemy of both,  
Since the enemy of each took life from me.” (4.3)

As Maskell mentions, the “unconscious irony and pathos” are derived from these lines of Jocasta. In fact, it is the stage space which precisely represents the double meaning of that place “which she believes is a place of peace and love, whilst the spectators, thanks to Eteocle’s revelations of the life-long hostility between the brothers, know that their place of birth is a place of anger and hatred” (19). In this tragedy, the place plays a great role in accomplishing the action, which is also significant in a double sense: to kill themselves and to complete the demands of the oracle.

In addition, Racine invents a “theatrical fiction,” a device frequently employed in his plays (Carlson 103), from this “neutral room belonging to no one character but available to all for private conversations. Since all the actions in the play happen in this same place, this place has various significances, especially with its exit which guides the characters outside of this room and even to their battle field.

To avoid “physical death” which “never belongs to tragic space,” Racine introduces the “Exterior,” which is in fact “the site of non-tragedy” and which “contains three kinds of spaces: that of death, that of escape, and that of the event”:

“Physical death never belongs to tragic space: this reputedly for reasons of propriety; but what propriety rejects in carnal death is an element alien to tragedy, an “impurity,” the density of a reality scandalous because it no

longer proceeds from the order of language, which is the only tragic order: in tragedy one never dies because one is talking.” (Barthes 5-6)

To accomplish his “theatrical fiction,” Racine enriches his tragedy by extending the stage with this exterior, while maintaining the purity of his “tragic space” by rejecting “physical death.” As one of the most ingenious playwrights in the 17<sup>th</sup> century in France, Racine not only respects the unities of time, place and action recommended by Aristotle in his *Poetics*, but also searches for the “propriety” and “the order of languages, which is the only tragic order.”

## 2. Cocteau’s surrealist play: Fantasy and Dream

*The Infernal Machine*, “first produced by Louis Jouvet in 1934, is considered the most extraordinary work of all Cocteau’s improvisations” (Oxenhandler 129). As Carlson notes, “the call for ‘artistic autonomy’ in the theatre instead of imitation of life is one that echoes through much French theatre theory of this period,” (343) and Cocteau is one of the most representative artists who fully enjoys this “artistic autonomy.” This “rejection of conventional reality” is already imprinted in his preface to *The Wedding Party on the Tour Eiffel* (Carlson 344), written by Cocteau in 1922. As Carlson said, borrowing the words of Apollinaire, Cocteau’s “surrealistic” work translated reality into “a coherent ensemble of painting, dance, mime, and plastic art- a total theatre piece” (343). Thus, contrasted with Racine’s 17th century tragedy as is seen on the previous pages, the unities of time, place and action are no more respected in this avant-garde

work and purposely destroyed in order to make the play not real, but “surrealistic” with its various theatrical devices:

“Cocteau’s art up to this point has operated by a skill full process of selection, revealing subsidiary aspects of the story while leaving the great tragic truth in shadow. It lies there in the shadows, just beyond the reach of our skeptical modern minds, while we see the characters in roles that we can comprehend in our terms –the terms of ambition of flirtation or fantasy or anger.”(Oxenhandler 142)

Thus, in *The Infernal Machine*, where Cocteau selects some essential parts of “the great tragic truth,” the play is more flexible for the time, place, and actions than in Racine’s tragedy. Especially, the time is even elastic, and it can be transformed as long as the artist wants to manipulate it for his surrealistic purpose.

For instance, from Act I to Act III, there is a huge time difference between two acts, i.e., 17 years, while in the Act II, which is “a pure invention of Cocteau,” time has no boundaries as well as the place which can be set anywhere. Here, the time and the place, where Oedipus meets Sphinx, has even an imaginary aspect in which “the drama dissolves into fantasy” (132).

Concerning the place, the scenery is not limited to “a room of palace,” as is seen in *The Theban Brothers*. The setting ranges from the rampart of the palace to outside the palace where Oedipus meets the Sphinx; to a nuptial chamber for this conqueror and Jocasta; to a platform with a fountain. In addition, stairs connect the high platform to the city in which the Theban people dwell. The different settings, arranged by Cocteau, give an impression that they are made in “miniature,” so that all the places are adjusted to be appropriate to his “sensitive and imaginative” strategy (143).

As Francis Fergusson remarked, “the entire play, with the exception of the last act, shows us a diminished world, a world of light, boulevard comedy replete with suggestive plays on words and double-entendre” (200). These three acts in Thebes can be seen as “any demoralized Balkan or Mediterranean commercial city of our time or anytime” (198). Being no more “the mythical scapegoat of the gods,” Oedipus is described as “the winner of a bicycle marathon or an ambitious politician” who can be seen anywhere in our days. Cocteau’s characters seem to be minimized as an archetypal form of human beings struggling for their destiny in a surrealist dimension of a “diminished world”:

“We have a modern and antique hero, a bedroom farce and a Greek myth. And myth, seen through this screen of petty intrigue, assumes something like its old dimension. It extends beyond the narrow limits of the platform with its cardboard palace to strike reverberations in that racial conscience which poetry helps preserve.” (Oxenhandler 143)

Using “the spoken word,” Cocteau wants to introduce “poetry of the theatre,” instead of searching poetry in the theatre as it is seen in traditional verse drama such as Racine’s tragedy. This poetry of the theatre will be achieved by all the means available to the staged performance. Cocteau wants to “accentuate” the absurdity of life, “emphasize” it, and paint it “more truly than the truth” (Cocteau, *Wedding* 95)

Thus, this play of Cocteau is balanced between the modern and antique background, as well as between fantasy and dramatic reality. In *The Infernal Machine*, the plot doesn’t depend on the action, unlike *The Oedipus Rex* of Sophocles where the plot is “a search for a culprit, the search, that is, for the human responsibility which brought on the plague.” In Racine’s *The Theban Brothers*, all the characters struggle to

accomplish the ultimate end of killing herself or himself and of killing one another. Instead of focusing on Oedipus' quest for "his true nature and destiny," the play is rather propelled by a pursuit of "feeling and expression" of the characters.

"The high point of the play, Act III, the wedding night of Oedipus and Jocaste, is developed with the versatility of a Moliere comedy. But again, as in Orpheus, the predominant tone is neither comic nor tragic. It is something else, some special genre of Cocteau's own creation, with a continuity of feeling and expression which is not easily accounted for."(129)

This play is "something else, some special genre," in that Cocteau introduces the variety of special devices throughout as the introduction of voice for each act, the apparition of ghost, and the intrigue of dream. These theatrical devices, as well as the theme, contribute a strong surrealistic aspect in the play and they make the play more liberal and avant-garde in the level of directing. Thus, the play seems to put more emphasis on these devices rather than the characters' actions themselves.

The play starts with the Voice which "rehearses the story of the myth and enjoins the audience to look for the real story behind the entertainment they are about to witness." Since Cocteau doesn't treat the whole history of *King Oedipus* the same way as Sophocles, this Voice is very helpful for audiences who do not have basic knowledge about the myth of Oedipus. The explication of Voice gives Cocteau more freedom to develop his play using the flexibility of his imagination. Furthermore, this device of Voice introduced at the beginning of each act instills a feeling of "alienation" in the spectators:

#### THE VOICE



“Spectators, let us imagine that we can wind back the last few minutes and relive them elsewhere. While the ghost of Laius tries to warn Jocasta on the ramparts of Thebes, Oedipus encounters the Sphinx on a hill that overlooks the city. The same trumpet-calls, the same cock-crows, the same moon, the same stars.” (2)

With this Voice, the spectators might feel more engaged with the play and, at the same time, recognize that the play is not real and that it produces a theatrical reality. Consequently, the Voice strongly contributes surrealist features to the play, allowing the spectators to get more involved and see the play as both “modern and antique” as well as real and imaginary.

These surrealist features are strengthened by another theatrical device: the apparition of a ghost. Just like the opening of *Hamlet*, *The Infernal Machine* introduces the ghost of a father, in this case Laius, at the beginning of the play. The conversations between two soldiers inform the audience about the death of Laius, the existence of the Sphinx, and the apparition of the ghost of Laius, their dead king:

“He doesn’t frighten us. Not our old ghost, Laius. He doesn’t still make your guts quiver, does he? Perhaps the first time... But not afterward. He’s not a bad ghost, he’s a friend. Ah, the trouble is we’re all jumpy in Thebes: you, me, the rich people, and the poor people; everybody except the few who always out on top. We’re tired of fighting an enemy we don’t know, and we’re tired of oracles and heroic victims and brave mothers.”(1)

The apparition of this friendly ghost permits Cocteau, who is “tired of oracles and heroic victims and brave mothers,” to skip all the “heroic” and “majestic” aspects of the myth of Oedipus. The Ghost of Laius appears “fixed,” “frozen,” and “stuck,” instead of being scary or horrible, and even has trouble disappearing:

“He tried – God how he tried! But he just couldn’t. We thought he’d go mad. Then he asked us to swear at him, because he said that the way to make a ghost disappear. But we couldn’t – he’s our friend. And the more he begged us, the more stupid we looked.”(1)

This ghost’s inability to disappear on its own makes its supernatural power look ridiculous. Described as a “stupid” beggar, this ghost lacks both horror and power, becoming a subject for sympathy. The soldiers see him and say, “A dead king isn’t a king.” Furthermore, Cocteau enhances his surrealistic play with the apparition of the ghost of Jocasta, who is a part of the fantasy in this play with her “extravagant’ and “largely comic” character. It is with the apparition of the ghost that Cocteau insinuates the death of Jocasta, without introducing the messenger. This device not only economizes the play, but also makes the play dreamlike. Since it is carefully calculated from the beginning, the play is “not vitiated by the presence of Jocasta, for the supernatural has established its rights early in the play” (Oxenhandler 142).

In addition, the playwright introduces Jocasta’s dream, a device which seems more significant and prophetic than the oracles predicted by Tiresias, the great prophet:

“I dream I am somewhere rather like this ledge. It’s night, and I am holding a baby. Suddenly the baby becomes a sticky pulp which runs through my fingers. I scream and try to rid myself of it, but it clings to me. Then, when I think I’m free of it, it flies back and hurls itself against my face. And this thins... this pulp... is alive! With a kind of mouth that fixes on mine. And it creeps about me, feeling for my belly and my thighs... Oh!” (1)

First, this dream plays a great role in reminding the readers or the audiences of Laius and Jocasta's crime: abandoning their infant Oedipus as prophesied by the oracle. Their crime is still imprinted in Jocasta's subconscious, repeatedly appearing in her dreams. Cocteau successfully implicates Jocasta's infanticide only through these lines. The memory of this past crime manifests itself in Jocasta's subconscious as a "pulp" which is so "alive" that she cannot rid herself of it.

The dream also predicts that the consequence of the infanticide committed by the parents will be substituted for another crime: incest between a mother and her own son, which is another fundamental taboo. Here, the feminine senses are juxtaposed with a predictable dream. When Jocasta meets the soldier, who reports seeing the ghost of Laius, she is instantly reminded of her son that she abandoned nineteen years ago and might be the same age as this young guardian: "The same age. He'd be exactly the same age. How good-looking he is!"(1)

In Act Three, *The Wedding Night*, Cocteau presents very surrealist scenic images which suggest that the maternal source is like a primitive power of life: a platform which "represents Jocasta's bedroom, red as a butcher's shop set down among Municipal building." The audience sees "a wide bed covered with white furs." At the foot of the bed lies an animal skin; to the left of the bed, a cradle. These scenic images explain the double aspect of Oedipus who might be a husband in the bed and a baby in the cradle.

Here, dream and supernatural are introduced again in this act as a tool to shake the inside of this couple, who is sleeping "side by side, hand in hand."

"Murmuring of the fountain. Distant, intermittent thunder. A flash of very bright dream lightning. The animal skin is pushed up by the head of

Anubis. On the end of his arm is Oedipus' belt. Oedipus tosses uneasily.”(3)

The apparition of Anubis, another supernatural character, whom Oedipus meets in Act II, makes the play strongly surrealistic in that now the audiences share not only the stage reality but also the realm of Oedipus' dream. Thus, Cocteau demonstrates two different dimensions on the stage: the natural and supernatural, through which the characters constantly travel from one dimension to another, from their sleep to their wake, from unconsciousness to consciousness:

Jocasta: *mumbling in her sleep.* No, no, not that pulp, not that sticky pulp...

Oedipus: *in a heavy, distant voice.* I'll count up to fifty: One, two, three, four, eight, ten, eleven, fourteen, fifteen, fifteen, fifteen, three, four...

Anubis: “And Anubis would spring and open his wolf jaws!

(He disappears through the trap door, replacing the animal skin above him.)

Oedipus: Help! Help! Come here! Anybody! Help me!

Jocasta: What is it, my darling? Oedipus, I was fast sleep.

(She shakes him.)

Wake up!

Oedipus: No! Oh! no! Please! Mercy!

Jocasta: It's all right, my darling. It was a dream.

Oedipus: No, no!

(He wakes)

Oh! Where was I? Jocasta? It's you. What a terrible nightmare!

Jocasta: There! It's all over. You're in our room... in my arms. (3)

Contrary to the image of mother which constantly reminds the readers and audiences of the tomb and Hell, as portrayed in Racine's tragedy, the maternal images of Cocteau can be classified as protective spaces such as a room, a fountain, and stairs. This protective image continues to be demonstrated until the end of play, where Jocasta dies by hanging herself. In fact, the playwright finally makes his tragedy just like Racinian

tragedy. Nevertheless, the “use of the marvelous: the ghost of Laius, Anubis and the Sphinx, the final reappearance of Jocasta” infinitely enhance the fantastic aspect of the plays of Cocteau, who “calls for a new art combining many elements - the fantastic, the dance, acrobatics, mime, drama satire, music, and the spoken world” (Carlson 344 ).

### 3. Beyond time, space and language

If Racine, a neo-classic playwright, searches for “the order of languages, which is the only tragic order,” according to Barthes (6), Cixous does the opposite in *The Name of Oedipus*. Paradoxically, this play seeks to purposely deconstruct “the order of languages.” Known for her “feminine writing,” Cixous looks forward to destroying the paternal hierarchy imprinted in the Western exigency.

Beyond the *coincidence of opposites*, a notion previously mentioned in this chapter, Cixous pursues “desire” which “undoes absolute knowledge, reason, mastery and decapitates (paternal) authority” (Conley 14). The purpose of her “feminine writing” is to deconstruct the paternal hierarchy in the text: the order, the name, and the language itself. With her feminine writing, Cixous attacks one of the oldest and the most authentic texts of Western exigency: the plays of Sophocles. To deconstruct this hierarchy, Cixous emphasizes “love and affirmation” of her feminine writing over “a (metaphoric) death-castration –” of the order of languages (Conley 14).

Contrasted with Racine’s verses written in perfect Alexandrine style which strictly respects twelve syllables for each verse and rhymes for each couple of verses,

Cixous rarely shows complete sentences throughout *The Name of Oedipus*. Thus, the play begins with the fragment of the words, nouns, prepositions and verbs, which are sometimes even discomposed in her text:

“Fear            Fear            No!            Without  
 Fear            Lover            I don’t want to  
 I am scared            Dies            Without  
 Mother            Not return  
 Child            Fear  
 See each other            Not to know  
 Die            Where is  
 Mother cries            The body  
 The child            Bu  
 Listen            Ry  
 It            It  
 Mother            Fear  
 Mother!            If he dies  
 Don’t you            Alone  
 See            Fallen  
 That I die            Going to die  
 Mother!            I  
 Dies            Cry  
 Fear            Lover  
 To see him die  
  
 Fear            Alone  
 Die before            Alone  
 Seeing her            Alone  
 Dead            Alone  
 Dead            Nobody” (13)

The repetition of some words seems to substitute for the chorus in ancient Greek tragedy. Nevertheless, here, the order of the language is totally destroyed and the fragments of the words evoke echoes in the unconscious of readers and audiences. As seen, the sentences and the order of language are destroyed in Cixous. The text is castrated to conceive new desire and deconstructed to construct a new text.

In fact, there is much less plot and story in Cixous's *The Name of Oedipus* than in either Racine's *The Theban Brothers* or Cocteau's *The Infernal Machine*. For Cixous, her readers and audience are supposed to already have some knowledge of the basic plot and story of Oedipus, either from Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* or other posterior plays. Nevertheless, even if readers or audiences do not know what is going to happen in this text or performance, they would not be confused nor would Cixous be hindered by their lack of knowledge of the play, in that she only works "on human themes that don't need to pass through narrative to find expression" (Sellers, White 8).

As often demonstrated by the writers in the "Nouveau Roman," which strongly influenced the majority of French writers in the 1950s, including Alain Robe-Grillet, Marguerite Duras and Nathalie Sarraute, Cixous is not fundamentally concerned with the time, place, action, or even story. It is in this sense that the Nouveau Roman might be totally new. This movement solicited "certain writers who 'experimented' with style in each novel, creating an essentially new style each time." Two major concerns for these Nouveau Roman writers are "Ici, Maintenant" ("Here, Now"). Thus, Cixous' *The Name of Oedipus* is also strongly focused on "Here, Now." "Here, Now" insinuates a nowhere, or a beyond, in which the play is free from all the restrictive categories of place and time. However, as Wilcox indicates, Cixous' writing, even though "much in the present mode, shows both sequence and progress." The text opens "to the past" and also "to the future" (Wilcox 44).

*The Name of Oedipus* was presented at the Avignon Festival in 1978, directed by Ariane Mnouchkine who led the group *Theatre du Soleil* in suburban Paris. The form of Cixous' spectacle is clearly different from other Oedipus performances up to that date,

and even from Cocteau's avant-garde and surrealist work. The plot and intrigue of the myth of Oedipus is audaciously eliminated, and even the names of Oedipus and Jocasta are simplified to O and J. According to Cixous, this simplification explicates that the names carry no significance in this play. In fact, this denegation vis-à-vis the names will continue through the whole play.

From the beginning of the play, the absence of characters is remarkably shown. The play begins with a long narration by J, which represents Jocasta. This narrative can be considered as that of the writer herself, or that of the readers and audiences. It is deeply saturated with fragments of memories, which are individual and collective while being personal and universal. Profound confusion is evoked in these fragments of memories in that the readers and the audiences will constantly have an illusion that they are experiencing a total fusion with the characters, who talk about their memories, fears and desires, which strongly touch the collective unconscious of human beings.

“You/My Life/Stay. Today/My love/Stay (with) me/Wholly/Don't be far/From me/One second/Don't go outside/Don't answer to anybody/Don't listen/Except my voice/Only once/Because I want it/Don't be the king/Stay (with) me/Be mine/Forget the world/Forget the city/Forget the time/Don't be anybody/Today/O my love/Be my love/Be my blood/Be my bones be in my bones/My enflaming marrows/Forget the men/The women, the dying ones/They don't call/They don't scream/They don't die/They don't reproach you/For not coming/To help them/They don't wander/In the streets among/Their excrements /In begging of the death/To come save them/There is nobody in Thebes/Inutile to leave/There is no city, outside/ No Thebes, no street/Not a cat, even not a phantom/Of baby” (14)

This long monologue by Jocasta at the beginning of the play strongly reminds readers or audiences of Cixous' intentional denegation of names and the order of our



society including that of name, place, action, and language system. Audiences may recognize that there is no significance in following the plot or storyline. Even the style of writing is new, since there are no more well-constructed sentences. Most of the sentences are intentionally convoluted by the author. Cixous tries to demolish the system of languages as well as denying the names which are representative of the order of our society based on patriarchal domination.

Here again, there is an immense difference between Racine's tragedy and Cixous' new theatre. In sum, the text is very far from that of Jean Racine, which is gloriously decorated with strict Alexandrine poems and even that of Jean Cocteau which respects the least form of sentences, when the play is considered a sort of "boulevard farce" based on "spoken words." In fact, Cixous's plays have "very much a narrative" compared with her other texts for which she does not "need to pass through narrative to find expression." Nevertheless, the narrative in Cixous' play is significantly condensed in order to accentuate her "human themes" (Susan, White 8).

Additionally, concerning the play's performance venue, it doesn't matter if this performance occurs in an ancient Greek style amphitheater or small black box theatre, a "catoucherie" in a suburb of Paris or a barn or a beach. Not only did Cixous avoid precisely indicating a venue, but certain audiences may quickly recognize that the play's performance location is not really significant. The concept of setting becomes irrelevant.

At this point, one of the greatest evolutionary aspects of this new play is in the fact that there is no limit of place. It can be staged everywhere, with a random Jocasta and Oedipus that can be found in any living person. The archetypal images of Jocasta and Oedipus will be omnipresent in all its different forms and representations.

It is noteworthy that there are two Jocastas and two Oedipuses. Even the chorus is divided into two parts. The O/J abbreviations for Oedipus and Jocasta signify, once again, the denegation of names and they might be considered as the names of all human beings. Being divided from the origin, the I, “as a dramatically autonomous machine overtakes authorial control of language” (Conley 14).

O/J could be anybody, rather than a specific Jocasta and Oedipus definitely fixed as they are in Sophocles’ classic tragedy, *Oedipus the King*. They are more similar to Ionesco’s characters, especially in *The Bald Soprano*. Jocasta and Oedipus are similar to certain Mr. and Mrs. Martin and Mr. and Mrs. Smith who could be anyone living in his or her daily life. The point is that these characters are always tragic rather than comic even if they do not care about their names. The fight against the fear of the destiny of human beings, which is not durable, seems tragic in the characters in both of these plays, floating in ambiguity.

Instead of naming the characters and clearly giving their identity, Cixous wants to confirm their identity through a psychoanalytic approach. Here, the personal memory of childhood juxtaposes with the collective unconscious of human beings. Cixous incorporates the memory of her own father who is struggling with his death and juxtaposes it with the death of Laius, murdered by his own son Oedipus. Like Oedipus, who killed his own father as the oracle prophesied, J cannot see her dying father’s face. There is always an interdiction to watch the father dying:

“Suddenly turning his face,  
Against me, his angry eyes  
The air became dark. He was looking for me with his eyes  
He threw to me look of hostility:

What are you doing?  
Go away! Quit! Quit!  
The glass broke his voice. I did not hear:  
Quit! I did not hear the pain, the humiliation  
The gentleness in the rage  
Quit! You don't see I am dying?  
I was seeing. I went to see. I will never see.”(17)

In this distant memory of her dying father, Jocasta, who is Cixous herself, is struggling between the desire of staying with her father and leaving him, of seeing his death and turning her eyes from his “pain” and “humiliation.” This struggle can be considered a denegation of name, order, and logic as Cixous shows through her “feminine writing.” As Conley puts it, “converse to the male, what best can only spray his words, the writers-as-mother gives a birth to and ‘nourishes’ her text” (83).

Cixous’ writing also has “the inner logic of a psychoanalytic cure, but one that is home-made.” It progresses “from an obsessive innerness (...) to the elaborate construction of a confident identity” (Wilcox 43-44). Thus, it is through the profound reflection on her distant memories that Cixous tries to cure herself from this long conflict between obedience and disobedience vis-à-vis hierarchy of paternal domination. Here, her personal memories touch the readers and audiences in reminding them of a “collective memory,” which is an “archetypal image” or myth according to Jung. “Cixous’ new form of theatre demonstrates a strong tendency to return to the myth again as insinuated by its title, *The Name of Oedipus*.” This return to the myth produces a new paradigm of unity between time, place, and action:

J.  
“To be free between the time  
Before him, nobody, after him. Him alone, the first.”(p. 62)

J.  
“Where are you bringing me?”  
O.  
“Very high between the sky and the night.  
In the room of crystal  
Between ma flesh and my heart.”(62)

Time has neither place nor action, or even boundaries in this play. They are all flexible and open to a new horizon for her writing. The readers and audiences seem to be invited to a new world where the time, the space, and the flesh of the characters are blended into one another. In Cixous’ work, “theatrical fiction” becomes fusional in that the senses correspond to one another: “My voice does not find him anymore!/ My voice became blind” (54). Here the voice can see and becomes “blind” like the eyes do. Like Baudelaire, Cixous invents a metamorphosis in which all the senses blend into one another and their fusion is absorbed on the flesh of text which is in fact a feminine body:

O: “And you fall on my flesh/As the night sun/ On the sun ofday/Our lips are frozen/ But our languages are burning/ It is you my night which erupts/On me/And it is definitely me this sea /Silent who has just opened/His flesh so that you pour out/And we enter the one in other one./my mother./ My child./ My flesh is calm here./I am going to cease suffering./ I have just forgotten everything./ I do not know which to die.” (86)

At the end of the play, Cixous maximizes this correspondence of senses, where every element of a unified body joins to those of the universe itself, where the combined “flesh” of human beings ultimately finds the tranquility and quintessence of a new existence. Conley writes that Cixous “invokes all the senses, touch, hearing, taste, no longer in hierarchy order.” Here, the mother “who is not a simple convention but maintains a link with flesh and blood” becomes “the source of writing” and the origin of creation. Here,

the woman's writing could be recognized by "its own presence, its own closure" while it is constructing a new value in humanities (Conley 83).

## CHAPTER FOUR: THEATRICAL READING AND A NEW PERSPECTIVE OF STAGING

### 1. A theatrical reading

Besides the fact that these three plays show differences in theme and style, they also demonstrate different forms of stage directions which can be discovered through attentive “theatrical reading.” “In fact, the difference of perception lies in the difference between a literary reading and a theatrical reading” (Maskell1). To the seasoned eyes of directors or performance critics, the plays reveal some interesting features. Forged from the original thoughts of playwrights to the surface of the text, these features help make a stage look more figuratively rich compared to what is perceived by a literary reading.

A theatrical reading can “set out to explore and elucidate this (theatrical) language,” “guide theatrical directors in their productions” of playwright and show that there is a “certain guidance on décor” (2). Thus, a theatrical reading may help directors and audiences fortify their understanding and inspiration of plays and to create a new stage based on existent texts.

Racine’s first tragedy, *The Theban Brothers*, was first performed on June 20, 1664, at the Petit-Bourbon in Paris by Moliere’s Company. Since 1680 it has been performed at the Comedie Francaise. Racine may have had a concrete take on stage making in these Parisian theatres. As Maskell mentions in his study of Racine, Racine shows a strong passion for the décor and the mise-en-scene, even if there are only a “few stage directions” and “the printed page of a Racinian tragedy seems poor in stage

directions compared with some later plays.” Maskell also remarks that “the text of Racine’s plays contains “stage directions both explicit and implicit” and “these can stimulate the reader to conjure up a performance in the imagination, and may sometimes guide theatrical directors in their productions of Racine” (2). Compared to some later plays, the stage directions are suggested “through the speech of the character” rather than the printed page of the play:

“Racine does specify that characters should speak in certain tones of voice, display certain facial expressions, enter or exit in a particular manner, sit, stand, kneel, embrace, faint, kill themselves, or employ stage as much a part of Racine’s theatrical languages as the actual words spoken by the characters.”(Maskell 3)

Racine seems to be more concerned with scenery than usual. According to Maskell, even if only “a royal room” is indicated as the place of the play, Racine evokes imagination through this room from the readers and audiences. As is seen, this room is composed of various imaginary spaces which connect inside to outside: “Olympias, they have set out? Mortal pain!” (1.1) If the readers and audiences observe his language from a theatrical point of view, they can be stimulated “to conjure up a performance in the imagination” (2-3). Maskell attacks the commentary of Picard on Racinean tragedy saying that “tragedy becomes a purely psychological drama (...) drama becomes detached from time and place (...) the décor is abolished”:

“These phrases have been used to characterize Racinean tragedy. They do not. They would be much better applied to the predominantly verbal dramas which preceded Racine in early 1660s, and in contrast to which Racine based his stagecraft on precise time and space, forging a dynamic relationships between words and visual effects. (...) His characters seldom merely talk about their emotions and feelings: they embody them in

action, often in physical action. Racine crossed the verbal frontier into true theatrical territory” (Maskell 43)

Nevertheless, as Maskell mentions, “Racine dared to be simple, straightforward, even crude.” This playwright opened a new horizon for the imagination of his readers and audiences. This “purely psychological drama” would be interpreted in numerous modern ways and the décor would be “abolished” to allow for new forms conceived by posterior directors and stage designers. For instance, the royal room could be transformed into the womb, hell, and tomb. Racine insinuates this throughout the poetic images of his texts. “Certain guidance on décor” by Racine, likely an archetype of collective human subconscious, can provide a strong initiative for the imagination of directors and stage designers as well as that of readers and audiences.

Compared to Racine who demonstrates his stage directions through the speech of his characters and through poetic images, Cocteau fully shows his stage direction in the text of *The Infernal Machine*. According to Albert Bermel, who translated *La Machine Infernale* in English, the play was first performed in French at the Theatre Louis Jouvet in Paris in 1934, directed by Jouvet and costumed and décorated by Christian Bérard. *The Infernal Machine* was first played at the Phoenix Theatre, New York, in 1958 under the direction of Herbert Berghof, with scenery by Ming Cho Lee, costumes by Alvin Colt, and lighting by Tharon Musser (Cocteau 3). The playwright explicitly shows his stage directions throughout the play with italicized addition at the beginning of each act. Here, the stage description covers all aspects of the production including not only the décor, but also the light and sound, as well as costume and props.



It is natural that Cocteau, an interdisciplinary artist, demonstrates his various talents with detailed stage directions, enriching his production. In addition, it is his stage direction that confirms the surrealist aspect of Cocteau's play. His unique suggestions give an avant-garde touch. The stage indications for Act II are a good example of this issue:

#### Act II: The Sphinx

"A deserted spot on a hillside overlooking Thebes, by moonlight. The road from Thebes (From left to right) passes across the front of the stage, and bends around a tall leaning stone. The base of the stone is held in place at the end of the platform and forms the entrance doorway on the left. Behind the remains of a little temple is a ruined wall. In the middle of the wall is an intact pedestal, which must have marked the entrance to the temples, and bears the remains of a chimera – a wing, paw, and haunch. Broken columns.

A girl in white, The Sphinx, is sitting among the ruins; a jackal's head rests in her lap, the rest of its body being hidden behind her. Distant trumpets. (2)

In this act, a pure invention of Cocteau's, the playwright incarnates the Sphinx, a legendary monster, into a "girl in white" evoking the image of an angel. The visual of angel juxtaposed to that of monster makes this avant-garde theatre look more surrealist. Cocteau's stage directions are sometimes so exact they indicate even the direction "from the left to right" when mentioning "the road from Thebes." Plus, this road passes "across the front of the stage" instead of being situated behind the stage. This unusual setting of the road also creates an illusion for the audiences situated backstage, who, as a result see the girl in the white stage over the shoulder of Oedipus.

The stage directions for Act III demonstrate another instance which strengthens the surrealistic aspect of the play:

Act III: The Wedding Night

A platform represents Jocasta's bedroom, red as a butcher's shop set down among Municipal buildings. A wide bed covered with white furs. At the foot of the bed, an animal's skin. To the left of the bed, a cradle.

The young soldier is just visible on the extreme right, sleeping by a fountain in the courtyard "below" the bedroom window.

These indications about the stage might remind the directors and stage designers of the double aspect of the play which covers the old and new dimension of the Oedipus' myth. If a stage designer follows the scenery as Cocteau indicates, the audiences will be exposed to a totally new atmosphere, never before seen in an Oedipus performance. Cocteau enlists the use of a platform which "represents Jocasta's bedroom, red as a butcher's shop set down among Municipal building." This stage detail might evoke a very strong manifestation of a place detached from time and space.

Here, time could be both old or modern, while place could be either Thebes or a city in which the audience actually dwells. The stage specifications strongly suggest that the forbidden issue of incest could be raised over and over again in our modern daily lives and that Oedipus and Jocasta could be one of us. It is interesting to observe that this simple direction in décor fortifies Cocteau's modern adaptation of ancient Greek play while making a considerable impression in the subconscious, effectively associating the images of "red" and "butcher shop."

In addition, the description of "the young soldier," who "is just visible on the extreme right, sleeping by a fountain in the courtyard 'below' the bedroom window," further evokes surrealistic aspect in the play. This fountain, symbolic of the image of

protector-healing mother, creates a new dimension of the mise-en-scene, introducing an “alienation” effect named by Brecht or a “flash back” effect in a film.

The young soldier reminds the audience of the night when Jocasta meets him at the rampart, awaiting Laius’ phantom. The “fountain” is juxtaposed with the red bedroom of Jocasta, while the sleeping young soldier outside, who once reminded Jocasta of her abandoned son, is juxtaposed with Oedipus who is inside with Jocasta. Thus, the stage directions play an important role in intensifying the context of the play when Jocasta is asked by Oedipus how she could already know of the young soldier’s likeness to Oedipus without ever having seen Oedipus before. The directions widen the horizon in this surrealist play beyond time and place. Also Cocteau manipulates, through his guidance of décor, the vertical structuring between the platform, suggestive of the patriarchal images such as a scepter and a summit, and the bottom of Thebes, which mimics the omphalos of maternal world.

In addition, The Voice, which opens each chapter of *The Infernal Machine*, also indicates major stage direction. This Voice is, in fact, that of Cocteau, who wants to talk not only to his contemporary audiences but also to later generations:

“Watch now, spectator. Before you is a fully wound machine. Slowly its spring will unwind the entire span of a human life. It is one of the most perfect machines devised by the infernal gods for the mathematical annihilation of a mortal.” (1)

This announcement strongly emphasizes stage directions, especially directing and décor. The Voice plays an important role in setting the stage of this avant-garde play in which “all four acts treat their material in unusual and disturbing ways, so that the

supernatural is by turns grotesque, comic, tender, awesome, inscrutable, threatening, uncomfortably familiar and horribly predictable”(Yarrow 108). Both director and stage designer would be inspired by this special indication. In fact, the Voice is more efficient than usual written indications in that the inspiration might be shared with the audiences during performances.

In the case of italicized stage directions, the inspiration would occur in the imagination of readers, directors, and stage designers who would then transfer the inspiration to the audience in the form of performance. Performance and décor typically enhance the imagination of the audience. But in *The Infernal Machine*, they are more directly connected with the playwright via the Voice, which remind of Cocteau’s stage directions and renew the potential energy at certain moments of every performance beyond time and place. For instance, at the beginning of Act IV, the Voice announces “Seventeen years go by swiftly.” The information is immediately transmitted to the audience and it confirms the surrealist features of the play. With this short indication by the Voice, the initial stage direction of Cocteau is fully realized between audiences, directors, and stage designers. Cocteau’s avant-garde works reveal a wealth of significant stage direction and new discoveries can be found with each pass. Future ideas of staging will be determined through the variety of point of views and perceptions of directors and stage designers in their own respective creations.

On the other hand, in Cixous’ *The Name of Oedipus*, written stage indications are totally absent. Nevertheless, it is paradoxical that the stage directions seem to be perceived through the text where the order of language is definitely destroyed. Again, it is a “theatrical reading” that can discern certain stage directions hidden under the texts.

“There is nobody in Thebes/Inutile to leave/There is no city, outside/ No Thebes, no street/Not a cat, even not a phantom/ Of baby”

“And you fall on my flesh/As the night sun/ On the sun of day/Our lips are frozen/ But our languages are burning/ It is you my night which erupts/On me/And it is definitely me this sea /Silent who has just opened/His flesh so that you pour out/And we enter the one in other one,/my mother,/ My child./ My flesh is calm here./I am going to cease suffering./ I have just forgotten everything./ I do not know which to die.”

Keen directors and stage designers are able to perceive the stage directions inspired from these extracts of text. The designation of outside, the realm of father, would be emphasized by the mother’s eternal inside. Here, the Father’s outside is described as a ruined, deathlike place without lives, while the Mother’s sea is described as a fresh and vital world with the images of flesh and sun, which share dynamic energy with one another. These contrasting images emanated from the deconstructionist text of Cixous, who wanted to demolish age-old paternal domination in Western exigency through “feminine writing.” These nuances inspire the audience and director to appreciate the visual value of the play.

Thus, the wall ruined at Thebes is there, not to be reconstructed as the way it used to be before, but to be transformed to a totally new form of natural elements, as is mentioned in Cixous’ text. Here, a theatrical reading plays an important role in visualizing the text.

“Suddenly turning his face,  
Against me, his angry eyes  
The air became dark. He was looking for me with his eyes  
He threw to me look of hostility:  
What are you doing?  
Go away! Quit! Quit!

The glass broke his voice. I did not hear:  
 Quit! I did not hear the pain, the humiliation  
 The gentleness in the rage  
 Quit! You don't see I am dying?  
 I was seeing. I went to see. I will never see.”(17)

The image of a dying father in a faint childhood memory may have induced this particular stage direction. The impact of this flashback is much stronger than the stage direction describing the young soldiers sleeping outside in the Act II of Cocteau's *The Infernal Machine*. The flashback technique here in this psychoanalytic passage provides an even wider view on a stage direction. For instance, the projection of this passage on a stage screen may serve as a new form of staging.

In fact, Cixous' text already presents double characters of Jocasta and Oedipus from the beginning of the play. This double-character presentation indicates the dual aspects of these characters.

J.	J.
“You	No Oedipus! Don't be Oedipus
My Life	Today, it is not you
Stay. Today	whom they call
My love	Don't be somebody to whom they ask
Stay (with) me	Deny the dying people
Wholly	The jealous, deny the name
Don't be far	That they launch to you
From me	Come, approach to me” (14)

This passage implies certain stage direction by itself. Although there is no explicit direction, the double presence of one character demands planning for the positioning and blocking of the two actors. J.1 launches an echo to J.2 and O.1 does to O.2, while O.1 can be replaced by O.2.

O.1 or O.2

“Tell me at least who you are!  
What is your name?  
Who wants to die?  
I want to see you face by face?”

O.

“In this moment with his all power  
He heated my face,  
He destroyed my temples.  
An angry is up in me  
I was in the night of blood.” (34)

Here, one Oedipus discusses the night he killed his father, while another Oedipus questions back, touching the subconscious of the other. The director should take note of this character juxtaposition, a beneficial in-stage directing cue. Two Jocastas and two Oedipuses share their reciprocal echoes and these echoes multiply among other characters; the echoes of two Oedipuses not only impact the two Jocastas, but also T. (Tiresias) and Chorus themselves. Altogether, they create a multi-layered dimension on the stage. This multiplication of characters evokes a mirror effect, reminding of the “theatre in double” by Artaud. Use of this effect accentuates the fact that these characters could be any human being of any time and any place.

This stage direction even reflects Cixous’ intimate and strong relationship with the *Theatre du Soleil* led by Ariane Mnouchkine. Cixous was influenced by the theatre group’s incorporation of multiple and multicultural styles of theatre in their collaborative works. As Wilcox mentions, Cixous’ work with Mnouchkine opens out her “feminine writing” to another form of language and creation:

“It is through the bodies of the actors, their long training, inspired from the theatres of the East, in mime, dancing, meditation, make-up, costume, that

the text now speaks, is communicated. Performance is a live present in which the body is more complete than in the written text, since it is there as flesh, spectacle, music, movement, speech.” (Wilcox 46)

*The Name of Oedipus*, extracted from Cixous’ *Song of the forbidden body*, its original text, was performed by Mnouchkine at Avignon Festival in the form of small scale opera. In this opera, staged by Mnouchkine, with music by André Boucourechliev, the double characters share their feelings, hopes and anxieties, as a part of musical notes divided in two different parts. The theatrical works by this female director who attempts to overthrow the cultural Western Orthodoxy to reinforce the Third world culture for the sake of establishing the new universality certainly influenced Cixous’ deconstructionist theatre.

Cixous revolts against the Western exigency supported by the paternal hierarchy and pursues the new harmony of orders through her multicultural and multilingual deconstructionism, offering a new perspective on staging. As she mentions, “The ‘Dark Continent’ is neither dark nor unexplorable” (Medusa XX). Cixous’ deconstructionist works are oriented to create a new facet of theatre through the collaboration and interchange between the Western exigency and the Unknown world.



## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Since the ancient Greek period of the trilogy of Sophocles--*Oedipus The King*, *Antigone*, and *Oedipus at Colonus*--discussing the passion and pain of Jocasta, mother and wife of Oedipus, has been a taboo in the Western Exigency. Though Racine focuses primarily on the character of Jocasta in *The Theban Brothers* (1664), she still remains a source of sin and is portrayed as a deathlike monster. Even if Oedipus is absent in *The Theban Brothers*, the image of the father still strongly correlates with glorious divinity, a notion constantly contrasted with the dark, human fatality representative of Mother. Consequently, the character of Jocasta is described as a dark and sadistic mother persecuted by the oracle, a symbol of paternal hierarchy. In Racine's play, the father is glorified by the luminous images of scepter and glaive, and contrasted with those of the monstrous maternity in which the womb joins the tomb. Thus, Racine's tragedy functions as a contrast between paternal hierarchy and persecuted maternity, based on a *coincidence of opposites* which also determines the Western orthodoxy.

Conversely, in *The Infernal Machine* (1934), Cocteau's surrealist and avant-garde work, we find a completely different Jocasta. Cocteau portrays his character as an extravagant and hilarious lady who returns to the staid stereotype of woman with its original, primitive femininity and protectoral healing power. Here, the power of Tiresias, symbolic representative of oracle, father, and gods, is seriously degraded by a decadent queen who gains dominance by exercising her feminine sensibility. The invention of this surrealist Jocasta is considered representative of Cocteau's unconventional approach

which troubles the order of *coincidence of opposites* by overturning the position of the dominated and the dominant, the feminine and masculine, the human and the divine.

If Cocteau's avant-garde work overcomes the Coincidence of Opposites supported by Racine's neo-classical play, Cixous' deconstructionist writing goes further to deny this age-old value of Western exigency. In *The Name of Oedipus*, Cixous revolts against the paternal hegemony which has been affected by Sophocles' *Oedipus The King*'s destroying of logos and names: "No, Oedipus! Don't be Oedipus!" (14). The title of father is no more respected and even effaced by the mother's power which enhances her body and her desire to join with a cosmic unity. Cixous' "feminine writing" may be considered "truly bisexual" in the sense that masculinity and femininity are both "omnipresent, exchanging, intermingling, enriching each other." Thus, in *The Name of Oedipus*, not only is the domination of masculinity replaced by maternal triumph, but also the constraints of conventional binary opposition are denied its potential to create new possibilities in which "male and female are able to unite, divide, multiply" without limit (Freeman 242).

The three plays also show a clear difference in style as well as in theme. Considered one of the foremost playwrights of the Neoclassic period, Racine respects the unities of time, place and action, demonstrating his perfect mastery of Alexandrian poetry. In Cocteau's avant-garde play, these entities are largely destroyed. The style becomes liberal and decadent contributing to the play's surrealism and incorporation of various devices such as dreams and phantoms. In *The Name of Oedipus*, Cixous even denies the plot and the order of languages. Thus, it is not the story or action but the intermingled narration based on her transcendental memory and subconscious that leads

this deconstructionist play. As a result, her play evokes a strong psychoanalytic perspective which reminds the readers and audiences of a collective memory, an archetypal image beyond the story and the plot. This opens new possibilities of creating the stage with directions often hidden in the text, serving as potential to envision a new form of theatre. In fact, as a deconstructionist, Cixous, incorporating multiple styles and implicit stage directions in the collective works with Mnouchkine, pursues the international and intercultural collaboration for the sake of universality.

This study on the theatrical evolution of theme and style existing in three French plays shows how they are deconstructional to one another, each denying the existing values and orders of their respective time periods. While Racine respects the value of Ancient Greek tragedy, the plays of Cocteau and Cixous deform the preceding work and replace each with another theme, style and new stage devices. Their deconstructionism plays a seminal role in regenerating the world of theatre by continuously establishing a new order. This constant renewal fosters important creative progress and pushes the boundaries that will define the new frontiers of theater. As Greenwald indicates, “If the theater continues to address fundamental human concerns at the highest aesthetic levels, there is nothing to fear in the work of contemporary artists. (...) The advantage we have today is that we have never been so well equipped--mentally, artistically, and technically--to portray the triumphs and shortcomings of our species through such truly global means” (472).

**APPENDIX A: A SHOWCASE OF “OEDIPUS, I LOVE YOU” WITH  
KATE INGRAM**

It was during *Contemporary Theatre Practice*, a class taught by Dr. Julia Listengarten, that I first had the idea of creating a trilogy of three different French plays. After earning my Ph.D. in French Literature in France, I was studying in a Master of Arts program in Theatre at the University of Central Florida. Since I had written my doctoral thesis about Jean Racine, I had knowledge about 17<sup>th</sup> Century French Literature and Theatre. While doing research on French contemporary playwrights such as Eugene Ionesco and Jean Genet, I was impressed by rediscovering their well-known features about absurdism and ritualism. Also, I had an opportunity to do a presentation about Hélène Cixous specifically focusing on her “feminine writing.” During these studies concerning the contemporary period, I thought it would be interesting to do some comparative research between 17<sup>th</sup> century Racine’s tragedy and the contemporary works based on a common subject by those prominent playwrights.

The following semester, I was studying with Dr. Listengarten in her *Research Method in Theatre*. She asked us to present a production proposal for our final projects. Thus, I came to flesh out my vague idea about a trilogy of three different French plays; Jean Racine’s *The Theban Brothers*, Jean Cocteau’s *The Infernal Machine* and Helene Cixous’ *The Name of Oedipus*. There are three reasons that I selected these three French plays, all written in different periods. First, they commonly treat the myth of Oedipus based on different viewpoints. Second, the styles of these plays are explicitly different from one another. Third, they are not well known in the United States except for *The Infernal Machine* which has been presented fairly frequently throughout America. In the

case of *The Theban Brothers* and *The Name of Oedipus*, their presentation has been rare even in France. I thought that it would be beneficial for the American audiences to learn about these French plays.

Interested by the differences and similarities of the three plays in terms of theme and style, I made a production proposal with the title of *Three Jocastas*. Dr. Listengarten and my classmates, most of whom are doing their MFA, were interested in this project and I was very pleased with the positive response. As an MA student, usually relegated to theoretical and critical issues, I was fortunate to receive the opportunity to present the production proposal and then realize this show.

In fact, it was with Kate Ingram that I finalized my production proposal for *Three Jocastas*. During my fourth semester of my residency at the Theatre department, I attended Ingram's "Improvisation Studio," which is a "Voice and Speech" Class. Kate introduced me to the theory of Arthur Lessac, along with his book, *The Use of Training of the Human Voice*. The class focused on the three different dimensions of body and voice: potency, radiancy and buoyancy. For Lessac, who considers theatre and actor training in particular "the only art form that makes optimal use of the total human instrument," these three energies are very important for "the mastery of movement, sensitivity, vocal life, nonverbal communication, and character development" (Lessac 3).

At the end of the semester, we did presentations of our voice exploration with the different texts that Kate sent us a week before for the assignment. Each of us presented our own text in three ways according to three different maps of consonants, structural vowels and tonal vowels. While practicing the three different ways of reading a same text

according to the three different maps, I thought it would be interesting to apply these three different voice energies to three different texts.

This idea suddenly reminded me of my production proposals that I had made last year for the class of *Theory and Criticism* by Dr. Julia Listengarten about a trilogy of three different French plays about Jocasta, tragic mother of Oedipus. So, I tried to apply the three different maps of consonants, structural vowels, and tonal vowels in three different characters. I finally arrived at making some director's notes for "Three colors of Jocasas," those of Racine's *The Woman in Thebes*, Cocteau's *The Infernal Machine* and Cixous' *The Name of Oedipus*. For the consonants, I chose Cocteau's Jocasta for her character's radiancy. In this case, the actress will follow the "consonant map" to demonstrate to the audience her surrealistic and hilarious character, paying no attention to her own guilt and looking for her physical desire and happiness. She would take radiancy as her principal energy to realize her mockery for the sin. For the structural vowels, I used Cixous' Jocasta as I could imagine lots of buoyancy in this character. The actress would follow the "structural vowel map" to let the audience share her serenity found in a perfect marriage of body and soul. No more guilt, no more pain. The buoyancy will be her principal energy throughout her monologues, complete with plenty of metaphysical grace and joy. Finally, for the tonal vowels, I used Racine's Jocasta for the obscurity in her character. In this case, the actress will respect the "tonal possibilities map" to explain her dark inner world. Her pain and agony will be constantly insinuated through her potent energy.

It was a fantastic experience to apply my knowledge of voice and speech class to my eventual production proposal. The most impressive part was the fact that Kate loved

this project and kindly encouraged me to realize this production proposal. I proposed she play three different roles and she accepted it. I was really honored by her suggestion and her acceptance of my proposal. Since I needed to prepare a stage of French theatre for the occasion of the annual French Gala Show, I thought it would be nice to combine Kate's vocal show case with French theatre presentation on the same stage.

Since I had only Kate and some French major and minor students as actors, I needed to cut the text following the essential part of Jocasta's lines while I left the rest of the text in the imagination of the audience. In the case of Cocteau's play, I split Jocasta in three different persons in such a way they could play the roles of the great priest, the soldier, and Oedipus alternatively while a Jocasta was playing her own role. By enhancing Jocasta's costumes to present three different characters, I expected audiences to feel a kind of mirror effect in this manipulation of same characters. Nevertheless, I think there was still some confusion that the audience experienced as a result of this directorial choice. If I have a new occasion to direct this show again, I would like to introduce the voice of other characters such as Oedipus and Tiresias. This would allow the audiences to better understand the performance. I hope to someday make a bigger scale show with these three different Jocasas by Racine, Cocteau and Cixous.

My French major and minor students really enjoyed participating in this show, since they had not had any occasion to play on the theatrical scene for their class studies. As an instructor, I observed the evolution of my students especially in terms of their French pronunciation during the preparation of the show. At the beginning, they did not feel confident with the language, however, at the end of their preparation and during the



show, their French was significantly improved. By this occasion, I confirmed again that the theatre is the best way of learning a language par excellence.

As a student in the Theatre MA program, I had an amazing experience to see how my concept of thesis and my first idea of my production proposal were being visualized on stage. I believe that the costumes and the light offered many additional insights into the world of the respective plays to the audience. For example, the lingerie look costumes for three Joastas in Cocteau's avant-garde play and the red light were effective in demonstrating this play has a potential to be staged as a decadent and scandalous one from a conventional point of view.

In sum, this show gave me not only a precious directorial experience with a "voice experimental theatre," but also a wonderful experience of teaching French to my French minor and major students-actors through the theatrical training. The performance was held at the Black Box Theatre of University of Central Florida in March 18-19, 2010.

## **APPENDIX B: PRODUCTION JOURNAL**

- Feb. 5: Production Meeting I (Tech Center)  
Kate Ingram, Kyung Mee Joo
- Feb. 12: Production Meeting II (Tech Center)  
Kate Ingram, Kyung Mee Joo, Colin Powers (Sounds) and Lindsay Van Stone (Assistant Director)  
  
The Title of the show fixed as “Oedipus, I Love You” from the original title, “Three different Jocastas.”
- Feb. 19: Production Meeting III (Tech Center)  
Kyung Mee Joo, Colin Powers and French Students: Caroline Martinez, Susanna Rupperts, Ashley Jackson, Kathleen Coulter, Christina Bell  
  
Discussion about the costumes and some corrections for French pronunciation.
- Feb. 26: Production Meeting IV (Black Box)  
Kate Ingram, Kyung Mee Joo, Colin Powers, Daniel Dansby and French Students: Caroline Martinez, Susanna Rupperts, Ashley Jackson, Kathleen Coulter, Christina Bell
- March 2: Rehearsal with French Students (Trailer 534)  
Blocking and some corrections for French pronunciation.
- March 3: Rehearsal with Kate Ingram and French students (Trailer 534)  
Decided to do English/French mixed version instead of two separate versions of English and French
- March 4: Rehearsal with Kate Ingram (Trailer 534)  
Tried to juxtapose *Oedipus, I Love you* in English version with *Oedipe, Je t'aime* in French version  
The idea of theatre in theatre: Having Kate play as a director in the theatre in theatre
- March 15: Tech Rehearsal with Kate Ingram and French students (Black Box)  
Daniel Dansby (Lighting) joined the team
- March 16: Tech Rehearsal with Kate Ingram and French students (Black Box)
- March 17: Dress Rehearsal with Kate Ingram and French students (Black Box)

March 18: Performance at the UCF Black Box Theatre

March 19: Performance at the UCF Black Box Theatre

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