

THE INTERPRETATION OF SHAKESPEARE

BY ARIANE MNOUCHKINE

AND THE THEATRE DU SOLEIL

by

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A thesis submitted to the  
Faculty of Arts  
of the  
University of Birmingham  
for the degree of  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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May 1988

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## SYNOPSIS

This thesis is an account of 'Les Shakespeare', a cycle of three plays by Shakespeare produced by the Théâtre du Soleil, Paris (1981-4), translated and directed by Ariane Mnouchkine.

The Introduction sets Mnouchkine's Shakespeare productions in the context of those of her contemporaries and relates them to Shakespeare's twentieth-century production history in France. Particular reference is made to her experimentation with Far Eastern theatre forms: the concept of theatrical Orientalism is defined, of which 'Les Shakespeare' is a manifestation.

Chapter One is a chronological history of Théâtre du Soleil productions (1964-1980), company development and characteristic uses of form and style. Chapters Two, Three and Four give a detailed account of 'Les Shakespeare'; *Richard II*, *La Nuit des rois*, and *Henry IV (première partie)*. These chapters concentrate on the development of a new theatrical language inspired by Oriental theatre forms. Chapter Five thus sets out Mnouchkine's Orientalist approach to theatre, in terms of acting, music and scenography.

The Conclusion assesses the uniqueness of Mnouchkine's Shakespeare and focuses on her subsequent application of theatrical Orientalism to the Soleil's post-Shakespeare cycle work, and on the presentation of twentieth-century history in the Shakespearian manner. It interprets theatrical Orientalism as a desire for formalism which appears paradoxically, after a succession of unscripted plays, with the Théâtre du Soleil's return to the text.

This thesis contains approximately 70,000 words.

'De plus, pour que la gradation mentale soit plus sensible, il faut établir entre Shakespeare et nous une espèce de pont corporel'.

Antonin Artaud, 'L'Evolution du décor', *Oeuvres complètes*, 2, 9-12 (p.11).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the following individuals for their assistance: David Bradby, Anne Neuschäfer, Michael Raab, Claude Schumacher, Gerd Uekermann; Marie Léger (of the Théâtre de l'Épée de Bois); Kate Quick (of the Oxford Playhouse); Naruna de Andrade, Martine Franck, Gérard Hardy, Ariane Mnouchkine and Sophie Moscoso (of the Théâtre du Soleil); Susan Brock and Russell Jackson (of the Shakespeare Institute).

## NOTES

The footnotes to each chapter list press cuttings in full, including dates of publication, in the first instance and are then subsequently abbreviated to author and title. All other works are listed in the footnotes by author and title. Full citations of the latter are to be found in the Bibliography.

Within quotations of foreign languages English punctuation marks are used, except for Mnouchkine's translations which are punctuated as printed.

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(All photographs reproduced by kind permission  
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## INTRODUCTION

Le théâtre élisabéthain était fait pour être regardé. Tout comme il faut regarder l'opéra chinois. Tout s'y passait pour de bon.<sup>1</sup>

With the publication in France in 1962 of *Shakespeare, notre contemporain*, Jan Kott established a link between Shakespeare and Far Eastern theatre forms. Almost twenty years later Colette Godard, with her review in *Le Monde* entitled 'Les Samouraïs de Shakespeare'<sup>2</sup>, established that the link had been made manifest in a theatre production. This production, *Richard II*, was the first in the Théâtre du Soleil's cycle of Shakespeare plays which opened on 10 December 1981 at the Cartoucherie de Vincennes, Paris. The season proposed had as its framework Shakespeare's second tetralogy: *Richard II*, *Henry IV (parts one and two)* and *Henry V*, coupled with the comedies *La Nuit des rois (Twelfth Night)* and *Peines d'amour perdues (Love's Labours Lost)*. It was clear from Godard's review and from interviews with the Théâtre du Soleil's director, Ariane Mnouchkine, that this project was going to be one of the most sustained applications of Far Eastern theatre forms to Shakespeare, and the first such application to Shakespeare's comedies. Kott's advice, it appeared, was being heeded.

This was not the first time that the Théâtre du Soleil had worked on the plays of Shakespeare. Mnouchkine had already directed *Le Songe d'une nuit d'été (A Midsummer Night's Dream)* in 1968 and what is more, during rehearsals for many of the subsequent productions, characters and whole scenes from and by Shakespeare were used as exercises and as sources of inspiration.<sup>3</sup> Far Eastern

theatre forms, likewise, have been at the core of Mnouchkine's work from the outset and Mnouchkine, as is explained later, not only travelled to the Far East in her formative years to experience them at first hand, but also during the rehearsals of 'Les Shakespeare' (as the cycle was dubbed) invited the exponents of these forms to come to the Cartoucherie and teach the members of her company. This Orient-influenced Shakespeare cycle, therefore, was going to be one of the greatest single theatrical projects on Shakespeare in translation in the twentieth century by a French theatre company and one which was going to attract worldwide critical acclaim.

The attention of the world's theatre critics turned to Mnouchkine's Shakespeare cycle first and foremost because of her experimentation with the theatre forms of the Far East in which she had dabbled in the past. The critics and audience were astounded and some shocked at the oriental setting for Shakespeare's History plays even though throughout Europe in the post-war period Shakespeare had been and was still being used as the basis for experimentation in the theatre. The almost total abolition of a European frame of reference, however, and the apparent pursuit of formalism at all costs by the Théâtre du Soleil were the two most important innovations of Mnouchkine's Shakespeare.

Mnouchkine's purpose for producing the cycle was published in the manifesto-style programme notes of *Richard II*:

Nous entrons dans ce cycle un peu comme on entre en apprentissage dans l'atelier d'un maître, espérant y apprendre comment jouer le monde sur un théâtre.

Mnouchkine is not alone in considering herself an apprentice to the

great master Shakespeare. Most of France's leading theatre practitioners in the twentieth century have thought along the same lines: Copeau, Dullin, Baty, Planchon, Barrault and, to an extent, Brook (in so far as he is now part of the French theatre). Consequently, in the same tradition, Mnouchkine refused to see the production of Shakespeare as an end in itself. In the programme she stated her ultimate goal:

C'est pour nous préparer à raconter dans un prochain spectacle une histoire d'aujourd'hui que nous consultons Shakespeare, lui l'expert qui sait les outils les plus justes et les mieux adaptés aux récits des passions et des destinées des hommes.

Her aim, therefore, was not to impose correlations between the medieval history plays of Shakespeare and some contemporary twentieth-century history, but to free Shakespeare's work from any really identifiable temporal or local restrictions in an effort to present a contemporary history play at a later date and in its own right.<sup>4</sup> It was the language of the theatre for the presentation of history which was to be researched and developed, and not history itself.

Mnouchkine is not alone either in using Shakespeare as the textual basis for experimentation. Throughout Europe in the recent past Shakespeare 'mise en scène' has provoked more controversy and generated more new, radical approaches to theatre than possibly that of any other playwright performed on the European stage. Those practitioners in the post-war period principally responsible for this include Peter Stein of West Germany, Italy's Luca Ronconi and France's Roger Planchon, Patrice Chéreau and Daniel Mesguich. They

all form a kind of European 'Shakespeare movement' independently of each other and in their various ways and to varying degrees have instituted a major reassessment of Shakespeare in production.

Stein's productions of Shakespeare at the Schaubühne, Berlin began in 1976 with *Shakespeares Memory I & II*, two evenings of discussions, images, acrobatic exercises and actual scenes, all aiming to reflect and instruct the audience in late-Renaissance life. The aim of this production was threefold; first to stress the contemporary relevance of Shakespeare; second through clinical research and educational presentation to place Shakespeare firmly in a late-Renaissance context (as for most Germans Shakespeare in the twentieth century is a Romantic); third to present a preliminary production to prepare his audience for the subsequent production, *As You Like It* (*Wie es euch gefällt*), the following year. The production's main feature was a two-part acting space divided by a large labyrinthine passage through which the spectators were made to pass, and by extension, one presumes, were made to tread the path to the forest of Arden. This was to be Stein's only production of Shakespeare but one which saw most notably the appearance of authentically resurrected popular acting styles.

Luca Ronconi's *Orlando Furioso* (1969) was compared to the multi-focused spectacle and the strong emphasis on the visual aspect of theatre of Mnouchkine's *1789*, the story of the French Revolution. Unlike Mnouchkine, however, Ronconi has no great admiration for Shakespeare, principally because of Shakespeare's mammoth production history.

En tant qu'Italien, surtout, je ne saurais parler d'un auteur ou même d'une oeuvre, car, en Italie, le théâtre, beaucoup plus qu'ici a toujours été discontinu, lié à une circonstance, une occasion, une commande.<sup>5</sup>

Ronconi is interested in the immediacy and opportunism of a production rather than in developing a theory or consistent form and therefore professes more interest in unknown Elizabethan authors rather than Shakespeare. Ironically, in contradiction to his rejection of plays with production history, Ronconi is best known for his interpretation of theatre classics (among them *Richard II* and *The Merchant of Venice*) and of opera.

Ronconi's most recent production, at the Paris Odéon, *The Merchant of Venice* (*Le Marchand de Venise*), bears a strong resemblance to his opera work, notably that at La Scala, Milan. Like most directors of opera Ronconi works within the confines of a score and finds liberation and release in the designs and multi-focused spectacle. Scenography, for Ronconi, takes on a whole new dramatic meaning. He treats each scene as an 'environment' which has to be established into which the text (libretto or score) is placed. The environment then serves a dramatic function as the characters empathetically or contrapuntally operate within it. The exaggeration which ensues might be best suited to a nineteenth-century melodrama or opera and not Shakespeare, it might be argued, given that the spectacle takes precedence, yet the heavy mobilization of scenery and the creation of visually exciting stage business serve to create an attractive 'backdrop' to *The Merchant*, though not necessarily relevant to it. Ronconi relies very much on the technical capabilities of the stage to create spectacle rather

than emphasizing the inventiveness, creativity and skill of the actor. The end result is 'designer Shakespeare' pure and simple. Unlike Stein who examines environment through clinical research, social analysis and through the resurrection of authentic popular acting styles, Ronconi aims primarily at the visual power of spectacular effects. His approach to theatre is constructionist, he talks of machines (mechanical and other), is interested in simultaneous action and experimenting with audience-actor relationships. The play serves as vehicle for his invention. He imposes a machinery on *The Merchant* which dictates the pace of the production and his actors become mere cogs in the giant 'industrial' wheel. Above all, Shakespeare for Ronconi is an empty vessel and unlike Mnouchkine, he does not place Shakespeare at the core of his 'ideal repertoire'.

Perhaps of all her contemporaries it is Roger Planchon of the Théâtre National Populaire of Villeurbanne, Lyon who comes closest to Mnouchkine as regards focusing on the actor and manifesting interest in Oriental theatre forms. The early repertoire of Planchon's first company, the Théâtre de la Comédie, featured Shakespeare, productions which were among his most notable successes of the fifties. David Bradby, in *Modern French Drama 1940-1980*, points out the main influences on Planchon's theatre:

It identifies much more with an older tradition, going back through Brecht and Büchner to the Elizabethans, of a theatre combining a fluid, epic style with a broad range of reference, at once personal, social and historical. [...] it is a theatre profoundly marked by the influence of Artaud. The one point Brecht and Artaud had in common was their interest in the theatre of the Far East. Planchon was the first of many directors and playwrights [...] to have taken an interest in

Japanese theatre because of its elaborate gestural language, owing nothing to illusionism but converting everything into specifically theatrical signs.<sup>6</sup>

Planchon's interest in Oriental theatres manifested itself primarily in his treatment of the psychology of character and in the physicality of the actors' performance. He believes that the psychology of character should be externalized in so far as it forms a situation or scene, that it be dramatized and not left to the guesswork of the audience. Psychology is no longer subtextual. The upgrading of psychology on the stage constitutes an integral part of the drama and this was the main feature of Planchon's first production in Villeurbanne, *Henry IV parts one and two* (1957). In the sixties the physicality of the actors took precedence in his Shakespeare productions, and like the Berliner Ensemble's 1965 production of *Coriolanus*, Planchon discovered the battle scenes in Shakespeare perfect vehicles for his actor-athletes to combine violence with ritual, such as in *Troilus and Cressida* (1964), and he infused *Richard III* (1966) with the ritualized movement of actors and machines as instruments of death.

One major aspect of Planchon's (and indeed Mnouchkine's) work borrowed from the theatres of the Orient is the use of auditors, characters or figures on stage who act and react to events without necessarily forming part of the main action. This has been seen in Planchon's more recent preoccupation with the classics of the French theatre. His 1980 production of Racine's *Athalie* is a case in point. In it the chorus was attendant to the action throughout the play and did not just appear, as is written,

at the end of each act. This and the choral elements in *Dom Juan* performed with *Athalie* as a theatrical diptych introduced movement to the French classics which by tradition had been performed in a static declamatory manner. This use of non-intervening 'presences' on stage already had been seen in his 1959 production of Marivaux's *La Seconde Surprise de l'amour*. In his productions of the French classics, Shakespeare and indeed in his own plays, the main feature of Planchon's direction has been to relate everyday events and personal or domestic dramas to the broader spectrum of historical events, a feature common to the work of Brecht. In this way, therefore, Planchon's Shakespeare compares much more with Mnouchkine's post-Shakespeare cycle work on contemporary history rather than with her productions of Shakespeare which, as we shall see, bear witness to the creation of a form surpassing any true social or historical analysis.

Patrice Chéreau (one of Planchon's early assistant directors) who, like Ronconi, has devoted a large amount of his time to the direction of opera, used Shakespeare to create a name for himself. His 1970 production of *Richard II* (at the Nouveau Gymnase, Marseille, and later at the Paris Odéon) created a *Hernani*-like scandal in the theatre world. Chéreau, playing the lead as well as directing, created a young homosexual Richard complete with boy slaves and a simultaneous infatuation with Bolingbroke and death. The violent irreverence of the acting took place in a sand pit, the noise of which added to the bizarre circus-spectacle. Carried aloft by androgynous gigolos in the sand-filled hell-hole, Chéreau incited the wrath of critics and public



alike who stormed out of the 'générale' in droves. Chéreau, rather than launching a new spirit of invention and style for Shakespeare in his *Richard II*, was more concerned, it might be argued, with launching his own career.

Daniel Mesguich, former director of the Théâtre du Miroir and now of the Théâtre Gérard-Philipe de Saint-Denis, is another director, like Chéreau and Ronconi, noted for his productions of Shakespeare without them being an essential part of his theatrical repertoire. His 1977 production of *Shakespeare's Hamlet* (he directed a second production in 1986) tampered with the text more than perhaps most of his contemporaries (Mnouchkine created a form, Ronconi an environment). Mesguich believes that for us *Hamlet* (or any play by Shakespeare) is not simply a question of the text. *Hamlet* also means previous production history and translations and it is not his aim to give his definitive version of the play in the sequence of production events but to open the play up to all sorts of possibilities. This is why the show was entitled *Shakespeare's Hamlet* and not Mesguich's. This translates on stage as a Derrida-inspired presentation of the play, such as the secondary presentation of the initial ghost scene during the playing of the initial scene. The secondary scene was a few steps ahead of the first and offered a fragmented mirror-image. To compound this Mesguich went further by fragmenting the language during the primary scene creating what he called a Hamlet effect. Mesguich's Shakespeare is based on a philosophy of fragmentation and deconstruction and is probably the most clearly identifiable and theatrically philosophical of all post-war French interpretations

of Shakespeare.

And so Mnouchkine slots into a post-fifties tradition of theatre production in Europe which uses Shakespeare as the textual basis for experimentalism with form and style. Many theories can be posited as to why the major European directors should choose an English playwright in order to create and develop highly controversial theatrical styles and conventions. Perhaps the fact that Shakespeare does not form part of the cultural heritage of directors such as Mnouchkine, Planchon, Ronconi and Stein is reason enough for those directors to experiment without upsetting the applecart of their respective theatrical traditions. Divorced from the cultural traditions of English theatre practice, Shakespeare in modern European theatre has few pre-requisites or preconditions and the application of controversial and experimental forms to Shakespeare incites much less wrath amongst the traditionalists and purists of theatre in Europe than it would in England.

Conversely Mnouchkine's contemporaries, it could be argued, are less keen on the pursuit of a form and more on forcing a reassessment of the French classics. Planchon's productions of *Bérénice* (1966), *Athalie* and *Dom Juan* (1980-1) are cases in point. His *Mise en pièces du 'Cid'* (1969) adopted a deconstructionist approach to Corneille as Mesguich was to do seven years later with *Hamlet*. Both Planchon and Chéreau have experimented with Marivaux, the most striking example of which being Chéreau's 1976 production of *La Dispute*, for which the set took on a life of its own. Most of the major contemporary theatre practitioners in France have not only experimented with form and style in their productions of

Shakespeare but also have adopted highly experimental and controversial approaches to the French classics. Mnouchkine, however, proves herself exceptional amongst those directors: in her professional career she has never directed a French classical play and before 1985 had never directed a play by a French playwright in the conventional sense. Mnouchkine's experimentalism was reserved entirely for Shakespeare.

It is not untrue to say that much of the interest shown in modern European productions of Shakespeare is founded on the novelty of artifice (or form). Like her contemporaries Mnouchkine admits to using Shakespeare as a vehicle. What raises Mnouchkine's Shakespeare above that of her fellow directors is that the form she creates, being of Oriental influence, breaks the bounds of her European cultural context. Stein, Ronconi and Planchon all use Europe as a frame of reference, and even though Stein injects his productions with popular theatre forms and Planchon his with the gestural and physical styles inspired by the Orient, it is Mnouchkine's Shakespeare which leads the field in European theatre in the projection of Orientalism.

The concept of Orientalism in the academic or indeed theatre world as a department of thought is relatively new. Its emergence follows the post-1945 decline of the Far Eastern empires of both France and Great Britain. The Oxford English Dictionary lists three very interesting yet conflicting definitions of the term 'Orientalism': first as the noun for anything which possesses 'Oriental style or quality', second it refers to Oriental scholarship and third to the knowledge of Far Eastern languages.

The latter definition would seem to imply that anyone who could speak a smattering of Japanese, Mandarin or Hindi was an Orientalist. What is more, an Orientalist is also defined as someone who belongs to an Eastern or Greek church! These definitions of the term relate to French theatre and culture as the East emerged concomitantly from its 'exotic' mould in French literature. This mould was fashioned by the nineteenth-century Romantic poets and became a source of inspiration for the French theatre. Trips to and trade with the East in the twentieth century increased the size of Oriental scholarship, and, in the theatre, Orientalist approaches to material and style increased in number and gained in strength.

It was not until the latter half of the twentieth century, however, that Orientalism became a recognized area of study, or academic discipline, principally because it was a discipline which demanded the Westerner to examine objectively his own perception of the Orient, and thereby to expose his many and varied misconceptions of the same. The launch of this discipline came with the publication in 1978 of *Orientalism* by the American historian Edward W. Said. The book's major concern is with the Arab world and in particular with America's misrepresentation and misinterpretation of Islam, yet the theories incorporated therein are extremely useful to the French theatre historian insofar as they can be applied to twentieth-century theatre practice in France. To begin with, it was the first book of its kind to recognize that a Westerner's critical analysis of his own interpretation of the Orient was a viable proposition in the

academic or even theatre world, as Said dispenses with the Oxford English Dictionary definitions of the term and sets out a *fin de siècle* definition of Orientalism in the post-colonial world. From the point of view of analysing Ariane Mnouchkine's application of Orient-inspired theatrical forms to Shakespeare, he makes references, if a little too fleeting, to what one might call the sub-discipline of 'theatrical Orientalism', in other words to the influences and effects of the Orient on Western theatre.

Although he concentrates largely on America, Said singles out the British and the French theatre, as being the most affected by Orientalism. It comes as no surprise that the culture of these two countries should be influenced by Orientalist phenomena since the empires of both encompassed huge slices of the Orient.

Unlike the Americans, the French and the British [...] have had a long tradition of what I shall be calling *Orientalism*, a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience.<sup>7</sup>

The concept of the empire is an extremely important factor in the growth of Orientalism: this was the idea of the ruling officer-class colonials interpreting the culture of a people they were colonizing, yet at the same time holding it at arm's length.

Additionally, the imaginative examination of things Oriental was based more or less exclusively upon a sovereign Western consciousness out of whose unchallenged centrality an Oriental world emerged, first according to general ideas about who or what was an Oriental, then according to a detailed logic governed not simply by empirical reality but by a battery of desires, repressions, investments, and projections.<sup>8</sup>

From this point of view it would seem that the Orientalist is someone who is doing the Orient a favour by bringing to light and

indeed propagating the culture (amongst other things) of the Orient, rather than someone who is looking for specific and unselfconscious influences on Western society. Said acknowledges this:

Orientalism is premised upon exteriority, that is, on the fact that the Orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West. He is never concerned with the Orient except as the first cause of what he says.<sup>9</sup>

In other words, the Orientalist is the megalomaniac exploiter (or cultural colonist) who cares little for his subject that is the Orient and more for his own brand of Orientalism as the final product.

This point leads one to respond to the accusation made against theatrical Orientalists such as Mnouchkine of exploiting the forms of Eastern theatres and consequently being extolled for her subsequent hybrid which bears little, if any, relation to the original. The hybrid nature of the interpretation thus divorces itself from its source of inspiration. Said comments on this split from the original source:

We need not look for correspondence between the language used to depict the Orient and the Orient itself, not so much because the language is inaccurate, but because it is not even trying to be accurate. What it is trying to do, as Dante tried to do in the *Inferno*, is at one and the same time to characterize the Orient as alien and to incorporate it schematically on a theatrical stage whose audience, manager and actors are *for* Europe, and only for Europe.<sup>10</sup>

As it divorces itself from the original, this hybrid interpretation is the only means possible for a Western practitioner or Orientalist to depict the Orient in such a way as to render the

Orient comprehensible to a Western audience. Importing a true Oriental production to the West has little effect on the uninitiated and the ill-disposed. The hybrid is of wider public appeal. Unfortunately, as the representation of the Orient undergoes its metamorphosis to Orientalism the inaccuracies, the misinterpretations and the misconceptions of jaundiced vision creep in. These are the aspects which Said, in *Orientalism*, wished to expel from the whole concept of Orientalism yet, as shall be made clear later, these were the very aspects highlighted by Mnouchkine's Orientalist approach to Shakespeare in order to expose the inadequacies of Western dramatic theory and theatrical forms.

Where then are the meeting points of Eastern and Western theatre traditions which act as the starting point for the Orientalization of the Western stage? Of course, keeping the Orient in an inferior position and at arms' length, Orientalism demands those starting points to be within the Eastern theatres themselves rather than looking for easily comprehensible parallels or indeed common ground between the two traditions. Leonard Pronko, in his book *Theater East & West*, sets out this common ground and draws the parallels ranging from Balinese dancing to Peking Opera, all the while charting the development of Orientalism in the French theatre of the twentieth century. The genesis of this development, Pronko asserts, is with the post-1931 broadening of attitudes as regards Oriental theatres and forms by Antonin Artaud, following the appearance of a Balinese dance troupe at the 'Exposition Coloniale' in that year. The history and development of each Oriental theatre described by Pronko is, in typical Orientalist fashion, of little

importance in itself. Pronko is more concerned with how such theatres and forms were received in France and Europe generally and goes on to perpetuate and advocate the idea of rethinking our Western theatre along similar lines to our Eastern counterparts, to whom we have recently been exposed. Even the codes and rituals of Balinese dancing have something to teach our realistic theatre, Pronko believes:

We might relearn the effectiveness of the eyes, the lips, the limbs used in a nonrealistic way, the possibility of combining high stylization and masks with utter realism. In Bali the Topeng or masked dance can create characters as alive as any seen in Western theater: through stylized movement a young man, wearing an old age mask which seems now laughing, now sober, dazzlingly evokes an old man in most naturalistic details, blowing his nose, scratching his arms, and picking lice from his body.<sup>11</sup>

Pronko is arguing that through extreme stylization the actor can achieve a performance or create a character closer to the real than could be achieved through a realistic approach, since the latter is simply the imitation of the real and not the creation of the real.

Peking Opera, though still highly stylized and intensely physical, goes one step further away from the real since it is neither trying to imitate nor to create the real *per se* but to abstract and thereby approach the essence of the real:

The highly stylized, carefully controlled movements of legs, arms, and sleeves carry specific meanings. The same is true of the position of the head, the movements of the eyes and mouth.<sup>12</sup>

These symbolic meanings of physical gestures of course could never be compared with the codes and sign language of, say, the *Kathakali* theatre but, in any case, much of the symbolism of both theatres is



lost on the Western spectator. It is for the Orientalist practitioner, therefore, to use or even misuse such symbolism in an Oriental-style self-creation to make such particular symbolic actions as horseback riding easily translatable on the stage in the West. As is explained in Chapter Two, Mnouchkine's misuse or rather reinterpretation of this one aspect of gestural symbolism of the Peking Opera is such that the Western spectator retains the belief that the origin of such gestural symbolism is Oriental. It is immediately understood to be part of our experience yet it is not part of our theatre tradition. It is a common mistake to believe that a reinterpretation of a blatantly Oriental theatre technique is Oriental rather than Orientalist.

It is the *Kabuki* theatre of Japan, however, which has been lauded throughout the twentieth century in Europe for being the most accessible to the Western spectator for its appeal to several of the senses at once. After the visit by a *Kabuki* troupe to Russia in 1928, Eisenstein noted his impressions, here related by Pronko:

The *Kabuki* actor, Eisenstein notes, appeals to every level of the spectator simultaneously, creating what may be called synesthesia, for the actor's movement can correspond to music or to the sound of wooden clappers; it can take place in space, be accentuated by sound or by a flat surface moving at the back of the stage, or it can correspond to some intellectually conceived convention.<sup>13</sup>

The intellectual experience of a *Kabuki* performance in the West is questionable, however. The *Kabuki* plot is a variation on a standard theme and follows stock formal patterns. Furthermore, the quality of the text as a piece of literature is, for the most part, poor. Popular theatre such as *Kabuki* is rarely considered to be a

worthwhile intellectual experience, and even the language of *Noh* is barely comprehensible to the Japanese. For a Western spectator whose knowledge of the language is scant and whose knowledge of the codes and traditions of the theatrical form minimal, a theatre performance such as the *Kabuki* offers an entirely new experience. The physicality of the performance language of Far Eastern theatres appeals strongly to the Western spectator who has been grounded in his own textually-based theatre and in the belief that theatre is a branch of literature. Yet the Western spectator can never be fully engaged in the production as Peter Brook explains:

One of the difficulties we encounter when we see traditional theatre from the East is that we admire without understanding. Unless we possess the keys to the symbols, we remain on the outside, fascinated, perhaps, by the surface, but unable to contact the human realities without which these complex art forms would never have arisen.<sup>14</sup>

However, such a theatre performance in the West will not only appear attractive to those wishing an immediate aural and visual experience but also to those interested in the rather more intellectual experience of interpreting and deciphering codes, rituals and gestural hieroglyphics without a key. The hybrid Orientalist production compounds the experience for the intellect since it demands the separation of the truly oriental from the products of Orientalism.

One main reason for the *Kabuki* theatre's accessibility in the West is that it followed a similar path to Elizabethan theatre practices. What is more, their reception throughout the centuries in their respective places of origin is comparable, too. Today, as

Pronko points out, *Kabuki* has become the touchstone for Orientalist interpretations by Western theatre:

Kabuki's position, halfway between realism and stylization, makes it an accessible and profitable meeting point for the theaters of East and West. Less obviously balletic than the dance drama of Bali, less obviously operatic than the Peking theater, less obviously realistic than the Noh, it offers striking parallels with Western realistic drama as we know it today, and with our more highly stylized forms of theater from the past.<sup>15</sup>

Pronko's interpretation of Orientalism is, therefore, one of parallelism and association between East and West, of the search for common ground between the two. In Edward W. Said's interpretation, Orientalism is the usually inaccurate interpretation of the Orient by the West in a highly artificial form which bears few relationships with its original source of inspiration. How these interpretations of the term are applied to twentieth-century theatre in France become clear only in the light of Mnouchkine's application of an Eastern-inspired form to Western texts, as had been advocated by many major French theatre practitioners before her.

The influence of the Orient on French theatre grew steadily throughout the twentieth century, and with the arrival of Far Eastern dance troupes and theatre companies, began to impose itself on the consciousness of many theatre practitioners both in France and in Germany. Antonin Artaud, one of the most important theatrical philosophers of the century in France, was partly responsible. He succumbed to the appeal of Far Eastern theatre while training at Charles Dullin's theatre school and was further smitten after watching a group of Balinese dancers appearing at the

Exposition Coloniale in Paris in 1931. In *Le Théâtre et son double* he devotes a whole chapter, entitled 'Sur le théâtre balinais', to the experience:

Notre théâtre qui n'a jamais eu l'idée de cette métaphysique de gestes, qui n'a jamais su servir la musique à des fins dramatiques aussi immédiates, aussi concrètes, notre théâtre purement verbal et qui ignore tout ce qui fait le théâtre, c'est-à-dire ce qui est dans l'air du plateau, qui se mesure et se cerne d'air, qui a une densité dans l'espace: mouvements, formes, couleurs, vibrations, attitudes, cris, pourrait, [..], demander au Théâtre Balinais une leçon de spiritualité.<sup>16</sup>

Artaud goes on to identify the difference between occidental and oriental theatre as being the opposition of the psychological and metaphysical with the importance accorded to the text in Western theatre symptomatic of the division. Even though it was for this reason that he was prompted to write 'En finir avec les chefs-d'oeuvre', he still retained his respect for Elizabethan texts from which, he believed, emanated a 'virtualité' which matched up to his ideals of a metaphysical theatre. It is also interesting to note that in his first manifesto for his 'Théâtre de la Cruauté' he announces at the head of a proposed programme:

Nous mettrons en scène, sans tenir compte du texte: 1. Une adaptation d'une oeuvre de l'époque de Shakespeare, entièrement conforme à l'état de trouble actuel des esprits, soit qu'il s'agisse d'une pièce apocryphe de Shakespeare, comme *Arden of Faversham*, soit de toute autre pièce de la même époque.<sup>17</sup>

In the ideal theatre, therefore, according to Artaud, Shakespeare should feature in the repertoire.

The extensive travelling of leading theatre practitioners this century permitted them to experience Far Eastern theatre forms

in their natural habitat. This first-hand experience was to influence their subsequent work in the French theatre. When Barrault took his company to Japan in 1960 and Mnouchkine embarked upon her Far Eastern tour in 1963 (while still uncertain of her profession), they were both simply following in the footsteps of many of their theatrical predecessors. Even as far back as the 1930s a prolonged stay in the Orient affected the work of French dramatists, such as Paul Claudel, who was French ambassador to Japan and, of course, affected by the Orient. Such visits by dramatists or practitioners had, of course, an effect on their own work and on the work of those in their immediate spheres of influence. The effect of Oriental theatre before the saturation of television on the great French public was naturally limited and largely depended on the Orientalist interpreting or rather filtering the immediate Oriental experience. The trips made by Far Eastern theatre companies to France were of vital importance.

Before the Second World War visits by groups of Balinese dancers or *Kabuki* actors to France were few and far between. After the war two major visits in the nineteen-fifties and sixties by *Kabuki* troupes captured the imagination of spectators and critics, both in 1958 and the follow-up to Barrault's trip to Japan, in 1960. In the past fifteen years, visits by *Bunraku* and *Kathakali* troupes have become increasingly common. The *Kabuki* theatre, though far removed from its humble beginnings, retains its seventeenth-century codes and rituals and still flourishes despite the high-technological advances of Japanese society. This is one reason given by Mnouchkine and others for applying Far Eastern theatre

forms to Shakespeare: both *Kabuki's* form and Shakespeare's texts have survived from the seventeenth century.

The Balinese theatre, too, retains the rituals of its origins and unlike *Kabuki*, has not estranged itself from its civilization, or sold itself to the demands of commercialism. Leonard Pronko, in *Theater East & West*, explains how the Balinese is the only true surviving theatre which has not divorced itself from its religious origins and its civilization:

Like the Elizabethan - or the Chinese or Japanese - the Balinese feels a real intimacy with the performance, and can view it from any of three, or even four, sides. But the classical theaters of England, China and Japan have gone some distance beyond their ritual beginnings. [...] In this central staging there is no use of settings, and never any visible indication of a change of scene. Instead, the location is suggested through dialogue, gesture or facial expression. Properties are few, including occasionally a curtain through which the dancers enter, a few umbrellas, banners, lances, and fans.<sup>19</sup>

As we shall see later, this could almost be read as an accurate description of the Théâtre du Soleil's 'Les Shakespeare' in 1984.

It is widely acknowledged that the Berliner Ensemble's first visit to Paris in 1954 was instrumental in provoking a reassessment of performance style in post-war French theatre. This new gestural language (never before seen in France) was used to perform *Mutter Courage*. It appealed to and influenced the work of Roger Planchon in particular. The 1955 and 1958 visits by the Peking Opera also helped to generate interest (particularly among the critics) in a more gestural approach to performance, and acted as an obvious counterpoint to the reductionist 'doom and gloom' of the Theatre of the Absurd. Spectacle, symbolism and athleticism offered by the

Peking Opera were the order of the day. After its second visit to Paris, at the Théâtre des Nations in 1958, Robert Kanters wrote in *L'Express*:

Un symbolisme simple et raffiné fait des nombreuses scènes de combat, par exemple, un spectacle à la fois plus chargé de signification, plus amusant et même plus réaliste que les scènes de bataille du Châtelet ou même de M. Peter Brook. C'est que chaque acteur, chaque figurant est ici pris des pieds à la tête, avec tous ses moyens dans tous les sens, comme un seul mot. Ah! si M. Gérard Philipe en interprétant le récit du 'Cid' avait aussi le jeu des jambes et de bras de M<sup>me</sup> Tchang Mei-Kiuan qui jongle avec un nombre incroyable de javelots.<sup>19</sup>

Struck by the very athleticism of the performance, Robert Kanters' enthusiasm appears very Artaudian. He goes on:

Sans aller jusque-là, il est évident que nous avons beaucoup à apprendre de la tradition théâtrale chinoise, quand ce ne serait qu'à ranimer et à mieux maintenir les traditions théâtrales de notre Occident.

Kanters' review points to the theatre critics' realization of the inadequacies of Western theatre in coping with the theatrical form for the presentation of the classics. Georges Lerminier, writing in *Le Parisien Libéré*, saw further lessons to be learned from this production, and offered specific advice to French directors:

La lutte de guerriers célestes et des guerriers des eaux, et le combat singulier de la rebelle et du céleste général sont ... shakespeariennes. Je pense depuis trois ans à ce qu'un metteur en scène occidental pourrait faire avec les batailles de *Jules César*, de *Roi Jean* ou de *Richard III*, en faisant appel aux acrobates de Médrano ou de Bouglione.<sup>20</sup>

What must be pointed out, however, is that these critics had had three years since the Peking Opera's previous visit, to formulate and develop a reaction to the idea of an alien culture invading

their own cultural territory. The initial response after the first visit in 1955 to the Théâtre des Nations was to acclaim the gestural style and acrobatic feats of the Chinese yet many expressed dismay at the inclusion of such acrobatics in the domain of the theatre. Three years later the critics were calling on the Western theatre directors to rejuvenate Western classics, and the plays of Shakespeare in particular, in like manner.

This piece of advice would seem, in retrospect, to have been heeded for Jean-Louis Barrault subsequently used athletes from the Ecole de Joinville for the battle scenes in *Jules César*. Nevertheless, this can hardly be seen as an innovative departure since his battle scenes had already been choreographed in *Antoine et Cléopâtre* in 1945 and even as far back as 1933 he had been involved in staging the battle scenes of Dullin's *Richard III*. The Berliner Ensemble also had its part to play in the orientalizing of Western theatre. Bertolt Brecht, heavily influenced by Chinese theatre, had his plans for *Coriolanus* posthumously realized in the Ensemble's touring production in the nineteen-sixties. Kenneth Tynan here describes the theatrical form employed in the production which visited London in 1965:

Next: battle in the open, with waves of soldiers clashing in the stylised manner of Chinese Opera, knees akimbo and swords maniacally brandished. As they part, the mortally wounded spin and fall. Finally, the generals meet in single combat, covered in blood yet grinning as they face each other like two young Samurai delighting in their expertise.<sup>21</sup>

Across Europe Planchon, Barrault and the Berliner Ensemble were rejuvenating Shakespeare's battle scenes and becoming more



adventurous in the use of the body. That particular style or form, however, had yet to permeate the obviously non-physical scenes of those same plays. What is more, the opposition to pure Far Eastern theatre forms, let alone those applied by Orientalists to Western theatres, remained intransigent.

Claude Roy's book *L'Opéra de Pékin*, published soon after the Peking Opera's visit to Paris in 1955, accuses the critics of myopia and intransigence for failing to accept that any theatrical form should be allowed to cut across so blatantly the parameters of theatre, opera and circus.

Une autre erreur, qui a été bien souvent exprimée au cours du séjour à Paris de l'Ensemble de la République Populaire de Chine, met en cause la notion même de *théâtre*. Le spectateur français hérite de ses classiques, et des règles du jeu auxquelles ils se soumièrent, le sens des distinctions tranchées, et le respect des *genres*. Il attend du théâtre qu'il soit théâtral (et seulement)...<sup>22</sup>

The proposition to the French public so rigidly formal in its respect for 'genres' was one of a total theatre, a notion which had emanated from the work of both Artaud and Brecht. Claude Roy records his dismay at this notion being too revolutionary in 1955:

Le spectacle total que lui proposent les Chinois le déconcerte. Un critique parisien faisait la moue devant 'les prouesses acrobatiques dont les spectateurs pourraient depuis longtemps admirer les pareilles si les habitués des répétitions générales fréquentaient l'Olympia ou Médrano'. A quoi Jacques Prévert répondit fort judicieusement en me faisant observer qu'il avait déjà vu au cirque des sauteurs arabes prodigieux et des figurants à l'Opéra déguisés en soldats, mais jamais à l'Opéra des soldats capables de sauter *aussi* (et aussi bien que les sauteurs arabes).<sup>23</sup>

What the critics obviously preferred was artifice to skill.

Why should an audience attend a production of a theatre so obviously removed geographically, philosophically and artistically from its own brand of theatre if not for an experience of the exotic. This was how the Orient had been portrayed as far back as the nineteenth century, by the poets Baudelaire and Rimbaud. Roy agrees that this was the expectation and motivation of many:

Neuf sur dix des spectateurs qui allaient, en juin 1955 découvrir, à Sarah Bern[h]ardt ou au Palais de Chaillot, l'Opéra de Pékin imaginaient qu'ils allaient goûter un plaisir sans doute violent, mais à coup sûr insolite, dépaysant, exotique. Leur surprise fut extrême, de se découvrir si vite, passé le premier choc de l'in-ouï, du pas-encore-vu, en pays de connaissance. Ce qu'ils *reconnaissaient*, ce n'était pas un des sommets de l'art qu'ont certains hommes d'être parfaitement des hommes - c'était aussi un peuple, un peuple si lointain, et qui soudain leur devenait *familier*.<sup>24</sup>

The stories told by the actors were familiar ones to the Western spectator, even if the legends were not, and were told in a theatrical language which made the language of the text, if not exactly redundant, then assume a supporting rather than leading role. The roles in the theatrical event were more equally divided and all were functionally essential to the production as a whole.

Performing Shakespeare and Far Eastern theatrical forms together on the French stage, with the acrobatics, the unfamiliar and strange sounding instruments and the declamatory way of narrating the text, might have been a difficult experiment to take in 1958 because Eastern culture was not as well known in the West as it is today. It might have had a disconcerting effect on the spectators simply because their culture (represented by the text) would be naturally at odds with the alien culture (the Far Eastern

form) used to present it on stage. Claude Roy goes on to explain the incongruities of spectators and actors' confrontation with opposing cultural backgrounds (at the Peking Opera) and the experiment of applying an alien culture to a Western audience:

L'expérience du théâtre avait la rigueur, en effet, d'une expérience de laboratoire. Toutes les conditions étaient réunies pour rendre difficile, improbable et contrarié le passage de la moindre émotion. Sur un plateau dépouillé de tout élément qui parlât à notre imagination, baigné d'une musique dont le système, les valeurs, la couleur, et les harmonies ne pouvaient que *déconcerter* notre ouïe.<sup>25</sup>

There are two possible effects on an audience of this experiment, either one despairs at not being able to decipher the codes, rituals and references of the Eastern form or one appreciates it on an entirely different level to that of a Western play, on the level of artistic appreciation for its own sake filtered through the eyes and the culture of a Western spectator. Roy continues:

Les règles inconnues qui organisaient ses gestes, et la cérémonie de ses pas, les principes qui régissaient l'étrange ondulement de sa diction, l'émission vocale totalement artificielle à laquelle il se soumettait dans les parties chantées; les références à des légendes, une histoire et des notions dont nous ignorions sans doute l'essentiel, tout enfin était réuni, de ce qui devait nous rendre ce spectacle totalement *étranger*.<sup>26</sup>

The message to the Western spectator or critic is a simple one: do not even attempt to decipher codes and rituals and do not be afraid of missing the essential points of the story and the culture of which it is a part. The idea is to recognize and treat it as something totally alien to the West. Then the Western spectator must allow it to filter through his eyes, ears, culture and

experience and perceive it as an artistic experience in itself. The critics who fail to do this are lambasted by Orientalists such as Roy. And the spectator who permits himself to become the already described filter becomes, unwittingly, an Orientalist himself.

Not being a practitioner of theatre, Roy can only ever be considered as a passive theatrical Orientalist. The true Orientalists of the French theatre are those who attempted to establish a new training for the actor, new constructions for the auditoria, and new forms for the performance of dramatic works. Copeau, Dullin, Artaud, Barrault and Mnouchkine were all heavily influenced by the Orient and all attempted such feats. Roy records reactions in the West to Far Eastern theatres. Yet this is not Orientalism in any sense of the word. Orientalism in the theatre can only come about by means of such visits and such reactions, both positive and negative, to them. Only when these reactions manifested themselves in a concrete fashion in the work of French theatre practitioners did they become attitudes and effects of Orientalism. The training offered by all these practitioners to the actor was to develop a form and thereby to present a repertoire, by accident or design, based on the classics, particularly the plays of Molière and Shakespeare. The search for a form for the theatre is the very essence of theatrical Orientalism. Said believes that a Shakespearian text is only ever valid in its transient state of reaction and development in conjunction with a theatrical form. Similar is his belief that the presentation of the Orient undergoes a metamorphosis when subjected to the same theatrical form. The

presentation of the Orient on the stage in the recent past, however, has not acquired the same status as a Shakespearian text:

Even so relatively inert an object as a literary text is commonly supposed to gain some of its identity from its historical moment interacting with its attentions, judgements, scholarship and performance of its readers. But, I discovered, this privilege was rarely allowed the Orient, the Arabs, or Islam, which separately or together were supposed by mainstream academic thought to be confined to the fixed status of an object frozen once and for all by the gaze of Western percipients.<sup>27</sup>

Said's point arises from the fact that many critics are under the mistaken belief that any production in which Oriental designs and costumes proliferate, is necessarily Orientalist. The recent Royal Shakespeare Company production of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and the two productions of Greek tragedies at the Théâtre du Temps in Paris are cases in point.<sup>28</sup> No matter how authentically oriental the music, the sets and the costumes may be, if the whole form of the theatre does not change the spectator is left with decorative Orientalism pure and simple.

Decorative Orientalism is one way of describing Ariane Mnouchine's early productions before the setting up of the Théâtre du Soleil proper. Her first production, under the auspices of l'Association théâtrale des étudiants de Paris (l'ATEP) was a play by the French Orientalist poet Henri Bauchau, entitled *Gengis Khan* (1961). At the time she was noted as saying that, 'On avait toute la Chine à mettre en scène'. She was concerned very little with the form of the theatre, let alone the work of the actor and at the time she was, one could claim, the precursor to Said's definition of Orientalism:

Orientalism is premised upon exteriority, that is, on the fact that the Orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West.

Only after establishing the Théâtre du Soleil, training at the Lecoq school of mime and having resolved to establish both a theatre and a school along the lines of Jacques Copeau, did Mnouchkine recognize the need for a form for the theatre and was to find her source of inspiration for that form among the theatres of the Orient. That recognition was a long process: *Gengis Khan* and 'Les Shakespeare' were separated by a period of twenty years.

Not only can one perceive similarities between the aims and achievements of Mnouchkine and Copeau but one can also draw a line directly between the two practitioners. During 1966-7 Mnouchkine attended classes at the Ecole Jacques Lecoq, which was to be her only formal training in any aspect of theatre albeit in the non-mainstream branch of mime. Lecoq had begun his training with the director Jean Dasté who in turn had had very close links with Copeau. Similarly, most critics have seen the influence of Artaud in Mnouchkine's work, Artaud having been a pupil of Charles Dullin, who in turn had been a pupil of Copeau. All roads back from Mnouchkine lead to Copeau. They both share an interest in the theatres of the Orient, they stress the importance of establishing a school as well as a theatre, they are convinced by the need for the 'tréteau nu' (the bare boards), and they both profess to have a great admiration for Shakespeare. Copeau is indisputably Mnouchkine's source of inspiration and indirect mentor in his overall aims for the theatre, if not in the methods of their

execution.

Jacques Copeau founded his Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier with the aim of purifying the theatre from the self-conscious stage effects of the actors or *coups de théâtre* of the designers which very often bore little or no relevance to the plays being performed. Out of a total of seven seasons in the existence of the Vieux-Colombier, plays from the classical repertoire (particularly Shakespeare's *La Nuit des rois*) were performed in the majority. Perhaps the most significant aspect of Copeau's theatre was the abandonment of the Italianate interior in favour of a quasi-Elizabethan structure, a move which was the precursor to future experimentation with actor-audience relationships later in the century, most notably in the theories of Antonin Artaud and in practice at Ariane Mnouchkine's Théâtre du Soleil.

Mnouchkine's theatre is similar in many respects to Copeau's Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier and subsequent Compagnie des Quinze; the emphasis on physical and gestural acting styles, the resort to the classical repertoire, the merging of performance and plastic arts, and above all the total commitment of the participants. Unlike the Vieux-Colombier, with its successful initial subscription scheme, the Théâtre du Soleil began life as a part-time venture (as is explained in Chapter One) when the company members were forced to earn their living in other ways during the day. The artistic success of their productions in the late sixties secured meagre aid from the Ministère des Affaires Culturelles which, though doubled in the early seventies, was not sufficient to mop up the debts incurred in the pursuit of absolute perfection, and to the present

day the company has never been sufficiently profitable to prevent it from disbanding for long periods between productions. Mnouchkine's actors have been able to spend long rehearsal periods while claiming benefit from the state. Only when the company actually has gone into production do the actors receive a salary from the Soleil. Copeau, on the other hand, did not have this safety net and failsafe yet the subscription scheme gave his entreprise sufficient security from the opening production.

From an artistic point of view, however, the two theatre followed similar paths. In *L'Age d'or* (1975) Mnouchkine achieved what had eluded Copeau, namely the restoration of *commedia* techniques applied to a contemporary drama. Subsequently the introduction of Hélène Cixous as resident writer to the Soleil copied the arrival of André Obey to Copeau's Compagnie des Quinze some fifty years earlier. The retention of artistic integrity was paramount in both theatres. Tales of Mnouchkine's extravagance with sets and costumes in the sixties simply mirror Copeau's belief in exactitude at all costs.

Unlike Copeau, who became director of the Comédie-Française for a short period in 1940, Mnouchkine has never been drawn into mainstream French theatre. Increased sponsorship from the Ministry of Culture (not immediately after 1968 but during the Socialist government of the early eighties) ran concurrently with the Shakespeare cycle, perhaps the pinnacle of the company's artistic creation, and secured the required worldwide critical acclaim to ensure subsequent sufficient funding, the most recent being an award for artistic achievement from the European Community. The



Théâtre du Soleil is not cost effective despite uniform salaries in its self-styled socialist utopia: Copeau's patrons and artists shared the profits. Copeau attempted to change the face of French theatre from the inside whereas Mnouchkine at first sight appears to have opted out and be on the retreat. Copeau had attempted a revolution of retheatricalization but his audience was small and restricted largely to the Parisian upper middle-classes, the result largely of the subscription scheme. Mnouchkine, caught up in the spirit of 68 toyed with the idea of taking theatre to the workers in the factories and subsequently provided facilities and reductions for Trades Union groups to visit her theatre. She rejected the Left Bank for the unfashionable suburb of Vincennes. In the meantime her popular styles and forms had brought in a student audience which, with the benefits of education, would eventually turn bourgeois itself. Copeau's intended revolution never took place as the centralization of theatre in Paris never loosened its grip. Mnouchkine's revolution was aided and abetted by a minuscule revolution in society and it is quite interesting to note that a director of the sixties such as she, with visions of a socialist utopia, should turn her back on the workers:

If they want the theatre they can make the effort  
to come to it.<sup>23</sup>

Turning her back on the workers or abandoning her hopes for a socialist utopia occurred, significantly, with her return to the feudalism of Shakespeare's Kings. The form not the message took precedence. Returning to the classical repertoire and concentrating on form and style, thus was a return to Copeau.

Alongside the Vieux-Colombier flourished Copeau's theatre school which was responsible for producing the greatest number of influential theatre practitioners, more than possibly any other school in France in the twentieth century. Copeau's first season at the Vieux-Colombier in 1913 offered actors and audience alike an alternative to commercialism in the theatre and provided a subsequent alternative to the unpopular 'revolutionary' tendencies of Antoine, Fort and Lugné-Poë. His aim was to work towards establishing a co-operative of actors sharing an austere total commitment to the theatre. David Bradby explains the characteristics of the school:

The training given at the school was based on a quasi-religious search for truth through a mystical trinity of qualities; *le Beau, le Bien* and *le Vrai*. Emphasis was laid on cultivating the complete man, not just the technical faculties, and on training actors to work for the group rather than for themselves. Discipline was harsh, control of the body a major priority.<sup>30</sup>

He had no contempt for the text, however, and is known today principally as a literary director with an unashamed admiration for the classics.

Avec Molière et Shakespeare. . . il n'y a plus d'intermédiaire entre la création poétique et sa réalisation proprement théâtrale. L'invention dramatique et sa mise en scène ne sont que les deux moments d'un acte unique. Il n'y a donc plus de conflit, pas même de différence, entre les idées du poète, celles de l'acteur, celles du metteur en scène. Bien plus, il y a, entre elles, identité de moyens, identité d'expression.<sup>31</sup>

Copeau strove to attain a production whose roles of actor, director, designer and playwright's intention merged through a co-operative undertaking of like minds. This fusion of all the

elements in the theatrical event at the beginning of the century was necessitated by the dominance of the actor who at the time sought only effect and adulation at the expense of the play. The Théâtre du Soleil also had a similar problem to tackle by the late sixties and early seventies. Theirs was one not posed by the actor but by the emergence to a position of dominance of the director, and also by the constraints imposed by the playwrights of the 'absurd' which left little room for invention on the part of anyone else. To solve his problem initially Copeau resorted mostly to the classics rather than to new writing, to plays considered indestructible vehicles for the unification of theatrical roles. Mnouchkine, however, to underplay the role of the director (and concomitantly that of the writer) appointed herself *Probenleiter* or leader of rehearsals for a series of four plays beginning in 1969 with *Les Clowns*. These four plays were all termed 'créations collectives'. They saw the actors, *Probenleiter* and designer experiment and work together to achieve group-instituted works. The culmination of this approach was a play (to be discussed in Chapter One), entitled *L'Age d'or* which was unscripted, which relied almost entirely for its impact on the inventiveness of the actors on a particular night, just as it had once happened in the *commedia dell'arte*. The acting style of Mnouchkine's 'créations collectives' is a reflection of those used by Copeau particularly in his work on the plays of Molière. Thus what the classics were to Copeau the 'créations collectives' were to Mnouchkine. Their reasons for turning to these forms of theatre were similar in many respects and the emphasis in both was on the co-operation of actors, director,

designer, technicians and musicians.

Given Copeau's admiration for Molière and the retention in the repertoire of *La Nuit des rois* (Shakespeare's play of *commedia* characters). it is not surprising, that he should have been interested in establishing a theatre vocabulary for the twentieth century with its roots based firmly in the type-masks of the *commedia dell'arte*. The mask constituted an important part of the training of the actor in his school. As we shall see later, Mnouchkine trained at the Ecole Jacques Lecoq and her subsequent use of mask becomes an essential part of the theatrical form created for 'Les Shakespeare'. For both Copeau and Mnouchkine, the mask is the basis for all characterization. Only when it is mastered can the text (by Shakespeare, Molière, or by collective methods) be fully integrated.

Copeau produced two pupils of note; Louis Jouvet and Charles Dullin, who together with Georges and Ludmila Pitoëff and Gaston Baty formed a 'Cartel' of four theatres which were mutually self-supporting. The repertoire of their theatres sought recourse in the classics, particularly in the plays of Molière and Shakespeare. Dullin played the lead in *L'Avare* and *Richard III* (1933). Baty produced *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* and many plays by Molière, and the Pitoëffs had several successes with *Mesure pour mesure*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet* and *Roméo et Juliette*. Their repertoire is significant in the interpretation of Shakespeare and theatre styles of the inter-war years. Georges Pitoëff wrote of Shakespeare:

Dans Shakespeare [...] j'admire surtout la  
beauté de la pensée et sa répercussion sur nous.  
Les idées s'enchaînent à l'infini, nous

entraînant à leur suite.<sup>32</sup>

This universal quality of Shakespeare is what appealed to Gaston Baty as well:

Il est descendu plus profondément dans le secret des âmes et il a frissonné plus humainement devant le mystère des destinées.<sup>33</sup>

Louis Jouvet, though an admirer of the classics, never performed Shakespeare after leaving the Vieux-Colombier in 1922, but instead used the classical repertoire as his inspiration for the creation of a modern poetic drama:

Par sa persistante durée, le théâtre classique trouve ici sa définition. Je crois profondément que les seuls thèmes valables au théâtre sont les *thèmes permanents*, ceux qui sont communs à toutes les générations depuis que le théâtre existe.<sup>34</sup>

Jouvet fulfilled Copeau's aim of integrating the playwright in the production and with a close association with Jean Giraudoux not only established a poetic drama but also restored the play to a lofty position within the theatrical event. In the post-war theatre it is Mnouchkine who stands at the forefront of this role-fusion, first with her 'créations collectives', then with the classics, 'Les Shakespeare', and most recently with the integration of a modern dramatist, Hélène Cixous writing Shakespeare-inspired poetic drama, into the theatrical event.

Yet of all the directors of the 'Cartel' it is Charles Dullin who comes closest to Mnouchkine in terms of style, form and repertoire. Most importantly of all Dullin is one of Mnouchkine's predecessors who practised the teaching of Far Eastern theatre forms in his school. In particular, Dullin was an admirer of

*Kabuki*, an admiration which was to affect one of his more famous pupils, Antonin Artaud:

On a l'impression en écoutant l'enseignement de Dullin qu'on retrouve de vieux secrets et toute une mystique oubliée de la mise en scène. C'est à la fois un théâtre et une école. [...] On joue avec les tréfonds de son coeur, avec ses mains, avec ses pieds, avec tous ses muscles, tous ses membres. On sent l'objet, on le hume, on le palpe, on le voit, on l'écoute, - et il n'y a rien, il n'y a pas d'accessoires. Les Japonais sont nos maîtres directs, et nos inspirateurs, et de plus Edgar Poe. C'est *admirable*.<sup>35</sup>

Jean Dasté comes closer than many to Mnouchkine's aims as well. Dasté, like Copeau, Dullin and Mnouchkine, offered a similar repertoire of Molière and Shakespeare and even adaptations of *Noh* plays. David Bradby writes:

But his aim was more sharply defined as a recovery of popular theatre: 'To rediscover folly, festivity, and the fundamental freedom of being'. [...] In these aims he prefigured the work of the Théâtre du Soleil in the seventies.<sup>36</sup>

The common denominator of all these theatre practitioners is their admiration for the classics, and their desire to develop suitable performance techniques, based largely on the *commedia dell'arte*. What we can conclude, therefore, from the line that can be traced from Copeau to the 'Cartel des Quatre', to Dasté and then to Barrault, Planchon, Lecoq and Mnouchkine, is first and foremost a re-evaluation of the text as one element amongst others in the theatrical event coupled with a heavy emphasis on the plays of Shakespeare which, being self-sufficient texts, require no superimposition. Secondly, they all share the same common aim of discovering and developing a performance language which emanates from the spirit of the actor rather than the text, as theorized by

Artaud. For this they tended to look, on the whole, to the Orient. There they found a living medieval theatre, (in the sense that these seventeenth-century forms were, so to speak, the equivalents of medieval European theatre), and a living medieval performance language, ritualized and codified. It must be pointed out that what struck them most and what they were primarily concerned with was not the theatrical heritage of, say, *Kabuki* and *Noh*, which are as textual as our Western theatre, but the theatrical means of expression which emanated from beyond the text. Their aim was to develop a similar means of expression and apply it to the classics, particularly to Shakespeare.

It would thus be pointless to examine here the relationships between seventeenth-century English and Japanese theatres, or indeed between Elizabethan and *Kabuki* performance styles since this succession of twentieth-century French theatre practitioners attempted to divorce the two and heighten their differences. Shakespeare remains Shakespeare in France from Copeau to Mnouchkine but the performance styles become more and more experimental. Yet it is at this point that the influence of *commedia dell'arte* appears and goes some way along the road to bridging the gap between the text and the theatrical language.

*Commedia dell'arte* could be said, perhaps, to be the European theatrical relic of the Renaissance in much the same way as the *Kabuki* theatre is of the seventeenth century in Japan today. They are at once theatrical styles and, when recorded, theatrical texts. Their characters are highly individualized, of one or two dimensions, and are governed by their masks. Their plots follow

rigid patterns and their performance styles are very gestural and even athletic. In Europe, however, *commedia* did not survive *per se* whereas *Kabuki* flourished in Japan eventually to become an institution (and recently absorbed into some film styles, as is the case with Kurosawa). *Commedia* in France became the tool of the experimental theatre practitioners this century and, with the increase in trade and cultural exchanges between Europe and the Orient so, too, did the performance styles of the Far East. But despite their similarities there is no evidence of an attempt to fuse the two styles, even in the plays of Shakespeare. For the French directors Shakespeare consisted of both *commedia*-type scenes and situations within a framework of highly declamatory and ritualized poetic oratory. The theatrical forms of the Orient and the *commedia* existed in tandem: from Copeau to Mnouchkine they became the language of Shakespeare.

And so, in much the same way as Claude Roy had been a journalistic Orientalist, Mnouchkine evolved from a passive Orientalist in the Said mould and a decoratively descriptive one, after making trips East, into an active Orientalist at the beginning of the nineteen-eighties for her proposed cycle of Shakespeare plays, like so many practitioners before her. The intervening period saw much work on popular acting style such as *commedia dell'arte*. And as Mnouchkine slots into this tradition, we begin to see the development and general trends of Orientalism in the French theatre. From Copeau to Mnouchkine, many leading theatre practitioners in France have been influenced to varying degrees by Far Eastern theatre forms. They have applied their Orientalist



(i.e. filtered) interpretation of these forms to the classics of the Western theatre, and to the works of Shakespeare in particular. They have either made trips East or have seen or taught Far Eastern theatre practices in the West, and have juggled with the theatrical elements within the event that is theatre, and given the inventiveness and skill of the actor a much more prominent role than traditional Western theatre allows. The texts or, in Mnouchkine's case, the plays of Shakespeare, are redeployed in the event as a tool of equal status to the music, delivery, movement, lighting and setting. These practitioners, following this redeployment, have advocated the creation of a form for the presentation of Western theatre. And thus one automatically is given to assume that the main purpose of the Orientalist in the French theatre is not one which follows Said's definition of describing and rendering plain the Orient, but is to prise our Western theatre out of its self-dug textual trench.

Orientalism then could be said to be the cultural context for the undermining of the text in the theatrical event given that it is inspired by the theatres of the Far East which are intrinsically physical and visually exciting. The trend in twentieth-century French theatre, however, has not seen the emergence of Orientalism being concomitant with the undermining of the text. Most of Jouvet's work was testimony to the contrary in fact, and that of Planchon does not manifest any visible Orientalist attributes in the final analysis, all the while restoring the classical texts to the French stage.

The undermining of the text basically results from the

return by practitioners such as Stein, Copeau, Dullin and Mnouchkine to popular theatre forms. For Copeau and Stein the popular theatre forms of Europe precluded the total dominance of the role of the text. Practitioners such as Dullin and more obviously Mnouchkine sought out the popular theatre forms of Oriental theatres as well as their simple spectacle value. Popular theatre styles oppose high drama and it is a supposition, therefore, that their use on the contemporary stage is a deliberate move to reduce the importance of the text given that pure popular theatre forms is now obsolete.

The true undermining of the role of the text cannot be seen sufficiently in productions whose textual basis is fluid anyway and relies totally on whim, talent and circumstance. Such productions are what Mnouchkine provided in the mid-seventies, the 'créations collectives', the text of which cannot be self-deprecating since it does not exist in the first place. This may only be gauged when a text is used and when its role is readjusted in the event; Mesguich applied a Derrida-inspired theory to *Shakespeare's Hamlet* which saw the fragmentation and de- and reconstruction of the original; Stein saw Shakespeare as a vehicle for his heavily researched presentation of a socio-historical analysis of the late-Renaissance; Ronconi used the texts as the basis for scenes of directorial invention to create a mechanical environment. Mnouchkine, like her contemporaries, professed great admiration for Shakespeare's texts, translated them faithfully and accurately and used them consciously as the basis for experimentalism with form. She shows a reverential respect for those texts but not to the

point of excommunicating the other theatrical elements. With Copeau and particularly Jouvét the textual element of the theatre had reached its peak and by 1981 Mnouchkine was she seeking to restore the other elements to the same 'niveau'.

By returning to Shakespeare after a thirteen year break from a 'legitimate' text, Mnouchkine was neither turning full circle by returning or seeking recourse to the text, nor was she seeking to undermine the text still further. 'Les Shakespeare' heralded the beginning of an attempt to improve the status of all the other theatrical elements and of the creative invention of the actor.

Most leading practitioners in Europe such as Stein, Chéreau, Planchon, Ronconi and Mesguich were attempting to varying degrees and in various ways to achieve the same aim and all sought recourse to the classics. One cannot go as far as to call them Orientalists, however. None of them would make that claim. Planchon was much less affected by the Orient than by Brecht and Artaud. The Orient and its influence has never manifested itself either on the stages of Ronconi and Chéreau. They work closely with their designers and much of their experimentation with form comes from that newly-forged link. Mnouchkine, however, inspired by the Copeau-Dullin-Artaud tradition of aiming to cure the ills of European theatre, sought to improve the status of all the theatrical elements other than the text, by following the trail to the Orient. Thus her Shakespeare is to prove exceptional amongst the work of her contemporaries, in its pursuit of Orientalism.

## NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

1. Jan Kott, *Shakespeare, notre contemporain*, translated by Anna Pozner, p.264.
2. Colette Godard, 'Les Samouraïs de Shakespeare', *Le Monde*, 15 December 1981.
3. For a chronological list of Théâtre du Soleil productions see Appendix A.
4. Two contemporary history plays followed 'Les Shakespeare' in fact, both written by Hélène Cixous: *L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk, roi du Cambodge* (September 1985), and *L'Indiade* (September 1987).
5. Luca Ronconi, 'Je ne suis pas un médiateur innocent - entretien avec Jean-Michel Déprats et Georges Banu', *L'Art du Théâtre*, no.6, (1987) 91-100 (p.92).
6. David Bradby, *Modern French Drama 1940-1980*, p.105.
7. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, p.1.
8. Said, p.8.
9. Said, pp.20-1.
10. Said, pp.70-1.
11. Leonard Pronko, *Theater East & West*, p.32.
12. Pronko, p.44.
13. Pronko. p.127.
14. Jean-Claude Carrière, *The Mahabharata*, Foreward by Peter Brook, p.xiii.
15. Pronko, p.138.
16. Antonin Artaud, *Le Théâtre et son double*, pp.85-6.
17. Artaud, pp.153-4.
18. Pronko, p.18.
19. Robert Kanters, 'Arlequinades et chinoiseries', *L'Express*, 9 May 1958.
20. Georges Lerminier, 'Voyage au bout de la Chine avec l'Opéra de Pékin', *Le Parisien Libéré*, 5 May 1958.

21. Kenneth Tynan, 'Brecht on Shakespeare', *Observer*, 4 October 1964.
22. Claude Roy, *L'Opéra de Pékin*, p.31.
23. Roy, pp.31-2.
24. Roy, p.79.
25. Roy, p.82.
26. Roy, p.82.
27. Edward W. Said, 'Orientalism Reconsidered', *Literature, Politics & Theory: Papers from the Essex Conference 1976-84*, edited by Francis Barker, 210-29 (p.214).
28. Shakespeare and Fletcher, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, Royal Shakespeare Company (Stratford-upon-Avon and London, 1986-7); Aeschylus, *Electre*, and Sophocles, *Antigone*, Théâtre du Temps (Paris, 1987).
29. Irving Wardle, 'An Artist's Response to Guilt and Complicity', *The Times*, 2 April 1986.
30. Bradby, p.2.
31. Clément Borgal, *Jacques Copeau*, p.69.
32. France Anders, *Jacques Copeau et le Cartel des Quatre*, p.163.
33. Anders, p.164.
34. Anders, p.165.
35. Antonin Artaud, 'Lettre à Max Jacob', *Oeuvres complètes*, 3, 117-19 (p.118).
36. Bradby, p.89. The reference is to Jean Dasté, *Voyage d'un comédien* (Paris, 1977).

CHAPTER ONE:  
A HISTORY OF THE THEATRE DU SOLEIL

The Théâtre du Soleil does not only have a history, it has also a pre-history, determined by the student interests, preoccupations and work of its director, Ariane Mnouchkine. Significantly Mnouchkine's interests in the Soleil's pre-history period included both Shakespeare and the Orient yet Mnouchkine's early career betrayed no great love of the theatre. The cinema appeared to her an altogether more attractive and inventive medium. It was a medium which the Théâtre du Soleil eventually embraced in the nineteen-seventies, one which spawned the theatre's name and which provided it with the greatest source of production research and rehearsal methods. Mnouchkine's infatuation with this medium was by no means an arbitrary one. Her father, Alexandre Mnouchkine, was the successful producer of such films as *Les Parents terribles* (1948) and even two of 1981's biggest box-office successes in France, *Garde à vue* and *Le Professionnel*. It is not surprising, therefore, that as a student, Ariane should spend most of her free time frequenting the Paris cinemas rather than the theatres.

Mnouchkine's first real contact with the theatre, in a semi-professional capacity, came not in France, but in England. When eighteen years old she spent a year studying at Oxford University, studies which, not by design, were devoted largely to Shakespeare. Most of her free time, however, was spent working for the Oxford University Drama Society (OUDS) along with, amongst others, Kenneth Loach, John McGrath, Patrick Garland and Dudley Moore. It was

during this time that she made her first semi-professional contact with Shakespeare in production. The play was *Coriolanus*, performed by the OUDS at the Oxford Playhouse in March 1959. It was directed by Anthony Page, on loan from the Royal Court Theatre as the OUDS had a policy of employing professional directors for a largely student cast. Mnouchkine was listed in the programme as Production Secretary, extra actor and also co-fight arranger together with Steven Schorr-Kon. Her work in the latter role was singled out by several of the critics who remarked particularly on the potency of the crowd control work for which she was responsible. This work embraced the presentation of military exercises to the less well-ordered mob scenes. J.C. Trewin remarked that it was "an athletic night marching, countermarching".<sup>1</sup> Her role in the production of *Coriolanus* is further significant in the knowledge of the gestural and acting styles used in the staging of Shakespeare in France in the nineteen-fifties and sixties, styles influenced by Brecht, Artaud, and also by the visiting Far Eastern theatre troupes with their rituals and acrobatics. It is pointless, however, at this juncture, to compare the work of the young and inexperienced Mnouchkine (on sabbatical in England) with the current trends in mainstream European stage techniques, particularly those used to stage the plays of Shakespeare.

There is absolutely no evidence to indicate how much Mnouchkine was influenced by Shakespeare during her period at Oxford and, despite her handling a cast of seventy, there is little to suggest that she was doing anything other than moving two-dimensional cut-out figures into interesting patterns in a

cardboard box, using time-worn, quasi-realistic methods of stage fighting. Most of the credit one can attribute her in this instance is her ability to have recruited and deployed the members of New College Boat club as the Volscian Army, an ability which anticipates her subsequent preoccupation with athletic actors rather than voice-trained speakers. It is for this reason that her period at Oxford should be termed her pre-history for not only was her career decision still in the balance but also because it is difficult to incorporate her semi-professional work outside France into the trends and influences of post-war French theatre. Certainly her interest in Shakespeare was nascent during this period, but that interest owed little or nothing to the French theatre.

Upon her return to Paris, Mnouchkine enrolled at the Sorbonne to read Psychology and, determined to pursue her newly acquired theatrical interests, sought out the University Drama group. There was only one student theatre group in existence at the time, however, the 'Groupe antique'. The uninspiring name and the closed ranks of the group prompted her and her friends to set up on their own. They booked a room at the University and put up a notice: 'Association Théâtrale des Etudiants de Paris (l'ATEP) - 6<sup>ème</sup> étage'. The success of the association was mixed. Although during the three years of its existence productions numbered two, the group attracted the patronage of some notable names in the French theatre. Roger Planchon, already cited as having a strong interest in the plays of Shakespeare, was elected Honorary President. Jean-Paul Sartre was invited to the inaugural meeting in



1959 and gave a lecture entitled 'Théâtre épique et théâtre dramatique'. With the proceeds from the entrance fee to this lecture, l'ATEP was able to mount its first production, *Noces de sang* by Garcia Lorca in January 1960. Dominique Sérina, one of the group's founder members, directed and Ariane Mnouchkine was both administrator and costume and set designer.

It was not until some eighteen months later, in the summer of 1961, that l'ATEP was able to mount its second production and Ariane Mnouchkine was able to direct for the first time. The play was *Gengis Khan* by Henri Bauchau and was performed at the Arènes de Lutèce. It marked the beginning of a long association with Françoise Tournafond, costume designer and Jean-Claude Penchenat, producer. The production demands attention since it was Mnouchkine's first attempt at solo direction, yet the records are not at all illuminating as regards early indications of a style which might mark her direction. It is disappointing still to find at this stage that Mnouchkine was preoccupied with a grid-like stage plan and little lead figures:

Son livre de régie comporte essentiellement des indications concernant les mouvements, tels que assis en 2A, se dirige en 3B, etc.<sup>2</sup>

Her directions to the actors are similarly simplistic:

...qu'il montre sa colère, qu'il montre qu'il est content, qu'on l'entende, etc.<sup>3</sup>

As the Bablets point out, Mnouchkine at this stage troubled little about the work or the role of the actor in a production. Her overall production concept took precedence.

Since the director's function, apart from the conception of

ideas, is largely that of the artisan, little attention need be paid to these early scribblings in her director's notebook. What is decidedly more useful to the historian is her interpretation not of who stood where, moved there, said this, held that, but of the play as a dramatic whole. Although this is an occidental play, written by a personal friend of the director and a confirmed Orientalist, the subject matter is Far Eastern and so too was Mnouchkine's spectacle:

*Gengis Khan* est un 'spectacle': c'est par des images qu'Ariane Mnouchkine y montre l'extraordinaire présence de la Chine qui, ennemi héréditaire du conquérant mongol auquel elle est apparemment assujettie, le dévore et l'assimile peu à peu.<sup>4</sup>

Her choice of play and its production is a tribute not only to her year of 'Shakespeare studies' at Oxford, but also to her increasing preoccupation with Far Eastern culture. The medieval family and domestic feuds were Shakespearian by nature, although Mnouchkine did not admit to such associations at the time. Her main concern was with the presentation and translation to a Western stage of an alien culture:

Les costumes, très riches malgré la pauvreté des moyens ('nous n'avions pas d'argent', Fr. Tournafond) sont des signes d'une Chine lointaine et toute-puissante: ils sont travaillés à partir de morceaux de couvertures militaires retaillées, peintes, patinées puis matelassées et enfin décorées par des tissus de pacotille offerts par Bouchara.<sup>5</sup>

This procedure of building up costumes, at first an economic necessity, became a regular feature of the Théâtre du Soleil, particularly during the Shakespeare cycle of the 1980s when costumes were developed at the same time as the characters evolved.

Another feature common in the later work is the suggestion that the characters might embody non-human qualities:

Oeuvre éminemment poétique, sanguinaire, chaude et humaine, qui appelait des images hautes en couleurs ['Il y avait toute la Chine à mettre en scène' (AM)], d'où les costumes très chamarrés, les bannières portées par des acteurs-chevaux harnachés, etc.<sup>6</sup>

Mnouchkine's interest in the Orient was thus evident (in *Gengis Khan*) long before she herself embarked on a tour of the Far East to experience the cultures first hand. By that time the Peking Opera had already made two recent visits to Paris in 1955 and 1958, and visits by Japanese *Kabuki* and *Bunraku* troupes became more common in the sixties. And so, at the time when it was becoming more and more fashionable for directors and companies such as Planchon, Barrault and the Berliner Ensemble to employ styles and forms similar to those of Oriental theatres, Mnouchkine embarked on a trip that was to take her to the Middle East, India, Japan, China, Cambodia and Korea. The year was 1962 and although l'ATEP continued presenting productions of Marivaux and Brecht, National Service obligations, final examinations, and the now absent Mnouchkine were all responsible for the breaking-up of the group. It was agreed, however, before they went their separate ways, that they should meet two years hence to continue their work.

It is at this point that the pre-history of Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil reaches its natural conclusion. Two dominant features were already beginning to emerge from their work and the experience gained thus far: Shakespeare and Far Eastern theatre practices. These features emerged concurrently

with a similar emergence in the 'legitimate' theatre world; theirs was not a symptom of it since few, if any, of l'ATEP's members had any previous extensive knowledge of the professional theatre. Although Artaud had begun to make his mark on the consciousness of the French theatre world, advocating a primeval, virtual theatre alien to the West, akin to the Orient, it was perhaps due more to the Far East's, and particularly Japan's, defrosting trips West, that influenced the theatre directors of the time. Thus the patronage of Planchon might have had a spiral effect on the development of Mnouchkine and l'ATEP along similar lines. This was the tenuous link which existed between Mnouchkine's company and the regular theatre world. The aforementioned preoccupations of both stood on imminently converging paths.

Before travelling to the Far East, Mnouchkine paused in Italy to work as assistant producer, director and script writer of a film entitled *L'Homme de Rio*, which earned her sufficient money to subsidize her future travels. Here the professional contacts of her father proved useful. Her travels offered little direct contact with the theatre except for a brief flirtation with the *Kabuki* in Japan. The overall experience of the culture, however, remained with her. Upon her return, at the end of 1963, ten former members of l'ATEP regrouped and decided to form a theatre community in the true sense of the word. They were Myrrha and Georges Donzenac, Martine Franck, Gérard Hardy, Philippe Léotard, Ariane Mnouchkine, Roberto Moscoso, Jean-Claude Penchenat, Jean-Pierre Tailhade and Françoise Tournafond. Many of these members were to remain together until the Shakespeare cycle in the eighties. These ten founder

members formed a 'Société Coopérative Ouvrière de Production' (SCOOP) in May 1964 and each contributed 900 Francs membership fee. Since it was a co-operative, everyone was to work together. There was to be no hierarchical structure of roles as in the 'legitimate' theatre. The roles of administrator, designer and floor-sweeper were to be assumed by individual company actors with assistance from the other actors. The idea of a workers' co-operative was a revolutionary one in the French theatre and would tend to suggest a left-wing political bias. Their politics did indeed veer to the Left simply because of France's recent imperialist treatment of Algeria, rather than out of any deep-seated ideological belief. Rather than the abbreviated SCOOP, the group decided to call itself the Théâtre du Soleil, a name which was a reaction to the popular vogue at the time for abbreviations such as TNP (Théâtre National Populaire) and TEP (Théâtre de l'Est Parisien). Their choice of title was acknowledged as a tribute to such film-makers as Max Ophüls, Jean Renoir and George Cukor. The name's suggestion of warmth and light was a far cry from the functional abbreviations of the time. Furthermore, it was perhaps an unconscious allusion to the Orient.

Just as no political ideology governed the group, so no single theatrical philosophy governed style or form. Influences on style and form did begin to emerge, however. Mnouchkine's love of the Orient during the lifetime of l'ATEP had intensified during her leave of absence. As a group during this pubescent period in the life of the Théâtre du Soleil, they made several trips to the theatre, one of note being the visit to France in 1965 of the

*Kabuki-za* to Barrault's Théâtre de France. Eastern theatrical forms were present from the Soleil's inception. During the lifetime of l'ATEP, invitations had been sent to teachers from these two practitioners' schools to come to meetings. This policy continued right up to 1967 during which time a link was forged between the Théâtre du Soleil and the Ecole Jacques Lecoq. This link with the Lecoq school of mime was strengthened further by Mnouchkine enrolling herself.

Most of the members of the company during this early period retained their day jobs and would meet in the evenings to improvise, rehearse and discuss until the early hours of the morning. Perhaps because she was lucky enough to have rich parents, Mnouchkine, instead of working, was free during 1966-7 to attend classes at Lecoq's school. In the evenings she would then teach the other members of the group what she had herself learned that day, thereby establishing herself as a teacher, the natural director of the company. Even though later in the Soleil's development teachers of theatrical forms such as *Kabuki* and *Kathakali* were brought in at various stages of rehearsal, this period with Lecoq was to be the only time that Mnouchkine or the Théâtre du Soleil were to have any direct associations with a 'legitimate' theatre school.

At the time when Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil were establishing their company and mounting their first productions, like many other companies before them, *commedia dell'arte*, Shakespeare, and Far Eastern theatrical forms figured highly in their estimation. This young and inexperienced company, however, did not set out to fuse these three elements. At its

formation, the Théâtre du Soleil had barely the skills of experience or the financial security to survive the abuse from the Actors' Union who accused them of being amateurs treading the sacred terrain of the professionals. They knew that their proposed workers co-operative had been attempted in the past but, as the Ministère des Affaires Culturelles willingly pointed out, all previous attempts had resulted in failure and dissolution. The Soleil persisted, keeping in mind the aim of France's leading theatre practitioner of the twentieth century:

En nous référant à l'exemple de Jacques Copeau, nous avons décidé de tenter l'expérience.<sup>7</sup>

Copeau's aim of a theatrical creation from a collective company was in the minds of the Théâtre du Soleil's founder members, although at the time his methods, his influences, his styles and preoccupations were beyond their grasp. To develop along similar lines demanded experience.

In an idealistically 'hippy' frame of mind, the whole company left Paris for the Ardèche countryside with the belief that by raising sheep they might earn enough money and have at the same time the peace and tranquility to rehearse a production which would subsequently be taken on tour. The starting point in their search for a suitable play was Chekhov, of whom Mnouchkine was an ardent admirer, and this led them quite naturally to Maxim Gorky and *Les Petits Bourgeois*. The play was a good starting point for a relatively inexperienced director and group of actors:

Elle trouvait que les personnages simples et bien typés permettaient un exercice de style à des comédiens sans beaucoup d'expérience.<sup>8</sup>

Two months later they realized the mistake of their self-imposed isolation in the country, returned to Paris, auditioned actors and began rehearsals.

This marked the real starting point of Mnouchkine's career as a director. She soon came to realize that the position of the actors on the stage was of relatively little importance. As cited in Bablet and Bablet, she came to the conclusion that:

La mise en scène, c'était les rapports, les états d'âmes, les états d'esprit, les acteurs, les acteurs et l'espace.<sup>9</sup>

What marked her change of attitude to direction was not her experience of Far Eastern theatres but her discovery of the methods advocated by Stanislavsky. Beginning with lectures on the period of the play, roles were assigned, characters were analysed, lessons were followed to develop the actors' physical capabilities and only after all this did they begin to improvise. This attempt at psychological realism was something new to the classically trained actors in France at the beginning of the nineteen-sixties and caused much resentment among those unable to come to terms with the method. Basically it demanded not only the facility to become completely obsessed with the character but also by exploring all possible motivations for actions, gestures and words, demanded a spirit and ability to create. Mnouchkine found her role not by telling people what to do and when to do it but by guiding the improvisations and thus creating a performance style. For this she was later to borrow from the Berliner Ensemble a title to describe her function as director: *Probenleiter*, 'leader of rehearsals'.

One direct result of Stanislavsky's method and one which was



an innovation for many of the actors, was the opportunity to create (or rehearse) in costume and make-up some months before the curtain went up. Françoise Tournafond explains why:

Il faut que le vêtement se fasse au corps.<sup>10</sup>

This policy of exploring character obviously had its repercussions. There was, naturally, a period and a style to begin with as a kind of framework, but as the work progressed and as the characters and their actions developed, so did the make-up and the set and the costumes alter. And so the traditional divisions within the theatre were broken down. Each member was as much actor as he was designer or even director. Stanislavsky's method, however, remained the starting point and mainspring of the co-operative venture and was central to the future development of Copeau's original aim of collective creation. *Les Petits Bourgeois* opened in November 1964 and ran for fifty performances. Its short run had no more than a ripple effect among the theatre critics but its performance style was greatly lauded. Claude Olivier wrote in *Les Lettres Françaises*:

La mise en scène ne vise jamais à l'effet.<sup>11</sup>

From the outset, therefore, with the introduction by Mnouchkine of Stanislavsky's methods to the Théâtre du Soleil, the text was always subservient to the theatrical form.

After the claustrophobic and depressing nature of *Les Petits Bourgeois* came a more light-hearted and 'theatrical' project, *Le Capitaine Fracasse*. It was to prove a very significant period in the development of the Soleil's working methods. The novel by Théophile Gauthier was first taken apart chapter by chapter, discussed, the situations improvised, recorded and written down by

Ariane Mnouchkine and Philippe Léotard, rehearsed, rewritten and re-rehearsed. Granted they had a text as their starting point, it was their first attempt at collective creation.

It was also their first confrontation with the *commedia dell'arte*. Both scenario and characters of *Le Capitaine Fracasse* are easily identifiable with the *commedia*, and indeed marked the beginning of the Soleil's subsequent preoccupation with theatre within theatre, with its groups of strolling players mirroring the Soleil members themselves. It also afforded them the opportunity to learn and develop many theatrical skills, most of which were uncommon on the French stage at the time; singing, dancing, playing instruments, music-hall routines, acrobatics and circus techniques. Only one critic, Gilles Sandier, was astute enough to recognize the significance of the innovation:

Et ce qui, dans ce spectacle, m'a donné un si vif plaisir, c'est la justesse d'accent que trouve la ferveur d'une jeune troupe pour rendre hommage au théâtre et à son univers fabuleux: justesse et ferveur qui sont aussi bien celles de Corneille dans *L'Illusion comique*, ou de Renoir à chaque fois qu'il dit son amour du spectacle (la *Commedia dell'arte* dans *Le Carrosse d'or*, ou le music-hall dans *French Cancan*).<sup>12</sup>

It was as much a reaction against the Stanislavskian character analysis of *Les Petits Bourgeois* as a celebration of both themselves and the theatre. Mnouchkine admits that they seemed to lose most of what they had learned from Stanislavsky, but the loss was only temporary and the experience of a theatrical festival, despite the financial disaster, was to become the foundation for future collective creations such as *1789*, *1793* and the film *Molière*. The only problem was to marry the psychological realism of

Stanislavsky with the festive, celebratory spirit of the theatre.

At first sight, *La Cuisine* (*The Kitchen*) by Arnold Wesker would not appear to fit the bill of Stanislavsky's psychological realism as the characters are not realistically defined, and the kitchen of a restaurant was not exactly the ideal location for a celebratory act of theatre. Nevertheless, Mnouchkine raised the play to fulfil both criteria. First of all she began with the Stanislavsky method, although this time no roles were assigned but were passed around from actor to actor. In this way everyone was able to build up the social environment of the kitchen staff and then the characters. From this emerged the necessity to visit a real-life kitchen, not so much in order to establish a psychological realism but to develop, interpret, imitate and eventually stylize the movement involved in the everyday work of the kitchen staff. The ability (much praised by the critics) of recreating faithfully the work of a kitchen, although begun through the Stanislavsky method, was fully realized by Mnouchkine's introduction to mime and the *commedia dell'arte* at Lecoq's school of mime and 'expression corporelle'. Perhaps that was the failure of *Le Capitaine Fracasse*, the inability of the amateur to explore fully the potential of the body.

During the rehearsals of *La Cuisine*, Mnouchkine attended Lecoq's school, and it might be worthwhile at this point to note some of the features of his method of building character and scenes. Lecoq began by observing an action and trying to find the motivation for that action. Then came his analysis, where each component part of the action was separated from the others and all

other non-functional components disregarded, in other words he started from a neutral position. Finally came the improvisation and, in order to avoid realism, he employed masks to force the actor to become neutral and obey the mask:

At a certain moment the emotions grow, the characters strengthen, personages are born under the character mask. Improvisation passes to the level of creativity. The forms, the styles appear: from mime to theatre, from *Pantomime Blanche* to the *commedia dell'arte*, from Greek chorus to tragedy, from gesture to work, from gesture to music, from gesture to its own self-mockery.<sup>13</sup>

This is the only point where the teachings of Stanislavsky and Lecoq converge: beginning with a neutral 'state', an *état de base*, they analyse environment and actions and eventually develop character. Stanislavsky's method, though largely improvisatory, takes the text or the situation as the starting point, whereas Lecoq believed, like Copeau, that words should only appear as a last resort, when all other means of expression have been exhausted. Both philosophies were used to great effect by Mnouchkine in *La Cuisine*; Stanislavsky for character, Lecoq for mime. But Mnouchkine herself is the first to recognize their ultimate limitations and, indeed, incompatibility:

Dans *La Cuisine*, nous avons tout le temps deux couleurs: le réalisme, puis la poésie de ce que les gens appellent le mime. Chez Shakespeare, il y a toujours trois couleurs; mais nous, la troisième couleur, la tragédie, nous ne l'avons pas encore trouvée.<sup>14</sup>

Although many came just to see the 'tranche de vie' offered by the mime, the production received great critical acclaim and was showered with prizes. Their next step amidst the euphoria, was the quest to find that elusive third colour between the realism and the

poetry of the mime.

From the Théâtre du Soleil's first three productions, there were already beginning to emerge identifiable performance styles; the psychological realism of Stanislavsky and the neutral mime of Lecoq which ultimately led to *commedia dell'arte*. The various formal methods of training acknowledged by Mnouchkine all follow similar paths, paths which lead back from Lecoq to Dullin to Copeau. They had established their company with the latter in mind and were obviously to follow, if somewhat unconscionably, his suggestions for repertoire. But the importance of a repertoire played and still plays second fiddle to the needs of the company to evolve their theatrical skills and performance styles. From the intense psychological realism they acquired a working method, a training for the actor and presented *Les Petits Bourgeois*. This was one 'colour'. From the collectively creative celebration of the theatre in its mime, acrobatics and music, they presented *Le Capitaine Fracasse*. This was the second 'colour'. In *La Cuisine* they were able to combine the two, despite expressing doubts as to their successful cohabitation on stage.

Mnouchkine's problem was basically to find a play which might constitute the main element within the theatrical event as a whole. She was not alone in her problem. It was one which had puzzled many practitioners from Craig to Brook before her. The solution to the problem was not simply to find a play 'à trois couleurs', it was to find a 'dramatic' rather than textual play. *Le Capitaine Fracasse* was their own dramatic creation and *La Cuisine* came close to this ideal, but just as Copeau had discovered in the

early part of the century, Shakespeare's plays were dramatic vehicles in themselves. They were both the text and the drama. They needed no dramatic superimposition from the director. All they needed was a body of actors with a well-developed repertoire of performance skills and languages, who would not interpret roles but would have their skills constitute the framework for the drama. Shakespeare and *Le Songe d'une nuit d'été* (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*), therefore, was to be their attempt at acquiring 'colour' number three.

Throughout the early period of the Théâtre du Soleil, the members of the company remained in touch with the current trends in French theatre, though largely ignoring them. They did, however, acknowledge the importance of their visits to performances by Far Eastern theatre troupes, the Berliner Ensemble and Barrault's production of *Jules César*. The common feature of the latter two was the co-existence of Shakespeare and Far Eastern performance styles. Although by this time, and indeed for some time to come, there was no interpretation by the Théâtre du Soleil of these styles, they were beginning to develop similar associations between texts and athletically mimetic forms. When Mnouchkine eventually broached Shakespeare, she was not only following the example of many influential directors before her, she was also attempting to eliminate Jan Kott's main bugbear of the late fifties and early sixties:

Lorsque le théâtre se fut éloigné de la convention élisabéthaine, il perdit tout à la fois le caractère spectaculaire que Shakespeare lui avait conféré et le nerf Shakespearien.<sup>15</sup>

By consulting Shakespeare, therefore, with a researched performance style, Mnouchkine was determined to return to the very source of the theatre, to find the third 'couleur'

Riding the tide of both popular and critical acclaim, the Théâtre du Soleil realised their fourth production in only ten months. Progressing from *La Cuisine* to *Le Songe d'une nuit d'été* (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*), however, was more of a jump than a transition. It was also an enormous gamble. The critical success of *La Cuisine* was founded largely on the highly accomplished acting skills of the company and the facility to perform a 'tranche de vie' on stage, but the popular appeal of the play lay with its disadvantaged protagonists and its dramatization of manual labour. The fact, too, that the production was taking place in a circus was no mean contributing factor to the Théâtre du Soleil's achievement in reaching a whole new audience: the workers' 'collectivités'. The leap to Shakespeare might have been deemed suicidal by possibly alienating their newly won audience. Not only could a Shakespeare play seem representative of bourgeois culture in the highly charged political atmosphere of 1968, it was also foreign. Yet despite the disadvantages of such a choice, *Le Songe* was to prove an important step in the development of the Théâtre du Soleil's company structure, its relationship with the audience, and in its experimentalism with style, form and the use of the body.

Unlike her contemporaries (Barrault and Planchon *inter alia*) who were experimenting at the same time with Shakespeare's histories and tragedies, in the main, Mnouchkine was about to apply athletically experimental forms, inspired by Far Eastern theatres,

to Shakespeare's comedies. Not that Mnouchkine's eventual production of *Le Songe* was of Far Eastern influence, however. It was simply non-European. That in itself was an enormous break in tradition. By 1968 *Le Songe d'une nuit d'été* had accumulated an appalling collection of preconceived pre-requisites: Mendelssohn, nimble fairies and confetti. Even the 1965 Comédie-Française production which had Puck flitting around the stage on his 'Tour de l'amour' on a bicycle did little to dispel the visual and aural delight of a celebration of music and dancing. Only one other production of *Le Songe* during the lifetime of the Théâtre du Soleil, in all its embryonic states, is worthy of note. That was the Théâtre National Populaire's contribution to the Avignon Festival in July 1959 at the Cour d'Honneur du Palais des Papes, a venue which would eventually become the occasional home for Mnouchkine's Shakespeare cycle some twenty-three years later. The TNP's Jean Vilar was the director of a new translation by Jean-Louis and Jules Supervielle especially commissioned for the occasion.

As many directors and spectators of *Le Songe* might concur, the play seemed an obvious choice by Vilar for an open air production in Avignon on a midsummer's night with the real moon enhancing the play's mystical qualities. The stage, however, was a typical in-house design of wooden step-like rostra, symmetrically raked to allow the actors sufficient space to repose and deliver the text. Around the back of this semi-circular platform realistic young shrubs were strategically and again symmetrically placed, to suggest the forest. The court costumes were authentically Athenian



and, to set the forest dwellers apart, Oberon and Titania were endowed with foliage-based head-dresses, and Puck had two large leaves to lend his ears a more devilish appearance. Overall it was a production which respected previous performance traditions with its music and dancing and its pre-Kott, naïve and rather benign notion of love. Both the production and the translation were very much in the minds of the Théâtre du Soleil troupe when they commenced rehearsals in 1967. as a theatrical devil's advocate, if little else.

Although Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil developed their own textual interpretation of *Le Songe*, the translation and adaptation of which was attributed to Philippe Léotard, they acknowledge as their starting point two major previous translations, those of Hugo and the Supervielles. But as Léotard himself admits, after the essentially physical lessons in acting during their previous production, *La Cuisine*, it appeared to be an impossible task then to jump to the most literary and poetic of texts and remain faithful to it:

Une traduction, c'est toujours une trahison, l'on doit choisir, sacrifier certaines parties pour la compréhension de l'ensemble.<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless, it wasn't simply a question of carefully selected excisions which had to be made to avoid such a betrayal when they came to rehearsals of the Supervielle text. The Bablets refer not only to the speech difficulties which the actors encountered with the text but also to a complete lack of sympathy with its fairy-tale superficiality:

La troupe a commencé à répéter sur la traduction de Jules Supervielle; trop littéraire, les comédiens

ne peuvent pas la 'mettre en bouche'. On dépouille le texte de ses 'joliesses' au goût de l'époque; toutes les niaiseries sont gommées au profit du fantastique; plus de fées, mais des hommes et leurs fantômes concrétisés par des demi-dieux, des êtres de chair et de sang.<sup>17</sup>

The troupe's intention was not just to strip away the niceties of the translation it was also to strip away the swaddling fairy-tale qualities of a century or more's interpretation.

Mnouchkine's desire for the characters of the play to become real people 'de chair et de sang' was evident from the outset. Determined not to play the mechanicals in a patronizing and therefore deprecating manner, she decided to rename them. Out went the catchy nicknames of the Supervielle text such as Lecoin, Vavette, Gatebois, Marmiteux, Tubulure and Famélique, names which were even more fantastical and fairy-like than Hugo's nineteenth-century version. In their place she adopted new fore- and surnames; Pierre Lecoince, Nicolas Bouton, Richard Palafitte, Alexandre Snoute, Clovis Etoupille and Marcel Pipistrel. These somewhat clownish versions were complemented by the Greek Demetrios and Lysandros, and all were names which, if not entirely realistic, were at least humanized.

If anything, the Supervielle translation was even more poetic than its nineteenth-century counterpart. Several examples are necessary to see how the lines were unable to 'fit in' Mnouchkine's actors' mouths. Héléna, for instance, extolling in jealousy the virtues of her rival Hermia, is translated literally from the English by Hugo:

Vos yeux sont des étoiles polaires; le doux son de  
votre voix - est plus harmonieux que ne l'est pour

le berger le chant de l'alouette.

Supervielle, however, substitutes this with a more emotive vocabulary:

Vos yeux sont des étoiles polaires et le doux gazouillis de votre voix est plus mélodieux que l'alouette à l'oreille du berger.<sup>19</sup>

This comparison is a mere indication of Supervielle 'dressing up' the whole text. Hugo's translation was Supervielle's consultative document and, although adopting a prose style, his deviations from Hugo's version are restricted largely to vocabulary and points of style. In other words he created a more beautiful and poetic text. Titania, likewise, is imbued with a different vocabulary which renders her speech slightly more archaic:

Pourquoi reviens-tu donc par ici du fin fond des escarpements de l'Inde? Parce que, pardi, cette trépidante Amazone...<sup>19</sup>

Here 'escarpements' replaces Hugo's simple 'côtes' and 'pardi' the more up-to-date 'sans nul doute'. Yet despite Supervielle's tendency to poeticize, the text has a most distinctive twentieth-century flavour, especially during the mechanicals' scene, made no more evident when Tubulure (Flute) laments Navette's (Bottom's) non-appearance:

S'il ne vient pas, la pièce est fichue.<sup>20</sup>

What is obvious in Supervielle's interpretation is that only the mechanicals should utter slang in a translation which heightens even more the poetic qualities of the courtiers' speech.

Lest this appear too disparaging an attack on the artificiality of this translation and entire production, it is important to realize that it was the product of a received

interpretation, not only of theatre practitioners but of their regular patrons as well. The Théâtre du Soleil had, of course, no such established 'clientèle' and it was a tribute to the importance of Supervielle's translation and Vilar's production that theirs was the first translation used by the Soleil in rehearsals, even though it was later to be maligned and eventually discarded. It did leave its mark, however. Hugo's translation originally dispensed with the act divisions and substituted eight scene divisions instead, divisions which were constructed around the periods when the characters are asleep on stage. Supervielle went one step further. He refused any divisions at all, implying, therefore, that the play should be performed in one complete sequence. This was the legacy which was to be adopted by the Théâtre du Soleil nine years later.

Even though there is no reliable test of public opinion, it is clear that Mnouchkine's rejection of the traditional approach to *Le Songe* was warmly received by the critics. Gilles Sandier in *Théâtre et Combat* writes:

Finis le bric-à-brac habituel et ennuyeux de la féerie de carton-pâte laissant échapper toute poésie.<sup>21</sup>

Renée Saurel, writing in *Les Temps Modernes*, concurs:

*Le Songe* a toujours été vidé de sa violence, affadi et édulcoré.<sup>22</sup>

We can thus interpret from both critics that previous productions of the play were perhaps the biggest single case for the play not being performed at all. This was especially true of Shakespeare's comedies since it had become the tendency to treat them as lightweight farces. What those productions had omitted was the

fundamental acknowledgement of there being a violent undercurrent running through the relationships of all sets of lovers. The ability to see the play in chiaroscuro, in its darkness as well as its lightness, was being called for. This ability which Sandier demands in the initial preparation of Shakespeare in translation:

Il fallait surtout (c'est toujours le problème pour Shakespeare) un texte qui ne trahît pas l'étrange, complexe et noire préciosité de Shakespeare.<sup>12</sup>

The adjectives complex and dark are not used lightly given Sandier's previous experience of *Le Songe* prior to 1968. The problems with most Shakespeare productions, apart from those on the Copeau to Mnouchkine trail of experimentalism in theatrical forms, was that the comedies had never broken the mould of nineteenth-century Romanticism, the period which witnessed the explosion of Shakespeare on the French stage. These were the two sides of the coin to productions of Shakespeare. On the one hand there were the radical, experimental, non-European in influence, and highly athletic theatrical forms, and on the other hand was all the paraphernalia of the proscenium arch, gauzes, flowers and artificial grass. The latter became almost a kind of Romantic 'bienséance' in the theatre, and Shakespeare's pastoral comedies, it appeared, offered little hope of wiping the slate clean. This is not to say that attempts were being made by less 'experimental' practitioners to liven up the jaded production history of the comedies such as *Le Songe*. The 1965 production at the Comédie-Française, already mentioned, dispelled its rather jaded reputation, as Sandier points out:

Invention farcesque, gags un peu fortement assésés, grosses ficelles et rire franc. Jazz, cirque,

music-hall, danseuses de cabaret, vélos  
acrobatiques, quelque chose comme *Shakespeare*  
*Follies*.<sup>24</sup>

Why not? Sandier goes on. The stage came to life but the play seemed to have been forgotten under the weight of directorial imposition.

L'adaptateur habituel de Fabbri avait ficelé sur le canevas du *Songe* un texte gros, sommaire, facile, simple matière à drôleries, sur lequel la vieille Maison s'amusait...<sup>25</sup>

Far from dispelling the tinsel and fairy-lights image of the play, the Comédie-Française had created a new kind of artificiality of cheap gags and music-hall farce. No theatre practitioner before Mnouchkine in 1968 had agreed with Jan Kott, or indeed translated to the stage the conception of *Le Songe* as a world 'tout à la fois cruel et incompréhensible, il se moque des sentiments, il est atroce et ambigu'.<sup>26</sup>

As with most of the Théâtre du Soleil's repertoire, the decision to produce *Le Songe d'une nuit d'été* was at Mnouchkine's instigation. In some degree she saw it as a complement to *La Cuisine*, believing that the two fundamental factors governing man's activity were work and love. The world of work was explored in Wesker's play, and it was now time to turn to the domain of love. There is no question that Kott's *Shakespeare, notre contemporain* was responsible for the reappraisal of *Le Songe* in France and, as it transpires, Mnouchkine was the disciple prepared to put his theories into practice, although she would never admit to it. This was to be the only occasion when dramatic criticism was to condition the work of the Théâtre du Soleil.

In the programme to the Soleil's production, Kott's theory of *Le Songe* is expounded:

*Le Songe d'une nuit d'été* est la pièce la plus sauvage, la plus violente dont on puisse rêver. Un fabuleux bestiaire des profondeurs dont le sujet n'est rien moins que ce 'Dieu furieux' qui sommeille dans le coeur des hommes. Tout y est direct, brutal, 'naturel'. Aucune féerie, aucun merveilleux, mais du fantastique avec ce que le fantastique a de vénéneuse angoisse, de terreur.

This interpretation is part Freudian as well. It affirms a belief in the liberation of the subconscious and the release of the subsequent elemental powers; in other words it is psycho-analytical. When translated to the stage, the most obvious theatrical interpretation would be a surreal one. Kott even goes as far as to suggest certain images of Bosch. Mnouchkine was ready to bring out the animal in man which is the main undercurrent of all the trials and tribulations of the lovers, but above all her aim was to rescue the play from its nineteenth-century Romantic clutter and bring it up to date for a contemporary audience; playing on the subconscious was consequently part and parcel of playing to a contemporary audience.

Kott's appeal to the Théâtre du Soleil was also his practical sense, advocating the use of a distinct theatrical form for the presentation of *Le Songe*: *commedia dell'arte*.

Ce Puck n'est pas seulement ce lutin espiègle de la légende. Il est également l'Arlequin de la *commedia dell'arte*. Pourtant, le véritable Arlequin est un diable.<sup>27</sup>

It was a theatrical form which Copeau had already been advocating for Shakespeare's comedies in the early part of the twentieth century but which few other directors had heeded. It was also the

form which Mnouchkine had been studying at Lecoq's school and which she had been teaching to the other members of her company. Nevertheless, when it came to it, her production was not *commedia*-inspired.

A corporeal production of an unspecific nature was the goal, in an attempt to humanize the play. It proved to be successful as a production concept but a mistake for the company as a 'Société Coopérative'. Despite the fact that the Soleil was a co-operative venture which granted equal status to all its members, and in part a theatre school, two classical dancers, Germinal Casado and Ursula Kübler, the former being a member of the Béjart ballet company, were drafted in to assume the roles of Obéron and Titania. It was a brave step when one considers that neither dancer had delivered lines on stage before. But this was a foretaste of the Soleil's working methods with the text: the physicality of the actors was to dominate the poetry. But rather than super-imposing the dancing skills onto the established Shakespearian text, the latter was reduced to being simply another element in the whole theatrical event.

After the initial failure to come to terms with the Supervielle translation, Shakespeare was discarded completely. Instead the character-types in *Le Songe* were used as a starting point for improvisatory mask work which established the physical dimensions and limitations of those character-types. This was one of the two 'couleurs' mentioned in the Introduction. The second 'couleur' was the establishment of character itself following the methods of Stanislavsky's psychological realism, already tested in



*Les Petits Bourgeois*. The two professional dancers were brought in and gradually the text was assimilated into the rehearsal process, not as a *fait accompli*, but rather as a tool to develop the skills of the actors in much the same way as they had done with *Le Capitaine Fracasse*; textual inspiration, improvisation, re-writing, improvisation and more re-writing. For the first time on the French stage *Le Songe d'une nuit d'été* was not translated or even interpreted. In much the same way as each of the elements in Mnouchkine's production, the text evolved.

The other theatrical elements were undergoing the same process of evolution simultaneously. The music which accompanied the recitation of the text was revolutionary in its disrespect for tradition, as Jacques Nichet points out:

Sans parler de Mendelssohn, nous sommes loin de l'évocation d'un monde merveilleux par des chœurs d'enfants-lutins, dans l'opéra de Britten.<sup>28</sup>

The musical element was again not an accomplished piece imposed on the production, but evolved during the course of rehearsals. The composers, Jacques Lasry and Bernard Baschet, followed the actors throughout rehearsals, watching the characters develop and assigning to each character or character-type or even mood, a sound, a vibration, and sometimes an instrument. Consequently the 'orchestra' was not at all conventional, many sounds having to be created by non-musical instruments. The music not only complemented the characters, their moods and their actions, it also became the characters' third voice. The spoken word was the first and most obvious voice, the body was the second means of expression, and the music, his objective third. As most of the critics differ in their

interpretation of the music, ranging from South American, to Indian, African and Far Eastern, the musical composition achieved on one level the production's global aim of liberating the locality of the play.

Having liberated the audience's aural perception of the play according to the production's general working method of evolution, the visual liberation of the spectacle was eventually achieved along similar lines but with much greater difficulty. Because Mnouchkine, in her attempt to achieve a degree of psychological realism from as early as possible in rehearsals, required the actors to be in costume from the outset, it came about that as characters were developing, an initial set of costumes had to be discarded, and a new set created at enormous expense. This lack of concern for financial restrictions on the production budget led to a series of similarly ambitious set designs. The original conception of the set was of an African tropical forest which in some way might come to life.

Pour le sol, dit R.Moscoso, le décorateur, j'ai travaillé sur l'idée d'un sol mouvant - mousse qui respire - fourrure de fauve qui respire. J'ai trouvé comment la réaliser, j'ai fait une maquette avec une mécanique légère.<sup>29</sup>

But the moss, though living, was reminiscent of the artificial grass and trees common to previous interpretations. The rehearsals continued with the actors working on human representations of animals and eventually the idea of a stage surface was conceived: beige and brown goatskins, twelve hundred of them stitched together to cover the entire arena of the Cirque Médrano. The backdrop was a semi-circular curtain made of strips of wood which acted as a

filter for the shimmering moon behind.<sup>30</sup>

The final design for the costumes was equally daring as Françoise Tournafond, explains:

Pour les gens de cour, pantalon et tunique blancs inspirés de ceux de la classe ouvrière du XIX<sup>e</sup> s., avec quelques rouges vifs soulignés par le maquillage.<sup>31</sup>

The costumes were a mixture of what was within the realm of the audience's actual experience, such as blue jeans and hippy beads, combined with the foreign, the unknown and therefore, the fantastical: the Hindu costumes and the Amazons dressed as Aztec chieftains. Both the real and the fantastical were fused by way of the arrangement of the stage and the auditorium, united by the uniform goatskin and thereby fusing the reality and the unreality of the myth of theatre. And similarly, as Jacques Nichet points out, there was no unbridgeable gulf between the fantastical world of the play and the physical and practical limitations of the set, a gulf so often created by an abundance of artificiality:

Il n'y a plus de distance factice entre contenu et contenant, entre le plateau et le jeu de construction des praticables, entre l'espace réel de la scène et l'espace du monde imaginaire.<sup>32</sup>

By breaking down the barriers between 'scène' and 'salle' and between a fantasy world and its physical representation, Mnouchkine had finally managed to nail the lid on the coffin of nineteenth-century illusionism.

The play began with an emphasis on the violence referred to in the programme: 'la pièce la plus sauvage, la plus violente dont on puisse rêver'. Egée warns his daughter of the penalty for

disobeying him and Thésée reminds Hippolyta, renamed in this production La Reine Amazone, of how he conquered her:

Hippolyta, c'est avec mon épée que je t'ai courtisée. En te faisant violence, j'ai conquis ton amour.<sup>33</sup>

Mnouchkine abolished from the outset any picture of civilization and order and established one of rule by force. But of course the lovers embark of a moonlit elopement from this rule by force and unleash instead forces of an elemental nature. Puck, shirtless, delighted in the sensual pleasure of rolling in the grass, or in this case on the goatskin, as if wrapping himself in a cloak of animalism, dispelling the myth of him being just a naughty or even devilish schoolboy. Instead of writhing on the goatskin, Titania's animalistic desires were made evident in the scene with Bottom and the ass's head; her manifest love for the ass defied nature yet was portrayed as being sensually natural. Jacques Nichet explains:

L'interprétation du Théâtre du Soleil évite de traduire comiquement cette rencontre de la reine et de l'âne, animal plus terrifiant que drôle si l'on se rappelle qu'au Moyen Age et à la Renaissance, il symbolise la puissance sexuelle la plus lubrique.<sup>34</sup>

Falling in love with an ass was a dreadfully serious proposition.

Nichet explains what this approach suggests:

Cette interprétation apparente Shakespeare à Bosch et aux surréalistes.<sup>35</sup>

Jan Kott's own vision of the play is virtually identical:

Titania, qui caresse le monstre à tête d'âne, pourrait sortir des visions atroces de Bosch.<sup>36</sup>

It is doubtful, however, that Mnouchkine had any such interpretation in mind during rehearsals. The actors had initially

worked on animal behaviour and human relationships, and the ultimate interpretations seem to owe much more to the liberalization of society in the nineteen-sixties, rather than to accepting one's sensuality and sexuality. Moreover, this would appear exactly what Kott had been advocating:

Dans cette grande fresque de la folie amoureuse, Shakespeare est [...] tout à fait homme de notre époque.<sup>37</sup>

It would appear then that Nichet was not simply analysing the Soleil's interpretation of *Le Songe*, he was also applying to it Kott's dramatic theory.

Much of the criticism which Nichet and others level at previous productions of *Le Songe* is the fact that the masque elements of those productions were responsible for the play as a whole being deemed obsolete. Consequently, this is where the adapter, Philippe Léotard, made the most significant changes, substituting the songs for dances. Even the fairies' lullaby to Titania was suppressed. Nichet explains what took place:

Mais pour ne rien perdre de l'équilibre savant de la pièce, cette berceuse a été remplacée par une danse où Titania, solitaire, exprime sa nostalgie d'être seule et ses désirs enfouis.<sup>38</sup>

Mnouchkine replaced the masque entertainment with a combination of invented monologue amidst a choreographed dance. The body, in other words, was being asked to interpret visually what the suppressed lullaby could never hope to express to a twentieth-century audience. Here was the clearest indication yet that the Théâtre du Soleil was not intent upon wholly relying on the text. Dance, or movement, became for the Théâtre du Soleil its *art de passage* (just

as mime was for Jacques Lecoq), when the drama had lost its force of words and was renewing its forms. Overall, Léotard's adaptation, which has never been published, remained faithful to the original with cuts being of a very minor nature. It was performed without interval in two and a half hours and was an adaptation which propelled the play in a new direction. In the programme the company reflects why no one had abolished its fairy-tale image before:

D'où vient que cette oeuvre demeure souvent dans nos mémoires sous la forme rassurante d'une farce jouée parmi les pâquerettes ou d'un conte pour un enfant.

They go on to attribute this tendency in interpretation to Shakespeare's own vocabulary of elves, gentle fairies, and primroses which, indeed, up until then had been interpreted literally. The Théâtre du Soleil, however, advocated a more contemporary approach:

Il fallait faire la part à la mode du temps.

It would be just as wrong to interpret Shakespeare's elves and fairies literally as to believe the Soleil's contemporary interpretation was founded on its use of jeans, beads and a leather-booted Titania. 'A la mode du temps' was, more importantly, the expression of one's sexuality.

Moreover, a certain fidelity to the productions at the Globe is also suggested by Nichet in that the amphitheatre permitted a total vision of the action and, therefore, permitted the total freedom of movement of the actors. Yet the Soleil's *Le Songe* goes beyond the Globe. There was little to suggest that the audience was in a theatre in the conventional sense, in a world of illusion.

Consequently the mechanicals' play within the play stood out as being the only illusion, as they brought with them their nineteenth-century makeshift theatre of make-up, disguises and, most important of all, curtain. Nichet calls this instead 'une pièce dans la nature', for it was this scene alone which suffered from artifice and illusion. Is it any wonder then that Mnouchkine and Françoise Tournafond should decide to dress their mechanicals in nineteenth-century costume?

Yet the mechanicals' nineteenth-century costume was not simply a swipe at the illusionary tendencies in the theatre of the period. They also infused this dream play with a sense of reality. As stated earlier, the set suggested no easily identifiable scenic or temporal location. The costumes of the court, although identified rightly by most critics as Hindu, or at least of vague Indian origin, did not really register with a French public as specifically as a sari might to a British one. The mechanicals' scene with its emphasis on '*bienséance*', not wishing to offend its stage audience with its lion, although in the play terrifying the hapless Thisbe, is a useful point of contrast and comparison with the production of the whole play. The animal was clearly frightening in the sketch yet was performed artificially and apologetically so as not to offend its audience in much the same way as the whole *Le Songe d'une nuit d'été* was ineffectual and apologetic in its representation of the animalistic undercurrents in previous productions of the play. Mnouchkine's production, however, with its elemental music and its sensual movement, was a challenge to this ineffectual stage notion, not just as an

entertainment but also as a liberation of the subconscious. Retaining the former notion of the performance of the 'pièce dans la pièce', by offsetting its formalist *commedia* techniques with the animalism of 'la nature' that was the play as a whole, was one sure way of providing a yardstick for what they were attempting, and indeed, succeeded, to achieve: to dispel the illusion.

Shortly after the production opened, the weekly *Nouvel Observateur* published two articles, in successive weeks, on the Théâtre du Soleil. The first was an analytical review of the production which was overtaken the following week by a retrospective look at the company and an interview with Mnouchkine herself. Guy Dumur's review of the play tries to evaluate the production's success and in so doing falls prey to his preconceptions and assumptions. More explicitly than Nichet, Dumur associates that success with the new audience which both the Cirque Médrano and *La Cuisine* had discovered:

Avec Ariane Mnouchkine au Cirque Montmartre, nous sommes pris dans une aventure beaucoup plus compliquée. *La Cuisine*, de Wesker, nous avait révélé l'immense talent de cette nouvelle venue dans l'avant-garde parisienne. Elle avait alors conquis un vaste public qui lui restera fidèle, les jeunes surtout, car c'est pour eux que ce nouveau spectacle a été composé.<sup>33</sup>

When he says that the production is geared to a young audience, is he perhaps referring to the denim and hippy beads in the show, the most recognizable symbols of contemporary popular culture? In the knowledge of Mnouchkine's re-evaluation of *Le Songe* and her researched performance methods, it can only be concluded that Dumur, like most of the critics of the time, was associating novel,



if not revolutionary, theatrical practices with the young. Writing in early 1968, those critics were perhaps signalling the more general unrest in French society that was to erupt a few months later, in which the theatre and in particular the Théâtre du Soleil, played a significant and active role.

Dumur goes on to describe the bare feet of the actors, the animal skins, the Hindu costumes, the meditation-type postures, the fury of the lovers and Puck's raucous shouts, and tries to relate all this to the preoccupations of the youth of 1968.

La cérémonie est celle que la jeunesse d'aujourd'hui s'offre à elle-même et je suis sûr que l'auteur de *Shakespeare, notre contemporain*, Ian Kott, reconnaîtrait ses idées sur la similitude entre les désirs d'évasion des néo-platoniciens de l'époque de Shakespeare et ceux des hippies d'aujourd'hui.

Dumur, perhaps, stretches the association a little too far by linking the hippy philosophy with Jan Kott's interpretation of Shakespeare of the late fifties, let alone the neo-Platonists. Nevertheless, Dumur rightly points out the similarity between the liberation of the subconscious in *Le Songe*, as advocated by Kott, and the advent of a general liberalization of society in the late sixties. Indeed, caught up by this fervour of liberalization at the time, he believes that Mnouchkine could have gone even further, suggesting that the Titania-Bottom scene was too tame and unliberated for a contemporary audience. Dumur was thus a good example of how the theatre critics of the period were detecting forces in the theatre which were indicative of society as a whole.

It is no great surprise, therefore, that the criticism of the Soleil's work and of this production in particular, was

coloured at the time by the political persuasion of the newspaper or journal for which the critic was writing. In an unsigned review in the Conservative daily, *Le Figaro*, it is admitted that this new audience with its sudden and avid thirst for culture, (such is the interpretation of the Soleil's work), is impressive. Yet the overall impression of the review is of a scathing attack on anyone, in the theatre or in society, attempting to achieve 'la nouveauté à tout prix':

Un public juvénile, frénétique et généreux a vivement applaudi cette performance et quelques autres, dont un maquillage à l'argile que bien peu d'acteurs professionnels accepteraient: il exige une heure et demie de soins attentifs avant l'entrée en scène et donne au corps tout entier la teinte rougeâtre des ennemis de Buffalo Bill dans un western en couleurs à bon marché.<sup>41</sup>

Implying an undeserved reception from an untypical audience for a group of amateurs with a cheap and nasty production, this was merely the establishment battenning its hatches.

Leaving aside the possible social implications of the production and the sources of inspiration which the critics believed to have guided it, such as Freud, Sade and Artaud ('*Le Songe* passé à travers Artaud' was the claim of Gilles Sandier), those critics of the time appeared to unite in universal condemnation of the production on a specific point: the standard of acting. The two dancers drafted into the company for the production came in for the heaviest criticism, as Renée Saurel exemplifies:

D'autres, comme Ursula Kübler (Titania) et Germinal Casado (Obéron) choisis pour leur talent de danseurs, ne disent pas bien le texte de Shakespeare, et cela nous renvoie, une fois de plus, aux carences de notre enseignement théâtral.<sup>42</sup>

Virtually all the critics, with their negative approach to the two dancers, were guilty of an implied criticism of the production concept as a whole. Yet, in a mood of imperceptiveness and self-contradiction, the concept is generally lauded. Saurel, immediately prior to her criticism of the two dancers, displays this mood:

. Intelligence de la mise en scène, beauté plastique, science des éclairages, qualité rare de la musique [...], voilà un spectacle très attachant.<sup>43</sup>

Saurel is guilty of judging the production according to the criteria of the 'legitimate' theatre with its classically trained actors, and of ignoring the fact that the production was a corporeal one which reduced in importance the role of the text. The poor delivery of the two dancers was not necessarily a sign of their inability to act, it was also indicative of the lack of attention paid by Mnouchkine to the traditional equipment of the actor: voice projection and natural delivery. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that a de-poeticized text was not imbued with the declamatory and oratorical delivery style.

Nevertheless, this criticism of the Soleil's acting capabilities was contained within the sixties. Most of the retrospective criticism, some ten years later, either overlooked these shortcomings or was able to place them in context of the re-evaluation of the elements within the theatrical event, and the changing preoccupations of the theatre practitioners with regard to working methods and styles which were taking place at the time. Raymonde Temkine, in *Mettre en scène au présent*, in 1977, looks back on *Le Songe* of 1968 with an adjusted vision of Mnouchkine's experimental concept:

Ce choix fut critiqué. Germinal n'avait jamais que dansé, on le jugea mauvais acteur. Ursula avait joué avec Béjart et Casarès dans *La Reine Verte* mais on lui reprocha son accent. Ariane défend son choix aujourd'hui encore et je l'approuve. Elle voulait des êtres qui puissent voler, immatériels en un sens, en un autre, puissamment corporels: Obéron, l'animal-dieu; Titania, la sensualité innocente.<sup>44</sup>

Contemporary criticism could accept a novel interpretation concept by relating its novelty to general social change but only retrospective criticism could really assimilate revolutionary theatrical forms. Only Jacques Nichet was willing and astute enough to acknowledge the influence of extraneous forms which were assaulting the traditions of the French theatre, with Ariane Mnouchkine's assistance:

Elle a su préserver les qualités de l'ancien théâtre qu'elle a découvert au Japon: Force et Dépouillement. Comme Zéami, l'artiste prestigieux de Nô au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle, elle a foi dans le théâtre.<sup>45</sup>

Since Nichet was the main and most comprehensive source for the retrospective critics' interpretation of the early Soleil work of the sixties, because of his close analysis of the adaptation and production styles, it is important to note that Nichet was bold enough to praise and encourage it at the time.

However the critics praised or condemned the production, *Le Songe d'une nuit d'été* played for three months to packed houses. The daily advertisement in *Le Monde* was money well spent. By mid-May political events and social unrest caught up with the Soleil. The May 68 climate in Paris effectively prohibited a politically aware theatre company such as the Théâtre du Soleil from performing a play which, though immensely popular, was representative of

bourgeois culture. *Le Songe* was temporarily postponed for a month from mid-May to mid-June while the Soleil, at the invitation of the strike leaders, resurrected *La Cuisine* and toured the factories occupied by the striking workers as a basis for discussion and as an analogy of their own situation. The political inclinations of the Théâtre du Soleil prior to the May 68 strike were rather ambiguous. Certainly individual members of the company were committed to the Left ideologically and, since the Soleil originated at the Sorbonne, they all felt a close affinity with the student protests. Nevertheless, despite the contact which had been established during the run of *La Cuisine* with the 'collectivités' - the workers groups - this intermission in *Le Songe's* run was really the first time that the company had come face to face with the workers on the shop floor. This meeting was to prove invaluable and was to affect the subsequent development of the company:

Les événements de 68 nous ont apporté la confirmation de notre 'choix'. La vie en groupe au sein de la Compagnie a suscité plus de responsabilités. *Le Songe d'une nuit d'été* a marqué une limite. C'était une erreur d'avoir accepté des comédiens 'de l'extérieur'.<sup>46</sup>

The classically trained dancers were not only implicated in the Soleil's pretensions to bourgeois culture, they were also paid a higher wage than the other company members. Thus the May 68 strike had a direct effect on achieving a more egalitarian structure within the company itself which might perhaps have seemed to have forgotten its original definition as a 'Société Coopérative Ouvrière de Production'. Henceforth the wages were made uniform from Mnouchkine to floor-sweeper and indeed the whole notion of a

hierarchical structure was abandoned. All members, at least in 1968, were declared equal.

The month's break from 16 May to 15 June was followed by another month at the Médrano performing *Le Songe* but this finally came to an end on 13 July. The political consciousness of the group had been affected to such an extent that the Shakespeare play had to be abandoned, a new ideology had to be worked out, future productions rethought, and their own future as a company reconsidered. Four months of commercial exploitation was hardly enough to cover expenses let alone secure the existence of the Théâtre du Soleil financially. The troubled conscience of the Théâtre du Soleil took its expensive toll on the company as a viable operation.

The Soleil's production of *Le Songe d'une nuit d'été* was a revolution in itself. Here was the most successful attempt to date to destroy the myths which had surrounded the play, myths which had also relegated it to the unplayable category. It was probably the most corporeal production of one of Shakespeare's comedies to be seen on the French stage. It had rejected the traditional fairy-tale interpretation and stripped the translation of its embellishments and poetic niceties. And for the contemporary critics it had put into practice what Jan Kott had theorized nearly a decade earlier. Most significantly of all, it had assimilated foreign influences and related its subtextual qualities such as the liberation of the subconscious with all its violence to the preoccupations of French society. Yet for all that, it was a classic and even worse its interpretation was esoteric. It is

difficult to imagine how long the production would have run if the proposed trips to the Soviet Union and to the Festival de Bourgogne had been realized. There is little evidence to suggest that the Soleil would not have exploited its success further in order to secure its own financial future.

It is also difficult to imagine how the Théâtre du Soleil would have developed had it not been for the events of May 68 preoccupying the company members and necessitating a change of repertoire. What did happen subsequently points the finger at a possible future development. Immediately after *Le Songe*, with minimum finances, the company spent a period of rehearsal exploring other Elizabethan texts and Far Eastern theatrical forms, an early sign of the shape of things to come. Yet May 68 put paid to the idea of developing in that direction for the time being:

Plusieurs membres de la troupe et moi-même éprouvions une certaine lassitude sous l'influence de l'énorme atmosphère suicidaire qui a suivi l'après mai 1968.<sup>47</sup>

This shared sentiment demanded a re-examination and redefining of their roles as actors in society as well as in the theatre. They were no longer to become the exponents of experimentalism with Shakespeare let alone with any established text for a long time to come. This self-consciousness of the period is a possible explanation for their subsequent preoccupation with plays within plays, with theatre within theatre, with a theatre troupe played by a theatre troupe, as if they were attempting to justify their own position.

Although the upheaval of 1968 spelled a temporary financial

setback for the Théâtre du Soleil, it failed to diminish the impact which their production of *Le Songe* had on European interpretations of Shakespeare. Only two years later, Peter Brook mounted a production at the Royal Shakespeare Company of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* which made explicit use of circus techniques and was highlighted by clowning, gymnastics, acrobatics and Indian music. At the time Brook and his designer admitted to being influenced by a Chinese circus performance in Paris, yet it seems impossible, in retrospect, not to recognize Mnouchkine's orientalized *Dream* in a real circus as being a precursor to the Brook production.

By the advent of Brook's production in 1970, the Théâtre du Soleil had abandoned completely its experimentation with existing texts and had embarked on a course of collective creation proper. What most critics fail to realize, however, is that by the time of *Le Songe*, the Théâtre du Soleil had already firmly established a collectively creative working method even with an existing text as a starting point: adaptation and improvisation. Moving away from Shakespeare, therefore, was not so much a case of abandoning the classics as a recognition of their being superfluous to a theatrical production. Instead of Shakespeare as their starting point, why not use historical periods and situations, contemporary character-types and bodies of theatricals as their source of inspiration? Thus by abandoning *Le Songe*, they were not suppressing Shakespeare but one of Artaud's bugbears, namely the rigid formalism of western bourgeois culture: the text.

The desire within the Théâtre du Soleil for a new kind of production method after 1968 meant that a textually based



production would not return to their repertoire, under Ariane Mnouchkine's direction, for over thirteen years, until the reinstatement of Shakespeare once again in 1981. Yet they did not set out with any such intention. For the third time in the history of the Soleil, the members of the company left Paris for a commune-type existence in the country, this time at Arc-et-Sénans, and began to read and discuss their past theatrical repertoire.

A Arc-et-Sénans, on lit des textes, beaucoup de textes: Shakespeare, les Elisabethains, des pièces chinoises et japonaises. Rien n'accroche. L'ennui, le doute s'installent.<sup>49</sup>

Nonetheless they had visions of a new life and a new approach to theatre: a utopian dream. No longer would they rely on written texts to formulate their productions. They began intensive work on *commedia dell'arte*: on the art of improvisation and on the use of mask. Concentrating thus on the physicality of performance, it soon became apparent that their next production would be based on the life and work of clowns; their stylized gestures, their deformed voices and their prosaic speech. This was the beginning of the end of the text in Mnouchkine's theatre. A text, in the conventional sense and playing a conventional role, was not to return to the Soleil stage until 1981 (with 'Les Shakespeare'), some twelve years later.

Not only was *Les Clowns*, first created at the Théâtre de la Commune d'Aubervilliers in 1969, a new departure for its rejection of the text but it also questioned and juggled with the roles within the theatre. Mnouchkine, in effect, abandoned her role as director. Instead she became the outside observer at rehearsals,

taking notes, never intervening except at the end of the day to pass comment and help the actors make choices. It follows that since the director's and writer's roles were suppressed a greater importance was accorded to the work of the actor. Instead of being simply 'l'interprète' of a text, he became 'l'acteur-créateur', as was being advocated by the critics-cum-disciples of Artaud and Brecht. Marc'O is one such critic:

Les exigences du théâtre fondé sur la littérature (fût-elle d'avant-garde) font le comédien *interprète*. Pour qu'apparaisse un nouveau type de comédien (je le nomme *l'acteur-créateur*) il faudrait que des oeuvres écrites rendent son existence possible. Il faudrait aussi des metteurs en scène capables de créer les conditions scéniques permettant la manifestation de cet acteur-créateur.<sup>47</sup>

Basically he was advocating a total theatre which demanded the participation of all the elements of the theatre and their creative potential. What is more, he was advocating a 'création collective'.

La recherche des moyens du théâtre de demain réside dans l'*exercice* du théâtre que nous faisons aujourd'hui à partir d'une vision idéale d'un théâtre d'une participation totale, active et créatrice, de tous.<sup>50</sup>

Such was the direction of the Théâtre du Soleil as from *Les Clowns* in 1969.

Although abandoning the text and reshuffling the roles within the theatre, this new direction of the Soleil was hardly a radical step. Improvisation and self-creation had been the working-method for *La Cuisine* and *Le Songe*, yet the conception of a 'play' was to be altered into a series of independent sketches which gave snapshots of circus life and reflected their own lives as performers. A step away from Stanislavsky is also detectable at

this stage. Instead of the actor becoming infused and taken over by his character, the actor in *Les Clowns* stood back. He did not interpret, he presented. Colette Godard explains:

Il ne s'agit pas de faire le clown, mais de le montrer, d'en faire un personnage à part entière, costumé et grîmé en couleurs rutilantes plus proches des sublimes demi-dieux de Kathakali que des dieux dérisoires du Magic Circus.<sup>51</sup>

The excessive, camp interpretation of clowning by the Grand Magic Circus was in distinct contrast to the respectful representation of clowns by the Théâtre du Soleil. This preoccupation with destroying the illusion of theatre by standing back and being seen to stand back from the characters, is perhaps an extension of what they had achieved in *Le Songe*. The mechanicals' 'pièce dans la pièce' in the latter play presented illusion in all its glory. By 'faire le clown' instead of 'interpréter le clown', the Théâtre du Soleil was permitting its audience objectivity and showing the theatre to be nothing more than artifice.

During the run of *Le Songe* with the Soleil's eviction from the Cirque Médrano imminent, several critics called for a respectable theatre to do the production justice. After 1968, Mnouchkine resolved never to darken the door of a 'respectable' theatre again, for that would have been tantamount to complicity:

Les spectacles qui pensent à gauche et sont produits dans des conditions de totale imbrication au système m'exaspèrent. Ce sont des spectacles alibis.<sup>52</sup>

The Théâtre du Soleil, throughout its brief history, could rarely have been accused of complicity in that respect. Both *La Cuisine* and *Le Songe* had been performed in a disused circus, and the early

plays initially at various arts centres. After renting the Elysée-Montmartre for *Les Clowns* and *La Cuisine* in repertory, it became clear that the costs prohibited the company from continuing their work of collective creation. They began rehearsals for their next production, *1789* at the Palais des Sports and later, for a peppercorn rent, at the Cartoucherie de Vincennes, a disused and dilapidated munitions factory in the middle of a forest, which was to become their permanent home. The building was their own and they were able to convert it to suit the needs of each production, experimenting with audience-actor relations and exploding the myth of illusion by making the work of the theatre visible to all.

Having exorcized the guilt complex which was the result of their feeling of political impotence in 1968, the subsequent two productions tackled the theme of revolution. *1789, la révolution doit s'arrêter à la perfection du bonheur*, created in Milan in 1970 and subsequently at the Cartoucherie, and *1793, la cité révolutionnaire est de ce monde* (in 1972), attempted to rewrite the story of the French Revolution. During the six months of rehearsals for each play, the period of history was researched through books, lectures, films and general discussions. *1789* was similar in a sense to *Les Clowns* in that the actors stood back from the action by playing fairground barkers who in turn not only presented the story of the Revolution and the subsequent rise of the bourgeoisie, but also narrated directly to the audience their own personal experiences of the Revolution. So on a theatrical level the actors removed themselves from direct involvement in the action, swapping roles to maintain their distance. Yet, on the other hand, the

characters created, the fairground barkers, achieved a kind of personalization of history which appeared to bridge the gap between the actor and witness to the Revolution. The leading figures in the Revolution, therefore, became caricatured, whereas the 'bateleurs' appealed successfully to the audience's sympathy since they were one step less removed from the audience. 1793 was, however, an altogether more polemic approach to history and cut out the fairground barker, the middle man between the actor and the revolutionary. Here the actors created 'sectionnaires' and infused them with the actors' own political persuasion. The former play was a celebration of theatre as much as the portrayal of the excitement and expectation of the period, while the latter was a more sober, reflective and discursive approach to the desire for democracy. The former was a spectacle for the members of the audience audience, engaging them physically in the action, whereas the latter appealed to their critical faculties and powers of analysis. What both plays achieved was an education of the spectators in that it readjusted their vision of the period of history and related it to their own experiences of expectation and then suppression in 1968.

It was during this period that the critics labelled the work of the Théâtre du Soleil 'création collective'. Their initial research and their improvisations were controlled by a collective spirit, made no clearer than the alternating roles in 1789. Improvised sketches were created sometimes at the rate of thirty a day, only a few of which were finally retained at the suggestion of the, by now, fully fledged 'Probenleiter', Ariane Mnouchkine. By the time they began rehearsals for 1793, they were able to

improvise in very large groups and knew themselves what should be retained and what edited, without the direction of Mnouchkine. In this collective frame of mind their attention was turned to the use and the effect upon the audience of the scenic arrangement within the hangars of the Cartoucherie and so 1789 became partly a promenade production with the eighteenth-century 'bateleurs' speaking directly to the spectators, engaging them physically in the fairground action, rather than to an indistinguishable mass of bodies at one end of a darkened auditorium, and infected them with the festivity of their fairground-cum-theatre. For 1793, on the other hand, the audience literally took a back seat to be able to digest the reported speech and reflect upon the political ideologies expressed. To present their Theatre of the Revolution, in other words, the Soleil abolished the traditional hierarchy of scenic space. Only the spectator of both productions can determine which method was the most politically effective: the unashamed celebration of the theatrical ritual that was 1789, or the discursive and possibly alienating 1793. If it were not too simplistic a notion, perhaps it was, on a basically dramatic level, the opposition of Artaudian rite and Brechtian distanciation.

After the most celebrated period in French history, the Théâtre du Soleil turned its attention to the representation of the contemporary world. Finally they felt prepared to realize Jacques Copeau's ultimate goal of a theatre troupe-cum-school presenting a contemporary history play. It is no surprise, therefore, that the theatrical forms employed for the creation of this production should have been *commedia dell'arte* and Chinese theatre, precisely

what Copeau had advocated. The title was *L'Age d'or*. They began by interviewing ordinary workers and students to gauge their hopes, fears and ambitions. They then set up what by now had become an established working method of creating character-types, corresponding roughly to the stylized *commedia* types and improvising around them. From there they developed a loose storyline around the misfortunes of an immigrant worker called Abdallah, the contemporary Harlequin, and then they added another layer of the largely improvised scenes of social problems and injustice such as property development scandals, drug abuse and inadequate communication between generations and within families.

The structure of *L'Age d'or* was loose and depended for the most part on the nature of the improvisations on a particular night and, therefore, on the acting and improvisatory skills of the performers. It was perhaps the furthest the Théâtre du Soleil was to get from using an established text as a framework. On the one hand they wanted to distance the audience and themselves from the contemporary world they were presenting, to avoid inevitable parody, yet on the other hand they could not ask the audience to sit back and judge analytically and objectively the political message, as was the case in 1793. The scenic arrangement of the Cartoucherie engaged the audience in the production yet the theatrical forms used distanced them from their contemporary reality. This was the *apogée* of the development of the Théâtre du Soleil. They were constantly using extraneous or outmoded and highly stylized theatrical forms, the Chinese theatre and *commedia dell'arte*, not as a means of theatricalizing the theatre *per se*,

but as a means of distancing the audience. *Les Clowns* had revealed the political impotence of the actors, but here, just as in 1789 and 1793, it was the Soleil's use of theatrical forms which became a political weapon.

The egalitarian utopia of community spirit, lack of possessiveness and hierarchy to which *L'Age d'or* aspired was achieved in Mnouchkine's next project, the film *Molière, une vie*. In the film Molière eventually stumbles upon a company of the Théâtre du Soleil variety, not in a conventional theatre building, but in a barn, happily removing their make-up. The message was clear: the Théâtre du Soleil, represented by the theatre company in the barn, was the living example, on a minuscule scale, of an egalitarian society, a utopia. Yet the next production, immediately prior to their return to Shakespeare, cast seeds of doubt. *Méphisto*, an adaptation of Klaus Mann's novel, which was a fictional revenge on the real-life actor Gründgens, portrayed the political dilemma facing the politically committed actors in Nazi Germany: adhering to their political principles or saving their own lives. The idealistic choice was rejected by the leading actor, Höfgen, who chose to perform before Hitler the most famous of all classical roles, Mephistopheles in Goethe's *Faust*. The theatrical form and structure of the Soleil's production exemplified this dilemma. At one end of the auditorium there was a reconstruction of a proscenium arch theatre in which the classic *Faust* was performed, and at the other end was situated the left-wing political cabaret with its improvised sketches, and with the actors switching back and forth between the two. This was the polarized presentation of



hierarchy and anarchy on a dramatic level, with the audience literally sitting on the fence, having to turn from one type of theatre to another, and therefore being confronted with the same dilemma as the actors. Again the theatrical form had become a political weapon, yet in this case it provided the audience with a means of understanding Höfgen's decision not to stick to his principles.

The Soleil's understanding and apparent sympathy for Höfgen's weakness, which caused an outcry from the French Communist Party, was a recognition of man's instinct for self-preservation. It was also a recognition of the artist's political impotence in social struggles, which the Soleil members themselves had experienced in 1968 and which they had first dramatized in *Les Clowns* in 1969. Submission to this impotence may not have been the desired solution but it was the one which, in Nazi Germany at any rate, saved the artists' lives. Gone were the socialist utopias envisaged in *1793*, needed in *L'Age d'or* and presented in *Molière*. It was the end of an era in terms of the history of the Soleil and one which saw a complete overhaul of company members. They had come to terms with their impotence and guilt, had developed theatrical skills and introduced new forms to the French theatre. Now they appeared to be ready to begin again where they had left off back in May 1968, when they had to abandon *Le Songe* in the face of political events.

More than a decade later the Théâtre du Soleil returned to Shakespeare for much the same reasons as they had chosen to do so in 1967 - to present an inherently dramatic play and thereby equip

themselves with the theatrical tools necessary to present their own version of the contemporary world. Returning to the text could also be construed as turning full circle, but a decade or so's intermission was a time when the company members polished their use of form for specific purposes, as political or theatrical weapons. It was impossible to imagine that they would not apply that use of form, for similar purposes, to Shakespeare. The supposedly socialist theatre company with visions of an egalitarian utopia, presenting the Kings of Shakespeare's history plays, seemed to be an interesting proposition.

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30. Bablet and Bablet, slide 4: Puck and Titania against a backdrop of a shimmering moon.
31. Bablet and Bablet, p.29 and slide 5.
32. Jacques Nichet, 'Carnet de théâtre: *Le Songe d'une nuit d'été*', p.544.
33. Supervielle translation, p.7.
34. Jacques Nichet, 'Carnet de théâtre: *Le Songe d'une nuit d'été*', p.541.
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## CHAPTER TWO:

*RICHARD II*

Immediately prior to the opening of the Théâtre du Soleil's Shakespeare cycle in December 1981, theatre in Paris was witnessing a confrontation of two theatrical opposites; reductionism and full-blown spectacle. On the one hand the 'Festival d'automne' was organizing a retrospective celebration of Samuel Beckett's work on the occasion of his seventy-fifth birthday with some twenty short plays, or 'dramaticules', a term of affection by which they had come to be known. On the other hand, there were works of much grander proportions such as Patrice Chéreau's production of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* which had transferred from the Théâtre National Populaire at Villeurbanne. This monumental seven-hour theatrical extravaganza was a delight to the eye, with its tendency towards nineteenth-century illusionism, and, what is more, even bordered on the naturalistic with its 'slice of life' extras and its real horse! These two tendencies are best summed up by Bernard Dort, writing in *Le Monde*, some four weeks before the opening of the Soleil's Shakespeare:

Rien de plus dissemblable que cette poussière de Beckett et la montagne de *Peer Gynt*.'

Here, on the stage in Paris, at the beginning of the nineteen-eighties, were two conceptions of theatre whose production methods characterized the major movements of both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in France: illusionism (through to Naturalism), and reactions against Naturalism (in particular, the

Absurd). It seemed a strange apposition of past theatrical forms in a period in which the theatre was extremely conscious of, and sensitive to, form. Dort records his similar confusion:

Impossible de ne pas le constater: entre Beckett et Ibsen-Chéreau, entre cette réduction, ce creusement du théâtre par lui-même, et cette affirmation d'un théâtre-monde, il y a comme un abîme. Pourtant ces deux pratiques coexistent. Leur coexistence caractérise même, peut-être, l'activité théâtrale, aujourd'hui.<sup>2</sup>

That there was a gulf in French theatre in 1981 between pretensions to illusionism and reductionism was obvious. Bridging that gulf was a perplexing proposition. Dort reflects on such a mammoth task:

Ne peut-on rêver d'une représentation qui renonce aux prestiges de l'image et à la fascination de la somme, sans céder, pour autant, au vertige de la fragmentation, de la mort et du silence?<sup>3</sup>

At the time of writing Dort believed he had found the answer in *L'Épopée du Mahabharata*, performed at the Opéra-Comique during the 'Festival d'automne' by the Kalamandalam Kathakali Dance Company, which to Dort seemed to contain all the elements required to bridge that gulf: myth, history, the mundane, the sacred, the basic, the refined, freedom and ritual. He seemed to be inviting the Parisian theatres, excepting naturally the Théâtre du Soleil, to reply to their lack of inspiration and his own lack of faith in them:

Mais une telle réussite est hors de notre atteinte. Ou peut-être n'est-elle rien d'autre qu'un mirage de l'Extrême-Orient.<sup>4</sup>

Dort's required elements could arguably be found in any play by Shakespeare and the spectacle and formalism in theatrical traditions of the Far East, as had been advocated by many leading theatre practitioners in France throughout the twentieth century.

And so one month later, with 'Les Samourais de Shakespeare' announced in *Le Monde*, (Colette Godard's review title of the Soleil's *Richard II*), Dort could be said to have been the initial harbinger and the prime advocate of Mnouchkine's Shakespeare cycle.

Since the gulf then was to be bridged by one of the classics, which are, by nature, perennial, the question ultimately arises of what one should do with a classical text on the contemporary stage. Again there appears to be a gulf, a divergence of opinion, as Dort points out in an article in *Le Monde Dimanche* in February 1982:

Faut-il actualiser les classiques, faire comme s'ils avaient été écrits la veille, ou, au contraire, les historiciser, faire ressortir leur caractère daté? A moins qu'on ne décide encore de les tenir pour éternels et de les jouer comme s'ils étaient de tous les temps et de tous les pays.<sup>6</sup>

The same question had confronted the Théâtre du Soleil in 1967-8 during their production of *Le Songe d'une nuit d'été*. They felt conscious on the previous occasion of stripping the play of all former interpretation and of rendering the violence of the emotions, a contemporary phenomenon, rather than the fairy-tale forest and the nymphs and fairies. Only with a few vestiges of contemporary culture, Mnouchkine adopted a policy of neutralizing both the temporal and scenic locations of the play. She also adopted a new, esoteric, but essentially physical acting language in order to counteract the tendency of twentieth-century actors to marry quasi-naturalistic acting with poetic, classical texts. Dort explains this justification:

Mettre dans la bouche des comédiens des textes écrits, leur faire exécuter des mouvements prescrits, il y a, parfois, plusieurs siècles, a



donc quelque chose de paradoxal. Presque de contre-nature.<sup>61</sup>

This unnaturalness is a problem for any director of Shakespeare who must come to terms with the fact that his production will inevitably be a marriage of an early seventeenth-century play with its medieval history (if a history play) performed by a contemporary acting troupe. The unifying factor of all three elements can be nothing other than form. Only the acceptance by the audience of a suitable form can bridge the gaps between diverging elements and traditions.

Three major productions of classical plays were on the Parisian stage by early 1982; Peter Brook's production of *La Tragédie de Carmen*, which combined the works of Mérimée and Bizet, Antoine Vitez's opening production at the Palais de Chaillot of Goethe's *Faust (Part One)*, and the Théâtre du Soleil's opening production of their proposed Shakespeare cycle, *Richard II*. Brook rearranged the Bouffes du Nord for *Carmen* to create an acting area which was reminiscent of an Elizabethan stage and which broke down the barriers between 'scène' and 'salle'. Instead of presenting an opera, Brook's company related the events directly to the audience, in other words banished the idea of a packaged Spanish nineteenth-century love triangle and replaced it with an emphasis on the immediacy of the theatrical event and stressing its contemporariness. It was a case of historical opera turned present day classic. Vitez, on the other hand, ranged from one century to the next in his production of *Faust*, as he himself had advocated some five years earlier:

Notre travail à nous est [...] de montrer les fractures du temps.<sup>7</sup>

His aim in *Faust* was to present different ages, different times on stage at the same time, in a blatant refusal to accept the existence of time as a concept, in a sense. Mnouchkine on the other hand, as we shall see later, took a different approach from both Brook and Vitez; bringing the classics up to date or self-consciously refusing to admit to the passage of time was not her major concern. Hers was a full-blooded recognition of the distance between the classics, their history and the contemporary theatre. All three directors, for different reasons and in different ways, sought to reunite these three elements in their acceptance of their differences. Yet Dort is able to perceive a link between the three and a trend in the approach to the production of classical texts at the beginning of the nineteen-eighties.

...pour différents qu'ils soient, ces spectacles ont, au moins, en commun de ne pas faire silence sur leur distance à l'égard de l'oeuvre. Leur approche du texte se fonde même sur cette distance, qu'ils choisissent, en fin de compte, de la rendre évidente ou de la nier. Et elle ne se préoccupe pas d'abord du sens: elle s'attaque à la forme.<sup>8</sup>

Dort here defines the terms for the examination of the Soleil's Shakespeare, which was perhaps to become, what he had hoped would be, the natural bridge to the gulf that had opened in theatre practice in France by late 1981. The examination should not, therefore, be principally concerned with the interpretation by Mnouchkine of textual meaning, but with the choice and exploitation of form.

Why then was the Théâtre du Soleil so anxious to perform Shakespeare, and moreover Shakespeare's History plays, when the characteristics of the company's repertoire for over a decade had been to perform 'créations collectives', and plays in progress, non-textual and even unfinished? Even though the material for shows such as *1789*, *1793* and *Méphisto* was rooted firmly in the past, the form they took was created during the rehearsal period, and they became as much plays about contemporary history, as historical plays. Returning to Shakespeare might subsequently appear as a retrograde step. Ariane Mnouchkine explains her reasons:

c'est en pensant à un spectacle sur un sujet contemporain que nous avons eu l'idée d'un travail préparatoire sur des pièces de Shakespeare, comme un apprentissage avant cette nouvelle création. Mais très vite nous avons senti qu'il fallait aller jusqu'au bout de ce travail, jusqu'à son aboutissement normal: la représentation.<sup>9</sup>

Mnouchkine here describes herself as an apprentice to the master, Shakespeare. But why Shakespeare? She explains:

nous consultons Shakespeare, lui l'expert qui sait les outils les plus justes et les mieux adaptés aux récits des passions et des destinées des hommes.<sup>10</sup>

In 1981 again, Mnouchkine was repeating her main preoccupation of the late nineteen-sixties, namely the necessity of rediscovering, on the part of the whole company, the theatrical third 'couleur', in other words the marriage of an autonomous and inherently dramatic, classical text with a researched performance style.

If *Méphisto* was a step in that direction, then its character typification and *commedia dell'arte* performance style succeeded only partially. The text itself was, purely and simply, a record of their improvisations around Klaus Mann's novel. It was a basic

skeleton of a text which meant little outside the context of the creativity of the Théâtre du Soleil. When the Royal Shakespeare Company translated and performed the text as a self-contained unit, its skeletal qualities became even more apparent. The development of a gestural language could not be fully achieved by the Soleil company while under the simultaneous constraints of textual creation. What was needed was an already existing textual framework, that inherently dramatic text in other words, which stood up on its own and which provided the opportunity to research and develop their acting skills and performance language, which could then possibly be codified and used as the basis for the creation of a contemporary historical production. Anne Neuschäfer, who witnessed from inside the genesis of 'Les Shakespeare', interprets the Soleil's decision to return to the text:

Au terme de *L'Age d'or*, Mnouchkine avait compris que le seul développement du jeu corporel ou la réappropriation du répertoire de la *commedia dell'arte*, bref, l'approfondissement de l'improvisation avec les comédiens, ne débouchait ni sur une véritable personnification, ni sur la création d'un texte dramatique satisfaisant. Il y avait là un obstacle fondamental, qui ne serait levé, peut-être, qu'en reprenant le problème à l'envers, en recourant aux textes de Shakespeare, dont l'existence autonome en dehors de la représentation ne fait aucun doute.''

Starting from the initial base of character typification which was the starting point for all the collective creations, they would then infuse their work into the historical situations offered by the text. The ultimate effect would be the universalization, not of character types themselves, but of the entire dramatic situation.

After *Méphisto*, which represented the failure and the inadequacy of the artist to change society, as he is caught up in the whirlwind of political events and 'historical' situations, the Théâtre du Soleil intended to continue with the presentation of history, of contemporary history, but this time to isolate it geographically from France. This was not so much in order to incorporate different theatrical styles into their subsequent productions, since they would inevitably do that anyway, but more to avoid the gauntlet of abuse from the well-meaning Left who were amazed by the Soleil's non-partisan approach to the Hitler period in *Méphisto*. Their desire to universalize character typification had, therefore, its future in the universalization of historical dramatization:

A travers les images de cités mortes, de nomades privés de leurs espaces, de peuples privés de leur identité culturelle, de leur réalité anthropologique, une vaste méditation sur la résistance des forces populaires, des cultures populaires, des religions populaires, la force de vie [...] en Pologne, en Afghanistan, en cent autres lieux du monde.<sup>12</sup>

Her aim, through the process of typification, was to present the history of the world, or history universalized in the theatre:

espérant y apprendre comment jouer le monde sur un théâtre.<sup>13</sup>

So if Shakespeare is their master, and historical representation their aim, what better textual basis can there be than Shakespeare's History plays:

Les tragédies historiques nous disent '...les tristes histoires de la mort des Pois, comment les uns ont été déposés, d'autres tués à la guerre, d'autres hantés par les spectres de ceux qu'ils avaient déposés. ' (*Richard II*)<sup>14</sup>

The choice of the Second Tetralogy is one of wishing to start at the beginning of a chapter in the history of a country, whose domestic battles have worldwide implications:

'Ce majestueux trône des Rois, cette île couronnée, cette terre sacrée, ce siège de Mars, cet autre Eden, ce presque Paradis...' (*Richard II*) est pour chacun de ces aventuriers l'image du monde; et eux-mêmes sont à eux-mêmes l'univers, lorsqu'ils découvrent et racontent leurs paysages intérieurs.<sup>16</sup>

The Théâtre du Soleil is giving the audience advance warning in the programme that the internal struggles within the characters themselves, within the kingdom itself, are symptomatic of the turmoil and battle on a worldwide and even universal scale.

With the inception of the plan to achieve this, and the symbolically universal third 'couleur', the Théâtre du Soleil underwent a metamorphosis at the completion of the run of *Méphisto* in July 1980. Many new and inexperienced actors were signed up as a result of workshops, including several whose mother tongue was not French. John Arnold, a young Englishman, of no theatrical experience, save his apprenticeship at the Cartoucherie, was given two major roles in *Richard II*: Jean de Gand and Exton. At the same time, many other actors, who did not feature greatly in 'Les Shakespeare', but were to be given large roles in the subsequent contemporary play, came from South America, and from Chile in particular. This was the result of Mnouchkine's attempt to secure the release from prison of an unnamed Chilean director; in other words as the result of a political act by an artist. Not just being content with presenting 'une méditation sur la résistance des forces populaires etc.', Mnouchkine was acting to salve her

political conscience after the heavy buffeting caused by the Left's criticism of *Méphisto*. In any case the expansion of her company was the tangible example of her wish to universalize history.

And so, with the company reformed, and with substantially increased state financial aid from the newly formed Socialist government, the Théâtre du Soleil embarked, on 10 December 1981, on a proposed cycle of four of Shakespeare's History plays (the Second Tetralogy): *Richard II*, *Henry IV parts one and two*, and *Henry V*; interspersed with two comedies, *Twelfth Night (La Nuit des rois)* and *Love's Labour's Lost (Peines d'amour perdues)*. After six months of initial rehearsal, *Richard II* was to be presented followed by each of the others at two-monthly intervals, culminating in the performance of the whole cycle at the Avignon Festival in the summer of 1982. With Mnouchkine undertaking the translation of all the plays herself, this was going to be the biggest single theatrical project on Shakespeare since the monolithic work of François-Victor Hugo's translations of the mid-nineteenth century.

Both the choice of plays and the choice of performance styles were made with respect to their lack of previous theatrical tradition. We have already seen in the previous chapter how it was Mnouchkine's aim to dispel the myths of tradition surrounding productions of *Le Songe d'une nuit d'été*. The Second Tetralogy, however, had little or no recent production history and, what is more, Copeau's famous production of *La Nuit des rois* went as far back as 1914. The production style proposed, that is of oriental influence, had never before been so categorically acknowledged either in previous Théâtre du Soleil productions or in previous

productions of Shakespeare in France. The entire concept of 'Les Shakespeare' was novel.

The experience of attending a performance by the Soleil at the Cartoucherie was itself a novelty. Since coming to the Cartoucherie in 1971, the Théâtre du Soleil had redefined, for the theatre-going public in Paris, the meaning of the theatrical event, the act of theatre. Attendance at *Richard II* or at the other plays in the cycle, meant not simply watching a performance, it was more an experience of and an insight to the mechanism of a theatre company. *Richard II*, the play, was just one element in that whole event. Wading through the mud churned up by the riding school which separates the Théâtre du Soleil's section of the Cartoucherie from the outside world, one is made aware that the journey to the theatre was one part of the whole experience. The sign heralding 'Les Shakespeare' is visible from a distance, and so, normally, are several of the actors, already in costume. The sense that this is, after all the publicity, a working collective is felt whenever Ariane Mnouchkine herself is seen taking turns at the box office, sweeping a floor, assisting the public without tickets. It is a world of at least surface equality in which the public is invited to spend some time.

On entering the first of the three hangars used by the Soleil in production, the spectator initially feels as if he has stepped into a time warp, or rather location warp. The floor covering of this vestibule, the stage and auditorium, is of a coarse light brown matting divided into strips. The hall section, or the huge first hangar, is the reception area for the audience.



In one corner is the profit-making bookstall for this and previous productions' paraphernalia, for despite their reputed socialist principles, their reputation demands a certain amount of commercialism. Along two of the walls are displayed the production photographs and on the fourth wall is the bar-cum-cafeteria manned by several of the actors who perform the minor roles in the play. The food and drink provided is given equal status to the play proper. The Soleil realized that with the early start to the performances, many people came straight from work without eating. These may appear incidental and peripheral details but they are just several examples of how the Théâtre du Soleil consider it important to cater for the audience's every need, and not just their entertainment.

From the very beginning it is noticeable how the company strive to engage their audience. The performance of the imminent production is hinted at long before the first drum-roll and the first entrance on stage. The entrance section of hangar one appears, at first glance, to be a kind of Elizabethan banqueting hall. In spite of the coarse matting on the floor (the 'tapis-brosse'), Guy-Claude François, the production and auditorium interior designer, attempts to reproduce a mock Elizabethan environment with the high wooden tables and low benches (which, incidentally, are relics of 1789 and 1793), the black and white striped drapes and even the 'serveuses' who appear initially, at any rate, to be dressed in period costume. One gets the impression of having come perhaps for a jousting tournament, or even an Elizabethan court entertainment, rather than for a twentieth-

century interpretation of Shakespeare. Furthermore, in hangars two and three, (the auditorium, acting, orchestral and dressing room spaces), additional references to Elizabethan England are to be found, such as the same black and white striped drapes and the long rack of ruffs in the dressing room. These references aside, the precise temporal or visual location which is being set up is not exactly plain to the eye. The orchestra, or rather the huge collection of percussion instruments to the right of the stage and raked auditorium, originate from the four corners of the globe. The painted backdrop to the stage and the costumes of the actors making up are, too, of some vague oriental origin. The basic setting for the production, which initially springs to mind as being Elizabethan England, would appear to be subject to oriental influences.

Clearly, until the beginning of the play proper, the overriding impression of the event is the desire for unification on several levels. Firstly, the barriers are broken down between the company and the audience, permitting the latter much simpler access to the normally forbidden world of the dressing rooms and generally demystifying the event. Secondly, although the auditorium and the stage are clearly definable, the 'tapis-brosse', which first graced the floor of the Cartoucherie in *L'Age d'or* (1975), gives the impression of an attempt to unify the traditionally divided theatrical space. But by far the most embracing attempt at unification is the creation of a seemingly authentic Elizabethan environment (some costumes, the ruffs, the benches and the drapes) as the setting for an orientally influenced theatrical style.

What then is the justification for orientalizing a Shakespeare production and of placing the audience in limbo between an Elizabethan play of medieval English history in an ostensibly Japanese environment? The programme notes begin to explain:

L'exemple du théâtre oriental, notamment japonais, s'est imposé à nous, avec ses histoires peuplées de ces grands guerriers, nobles, princes et rois qui nous occupent.<sup>16</sup>

The Soleil seems to believe in a similarity between the character types in the medieval history of both England and Japan. Alfred Simon, writing in *Acteurs*, explains further:

Il lui fallait jouer la rupture de toute tradition gestuelle dans le théâtre occidental, retrouver la féodalité des rois shakespeariens dans la seule tradition où la féodalité se soit perpétuée, dans la gestuelle du Kabuki et du Nô japonais. Entre le Nô, ésotérique et élitaire, et le Kabuki, populaire et mélodramatique, elle a bien vu que Shakespeare allait de soi plutôt dans le sens du Kabuki.<sup>17</sup>

The choice then appears to be one of a theatrical style of feudal dimensions which is still in existence today, although Simon fails to acknowledge that in present-day Japan, *Kabuki* is as much a museum piece as *Noh* is esoteric. The ultimate danger of presenting a theatrical style beyond the indigenous culture and common experience of an occidental audience might also be thought of as esoteric and incomprehensible. The links between Japanese and English warriors may be easily identifiable, but the complex ritual of music and movement of both *Kabuki* and *Noh* has no equivalent in the indigenous European theatre. Ritual then has to be inherent in everything connected with the production, from the gestural language of performance to the overall Artaudian interpretation of the ritualistic origins of the theatrical event.

As the six hundred or so spectators take their seats in the raked auditorium with nothing but the 'tapis-brosse' to sit on (although cushions and back supports were added later on in the course of the cycle) the openness and vastness of the arena permits them a glimpse of the theatrical ritual in preparation. With clockwork precision, the actors prepare for the impending spectacle, congregating around the back of the two long catwalks, which appear to bear a resemblance to the 'hanamichi' of the *Kabuki* theatre. The three musicians, led by Jean-Jacques Lemêtre, the composer, join the throng. The audience, alert to the imminent start of the show, fall silent. A short time passes during which it appears as if the composer and chief musician are leading the actors surrounding him, in a kind of pre-performance prayer. These pseudo-religious inferences precede the ritual that is the performance itself. It seems to be a case of an organist instructing his choir for an impending religious service. The ritualistic and religious overtones are unmistakably Artaudian.

Slowly and rhythmically, the musicians led by Lemêtre, clad in 'aikido'-type costumes, pace towards their instruments in the orchestra section of the auditorium which, though off-centre, looks like the only visible bridge between 'scène' and 'salle'. All of a sudden the drums roll, the cymbals clash and the auditorium resounds with a cacophony of percussion. In spite of this, the entrance curtain to the box which stood at the end of one of the catwalks is heard being pulled back swiftly and it is a noise which, throughout the production, becomes engrained in the

audience's memory as a leitmotif for impending action, as it heralds an actor's entrance.

Into the stage and auditorium arena, whose walls are covered with a kind of scaling gold-leaf paint, with a blood red silk backdrop, come hurtling at breakneck speed, King Richard and his court. They are closely packed together as they proceed along the catwalk. The audience is unable to see how they move, whether they are running or walking with huge strides as their 'hakima', their trouser-like costumes conceal their movement. As they proceed in an anti-clockwise direction, faces permanently fixed on the audience, they appear to be dancing, and they perhaps make the theatre historian think back to the dance-like movements of Titania and Obéron in *Le Songe d'une nuit d'été*, Mnouchkine's last Shakespeare production. In one fell swoop and in a breathtaking spectacle, with Richard leading the throng in a lighter coloured costume, the hierarchy of the court is established visually.

With a simultaneous and indeed commanding crash of percussion, the court unfolds itself according to hierarchy across the stage, revealing the enmity between Bolingbroke and Mowbray. Enscenced on his black table which serves as his throne, and holding majestically out from his waist his black sword, (the only symbol of authority visible on stage), Richard surveys his courtiers, equidistantly spaced in front of him, facing the audience. The vertical black lines at the edges of the rolls of matting on stage serve as a demarcation of the space between characters. During the opening scene, and indeed in most of the court scenes, the characters are confined to their respective mats,

within two of the black lines. This process corresponds very much to the practice in Japanese society of covering rooms with similar coarse matting called 'tatami' which mark out the territory of the individuals. To transgress another's territory by stepping on a line is considered even today in Japan to be very bad manners in much the same way as the medieval English court insisted on strict adherence to the hierarchy within it.

If the actual position of the actors on stage is very clearly defined, then their corporeal movement is even more so. The whole of Act I, scene 1 is played with little or no physical movement on the part of the actors who, knees bent and hands placed on thighs, stretch out horizontally across the stage. As Mowbray and Bolingbroke plead their cases before Richard, they are permitted to move forward from their adopted position, all the while remaining within two lines, on their particular 'tatami' until, of course, they lie prostrate across two lines and break the rules of convention. Banishment, therefore, is an absolute necessity, even without its textual justification. It is a necessity after breaking the rules of form. The direction of this scene may, on paper, appear to be an anti-climax after the exhilarating and spectacular entrance of the court, and be visually unexciting, but even though the positions of the actors on the stage may remain for the most part constant, movement is omnipresent. Most of that movement is restricted to the gestural reactions to the action or rather dialogue, although this, too, is forever constant. It is not the actors, however, who contribute their own gestures to their speech. The text is declaimed directly

to the audience, and the other actors on stage, depending on the characters they are playing, react mostly through their hands, accordingly. In fact it is sufficient for a simple flick of the wrists to determine who supports Mowbray and who, Bolingbroke.

Since the text is declaimed, and the reactions between characters are essentially corporeal, the emotions of the characters are not merely intense, they are explosive. Richard, describing the confrontation, expresses in words what the audience cannot visually fail to doubt:

Faites-les venir alors en notre présence, face à  
face
 Et front contre front, Nous-mêmes voulons entendre  
 L'accusateur et l'accusé parler librement.  
 (Entrent Mowbray et Bolingbroke)  
 Pleins de morgue et de colère, tous les deux sont  
en rage,
 Emportés comme le feu et sourds comme la mer.<sup>10</sup>

'Face to face' and 'brow to brow' could not be interpreted less literally by Mnouchkine. Each actor faces the audience, away from Richard and his opponent, unnaturalistically. Opposition, in Mnouchkine's book, appears to be total separation. The emotions of the two opponents are likewise taken to extremes. Both have to be physically restrained not so as to prevent them attacking one another, but to prevent them doing injury to themselves, as they appear to be suffering from some kind of fit. They are not the only two to suffer from this mixture and association of anger-hatred-madness. Richard himself suffers from the same mixture although his apparent 'madness' is the result of pain rather than anger. Mnouchkine does have some textual justification for her direction in this respect, as Northumberland comments on Richard's mood to Bolingbroke:

Chagrin et douleur du coeur  
 Le font divaguer comme un homme en délire,  
 Mais il vient.<sup>19</sup>

Yet at all times this is not an academic exercise. The emotions are physically and gesturally concretized in a way which lends a new interpretation to Bolingbroke's vow:

car ce que je dis,  
 Mon corps le prouvera sur cette terre.<sup>20</sup>

This seems to be physical proof that the characters are not simply affected by these emotions, they become possessed by them as well.

It would appear, particularly from the opening scene which sets the standard for the subsequent play, that the characters and their emotions are being given a public autopsy, are being laid bare for all to see, with the cruelty of a butcher's knife. Shakespeare is responsible initially for such a medical image as Richard defines his own role in the squabble between Bolingbroke and Mowbray:

Une rancune si profonde incise trop profond.  
 Sans être médecin, Nous prescrivons ceci;  
 Oubliez, pardonnez, concluez et mettez-vous  
 d'accord.  
 Ce n'est pas la saison de saigner, disent Nos  
 docteurs.<sup>21</sup>

If Richard is the doctor intent on healing, then Mnouchkine could be termed the surgeon, operating posthumously, and performing an autopsy on the characters' emotional states. Bernard Dort, writing in the *Theater Heute Jahrbuch* (1982), perpetuates this idea:

Seine Aufgabe ist es, als kalter und gleichzeitig leidenschaftlicher Chirurg die öffentliche Autopsie einer Seele vorzunehmen, um eines dieser grausamen, lehrreichen und schönen Bilder zu sein und darzustellen, die Anatomiemodelle heißen.<sup>22</sup>



If, in this early scene, the soul is said to be laid bare, then we must wait for the blood to flow.

To have a duel in the opening scene might not be dramatically effective since it would tend to put all the eggs of the spectacle into the one metaphorical basket, yet the first scene in consequence could be said to suffer from an anti-climax. In Mnouchkine's production this feeling is both heightened and attenuated. From the point of view of action, the drama is tense, rendered more so by the percussive accompaniment which builds up during the scene and then is ultimately thwarted by Richard's intervention, halting the impending duel and similarly arresting the progression of the musical score. Mowbray comments to Richard not only on his sentence of banishment but also simultaneously and unwittingly on this theatrical effect as well.

Qu'est-ce donc que ta sentence sinon la mort  
muette  
 Qui dérobe à ma langue jusqu'au souffle natal.<sup>23</sup>

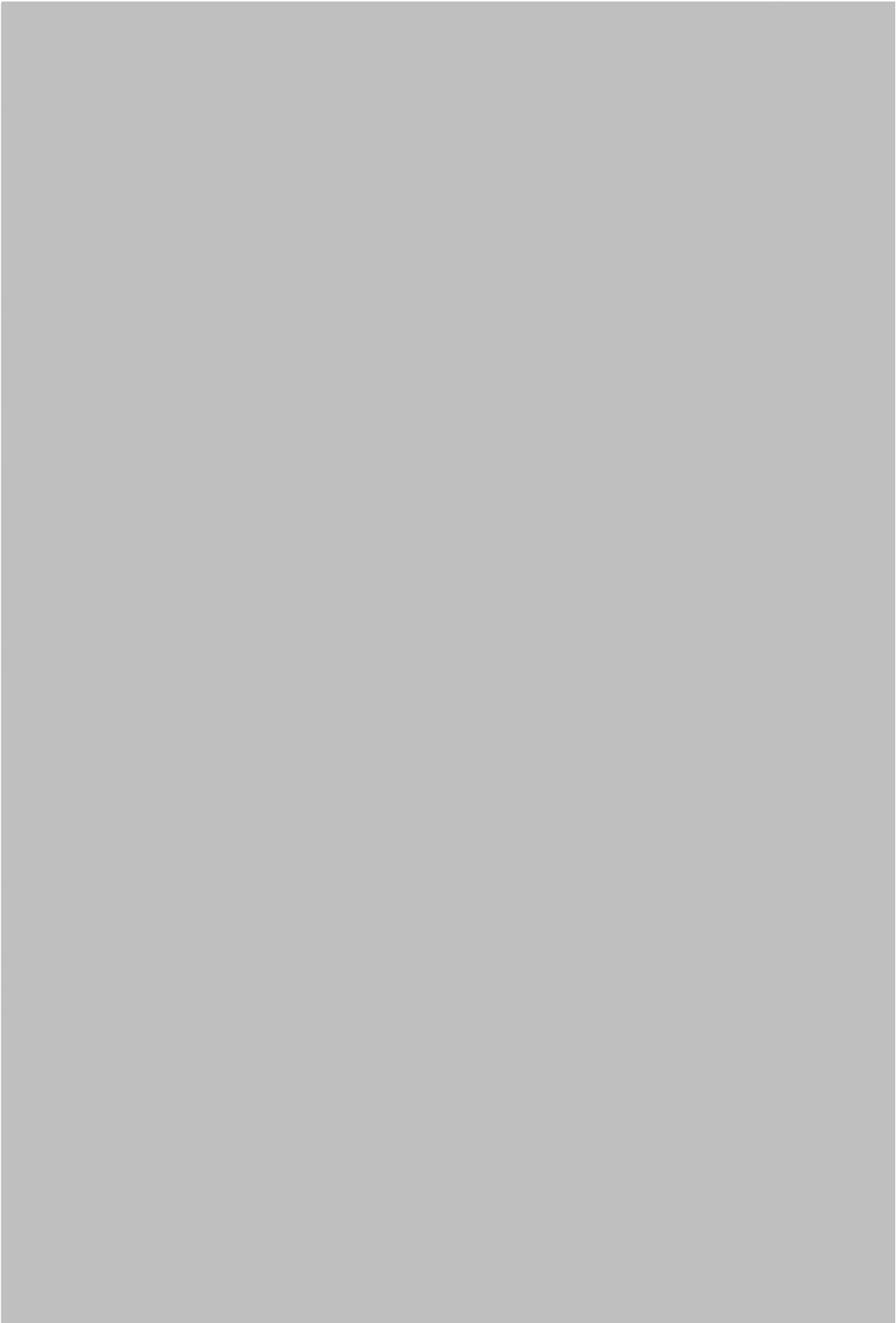
From the characters' point of view and from the audience's expectation of action, this banishment by Richard of both characters and musical accompaniment could be termed an anti-climax. But from an essentially dramatic point of view it is a welcome relief from the thought of an impending death on stage and, since the percussion never ceases from the first entrance, an aural relief as well.

With the news that Bolingbroke's father is on his deathbed, that with Bolingbroke in exile, Jean de Gand's riches will fall to the King, Richard immediately reveals his voracious appetite for wealth:

Dieu! suggère à son médecin  
 De l'expédier immédiatement au tombeau!  
 La garniture de ses coffres Nous fera des manteaux  
 Pour équiper Nos soldats dans toutes ces guerres  
 d'Irlande.<sup>24</sup>

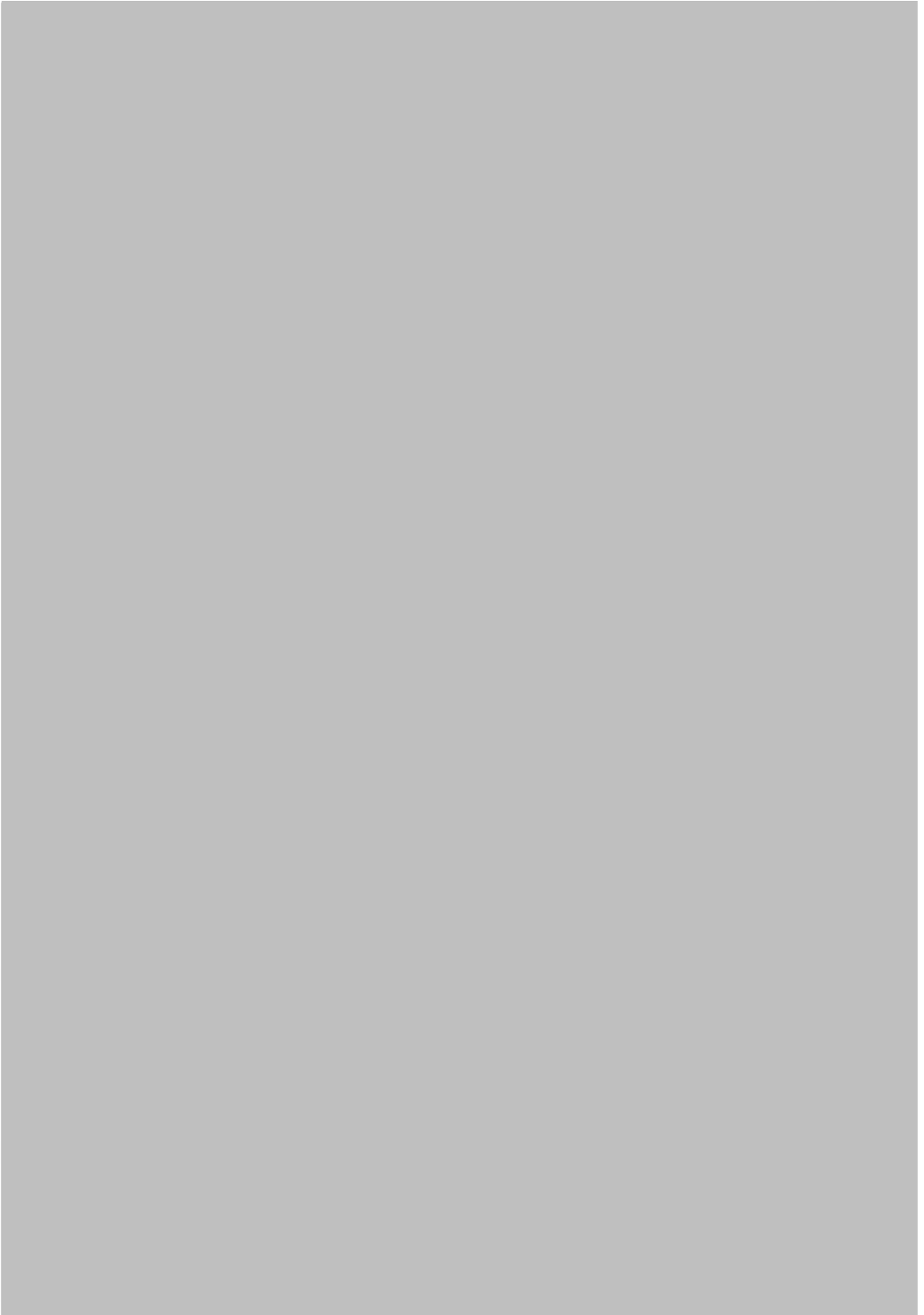
Wealth is what is apparently suggested by the gilded walls of the arena and it is no surprise, therefore, that as Richard's aspirations for wealth are revealed at the conclusion of Act I, the blood-red backdrop should fall to mark the beginning of Act II, and to reveal a similarly gilded silk backdrop for the scene of Jean de Gand, at home, about to expire (Plate I).

Act I, scene I glistens with gold, from the backdrop to the additional gold costumes of the characters, all of which perhaps signify gilded years, as well as riches. The bed which supports Jean de Gand is another black bench with four bamboo poles at the corners, again an indication of attempted Orientalism, and is attached to the roof of the arena by four ropes stretched taut. With these ropes Mnouchkine might perhaps be suggesting a visual link between death and the traditional resting place in the sky. Here, then, is Jean de Gand awaiting his 'ascension' in a bamboo chariot. It is also worth noting at this point that the symbol of the rope attached to the roof is inverted later on in the play when Richard is trapped by the rebels, he is ensnared by ropes which originate from beneath the stage, as if a different kind of death force were pulling at him. Richard's own fate is forewarned visually in Act I, scene 1 when ironically, instead of Richard comforting Jean de Gand in his last moments, Jean de Gand actually cradles Richard's head in his lap. One immediately asks the question, who is in greater danger of dying?



Jean de Gand on his deathbed, *Richard II*, (11,1)





Confrontation between the Duc d'York (second from right)  
and Richard (extreme right), *Richard II*, (II,1)

appear to be riding horses. It must be pointed out, however, that this is not a mime in the true sense of the word, since the actors are portraying the entire motion of the rider and the horse at the same time (Plate III). Consequently it appears on different occasions in the scene as if the personality with which the characters have been infused has been determined to a large extent by the particular character of the actor's mount.

The second half of the production begins with Act III, scene ii, Richard resolving to give up his crown. And while making up his mind, he informs the audience directly of the point of departure for this whole Shakespeare cycle of the Théâtre du Soleil:

Au nom du ciel, asseyons-nous à terre  
Et disons les tristes histoires de la mort des  
Rois:  
Comment les uns ont été déposés, d'autres tués à  
la guerre,  
D'autres hantés par les spectres de ceux qu'ils  
avaient déposés,  
D'autres empoisonnés par leur femme, d'autres  
égorgés en dormant,  
Tous assassinés. Car sous la couronne  
Quienserre les tempes d'un Roi mortel,  
La mort tient sa cour.<sup>26</sup>

This not only explains Richard's reasons for abdication, since he, in retrospect, considers himself to be the instrument of a world mechanism much greater than he, it also gives some justification to the theory behind the Shakespeare cycle being an exercise in the autopsy of the history of kingship. Since this is a retrospective analysis and since the individuals involved are unable to stop the great mechanism that is beyond them, there is some justification then for the dehumanization in Mnouchkine's production, for their

The return of Bolingbroke, *Richard II*, (IV,1)  
Actor and mount are indissociable

declamatory style of delivery and for their lack of psychological motivation.

The eventual reunion of Richard and Bolingbroke is of the elemental nature predicted by the latter:

Le Roi Richard et moi aurons, je pense, une  
rencontre
 Aussi terifiante que celle de l'eau avec le feu  
 Quand, dans le choc retentissant de leur union,  
 Ils déchirent le front ennuagé du ciel.  
 Qu'il soit le feu, je serai l'eau flexible.  
 Qu'il fasse rage tandis que je pleus sur la  
terre.<sup>27</sup>


This clash of elements is considered to be between two incompatible bodies, using the image of fire and water. Bolingbroke continues with the opposition of East and West:

Voyez, voyez, le Roi Richard lui-même apparaît  
 Comme le fait le mécontent soleil  
 Qui rougit au flamboyant portail de l'Orient,  
 Lorsqu'il aperçoit les envieux nuages  
 Acharnés à éclipser sa gloire et à ternir la trace  
 De son brillant sillage [vers l'Occident].<sup>28</sup>

This image of the rising sun from the East and the dark clouds from the West is also perhaps representative of the production concept as a whole: the Western textual theatre versus the orientally influenced theatrical style although, it must be said, without their obvious connotations of happiness and gloom. The clash of elements in the production, the abdication scene of Act IV, is offset by the audience's own knowledge of Richard's coming to terms with the loss of the crown. In one swift action Richard completely divests himself of his regal garments and has to be physically restrained after handing over the crown and sceptre. Of course, in the light of Richard's speech about the fate of kings, it is of no great worth being in possession of these symbols of Kingship. It is







Bolingbroke acquires the 'crown of thorns',  
*Richard II*, (IV,1)

Although remaining faithful to the original for the most part, Act V sees many alterations. In scene ii, the character of the Duchess of York is cut completely and so, too, is the background to Aumerle's seditious behaviour. The result of this is that the audience can focus on the seed which is unwittingly sown in Exton's mind of the true wishes of Bolingbroke, and the murder of Richard is hastened. Consequently in scene iv, Bolingbroke's pardon follows the murder. One could accuse this rearrangement of not focusing sufficiently on the full implications of Aumerle's action since Bolingbroke, having barely assumed the throne, is confronted by a traitor. This scene is then perhaps not given sufficient prominence to counterbalance the similar pardon scene of Richard's at the beginning of the play. Arguably, Mnouchkine might not have fully exploited the point of the cyclical nature of the History of Kings professed by Richard and even quoted by the Théâtre du Soleil in the programme.

The scene surrounding the murder of Richard undergoes the most significant changes of all. Scenes iv and v of the original are incorporated by Mnouchkine into the end of scene ii and become scene iii. Formerly scene iv was made up of a dialogue between Exton and a servant, with Exton using the servant to justify his own interpretation of Bolingbroke's meaning and resolving to kill Richard. Mnouchkine, however, dispenses with the servant completely and instead incorporates his lines into Exton's own to constitute a kind of interior dialogue. The dialogue with the self works well:

C'était cela, n'est-ce pas?  
Ce sont ses propres paroles.

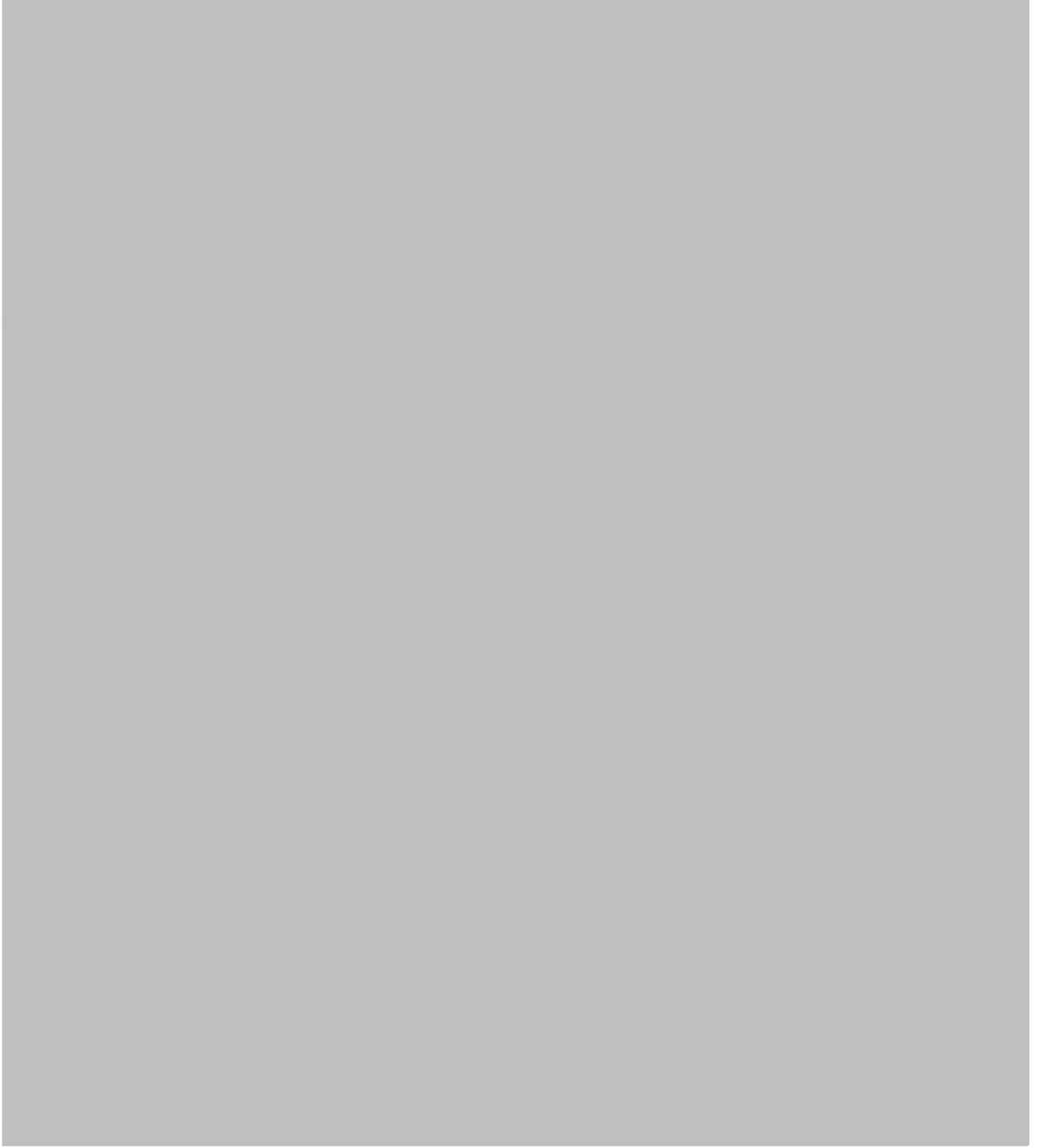
«N'ai-je pas un ami», a-t-il dit. Il l'a dit deux  
fois  
Et deux fois de suite il a insisté, n'est-ce pas?  
Oui.<sup>32</sup>

Exton now poses the questions, and answers them himself, ultimately resolving to embark upon a course of action:

Viens, partons.  
Je suis l'ami du Roi et je le délivrerai de son  
ennemi.

The interior dialogue and the final resolution of this speech, though short and rather simplistic in nature, appears in fact to give Exton a kind of soliloquy. Since Exton ultimately fulfills Bolingbroke's secret desires, he could be interpreted, by extension, as Bolingbroke's right hand man, his alter ego in fact. And so Mnouchkine could be interpreted to be giving Bolingbroke a soliloquy by proxy, while Shakespeare accords him none. The only drawback, however, is that this soliloquy is made up of internal dialogue of the 'yes' and 'no' variety, rather than internal debate.

To complement the image of Richard as the hunted and eventually trapped animal, Richard's prison cell is a cage-like version of the castle of Flint, a white tubular scaffold structure which gives the prisoner inside the appearance of a zoological exhibit. Ostensibly it is a prison awaiting completion, and the open and apparently unfinished nature of the structure permits Richard to transgress its confines. There is, however, some strange, inexplicable and perhaps metaphysical force which seems to keep him eternally bound to his prison whether he be before or behind bars (Plate VI).



Exton about to murder Richard, *Richard II*, (V,iii)

In a similar vein, Mnouchkine makes alterations to the prison scene, too. Again as with Exton, Richard's source of conversation with the 'palefrenier' and the 'gardien' are removed, focussing thus on Richard's inner contemplation on the state of the nation and his own personal condition. In this case, removing characters from the scene also has an effect on the motivation for the action. In the original it is Richard striking the guard for not tasting his food which prompts the guard to call for help, and for the assassins to complete their task. This is at least a tenuous motive for the murder. In Mnouchkine's adaptation, however, no such motive is present. The entire build-up to the murder scene is not achieved through human altercation and motivation, it is achieved through an extraneous source to the action: the music. Richard comments on it:

J'entends de la musique.  
 Ha, ha! Gardez la mesure! La douce musique  
 Devient amère quand la mesure est fausse  
 Et le tempo mal cadencé.  
 Il en va de même avec la musique de l'existence  
 humaine.<sup>233</sup>

But the music which is out of time is beginning to have an effect on Richard, making him feel ill at ease:

Cette musique me rend fou! Qu'elle cesse!  
 Car si parfois à la raison elle ramène le fou,  
 Vers la folie, moi, elle semble m'emmener.

More than just words. the musical element of the production intervenes and as Richard continues to analyse it, he also gives it reason to intervene:

C'est un signe d'amour et l'amour pour Richard  
 Est une perle rare en ce monde de haine.

The music here is a prelude to the murder of Richard and because of Bolingbroke's apparent love/hate relationship with Richard, the murder (as well as the music) could be termed an act of love. In any case, Exton's devotion to Bolingbroke means indeed that it is an act of love. Yet the importance of the music has more relevance than simply on a symbolic level. It is the replacement of the 'palefrenier' relating the disturbing news of Bolingbroke and the 'gardien' refusing to taste Richard's food. Consequently the musical element of the production provides the necessary motive for the action; it constitutes the redefinition of the theatrical roles; it is the replacement of the psychology of character; it is the triumph of form.

The tubular prison that once housed Richard is transformed into a catafalque to carry the deceased King off stage: a further instance of the fact that all the properties in the production have dual functions; from the actual weapons to the laurel crown (of thorns), from Jean de Gand's deathbed to the prison-cum-coffin apparatus, all are unmitigating instruments of death as well. It is not surprising, therefore, that John Arnold, who plays the metaphorically pruning-conscious gardener's assistant in Act III, should also, in Act V, assume the role of Exton and murder Richard.

Mnouchkine's cyclical view of History is not allowed to finish its chapter on a murder scene, but rather on one of the two Kings together, one living, one dead. Exton, thanklessly, brings the body of Richard to Bolingbroke who, unmajestically, sits on his table-like throne, legs dangling, cradling Richard's body in an unmistakable *pietà*, thus bringing to a culmination the plethora

of Christian imagery which, prior to that, has Richard gripping the bars of his prison, in a pose not that unlike Christ on the cross. Finally Bolingbroke announces a pilgrimage to the Holy Land to atone for his sins:

Je ferai un voyage en Terre Sainte  
Et laverai ce sang de ma coupable main.<sup>34</sup>

From King to King, from one chapter of the cycle to the next, the imagery of Christianity is perpetuated textually, and in Mnouchkine's production, visually as well.

Even though one is led to believe that decisions affecting theatrical creation are the result of collective bargaining, there is evidence to suggest that the director was able to impose her pre-calculated collection of metaphors and imagery onto the final performance. The actors may indeed have been renamed 'acteurs-créateurs' but their creation is still shaped along the lines of the director's vision. The most obvious example of this is in the many Christian images which exist in the play. Interviews with Mnouchkine and her actors Georges Bigot and Philippe Hottier, given at the opening of the production, help to answer some of the questions raised regarding interpretation and staging as well as giving an insight to the process of creation. Bigot's 'Christ-like' Richard is a case in point. Mnouchkine answers the question of the derivation of such an image:

Toutes les images motivantes du travail sont à puiser dans le texte. Chaque fois qu'on cherchait à imposer des images de l'extérieur, on devait très vite les abandonner et les remplacer impérieusement par ce qui était dans le texte.<sup>35</sup>



Certainly the Christian imagery proliferates in the text, but the choice of the staging of such images is not textually based. Philippe Hottier, in an interview in *Théâtre/public*, explains how the image of Richard's Christ on the cross pose came about:

Je sais qu'Ariane avait déjà cette image dans la tête mais elle ne l'a pas dit. Au cours d'une séance de travail sur la scène de l'assassinat, le comédien qui jouait Richard, après s'être défendu ardemment, est tombé comme un Christ descendu de [la] croix.<sup>36</sup>

Although Mnouchkine had such an image in mind before the start of the rehearsal period, it was the creative ability of the actor concerned, (and it must be pointed out that in the initial stages the actors swapped roles presumably to maximize creative potential), obviously pointed in the right direction by Mnouchkine, who came up with the image of Christ falling from the cross and it became a permanent feature of the subsequent production. Georges Bigot who ultimately assumed the role of Richard concurs with Mnouchkine on the origins of his *pietà* image:

Richard s'amuse souvent avec l'image du roi gisant, par exemple dans la scène avec Gand et dans la scène des adieux avec la Reine. Dans la scène finale, c'est venu presque naturellement.<sup>37</sup>

The text is thus considered to be the basis for any visual imagery, so therefore the question of directorial imposition could never arise.

The duality of the relationship between Bolingbroke and Richard in Mnouchkine's version as they waver between love and hate and particularly in the final scene where the two emotions are textually indistinguishable, is an aspect of the play which is highlighted to the extreme. Much has already been said in

interviews and articles about the quasi-homosexual relationship between the two, an interpretation which had been realised in the last major French production of the play (in 1972 by Patrice Chéreau). Georges Bigot explains how the Théâtre du Soleil approached this aspect:

Ce n'est jamais dit explicitement dans la pièce et de toute façon ça ne nous est pas apparu comme un élément essentiel.<sup>323</sup>

Philippe Hottier, however, shows that the homosexual undertones were interpreted more generally, but no less forcefully, as a relationship of perversion:

Plutôt que la donnée d'homosexualité il y a une notion qui était apparue au cours d'une improvisation, la notion de perversion.<sup>324</sup>

This perversion was initially translated on many levels, not only in the direct relationship between Bolingbroke and Richard. Hottier goes on:

Dans la scène où Bushy, Bagot et Green racontent au Roi comment se sont passés les adieux de Bolingbroke, tous quatre étaient assis dans un coin et racontaient cet épisode de façon sarcastique, mauvaise. Il y avait là une notion de décrépitude de l'image royale dont je regrette qu'elle ait totalement disparue.

Although eventually discarded, this tendency towards the staging of perversion on all levels helps us to understand the reason behind the interpretation of the love/hate relationship between Richard and Bolingbroke. Of such scenes as Bolingbroke debasing himself in front of his captive Richard, treating the latter with great admiration and even affection, and the *pietà* scene, Mnouchkine says:

Je crois qu'il l'aime, qu'il aime l'impossible; il voudrait la réconciliation du pouvoir et de la pureté.<sup>40</sup>

The duality of their relationship is based on an impossibility: on the belief that usurpation and murder can be equated with an act of love. It is little wonder then that Mnouchkine should interpret this not on a cut and dried homosexual interpretation but on a more complex kind of perversion.

Mnouchkine's belief in surgical theatre, in a theatre of autopsy, in a theatre which cuts man open rather than a theatre of reflection, of a theatre which sends back images of life to the audience rather than revealing the essentials of life itself, is a belief which transformed Act III, scene iv, the scene of the two gardeners. Marc Dumétier explains how the scene was approached at an early stage of the rehearsal process:

...ils sont dans un jardin; on s'est employé au début à dessiner le jardin comme ça: on pensait: là il y a les tomates, là les rangées de petits pois; mais à un moment donné on s'est dit qu'il valait mieux que nous partions d'un rêve qui soit complètement nu, qui soit dans notre tête, de façon que le spectateur puisse le vivre avec nous.<sup>41</sup>

From the production one might say that starting 'complètement nu' meant playing the scene in a popular and thus easily accessible theatrical tradition for the weight of images and source of reflection for the historical drama. That theatrical tradition stems, too, from the Orient where the comic characters, bestowed with the same dramatic function as Shakespeare's, are played by clowns. Ariane Mnouchkine explains further what form the early rehearsal of this scene took and how the decision to have two

clowns as gardeners came, not out of a respect for theatrical form, but out of a basic necessity:

Au début, il y avait un vieil homme masqué. C'était un assez joli personnage mais la scène manquait d'insolence, restait dans le bon goût. J'ai demandé un jour à Philippe Hottier d'enlever son masque et de le faire en clown. La scène a immédiatement pris une autre dimension. C'est devenu la parole même du théâtre.<sup>42</sup>

Hottier's *commedia dell'arte* work back in 1975 for *L'Age d'or* was called upon again. Unmasking the character in *Richard II* and playing a clown was not substituting one mask for another, it was starting at the very beginning of the creation of the character. it was returning to the essential.

This scene then is the touchstone for the creative process in *Richard II*, and eventual theatrical form. The director and the actors explain how the process and the form evolved. Mnouchkine first clarifies why it was necessary to start off 'complètement nu':

Chaque fois qu'en répétition les comédiens se retrouvaient en train de se parler, ça ne marchait pas. Je leur disais: 'Racontez-le au public'.<sup>43</sup>

She goes on to define why the actors suffered from such tendencies at the beginning:

Quand l'Etat, la passion qu'il doit exprimer par rapport au personnage, n'est pas suffisamment clair, il a toujours tendance à se réfugier dans un rapport psychologique avec le partenaire.

This notion of an 'état', a state of the character is not one which Mnouchkine has invented herself. It is one which dates back to her early career and her encounter with Stanislavsky's teaching, and which she has subsequently applied to or interpreted in Shakespeare:

L'acteur ne peut et ne doit jouer qu'un seul état à la fois, même s'il le joue pendant un quart de seconde, et que, au quart de seconde suivant, il y a un autre état, ce qui, avec Shakespeare, arrive tout le temps. Shakespeare est d'une extrême versatilité de passions: dans la moitié d'un vers il peut y avoir une rage verte; dans le suivant il y aura une euphorie bleue.<sup>44</sup>

Before the actors come to build up their succession of differing 'états' they must first discover their particular 'état de base'.

Philippe Hottier explains this phenomenon:

Il y a deux choses: l'état de base du personnage et les états successifs qu'il traverse. Je dirais que l'état de base, c'est l'attitude devant la vie. Arlequin n'a pas le même état de base que Pantalon [...] Une fois qu'il a trouvé cet état de base, il va le vivre tour à tour dans la joie, la colère, l'agression etc. L'état de base se modifie à travers des états secondaires.<sup>45</sup>

It starts with the body and culminates with the voice. Hence, although inspired by Stanislavsky, it owes more to the teaching of Jacques Lecoq.

Furthermore, contradicting both Stanislavsky and Mnouchkine, this vocabulary also eliminates the possibility of any form of psychological motivation in the performance. Mnouchkine interprets this, however, from the duality of the text:

Shakespeare parle tout le temps à travers ses personnages mais il parle aussi tout le temps d'eux.<sup>46</sup>

Because Shakespeare is at once speaking through his characters and speaking about them, it is for this reason that Mnouchkine interprets character as a receptacle and a receptacle cannot justify being motivated psychologically. It is for this reason that Mnouchkine has her characters, particularly in the court scenes, form parallel lines, separated by mats, delivering the text

directly to the audience, rarely looking at one another, but reacting through facial expression and corporeal movement. Thus the text is imbued with a form which gives it its structure, yet at the same time that form is reputed to emanate directly from the text. The interpretation of the text, that is the refusal to accept the psychology of character and the psychological motivation for action is the reason for and the basis of the form. The form that is the physical translation of basic 'states' of passion has its inspiration in the text yet would appear to have been created as a self-sufficient language which, during the course of its development, has shed its source of inspiration, finally returned to that source and, it might appear to some, rather irreverently taken over the text, as perhaps the poetic icing on the cake of theatrical form.

At the time of *Le Songe d'une nuit d'été* in 1968, many of the critics saw in Mnouchkine's direction echoes of Jan Kott's *Shakespeare, notre contemporain*, echoes which Mnouchkine then acknowledged herself. It is an obvious starting point, therefore, in the analysis of her subsequent Shakespeare production, some thirteen years later, to see if any of Kott's influence still lingers on at the Théâtre du Soleil. Kott stresses the symbols of power in the play, gold and the crown:

Au Moyen Age, l'image la plus pure de la richesse  
était un sac de pièces d'or. On pouvait soupeser  
chaque écu dans sa paume.<sup>47</sup>

The image of gold pervaded the entire arena of the Théâtre du Soleil; from the gold paint on the walls to the succession of gold backdrops, and even glistening gold capes were added to the

costumes as the actors performed scenes in which gold, or wealth, was the major theme. Similarly, the crown in *Richard II* is stressed by Kott as being the ultimate symbol of power, which he perceives as lust or greed:

Pour Shakespeare, l'image du pouvoir est la couronne. Elle est lourde. On peut la saisir de ses mains, l'arracher de la tête du monarque mourant et la poser sur la sienne. Alors on est roi.

Mnouchkine also attributes great significance to the property on stage, as it appears a marvellous piece of solid gold, and a worthy object of desire. But that is as far as Mnouchkine agrees with Kott. The former shares Richard's own view of the crown, that is not being worthy of attaining. Thus Mnouchkine's design is of a crown of thorns. Similarly, the abdication of Richard diverges from Kott's vision of usurpation in the History cycle. Kott's idea of seizing and snatching could not be further from Mnouchkine's direction of Richard offhandedly and even willingly passing over the crown to the next man. Kott says:

Le détronement doit être accompli vite et complètement. Le roi doit être dépouillé de sa royauté.

Mnouchkine's Richard divested himself swiftly of his regal attire and accelerated the ceremonial passing over of the crown but it was accomplished by Bigot with a kind of dramatic irony which Kott could never have envisaged back in the late fifties.

Much was said by Bernard Dort at the beginning of 1982 when many of the major theatres in Paris were performing classical plays, about how a contemporary theatre should perform a classical play. Kott believes that gold, as a tangible symbol of power is lost on a contemporary audience:

On pouvait voir la richesse, on pouvait la toucher et la flairer. Ensuite, seulement, elle a perdu sa substance, elle est devenue signe, symbole, abstraction. Elle a cessé d'être une chose. Elle est devenue un morceau de papier couvert d'inscriptions. Karl Marx a fort bien su décrire ces transformations dans *Le Capital*.<sup>411</sup>

From gold to land to money, power was transformed during the centuries and, as Kott says, it became less and less materialistic:

Il est devenu abstraction et mythologie. Presque une idée pure.

Then with the rise of fascism in Europe in the twentieth century, power suddenly became 'humanized' again:

Ce n'est qu'à notre époque que nous avons vu à nouveau l'image terrifiante du pouvoir absolu, qui a nom et prénom, qui a des yeux, une bouche et des mains. La lutte pour le pouvoir a cessé d'être une abstraction. Elle est devenue une lutte sans pitié entre hommes vivants, qui sont assis à la même table.<sup>412</sup>

Kott's view of power in the twentieth century smacks of Orwellian totalitarianism and obviously provokes consideration of Mnouchkine's view of power, specifically after treating the subject of Fascist power in the last Soleil production, *Méphisto*. In that production, ultimate power was made flesh but only in the theatre, in the false world and in the *commedia* cabaret sketches, far removed from reality. The representation of power was removed several times by the play within the play scenario, and the meaning of power in *Méphisto* became for the characters and indeed for the actors in the play, the coming to terms with their lack of power.

In *Richard II*, however, the achievement of power is at the forefront of the drama and cannot be removed from the audience by altering the scenario. Mnouchkine, despite this, stresses the



necessity of removing it directly from the contemporary audience's view of power:

Shakespeare n'est pas notre contemporain et ne doit pas être traité comme tel. Il est loin de nous comme est loin de nous le plus profond de nous-mêmes.<sup>50</sup>

Shakespeare's history of the Middle Ages is twice removed from the contemporary audience by nature and therefore the director fails to see the relevance let alone admit to being able to bring it up to date. Hence the symbols of power recognizable in the Middle Ages, the gold symbolism and the crown are as prevalent as they were then, and who is to say less comprehensible. Recognizing the split, Mnouchkine makes it even wider:

Enfin pour tout théâtre, il y a besoin d'une forme... Nous sommes allés chercher une base de travail dans les théâtres orientaux parce que là est l'origine même de la forme théâtrale.

Avoiding totally the practises of contemporary Western theatre, not only accentuated the division between the audience and the history enacted on stage, it also accentuated the gap which had opened up between Mnouchkine and the Shakespeare critic who had inspired her in the sixties, Jan Kott.

Splitting away from the traditional Western theatre, using one of its classics as a basis for establishing a new theatrical form which has its basis and inspiration in the codes of Far Eastern theatres, was the point on which most of the European critics were divided. Some believed that the development of the gestural language was being achieved at the expense of the recitation of the text. Gilles Sandier's view is a case in point:

...il fallait une diction accordée à cette gestuelle symbolique, à cette écriture scénique qui

fait que les corps tracent dans l'espace les actes des héros. On a donc choisi un mode de diction qui serait celui du récit épique: le texte est proféré sans intonations *recto tono*, en articulant chaque syllabe: des mots qui seraient écrits gros comme les alphabètes d'école.<sup>51</sup>

The punctuation of syllables and phrases rendered the text more precise, clearer, yet the accusation of making everything too simplistic can only come from someone who fails to understand that the code of diction is all part and parcel of the rehearsal process, of the building up of character: in performance it becomes part of the global form. The lack of intonation, for Sandier, obligated the obliteration of any psychology of character:

A vouloir effacer tout jeu psychologique, on rend les personnages peu discernables et peu compréhensibles.

The argument about the refusal of psychology on the Théâtre du Soleil stage is a valid one. This can be countered, however, if one understands the nature of the theatrical form. This form has the actors narrate rather than represent, and who is to say that one cannot distinguish between characters while listening to a story which is accompanied by dazzling stage pictures?

Most of the more discerning critics and those, since the nineteen-fifties, who have advised French theatre to take a leaf out of the book of Far Eastern theatres, were able to understand and explain Mnouchkine's intentions in her choice of form. Bernard Dort is one such critic:

On a même taxé le spectacle de formalisme. C'est mal comprendre ce choix de forme.<sup>52</sup>

The choice of form, of course, is based on the necessity to distance the spectator from the history and from his preconceived Western notions of theatre:

Dans ce rituel inventé, le texte shakespearien resplendit. La scène ne traduit pas, n'imite pas le texte. Elle nous l'offre. Elle nous le rend perceptible, comme s'il venait de très loin, presque étranger, du fond du monde du Soleil-Levant. Ici, la géographie recoupe et renforce l'histoire. A nous de déchiffrer les règles de ce jeu lointain et resplendissant. Mais une fois le roi captif, dépossédé, puis déchu, tout change. Richard est presque nu: non plus un mixte de hanneton et de cheval d'apparat, comme les féodaux, mais un homme comme chacun de nous. La distance, alors, s'efface.

Accentuating the division between a contemporary audience and both history and theatrical forms, Mnouchkine, in Dort's book, was bringing the story much closer to us.

To retain the psychology of character in *Richard II* would have meant Mnouchkine retaining the codes of Western theatre with all its Naturalism or, if pushed, since the Orient was her preoccupation, then at least remaining faithful to the codes of all those oriental theatres from which she received her initial inspiration. But to demand such reverence to established forms is to miss Mnouchkine's dramatic purpose:

Se référer aux théâtres traditionnels japonais serait inutile [...] Ariane Mnouchkine ne veut pas de reconstitution, ne veut pas adapter Shakespeare aux codes du nô, du kabuki, du bunraku. Elle s'en sert pour la distance immédiate qu'ils imposent et qui annule toute tentation de naturalisme et de quotidien.<sup>53</sup>

As Colette Godard points out, it was not at all a question of establishing a new and orientally influenced form simply for

theatrical purposes of spectacle and novelty, Mnouchkine's main concern was with the dramatic purpose of distancing her audience.

Most of the other European critics, particularly in England and West Germany, were similarly divided over one thing: the role of the text in Mnouchkine's theatrical event. This redefinition of the role of the text was the axe which Eric Shorter was to grind in all his many reviews of the production for the English press:

And the shows themselves were entertaining, even though they were called *Richard II* and *Twelfth Night* and were attributed to Shakespeare. That they were not Shakespeare was beside the point. They couldn't be Shakespeare since they were acted in French; but they could have come within spitting distance of him if they had been acted with any attempt to consider his wishes in the matter.<sup>54</sup>

Sybille Wirsing, on the other hand, took the opposite point of view in her assessment of the text in the production:

Der Text, den sie selber ins Französische übersetzt hat, ist die Majestätsperson. Ihm gehört die Bühne. Seine Deklamation und die instrumentale Grundierung beherrschen nicht nur das Ohr. Was das Auge sieht, ist die Inszenierung des Wortlauts unter strengem Verzicht auf Beiwerk and Blendwerk [...] Ihr liegt es fern, das Schauspiel psychologisch auszudeuten oder agitatorisch aufzuwerten. Es soll für sich sprechen. Hingegen beweist sich die inszenatorische Phantasie durch die Dramatisierung jeden Augenblicks.<sup>55</sup>

There were those, in fact, like Wirsing who, far from thinking that Mnouchkine's redefinition of the role of the text deflated its status, believed it to be the lynchpin of the whole production. To her, Mnouchkine was narrating a story and the performance was simply the 'Inszenierung des Wortlauts'. As all the major theatre critics in France such as Dort and Godard would concur, since the text is being stripped of its psychological motivation, (deemed

directorial imposition), it is being allowed to speak for itself. Consequently, 'Ihm gehört die Bühne'.

*Richard II* outlasted its predicted two month run before the inclusion of the next play in the cycle, *La Nuit des rois*. It was not until some seven months later that the latter play was premièred at the Festival d'Avignon on 10 July 1982. Since the percussion dictated the speed at which the text was delivered and thus determined the length of performance, on many evenings the show could, with an inordinately long interval and after a delayed start, take anything up to five hours. This was certainly the main gripe for the Soleil's greatest critics of their choice of form, although sitting for such a time on a doormat-type floor covering presumably compounded their displeasure. Mnouchkine, after the initial seven month run, speeded up the running time of the show and introduced more suitable seating arrangements in an effort to render her audience more receptive to the performance and stave off the critics. Certainly the isolation of the Cartoucherie and its distinct lack of creature comforts made a trip to their theatre a pilgrimage for the most hardened devotees.

The creation of a gestural language for the production had its dangers and its limitations. Inevitably, if it were to be codified and to retain the basic set, then the subsequent plays in the cycle were in jeopardy in as much as the innovation of the gestural language might wear off with just a simple recitation of the text being the only new element in the production. These were the warning bells which sounded immediately prior to *La Nuit des rois* but they were sounded in vain because the interpretation of

this language was falsely assumed to be based on a code, such as specific hand and head movements to suggest certain emotions or mimed actions. This assumption is a logical one since the inspiration for this language came from *Noh* and *Kabuki* forms, themselves very stylized and indeed immaculately codified. The discovery that the language was not based on a fixed and predetermined code was, in turn, a disappointment for some who saw such a code as the faint glimmer of some kind of order in the eclecticism of *Richard II*'s theatrical form.

For the Japanese, it was not real *Kabuki* or real *Noh*. For the Europeans, it was a slap in the face of their indigenous culture, a slap which had been advocated by Artaud several decades earlier. It came to be seen as a bridge between two cultures, or rather the interpretation by Western theatre practitioners of Far Eastern culture, in other words, Orientalism. And thus by setting the play in a cultural limbo, by her choice of form, Mnouchkine not only removed all preconceptions of the theatre and Shakespeare, she also bridged the two-fold gap between English Medieval history, an Elizabethan text, and a twentieth-century audience.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

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2. Bernard Dort, 'L'Archipel et le continent'.
3. Bernard Dort, 'L'Archipel et le continent'.
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5. Bernard Dort, 'Le Présent des classiques', *Le Monde Dimanche*, 28 February 1982.
6. Bernard Dort, 'Le Présent des classiques'.
7. Danielle Kaisergruber and Antoine Vitez, 'Théorie/pratique théâtrale', *Dialectiques*, no.14 (1976), p.9.
8. Bernard Dort, 'Le Présent des classiques'.
9. Alfred Simon, 'Théâtre du Soleil: une année Shakespeare', *Acteurs*, no.2 (February 1982), 16-20 (p.16).
10. Programme notes of *Richard II*.
11. Anne Neuschäfer and Frédéric Serror, *Le Théâtre du Soleil: Shakespeare*, p.14.
12. Alfred Simon, 'Théâtre du Soleil: une année Shakespeare', p.18.
13. Programme notes.
14. Programme notes.
15. Programme notes.
16. Programme notes.
17. Alfred Simon, 'Théâtre du Soleil: une année Shakespeare', p.20.
18. Act I, scene i, p.10. (This and all subsequent quotations are from Mnouchkine's translation).
19. Act III, scene iii, p.90.
20. Act I, scene i, p.11.
21. Act I, scene i, p.15.
22. Bernard Dort, 'Frankreich; das reine Theater und die rohe Wirklichkeit' in *Theater Heute Jahrbuch* (1982), 105-7 (p.106).

23. Act I, scene iii, p.28.
24. Act I, scene iv, p.37.
25. Act II, scene i, p.51.
26. Act III, scene ii, p.79.
27. Act III, scene iii, p.85.
28. Act III, scene iii, p.85.
29. Act IV, scene i, p.107.
30. Act IV, scene i, p.110.
31. Act III, scene ii, p.79.
32. Act V, scene iii, p.121.
33. Act V, scene iii, p.123.
34. Act V, scene iv. p.129.
35. Jean-Michel Déprats, 'Le Besoin d'une forme: entretien avec Ariane Mnouchkine', *Théâtre/public*, nos.46-7 (July-September 1982), 8-11 (p.10).
36. Jean-Michel Déprats, 'Un Texte masqué: entretien avec Georges Bigot et Philippe Hottier', *Théâtre/public*, nos.46-7 (July-September 1982). 12-14 (p.14).
37. Jean-Michel Déprats, 'Un Texte masqué', p.14.
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39. Jean-Michel Déprats, 'Un Texte masqué', p.13.
40. Alfred Simon, 'Les Dieux qu'il nous faut: entretien avec Ariane Mnouchkine', *Acteurs*, no.2 (February 1982). 20-4 (p.22).
41. Anne Berger, ed., 'En Plein Soleil', *Fruits*, nos.2-3 (June 1984), p.93.
42. Jean-Michel Déprats, 'Le Besoin d'une forme', p.11.
43. Jean-Michel Déprats, 'Le Besoin d'une forme', p.8.
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45. Jean-Michel Déprats, 'Un Texte masqué', p.12.
46. Jean-Michel Déprats, 'Le Besoin d'une forme', p.10.



47. Jan Kott, *Shakespeare, notre contemporain*, translated by Anna Pozner, p.14.
48. Kott, p.14.
49. Kott, pp.14-5.
50. Jean-Michel Déprats, 'Le Besoin d'une forme', p.8.
51. Gilles Sandier, *Théâtre en crise: des années 70 à 82*, p.42.
52. Bernard Dort, 'Le Présent des classiques'.
53. Colette Godard, 'Les Samourais de Shakespeare', *Le Monde*, 15 December 1981.
54. Eric Shorter, 'Avignon', *Drama*, no.146 (Winter 1982), p.27.
55. Sybille Wirsing, 'Die wunderbare Wirklichkeit', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 12 September 1984.

## CHAPTER THREE:

*LA NUIT DES ROIS*

By breaking the Second Tetralogy between *Richard II* and *Henry IV* to insert *La Nuit des rois*, the Théâtre du Soleil were saying that remaining faithful to the chronology of the two plays did not go hand in glove with the development of a theatrical language for the whole company. Working on a history play such as *Richard II* could only ever fully exploit the talent and skills of one section of the Théâtre du Soleil company: the men. Because of the nature of the histories, few women ever appear on stage. *La Nuit des rois*, however, with its inherent transvestism seemed ripe to redress the balance and give the female members of the company an opportunity to command leading roles. To proceed directly from *Richard II* to *Henry IV*, therefore, would have been one step in line with chronology and one step out of tune with the personal development of the actors. And so, as Hélène Cinque, a Théâtre du Soleil actress, aptly and cryptically explains, comedy in the Shakespeare cycle was to be conferred with a productive role:

*Henry IV* naît effectivement des deux autres: Son père c'est 'Richard' et sa mère c'est 'la Nuit'.'

The virtually all-male historical tragedies would be married to the female dominated comedies, one can only presume, in a theatrical world of perfect sexual equality.

Mnouchkine had decided at the outset of the rehearsal period to have all the roles in *La Nuit* played by women:

Le passage par *La Nuit des rois*, avec, au départ, cette idée qui s'est avérée mauvaise, de faire jouer tous les rôles par des femmes, cette idée à

laquelle nous avons dû renoncer d'ailleurs, c'était une façon de montrer immédiatement un autre aspect de l'oeuvre de Shakespeare et aussi, très simplement, d'offrir des rôles aux femmes de la troupe, car il y en a tout de même plus dans les comédies...<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, rehearsing the women during the day while the men performed *Richard II* at night, seemed a convenient way of solving a very demanding 'time and motion' problem. Practical considerations aside, *La Nuit* seemed an even more suitable choice for the casting of women in all the roles since there is a strong element of transvestism at the kernel of the plot. To have women playing men as well as women playing women might possibly enable the audience to experience the same confusion inspired by the transvestism and role play, as do the characters in the plot. By having the play performed entirely by women was an act of directorial imposition, not something which emanated directly from the text. This was made evident during the first rehearsal period, with the images and the scenes of improvisation which were concocted. Sophie Moscoso explains:

Les premières images étaient celles d'un harem où les femmes rassemblées et enfermées rêvent leurs désirs en contemplant les rayons du soleil qui viennent du jardin, de l'extérieur, dessinant sur les tapis des dessins étranges et caressant les formes douces des moucharabiehs.<sup>22</sup>

Very quickly they realized that they were losing their way and were running the risk of imposing on some characters meaning and depths which were contrary to their dramatic function. Thus as far as certain characters were concerned, they came to realize what their ultimate objective consisted of:

...investir les personnages dits comiques de la fonction unique de faire rire [...] nous avons donc

dû lutter pied à pied pour ne pas boursoufler les personnages comme Toby, Aguecheek et Fabien, d'une croûte comique, pour trouver leur drame, leur chair, leur enfance: créatures déchues qui n'ont pas accès aux drames et aux plaisirs brûlants de l'amour; pour ne pas mourir, ils consacrent toutes leurs forces au travail, à la poésie de la blague."

Taking transvestism and making it the point of departure for directorial imposition was quickly seen as the misinterpretation and misappropriation of character.

The transvestism in the play is an opportunity to express thwarted desires and passions and has a spiralling effect when such desires and passions backfire. And what must never be forgotten is that disguise is also a source of comedy. Complicating the picture of disguise by disguising everyone might have clouded the issue at critical moments, particularly when these moments are the sole source of humour. Furthermore, the Théâtre du Soleil rightly recognized that Viola's disguise, the main act of transvestism in the play, is a sign that she is in a new land, the 'Pays des Merveilles'. If everyone in Illyria were in disguise, it would mean that Viola's journey to another land would be a fact visually lost on the audience. Again it would be a case of misappropriation:

...nous ne devons jamais troubler l'eau sous prétexte de la rendre plus profonde; limpidité du lac de haute montagne: ce n'est pas parce que l'eau est limpide et transparente que les fonds sont moins profonds, le monde entrevu moins mystérieux, bien au contraire [...] Le déguisement de Viola est le simple signe poétique de son voyage au pays de l'Illyrie, le travestissement n'a pas besoin d'être surjoué, il est là, c'est tout; l'essentiel est l'aventure dans laquelle son âme est plongée."

By increasing the number of actresses in disguise, the Théâtre du Soleil were not just in danger of committing the grave sin of

directorial imposition, they were also running the risk of eliminating the character work they had achieved in *Richard II*. That work was the discovery of each character's 'état de base' and leading him during the course of the play through each of his many 'substates' one at a time. Disguise, of course, adds a new dimension to this method of 'state-building' since appearance and reality are doubly confused. Not only would the actresses have needed to find double 'états de base' but double subsidiary 'states' as well. What would have happened had an actress, while performing in her double subsidiary 'states', remained in her initial 'état de base'? Had the Théâtre du Soleil continued using both their working method of 'états' while under the influence of the preconceived directorial imposition of disguise, they may have offered the audience an interesting proposition of Illyria as a harem, but they would have had to endure a possibly suicidal crisis of form.

The form of *La Nuit des rois* was to become a quasi-Indian pastiche of *Kathakali* theatre. The colours more subdued, the instruments more mellow in tone and the acting style less athletically explosive than the *Kabuki*-inspired *Richard II*, at least to the Western spectator, that is. Setting Illyria in the Indian subcontinent as a shift from the feudal strife of Japanese warriors was a decision which was to emulate the shift from historical tragedy to that of comedy. If the opposition of *Richard II* and *La Nuit*, the historical tragedy and the comedy was, in the language of the Soleil, the apposition of male and female 'père' and 'mère', naked ambition and naked passion, then it is

interesting to note that according to the Western views of the Théâtre du Soleil, Japanese *Kabuki* and Indian *Kathakali* confront one another in a presumably similiar apposition of the active and the passive.

This Orientalist approach to *La Nuit des rois* has had two important exponents in twentieth-century French theatre prior to Mnouchkine: Roger Planchon and Jacques Copeau. Roger Planchon's interest in a gestural language owed a great deal to the influence of Japanese theatre and although much more renowned for his application of such a language to *Henry IV (première partie)*, it is interesting to note that his early repertoire included a production of *La Nuit des rois* in 1951. Jacques Copeau, however, earned the distinction of making *La Nuit* both a popular and critical success from 1914 onwards, and it was probably the most famous production not only in the history of his Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier, but also in the history of the play in France. His interpretation at the beginning of the century should be kept in mind when considering Mnouchkine's version in the nineteen-eighties. Writing to his English set designer, Duncan Grant, Copeau puts forward his own interpretation of the play and his advice for a suitable set design:

Pour *La Nuit des rois* en particulier, j'imagine ce qui est autour comme absolument neutre - toute la gaieté de la forme et de la couleur étant produite par les costumes et les attitudes des acteurs. [...] Tout est dans le temps, le rythme, le mouvement, l'attitude, l'attaque de la voix. Donc imaginer un dispositif devant lequel toute la comédie puisse être donnée, complété peut-être par deux ou trois toiles de fond supplémentaires.<sup>12</sup>

Here Copeau was setting out his plan for a gestural *La Nuit*, one which focussed on the actors and not on the technological capabilities of the theatre.

Thinking along similiar lines to Mnouchkine, Copeau commissioned Théodore Lascaris to undertake a new translation.

Mais plus une oeuvre est forte, plus elle renferme de vérité humaine et universelle, plus sa beauté profonde est affraîchie des circonstances et du temps, plus elle supportera, appellera, exigera au cours des siècles d'interprétations renouvelées.<sup>7</sup>

Yet it wasn't only the translation which was novel. Clément Borgal explains the novelty of the production and its success:

*La Nuit des rois* devint la grande révélation de l'année. Qualité du texte français et de l'interprétation, dépouillement du décor, goût des costumes, homogénéité de la troupe: on ne trouvera rien à reprendre.<sup>8</sup>

Copeau basically had realigned the elements in the theatrical production and had imbued the actors with a gestural language which made the traditional language of the theatre, (interpreting the psychology of character), if not completely redundant, then reduced in status.

This gestural language was one which had its roots in *commedia dell'arte*, based on its character types, and it conferred a new title on the twentieth-century actor, that of 'créateur'. It was one which he applied with greatest success to his productions of Molière's plays. Yet Copeau also used it in his productions of Shakespeare:

De Shakespeare, Copeau retient les comédies qui mêlent des traits de Commedia à la poésie.<sup>9</sup>

Applying a similiarly *commedia*-inspired language to *La Nuit des rois* had its justification in the similarity of character types. The acrobatic Feste could be described as an Elizabethan Harlequin, Maria the cunning, unscrupulous and adaptable Brighella, Malvolio the cuckolded and derided Doctor, Sir Toby the rich, noble, and quarrelsome Pantalone, and Fabian Pulcinella, the buffoon. Mnouchkine, who acknowledges Copeau's influence, gives in readily to the similarity between *commedia* and *La Nuit* but in Illyria, this magical piece of the Orient, the basis for her character types could also be founded on the influence of the masks in the theatres of the Orient, particularly in Chinese theatre, for example, both of which gave the form of the production its dramatic function.

J'appelle convention au théâtre l'usage et la combinaison infinie de signes et de moyens matériels très limités, qui donne à l'esprit une liberté sans limites et laissent à l'imagination du poète toute sa fluidité.<sup>10</sup>

The trend set by Copeau of interpreting Shakespearean comedy through a gestural language based on both *commedia* and Far Eastern theatrical forms was to be followed, in the nineteen-eighties, by the Théâtre du Soleil.

The relationship between *commedia dell'arte* and Chinese Theatre is a widely acknowledged one, principally because they are both vehicles for the actor's skill:

In most styles of theatre, the display of skill is absorbed into the mimicry and the actor's virtuosity is directed entirely towards dramatic ends, but in the Chinese theatre and the *commedia dell'arte* the actor's skill has a place of its own apart from the drama, hence the overt acrobatics in the military plays of the former and the *lazzi* [...] of the latter.<sup>11</sup>



*Commedia*, however, had a strictly improvisational element as a vehicle for the actor's skill, but Shakespearean productions have never been used in such a fashion, in twentieth-century French theatre. A more significant relationship between Chinese theatre and *commedia* is the use of masks and the effect that use would have on a Shakespeare play. Catherine Mounier, talking about *L'Age d'or*, the largely *commedia*-inspired Soleil production of 1975, suggests one very important effect this would have:

En s'inspirant du théâtre chinois où les cavaliers caracolent sur des chevaux imaginaires, les bateliers manient des rames sur des barques inexistantes, les acteurs se pénètrent de la nécessité d'une transposition incessante et s'écartent définitivement de l'anecdote et du psychologique, qui demeurent parfois une tentation avec la *commedia dell'arte*.<sup>12</sup>

The mixture of Chinese theatre and *commedia* influences on *La Nuit* would have greater effect on *commedia* inspiration itself in that the Chinese masks might eliminate incontrovertibly the actor's tendency to resort to psychology.

In each of the three decades spanned by the Théâtre du Soleil there has been one major production which has been largely improvisatory or *commedia*-inspired. In the nineteen-sixties it was in *Les Clowns* that the characters, with their gestural language, spoke through and about themselves at one and the same time, while conforming to definite character types. Straight *commedia* and contemporary *commedia* stood side by side in *L'Age d'or*, created by the 'acteurs-créateurs' and constantly in a process of change, in 1975. Between 1982 and 1984 *La Nuit des rois* was performed with its *commedia* characters and situations, and its orientally influenced

theatrical language. Not having written the original text of *La Nuit des rois* themselves, unlike *Les Clowns* and *L'Age d'or*, it was imperative that the distance between actor and character, afforded by the alien gestural language, should remain constant. By transporting Illyria half way around the world, and by trapping the play in the gestural language and incumbent paraphernalia of the Orient, and by conforming to its codes and conventions, the Théâtre du Soleil might well be able, therefore, to effectively neutralize the psychology of character.

The more discerning members of the audience seeking to view the cycle as a whole, would expect to notice the development in interpretation from *Richard II* to *La Nuit*, and would notice it prior to the beginning of the performance. The first hangar, the foyer, remains unchanged throughout the cycle but judging by the articles of costume visible to the audience before the show, a much less starkly colourful production is awaited. The Théâtre du Soleil company wastes no time in building up the expectations of the audience for some unprecedented spectacle. Their task is not one of convincing by the novelty of artifice. For those who come with the experience of *Richard II* in hand will notice that nothing much has changed at all. The set-up for whatever production of Shakespeare is the same, yet the mood invoked is altered significantly. It is altered by means of the drapes which adorn the hangars. Gone are the black and white striped drapes and in their place are pastel pinks and blues. To most, one would imagine, these colours have the effect of evoking memories of childhood, of fairy tales, and wandering imagination. The psychological effect of being surrounded

by such soothing kindergarten colours is quite simply to establish the mood in the auditorium and to encourage in the audience their receptiveness for the impending comedy.

Moving to hangars two and three, the auditorium and stage space, reveals a set which emulates the mood. In Copeau's *La Nuit*, too, the bare stage was a necessity and similar pastel coloured drapes acted as a backdrop to the action:

Quant au décor: des toiles blanches et bleues, et  
c'est tout.<sup>13</sup>

At the Cartoucherie the same bare stage as in *Richard II* remains yet the silk backdrops to the action have been swapped for similiar pinks and blues, on top of which are embossed abstract designs and patterns, verging on hieroglyphics. In a true theatre of the Orient such hieroglyphics would have some meaning, and it is frustrating for the more discerning members of the audience not to be able to interpret the symbols which are being thrust upon them. Perhaps this frustration is a foretaste of what is about to be presented in the play.

Apart from the hieroglyphics, which are indecipherable for the most part anyway, no attempt is made to localize the action visually. Localization is achieved musically, however, at the beginning of the play. As the Duc d'Orsino enters, at the very beginning with the line 'Encore cette cadence qui s'achève en mourant', he is accompanied from the 'orchestra' by the moaning sound of the 'tampura', an instrument from India which, to Western ears, appears to be constantly weeping and wailing when played. The sound it makes is a very fitting musical leitmotif for suffering

throughout the play. It is a leitmotif which engenders musical pathos. Visual pathos for the character of Orsino is achieved at times by the doubling of the actor. Georges Bigot also assumes the role of Fabien, the hapless Pulcinella figure and so, our sympathies are permanently captured by the suffering of Orsino, the pathos of Fabien and the star-quality of Bigot.<sup>14</sup>

Orsino's entrance is worthy of closer examination. Instead of the curtain at the end of the catwalk being pulled back dramatically by an attendant, Orsino himself slowly draws his own curtain, enters, and pulls it shut behind him again, perhaps a little suggestive of the hypnotically slow entrances in Japanese *Noh* theatre. It is a most inauspicious and inconspicuous beginning to the play when one compares it to the explosive and highly athletic entrance of the King and court at the beginning of *Richard II*. With the wailing of the 'tampura', the slow mournful gait of Orsino, the tears on his face, and the enormous handkerchief which he drags limply behind him, the picture is one of extreme sadness and suffering, hardly the start to a comedy one would expect (Plate VII). But the handkerchief is too gigantic to be taken seriously. It is like a prop from a circus clown's act. And, furthermore, the opening soliloquy is accompanied throughout by the wailing of the 'tampura' in a kind of duet between actor and instrument which turns out to be a running battle to see who can express the most suffering. The tragedy of the suffering is dispelled by the comedy of its execution.

The suffering in Illyria, and particularly of Orsino, which is not to be taken too seriously, is dispelled also from our vision



Georges Bigot as Orsino, *La Nuit des rois*

of the 'Pays des Merveilles' by the interpretation of the nobles, Sir Toby Belch and Sir André Aguecheek, accompanied by the feckless Fabien. Bigot's interpretation of Fabien, with his rosy cheeks and his almost Jack-in-the-box-type movements, means that when Bigot reappears as Orsino, being instantly recognizable, we are unable subsequently to take him or his predicament seriously. This piece of casting cleverly eliminates the possibility of us feeling pity for Orsino. All three characters, Sir Toby, Sir André and Fabien are interpreted as loveable clowns. Sir Toby and Sir André's first entrance, an unforgettable experience, is marked by their refusal to conform to the conventional entrances to the stage space and proceed to attempt an entrance from underneath the backdrops. They at first become hopelessly entangled and then with naïve cleverness, they raise the backdrop on a pole and scuttle underneath, in a tongue-in-cheek parody of the self-created convention of entrances. The special blend of naïvety, ingenuity and clumsiness of these characters captivates the audience unashamedly.

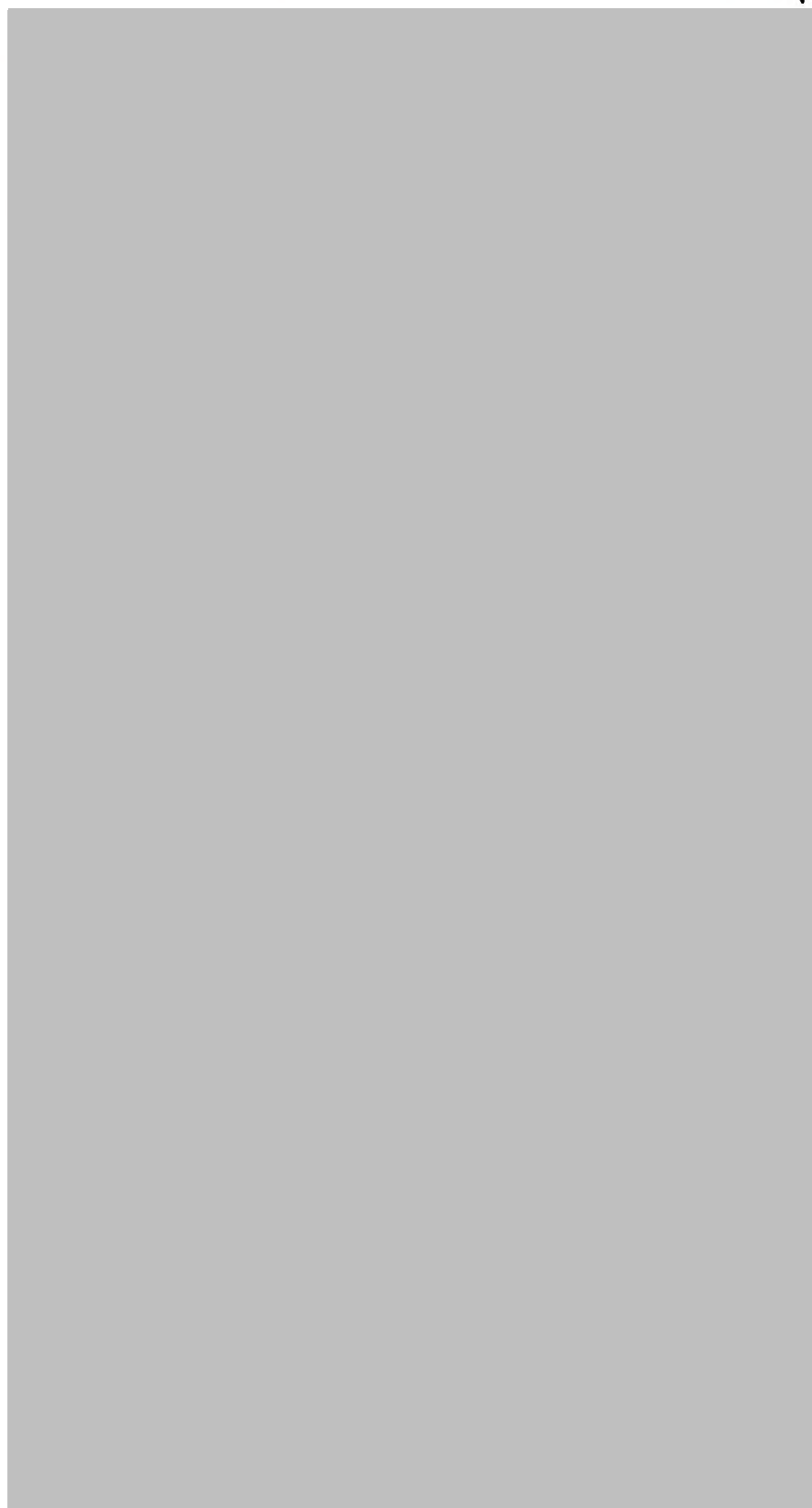
The relationship between Sir Toby and Sir André is a very interesting one for it is based on the physical differences between the two actors. Sir André is played by Clémentine Yelnik and is the only survivor of the initial rehearsal period when all the male characters were interpreted by women. Consequently her transvestism exacerbates the differences between the two members of this comedy duo. They insult one another, they assault one another and yet are eternally bound to one another, in typical music-hall fashion, Laurel and Hardy style. This comparison with Laurel and Hardy is



the spectators recognize these roles and relate them to their own cultural experience.

What the spectators cannot relate to their own experience, however, is when the clownesque proceedings are turned into something reminiscent of an Indian bacchanale by the entrance of the ankle-belled Feste (Plate VIII). These proceedings are invariably brought to a halt by the dour Malvolio dressed, it appears, as a Calvinist minister who attempts, at every possible opportunity, to castigate the revellers' behaviour and instil in them the spirit of the puritan. It is extremely interesting to note that Malvolio, who is dressed according to the Western spectator's experience, as a puritanical priest, and that is of distinctly Western origin, confronts Feste, probably the most Eastern of all the characters in this production. It is a classic confrontation between the exponents of the Occident and the Orient, made incarnate by the seemingly European Christian (Malvolio) and the magical, mystical and mythical spiritualist from the East (Feste). And so when Feste literally drives Malvolio off the stage, we could say that we are witnessing the triumph of the East over the West. This takes a curious twist, however, in the scene (to be examined later in greater detail), of Malvolio in prison when Feste dresses up as a priest. There the cunning and guile of the Eastern character is seen, by duping, to triumph over the easily fooled Westerner. This interpretation can only hold water if one were to cast aside the unmistakably Western clowns who side with Feste and capture the imagination in much the same manner. Perhaps, though, Mnouchkine is saying that when it comes to comedy, the East and the





Julien Maurel as Feste, *La Nuit des rois*

West are not all that dissimilar. This is just one of a series of juxtapositions between East and West which appear to be at the very heart of Mnouchkine's interpretation of Shakespeare: the Western puppet/clown Fabien and the Illyrian/Indian Orsino are both played by the same actor, and moreover the distinctly French actor who interprets both roles is, as Orsino, given an Indian musical leitmotif.

Juxtaposition, not simply on the levels of East and West, is alluded to in the programme notes, however:

Ceux que le destin y mène devront connaître la sauvagerie de l'amour, et comme dans les plus grands contes, traverser les épreuves, subir l'initiation, accomplir les rites, les figures obligées du plaisir et de la douleur.

These 'figures obligées du plaisir et de la douleur' lead the director to an explicit juxtaposition of happiness and grief and not just on the level of the festive Eastern spirit and the dour, conservative Westerner, either. How is 'le plaisir' interpreted in this production? Certainly there is humour, the humour of certain characters such as Sir André and Sir Toby provoke laughter, but it is usually at their own expense. These Punch and Judy, or Laurel and Hardy figures depend largely for their humour on their love-hate relationship which does not exclude violence. Apart from Feste who does not appear to be far removed from such extreme emotions of 'plaisir' and 'douleur' let alone affected by them, virtually no one character in Illyria can be said to be enjoying any 'plaisir' at all, from where the audience is sitting.

Grief, on the other hand, is ubiquitous. Orsino's grief, of course, is made manifest by the wailing musical leitmotif. As a

supplement to his aural grief he has several tears permanently painted on his face and dabs them regularly with his huge handkerchief, an action which visually exaggerates his emotion. His despondency is similarly conveyed during his exits by allowing this handkerchief to hang limply and drag abjectly along behind him. In one instance his grief is made poignantly worse by the mischievous Feste who, in a piece of comic invention, hides behind one of the catwalks, creeps up behind Orsino and steals the handkerchief. The wailing intensifies.

Olivia, likewise, grieves for her brother, and her grief is symbolically visible on her forehead with the transformation, to Western eyes at any rate, of the 'pundra', the distinctive red mark, or third eye, of Hindu religion, into a tear. The colour symbolism of the tear is extended to the blood red cloak which is forever draped over her shoulders. On her exit, she wraps it tightly around her as if encompassing herself in grief. Mnouchkine permits her vocal grief as well, although this time without any musical accompaniment. The text is completely dispensed with, in a scene of the company's own creation, in which Olivia tries to tell the audience of her plight but it all comes out in one gibbering and sobbing mess until eventually, several minutes later, she chokes out the word 'Non!' This is a classic example of Jacques Lecoq's philosophy of the text appearing only at the culmination of an idea.

Tears of grief are indubitably linked with the misery caused by the sea, another salty liquid. Sébastien gives an example of the textual link, speaking about his fears for his sister, Violà:

Elle fut noyée, [...] par toute l'onde amère de  
tous les océans, et [...] voilà que par mes larmes  
il me semble que je noie à nouveau son image.<sup>16</sup>

The image of water being opposed to 'le plaisir' is not only perpetuated by Orsino in his opening speech but also by Feste in his closing song:

Puis qu'il pleut de la pluie tous les jours  
Nous tâcherons de vous plaire tous les soirs.<sup>17</sup>

Sadness equals the sea equals tears, and although using the text as her justification, Mnouchkine is not wholly reliant on it to convey the emotion, hence the painted tears and the grieving instruments. Grief is essentially the kindred emotion of love, and particularly of lost or unrequited love. And so, it comes as no surprise, therefore, that after the machinations of the plot, when those presumed dead are reunited with their relatives and the love tangles are unravelled, that the imagery in the text should alter. Viola heralds this change:

Il a nommé Sébastien,  
Dans son miroir, je vois mon frère vivant;  
Tout à fait comme celui-ci est le visage de mon  
frère.  
Et il allait toujours dans cet habit, cette  
couleur, cet ornement,  
Car c'est lui que j'imite. O si cela est vrai  
Les tempêtes sont bonnes et les vagues saées sont  
un très doux breuvage.<sup>18</sup>

Consequently the sea, the symbol of grief throughout the play, which was represented by a rippling dark blue cloth to accompany the arrival of Viola in Illyria, should change at the end of the play, when wrongs have been put right, to a cloth of pastel pink.

Even though wrongs may be put right at the end of the play, save for the harsh treatment meted out to Malvolio, the greatest emphasis of the production is on the violence of love:

Ceux que le destin y mène devront connaître la  
sauvagerie de l'amour.<sup>19</sup>

Love is seen to cause the exaggerated weeping and wailing in this production and it also leads the characters to resort to some rather uncharacteristic behaviour. Olivia's infatuation with Viola disguised as Césario is interesting on two levels; on the cruelty of dramatic irony, since she has unwittingly fallen in love with another woman, and the actual aggressiveness of her behaviour on stage:

O splendide est le dédain sur cette lèvre  
coléreuse.  
Mon amour se trahit plus vite encore qu'un  
meurtrier,  
Quand il se croit dans l'ombre  
L'amour en vérité scintille comme le soleil.<sup>20</sup>

The play stops here at Act II, scene 1 for the interval, at a time when the audience is left in no doubt as to the folly which unmasks Olivia's heart and also exposes the cruelty of love. Her unrequited love goads her into taking action and it is she who attempts to seduce or rather overpower Viola/Césario on the floor. The dramatic irony cuts deeper because of the exaggeration by Mnouchkine of the savage effects of being in love.

This dramatic irony resulting from Viola's role play and transvestism is exaggerated throughout the play, for instance when Viola thinks up her scheme to ensnare Orsino:

Imagine pour moi un travestissement  
Qui ait au moins une chance de masquer mon  
dessein.<sup>21</sup>

We get no indication as to the havoc that such a plan will wreck on the lives of the inhabitants of Illyria, or the power that transvestism will wield.

FESTE: ...Savez-vous que j'ai peur que le monde qui est déjà si maladroit ne devienne en plus un peu efféminé.<sup>22</sup>

Feste, who is able to dupe Malvolio into believing that he is Frère Topaze, is unable to realize that he is addressing Sébastien rather than Violà/Césario. The dramatic irony of Violà's transvestism has an even greater effect on Olivia. The irony is, of course, that initially Olivia, since the death of her brother, has refused the advances of any man, and particularly those of Orsino. The audience, therefore, knows that when she attempts to seduce Césario (really Violà in disguise), she is still not breaking her vow of chastity. The twist in the tail, however, comes when she mistakes Sébastien for Césario as well. Both seductions are identically choreographed and equally explicit, so that only the audience, through Olivia's mistaken identity twice over, can laugh at her limited range of seduction techniques.

The implied lesbian relationship, though perhaps an unwitting and involuntary one, between Olivia and Violà, is mirrored even more explicitly by the not altogether latent homosexuality between Antonio and Sébastien, particularly in Act III, scene iii:

ANTONIO: Je n'ai pu demeurer loin de vous.  
Mon désir plus aigu qu'une lame effilée m'éperonne  
vers vous.

[...]

SEBASTIEN: Mon doux Antonio,  
Je ne peux rien vous dire sinon merci,  
Merci toujours et encore merci.<sup>23</sup>

The open and explicit nature of the relationship between the two characters on the page is translated on the stage by the two male actors embracing like lovers . One wonders indeed why Mnouchkine

did not dress up an actress to play the part, say of Sébastien, to give this relationship an added dimension, but the portrayal of explicit homosexuality remained. So the spectators witness one woman mistakenly seducing another woman and two men evidently in love with one another, and come, perhaps, to the conclusion that the consummation of love, when not unrequited, is only pederastic. And thus it is an act of pederasty, and not simply mistaken identity, which is seen to resolve the play since it is Antonio's mistaken attraction for Césarior/Violà which leads Violà eventually to her brother, Sébastien, the formerly implied lover of Antonio. The basic scenario of mistaken identity is followed to the letter by Mnouchkine, but it is injected with elements, or at least suggestions, of perverted sexuality that lead to brother and sister being reunited and the plot being resolved. Pederasty, therefore, may be said to be condoned.

We have seen how transvestism can lead to aggressive behaviour, although as far as the audience is concerned it is only ever hollow aggression since they know Césarior is a woman, yet it can also take the sting out of the tail of an aggressive situation. Clémentine Yelnik's interpretation of Sir André Aguecheek is based largely on the distance she creates between herself as an actress and the male character. As she began to build the character, she saw him as an inadequate human being:

...un jour j'ai vu une image de Sir André, j'ai eu la sensation de ce personnage-là, de ce vieux petit bonhomme qui avait été riche, qui avait été aimé, qui avait vécu des tas de choses, et qui n'avait plus rien, qui était une espèce de parasite aux crochets de Toby Belch, et qui était fasciné par le monde entier, sans pouvoir accéder à quoi que ce soit, qui était amoureux des femmes sans pouvoir en

avoir une seule, qui était admiratif de Toby Belch sans avoir son génie d'invention et sa force physique.<sup>14</sup>

As she was developing this character who never quite matched up to his own self-expectation or to the expectation of his peers, and since she was to play a male character, choosing Sir André's costume was, for Clémentine Yelnik, perhaps the most significant determining factor in the creation of the inadequate. She goes on:

...j'avais choisi cette veste noire, ce pantalon qui tombe dans tous les sens, une chemise aux manches pleureuses, des vieux bas plissés et des chaussures rouges immenses; pour moi qui chausse du 36, ça devait être du 43, des espèces de péniches rouges.<sup>25</sup>

In short she created a character which was of a woman in a male persona, suitably apt for an actress playing a male role.

The effect of this interpretation on the play is significant. In Act III, scene iii, when the nobles mistake Violà for Sébastien who has offended them, both Violà playing the male Césario and Sir André (played by Clémentine Yelnik) are pushed into a duel. Woman fights woman, but only the audience is aware of it, and the humour from their fear of fighting is intensified by this dramatic irony. Fabien assists Violà/Césario and Sir Toby assists Sir André, and both place plastic swords in their respective hands. Of course the consequences of a blow from a plastic sword could never be serious, yet the two 'women' physically wilt at the prospect of a duel. Sir André, of course, in Act IV, scene i, with the knowledge that Violà/Césario doesn't fight, mistakes Sébastien for Césario, attacks him and gets his just desserts for his false bravery. By playing up and mocking the duels and battles, physical



violence is far from condoned, for it is 'la sauvagerie de l'amour' which takes precedence, and is indeed real. So Sir André's bravery is false, his sword is false, and in this production, even his sex is false as well.

Obviously the policy of casting has an effect on the production. It goes without saying that the doubling of actors necessitates, at times, the cutting of scenes and even the removal of characters. The major doubling in this production is Georges Bigot as the Duc d'Orsino and Fabien. The only cut necessitated by this particular doubling is in Act V, scene i when Orsino enters Olivia's household and Fabien obviously cannot appear. Cuts to the imagery of the text, and not those simply demanded by the problems of production are centred largely around the policy of omitting any textual references which might locate or conjure up an image of Illyria in the real world. Maria's line in Act III, scene iii for instance, locates the action too precisely:

Pour sourire, il [Malvolio] fronce son visage en plus de lignes que la nouvelle carte du monde avec tous les méridiens des Indes.<sup>26</sup>

Nevertheless, subtle indications of scenic location do still remain, hints which are suggestive of the sub-continent to complement the suggestiveness of the costumes and the set. Antonio and Sébastien's proposed meeting place is a case in point:

Dans les faubourgs du sud, à l'Eléphant,  
C'est là que nous irons dormir.<sup>27</sup>

To some ears, perhaps, 'l'Eléphant' might have oriental connotations.

The cuts themselves divide up roughly into two categories: firstly, references to mythological figures such as Jupiter (although there is a reference to him which is not omitted later on in Act III, scene iii), and secondly references to the Christian concepts of heaven and hell. One example of the latter is of Sir Toby impatiently demanding the advent of Malvolio:

Où est-il par tous les saints? Même s'il est  
possédé par toutes les légions de tous les diables  
de l'enfer, je lui parlerai.<sup>203</sup>

In this instance, however, we must keep in mind the requirements of the stage space which force lines heralding an actor's entrance to be cut because the audience can see the actor approach on the two catwalks. For a character on the main podium to say 'Where is Malvolio?', might thus expect to be answered 'He's behind you!', as in pantomime. In any case, references to hell are retained, such as in Act III, scene v, p.104. Thirdly, reference to figures from Ancient History are removed, again to free the play from historical background to which Feste, an Indian spirit, would have had to allude:

Je jouerais le seigneur Pandore de Phrygie,  
monsieur, pour amener cette Cressida à ce  
Troïlus.<sup>204</sup>

Troilus and Cressida are themselves figures which are beyond the realm of Mnouchkine's Illyria. Neither do they form part of the Théâtre du Soleil's Shakespeare cycle, or indeed whole theatrical history. Yet in any event, all of these categories of cuts, however widespread, are never wholly consistent.

Several changes are of much greater proportion, all of which are acknowledged in the published text. One simply involves the removal

of lines. Act II, scene v, when Malvolio discovers, and is duped by the forged letter, is the first of these major changes. In the produced version, much of the dialogue before and after Malvolio's reading of the letter has been eliminated. Previously, as Sir Toby and Sir André hid behind a bush, Malvolio, prior to discovering the letter, prepared a speech to Sir Toby asking him for Olivia's hand in marriage:

MALVOLIO: Je dis: «Cousin Toby, la fortune en  
m'octroyant votre nièce m'accorde le privilège de  
pouvoir vous dire...»

SIR TOBY: Quoi ça? Quoi ça?

MALVOLIO: «Que vous devez vous corriger de votre  
ivrognerie.»

SIR TOBY: Salaud! A mort!<sup>30</sup>

By cutting this whole section, the humour of the dramatic irony, through insult, is lost and we go straight to the letter. The effect is one of separating one injury from another. Malvolio, having unwittingly insulted Sir Toby and Sir André, gets his just desserts by being duped by the letter. Consequently the force of the letter's cruelty is not fully exploited. In Mnouchkine's version, by going straight to the letter, the two nobles are not insulted but rather stand around Malvolio as he is reading it, and thus their duping of Malvolio, though hilarious, might appear unjustifiably cruel. The subsequent dialogue is reduced, Maria does not enter, with the result that the audience is not reminded of the foolishness of their enterprise, and its consequence, (Malvolio will next appear in yellow tights). Not only does this particular cut eliminate repetition and soften the blow, it cuts off the cruelty against Malvolio at its highest point.

This heightening of the cruelty against Malvolio is taken one stage further in Act IV, scene ii, when Malvolio is imprisoned and again duped, this time by Feste. Feste, in the original, is dressed up as Frère Topaze by Maria, but in the stage version Mnouchkine appears to have taken Maria's advice to accomplish the act of duplicity without any of the trappings of dressing up:

Tu aurais pu faire tout ça sans barbe et sans  
soutane, il ne te voit même pas.<sup>31</sup>

The open nature of the prison, which is discussed later, makes Malvolio's inability to recognize Feste as Topaze doubly foolish. When Feste enters, he does so as himself, with no Topaze costume, singing in his own voice which is in fact recognized by Malvolio and then cleverly switches his voice in an act worthy of an accomplished ventriloquist. The conversation runs as follows:

FESTE: Attention à ce que vous dites, voilà le  
moine. (Parlant comme le moine) Malvolio, Malvolio,  
que les cieux restaurent ta raison. Essaie  
de dormir et cesse de blablater.

MALVOLIO: Frère Topaze!

FESTE: (le moine:) Ne parlez plus avec lui,  
mon ami.

Qui? Moi, monsieur?

Certes non monsieur!

Que Dieu soit avec vous, frère Topaze.

(le moine:) Ah la la la! Amen!

Tsss, Tsss, Tsss.<sup>32</sup>

Because Feste executes this scene in his own costume, not even attempting to hide his true identity, the audience can only marvel at his skill and Malvolio's patent myopia.

Not only does Feste throw his voice to have a conversation with Malvolio, but he also throws his voice to have a conversation with himself. The effect is one of focussing on Feste's cunning, his skill, his facility to dupe, and not just by dressing up. In

the original, Malvolio fails to prove his sanity to Topaze, but here Malvolio is failing to prove his sanity, if you like, to Topaze, alias Feste, and to the audience all at the same time, since we can see an open plan cell and a myopic Malvolio. When Feste chides Malvolio with 'Je me suis fait gronder...' the dramatic irony is at its most cruel. This is a kind of exorcism in which Feste maliciously unloads the title of 'fou' onto Malvolio, and in so doing is temporarily transformed from his role as the Spirit of the East into a Western Christian Brother (Topaze), to poke fun blasphemously at his real Christian victim. The duplicity is cruel enough: there is no further need for a separate test of Malvolio's sanity. Even though Feste subsequently agrees to help Malvolio by procuring for him pen, ink and paper, the damage has already been done. The audience will forever doubt the sincerity of Feste whose knife cuts deep.

Act IV, scene iii is completely cut, and thus Sébastien's impending marriage is withheld from us and his separation from Antonio still remains. The next major cut concerns, once more, the punishment meted out to Malvolio, though this time it is the final instalment. Mnouchkine does not allow Malvolio's letter of explanation to be read out in Act V. Perhaps then his line requesting pen, ink and paper in Act IV, scene ii should have been cut as well. Normally Olivia's invitation to Orsino to celebrate a double marriage between herself and Sébastien and himself and Violà, comes before Malvolio's entrance, in fact while we are waiting for him to be brought on stage. Since Mnouchkine cannot suspend action to wait for him in this production because of the

demands of the stage space, these lines are transposed. They are now spoken after Malvolio has exited on a sour note, promising to exact vengeance. Orsino agrees to a double alliance and gives the command for peace to be made with Malvolio:

Rattrapez Malvolio. Engagez-le à faire la paix.<sup>23</sup>

And so the play ends on a happier note than the one of Malvolio crying for justice, in keeping with Maria's intention, (not Fabien's, since Bigot plays Orsino in this scene):

Pour faire plaisir à Sir Toby, j'ai écrit cette  
lettre,  
 Pour me récompenser, il a d'ailleurs promis de  
m'épouser.  
 Si les torts réciproques sont jugés justement,  
 Le plaisir malicieux que nous nous sommes donné  
 Provoquera le rire plutôt que la vengeance.<sup>24</sup>

Feste, likewise, communicating directly to the audience, points out the intention of the play:

La folie alors n'était qu'amusement  
 Car il pleut de la pluie tous les jours.<sup>25</sup>

It would appear that at the end of the play, in the knowledge that many of the jibes at Sir Toby and followers were omitted, Malvolio's punishment, unlike his 'madness', was of dubious amusement. Nevertheless, the celebration of the theatrical ritual, in most theatres a curtain call, but in this production a pastiche of a *Kathakali* dance with all actors remaining in character, Malvolio re-enters still with the company and still with his scowl, that is his 'état de base', for the psychology of character development is banished from the Soleil stage. And so one gets the feeling that the resolved plot, with everything turning out all right in the end, is bitter sweet since the characters can never

change their 'états de base'. Malvolio will reappear in subsequent performances with the same scowl, and our lasting impression is that his character failed to develop psychologically. Mnouchkine's philosophy, however, is that the characters do not 'develop' as they are being presented, they are developed and then presented.

The setting for *La Nuit des rois* uses certain elements from the previous production, such as Malvolio's prison, a white tubular cage-like structure. Again, as in *Richard II*, the prison scene is conducted in dungeon-like darkness with grey backdrops and dim lighting. The pinks and blues disappear and on that grey backdrop is a large silver circle to represent the moon and locate the play temporally. This tableau, with its appearance in both plays is the theatrical code at the Théâtre du Soleil for imprisonment. By representing the outside of the prison on a backdrop, far removed from the relatively small prison structure, an augmentation of the set is achieved. The whole stage thus becomes the prison and the action need not necessarily take place within the confines of the tubular structure. Malvolio can easily leave the structure and Feste can easily enter it. But it is the moon-like circle on the backdrop which augments the idea of imprisonment and signifies that Malvolio, be he before or behind bars, can find no escape.

The extension of the set is complemented by the extension, by way of properties, of the characters and their emotions. Each of the major characters has a parasol which is the visual symbol of his or her character or the essence of his or her character (the 'état de base'). Malvolio's parasol is a jet black colour representing sobriety; Olivia's is a blood red colour to match her

cloak and the 'pundra'/tear on her forehead; Orsino's is an off-white colour made of the same material as his huge handkerchief. Nearly all these parasols are carried by servants who accompany their masters on stage. They do not offer shade. Instead these parasols serve two functions: firstly they can mirror the master's or mistress's emotions empathetically, and secondly they can betray the servant carrier's feelings to his or her master or mistress. For example, when Feste is consoling Orsino, his parasol sways in rhythm to his soothing words. In Act V, when Maria is found guilty of forging her mistress's handwriting, the parasol in her hand trembles uncontrollably, thus exaggerating her emotion. Any emotion, in fact can be catered for: fear, hate, admiration, anger, and happiness, in any of the characters' 'substates'. This is a natural development from *Richard II* in which the courtiers' hand language not only mirrored the sentiments of others but also betrayed their own emotions as well. Mnouchkine, in other words, refuses to rely solely on the oral power of the poetry, she makes it visual as well.

At the beginning of the play, in similar visual fashion, Illyria is portrayed as being a land across the ocean. Viola, in her first appearance, is preceded by two extras rippling a large blue cloth at floor level and moving downstage in time to the music, until it comes to rest between the stage proper and the seating bank, thus physically dividing us from the fairy-tale land, although the wall of the waves is lowered for the duration of the spectacle. The play ends in a similar style. This time it is a pink cloth which sees off the characters at the end of the play.



although it remains permanently upstage, the rippling cloth entrancing them as they sit or stand behind it, cut off now from the audience. The cloth complements the now red and pink backdrop, and indeed the costume worn by Feste, who remains downstage singing directly to the audience:

Puisqu'il pleut de la pluie tous les jours  
 Nous tâcherons de vous plaire tous les soirs.<sup>26</sup>

Gone are 'la pluie' and the blue sea-cloth, and in their place are 'le plaisir' and the pink rippling cloth of enchantment, mesmerizing the characters as Feste enchants the audience with his song. Feste conjures up the oral fairy-tale in song, joins the visual fairy-tale of the upstage tableau and then there is a blackout.

In *Richard II* we saw a world in which man represented animals concurrent with actors presenting their characters, such as the portrayal of the horses, and as far back as *Le Songe d'une nuit d'été* man was reduced to his animal cousins as well. In *La Nuit des rois*, however, man is reduced to the childhood world of the nursery or the kindergarten, a world of pinks and blues, and a world of childhood vision. The pinks and blues, if we see them as representing happiness and sorrow, or even love and hate, are as definitive as, say, black and white. The children in this world see things in terms of all or nothing, black or white: there is no room for compromise:

...ces Indes intérieures qui, pour l'imagination, tiennent de la légende, de la magie, de l'enfance, du cauchemar. Dans ce monde profond, il n'y a, contrairement à ce qu'on pourrait croire, aucun double-sens, aucune ambiguïté chez les personnages, et leurs désirs ont la netteté du rêve.<sup>27</sup>

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The vision of the all-or-nothing attitude set in a kindergarten was one which had been seen on the Comédie-Française stage from 1981, in Patrice Kerbrat's production of Racine's *Andromaque*. The setting was unmistakably that of a palace nursery for the 'cycle infernal' of the polarized emotions of love and hate. The difference in *La Nuit des rois* is, of course, that in the sword fights, the weapons are made of plastic and no one is killed at the end. The greatest and most powerful weapon at the disposal of the characters in *La Nuit* is the ability to pierce the heart of the emotionally vulnerable. Though no blood may be shed, tears are shed in profusion.

En Illyrie, là-bas, les musiques déchirent et les fous savent tout. En Illyrie, là-bas, nul soleil atroce et nulle lune amère: l'amour seul est atroce, l'amour seul est amer, et l'amour seul règne. En Illyrie, là-bas.<sup>329</sup>

Thus the agony of love lingers on, long after the resolution of the plot.

The interpretation of emotions as being black and white, or in this case, pink and blue, inevitably derives from the construction of character, starting with an 'état de base'. The result affects the global interpretation of the play:

Le conte de fées côtoie le cauchemar, et dans cette histoire inexorable où le rire lui-même ne peut jaillir que du drame, le cœur et le corps volubiles se racontent sans retenue, ils jouent les variations de l'amour fou, du bonheur, de la farce et du chagrin mortels, de l'ivresse ou des larmes.

Here in the programme the possibility or range of such 'états de base' is clearly defined. Note that it states either drunkenness or tears. No two states can be presented at the same time by the one

character. In fact what transpires is that, despite the assurance by Bigot and Hottier to the contrary, that starting from 'états de base' each character then proceeds through a series of secondary states, the 'états de base' remain more or less constant throughout the play, and therefore the characters learning capabilities, or psychological development is either severely limited or non-existent. Anne Neuschäfer sees this particular constraint of character building a hindrance especially to the portrayal of the comic characters in the cycle. The Falstaff/Sir Toby character will be discussed in the next chapter, but here Anne Neuschäfer points out the handicap from which the interpretation of Malvolio by John Arnold suffers:

Le divertissement amer de l'amour bafoué, dont Malvolio fait les frais, glisse au fur et à mesure des représentations vers la farce. L'anthipathique et pédant Malvolio aurait pu, dès lors qu'il devient une victime, nous arracher sympathie et émotion. C'est au moins une possibilité du texte Shakespearien, car ce renversement de perspectives force le spectateur après la représentation à repenser sa position face aux événements, et à relativiser les choses.<sup>39</sup>

In other words Malvolio, despite being tricked by Sir Toby, Sir André, Maria and Feste, remains an object of derision, which is in fact his 'état de base'. Neuschäfer is right to point out that this 'état' never develops fully. Yet even though this may be the case, the audience's attitude to Malvolio is, if not not altogether sympathetic, then in a state of ambivalence. Cutting many of Malvolio's jibes at Sir Toby and the rest, not only arrests the development of Malvolio's character on stage, but also takes away some of the reasoning behind his punishment. To some, therefore,

that punishment, the incarceration and the torture by Feste, rather than forcing him to wear the ridiculous yellow tights, might seem unjust. Mnouchkine could therefore be said to be engineering audience reaction, rather than fully exploring and developing character.

If Malvolio changes little, then Sir Toby and Sir André change even less. The change of heart and remorse felt by Sir Toby, as reported by Maria in the final scene, is not alluded to visually at the Cartoucherie. He remains forever in his 'state' of 'ivresse', never to escape. The problem of the comic characters arises because they are portrayed largely as clowns, and clowns are, broadly speaking, two dimensional, larger-than-life figures. They have roles to play and adhere to, rather than characters to develop. Clowns invariably come in pairs, furthermore, and are pairs of opposites. During the Théâtre du Soleil's own celebration of those figures in *Les Clowns*, it was said:

La condition d'existence du clown est d'affirmer sa supériorité sur son partenaire.<sup>40</sup>

This is quite obvious with the Sir Toby/Sir André duo, since they are both physical and sexual opposites. Sir Toby does indeed wield great authority over his partner because of his greater physical strength as well as the latter's ineffectual nature. Yet they both remain lovable characters. The greatest instance of asserting superiority over a partner, in Mnouchkine's production, is to be found in the deliberate opposition of Malvolio and Feste, one dour, the other gay, in this particular circus ring. Feste's treatment of Malvolio, in asserting his superiority, is based precisely on the

condition of existence of the two clowns in the ring. Furthermore, to give this confrontation of opposites a global aspect, Feste appears as the Eastern spirit while Malvolio is the Western puritan. It follows, therefore, that the imposition of Eastern theatrical forms on this Western stage, two opposing partners if you like, is the condition of existence of this whole Shakespeare cycle's interpretation.

This interpretation of characters which leads to a proliferation of clowns on stage, is a point which is picked up by most astute critics. Nicholas de Jongh, writing in *The Guardian* about one of the cycle's final appearances at the Los Angeles Olympic Arts festival, points to Bigot's interpretation of Orsino as the key to the whole production:

Orsino in a white turban and tunic, is a red-lipped extravagant who begs for more melancholy music and is greeted with a wailing Indian vocal lament which leaves him quivering with delight. It is a sequence of excess and extremism of a kind which the production often adopts.<sup>41</sup>

A more definite pointer to such a policy is the fact that Bigot doubles as Fabien. F. Laroque, writing retrospectively in *Cahiers Elisabethains*, takes a different view:

Plus contestable par contre est l'interprétation également bouffonne que Georges Bigot a choisi de donner du duc d'Orsino, et ce à force de diction artificiellement syncopée et de maniérisme dans les gestes. Il est dommage d'avoir ainsi gommé la dimension mélancolique, contrepoint de la farce dans cette subtile comédie romantique.<sup>42</sup>

A critic who interprets *La Nuit* as a 'subtile comédie romantique' could only ever be at odds with Mnouchkine's interpretation. 'Subtile', in de Jongh's words is replaced by 'excess and

extremism'. Laroque seems to be advocating the contrapuntal balance between the 'genuine' love pains of Orsino and the antics of Sir Toby and his mob. Armelle Héliot thinks differently:

...l'amour seul est atroce, l'amour seul est amer  
et l'amour seul règne.<sup>43</sup>

Love is love is love, whether it is Sir Toby or Orsino who is in love. The theatrical language to interpret the emotion is a kind of esperanto, officially universal yet spoken by no one in the real world.

The two contrapuntal forces at work in this production are not those which separate shades or degrees of emotion, or different social groupings, they are the forces of comedy which naturally arise from the excesses of the emotion as well as the cruelty to which this emotion leads. Héliot explains:

Fils enchevêtrés de comédie avec suivante coquine, fou clairvoyant, intendant péremptoire, oncle éméché et gentilhomme dissipé: emplois du théâtre élisabéthain tirés ici vers la clownerie avec une magnifique virtuosité qui n'efface pas la cruauté du conte. La cruauté de l'amour.<sup>44</sup>

In short it is the counterpoint of the cruelty and the comedy of 'l'amour'. Héliot also identifies an important association between the clownesque interpretation and popular theatre forms. Laroque follows the same track:

Mais, pour réussis qu'ils soient, ces numéros qui amusent évidemment beaucoup le public ne vont pas sans certaines longueurs. Ils sont, il est vrai, dans la tradition du théâtre populaire auquel Ariane Mnouchkine est très attachée et parfaitement dans la lignée des théâtres publics de l'époque élisabéthaine. Ils expliquent aussi sans doute la durée du spectacle (4 heures, dont 20 minutes d'entr'acte).<sup>45</sup>

Laroque's main concern is the fact that during these 'numéros' the actors abandon the text and embark on a series of short sketches of mime which take the essence of the scene and continue it in a kind of dumbshow. The result is a series of sketches of great popular appeal. Thus they turn Shakespearian comedy into popular comedy, an act which is contrary to the spirit of twentieth-century West European interpretation, though very much in the mode of Elizabethan theatre. The only criticism left then is that they force one to sit on a bench in Avignon, buffeted by the mistral, for four hours and more.

By the time *La Nuit des rois* was first performed at the 'Cour du Palais des Papes' at Avignon, on 10 July 1982, the Théâtre du Soleil were just a little behind schedule. In fact at the outset they largely underestimated their production timetable, initially foreseeing a further play added to cycle every two months. As it turned out, the first interval was exactly seven months since *Richard II*. This was put down to the constraints of performing at night while rehearsing during the day. But working for Mnouchkine was never an easy option for the actor. During the run of *La Nuit* at Avignon, a great thunderstorm washed out all hope of a performance one night. Mnouchkine told the audience to return at 2.15 a.m., by which time it was hoped the storm would have abated. In the early hours of the morning, as promised, *La Nuit* was performed not once, but twice. *La Nuit des rois* became an all-night affair.

Most of the critics recognized the shift from Japan to India for the theatrical codes of *La Nuit*, as Armelle Héliot exemplifies:

...de même *La Nuit des rois* éprouve-t-elle quelque chose de l'Inde réelle: cinéma, théâtres, jeux, codes. Jusqu'à la couleur justement éclatante et fantasque. Clins d'oeil comme le mouchoir du duc Orsino droit sorti du 'Salon de Musique', citations comme les gestes précis de Maria ou les mimiques réglées du fou Feste, oiseau Paradis.<sup>46</sup>

In fact what had taken place throughout the entire rehearsal period stretching from 1981 to 1984 was a little more than just watching Indian films and listening to Indian music. The entire company was instructed by professional teachers in the arts of *Kathakali* and Indian dance. Maurice Durozier, who played both the Captain and Antonio, discusses the usefulness of studying *Kathkalli* and Indian dancing with the professionals:

Personnellement ce travail m'apporte beaucoup; ce n'est pas seulement un immense travail technique, mais aussi une nourriture intérieure, au même titre que les musiques, les films, les peintures qui nous aident à créer tout un univers d'images pour les spectacles.<sup>47</sup>

This interview with Durozier is revealing in that it answers the critics, particularly those of *Richard II* who said it wasn't real *Kabuki* or real *Noh* and thus disappointing. The instruction by the Indian teachers in the Indian arts was a kind of 'nourriture' for the company to feed on during rehearsals, rather than a conscious effort to re-enact the codes of authentic *Kathakali* on stage. Some of the movements, some of the music, some of the pictures were pure, others mere pastiche, and some *commedia dell'arte*. Mnouchkine explains why:

L'important [...] c'est qu'il [l'acteur] fasse tomber son caillou, pile, là où il faut, pour que toutes les résonances émotionnelles, philosophiques, métaphysiques, politiques, se produisent.<sup>48</sup>



Hitting directly a pure movement of *Kathakali* or Indian dancing, or even indeed Clémentine Yelnik's apparent Stan Laurel impression, is a conscious decision to choose the best means of expression of the theatrical language to convey the state of being of the character. The eclectic nature of the theatrical language used is an integral part. She goes on:

Un acteur n'énumère pas: il doit à chaque instant produire l'accord essentiel; le public reçoit, selon le niveau de chacun et selon les tendances de chacun, probablement ce qui lui est destiné.

A critic, therefore, with a wealth of theatrical experience would have a greater 'niveau' than the large proportion of young people in the audience who were the most enthusiastic supporters of the production. Without theatrical experience, then, youth can hit the nail of 'l'accord essentiel' on the head. Mnouchkine sees this mirrored in her own actors, many of whom have had little or no past theatrical history:

...pour John [Arnold], il n'avait jamais fait de théâtre, mais il était probablement fait pour travailler dans cette direction.<sup>42</sup>

Consequently the actors of the troupe have few, if any, preconceptions of Shakespeare, of Far Eastern theatrical forms, or what is more, of orientalizing Shakespeare. The actor, quite willingly, with the 'nourriture' he is feeding on, 'fasse tomber son caillou, pile, là où il faut'.

After its short opening run at the Festival d'Avignon, *La Nuit des rois* slotted into the cycle at the Cartoucherie on 6 October 1982 and the company thus embarked upon rehearsals for the next production, *Henry IV (première partie)*. Before arriving at

what was to become the final production in the prematurely shortened cycle, it is important to remind oneself of the function which was fulfilled by placing *Richard II* and *La Nuit des rois* back to back, as explained by Hélène Cinque:

*Henry IV* nait effectivement des autres: Son père c'est 'Richard' et sa mère c'est 'la Nuit'.<sup>50</sup>

The historical tragedy faced the comedy, the inspirational codes of *Kabuki* and *Noh* theatres were opposed by those of *Kathakali* and Indian dancing, and the Japanese warriors with the Indian deities. Yet the common denominator remained the playwright, the casting policy, the stage space and the Orientalist appetite of the company for the authentically Eastern 'nourriture'.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

1. Armelle Héliot, 'Mnouchking *Henry IV*', *Le Quotidien de Paris*, 12 January 1984.
2. Armelle Héliot, 'Mnouchking *Henry IV*'.
3. Martine Franck, Raymonde Temkine and Sophie Moscoso, 'Notes de répétitions', *Le Théâtre du Soleil: Shakespeare 2<sup>e</sup> partie*, Double Page, no.32 (1984).
4. Martine Franck, Raymonde Temkine and Sophie Moscoso, 'Notes de répétitions'.
5. Martine Franck, Raymonde Temkine and Sophie Moscoso, 'Notes de répétitions'.
6. Jacques Copeau, *Registres III: Les Registres du Vieux Colombier*, p.193.
7. Jacques Copeau, *Registres II: Molière*, p.19.
8. Clément Borgal, *Jacques Copeau*, p.109.
9. France Anders, *Jacques Copeau et le Cartel des Quatre*, p.231.
10. Jacques Copeau, *Registres I: Appels*, p.164.
11. Tao-Ching Hsu, *The Chinese Conception of the Theatre*, p.426.
12. André Libiouille, 'Recherches théâtrales - réinventer la tradition'; *Clés*, nos.7-8 (July-August 1975), 19-20 (p.20).
13. Copeau, *Registres III: Les Registres du Vieux Colombier*, p.197.
14. Even in the absence of the star-system, constantly rejected by the Théâtre du Soleil, the French critics had bestowed on Bigot the adulation normally reserved for the 'stars' of the mainstream theatre.
15. Act II, scene iii, p.52. (This and all subsequent quotations are from Mnouchkine's translation).
16. Act II, scene i, p.44.
17. Act V, scene i, p.163.
18. Act III, scene iv, pp.129-30.
19. Programme notes.
20. Act III, scene i, p.99.

21. Act I, scene ii, p.12.
22. Act IV, scene i, p.132.
23. Act III, scene iii, pp.104-5. Many critics believe that it was 'Le Capitaine' who spoke these lines. Maurice Durozier doubled as Antonio, and this undoubtedly led to the confusion.
24. Anne Berger, ed., 'En Plein Soleil', *Fruits*, nos.2-3 (June 1984), p.134.
25. Anne Berger, ed., 'En Plein Soleil', p.134.
26. Act III, scene iii, p.104.
27. Act III, scene iii, p.106.
28. Act III, scene v. p.112.
29. Act III, scene i, p.92.
30. Act III, scene v, p.171.
31. Act IV, scene ii, p.183.
32. Act IV, scene ii, pp.137-8.
33. Act V, scene i, p.162.
34. Act V, scene i, p.160.
35. Act V, scene i, p.162.
36. Act V, scene i, p.163.
37. Programme notes.
38. Armelle Héliot, 'Ariane en Illyrie', *Acteurs*, no.9 (November 1982), 39-40 (p.39).
39. Anne Neuschäfer and Frédéric Serror, *Le Théâtre du Soleil: Shakespeare*, p.21.
40. Cathérine Mounier, 'Les Règles du jeu', *Travail Theatral*, nos.18-9 (July-September 1975), 40-50 (p.42).
41. Nicholas de Jongh, 'Why the Bard's All Shook Up', *Guardian*, 22 June 1984.
42. F. Laroque, 'La Nuit des rois, mise en scène d'Ariane Mnouchkine', *Cahiers Elisabethains*, no.22 (October 1982), 102-4 (p.103).
43. Armelle Héliot, 'Ariane en Illyrie', p.39.

44. Armelle Héliot, 'Ariane en Illyrie', p.40.
45. F. Laroque, 'La Nuit des rois', p.103.
46. Armelle Héliot, 'Ariane en Illyrie', pp.39-40.
47. Anne Berger, ed., 'En Plein Soleil', p.175.
48. Anne Berger, ed., 'En Plein Soleil', p.211.
49. Anne Berger, ed., 'En Plein Soleil', p.217.
50. Armelle Héliot, 'Mnouchking *Henry IV*'.

## CHAPTER FOUR:

*HENRY IV (première partie)*

To produce *Henry IV* at the beginning of 'Les Shakespeare' in 1981 would have been inconceivable. The strict order of the cycle had to be followed, not so as to obey chronology but in order to draw on the working methods already established for the company's interpretations of *Richard II* and *La Nuit des rois*. These were interpreted as 'le père' and 'la mère' by Hélène Cinque at the opening of *Henry IV*.<sup>1</sup> The latter was created in the spirit or image of its predecessors or, to perpetuate Cinque's language, its theatrical progenitors. 'Le père' was the tragedy, *Richard II*, while 'la mère' was the comedy, *La Nuit des rois*. The tragedy used the codes and rituals of Far Eastern theatrical practices as the source of its inspiration and the basis for its construction. The theatrical language used to interpret the comedy was, on the other hand, the interpretation of applied *Kathakali* and Indian dancing. Thus the opposition of theatrical genres seen as the opposition of the sexes, was like the philosophical dialectic of thesis, and antithesis, to achieve synthesis: the mother and father were to produce their offspring, *Henry IV*.

Unwittingly, the rehearsals of *Henry IV* were to become the final instalment in the process of orientalizing the gestural codes of the Théâtre du Soleil. Once established, these codes facilitated the interpretation of the third play, and in spite of the long break from the opening of the last production in which the company

had to perform two plays in repertory while rehearsing, *Henry IV* was born with greater ease. Mnouchkine explains:

La formule d'Hélène Cinque correspond aussi à la représentation, et nous nous appuyons sur le travail et les trouvailles, si je puis dire, des deux pièces précédentes. Nous avons progressé plus facilement que pour *La Nuit des rois* d'ailleurs: nous dominons mieux certains problèmes, nous voyons tout de suite les impasses. Et nous sommes portés par l'élan des deux spectacles, par le fait que nous les avons traversés et qu'ils nous ont nourris... Pour l'essentiel les principes de travail sont restés les mêmes et pour le décor et pour la musique et pour l'apport de chacun à mes propres propositions.<sup>22</sup>

After two and a half years of working on the same project, it was obvious that certain trends had become evident and certain patterns of thought and working methods had become established so that each play might ultimately conform to a uniform global pattern, intentionally or not.

The pattern which was emerging during the rehearsals of *Henry IV* was the emphasis on contradictions, as Mnouchkine admits:

Shakespeare va droit au coeur des contradictions.  
Tout se renverse sans cesse.<sup>23</sup>

In Act III, scene iv of *Richard II*, the gardeners in their Bobo-the-clown costumes amuse the audience with their sparring, fighting and tumbling. But even though they fall and tumble, imitate and chastise one another, and even though they sport the most ridiculous red noses, they surprisingly inspire the audience with a political lucidity so sadly lacking in both Bolingbroke and Richard. Just as political myopia is contradicted by two clowns in *Richard II* so, in the same fashion, is the picture of a warring and seditious England contradicted by a picture, in the second play of

the cycle, of the magical, fictional and fairy-tale world of Illyria in *La Nuit des rois*. These are just two examples of the contradictions at the heart of Mnouchkine's interpretation of Shakespeare, and more will be pointed out later, yet it seems a fitting moment to investigate the attempts being made by the third play to achieve a cohesion of formerly contradictory elements.

Leaving aside, for the moment, the fabricated theatrical language of gesture and movement, let us first look at the members of the company and the various roles assigned to them. Philippe Hottier, one of the gardeners in *Richard II*, and Sir Toby Belch in *La Nuit des rois*, appears in *Henry IV* as Falstaff. In all three he plays the principal 'comic' figure and his Falstaff is the culmination of work done on his previous two characters. The spectator who sees the cycle in reverse order will undoubtedly consider Sir Toby, not as a character in his own right, but as an extension of the comic Falstaff mould. In *Richard II* John Arnold played both Jean de Gand and the gardener's assistant. In *Henry IV* he plays the title role but also emerges as Poins, Hal's sidekick. The doubling of Arnold in a serious and a comic role plays a major part in the cohesion of the casting policy. So Mnouchkine's plans for the cycle become evident on the level of casting, at any rate. For the regular visitor to the Cartoucherie something tangible is being offered, namely the recognition of actors by role types. Hottier, for instance, is as much Falstaff when he plays Sir Toby as when he assumes the role proper in *Henry IV*. With the exception of *La Nuit des rois*, John Arnold always assumes both a masked and unmasked, a serious and comic role, within the one play. (One



could, of course, argue that Arnold's interpretation of Malvolio encompasses all these qualities). Ultimately, Georges Bigot assumes the central role in each play; Richard, Orsino, and Prince Hal. One aspect of the theatrical codes established by the company may indeed be the way in which lines are delivered on stage, knees bent, legs akimbo, yet Mnouchkine's major contribution to the code system is to cast Georges Bigot in the central roles, thus indicating that Bigot will automatically equal the heroic, central figure. Casting, therefore, has become codified as much as gesture and movement.

From one point of view, however, the stability and cohesion of the casting policy could be interpreted as being contradictory to the idea of a cycle: a title which implies definitive movement and progression. Kingship remains static when one considers that Bigot is at once Richard and Prince Hal, son of the character (Bolingbroke) who killed Richard (his alter ego) in an earlier play. A further anomaly in this casting policy lies in the fact that two actors play the same character though, admittedly, in different plays: Cyrille Bosc takes on the role of Henry Bolingbroke in *Richard II* but that same character in *Henry IV* is played by John Arnold. Nevertheless, Arnold wears a mask for the latter role which helps to conceal the change of actor from the more astute members of the audience on a second visit. It must be pointed out, however, that masks are generally used in 'Les Shakespeare' as a convention for old age. So with Henry (or John Arnold) wearing a mask, we see the mask, having set up its own convention (of age) on the one hand, break a second convention (of

casting) on the other hand. An actor can play a character who is murdered and then later return to play his own murderer, just as Louis was interpreted by several actors in 1789. Mnouchkine would thus appear to be exposing the mask that theatre affords by setting up her own conventions and then, tongue-in-cheek, breaking them.

The setting for *Henry IV*, however, remains conventionally consistent and cohesive in the cycle. The layout and structure of the auditorium remains constant and the audience come to *Henry IV* for the same kind of experience as in the two previous productions. Not only can the spectator on his second visit appreciate the development from the previous productions, but also acknowledge that the elements of the setting are products of this development. The backdrops to the stage space proper are a case in point. The play divides initially into the affairs of the court and Eastcheap. The backdrops which represent the court are a series of red cloths on which are painted abstract gold leaf designs whose colours are invariably complemented by the black, gold and red court costumes. Eastcheap, on the other hand, is represented by a succession of pastel pinks, blues and yellows which often look like patchwork quilts and kindergarten murals because of their colour mixes rather than just simple abstract backdrops. These collage qualities of the backdrops are, in fact, a fitting representation of the environment of Eastcheap patronized by Falstaff and company; patchwork characters in a kindergarten setting. To reinforce the idea of Eastcheap being at a significant remove from the court, Mnouchkine has set it literally on another continent: the Middle East being a safe bet. Furthermore, Georges Bigot playing Prince Hal appears

dressed as Lawrence of Arabia (Plate IX). Overall designs for both settings and costumes display a uniformity and totality of vision. Indeed, the development from the two previous plays is significant. The court scenes are played using the same costumes and settings as for *Richard II* which were defined in Chapter Two as being Japanese (or at least vaguely Far Eastern) in origin. Conversely, the comic story of *La Nuit des rois* was performed against a backdrop of seemingly Near-Eastern design and the Eastcheap comic scenes in *Henry IV* are performed against a similarly Near Eastern, although one would opt for Persian, backdrop. One can conclude, therefore, that the codified design opposes the genres of tragedy and comedy of court and popular scenes by clothing them in the trappings of the Far East and Middle to Near East, respectively.

The contradictions of casting and setting are propagated further by the design and use of the properties, which are significantly greater in number than in either of the two previous productions. Two examples are sufficient to explain the extent of this spirit of contradiction. All the characters carry small, wooden, brick-like boxes; black for the court, natural, light-coloured wood for Eastcheap. They are carried around for most of the time and are deposited on the ground as the characters adopt their positions to deliver lines. They fulfil the same function as maces did, perhaps, in former times, for they are both symbols of authority and, as Hal proves when he is provoked by Falstaff, potential weapons as well. An important fact to note is that the dual functions of these boxes are not so contradictory as they



Georges Bigot as Prince Henry, *Henry IV*  
(*première partie*)

might first appear, for authority and superiority in weaponry are very often concomitant.

The second apparently contradictory aspect of the properties is the use of fans in the production. In Eastcheap, fans are a common property. Hal carries a yellow fan and Poins a red one. Initially, of course, the Western spectator will make the assumption that fans are signs of femininity, even though they have figured prominently in Japanese society in all ages. The use of the fans and their colour symbolism in the production fulfil dramatic functions in that they convey aspects of character, as shall be explained later. Hal's yellow fan, traditionally a colour representing cowardice in Western theatre, and 'mystery' in *Noh*, fulfils the Western spectator's expectations particularly at one interesting moment when Hal, while fanning himself, is nearly blown away by the force of his own fan. But the red fan of Poins contradicts this. It is symbolic of courage and valour and Poins attempts to fan the Prince with it. And so fans (and properties) may contradict one another in symbolic terms but more importantly, what they represent in the East contradicts their significance in the West.

To summarize the spirit of contradiction in this interpretation, all levels of the production must be included from the simple use or misuse of properties, interpretation or misinterpretation of setting, to the setting up and breaking down of the conventions of casting. How these contradictions are applied to the text we have yet to see. Nevertheless, the spirit of contradiction lies in the opposition of comedy and tragedy, 'père'



alien culture and land? Despite the sceptics and against all the visual evidence, Henry would appear to be asserting Rupert Brooke's belief of there being a 'corner of a foreign field that is forever England'. And so it is difficult to associate a possible rebellion in a land which is visually divided by colour and costume and not by splitting King and court from the rebels. The reds and blacks of the court and rebel camp scenes contrast sharply with the pastels of Hal's profligate escapades in Eastcheap and Gadshill. Mnouchkine's interpretation would seem thus to be concentrating not so much on contrasting the King with the rebels but on separating visually the opposing attitudes to kingship in the play.

These two attitudes to kingship, visually exaggerated in terms of colour and costume by Mnouchkine, stem from the differentiation made by the King in the opening scene, between the attitudes of his own son Hal and the rebel in the making, Hotspur, to valour, courage and honour, the trinity of essential qualities of a potential King, which lead Henry to wish:

O, si l'on pouvait prouver  
 Que quelque fée vagabonde de nuit  
 Echangea dans leur lit nos enfants dans les langes  
 Et appela le mien Percy, le sien Plantagenet,  
 Alors moi j'aurais son Henry et lui aurait le  
 mien.<sup>15</sup>

There are no great physical differences between the two men in the production, even though Hotspur is the taller and more athletic. The main difference is that exaggerated by the design; Hal stands out from both Hotspur and the Court in that his costume is composed of a pastel-coloured mish-mash of spare cloths draped around him. Visually the more Hal is contrasted with Hotspur, the more he is

estranged from his own father's court - all of which is, as has been stated, the result of differing attitudes to kingship. What an audience might interpret as an attempt by Henry to arrest this estrangement in its tracks is the fact that the actor playing Henry (John Arnold) plays Poins as well. Poins is thus seen perhaps, if not an extension of Henry, then at least his special envoy who attempts to redefine the enemy for the audience, unloading the title onto Hotspur by goading the Prince into action.

At first sight the actor's doubling up would appear to be a kind of blasphemous mix in terms of kingship for here we have Henry the supreme father figure being associated, by proxy, with the conspiratorial patrons of Eastcheap. Nevertheless, it is his symbolic red fan which signals to the audience his role in these scenes to set the Prince back on the rails and ultimately to shunt the rebellion off the track. As far as the audience is concerned, this would at first appear to be a task of enormous proportions. We initially hear Henry's character assassination of Hal only to find the latter, in his first entrance, living up to every single one of his supposed character traits. He fulfils his profligate image so despised by the King, his father, as he enters blind drunk, unsteady on his feet and quite incapable of stringing two words together. Bigot's interpretation of the character would thus appear to be an exaggeration to the point of mockery. In terms of his character creations in the cycle, Bigot has proceeded from the quasi-masochistic Richard, to the feckless and indolent Orsino, to an utter profligate and impotent heir to the throne, as if he had slid to the extreme end of the scale of dissolute unfortunates.



Similarly, Philippe Hottier's interpretation of Falstaff reaches extremely exaggerated dimensions. This Falstaff is the culmination of three years work on the principal 'comic' figures in Shakespeare. The first Gardener in *Richard II* wore loose fitting clothes, had a painted face, red nose and tousled hair. Sir Toby Belch in *La Nuit des rois* had the same ill-fitting clothes, though more elaborate, the same painted face and tousled hair. This time the notable progression is that he has painted an older face, has a fuller figure and is consequently a little less agile in his normal gait. His Falstaff in *Henry IV* is a further progression of this character type. His hair is even whiter, his painted face older, his clothes more ragged and, most important of all, his figure even fuller still. Yet for all this character type's advancing years he does not lose his agility, and cavorts about the stage with his cohorts in moves unthinkable of the Gardener two years before. This is the ultimate conception of the typical comic figure: the clown, the cowardly yet wise buffoon whose antics and devilishly comic escapades appeal to the large number of children in the audience. Together with Bardolph and Peto, Falstaff never once relies on the text, but on a look, on the direction of a look, a gesture of the hand and a leap in the air to convey his emotions or 'states'. The humour of the character Hottier has created is entirely gestural.

The third actor of note in this enumeration of sequential progression is Julien Maurel. As a young junior in *Richard II* he played, inauspiciously, Bushy and one of the *commedia*-inspired fools. In *La Nuit des rois* he progressed to the highly cunning and athletic Harlequin character, Feste. In *Henry IV*, however, his next

character was not a logical step. Here he played the part of Brulcoeur (Hotspur), which in the *commedia* character types fits in with neither the fools nor Feste. Furthermore, the young Hotspur in *Richard II* was played by a totally different actor. The only vague connection between all three is their ardour and their athleticism but so many other qualities such as guile, cleverness and foolishness appear to separate Hotspur from the other character types. No explanation can be given for this except to say that perhaps Maurel is a young actor who did not necessarily slot in to a definite character type from the very beginning. After all, Hottier had been playing a similar Pantalone figure to Sir Toby and Falstaff as far back as 1975 in *L'Age d'or*.

What links Maurel's interpretation of Hotspur to Hottier and Bigot's interpretation of Falstaff and Hal respectively, is his exaggeration. His 'states' are twofold and simple: blind fury, seen as a mixture of madness and diabolic possession and his weakness with his wife. Hotspur's perpetual fury may have two possible sources. There is the textual source, as Lady Percy relates his night-time habits:

Et quand tu es tout seul, pourquoi frissonnes-tu si  
souvent?  
Pourquoi as-tu perdu le sang rose de tes joues.<sup>7</sup>

Like any wife of an obsessive sportsman, she has been banished from the marriage bed ten days before the fight. The shivering and shaking reported by Lady Percy goes along with what we see on stage, a man shivering and shaking in rage and terror. Indeed his portrayal is reminiscent of a similar portrayal of the same 'state' by Bolingbroke in *Richard II*. What is more, given the company's

recent flirtation with *Kathakali* theatre, there could be a possible link between his interpretation of the 'state' of terror and *mudras*, the acting language of *Kathakali* theatre. The following is a description of a *Kathakali* performer of the *Ramayana* :

His cheeks vibrate, he seems about to cry, he looks startled, he looks afraid, he looks puzzled, he looks proud. But all through extremely small changes in particular parts of his face. Watching his face is like watching a map while on LSD. A chart of human feeling.<sup>15</sup>

Certainly Hotspur appears to do all these things, but the link with *mudras* is tenuous.

His wife's perception of the 'ailment' is matched by her ability to tame his violent emotions. This is Hotspur's second major 'state', his weakness in front of his wife. Since he permits himself just one weakness, the love of his wife, he is consequently putty in her hands, for this 'state' of weakness is played with as much intensity as his fury. It is a source of humour how Lady Percy manages his maniacal moods, transforming a man of violent tempers into a simpering wreck, simply by threatening to break his little finger, and actually grabbing hold of it:

En vérité, Henry, je te casserai le petit doigt  
Si tu ne me dis pas la vérité sur tout.<sup>16</sup>

At this point, suffering physical pain, Hotspur proceeds swiftly from his 'état de base' to a 'substate' of exaggerated agony. The transition is enormous. And so the expression 'to be wrapped round one's little finger' takes on a whole new literal meaning here, as this scene comments as much on the hollowness of the required qualities of kingship and battlefield honour as on marriage. And so, these 'states' of the characters do not permit hollow

interpretations. In Hotspur's fury and when his weak spot is touched, his emotional 'states' are carried to the extreme, extremes which are often mistaken by the uninitiated as exaggerations.

One of the greatest difficulties encountered by Mnouchkine in such scenes taken to their extreme was the fact that many of the puns, the word associations and the games were untranslatable:

Les difficultés les plus grandes tiennent aux jeux de mots extraordinaires, aux festivals de jeux de mots que sont les scènes comiques, en particulier.<sup>10</sup>

The way she overcame the problem did not consist in finding and playing similar word games in French, for Mnouchkine goes on in this same interview to define the importance of her translation, and more specifically, the role of the text in the production as a whole:

Mais il ne faut rien exagérer: ce n'est jamais qu'une traduction et l'énergie imaginative de Shakespeare, sa puissance nous portent...''

What would be more correct is to say that the 'acteurs-créateurs', inspired by Shakespeare's text, invented ways of dramatizing the humour of the situations. The best example of this occurs in Act II, scenes ii and iv, with the robbery at Gadshill and its aftermath at Eastcheap.

The robbery itself is given greater significance than is accorded to it in the text. It is probably the most vivid example of pushing comic situations to their extreme point, elsewhere termed exaggeration, and of letting the text stand still, in the way advocated by Lecoq for mime. Mnouchkine explains her intention:

Ensuite, le texte que je propose aux comédiens est soumis aux exigences du jeu, à leur propre rythme, ils doivent pouvoir se l'approprier sans heurt, lui donner une puissance 'naturelle', en quelque sorte.<sup>12</sup>

During Mnouchkine's version of the initial robbery, Hal and Poins do not leave the stage as such, but hide below it between the stage and the raked auditorium. They are a constant reminder to the audience of the dramatic irony of the situation that Falstaff and cohorts have been set up. Dramatically, therefore, the scene is heightened.

Pushing the comic situation to the extreme, however, begins with the interpretation of character. Falstaff, Bardolph and Peto, of course, have already been mentioned, and are further extensions of the Sir Toby and Sir André comic figures. The rich pilgrims who stumble onto the stage are spared nothing. They are tall and gangling, stupid in appearance and in reality for they tie their riches in bags around their waists for all the world, and the robbers, to see. The robbery is achieved not so much by the dexterity or skill of the robbers, who would not even appear to be able to cope with the slightest resistance, but by the clumsiness and stupidity of the slow-witted pilgrims. Having accomplished the deed, Falstaff and company do not leave the scene but sit in a circle counting out the money. Counting the money is a marvellous piece of comic invention, not only because these characters appear incapable of doing so, but also because they initiate a vocal chant to accompany their counting and their passing the money bags around the circle. In fact they constitute a rival to the orchestra proper in that they each have their own distinct vocal sound like a

percussion instrument. As the cacophony builds up, Hal and Poins come out of hiding, sneak up behind the robbers and add two more voices to the human orchestra. Amusing though this is, the fun only really begins when the dramatic irony is suspended and the robbers realize that they have acquired two more instruments to their band. If we now refer back to the simplicity of the second robbery in the text of Mnouchkine's translation, we can see the enormity of the mimetic creation:

FALSTAFF: Venez, mes maîtres, partageons et ensuite à cheval avant que le jour ne se lève. Et si le Prince et Poins ne sont pas deux authentiques poltrons, la justice n'est plus de ce monde. Il n'y a plus de courage dans ce Poins que dans un canard sauvage.

(Entrent Poins et le Prince)

LE PRINCE: Votre argent!

POINS: Coquins!

(Falstaff s'enfuit avec sa bande)

LE PRINCE: Une prise facile.<sup>13</sup>

The humour of the text lies basically in the dramatic irony of Hal and Poins listening in on the conversation, and the cowardly retreat of the robbers in the face of adversity. The basic humour of Mnouchkine's production is precisely the same yet added to it is a piece of comic invention which provides humour because of the same dramatic irony: unknown to the robbers, their vocal chant has been augmented by two unwelcome additions to the choir.

The morality of both robberies is dubious in any production until the audience is told that the money is reimbursed to its rightful owners. In this production Mnouchkine takes a firm moral line by removing all hints of criminality from the scene. To begin with the pilgrims come upon the scene asking to be robbed. The audience expects it and wishes the robbers accomplish their duty,

such is their blatant display of wealth. In a similar way Hal's theft is condoned by the audience, again because not only did the robbers steal the money in the first place, but also because they are so clumsy and excessively blatant in counting it. Because of the excessiveness in which the moral tale of 'ill-begotten gains reap no rewards' is put across, one tends not to question the dubious morality of Hal's second-hand criminal act. Hal comments on the excessiveness of the whole escapade:

...il y aura là du bavardage pour une semaine, du rire pour un mois et de la farce pour toujours.'<sup>4</sup>

The fact that the moral tale was told by means of human percussion lacking in subtlety assures the permanence of the farce.

Hal's dubious morality is more carefully examined in Act II, scene iv when at Eastcheap, Falstaff, Bardolph and Peto are shown up to be pompous liars as well as thieves since they, in turn, exaggerate the number of robbers who set upon them. It is at this point that Hal and Falstaff almost come to blows, saved only by the fact that they are either too weak or too drunk to turn their box-like symbols of authority into weapons. Conversation turns to the state of the nation and Hal's own profligacy in the eyes of the King. Falstaff, using drama in order to educate and prepare Hal for the next day's inquisition at Court, assumes the role of the King and imitates his circular entrance around the stage, sword at waist. Just like the human percussion of the robbery, this entrance is an invention by Mnouchkine which is made fun of in tongue-in-cheek self-parody. Consequently, when the roles are reversed and Hal, now as King, tries to imitate his action, he displays to all

that being unable to master the circular entrance means he is unfit to be King. By imitating and parodying her own theatrical conventions, Mnouchkine is also commenting dramatically on situation and character.

When Hal first attempts this circular entrance, one automatically thinks back to Bigot's very first entrance in the cycle as Richard. Here, for the first time in *Henry IV* the ghost of Richard is reincarnated, bar certain physical characteristics and changes of costume. With Hal's entrance resurrecting the ghost of Richard, the spectator of the whole cycle will be reminded of Henry Bolingbroke's treatment of Richard, and because Hal and Richard are being played by the same actor, Hal's apparent uneasiness with his role as heir to the throne, gets our tacit approval. The theory that Mnouchkine is putting forward by retaining this convention of entrances for the monarchs or monarchs-to-be is that kingship is self-perpetuating. Whether Richard, Bolingbroke or Hal is on the throne, the business of being King (translated here as the perfection of a circular entrance) remains the same. Kingship thus is portrayed, following Kott's line of argument, as a cyclical and sweeping concept which cuts across individualities and personalities.

All the role-play in this scene is a useful insight to the rehearsal process and character building of the Soleil company which it reflects:

FALSTAFF: Donnez-moi une coupe de vin pour me faire les yeux rouges, qu'on puisse penser que j'ai pleuré car il faut que je joue un état de passion et je vais le faire dans le style du Roi Cambyse.<sup>15</sup>



The optimum phrase here is 'un état de passion', given Mnouchkine's belief in 'states', and playing one single 'state' at a time. The only problem that could arise, presumably, is that the actor, Hottier, playing Falstaff, playing the King, might find it difficult to separate the various 'states' in a character twice removed. This can work to positive effect as in Bigot's case: his secondary character (the King) gives the audience a clearer indication of his primary character and that character's relationship with his father, with Falstaff, and indeed of his own behaviour. Playing the King, Hal takes the opportunity to cane Falstaff playing the Prince. This could be interpreted on various levels. Firstly, Hal might be taking the opportunity to punish Falstaff for his hollow boasts. Secondly, he might be trying to show up the blind, or at least myopic, vision of the King towards his son. Or thirdly, he might be purging his own profligacy by an act of masochism by proxy (by beating Falstaff he is beating himself). If this were the case, then it is the clearest indication yet of his attempts to mend his ways. This, however, could only ever be a 'substate' since it is played by a character within a character and until it is performed by the primary character, the Prince himself, in his primary 'states', one is left to wonder if his behaviour will be transferred to the real world as well.

An indication that it can indeed be transferred to the real world comes at the end of Act II. With Falstaff lying intoxicated and helpless, Poins rifles his pockets, discovers a stack of unpaid bills which will add fuel to his and Hal's future amusement. Just at the end of the scene, however, there is a reference in the text

to the changes which are about to take place in Hal's subsequent behaviour. He gives his instructions to Poins which point to this:

J'irai à la Cour ce matin. Nous devons tous partir pour la guerre et ta place y sera honorable. A cette grosse chenille, je procurerai une compagnie d'infanterie, et je sais qu'une marche de plus de deux cents pas sera sa mort. L'argent sera remboursé avec les intérêts. Rejoins-moi de bonne heure dans la matinée et ainsi, le bonjour, Poins.  
POINS: Le bonjour, Mon bon Seigneur.<sup>16</sup>

The interpretation of this speech is extremely important in order to understand Mnouchkine's intentions. By this time in the scene, both Hal and Poins are exceedingly drunk and are hiccupping uncontrollably. This display of inebriation surely counteracts the resolution Hal is making, to set wrongs right, reimburse the stolen money and join his father in battle. It is a display which reminds one of, say, Hal's coming of age or even a somewhat premature stag night. It is a final fling which, ostensibly, is the antithesis of what he is henceforth intending to achieve, despite what the text may indicate. Mnouchkine definitely leaves the audience unsure if Hal's resolution is to be taken seriously or not. On the one hand Hal is hiccupping and stumbling about, yet on the other he is resolving to mend his ways. Do we believe our ears (the text) or our eyes (the direction)? It is the director's intention, presumably, to have us believe both, but on a secondary level, on the level of association and symbol. As the two men bid farewell and take their leave, both unfold their fans (one red, one yellow) and set off down the catwalks, a few steps at a time, whispering, giggling and imploring one another unconvincingly to be quiet. They say goodbye but proceed in the same direction. Though they are



is that in the circular court entrance Hal has still not become fully proficient. Exchanging the qualities of the dissolute with those of the courageous and honourable are not, thankfully, symbolized by such an exchange of fans suggested. Adopting the latter course is seen as a process of education examinable only in the battlefield.

Act III, scene 1, which precedes Hal's commitment to the crown, in which the enemy camp prepares for the impending battle, is given much less heroic treatment in terms of delivery and style. Hal, in typical court fashion, recites his lines face front which, although it may be a convention of the theatrical language borrowed from the East, appears to a Westerner, because of its solid, stationary and declamatory style, a firm portrayal of resolution and commitment. The scene of the enemy camp is played as an ensemble with the actors playing to one another rather than to the audience, which appears to be typical conspiratorial fashion. What is more, the scene is marred by the friction between Hotspur and Glendower. Their disagreement takes place around a cloth map of the country where the conspirators are gathered to discuss the partition of the country when the battle is over. The physical position of the enemies on the stage, without their internal disagreements being voiced, is enough to contrast their strategy with the Crown's supporters, and particularly with Hal's change of heart. The seated conversing conspirator versus the upright, declaiming Crown defender is the basic theatrical translation of disunity and reunification.

Much of the disagreement within this scene is based not so much on unsettled scores between Hotspur and Glendower, but on the divisions within the Kingdom and the differences of nationality. How could the director manage to translate this division theatrically, using a theatrical language of Far Eastern origin, to a French audience? Two methods are at her disposal; either by means of the translation or the creation of 'états' as part of the theatrical language. Throughout the scene Hotspur pokes fun at the fact that Glendower and the ladies speak another language totally alien to him. To compound his displeasure, to find a lady speaking Welsh confirms his belief that it is a language of weakness and femininity. To show to a French audience the differences in origin of the Welsh language from English, Mnouchkine strays from the path of close translation. Hotspur's line 'I think there's no man speaks better Welsh',<sup>19</sup> is translated by Mnouchkine in such a way as to exacerbate the strangeness of the Welsh: 'Je pense que le gallois est du chinois pour moi'.<sup>20</sup> This is the translation of the Orientalist widening the gap between East and West to explain differences not readily comprehensible of and in the West. Shakespeare, of course, initiates this Orientalist approach, as Mortimer explains, to his Western audience, Hotspur's character traits:

Courageux comme un lion, affable prodigieusement  
Et aussi généreux que les mines de l'Inde.<sup>21</sup>

In terms of 'états', the representatives of the Kingdom are portrayed by contrasting displays of behaviour as well as language. Douglas, the Scot, leaps athletically around the stage, having

used, one can only presume, an unbroken and fearless stallion as his starting point, since 'Le mot de peur n'existe pas en écossais'.<sup>22</sup> Obviously the Welsh spoken and sung in the play would be as incomprehensible and exotic to a French audience as would Chinese to which it is associated. This is not an Orientalist approach pure and simple. Mnouchkine is using the theatrical language of the Orientalist to show us our lack of understanding and our distanciation from it in order to, thereby, exemplify the differences between Western languages and cultures themselves, even within the one Kingdom. Yet the Orientalist's approach to anything incomprehensible, foreign, and perhaps slightly exotic has one final repercussion. Welsh is descended from the language of the Brythons, the indigenous inhabitants of Britain and colonized successively by Gauls, Romans and Normans in much the same way as the Europeans successively colonized the East, expressed in Shakespeare's references to exploitation: 'aussi généreux que les mines de l'Inde'. Yet the Orient is where the sun rises and, by extension, where life originates, so by associating Welsh with Chinese, for example, Mnouchkine could, however unwittingly, be making a political statement.

The preparations continue to differ markedly in the opposing camps in Act IV, as the battle approaches. The tension created by the imminence of the battle is achieved visually as the backdrops change from scene to scene and with each change comes an even larger golden sun. We get the impression that the closer the action gets to the sun the more cataclysmic the battle will be. It could be said, in fact, that these painted backdrops are themselves able

to tell the story on a purely visual level, for as the sun looms even larger, it appears to slowly self-destruct, piece by piece, conveying the message of total devastation. The impression given is that the designer has managed to split the atom. To accompany this succession of 'exploding' backdrops, the two lighting states of full sun and setting sun manage to convey the transition from one scene and camp to the other, and collectively the passage of time.

As for the rebels, their scene alters little with the setting sun of the camp. For Falstaff and cohorts, the change of scene is great. Eastcheap disappears from the scene list forever and to mark this, Falstaff rolls up the mat which represented his drinking den, cursing profusely, slings it over his shoulder and walks off. To take up his bed and to walk is an unmistakable biblical reference in much the same manner as the *pietà* in *Richard II*. It would indeed be a miracle if by doing so, Falstaff could convince the audience of his being cured of cowardice. The delineation of character according to 'states' does not permit drastic character changes anyway. Hence Falstaff's costume for his new role is of the same design hilariously protected by part of an old beer keg as his breastplate. As Hal predicted just before the interval, Falstaff's soldiers are a motley crew of wasters and criminals. Mnouchkine avoids the insertion at this late stage of new characters, extras or not, and Falstaff's army is constituted simply by Bardolph and Peto to represent the following:

De ceux, en vérité, qui n'ont jamais été soldats,  
des valets malhonnêtes qu'on a fichus à la porte,  
des fils cadets de frères cadets, des apprentis  
d'auberge en rupture de contrat et des garçons  
d'écurie sans écurie, les parasites d'un monde  
tranquille et d'une longue paix, dix fois plus

troués de trous indignes qu'un vieil étendard troue  
de dignes trous.<sup>23</sup>

Their standard in fact turns out to be an extremely old and worn-out Union Jack which has seen better days, fitting for its bearers and a suitable symbol for the Union in disarray. The indication of a collection of criminals from the prisons like a Foreign Legion regiment to fill the ranks may indeed inspire the reader with little confidence. Falstaff proudly admits:

De la chair à canon, de la chair à canon. Ils  
rempliront une tombe aussi bien que les  
meilleurs.<sup>24</sup>

But what the spectator sees at the Cartoucherie is an army incapable of even winning the slightest skirmish. Mnouchkine builds up to the battle, in theatrical terms, through the anxieties expressed in the enemy camp, orally, through the backdrops, visually, and through the accompanying percussion, musically. Because the characters are speaking about and through themselves at the same time, characterization is not achieved in terms of psychological realism. This permits the exaggeration of Falstaff's motley collection of soldiers on the stage, without ever making the possibility of their eventual victory seem ridiculous. As shall be explained subsequently, since the actors are the characters telling their own stories, their athletic prowess or skill on the battlefield is not everything which commends them. It is the story which will dictate the outcome purely and simply. The audience are thus denied any involvement with the plot or with the characters.

This distanciation of the audience is achieved through the storytelling of the action, much more approachable in the scenes of





will be accomplished after such understatement. Generally in this scene, what we see differs markedly from what we hear. The athleticism of the actors is at odds with the tales of the soldiers' exhaustion. The affection shown verbally between Brulcoeur and Blunt is at odds with the pair on individual 'tatami', separated by the laws of convention, both of the battlefield and the performance language.

Both of these apparent contradictions affect the audience very little. What does affect them is the position they find themselves in after hearing Brulcoeur's long story of what took place after Bolingbroke's accession to the throne: the banishments, the broken promises and the injustice. Because of the conventions of the delivery, Brulcoeur speaks directly to the audience rather than to Blunt, in much the same way as the characters of the Revolution engaged the audience in 1789. By appealing directly to us, by filling us in with the previously unspoken history which took place between *Richard II* and *Henry IV*, he engages our sympathies. But he engages them purely on the same level as would a storyteller and contradicts, momentarily, our feelings for the King's side, despite him still being in the 'state' of the hot-headed and hard-hearted Hotspur. Because of the convention of delivery, Brulcoeur is given a soliloquy in much the same manner as Hal revealed the reasons for his dissolute behaviour to the audience. Rather than revealing his character here, he reveals the course of history. In a theatre, a Western audience is unsympathetic to the latter and although it may temporarily force us to adjust our vision of the King, we experience a strange desire

for the predestined outcome to run its course, with our sole interest being in its execution in the Soleil's theatrical language. Act IV, scene ii, in which the Archbishop of York and Sir Michael, though rebels, stand back to view the situation from the outside like a stage audience, as it were, is cut. Allowing them to list the warriors on each side and weigh up which side will win, Mnouchkine has not deemed necessary for one good reason: this stage audience is superfluous since, because our belief in predestination has been reaffirmed unavoidably (by distancing us from the action), we can read the portents for ourselves.

The portents thrive, the battle looms, and the Prince predicts its nature:

Le vent du Sud  
 Annonce ses projets en sonnant de la trompe,  
 Et dans les feuilles, son rauque sifflement  
 Nous prédit la tempête et un jour fracassant.<sup>27</sup>

It is Falstaff who, though not appearing until the end of the scene (V,1), renders this prediction true. He enters from the furthest catwalk alongside a backdrop now just a simple blood-red colour. As he passes he ruffles the curtain, giving the impression of a smouldering fire. The further he goes, the more intense the rippling effect becomes. That Falstaff should be the one chosen to initiate the battle thus would appear incongruous given the excessive logic and lack of comprehension of the term 'honneur', which never failed to be applauded:

Qu'est-ce que cet honneur? De l'air! Sacré bilan!  
 Qui a l'honneur? Le type qui est mort mercredi. Le  
 sent-il? Non! L'entend-il? Non! Il est  
 imperceptible alors? Pour les morts, oui. Mais il  
 ne vit pas chez les vivants? Non! Pourquoi? La

médiance ne le permet pas. Donc je n'en veux pas.<sup>219</sup>

Yet in the same way as his ironic tone undercuts the concept of honour, so does his rippling action of the curtain undercut the excitement which a stage battle might otherwise provide.

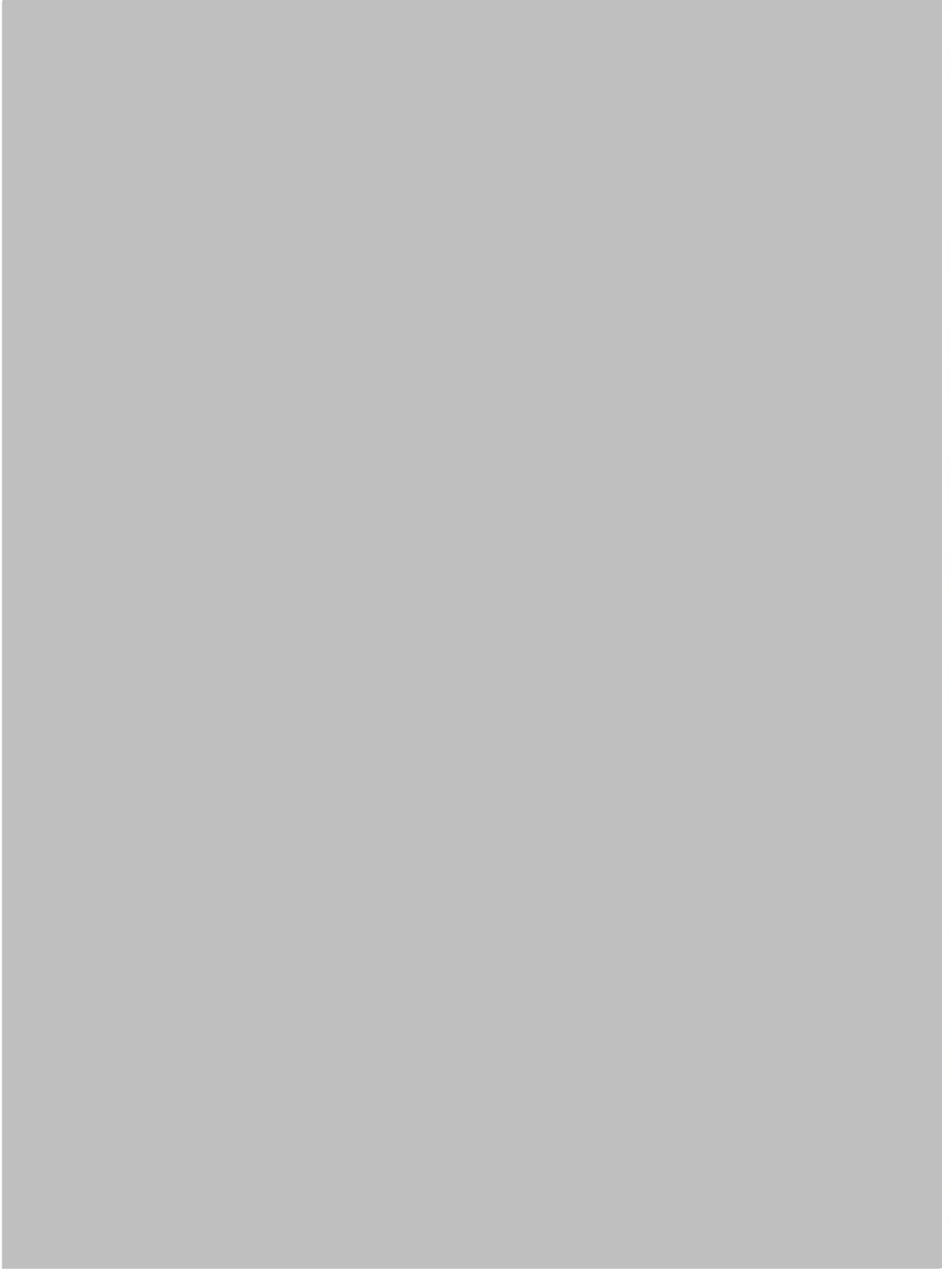
That Falstaff should undercut the possible excitement or entertainment value of the battle is in keeping with the musical, scenic and theatrically linguistic interpretations which have much the same effect. The music resounds, the actors rush and tumble athletically across the stage, yet each heroic action has something to undermine it. As Brulcoeur hurdles adroitly over the throne-like table, Hal characteristically crawls underneath it. Death, too, loses all of its gore and is similarly parodied and undermined. When a character dies, he falls to the floor in an upright squatting position, hands on hips and head hanging. When Falstaff, to save himself, has to feign death, he adopts the same undeathlike pose to hilarious effect. The translation of Falstaff's lines, too, achieves much the same thing:

Si Percy est vivant, je le perce. S'il me barre le chemin évidemment, sinon c'est moi qui volontairement me trouve sur le sien, alors qu'il me cuise en chiche-kebab.<sup>220</sup>

This tongue-in-cheek though vivid reference to the carnage of war has the same effect as him equating the danger of his life with the approaching concept of 'honneur'. By extension, therefore, honour is seen on this stage as a corpse in an unnatural squatting pose.

By this time the enemies of the King have taken to the battlefield dressed in black like Samurai warriors riding into battle, and sport horses' tails attached to their head-dresses.





Maurice Durozier as Douglas, *Henry IV*  
(*première partie*)



The death of Douglas, *Henry IV* (première partie)



Prince Henry on the battlefield, *Henry IV* (première partie)





ritualized to complete what would seem a suggested sexual consummation.

The final battle, generally speaking, is reduced to personalities in this production. There is no textual or visual reference to any other combat whatsoever. If it does exist, it does not affect the outcome. Mnouchkine has no such thing as mock armies invading the stage attempting to universalize the battle for the outcome hinges on the dual between the chief personalities: Brulcoeur and Hal. It is fitting, therefore, that the conflict is resolved by the consummation of the two partners in this marriage battle. The irony emerges, however, in the final scene when, despite his success, Hal has still not perfected that circular court entrance. One could conclude that infused with the 'states' of valour and courage, he is infused with the 'states' of the vanquished. One is made to wonder whether Hal can only achieve these 'states' in the same manner as his father who acquired his 'état' of King by deposing his predecessor, Richard.

Anne Neuschäfer, in her book *Le Théâtre du Soleil: Shakespeare*, sees this duel, or rather (in terms of character construction) the suffusion of one epitomized 'état' with another, as a process of character development:

Par ce duel, le prince a tranché radicalement le problème de la succession royale en sa faveur, mais a chargé sa conscience.<sup>35</sup>

The conversion of character through the drama has echoes elsewhere in *Henry IV* as well as in the cycle as a whole:

Mais, à un autre niveau, les évidences déclinent et les perspectives se renversent: le roi Henry devient un père préoccupé, Hotspur se glisse dans la peau d'un jeune héros sacrifié qui, mort, mérite

la plainte de Hal. [...] Même retournement chez Bolingbroke qui laisse échapper l'immensité de son désespoir et de son amour pour sa victime.

There are even references in the text to the outward appearance of a character being the manifestation of that character in essence such as Worcester's definition of Brulcoeur in Act V, scene ii:

Il est Brulcoeur, le sans cervelle, le jouet de  
ses humeurs.<sup>36</sup>

The 'état de base' of a character is definitive ('le sans cervelle'), it is something which never changes, likewise the gestures and emotional 'states' of the characters remain constant throughout the play, even though the scene and the situation may alter dramatically. For example, Hotspur's battlefield even extends as far as the bedroom.

This constancy to the 'état' is what Neuschäfer describes as 'une typisation à outrance'<sup>37</sup> and is typical of the mistake many critics make in associating this typification and stylization of character, the essence of formalist theatre practice, with the psychological development of character of the Ibsenite theatre. Neuschäfer, after acknowledging this development in most of the characters, despite their typification, goes on to single out Malvolio and Falstaff as characters which do not undergo this development. Nevertheless, as has already been pointed out, with Hal's ultimate failure in perfecting his court entrance, even after proving himself on the battlefield, his 'état de base' has been left unchanged, in the same way indeed as Falstaff and Malvolio. The mistake of such criticism is to equate the development of 'substates' (in this case, reactions to different situations and

emotions) of all the characters in the cycle, comically typified or not, with psychological development.

To trace the origin of this mistaken equation implies a failure to appreciate that the actor, from the very beginning, recognizes his position as regards his role. The programme notes to *Henry IV* give us an initial indication that the actors play characters who are storytellers themselves:

Les personnages de *Henry IV* sont des métaphores palpitantes qui font de la vie un art perpétuel, tous atteints, altérés, ivres de désir et de jouissance, balayés par le démon du temps et de la guerre, galopant à l'assaut de leur propre destin, tels les messagers de l'épopée.

The actors are at once narrators of the drama and participants in the drama. They speak through and about themselves at the same time:

Chacun est un héros de chanson de geste, écorché, dilaté, innocent, toujours en danger, qui rêve sa vie avec sérieux. Chacun a un système solaire dans la poitrine, chacun est le poète de son aventure, aucun n'y résiste, tous s'y abandonnent et la racontent en détail, avec fièvre, impudeur et inconscience, imagination et gaieté. Peut-être l'acteur est-il alors un envoyé qui part chercher très loin dans les profondeurs de l'Histoire, de l'imagination, de la poésie, au lointain du désert, les passions humaines d'un personnage.

Their journey is their research, their discovery of a 'state' and the evolution of their 'substates' throughout their journey. The performance, therefore, becomes as much a presentation of their research (their 'states' in all their forms) as a narration of the printed text. The notes continue:

Comme un messager consciencieux et fidèle, il devrait revenir, en guenilles magnifiques, dire ce qu'il a vu et ce qu'il a vécu pendant son voyage, à ce même public qui l'a investi d'une mission merveilleuse: évoquer en dessins simples et

splendides et incarner parmi nous, ici et maintenant, un être humain.

The re-enactment of a history coupled with the storytelling has its roots in the influence of the Oriental theatres and is, furthermore, a recognition of the unreality of the theatrical event and a retention of the disbelief.

How this dual function of the actors relates to the performances can be seen in the following extracts from the rehearsal notes. The idea of the actors imitating a strolling company from the Far East, telling stories and narrating histories, would underline the importance of the spectator not being made to suspend his disbelief:

Pense au village, sur ce haut-plateau, aux confins de l'Himalaya, à la piste de terre battue, la caravane s'y arrête et joue une dernière fois cette histoire avant que le village ne soit bloqué par les neiges.[...] Chacun a son royaume, chacun est le roi de ses émotions, de ses récits et de ses aventures; à ce moment là, tu es le centre du monde. Reste dans ta bulle! Raconte-nous ton aventure, ce qui se passe en toi, c'est cela qui est intéressant. Tu es un conteur.<sup>361</sup>

The performance part of the production with the actors talking about and through the characters at the same time is thus symptomatic of the whole event at the Cartoucherie, which attempts to remove the barriers between 'scène' and 'salle'.

The development of production technique by the opening of the third play in the cycle is founded firmly on the use of scenic space. The conventions of 'scène' and 'salle' which were respected during the performance of *Richard II* are almost completely ignored in *Henry IV*. Falstaff transgresses the barrier and uses the auditorium space as a convenient place to seek refuge in times of

trouble. Hal, too, engages the audience's sympathies by involving them in his conspiracy with Poin to cheat Falstaff, (he keeps watch in the auditorium space, too). Such characters become more tangible in consequence and make the fear of the battle spreading beyond the stage space more real. It is an often agreed fact that the actors mingling with the audience, whether inside or outside the play proper, affects that audience's feelings towards the characters those actors play. Consequently, it is interesting to note that it is what Armelle Héliot describes as the 'scènes de détour' with such characters as Falstaff and Hal, and not the court scenes, which could possibly have the greatest opportunity to engage the audience's sympathies.

Yet it is in *Henry IV* that these 'scènes de cour' and 'scènes de détour' are indissociable, thus engaging sympathies is not restricted to individual characters. Armelle Héliot explains:

...dans cette pièce drame et burlesque se mêlent, inextricablement, s'engendrant littéralement. La versatilité, marque de *Henry IV*, est aussi celle qui renverse tout rire en sanglot et toute joie en cruelle douleur.<sup>39</sup>

Mnouchkine acknowledges this as a conscious decision on her part:

Et si les parties franchement comiques sont beaucoup plus présentes et prises à tout moment dans la trame dramatique - jusque sur le champ de bataille, par exemple -, ce rire s'inverse sans relâche.<sup>40</sup>

Two examples of this are extremely vivid in production; Falstaff's 'chiche-kébab' reference on the textual side and Douglas's hilarious uncontrollable 'whinnying' on the theatre language side. Both could be deemed incongruously cheap jokes played precariously at moments of high dramatic and tragic tension. They also seem the

converse of the extreme tragedy befalling many of the characters in *La Nuit des rois*. Both are a mixture of genres and the company acknowledges that the equilibrium is achieved by the third play played somewhere between the two genres. Erhard Stiefel, the creator of the masks, spent six months in Japan in 1982 prior to rehearsals of *Henry IV*. He acknowledges the influence of the *Kyogen/Noh* mix on the play:

J'ai beaucoup appris également du *kyogen*, dont les personnages comiques peuvent porter des masques apparemment analogues à ceux du nô: les traits sont les mêmes mais l'expression diffère, au lieu de nous apparaître violents, ils nous semblent ridicules [...] Dans *Henry IV* j'espère produire une opposition entre tragique et comique identique à celle qu'on trouve entre le nô et le *kyogen*, sans pour autant faire des masques japonais.<sup>41</sup>

And so a mixture of genres, serious drama and analogous comic situations was accomplished rather than an alternation, and the mixture of *Noh* and *Kyogen* styles within the one scene required the audience to adopt an entirely new emotional response.

From the 'Cahiers de mise en scène' written by Sophie Moscoso, the assistant director, we can get some indication of how Mnouchkine went about establishing the mixture of genres in the play, but not simply on the level of altering the focus of contradictory comic and tragic scenes. Mnouchkine's belief in Shakespeare going 'droit au cœur des contradictions' was communicated to the actors at all times. In the notes for 23 April 1983, some nine months before the opening of the production, the instructions to Mortimer were as follows:

Attention      angélisme      mi dieu      mi démon

Further notes to Mortimer continue in the same biblical vein of being half-God, half-devil, like a fallen angel, as it were. These point to the 'état de base' of Mortimer as being self-contradictory, not allowing for the subsequent 'states' which will alter his emotional responses. Similarly John Arnold, as King Henry, is reminded of his 'état de base'.

comme un Roi nègre, *un roi pauvre*  
la splendeur intérieure.

Of course there is nothing contradictory in the fact that Mnouchkine should point to the King being black, after all there are a good deal more African tribal Kings than West European monarchs. But the fact that this King should also be played a poor King points to an Orientalist attitude of the dominance, the wealth and the power of a white King. It is an Orientalist attitude in the broadest possible sense, as Edward W. Saïd refers to North Africa and the Middle East in his book *Orientalism*. Mnouchkine, the notes reveal, equates 'nègre' with poverty and the status of a King alters little, much to the discredit of the Orientalists. Nevertheless, perhaps Mnouchkine was referring, by this, to Othello or even perhaps Oroonoko, an African King captured by white slave traders. The apparent self-contradiction of a captive King, a poor King, or a black King (from an Orientalist point of view), is indicative of this production's belief in the idea of kingship being self-perpetuating and perennial despite the changes of royal personages and in the fortunes of state. Georges Bigot is Mnouchkine's archetypal and perennial royal representative, be he Richard, Orsino, or Prince Hal.



Another contradiction is the dual function of the battlefield. Anne Neuschäfer sees this as the place where Hal 'grows up' and evolves as a character. Yet the rehearsal notes reveal that rather than growing up, Hal is actually born:

il naît dans le champ de bataille.  
 (Brulcoeur - tout armé - naît facilement, meurt  
 facilement).  
 Son Père par l'insulte l'accouche.  
 Naît difficilement.  
 C'est un héros qui naît.

Although the battlefield is a place where men may die, many others are born. Being born comes after the 'states' of 'infantilism' referred to throughout the earlier part of the play. Brulcoeur, of course, was already armed to the teeth in his 'état de base', so he could be born and eventually die easily. Hal's armour, in other words a similar 'état de base', is missing and therefore his 'birth' is a much more difficult process. Given this language of 'états' as set out in the rehearsal notes, one should take care not to confuse the transition through substates of Hal's unarmed 'état de base' as being psychological development. And so, therefore, all these apparent contradictions have one common denominator: whether the 'état de base' of 'angélisme' is in the 'substates' of 'mi-dieu' or 'mi-démon', of the King in the 'substates' of 'Roi nègre' or 'Roi pauvre', or of the warrior in the 'substates' of 'naître facilement' or 'naître difficilement', the actual 'état de base' does not alter. Consequently, the point at which this method is criticized is where characters such as Falstaff do not pass through or assimilate 'substates' apparently contradictory to their 'etats de base' and, therefore, have less depth of characterization.

This imposition of apparently contradictory 'substates' is further reflected in the form of the theatrical language. In keeping with the Japanese principle of 'tatami', characters initially remain firmly within their own environment and, during confrontations, within their own matted stage covering. Maurice Durozier, who plays Douglas, explains what happens when, after establishing this ritual, the characters fail to respect it:

Il y a le moment où tout à coup on voit apparaître le personnage, et on dit: voilà, c'est lui, lui qui va le jouer; c'est assez évident; ensuite il faut continuer à le nourrir, le faire évoluer et suivre les étapes des autres personnages. Dans *Henry IV* ça a fonctionné par familles de personnages: il y avait les nobles d'un côté et les personnages populaires qu'on appelait les *Kyogens* entre nous, toujours en référence au théâtre oriental; tout d'un coup un des personnages, par exemple un noble, franchissait un palier, et alors il fallait que tous les autres personnages franchissent un palier aussi.<sup>42</sup>

Like tribes of Samurai warriors, these families are kept poles apart, rarely colliding except in a stylized manner on the symbolic battlefield mat. In Japanese fashion, the laws of individual and family territories are respected until, of course, certain members transgress these boundaries. Each family has its production style and genre (the comedy is the domain of the *Kyogens*), and is an example of Orientalism at arms length. But it is only when these boundaries are transgressed and the styles and genres mixed that the drama becomes truly Orientalized.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

1. Armelle Héliot, 'Mnouchking *Henry IV*', *Le Quotidien de Paris*, 12 January 1984.
2. Armelle Héliot, '*Henry IV* par le Théâtre du Soleil', *Acteurs*, no.18 (March-April 1984). 32-5 (p.33).
3. Armelle Héliot, '*Henry IV* par le Théâtre du Soleil', p.33.
4. Armelle Héliot, '*Henry IV* par le Théâtre du Soleil', p.34.
5. Act I, scene i, p.9. (This and all subsequent quotations are from Mnouchkine's translation, unless stated otherwise).
6. Act I, scene i, p.12.
7. Act II, scene iii, p.48.
8. Yvonne Rainer, 'From an Indian Journal', *TDR/The Drama Review*, 15, 3 (Spring 1971), 132-8 (p.136).
9. Act II, scene iii, p.50.
10. Armelle Héliot, '*Henry IV* par le Théâtre du Soleil', p.33.
11. Armelle Héliot, '*Henry IV* par le Théâtre du Soleil', p.33.
12. Armelle Héliot, '*Henry IV* par le Théâtre du Soleil', p.33..
13. Act II, scene ii, pp.45-6.
14. Act II, scene ii, p.45.
15. Act II, scene iv, p.73.
16. Act II, scene iv, p.82.
17. Act III, scene ii, p.100.
18. Act III, scene ii, p.102.
19. William Shakespeare, *The First Part of King Henry the Fourth*, edited by P.H. Davison, New Penguin Shakespeare, Act III, scene i, p.97.
20. Act III, scene i, p.85. (This and all subsequent quotations are from Mnouchkine's translation).
21. Act III, scene i, p.91.
22. Act IV, scene i, p.121.
23. Act IV, scene ii, pp.125-6.

24. Act IV, scene ii, p.127.
25. Act IV, scene ii, p.120.
26. Act IV, scene i, p.123.
27. Act V, scene i, p.139.
28. Act V, scene i, p.145.
29. Act V, scene iii, p.154.
30. Act III, scene ii, pp.101-2.
31. Act V, scene iv, p.154.
32. Jan Kott, 'Le Théâtre japonais', *Travail Théâtral*, no.16 (July-September 1974), 91-107 (p.104).
33. Act V, scene ii, p.150.
34. Act V, scene ii, p.149.
35. Anne Neuschäfer and Frédéric Serror, *Le Théâtre du Soleil: Shakespeare*, p.22
36. Act V, scene ii, p.146
37. Neuschäfer and Serror, p.23
38. Martine Franck, Raymonde Temkine and Sophie Moscoso, 'Les Conseils d'Ariane Mnouchkine aux comédiens pendant les répétitions de *Henry IV*', *Le Théâtre du Soleil: Shakespeare 2<sup>e</sup> partie*, Double Page, no.32 (1984).
39. Armelle Héliot, '*Henry IV* par le Théâtre du Soleil', p.34.
40. Armelle Héliot, '*Henry IV* par le Théâtre du Soleil', p.33.
41. Erhard Stiefel, 'Le Créateur de masques et sa participation au spectacle', *Le Masque: Du rite au théâtre*, p.81.
42. Anne Berger, ed., 'En Plein Soleil', *Fruits*, nos.2-3 (June 1984), p.173.

## CHAPTER FIVE:

## MNOUCHKINE AND ORIENTALISM

To examine the Orientalism manifest in Mnouchkine's Shakespeare is to focus on the function and the attributes of every element of theatre outside the text, since the plays in any case are of occidental origin. The range of aural and visual equipment established during 'Les Shakespeare' (1981-4), though never codified in an oriental sense, needs to be catalogued here to show how Mnouchkine interprets theatrical Orientalism and how she applies it to the Western stage. This equipment (being manifestations of Orientalism) constitutes an extra-textual theatrical language. It appears as a direct descendant of a language advocated by Artaud (himself inspired by the Orient). To conform in part to most Far Eastern theatres, Artaud advocated the realignment of the theatrical roles and the repositioning of the text in the event:

Etant donné cet assujettissement du théâtre à la parole on peut se demander si le théâtre ne posséderait pas par hasard son langage propre, s'il serait absolument chimérique de le considérer comme un art indépendant et autonome, au même titre que la musique, la peinture, la danse, etc., etc.'

Artaud is one of many theorists (and practitioners) who, in the twentieth century, have been seeking a 'total' theatre, an ideal theatre using every means of expression and one which has been interpreted in many ways. One can hypothesize that the Artaud-inspired theatrical language of Mnouchkine's theatre, a plastic and non-literary one in essence, is that of such a theatre. Any

theatrical language which imposes its rules, conventions and grammar creates, by necessity, a form for the theatre. The most interesting aspect of Mnouchkine's form is that it is, above all, Orientalist.

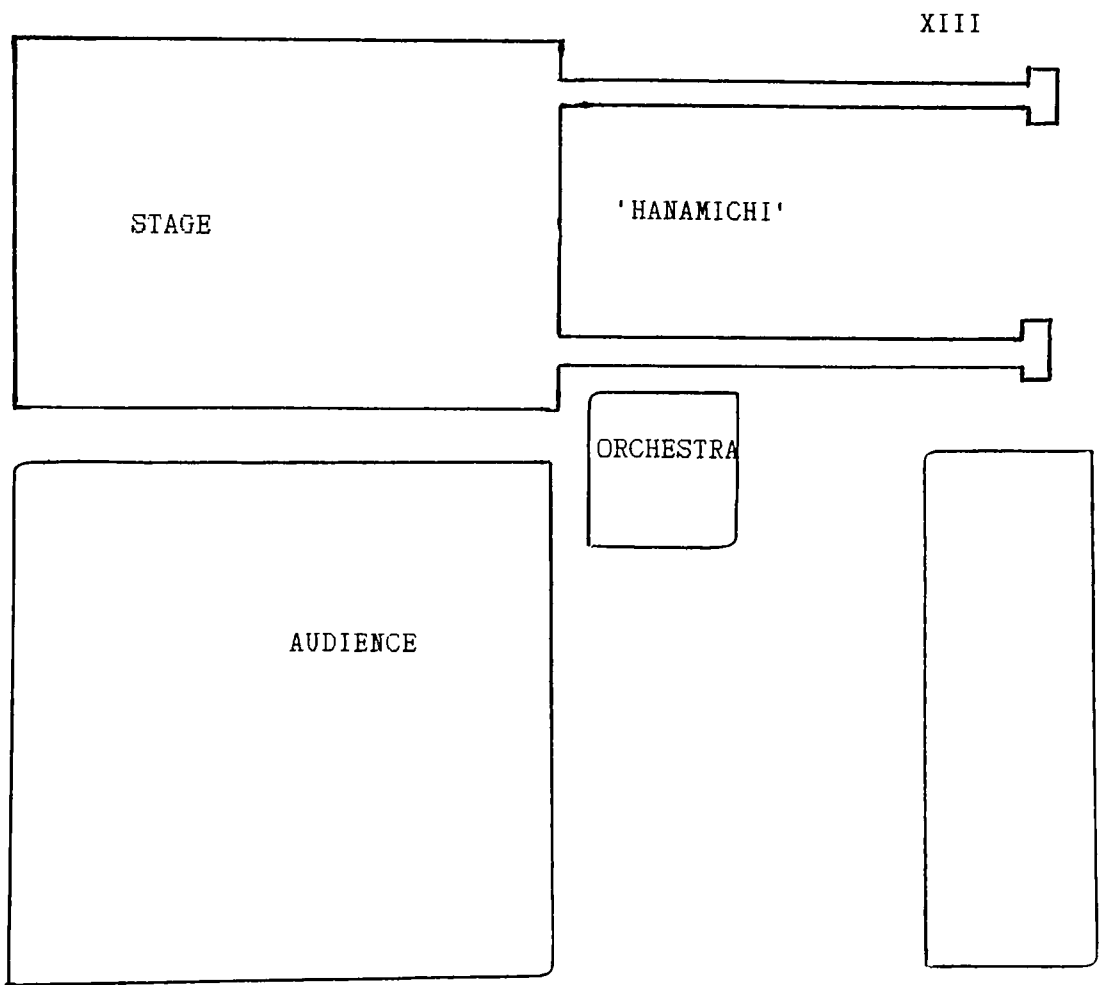
Perhaps the most important aspect of this language or 'art' is the environment created for its subsequent application. Artaud's ideas for the environment of his ideal performance, his so-called 'Théâtre de la Cruauté', put an end to the traditional auditoria conventions of 'scène' and 'salle':

C'est pour prendre la sensibilité du spectateur sur toutes ses faces, que nous préconisons un spectacle tournant, et qui au lieu de faire de la scène et de la salle deux mondes clos, sans communication possible, répande ses éclats visuels et sonores sur la masse entière des spectateurs.<sup>2</sup>

Far from attempting to realize Artaud's plans for a revolving performance, Mnouchkine had her spectators sit in a rigid 'scène/salle' conformation, but a traditional conformation with a difference. The whole arena, the three hangars of the Cartoucherie including the entrance hall, were all areas of performance which broke the spell of the play proper. The spectacle was as much to be seen in the actors preparations in an open-to-all dressing room and in the actors' doubling as programme sellers and barstaff in the entrance-hall hangar, as on the stage. The action of the play varied according to each production but stuck closely to the raised platforms and catwalks. As the cycle of plays progressed with time the company became more and more inventive and liberal in their use of space. Not only did they allow the action to spill over into the raked auditorium (such as in the Gadshill scene of *Henry IV*), but

also to continue right underneath the raked seating bank. The audience was completely surrounded by the spectacle (Plate XIII).

The stage space proper and the actual raised platform and catwalks were based on the configuration of auditoria of the Japanese *Kabuki* theatre, yet it never was acknowledged openly by Mnouchkine. The similarities between the Oriental configuration and Mnouchkine's Orientalized version were unmistakable. In the *Kabuki* theatre the audience is surrounded on three sides: the stage to the front and the catwalks ('hanamichi') on either side, almost hemming them in at a 90° angle to the stage. 'Hanamichi' literally translates as 'flower path' and the idea was originally borrowed by the *Kabuki* theatre from the Sumo wrestling arenas where patrons would lay gifts of flowers to favoured wrestlers. In the theatre the wrestlers are replaced by actors. The 'hanamichi' are not only lit by the house lights which remain fully illuminated during the performance but also by two rows of footlights along either side. The dramatic effect of these 'hanamichi' and their method of illumination is a great one. By being so close to the actors and by being so excessively illuminated, the actors are turned into mannequin-type figures in a shop-window display. They are the main routes for all important entrances and exits and for the 'mie', the traditional static, two-dimensional and photographic *Kabuki* pose. Leonard Pronko points out that this configuration has been transferred to the Western stage on two previous occasions; by Max Reinhardt in *Oedipus* in 1910, and by Meyerhold in Ostrovsky's *The Forest* in 1924. The closest the British theatre has come to approach this kind of configuration using 'hanamichi'-like runways



'Scène/salle' configuration of the Cartoucherie for  
'Les Shakespeare'



or catwalks was in the Royal Shakespeare Company's production of *Nicholas Nickleby* at the Aldwych Theatre, London in 1980. On this occasion, however, it was notable that the original dramatic purpose of such catwalks, namely to freeze and enlarge emotions and intensify the spectacle amongst the audience was long forgotten, and instead they were used to involve the audience in the action, to generate excitement, and to convey the whirlwind nature of the passing of time. And so, even though similarities can be drawn between the *Kabuki* configuration and the *Nickleby* one in the actual and physical sense, the latter could never be considered a product of Orientalism for one simple reason: the dramatic purpose of the latter is totally alien to the original.

Mnouchkine's dramatic purpose in her use and misuse of the *Kabuki* configuration was much more authentically faithful than might at first appear: she completely removed the 'hanamichi' from their position within the auditorium at a 90° angle from their original. Consequently they could not be used for bringing the enlarged emotions closer to the audience since they are now at a greater remove. Mnouchkine also retained the 'agemaku', the curtained entry boxes at the end of the 'hanamichi', yet again their original dramatic effect was negated. In *Kabuki* the noise of the entry box curtain being drawn back has the effect of provoking the entire audience to turn in their seats to face the back of the auditorium as the noise heralds the entrance of an important character or an imminent spectacle. As Pronko points out, this screeching noise becomes a pleasant one because of the expectation it invokes in the audience. In Mnouchkine's theatre the same noise

had little effect since the errant eye might have seen already a character step into the entry box in the first place, and being so far away from the audience it did not generate the same degree of excitement as would the movement of the entire audience turning in their seats. Yet the effect of the entrances in Mnouchkine's theatre was a spectacular one. The distance between the 'agemaku' and the stage-destination, spanned by the 'hanamichi', and the speed at which the actors, in many scenes, covered the distance between entrance and stage had the effect of turning the actor into a kind of human bullet being fired from the gun that is the ritual of the theatre and triggered invariably by the noise of the percussion. These human bullets then ricocheted off the glare of the stage space proper and finally came to rest, after spinning literally in a circle, in fixed poses. All the while their faces remained transfixed on the audience no matter the position of the body, and as if the audience were constantly training a rifle on them. The conventions of the entrances and exits had the same effect of establishing characters and emotions as in the *Kabuki* theatre, even though the actors remained aloof on the 'hanamichi' and still further away. What is more significant, however, is that the effect of Mnouchkine's Orientalized configuration and its use by the actors was one of embuing the spectators with the role of inquisitor and interrogator since the actors were forced to play directly to them. And thus by the Orientalization of an Oriental form, Mnouchkine embued the audience with a dramatic function.

The stage configurations, the propulsion of the actors onto stage, their poses and their exits were the basis for the highly

athletic and thus visually exciting aspect of the actors' performance. Yet that is not to say that 'Les Shakespeare' was one constantly fast-moving spectacle, however. Much of the acting in the court scenes, in the scenes of long verbal dialogue and argument was executed statically, with the actors keeping their faces fixed permanently on the audience, as if that metaphorical shotgun were being trained on them. These static scenes thus gave the appearance of the actors facing a firing squad. Static full-front acting is something of course which originates in 'Kabuki': 'shomen engi'. James R. Brandon describes it as follows:

The typical way of playing static scenes, in particular, scenes set within buildings, where normal Japanese etiquette prescribes that people sit quietly on a mat floor.<sup>3</sup>

Japanese social conventions thus force the actors apart as each of the characters is assigned 'tatami' (a mat). The risk of realistic acting which demands characters to transgress their boundaries is thus eliminated and the form of the acting is established. Mnouchkine's mat floor, however, did not conform to a domestic interior but rather to a public interior whose divisions between 'tatami', from the audience's perspective, were vertical. This verticality separated the actors across the breadth of the stage and forced them to establish a communal point of contact in the audience. The full-front acting adopted by Mnouchkine for these court scenes was not chosen out of a desire to remain faithful to *Kabuki* traditions, but was simply necessitated by the very nature of the stage design.

Perhaps the most notable examples of full-front acting in

'Les Shakespeare' were with the confrontations between Bolingbroke and Mowbray in *Richard II*. To begin with, the two characters adopted positions within 'tatami' upstage, either side of Richard. Although pleading their case to Richard, standing behind them, they continued to face front. As their pleading intensified and their arguments became more heated, this acting convention began to alter. It did so in very much the same way as the 'Tsumeyori' movement in *Kabuki*. Brandon explains:

An active movement technique arising naturally out of situations in which the opponents argue while they are standing (usually in an exterior scene). As the argument grows more heated, the opposing actors (or groups of actors) gradually edge in toward each other, step by step.<sup>4</sup>

Mnouchkine exaggerated this technique by intensifying the emotions of the two characters requiring them at some time to be physically restrained and eventually committing the ultimate transgression of stepping over the black line separating the 'tatami' and breaking the conventions of social etiquette.

The opposition of public and private scenes was not translated literally on Mnouchkine's stage as the opposition of explosive, athletic acting with the static full-front acting. The athleticism, generally speaking, was the domain of the actors and director's invention, which principally consisted of entrances and exits. The public scenes, their long dialogues and numerous characters were performed in the static, full-front manner. That is not to say, however, that the overall outward performance of these scenes was static. Internal movement was visible at all levels of the actor's performance. Though he may have remained rooted to the

spot, the actor's corporeal movements were manifold; the flaring nostrils, the shaking limbs, the trembling cheeks, the jerky head movements were all examples of emotions suppressed, by necessity. Many critics believe this kind of performance language was based on the acting language of the *Kathakali* theatre yet there is no definite relationship between the codified body language of *mudras* and the often suppressed emotions of the agitated Soleil actor. Furthermore, the hand and head movements of the stage auditors conveyed and even betrayed their emotions to the dialogue or situation being narrated or performed, rather than symbolized or acted out a narration themselves. All these suppressed movements or emotions during full-front acting sequences contributed to a tension which may have exploded only verbally but was accorded an apotheosis and some physical relief by the explosive exit which followed.

The opposing internal and external, static and athletic movements of the acting technique were brought together at times by the mimetic stylizations of specific actions. One such stylization was that of horse-back riding. The obvious point of origin of this technique is in the Peking Opera. Leonard Pronko describes the Chinese original:

Every movement of any part of the body reveals character, situation, and some specific action, usually in symbolic terms. The best-known example is that of horseback riding, symbolized by the actor's carrying a whip. When he dismounts, he hands the whip to his servant.<sup>5</sup>

This technique in Mnouchkine's Orientalist interpretation imbued the symbolized mount with the character of the rider, making man

and mount indissociable and varying the action according to the characters of a given scene, all the while respecting such conventions as the vertical 'tatami'. It is this mixture of external stasis and internal movement, seeming to be constantly at odds with each another, which gave the theatrical language its force.

As the symbolized mount was an extension of man, which conveyed his character, so did the properties he held in his hands or the clothes he wore express his character and convey symbolically his emotions and his character. Character could be determined by masks, by properties such as parasols, and the eclectic additions to costumes such as Elizabethan ruffs. These seemed to bear an affinity with the three-dimensional rice paper 'cutti' of *Kathakali* theatre. In the 'kumadori' make-up of *Kabuki* theatre red, black and indigo lines have strictly codified meanings, yet Mnouchkine's three-dimensional Orientalized exaggeration of this (red string hanging from the corners of the actors' mouths) was perceived by the Westerner as a spurt of blood, symbol of an internal haemorrhaging of rage. All these Orientalizations were interpreted without any respect for their original intended meaning in their natural habitat. Yet it was the use of fans and parasols which provided the most interesting aspect of Mnouchkine's Orientalization. Such properties have their place in both *Noh* and *Kabuki* and are commonly used in dance sequences:

The fan helps the symbology of Japanese dance-gesture language. It may serve as a falling leaf, a tea cup, a letter, a moon rising behind a hill, a flute, a sword, or merely as a decorative adjunct to the dancer's movements. [...] 'The fan in use is no more than an extension of the arm'. The arm of

course is an extension of the body; and the body in dance, to the Japanese, is an extension of the meaning of the song.<sup>6</sup>

Mnouchkine's fans and parasols did not tell stories themselves. Instead they accompanied the storytellers, often betraying what the characters would rather have suppressed, in what were cases of apparently self-inflicted dramatic irony. Like all the other usages of the equipment of Oriental theatres, their Orientalization by Mnouchkine accorded them a dramatic function.

As we are beginning to define Mnouchkine's Orientalism and establishing it as the starting point for the discovery and development of a form for our Western theatre, so too must we consider one major aspect of that Orientalism in relation to the form of the theatre and its overall contribution to Orientalism: the music. Music played a large part in 'Les Shakespeare', it accompanied the actors throughout, developing alongside them during rehearsals and, punctuating the text, dictated the pace of the performances and contributed aurally to the excitement of the spectacle. Immediately prior to the opening of *Richard II* at the end of 1981, an International Festival of Musical Theatre took place in Rennes. The performances at that festival received extensive coverage in the national press. One of the groups singled out from it was the Jayu troupe from Seoul, South Korea:

Sur des structures rythmiques très contraignantes (les ponctuations sourdes ou sèches du tambour vertical, frappé de la main sur la face gauche, d'une baguette sur la face droite et sur la monture de bois). la voix se déploie avec une diversité et une richesse exceptionnelles.<sup>7</sup>

The form of the action was dictated in their productions by a

codified language of percussion sounds and physical gestures. Jacques Lonchamp in *Le Monde* uses this troupe's work to distinguish between the normal West European conception of the term 'musical theatre' as being plays with music on the lowest rung of the operatic scale, to a theatre into which the music infuses structure and form, and ultimately breathes life.

Comment définir le théâtre musical, terme d'autant plus à la mode que chacun met dessous ce qu'il veut? Disons que c'est la reconnaissance des pouvoirs de la musique dans un spectacle théâtral, liée au refus de formes trop marquées dans le temps (opéra, opéra-comique, drame lyrique, opérette) et à la volonté de collaborer étroitement avec les formes modernes du théâtre, voire de la danse, dans un spectacle plus ou moins total.<sup>29</sup>

This is the new definition of musical theatre which must be applied to Mnouchkine's 'Les Shakespeare' since all three productions slot neatly into this mode of the music conspiring to achieve a form for the theatre and at all times providing the music with a dramatic function.

As can be seen from the above example, Mnouchkine's use of music compares favourably with that of most Oriental theatres. The fact that an unknown theatre from South Korea, let alone the world famous *Kabuki* or Peking Opera, uses music as a dramatic device, suggests that there would be little point in comparing Oriental uses of music with Mnouchkine's own in 'Les Shakespeare'. In any event, Mnouchkine never admits to being influenced in this respect from an Oriental point of view, but more from an accepted historical position:

Les grandes traditions théâtrales, les grandes formes de jeu, utilisèrent le masque (de la tragédie grecque aux théâtres orientaux) et la musique (sauf la *commedia dell'arte*). Dans *Richard*



*Il le musicien a répété avec nous dès le début, il élaborait sa musique d'après l'exécution des comédiens; peu à peu sa partition est fixée.*"

Music and masks have been in existence in the theatre from its very beginning. By taking the instruments, therefore, and interpreting the musical codes and traditions of the Oriental theatres in the West, Mnouchkine was not operating out of motives of Orientalist recreation *per se*. Their use in a Western theatre can only ever be considered as Orientalist, but in the theatre whose immediacy clouds such intellectual conceptions of the term, the use of music is only ever seen as theatrically Orientalist in that, like the acting and the stage design and configuration, it leads to a form.

In Chapter Four it was pointed out how the music and the invention of the actors combined to form human acting instruments, each with his own rhythm and tonal quality. This took place during the Gadshill scene in *Henry IV* when the actors continued the percussion when the actual percussionists had ceased to play. It was a perfect example of how character was generated by the percussion. The rhythm of the text was infused with a musical vitality of its own, too. Here Eric Shorter criticizes the accompanying percussion:

The vitality of her troupe and its astonishing discipline (every line of each play seemed to be set to music of the drum-based far eastern kind) took the breath away - as well as Shakespeare.<sup>12</sup>

It would appear that Eric Shorter, at the time, was ignorant both of the music's composition and the integral role it played in the collectively creative process of rehearsal. The composer and chief musician, Jean-Jacques Lemêtre, attended all rehearsals and

participated in all of the improvisatory work, talks, discussions and visits which formed part of the rehearsals. He was a constant witness and contributor to the formation of the characters and explored sounds which might best represent each character in his or her 'état de base', and each of those character's emotions in their secondary 'substates'.

The function which the Soleil's music fulfilled in Western theatre was one which had been inaugurated in *Kathakali* theatre in the eighteenth century:

Puntottam Acchan Nambudri [...] introduced the custom of having the instrumentalists follow an actor's gestures and facial expressions [...] He insisted that the *maddalam* and *canta* [drums] rather than merely marking the rhythm, should emphasize the action, the emotional mood and intensity.<sup>11</sup>

Mnouchkine, of course, takes this a step further and by so doing actually creates character. John Arnold, one of the youngest members of the troupe at the time, assumed many of the older character roles on stage such as Jean de Gand and Henry IV. Not only did his old-age mask and his carefully controlled movements aid him in his depiction of the old and frail, so also did the music. On many occasions it was the percussion which slowed down the rhythm of his speech and dictated the speed of his moves. *Noh* theatre has the music achieve a similar effect:

Rather than imitating an old man, the actor should simply slow his movements so that each is slightly behind the beat.<sup>12</sup>

What we were left with ultimately was a kind of physical and aural syncopation that suggested frailty in much the same way as Prince Hal stumbled frantically behind the main court groupings, so

obviously suggestive of youthfulness and inexperience. This then was an indirect creation of character where the character reacted to percussion in empathy or syncopatedly in counterpoint.

Two instruments, however, were of much greater importance; the 'tampura', from India, whose function in *La Nuit des rois* has already been described in Chapter Three, and the 'samisen' from Japan, used in *Henry IV*, here described by Leonard Pronko:

A long-necked instrument whose sounding board is covered with catskin, it has three strings and is plucked with a plectrum. Because its range is somewhat similar to that of the human voice, it is used to mimic and accompany the intonations of the actors. Along with a narrator, or a group of singers, the samisen may continue the actors' speech or emotions, or may accompany them.<sup>13</sup>

The instrument has a dual, two-way function: as the voice of the actor can be turned into an instrument, so can an instrument, such as the 'tampura' or 'samisen', become a human voice. In *La Nuit des rois* the wailing sound of the 'tampura' empathetically accompanied Orsino and became a much more potently dramatic representation of anguish than a human voice could possibly be. Its potency lay in its quality of exaggeration. And so the actor-instrument relationship was an integral part of the form of the production. So integral a part did the music play in the productions that Odile Cointepas remarks that she fails to see how the productions could have been realised without it:

On n'imagine plus ce travail sans cette musique: la musique nous impose formellement des rythmes, mais ces rythmes, ils ont le jeu de l'acteur pour base: c'est un dialogue soutenu.<sup>14</sup>

Thus not only did the music impose rhythm, form and character, it reacted to and altercated with the actors and can be said,

therefore, to have created, by itself, a character all of its own.

Neither character proper nor musical character related specifically to one instrument or to the tonal quality of an instrument. What is more, the instruments did not necessarily originate in the Orient. As the cycle progressed, Jean-Jacques Lemêtre included a much wider selection of instruments from the four corners of the globe. He abandoned the obvious temptation of observing authenticity of instrument and sound and instead selected instruments according to their tonal qualities. Lemêtre describes the task appointed him and the relationship between actor and instrument which he had to keep in mind:

Le plus long, le plus délicat, cela aura été de trouver les instruments. Il fallait qu'ils s'accordent à la fois à la spécificité de la tragédie du roi Richard, au tragique, et au projet 'oriental' d'Ariane Mnouchkine: je ne veux pas dire, au contraire, que nous avons cherché le vraisemblable, ou que nous avons voulu faire dire quelque chose à la musique. Il fallait qu'elle soutienne le texte, mais qu'en même temps elle s'y plie. Le point fort reste, de toute façon, le comédien. Sa voix. La façon dont il articule, et projette le texte.<sup>15</sup>

Lemêtre here makes some very interesting indications concerning the role of the music in the production. The instruments, when assembled into an orchestra, must eventually apply themselves to all the subsequent aspects of this Orientalist project, not only to tragedy but to comedy as well. They must relate specifically to the individual tragedy of a particular play and of a particular character, yet overall they must fit in to the pattern of the tragic cycle of history plays, turning occasionally to the tragic potential of the comedies as well. The role of the music is not

symbolic. Neither is it interpretive. It has no meaning or function other than its accompaniment to the voice and movement of the actor, from whom the original creativity and the inspiration to the instrumentalists derive.

As the cycle progressed and as both actors and instrumentalists developed their repertoire of performance language, so did the collection of instruments alter. From the outset the problem arose of combining rhythm and melody, the oratory with the emotion. Lemêtre explains the dilemma:

Pour *Richard II* le problème de la musique ne s'est pas posé dans les mêmes termes: Ariane l'a tout de suite pensée par rapport à ce qu'elle cherchait du côté de la diction, de la déclamation. Aussi le travail sur la musique, sur la rythmique, celui sur la voix, se sont-ils faits absolument en même temps. C'est à partir du texte même que tout a été établi: il nous fallait trouver une métrique du langage, en quelque sorte, et concevoir ce langage, cette parole, avec une hauteur de ton.<sup>16</sup>

The language is the starting point and the delivery of the text is the source of inspiration for the instrumentalists. In *Richard II*, unlike the subsequent plays in the cycle, music and voice were rarely separated, they rarely performed dialogues with one another; here they 'sang' duets:

Dans *Richard* d'ailleurs, la musique marque surtout les entrées et les sorties. Il faut qu'elle échappe au pathétique: qu'elle soit comme une trace inscrite dans l'espace. La musique ne propose rien. [...], percussion et voix du comédien sont absolument indissociables: leur relation est pensée harmonieusement.<sup>17</sup>

The instruments of rhythm, the gongs, the cymbals and the drums, (all of Oriental origin), punctuated the text in the same way as the actor articulated. The ultimate effect was one of having two

versions of the same text performed, a verbal and an instrumental one, reciting simultaneously. Few melodic instruments occurred. The most notable were the 'tampura' and the double bass, the latter being so because of its occidental origin. The melody would thus appear to have been dominated instrumentally by the percussion instruments, that is the rhythmical instruments. Translated in theatrical terms this means, therefore, that it was the whirlwind nature of the history of Kingship which was given precedence in the production, rather than a personalized, (and by extension melodic) account of the usurpation of the throne. Thus the Orientalist approach to music in this play separated rhythmical from melodic instruments, separating the tragedy from its tragic heroes, and at all times refusing to allow both sets of instruments to perform their traditional occidental role of representing and interpreting (Plate XIV).

For *La Nuit des rois*, the instruments generally originated much closer to Europe, abandoning the Far East, encompassing Burma, Thailand, Turkey, Pakistan and India, where the whole production would appear to have been focussed. But as the tonal quality of the instrument was much more important than the origin of the instrument, the orchestra for this play embraced castanets, Swiss cowbells and a large collection of wind instruments from South America, notably flutes from Bolivia, Peru and Mexico. Musical Orientalism would appear, in this play, to have been overlooked (Plate XV).

Dans *La Nuit des rois* nous avons procédé différemment pour un certain nombre de raisons qui tiennent à la nature même de la comédie, à la mise en scène, au caractère plus glissé des entrées et







des sorties, au fait aussi que les personnages se déplacent beaucoup plus en parlant. C'est avec moi que les comédiens ont choisi le timbre, l'instrument mélodique de leur personnage: puisque nous avons inventé des 'thèmes' <sup>139</sup>

Gone were the explosive entrances and exits. Their disappearance marked the shift from tragic history to comedy, and the rhythmical instruments were thus notably fewer in number. This perhaps suggested that Illyria was a nation of mystery lacking in substance, a magical world without a heartbeat. Indeed, because of the cruelty and the suffering of this world, it would appear to have lost its heart as well. In place of the explosive-sounding rhythmical instruments were the melodic instruments whose thematic sounds and leitmotifs translated and interpreted empathetically the 'states' and 'substates' of the characters. The most obvious example of this was the use of the wailing 'tampura' to accompany and perform a kind of dialogue with Orsino's grief. And thus as we changed from rhythmical to melodic instruments, received Orientalist notions crept in. The thematic leitmotifs were governed according to our Western perceptions of these strange-sounding instruments so that grief was played by a 'tampura' whose sound, to our Western ears, was an appalling wail.

The collection of instruments for the third play in the cycle, *Henry IV*, was altogether more eclectic (Plate XVI). Disused European instruments found their way into the collection and overall there appeared to be a return to those of Japanese origin. This was symptomatic of the production as a whole, the décor and acting styles of which alternated quite significantly between the King and Court (of Japanese origin) and the Eastcheap and Gadshill

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scenes (of some faintly Arabian origin). Likewise the mixture of the rhythmical and melodic was more equally poised. Although not marked on the orchestra plan, the 'métallophones', first used in *La Nuit des rois*, returned for this production. This self-created instrument was the result of Lemêtre's failure to find a suitable instrument (oriental or otherwise) to provide the correct resonance either for the mood or 'rhythm' of the play in general, or for the emotional 'state' of a character. This then was the sign of true musical Orientalism in operation. The interpretative and representative roles of the instruments had given way to musical creation in the physical sense. And so either with rhythmical or melodic accompaniment, a harmony was achieved between the text, the interpreters of the text, and the musical interpretation of the characters, as Sophie Moscoso explains:

Redonner une vie et une humanité à la musique: elle sort de l'homme non des machines.<sup>19</sup>

Rhythm and melody stood in apposition to one another but actor and instrument, character and musical leitmotif were indissociable. The instruments were mostly Oriental, their interpretation mostly Orientalist, and their function more dramatic than aurally decorative. Overall the music conspired to contribute to a new dramatic form.

One very important trend in both the acting style and the use of the music has been highlighted both in Chapter Four and the discussion in this chapter on the relationship between character and the music. That is the form which was established, based on the theory of human vehicles or instruments of narration. It becomes

clear in this chapter that the form of the interpretation took the text as its focal point. Respect for the text is paramount. That is why, despite all adverse criticism, no critic can fail to acknowledge or applaud the clarity with which the narration was articulated. The role of the music in punctuating and musically narrating in empathy with the character would appear to have led to the transformation of the actor, on specific occasions, into an instrument pure and simple. Consequently those moments of transformation took place when the narration of the text was halted and the 'states' and 'substates' of the characters were achieved through 'instrumental' methods in the orchestral sense. In *La Nuit des Rois*, the sobbing and gibbering of Olivia and that, too, of Orsino, (grief being the emotion or theme exaggerated in the production), became, due to its duration and its denial of the text, an instrumental variant on this theme. Likewise, in *Henry IV*, the robbers at Gadshill formed a kind of human orchestra with their voices taking over from, and ultimately replacing the text. On both occasions it is not only the text which was halted but also the music proper. It becomes obvious, therefore, in the knowledge of the working methods of 'states' for the creation of character, that this actor/instrument relationship is the very essence of the theatrical language employed by Mnouchkine, is at the very heart of her theatrical form.

This actor/instrument theory is not a new one: it was not invented by Mnouchkine herself. It is one which emanates from the abolition of psychology from the theatre and of divorcing the actor from his role. It is also one which derives from theatre

practitioners who believe in developing and utilizing all the tools at the actor's disposal rather than concentrating on the text. Jacques Lecoq is one such practitioner and it is interesting, at this juncture, to quote once more from the brochure to his school:

In the history of the theatre, mime as a separate art has no permanence. It is an *art de passage*, a transition, a channel for nourishing drama and dance. It appears at certain times, at the end of one theatre and the beginning of another. It retains action and conserves gesture in that interim in which theatre, having lost the force of words, renews its forms.<sup>20</sup>

It was also a relief for the audience: the explosive nature of the speech delivery and the accompanying percussion was aurally cacophonous. The mime sequences told the story or conveyed the emotions or 'states' in a way which was visually exciting yet not aurally taxing. It is the third of three levels of the actor's performance; firstly the delivery and interpretation of the text by the actors in character, secondly the visual and gestural language to convey the emotional 'states' of those characters, and thirdly a mixture of vocal and physical abilities which turned the actors (and characters) into instruments. This then could be what Mnouchkine was seeking to achieve back in 1967 after her success with the psychological realism of *Les Petits Bourgeois* and the highly gestural *Le Capitaine Fracasse*. This transformation, at certain moments in the production, of the actor into an instrument could be, in Mnouchkine's own words, 'la troisième couleur'

Most French practitioners of theatre in the twentieth century, writing about their trips to the East, focus particularly on the form of Oriental theatres which abolishes the Western

tendency in the theatre to psychology and the pseudo-psychological involvement of the actor with his character. Their subsequent Orientalist interpretations of these Oriental theatrical forms can only be interpreted second-hand, so to speak, but they lend weight to the importance of Mnouchkine's creation of a third level to the actor's performance. Jean-Louis Barrault's interpretation of Japanese theatres is especially worth noting. After a trip to Japan in 1961 he writes in his *Journal de Bord*, about the role of the actor in the theatrical production:

Le Kabuki est un dérivé du Bunraku [...] une seule différence, celle-ci phénoménale: un être humain a remplacé la marionnette. Donc: plus de manipulateur, plus d'assistants vêtus et voilés de noir. Les dieux et le destin se sont évaporés dans l'abstraction.<sup>21</sup>

Barrault's interpretation of the difference between *Kabuki* and *Bunraku* is a useful means of describing Mnouchkine's utilization of the actor in 'Les Shakespeare'. Mnouchkine's actors, it seems, given the abolition of psychology and the divorce of the actor from his character, are puppets which exteriorize emotions, either vocally, physically or both. The actors' bodies are the puppet figures yet their human intellect, guided by Mnouchkine, are the puppeteers who both recite the text and manipulate their own bodies. The puppet theatre of Mnouchkine, therefore, can have few nuances. It is larger than life. The puppets are mere instruments whose strings can be pulled or plucked in the same way as the instruments of the orchestra. The result is a kind of Brechtian 'Verfremdungseffekt' taken to its ultimate conclusion. The text, in this case Shakespearean, is recited within the framework of the

puppet form using puppet-derived (manipulative) theatrical language. Non-naturalistic texts operate best within this framework and like all theatre practitioners before her. Mnouchkine discovered that Shakespeare was most suited to this Orient-inspired treatment.

But the form created is only inspired by the Orient, it does not directly follow it. Armelle Héliot describes the effect generated by the application of this form to Shakespeare:

Rien dans *Richard II* n'appartient au nô, au kabuki: c'est justement dans l'étirement maximum de ce paradoxe qu'advient toute l'intensité du jeu et que s'expose la force intraversable du projet Mnouchkine.<sup>22</sup>

This paradox is precisely the creation of a new form for the theatre. This form is what one should call 'theatrical Orientalism'. The term must be qualified with the adjective 'theatrical' because it is a particular brand of Orientalism which has evolved much more than Edward W. Said could have envisaged in 1978. Mnouchkine's Orientalism is not, as Said said, 'a coming to terms with the Orient'. Said writes:

Orientalism is premised upon exteriority, that is on the fact that the Orientalist, poet of scholar, makes the Orient speak.<sup>23</sup>

He goes on to talk, in theatrical terms, of Aeschylus:

The dramatic immediacy of representation in *The Persians* obscures the fact that the audience is watching a highly artificial enactment of what a non-Oriental has made into a symbol of the whole Orient.

This theory, however, has been totally inverted by Mnouchkine since the inception of 'Les Shakespeare' in 1981. She is not trying to make the Orient clear to the West. She is using her Orientalist

interpretation of Far Eastern theatrical styles to create a similar style or styles in order to perform texts which form part of our Western cultural heritage, and thereby to develop a theatrical form.

In the wake of Mnouchkine's interpretation of Shakespeare, the review *Fruits* devoted an edition entirely to Orientalism in France and in French cinema in particular. In the preface to this edition, Anne Berger writes:

Je ne voudrais pas suggérer qu'il faudrait regarder du côté de l'Orient pour trouver les bonnes réponses à nos mauvaises questions. Trois siècles d'un 'orientalisme' entaché d'idéologie coloniale rendent inadéquats et dangereux l'usage antinomique de termes comme Orient or Occident. Le Voyage en Orient, qu'il soit réalité ou fantasme, se situe évidemment, lorsqu'on l'entreprend, au carrefour de l'imaginaire et de l'idéologie. Mais il se peut qu'au bout du compte (ou du conte) comme l'affirmait Jean Renoir, la réalité prévale.<sup>24</sup>

Anne Berger succinctly suggests that the essence of Orientalism, or indeed Occidentalism, lies 'au carrefour de l'imaginaire et de l'idéologie'. Orientalism, particularly in the theatre, is not concerned with recreation or adaptation. In a sense it is still colonial in that it plunders Eastern theatres and forms. It plunders not out of motives of exploitation but because its exponents realize the inadequacies of their own theatres and forms. The critics of Mnouchkine's Shakespeare, therefore, who lambasted the style and form of her creation as being unauthentic *Noh* or *Kabuki*, were evidently operating within the parameters of Said's definition of the term 'Orientalism'. Mnouchkine was not trying to come to terms with the Orient. The reverse is the case, in fact. She had long ago come to terms with it. Her principal objective



during her four years' work on 'Les Shakespeare' was of forcing the Western theatre (and all its practitioners and critics) to realize the necessity of creating a form for itself, a form which it had long since lost. To do this Mnouchkine looked to the Orient for her inspiration. The result was the creation of a 'theatrical Orientalism'. Theatrical Orientalism, in Mnouchkine's terms, is the search for a form.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

1. Antonin Artaud, *Le Théâtre et son double*, p.106.
2. Artaud, p.134.
3. James R. Brandon, 'Form in Kabuki Acting', *Studies in Kabuki: Its Acting, Music and Historical Context*, ed. by James R. Brandon and Donald H. Shively, 63-132 (p.100).
4. Brandon, p.100.
5. Pronko, p.44.
6. Faubion Bowers, *Japanese Theatre*, p.175.
7. Jacques Lonchamp, 'Le Théâtre musical, de Corée en Pologne', *Le Monde*, 8-9 November 1981.
8. Jacques Lonchamp, 'Le Théâtre musical, de Corée en Pologne'.
9. Ariane Mnouchkine, 'Le Masque: Une discipline de base du Théâtre du Soleil', *Le Masque: du rite au théâtre*, p.233.
10. Eric Shorter, 'Avignon', *Drama*, no.146 (Winter 1982). p.27.
11. Betty True-Jones, 'Kathakali Dance-Drama: An Historical Perspective', *Performing Arts in India*, edited by Bonnie C. Wade, 14-44 (p.28).
12. Pronko, p.85.
13. Pronko, pp.152-3.
14. Armelle Héliot, 'La Vie au Soleil', *Acteurs*, no.10 (December 1982). 30-4 (p.34).
15. Armelle Héliot, 'La Vie au Soleil'.
15. Armelle Héliot, 'La Vie au Soleil'.
17. Armelle Héliot, 'La Vie au Soleil'.
18. Armelle Héliot, 'La Vie au Soleil'
19. Martine Franck, Raymonde Temkine and Sophie Moscoso, *Le Théâtre du Soleil: Shakespeare 2<sup>e</sup> partie*, Double Page, no.32 (1984).
20. Bari Rolfe, 'The Mime of Jacques Lecoq', *TDR/The Drama Review*, 16, 1 (March 1972), 34-8 (p.36).
21. Jean-Louis Barrault, *Journal de Bord*, p.100.

22. Armelle Héliot, 'Ariane en Illyrie', *Acteurs*, no.9 (November 1982), 39-40 (p.39).
23. Said, p.40.
24. Anne Berger, 'Celui qui fait éclore la fleur travaille si simplement', *Fruits*, no.4 (October 1986), 3-9 (p.8).

## CONCLUSION

The Soleil's Shakespeare cycle finally reached its conclusion in the summer of 1984, almost three years after it had begun. In that period only three of the promised six plays had been produced. Many reasons can be cited for the cycle's premature demise. The whole project had been taking too long: at the outset it had been considered a kind of rehearsal project for a proposed contemporary history play. Under any circumstances three years of rehearsal would appear an inordinately long period. The company was finding it difficult to rehearse the remaining three plays within their self-imposed timescale. The cycle was performed during the period of increased sponsorship from the Socialist Minister of Culture, Jack Lang, and thus financial pressures were few. Heavy public demand, however, was limiting the time that could be spent on more Shakespeare, let alone future projects. The actors were beginning to show signs of discontent as the demands of performance were grinding their creative development and instincts to a halt. Philippe Hottier announced his resignation shortly after the opening of *Henry IV* and within six months the whole project was wound up.

The fact that one actor's decision to depart could have such drastic consequences on the future of both repertoire and company was a sign of the structure of the organization, the influence of Hottier, and an indication of the significance of the casting policy. Hottier's departure had the effect of a new broom sweeping clean. Several of the leading actors, among them John Arnold,

joined him and a plethora of minor actors followed suit. Hottier had been assigned the principal comic figure in each of the three plays; the First Gardener in *Richard II*, Sir Toby Belch in *La Nuit* and Falstaff in *Henry IV*. John Arnold, in the two History plays, was assigned the mask of old age and the role of sidekick to the principal comic figure: Jean de Gand and the Gardener's assistant followed by Henry IV and Poins. This casting thread ran through the cycle as a leitmotif and was the natural result of developing character from masks or 'états de base'. At the time Hottier announced his departure, the critics foresaw that he would be breaking the casting mould and that the cycle could not continue. The departure of the dissident actors was similar to the one after *L'Age d'or* some nine years earlier. Hottier was the first to leave on both occasions. His disagreements with Mnouchkine were well known but in the event were played down by both parties. By this time the company had gone a long way from their involvement with the workers 'collectivités'. Success had brought adulation and adulation created aloofness and isolation. When it came to the point, after the company's visit to Berlin, the termination of the cycle was no great surprise to anyone. History was simply repeating itself.

History has also repeated itself in terms of the company's repertoire. Shakespeare proves to be the focal and high points of the repertoire throughout the twenty-three year history of the Théâtre du Soleil. Between 1968 and the final performance of *Le Songe d'une nuit d'été*, and 1981 at the first performance of *Richard II*, no text by a single 'author' was performed by the

company. *La Cuisine* was revived in 1968 to meet the demands of the workers during the May 68 strikes but it was the production which had been mounted the previous year. *Les Clowns* was largely improvisatory, and both *1789* and *1793* were what came to be known as 'créations collectives'. *L'Age d'or* was a contemporary 'création collective', *Dom Juan*, by Molière, was neither directed by Mnouchkine nor performed by the mainstream company, and *Méphisto* was an adaptation of a novel. Thus the texts of Shakespeare marked the beginning and the end of the Théâtre du Soleil's period of 'créations collectives' in the textual sense.

The Théâtre du Soleil produced *Le Songe* in order to develop a level of performance unattainable with other wholly literary or completely performance-oriented plays. *La Cuisine* had been found to contain two elements (or 'couleurs') of what Mnouchkine was aiming for, a play 'à trois couleurs'. The two 'couleurs' formed part of her own theatrical training; the psychological realism of Stanislavsky and the notion of 'états', with the mime, acrobatics and music of celebratory theatre. Although *La Cuisine* contained these two 'couleurs', it was not able to combine them or even develop the third. Shakespeare's plays were thought to do just that and so in 1981 the company embarked on the largest single project on Shakespeare in production, in twentieth-century French theatre history, in order to re-equip a substantially reformed company with the same theatrical tools, skills and materials which might ultimately serve one day to perform a history, Shakespeare style, of the contemporary world.

The purposes of these two highlights in the company's

repertoire were clear. *Le Songe* was a first step in the search for a form, otherwise known as 'la troisième couleur'. 'Les Shakespeare' was also the search for a form but also for a more defined theatrical language in order to perform a contemporary history play using the same language. Returning to the text on both occasions enabled them to discover both the form and the tools of theatrical language since the self-sufficiency of the texts (they were dramatic as well as literary), liberated the actors from the obvious constraints of textual creation from scratch. That is not to say, however, that the actors became shallow vessels. *Le Songe* and 'Les Shakespeare' demanded a new approach to theatrical creation. The actors were liberated in the sense that they were already supplied with clearly defined characters, well-constructed plots, and poetic dialogue. The theatrical creation of the Soleil actors advanced along the lines of theatrical language and form. With a text of the highest order, the innovation and the importance of the language and the form created would not be obscured.

Both these language and form creations were unified on the two occasions by Mnouchkine's interest in the Orient. *Le Songe* was performed three years after her return from the Far East. It is difficult, however, to appreciate retrospectively, and in full, the scope of her Orientalized form and language in 1968. The combination of Hindu costumes and music with hippy beads and jeans would tend to suggest that *Le Songe* was less an innovation in the Orientalist sense and more a product of its time since much popular culture and music of the sixties was influenced by the Orient.

The choice of contemporary history play to follow 'Les

'Shakespeare' was never made until the company disbanded in 1984. The proposed play was expected to cover the period of the Théâtre du Soleil's own existence and include the world's revolutions and social upheavals. Many events were uppermost in Mnouchkine's mind; the colonialism in Algeria and Vietnam seemed obvious choices of subject although by 1985 the latter had been extensively portrayed by the American film industry. Sino-Soviet hostilities in the seventies were considered undramatic since very little actually took place and there were no big personalities involved. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was reported to be Mnouchkine's automatic first choice. It had been the subject of an aborted play by Mnouchkine before work began on 'Les Shakespeare'. She has since been vague as to why she renounced this idea after the Shakespeare cycle in favour of Cambodia and the downfall of King Norodom Sihanouk.

Cambodia was a country well known to the French public. It was a former colony and the subsequent revolutionary leaders of the Khmer Rouge, including Pol Pot had been educated in Paris around the time when Mnouchkine herself had been enrolled at the Sorbonne. Further, the choice of Cambodia as subject seemed apt since Sihanouk then lived in exile in Paris. Apart from these three reasons of topicality, Mnouchkine saw Sihanouk's deposition to have a close affinity with the fates of several of Shakespeare's Kings. With its pseudo-Shakespearian connotations and its Oriental setting, Sihanouk's Cambodia was a subject which enabled Mnouchkine to continue with her alliance, in the theatre, of Shakespeare and the Orient.



Approximately one year after the dissolution of the Shakespeare cast, the Théâtre du Soleil presented the contemporary history play entitled *L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk, roi du Cambodge*.<sup>1</sup> For the same purposes of freeing the actors from textual creation to concentrate on form and language, a text was commissioned from the feminist writer Hélène Cixous. William Shawcross's *Sideshow* was the main historical consultative document as were many other books and films on Cambodia's recent past. The film *The Killing Fields* was used to help the actors understand the events contained in the text in much the same way as other media were used in 'Les Shakespeare' to help the actors create their own theatrical language. The events of Cixous's text cover a period of twenty-five years, beginning with Sihanouk's refusal to submit to the partition of the country and ending with the Vietnamese invasion and the overthrow of Pol Pot. At all times it remains faithful to Shawcross's report of 1979, charting the events with surprising accuracy yet at the same time builds characters of minor consequence, such as Khieu Samnol (the play's 'common woman') into important lynchpins in the drama. The scenes range rapidly over continents, retaining chronology, and as the genocide of the Cambodian people is set into motion, the ever increasing number of the dead return to the stage to haunt and advise the living and to intervene in the course of the drama.

The play, at first sight, would appear to bear close affinities with Shakespeare's Histories. Indeed it is no accident that it should appear so. Gilles Costaz notes how the Oriental *Sihanouk* relates to 'Les Shakespeare':

Le Soleil entre donc dans l'après-Shakespeare. En montant *Richard II*, *La Nuit des rois* et la première partie d'*Henry IV*, Mnouchkine voulait retourner aux sources du théâtre et de la théâtralisation. Sans copier un style défini du théâtre asiatique, elle interrogeait la tradition de l'Orient pour parvenir à un langage qui soit le Théâtre. Cette recherche, poursuivie pendant trois ans, se retrouvera dans *Sihanouk* mais mise en cause pour le monde aujourd'hui.<sup>2</sup>

A Shakespearian history of an Oriental subject would appear to be the logical conclusion of the previous three years' work on Orientalized Shakespeare. One obvious danger, however, of following Shakespeare and openly acknowledging his influence on the play and the production is to make many unwarranted and apparently sycophantic references to the bard. Mnouchkine refers to the comparison that can be made between Shakespearian history and *Sihanouk* on the subject of fictional reality:

Nous nous sommes référés à Shakespeare dans le titre, en toute modestie. *Richard II*, chez Shakespeare, n'est pas tout à fait *Richard II*. Pour *Sihanouk*, pour le Cambodge, dans la pièce d'Hélène Cixous, tout est vrai et tout est fiction.<sup>3</sup>

The intention of creating a contemporary history, Shakespeare style, is unmistakable. Yet the ability to write characters as dramatic and historical vehicles, talking through and about themselves at the same time, remained to be seen. Cixous was less removed from the history than Shakespeare was to his medieval history, and Shawcross was a much more reliable and accurate source than Holinshed. The case for preserving rather than dramatizing historical reality was an altogether overwhelming one for Cixous, Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil, and there lay the danger of aping Shakespeare.

In Hélène Cixous's text, it is not only the characters and situation which are Shakespearian, her characters make many direct references to Shakespeare as well. Sihanouk, in Act II, scene ii of the 'Première Epoque' reveals to Penn Nouth that when he was a child he gave the stars names:

PENN NOUTH: Et laquelle est William Shakespeare,  
Monseigneur?  
SIHANOUK: William Shakespeare? Eh bien.. je ne  
sais pas. Trouvons-la. Vous aimez William  
Shakespeare, Penn Nouth?  
PENN NOUTH: Autant que nos propres Chroniques  
Royales. Vous n'admirez pas William  
Shakespeare, Monseigneur?  
SIHANOUK: Mais si, j'admire William Shakespeare.  
Mais il est un peu grand. Tandis que  
Mozart, il est si petit, j'ai envie de  
le prendre dans mes bras. William  
Shakespeare est immense comme un empire.<sup>4</sup>

Sihanouk also likens his situation to that of Antony in *Antony and Cleopatra*,<sup>5</sup> compares Lon Nol to Iago and Sirik Matak to Macbeth.<sup>6</sup> Even without all these references the average spectator with a basic knowledge of Shakespeare's plays could not fail to notice the striking similarity between the fate suffered by Sihanouk at the hands of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge to that of Richard II at the hands of Bolingbroke, although Sihanouk was allowed to seek refuge in the West rather than be murdered in prison. Adrian Kiernander, in *Plays and Players*, discusses the influence of Shakespeare on the play:

The script, commissioned by the company, is by novelist Hélène Cixous, a former professor of English who knows her Shakespeare well. This and the company's experience of playing Shakespeare has clearly influenced the writing. The canvas is vast, easily outdoing that of *Antony and Cleopatra*, and as full of political upheaval and betrayal as the Wars of the Roses. One of the most Shakespearean aspects of the play is its willingness to tackle political events and examine their causes not in

terms of ideology but as a result of personalities.<sup>7</sup>

In many of his articles, Adrian Kiernander attempts to justify these Shakespearian similarities, yet the most un-Shakespearian aspect of the play is the characters' constant reference to the author's source of inspiration, while failing to recreate the oratorical powers and the rhetoric of Shakespeare's Kings. Kiernander's attempt to consolidate the comparison is a futile exercise in that a non-native speaker's interpretation of twentieth-century French verse could never match his appreciation of heavily researched Elizabethan poetry. The most important contribution one can make to this comparison between contemporary and Shakespearian history is purely on the level of theatrical form and performance language employed for both 'Les Shakespeare' and *Sihanouk*.

The move to *Sihanouk* from Shakespeare should, in all probability, see the consolidation of theatrical Orientalism. The auditorium configuration was identical to that employed in 'Les Shakespeare' with very few minor alterations. The whole configuration was inverted in the hangars but the 'scène/salle' relationship remained the same. The 'orchestra' had increased in size and importance, in line with the stage space and on the same level, the floor covering was now one of brick and the stage of polished oak rather than the coarse matting of before. The solidity of the structure was perhaps the most overriding symbol of the whole production. Around the walls of the auditorium there was a fake balcony crowded with puppets representing the people of

Cambodia with their arms outstretched. The dressing room had no curtains to restrict the view of the audience and the pre-performance ritual gave one the sense of *déjà-vu*. All augured well for the retention of the theatrical language already created. In reality the language used was merely a pale imitation of its former self. Entrances were formal and in groups as before but as the play progressed through eight hours and two evenings, the entrances became less and less spectacular. The spectacle declined generally, with the costumes and colours becoming more uniform and dull as Pol Pot assumed command. This was complemented, however, by the dead returning to the stage in traditional and dazzling costumes, obviously representative of a former golden age. The irony soon became explicit that the annihilation of Sihanouk's supporters added to the spectacle of the play. They came back not simply to haunt the living but also to seek vengeance. The squatting position of the dead first seen in 'Les Shakespeare' was retained and the real horror of the genocide was the sole domain of the narration. Sets were sparse: a black table represented the throne of the deposed monarch, played again by Georges Bigot. There were few props but nearly all had some symbolic and dramatic significance. Only one parasol to shade Sihanouk in the early part of the play was retained and thus the dramatic function of properties betraying emotions was severely restricted.

Music and dance played an increasingly greater role. Sihanouk performed a circular dance to express his elation, most notably when he was told that he could return to Peking and when he was reunited with Penn Mouth. Musical leitmotifs separating groups

and individuals and representing basic emotions proliferated. The Khmer invasion was symbolized by the actors peering through telescopes. Sihanouk's exaggerated inability to even hold a telescope revealed he is a man of little military knowledge or strategy and therefore destined to fail and to fall. This was reminiscent of Hal's inability to perfect the circular court entrance in *Henry IV* as a sign that he was not yet fit to be King. Shades of the former dramatic function of properties recurred, but they were set outside the confines of the former highly structured theatrical form for them to achieve any real significance.

Apart from those characteristics already listed, *Sihanouk* fell far short of 'Les Shakespeare' in that this form and its implied performance language was not at all evident. Much of the music tried to recreate sounds rather than represent them and much of the acting bordered on the naturalistic. One of the more unwelcome naturalistic elements of the production was Khieu Samnol and Suramarit riding a bicycle on stage. If this policy had been pursued in 'Les Shakespeare' we perhaps would have seen real horses in *Richard II* rather than 'acteurs-créateurs'. The spectacle was muted at all times; the static, full-front acting had no athletic and circular counterpoint as it had in 'Les Shakespeare' and the orchestra even went as far as imitating aircraft noises. The references to Shakespeare in the text and the almost total omission of codified language and form is perhaps explained by the following comment by Mnouchkine:

Pour moi, le théâtre et l'histoire sont liés. Je n'imagine pas de spectacle non historique. Mais, quand je travaille, je ne me pose pas le problème de l'Histoire [...] Quand nous travaillions aux

Shakespeare, je ne me posais vraiment pas le problème de l'Histoire. J'avais plutôt l'impression de travailler à la survie de la culture, de la compréhension de l'autre, de l'acceptation de l'art. C'étaient mes motivations, ma réflexion.\*

If we take art, in this case, to mean language and form of the theatre, then we can see how the emphasis shifted away from those aspects of the production, which Mnouchkine formerly held dear, to the attempt to recreate a Shakespearian view of history. It was a return to the text. The historical perspective of 'Les Shakespeare' may not have had a firm directive, yet in *Sihanouk*, the contemporary history with supposed perspective, performance language and theatrical form were almost totally eliminated.

Charges that 'Les Shakespeare' had provided the Théâtre du Soleil with a catalogue of codified performance language were now totally unfounded. Although *Norodom Sihanouk* ran for almost a year with very few breaks, it did not achieve the great critical acclaim accorded to 'Les Shakespeare'. The main bugbear of the critics was that the play, at approximately eight hours in length, was too long not to have some dazzling spectacle to relieve the reality of the plot. Chronicling the historical reality of the contemporary world was a much more serious immediate affair than chronicling that of the French Revolution (in 1789). *Sihanouk* was an anti-climax. Spectators were expecting a highly structured form and were naturally disappointed at its absence. Although it could not be considered a financial disaster, *Sihanouk* did not always command full houses. Yet the financial difficulties facing the Soleil were compounded by the fact that the newly elected coalition Conservative government was less generous in its subsidies to

companies such as the Soleil, whose socialist principles prohibited capitalizing financially on its worldwide success. As had happened on many previous occasions, the company disbanded once more. The faithful took once again to the country to work out their next move, Mnouchkine involved herself once more with the student demonstrations of November-December 1986, and the message on the ansaphone at the Cartoucherie was one of despair: would they return to Vincennes ever again?

The answer was an indisputable yes. With state funding increased and the future of the company once more assured, Cixous turned her attention to the then imminent fortieth anniversary of Indian independence. Initially the project was to focus on Indira Gandhi but the struggle, inner turmoil and social strife surrounding the partition of India became the focal point of the scenario. The play, *L'Indiade*, is similar to *Sihanouk* in many respects. It is a chronological history play featuring world leaders, major political events mirrored and commented upon in pseudo-Shakespearian style through a 'common man' (or woman, in this case). The audience/actor apparatus was identical although this time the dressing room was tucked away underneath the raked seating bank from where many of the crowd and two-wheeled entrances would emerge. The stage was a polished marble oasis surrounded by brick steps, an obstacle for the explosive entrances that so characterized 'Les Shakespeare'.

The music played the same role in *L'Indiade* as it had in *Sihanouk* - creating leitmotifs for character, reacting to action empathetically or contrapuntally. Unlike *Sihanouk* there was little



attempt in this production to create naturalistic sounds from the instruments. The closest we came to naturalism was with the inclusion in several scenes of a bear (or actress in a bear skin). In the most exquisite mime, forcing us to suspend disbelief, the actress became a bear which followed Gandhi (in a most unlikely *Tarzan* scenario). The bear became embroiled unwittingly in the Sikh/Hindu conflict and was eventually killed to the great disappointment of the audience. This was one of the few characters which recognised concepts of friendship and hostility as good and evil, concepts which elsewhere were being corrupted by politics.

The politics of partition were central to the drama whereas political engagement was not. A common woman mingled with the audience, interfered with and commented on the action and singled out several spectators in a rather simplistic attempt to engage the audience. The disappointment over partition being the price for independence generated less emotional response than did the common woman (as well as the many others caught on the wrong side of the divisions) pleading for support as civil strife erupted. The presentation of partition was less scathingly portrayed than were the ordinary people tearing themselves apart, even though as in *Sihanouk*, the colonials were ferociously attacked.

The two 'Oriental' plays of the Théâtre du Soleil, therefore, do not conform to most Orientalist interpretations of history. The colonials are the villains while the Soleil remains unreservedly sympathetic to the Orient despite the atrocities committed there. The demise of colonialism, seen as the necessity for self-determination, runs concurrently with the civil unrest in

the newly independent country where the fears and prejudices of different groups and peoples are fostered by the departing colonials. The Soleil has a vision and gives an interpretation of the Orient which is highly respectful and sympathetic. It is perhaps a result of the 1968-Left (among them Mnouchkine) with their guilt complexes and their failures to achieve their Socialist utopias. The sympathy and respect for the Orient in the theatre in the nineteen-eighties is therefore less political and politically motivated and much more an attempt to come to terms with the realization of political impotence experienced by Mnouchkine after May 68. She is no longer trying to change the world. In both *Sihanouk* and *L'Indiade* she shows what is wrong with it, but offers no solutions. Like Shakespeare's Kings, the Ghandi 'dynasty' and King Norodom Sihanouk are portrayed as fated despots and tragic heroes, yet neither play passes judgement on them. Mnouchkine and Cixous here are Orientalists examining these figures from the Orient not to judge them or glorify them for being Oriental, but in order to show to the West that we, as Westerners, have played a major role (often that of the villain) in their fate. This is the result of Mnouchkine turning Orientalist out of 'guilt'. Had she advocated, in these plays, a Socialist utopia (as she might have done in the sixties) as a solution to the problems facing the post-colonial Orient, she would have committed an act of political and cultural imperialism. By remaining impartial she was advocating passively self-determination for the peoples of the Orient.

The Orientalist position of the Théâtre du Soleil, from a political point of view, is presented in a very significant way on

stage. Respect, sympathy and guilt constrain Mnouchkine to strive for faithful reproduction (or realism). Everything in *Sihanouk* and *L'Indiade* is authentic (except the nationality of the actors); from costumes, sets, props right down to the food served at the interval. It would appear that Mnouchkine felt unable to infuse these faithful narrations of the history of the Orient with the verve and zest of the form used for 'Les Shakespeare'. In *Sihanouk* the characters stood rooted to the spot for long periods to deliver lines while in *L'Indiade* much of the text was declaimed from a sedentary position. The form inspired by the *Kathakali* and *Kabuki* theatres (and the Peking Opera) were totally banished from the stage. In other words the more oriental the subject of the Soleil's work the less Orientalized the theatrical form. Mnouchkine had flipped a coin, so to speak: once the History plays of Shakespeare were Orientalized, now the Orient is presented realistically. Such are the two approaches to Theatrical Orientalism today.

This new formalism of the Théâtre du Soleil, inspired by the Orient and applied to Shakespeare, still lives on elsewhere, however. While the Théâtre du Soleil was turning its attention directly to the Orient, former members of the company, including several who departed after 'Les Shakespeare' were to be seen at the forefront of experimentalism on the French stage, in three notable productions, in three very different offshoots. The first offshoot, and perhaps most famous for its joint production of *David Copperfield* (1977) with the Théâtre du Soleil at the Cartoucherie, is the Théâtre du Campagnol. This company is the brainchild of Jean-Claude Penchenat, one of the nine founder members of the

Théâtre du Soleil, and supported by another of those original nine, Françoise Tournafond who was the costume designer of the Soleil up to and including *L'Age d'or*. Penchenat's aim was to carry on the work of collective creation that was the hallmark of 1789 and 1793. But in 1986-7 the company turned away from collective creation proper and popular acting styles to construct and perform a play entitled *Coincidences*. It was a collective work in the sense that the script consisted of excerpts from the works of famous writers. These writings coincidentally formed relationships and set up scenes to create a kind of Stendhalian scenario of the crystallization of life, progressing through the recognition of role play to falling in and out of love, chess games, illness and finally death:

Les personnages n'ont plus d'importance, c'est l'auteur qui apparaît avec ses obsessions; alors commence une sorte de danse des couples, des répliques, des caractères; une mise en route du jeu de théâtre, du 'à quoi on joue' de l'enfance [...] jusqu'à la mort.<sup>27</sup>

The pre-performance ritual was worthy of the Soleil. The actors made a spectacular entrance and divested themselves of their clothes in what could have been interpreted as an attempt to achieve the idea of 'l'état neutre'. In 1789 style the actors swapped roles and lines from their respective plays which contributed textually to the presentation of a particular 'state'. Shakespeare featured heavily with excerpts from *Love's Labour's Lost*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, and *As You Like It*. Since the characters were stripped of psychology and played an essentially functional role in the scenario, the actors became the instruments

of a human orchestra. Struck or plucked, the actors, as they passed through the 'states' to death, were liberated from the psychology of character, as advocated by the Soleil, and even freed from the constraints of plot. *Coïncidences* was a tangential digression from *L'Age d'or*. Unlike the Soleil's Shakespeare, the Théâtre du Campagnol did not seek a theatrical form with which to perform a text, it performed rather a public autopsy on the role of the text in the theatrical performance. Unlike the Soleil, the Campagnol must be credited with pursuing form at the total expense of the text.

The second production worthy of note in the post-*Sihanouk* period is *Les Ensorcelés* based on the novel *Les Diaboliques* by Barbey d'Aurevilly, presented by the Théâtre de l'Eventail.<sup>19</sup> This production embraced the work of two former members of the Théâtre du Soleil, John Arnold and Erhard Stiefel. Arnold here continued his work on old-age masks in much the same manner as in *Richard II* and *Henry IV*. Erhard Stiefel, who designed the masks for 'Les Shakespeare' and *Sihanouk*, created a mixture of *commedia dell'arte* half-face masks and Brechtian life-size puppets for the presentation of the horrific crimes contained in the subtext. These masks had the required effect of estranging reality from supposed reality. This adaptation took the form of a succession of plays within the play, each one designed to prick the conscience of the characters in their fictional reality as in *Hamlet*. The *commedia* and puppet masks all reflected Mnouchkine's work but their failure lay in their use being locked in the convention of secondary narration within the play. Consequently the form of the play was

disunited and much of the skill of the mask work lost its force.

The third in this series of offshoots, performing in 1987, is the Théâtre de l'Épée de Bois which has its home in the two hangars of the Cartoucherie adjoining the Théâtre du Soleil. The Théâtre de l'Épée de Bois is an eight year old company formed by Antonio Diaz-Florian under the influence of Mnouchkine whose assistance and patronage secured government financial aid and a home at Vincennes. In 1986 Diaz-Florian poached Serge Poncelet, a veteran of 'Les Shakespeare', particularly noted for his unsympathetic portrayal of Henry Kissinger in *Sihanouk*. From January to March 1987 the company performed *Caligula* by Camus, with Poncelet in the title role. But it was not only the personnel that Diaz-Florian had poached from the Soleil, the whole conception of the performance language, the idea of 'états', the form of the theatre, and most notably the Orientalization of a Western text, all owed an enormous debt to Mnouchkine as well.

The productions of *Caligula* and 'Les Shakespeare' were similar in many respects. The paths and lines covering the large stage space of the former production had to be strictly followed by the actors who, on entering the stage, acknowledged the musicians. The music was Armenian in origin and offered thematic leitmotifs for character and 'états'. It had a dramatic function similar to the music in *La Nuit*. Caligula called upon the music to change his opponents' moods. Music was an extension of Caligula's own character. The senators were mostly played in the *Kyogen* fashion, inventing much of the physical and acrobatic antics with ladders and torches to portray humorously their fear. Caligula's voice

complemented the music in that many of his utterances were monosyllabic and extra-textual, calling to mind those exclamations of 'Poi, poi, poi' by Falstaff in *Henry IV*. Most of the theatrical language had its origin in 'Les Shakespeare', too. One notable example was the convention for dying. This took the form of a spinning movement which went out of control. Ironically, Caligula had the force to set his victims, unwittingly, into a kind of circular dance which they invariably failed to prevent turning into a death spin. Death for Caligula was an exact copy of death in *Henry IV*, as he fell into a squatting position. It seemed that the performance language was inspired by the Théâtre du Soleil and not necessarily borrowed from the Orient.

Stage groupings were similar to 'Les Shakespeare', and so, too, was the delivery of the text. Yet the latter showed an even more formalistic approach by Diaz-Florian. 'Les Shakespeare' clearly distinguished between full-front acting and inter-actor acting. Caligula combined the two in many of his speeches and dialogues. He started off by talking directly to the other characters on stage and then switched his focus in mid-speech to the audience. This had the effect of turning us into participants in the drama and at the same time widening Caligula's sphere of influence (Plate XVII). In the 'Notes de Travail', Diaz-Florian sets out his aims for the actors:

- Rapport au public. Il est vital de lui raconter une histoire. Dialoguer immédiatement avec lui. Il faut se nourrir dans les yeux du spectateur.
- Le comédien doit se raconter une histoire par dedans (pas par dehors).





- Chaque pas, chaque mot est un son; respecter une démarche. Chaque mot en plus, est aussi une image.
- Aller toujours à l'essentiel.''

The true Orientalization of the play lay not in the eighteenth- or nineteenth-century Persian costumes or in the Armenian music, but in the dramatic function of costumes and music: the characters' cloaks made the death spin more impressive, and the music empathetically reflected and actively affected the characters and their moods. The acting style and the form of the delivery had a dramatic function far greater than that of simply narrating the story. The actors played 'states' and 'substates' one at a time and directly to the audience, their bodies were physical extensions of these 'states' and true psychology of character was banished. The psychopathic and irrational Caligula perhaps could not be compared to Shakespeare's Kings, but Diaz-Florian proved in this production, and in his 1988 production of Jonson's *Volpone*, that the performance language and theatrical form, researched by Mnouchkine, can be developed further and applied to classical texts other than Shakespeare.

That is not to say, however, that Shakespeare has been merely incidental to the surge of Orientalism in the French theatre. Occidentalism and Shakespeare have recently appeared concomitant with an ever increasing number of Far Eastern theatres performing the plays of Shakespeare, the most recent example being the Shanghai Kunju's European tour of *Macbeth*. Orientalism and Shakespeare are coincidental in twentieth-century French theatre. They coincide with their highly defined concepts of love, honour and death which, if performed naturalistically, are held up to

ridicule. Only the codes and rituals of the Oriental warriors, when Orientalized, are fit to perform such concepts and do them justice. Hence Orientalism and Shakespeare are not conflicting opposites.

Orientalizing Shakespeare does not, as one might suspect, have the effect of exacerbating the differences between the Western textual theatre and the formal performance languages of the East. 'Les Shakespeare' shows that the efficacy of Mnouchkine's form brings the two opposites together. It is the Orientalization which bridges the gap, all the while showing up the dearth of quality texts in some Far Eastern theatres, and the limitations of the pseudo-psychological acting styles of the West, as well as the sovereignty of the text in the theatrical event. Yet many Far Eastern theatres contain both qualities of performance style and realism. *Noh* theatre is a case in point. Tatsuro Ishii explains how 'yugen' and 'monomane' are combined within the *Noh* actor's performance;

*Yugen* in *Kakyo*, as well as in *Kadensho*, still refers to the beauty and elegance of the total performance (i.e., the combined elements of dance, music and *monomane*, or imitation). However, it should be emphasized, one must not apply this concept simply to the style of a performance; but one must also take into account the state of mind of the performer.<sup>12</sup>

Mnouchkine's work relates closely to these two concepts. 'Monomane' of 'Les Shakespeare', that is the imitation, is Mnouchkine's creation of 'states' and 'substates'. Accusing her of abolishing the psychology is to fail to understand that she might actually replace it with the altogether more valid psychology of the actor. This in fact could be an interpretation of the pre-performance

rituals of both the Théâtre du Soleil and L'Épée de Bois

The concept of 'states' is a result of Mnouchkine's earlier training in the Stanislavskian method and Jacques Lecoq's mime. Stanislavsky refers to the Inner Character, Lecoq to the 'état neutre', the *Noh* philosopher Zeami to 'tai', and Mnouchkine to the 'état de base'. All refer more or less to the inner spirit of the actor performing a role and to his emotional capacity. Thus if Richard had been played by an actor other than Bigot, the 'état de base' would have been different. Consequently the performance language articulated by the actor in that state of the inner spirit becomes, in the respective philosophies, manifestations of his Outer Character, the 'mimage de la nature', the 'yu', and the 'états secondaires'. Ishii goes on to talk of the physical result of this training on the *Noh* performance:

The paradox of the *no* is that it presents extremely restrained emotions expressed in stylized simplified movements and yet brings about a boundless enlargement of artistically refined emotional energy which is then transmitted to the audience; for this a performer has to have great capacity for condensing and focusing emotion.<sup>13</sup>

This is the point in the performance where the four philosophies diverge. Stanislavsky and *Noh*, as explained by Ishii, despite the particular psychological state of the actor, contains the physical gestures of the actor. Mnouchkine goes one step further and allows the 'état de base' to be physically translated and to have no bounds, as can be seen with characters such as Hotspur, Douglas and Falstaff. Mnouchkine thus commits a cardinal sin with *Noh*: the 'tai' or 'état de base' is given its own performance language. The 'tai' becomes rather than guides the form.

As Mnouchkine experimented with all of these philosophies, the role of the text in the productions altered significantly. *Les Petits Bourgeois* was a vehicle for the actors to follow Stanislavsky's psychological realism in an effort to discover the Inner Character, otherwise known as the 'première couleur'. Yet it is difficult to imagine how the young Mnouchkine was able to differentiate between Inner Character and the inner spirit of the actor. 'Créations collectives' such as *Les Clowns* permitted the actors to experiment with Outer Character, gestural acting and mime, otherwise known as the 'deuxième couleur'. Thus the first two 'couleurs' were discovered through a realistic and a non-textual play in turn. Finally 'la troisième couleur' was the experimentation with the relationship between inner and outer character. Shakespeare was the textual link between French and Far Eastern theatres, between *Noh*/Stanislavskian psycho-physical acting and the 'état de base' overwhelming the outer character in the Mnouchkine-Lecoq fashion.

Mnouchkine's relationship with *Noh*/Stanislavskian theories on acting is, of course, incidental to her training and experience. That relationship contributed to her Orientalization of theatre form yet her interest in the Orient resulted neither from refined personal tastes, nor from the twentieth-century trends in French theatre. Interest in the Orient, its religions and cultures constituted a major part of the West's 'hippy' culture in the sixties, of which Mnouchkine was a part. This was the extent of the Orientalization of *Le Songe* in 1968. The Orientalization of 'Les Shakespeare' in the eighties rose out of Mnouchkine's continuing

experimentation with theatrical language, actors' training, and the search for a form. This Orientalization was a conscious choice and bore no relationship to contemporary trends in Western popular culture at all. Despite the Théâtre du Soleil's preoccupation with popular acting styles and workers' 'collectivités', the Orientalization of the theatre shunted the production of 'Les Shakespeare' into the realm of elitist bourgeois culture. Speaking of the danger of the socialist theatre company locking itself up in an ivory tower, away from the workers, Mnouchkine says:

We would like to go to such places if we are desired. If, one day, the workers said, 'We would really like you to come' we would go. But I'm not going to say 'Please let us play for you' because I know it's useless. They have changed, too. If they want the theatre, they can make the effort to come to it.<sup>14</sup>

Orientalism and Shakespeare have radically altered the stance taken by the Soleil on the social responsibility of the artist.

The danger of codifying theatrical language and imposing form on the theatre is offset by the use in 'Les Shakespeare' of popular acting styles such as *commedia dell'arte* and the general acrobatics and circus techniques. This is the language of Shakespeare Orientalized. *Sihanouk* shifted the focus by Occidentalizing or rather 'Shakespearianizing' the Orient the moment traditional Cambodia faded into the background. Mnouchkine explains:

Pour moi, au début, l'inquiétude était de montrer les gens en complet-veston. Comment montrer cela? Heureusement, la première partie se déroule dans des milieux plus traditionnels. Nous nous sommes plus inspirés du Cambodge traditionnel. Puis cela se modernise.<sup>15</sup>

The success of 'Les Shakespeare' was to find language, form and symbols from an undefined Orient using them to distance the audience, as Colette Godard explains:

Nous sommes emmenés sur une terre mythique, ni japonaise ni britannique, dans le temps sans limite qui relie Shakespeare au Théâtre du Soleil [...] Ariane Mnouchkine ne veut pas de reconstitution, ne veut pas adapter Shakespeare aux codes du nô, du kabuki, du bunraku. Elle s'en sert pour la distance immédiate qu'ils imposent et qui annule toute tentation de naturalisme et de quotidien.<sup>16</sup>

*Sihanouk* and *L'Indiade* in these terms are retrograde steps. Just as in *Gengis Khan*, Mnouchkine appears to feel she has to reflect the whole Orient on stage including the Westernization of Cambodia. Hence, the codes, form and symbols used are constantly recognizable to a Western audience and verge on the naturalistic. Occidentalizing the East in the theatre is surely the domain of the Oriental.

Many critics saw *Sihanouk* and *L'Indiade* as a failure of Orientalism, because the subjects of the plays were Oriental. If we take Orientalism in the theatre as being, simply, the composition of a form, then *Sihanouk* was successful in pointing out for all to see that Orientalism without a form is not Orientalism at all. Colette Godard explained in *Le Monde* how *Richard II's* Orientalism rendered medieval history comprehensible to a Western audience by distancing the language and the form of its presentation. In his preface to *Modern French Drama 1940-1980*, David Bradby asserts that Shakespeare, Orientalized or not, has been the instigator of a resurgence of physical and gestural styles of acting in French theatre. With the exception of *Caligula*, Shakespeare stands alone

in being the textual framework of Orientalism, thanks mainly to the work of Mnouchkine. It implies a fundamental lack of faith in our own culture which, one would suppose, led Peter Brook, for instance, to produce *The Mahabharata*<sup>17</sup>. Instead of translating and adapting an Eastern play or plays, Mnouchkine went further than Brook in having a living French playwright chronicle the contemporary history of the Orient. Having been inspired at first by the Orient it is quite natural that both Brook and Mnouchkine should progress to presenting Oriental subjects and settings themselves.

Both the productions of Shakespeare and the presentation of Orientalism have restored the text to the French stage, not least to Mnouchkine's own theatre company. From 1969 to 1981 no 'legitimate' text was performed by the Théâtre du Soleil. Likewise many other theatres had put the text to one side. The Soleil's offshoot, the Théâtre du Campagnol was and still is presenting plays which rely heavily on the inventiveness of everyone in the theatre except the writer. The Théâtre National de Strasbourg was one of several theatres going through a period of hyper-realism in which the trivia of life were re-enacted faithfully and often undramatically, such as in the TNS's *Le Palais de Justice* (1981). Mnouchkine was part of that movement which sought to fuse the roles within the theatre. She herself didn't direct plays, she guided the actors who improvised and created scenes which were eventually written down, or indeed deliberately kept fluid such as in *L'Age d'or* (1975). Consequently no playwright in the conventional sense could be credited and thus by 1981, before 'Les Shakespeare', the

writer had no place in the Théâtre du Soleil.

Shakespeare, however, was instrumental in changing all this. Mnouchkine returned to the text not out of a change of heart but to enable her company to equip itself still further with the skill of invention as regards style and form. An existing text freed the actors from the constraints and worries of scenic and plot creation. Thus liberated, they found themselves able to concentrate on developing a form. It was a completely fresh approach to Shakespeare and not at all self-indulgent. Unlike Planchon, Mesguich and Chéreau, who had never left the text in the first place, Mnouchkine had no axe to grind by producing Shakespeare. Her contemporaries, it might be argued, sought to impose their interpretation of Shakespeare on the plays and tried to present their 'definitive' version, as if Shakespeare were a requisite part of every director's repertoire. This approach to Shakespeare, with its reconstruction and referentiality is instantly recognizable and one which led Mesguich to retitl *Hamlet: Shakespeare's Hamlet*. In Berlin, Peter Stein's approach to Shakespeare was slightly different in that he had to invalidate Shakespeare's twentieth-century production history in order to relocate Shakespeare from nineteenth-century Romanticism to the late Renaissance. However much he would like to deny it, Luca Ronconi indisputably stamps Shakespeare with his own hallmark and is just as individualistic and referential as his contemporaries all of whom, as a group, have used Shakespeare to experiment with style.

Mnouchkine, however, wished to concentrate on the lack of form in the theatre. Her contemporaries' experimentalism created a



form, one could argue, based on whim and circumstance. Mnouchkine returned to the text to research and develop a form for the presentation of a contemporary play. Her form differs in that it was not used to interpret Shakespeare's plays, but to present them. Presenting rather than interpreting a text reduces its status in the theatrical event. It becomes one element among others. Thus it was that 'Les Shakespeare' naturally led to the forging of a link between the theatre company and the writer, Cixous, just as Copeau had advocated. It is evident that the Soleil wished to present Cixous's text in the same way as Shakespeare's - as one element in the whole production. One reason why this is not so is that the text has not been resurrected but the form (in *Sihanouk* and *L'Indiade*) has fallen by the wayside. The Soleil found that the Orient and Orientalism could not exist in tandem on their stage. The text was the former, and the form the latter. The politics of the company ruled that the *-ism* of the form would be a disservice to the Orient (which was the subject of the text). Text and form parted company once more with the text reigning supreme. This leaves us to conclude that theatrical Orientalism can only ever exist in the productions of Western classical texts; in Dullin's *Richard III*, in the Berliner Ensemble's *Coriolanus*, in Diaz-Florian's *Caligula* and in Mnouchkine's 'Les Shakespeare'.

Plays about the Orient and theatrically Orientalist productions of Western texts stand opposed to one another at the Cartoucherie like everywhere else. Oriental plays or plays about the Orient do not make truly Orientalist theatre in the West. This

is not a new idea: Artaud had already warned of this decades earlier in *Le Théâtre et les dieux*:

Quand elle [la jeunesse] apprend que la médecine des Chinois, médecine archimillénaire, a su guérir le choléra par des moyens archimillénaires, alors que contre le choléra la médecine de l'Europe ne connaît encore que les moyens barbares de la fuite ou de la crémation, il ne lui suffit pas d'introduire cette médecine en Europe, mais elle pense aux vices d'esprit de l'Europe et cherche à guérir de cet esprit.<sup>13</sup>

Shakespearianized *Sihanouk* introduced the Orient as the 'médecine' to European culture, but more significantly it was the Orientalism of Mnouchkine's 'Les Shakespeare' (and not the presentation of the Orient itself) which sought to cure European culture of 'le choléra': the sovereignty of the text in the theatrical event.

## NOTES TO CONCLUSION

1. First performance: 11 September 1985.
2. Gilles Costaz, '*L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk, roi du Cambodge*', *Acteurs*, no.29, 12-6 (p.12)
3. Gilles Costaz, '*L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk, roi du Cambodge*', p.13.
4. Première époque, Act II, scene ii, pp.76-7
5. Première époque, Act III, scene iv, p.142.
6. Deuxième époque, Act I, scene ii, p. 206.
7. Adrian Kierlander, 'The King of Cambodia', *Plays and Players*, no.386 (November 1985), 17-8 (p.17).
8. Gilles Costaz, '*L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk, roi du Cambodge*', p.13.
9. Programme notes of *Coincidences*, performed at the Théâtre Victor Hugo, Bagneux, February 1987.
10. Théâtre Gérard-Philippe de Saint-Denis, January-February 1987.
11. Director's notes, unpublished.
12. Tatsuro Ishii, 'Zeami's Mature Thoughts on Acting', *Theatre Research International*, 12, 2 (Summer 1987), 110-23 (p.112).
13. Tatsuro Ishii, 'Zeami's Mature Thoughts on Acting', p.115.
14. Irving Wardle, 'An Artist's Response to Guilt and Complicity', *The Times*, 2 April 1986.
15. Gilles Costaz, '*L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk, roi du Cambodge*', p.14.
16. Colette Godard, 'Les Samouraïs de Shakespeare', *Le Monde*, 15.12.81.
17. *Le Mahabharata*, directed by Peter Brook, Festival d'Avignon, 1985. Brook sees the Orient and Shakespeare as being the only subjects for theatrical production worth considering: "Les sociétés orientales, très traditionnelles, conservent encore, des niveaux de connaissance très riches qu'on ne les retrouve, je crois, que dans Shakespeare". (Anca Visdei, '*Le Mahabharata*: rencontre avec un homme remarquable', *Acteurs*, nos.26-7 (June-July 1985), 35-6 (p.36).)

18. Antonin Artaud, 'Le Théâtre et les dieux', *Oeuvres complètes*, 8, 196-206 (p.200).

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## APPENDIX A: A CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF PRODUCTIONS

**L'Association Théâtrale des Etudiants de Paris** - (prototype of Théâtre du Soleil), productions involving Ariane Mnouchkine:

- 1960 *Noces de sang* by Garcia Lorca  
 1961 *Gengis Khan* by Henri Bauchau, directed by Ariane Mnouchkine

**Théâtre du Soleil**

- 1964 *Les Petits Bourgeois* by Maxim Gorky  
 1965 *Le Capitaine Fracasse* by Théophile Gauthier, adapted by Philippe Léotard and Ariane Mnouchkine  
 1966 *La Cuisine* by Arnold Wesker  
 1968 *Le Songe d'une nuit d'été* by William Shakespeare  
 1969 *Les Clowns* (création collective)  
 [Permanent home established at  
 Cartoucherie de Vincennes]
- 1970 *1789, la révolution doit s'arrêter à la perfection du bonheur* (création collective)  
 1972 *1793, la cité révolutionnaire est de ce monde* (création collective)  
 1975 *L'Age d'or, première ébauche* (création collective)  
 [Film *Molière, une vie*, 1977]
- 1979 *Méphisto, le roman d'une carrière* by Klaus Mann, adapted by Ariane Mnouchkine  
 1981 *Richard II* by William Shakespeare  
 1982 *La Nuit des rois* by William Shakespeare  
 1984 *Henry IV (première partie)* by William Shakespeare  
 1985 *L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk, roi du Cambodge* by Hélène Cixous  
 1987 *L'Indiade, ou l'Inde de leurs rêves* by Hélène Cixous