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Enter the Theatre

TRANSLATED BY BRIAN J. MALLET

Everything began in 1940 and up to 1948 in my very early childhood before consciousness, thought, with a play without an author, which was history itself, *res gestae*, the theatre of which was the centre of my native city Oran. The *core* of Oran had by chance the shape of the Theatre, I only realized it fifty years later.

The scene was the Place d'Armes – to the right the Municipal Theatre, to the left the Military Club and the pharmacy. On the corner Les Deux Mondes, my aunt Deborah's tobacconist's which was Ali Baba's Cave and the first version of the chorus. I myself was in the upper circle of Philippe Street and I could see the history of the entire world played out before me. This history was structured by a twofold plot. One world was trying to annihilate one world. In the first plot Nazism plus Vichyism and the fascisms were trying to destroy the wavering democracies, the champions of eternal moral values. In the second plot these same forces of good were divided and half evil, colonialist, misogynistic, repressive. From the upper circle where I climbed on to the rails, flanked by the hen, I wondered how in this entanglement of violent evil good forces, and where it was impossible to separate a pure good from any kind of morbid or diabolical attack, anything other than a tragic ending could be expected. I could not see any possibility of this on the stage. I was three and a half, four years old and searching with all my strength for a beyond. My German family was in the concentration camps, my grandmother had just managed to escape. She had come to us in Algeria where we were witnesses and hostages to many major and secondary persecutions.

From everywhere there loomed the forms of exclusion, exile or massacre. I also saw Fortinbras de Gaulle and the Allies enter the Placedarme. We were liberated but the Algerians were more enslaved than ever.

Democracy showed itself to be a dream, a word. There was no justice, no equality, no respect. Almost no courage. I was on the verge of despair. The world is tragic. If I did not give up hope, it was because my family was without sin and my father was a young doctor, true-spirited and incorruptible. But then he died at thirty-nine. What are the gods doing meanwhile? And we who are small and threatened, what can we do?

"If there is a somewhere else," I would say to myself, "which can escape the infernal practice of repetition, then it is there that new worlds are written, dreamed, invented."

Such was my obsession and my need. Is there a somewhere else? Where? It has to be invented. This is the mission of poets. Assuming that there are any. And that they are not cast into the triturator of history before they have even created.

Decades later I am attending the performance of my plays, and what do I see? That they had begun before I wrote, in Oran, Algeria.

In the meantime I have not stopped asking myself with growing astonishment what evil is, experiencing it in increasingly stupefying and painful ways, trying to understand its structure,

machine, ineluctability. And feeling myself cast as the keeper of after-lives (I do not say lives – *after-lives*) or Night Watchwoman. The mission entrusted to me by my father I would define as follows: I must do everything to ensure that I and the people around me are not swept away by oblivion, indifference, I must keep alive the *qui vive* and preserve the dead, the murdered, the captive, the excluded, from the jaws of death. This is my mission. I do not claim to fulfil it: there would no longer be any problem. I live the tragic, I live myself tragically, I am totally occupied by the question of the tragic. Which in no way excludes happiness and the comic, on the contrary. But I live and breathe the sense of threat, imminence and betrayal within the very midst of happiness and the love of peace.

When I use the word *tragic*, I determine the word in a trivial and ordinary way, that is to say that on the one hand there is tragic theatre, with the goat, the rather Greek fatality of making the wrong choice. On the other, and rather freer from etymology and the Greek context, I see it as linked to the need of the double bind, that is, to the fatal rending of what I call the soul or the heart, to situations of divided loyalty, a quartering of the self. It is the irreconcilable as ineluctable: the situation in which I must accept the unacceptable, or renounce what is most dear and most necessary to me because there is no right answer or happy ending, you cannot expect any consolation or justice, I have looked for it, I have wanted justice, I have crossed generations and frontiers, I have spent my life doing this to the point of finding myself almost outside of myself – in vain, because consolation and justice do not exist. But even so it was the right thing to do: because it is in this search and this pursuit that the share of justice and consolation reserved for us is to be found. As I ran, searched, struggled, committed myself to action, something calm was being hollowed out in me, calm in opposition to dramatic, something with which there is no negotiation: since the tragic is, and since it is *implacable*, there is no decision that wins the day, it is unquestionable (questioning is Job – Job is the theatre, is movement, protest, despair (that is, wounded hope), anger).

No, I would have discovered in the end that *there isn't* and *that's the way it is, the irreconcilable* is the tragic. That's the way it is. That's why, because it is unquestionable, there is a certain "serenity," a stasis, an immobility. This conviction of *that's the way it is* is often conveyed in my plays by characters who are no doubt fairly close to the secret of my heart, for example Aeschylus in *The Perjured City*. These are people who have lived a lot, thousands of years and of adventures.

The most incontestable example of the tragic, in my view, is *solitude*, the inescapable, unacceptable part of solitude, and which we experience to a minimal or major degree in all our human relationships, in family ties, and even in love: we do not understand one another *at the same time*. We are the subjects of misunderstanding. Even in the most successful love solitude is not overcome. You say to me: "Do you understand what I am saying to you?" And I say to you: "Yes, yes – of course." And it is only the next day that I understand that when I thought I understood you I did not understand you at all. The lateness, the too late, the lag, the untimely arrival of the message, are our most common and our most painful experience. And it is that which, transposed, transfigured into a theatrical mainspring causes havoc in tragedies: we call it the *untimely letter*; it is sent too soon, too late, and someone is killed. Cordelia is not saved. This solitude (this deafness, this disjunction of our rhythms) exists only if there is someone to make it appear. You have to imagine the conjunction of two conscious solitudes. One can be two in oneself (see Kafka), it is the incurable, the unsaveable or the unsolveable. Or the impossible. We are impossible. And *contretemps*. The Theatre is acted upon, that is to say undermined by *contretemps*.

The tragic is the insurmountable anachrony: the missed appointment. Even when it is not missed. *Sero te amavi*: Beauty, I have loved you too late, said St. Augustine to God. And Jacques Derrida repeats it at the beginning of his tragic text "Un ver à soie": *Sero* . . . How can one *love too late*? It is TooLate who is the demon of the Theatre.

But there is always an unpredictable element. Hazard, chance, a grain of sand in the works: the possibility that the tragic programming will break down, the grace of a totally unforeseen development. *That's the way it is*, it is necessary but at the same time, there is contingency.

But perhaps what is tragic, I fear and suspect, is the fact that it is only *from without*, by leaving society (*The Perjured City*) and even life (*The Perjured City*, *The Story*) that we can transgress, interrupt the practice of repetition. It is perhaps only the "dead" – or poets – those whom Artaud calls "the suicides of society" – who manage to conceive of a something beyond vengeance, or resentment or reprisal. But that requires passing *through death*, or through something equivalent: the consent of the I to renunciation. To expect nothing. To attain the state of *unexpectancy*. Another innocence. Is it possible?

"Original sin, that old injustice committed by man, consists of the reproach which man makes and to which he does not renounce namely that an act of injustice has been committed against him, that he has been the victim of original sin," Kafka says. Can someone renounce reproach? Who? In what circumstances? This is the question which I can ask only within the space of the Theatre.

The play of which it is my mission to be the author – let us say a story – begins badly. It begins with a storm, a blow, the worst: in full flight, a fall, a mourning in the midst of celebration. See those characters who were the epitome of life itself, how they are being driven to their doom. I run after the story and after the characters who are its hosts its masters its hostages.

Where can it go? The horses have bolted. The play moves along faster and faster. How will it end? No one has any idea. I would like it not to end fatally for those I love. But so many contrary wills and desires are woven into it.

But initially everything began for the unquiet author that I am with a proposal, or rather a temptation, from Ariane Mnouchkine in 1981: Do you want to can you write a play for the Théâtre du Soleil. I was immediately delighted and terrified. I wanted to, but to be able to . . .

The Théâtre du Soleil is not only enormous in everything, in art, in ambition, in ethical commitment, but first and foremost in scale and number. There is an economy of the Soleil, a company made up of sixty permanent staff that imposes obligations on the author; I have to give play to my pen for twenty or thirty fervent and famished actors, and therefore ensure the existence of fifty characters. For my part it is almost superhuman. Every time I commit myself to it, I tremble, I know that it will be very difficult. But thrilling. So I go ahead. I get on board.

The adventure has its conventions: first a long talk with Ariane. Because the subject of the play is searched for and decided in agreement between the two of us. It is always located at the intersection of contemporary events (let us say the *res gestae*) and the Theatre, in its pure reflexivity. It will not be a question of performance but of thinking through the necessity of the Theatre, its powers – but also its limits, as a party to world events. We dream of *telling* in such a way that something will *move* in reality. If not change – which would be enormously presumptuous – then at least be *recalled*, resuscitated, delivered from silence. Our job is first of all a *recollection* of what is happening, an illumination of the present itself.

It is this primordial ethical direction or orientation which is the first cause of our theatrical alliance.

I met Ariane in 1972 in overdetermining and prophetic circumstances: I went to see her and took along my friend Michel Foucault to get her involved in the work of the Groupe Information Prison which Michel Foucault had founded. The first "play" which brought us together lasted four minutes and was supposed to be performed outside prisons. But I never saw it: no sooner had we unloaded the boards than the police were at us with their truncheons. Between 1972 and 1981 we called each other and went to all the political demonstrations into which we put body and soul:

I called her towards women, she towards artists and the outcasts and the prisoners of the universe, and we each moved towards the other's side until the day she opened up the doors of her "Globe" to me. It was a real *coup de théâtre*.

In retrospect I see the logic of this turn of events. We have the same political and aesthetic – politicoaesthetic – conception of the Art of the Theatre.

Let me add – for I had already written a few small plays – that in its structure, in its laws, in its modes of functioning, in the acting which is Ariane's achievement, the Soleil is in all ways the place, the magical forge, the workshop of the Theatre itself, the ancient and modern cave where the mysteries of the Theatre are constantly analysed and reactivated. I myself am always an apprentice there. Ariane too, for the Théâtre du Soleil is a world which reflects on itself, sounds itself out, reworks itself from play to play. It is itself its school and its laboratory, and the workshop of all the despairs which accompany theatrical creation.

So we set out in search of the Subject. The directions are always the same: look for the scene, the event, the facts which, taking place "at these times" on the planet come to afflict us cruelly, having taken us (we the public, the citizens) by surprise or treachery, leave us wounded, powerless, appalled. Come or *are going* to afflict us. The poisoned needle which is plunged into our veins. The morbid episode which by attacking a society, a country, whether foreign or not, injures and wrongs the roots of humanity. A symptom, perhaps, the harbinger of an evil which promises to propagate. If no one begins to cry for help.

Crimes dramas scandals are legion. But the choice? It's a long business. We spend months, sometimes years, looking for what will make the Fable irreplaceable. And sometimes we err. More than once I have started out on the wrong track: we had been led astray. Whereupon, sometimes very quickly, sometimes after months of work, I realize that I cannot find the transposition. What then? You give up.

Often the "right" subject, the one that is transfigurable, the subject with roots which plunge deep into the unconscious and into the treasure-house of myths, and with foliage that brushes against the clouds, was just next to the "wrong" one around which we had gone, which has neither depth nor height. This was the case with *The Indiad*.

Once the Fable has been glimpsed in the distance – and we see first of all only the coastline – I set off on my way, and Ariane on hers. While I write, she constructs: the entire Theatre is pulled down and rebuilt as the receptacle of the new arrival.

And now a few secrets about what happens to the "author." Let us say for argument's sake that dozens and dozens of characters are going to arrive from "there," and that I write dozens of scenes.

To begin with there is: *the Place*. The place! The place is magical. It is a marvel to discover. It is from *the vision of a place* that all Ariane's work will be born. And for me from the moment *that the place takes its place*, all that remains is to wait. What place? I believe that the place of *The Perjured City* is the most *fertile* of places theatrically speaking, because it fuses with the structural localization of the Theatre itself: our stage, the cosmos, measures 300m² but it also has an address and a driving form: yes the place, however apparently immobile it might seem, must provide the momentum and the passage: Hamlet's ramparts, King Lear's cliff. The place is a great sacred actor. In *The Perjured City* everything *began* with a cemetery which was a city in itself – an enormous cemetery (Ariane thought about the City of the Dead in Cairo where 150,000 "homeless" people live among the tombs) populated with the dead and the living and which stretches outside the city walls. You can do everything with an immense cemetery, the hostile twin of the hostile city, reverse city on the wrong side right side out.

For me the Theatre is by definition the stage where the living meet and confront the dead, the forgotten and the forgetters, the buried and the ghosts, the present, the passing, the present

past and the passed past. There is nothing more Theatre than a great City of the Dead. It is a stage through which all the characters of a story make their appearance, from the most ancient, the most distant in the centuries down to the most contemporary, from the imaginary, the invented, the lost found again down to the real familiars. The dead are not always as dead as we think nor the living as living as they think.

A Theatre, a real one, is always a kind of external territory, whose externality is more or less included in or bordering on the City, an inside separated from the Dominant Inside, it is located at the gate, and because it is subversive, gated at the gates of the City, outlawed.

Here is the Place: the Cemetery. This will be the only indication or stage direction in my text. And here is the place of my new play, entitled *Drums on the Dam, In the Form of an Ancient Puppet Play, Performed by Actors: The Dam*.

Now the hour of the characters has come.

Enter – almost always and at least up until now – the character who, I will realize, is going to help me bring this creation into the world.

For the author that I am it is the apparition of this primordial Apparition which will open for me the invisible door of the Theatre. Here, no curtain, no veiling-unveiling. But, before any other, enter, coming from always, the "ferryman." I call him that since I first discovered his existence. Who? Aeschylus, the guardian of the cemetery in *The Perjured City*, Snorri Sturlusson the poet author of the Eddas in *The Story*, Sihanouk's dead father, Haridasi the nomadic Baul in *The Indiad*, the Soothsayer in *Drums on the Dam*. The being who acts as lookout and liaison. The one who is (neither) inside (nor) outside. "Who are you?" the shady lawyers ask him. "Aeschylus the guardian." "Aeschylus as in Aeschylus?" Yes, it was indeed Aeschylus-as-Aeschylus who came to me when I took up my waiting post.

The name was in my mind, because I had just translated his brilliant play *The Eumenides* for the Soleil, and I was thinking a lot about him the author of so many plays which have disappeared and never come back. Unless what we write are the ghosts of his plays, without our knowing it?

But he was not the only one to arrive and did not come back alone. Two years earlier I had just written *The Story*, where I had met Snorri Sturlusson. Now afterwards, fortunately, I had forgotten him. Snorri Sturlusson, a Homer for Northern Europe, a statesman, poet, historian, diplomat, the one who gathered together the immense Scandinavian oral tradition and cast it in a poetic form which he invented, "the author," that is, the ferryman and mediator of Nordic myths and legends and so the adoptive father of the gods and heroes. I felt a singular joy in making of this man from the Middle Ages the ancestor and the contemporary of fabulous characters of whom he was the guardian and the redeemer. Snorri by his presence in my play disconnects the linear order of time, he is himself *the witness* to events which took place "centuries" or thousands of years before, with him before begins again *today*. The creator is himself one of his creatures. But since he is informed of the ancient version of the facts which he has undertaken to report, a violent, cruel version doomed to annihilation, he sets himself the poetic task of dismantling, halting the ancient account and doing everything to ensure that the agents of calamity take a less fatal path. "What if a tiny little poet," he says to himself, "changed the course of history, if he inflected it?" Germanic mythology is a history in which a certain concept of the poet as *Dichter* is possible, after all. He might manage it. If he did then the story of History and of all the concepts of History would be thrown into disarray. And so this Germanic Snorri entered the play with the intention of re-writing it differently.

Aeschylus (mine) does not have this desire and this dream. He is truly, even in 1999, the hero of Graeco-philosophical-mythological thought and of its conception of tragic fatality, and that does not occur to him. And yet – as a poet he overflows his definition and his initial culture. He belongs to the community and the kingdom of dreamer inventors always capable of taking the

one step beyond, at least in imagination. And so my Aeschylus is haunted by his doubles or his others; from his mouth come words which surprise him a little and charm him himself, and those among the spectators who have not forgotten will recognize or think they recognize echoes of Shakespeare or Freud or Montaigne or François Villon. Because a poet is always haunted. His word is memory and prophecy. What can a poet do, awake, alone, in the tumult of History? That is my question. Where Snorri tries to forewarn and rewrite by encouraging the actors not to obey what was in the programme, Aeschylus is a tragically modern poet in his confessed powerlessness and his inability to foresee what is going to happen. He knows that he doesn't know. He is the vain watchman of those who sleep. He is the memory which cannot predict whence the misfortune will come. Historical time and poetical time cut across and pass each other in his word and his conscience. But he is the one who is pointlessly "in the know." What purpose will he have served? Accompanying and noting the inevitable. The role of the witness, but of the witness of whom Celan speaks, the witness who asks (whom?) who will bear witness to the witness once the witness has disappeared? Yes, who will bear witness? If "all are dead," "when all are dead," who will be the witness?

A cruel, paradoxical, ludic, fateful question, abyss and wall into which my plays plunge in their slightly crazy course, since they present the tragic in a *performative manner* by asking questions about the tragic, calling into question the tragic, trying to interrupt the end, the teleological, trying to write History in which "there is still some blank space" – still some indeterminateness. And this whiteness in *The Story* is a "real" white, a Snow which covers everything with a page on which a poet yet to come could write what has just happened in another version.

And in *The Perjured City* it is a Night, a celestial starry fabric.

In each case, I try to engage the possibility of a theatrical writing which overflows tragedy – is it possible? – to write understanding the tragedy and at the same time overflowing it and asking in the play itself the question about the overflowing of tragedy? That is what I hope to do. And that is why my plays have such strange and such unfinal endings. But I will come back, at the end, to my kinds of endings.

For the moment let us return to the beginnings, and to the appearance of the characters. So here I am in the company of Aeschylus or Snorri. And now I await the others. I wait. Let them come. "Creation" of characters for me means: allowing to come, allowing to form; persons either "known" or mythical or not yet encountered, but all of them, however famous or anonymous they may be, equally unknown, mysterious, enigmatic, brand new. No one has yet ever seen them even if they are called Brunhild or Erinyes, or Joan of Arc. As an author I am in the state of receptivity, a concave and hypersensitive state. My "work" consists of being impressionable matter. My state can be compared to a kind of waking dream, very passive, patient, hallucinatory. I am the empty stage. This may last a long time until I hear footsteps. I see nothing. Enter Voices. Characters. I do not move. It is an empty time, an animal time, vigilant, I am submerged, under the earth and under time. I listen. Perhaps the waiting is a form of prayer. By dint of praying them to come, they end up by coming. Enter – A character alone. Sometimes two or four. And there they are making a scene. This scene is of an extreme strength and *naked* because he or she or they are alone. The character enters, naked, the heart naked, he scratches his heart, he looks at his heart, bleeding, he is amazed, he opens himself up without understanding himself, as the characters of Shakespeare open themselves up when they are alone. And yet not alone. Because there is the audience. They confide in a witness who is both absent and present – moreover that is where its strength lies, the characters who confide or confess, Iago, my Hagen, Kriemhild, the Mother in *The Perjured City*, address themselves to an audience (and at the beginning the audience is me, H.C., the author) which is both there and not there, which does not say a word, but whose silence is golden, which listens does not intervene, does not judge, and the character shows himself as he would to anyone

or to the devil, to anyone who, in any case, would not prevent him from revealing himself as twisted divided tormented tempted hesitant deconstituted – for you need an interlocutor to show yourself and an interlocutor without an opinion and without a voice. That's me. My characters do that with me the author, they know that I am not there but that I listen to them, they speak to *each other*, question *each other*, sound *each other* out, explain themselves to *each other* and this *Each other* is the dummy, that is to say the author. I however am all ears, dozens of ears sprout on me, I record as quickly as possible, I take note at full speed, I hear their thoughts pass, they are going very fast, I have just the time to note the ultra-rapid beginning, the thread, the end of a passionate confidence. It is not writing. It is a crossing, an arrow, a logic. And suddenly I hear, I understand, the beating heart of a character. In a sense, when I hear a heart beat violently in the grip of such emotion, it is the sign that a character is born. The beating is expressed in a few words, in a brief phrase, which will be the key to that creature. As soon as they are born, they go into battle. I am them and I follow. I know them a little, I recognize the music of the heart of the one whom I call the King, or Nehru, or Siegfried or Immonde or Charles VII, I know who is called like that and who goes off to battle.

I say *battle*: sometimes it is a real battle in a real war. Sometimes a scene, a confrontation, and a scene is always a battle. The entire play wages war and seeks the moment of a peace. Each scene is a duel, or charge, there are invisible or real swords, traps set or defused. Every play is a war or its double: the war with words, the court, the trial. And each character is a king, the king of a kingdom fallen prey to an internal war: I struggle against myself, I attack myself, I accuse myself, I defend myself. The smallest of characters, the porter, the valet, the maid, is king or queen. The smallest is great. Most will experience the fate of human beings in a grandiose or modest way: dethronement, deposition, betrayal, banishment. Eternal themes but each time embodied for the first time. Joyce said in *Ulysses* that the note of banishment echoes throughout the work of Shakespeare. It is true. But it could also be said of Chekhov: the country squires in *The Cherry Orchard* are banished kings. We recognize them but we do not know them. To each his own pain and punishment. And Firs, the too old, forgotten, remaindered, is the most banished of the banished.

The reason why there are 150 different battles in Shakespeare is because one time it is Macbeth who is fighting, another time it is Richard II. What is the heart like, what colour, what heat, what pain, the heart which goes off to that battle, what does it risk, what will happen to it, and what does it hope for, what does it foresee, and what will not happen to it, etc. That can happen only when the characters are born. What for me is an eternal source of surprise is that there is a moment when the character has become so precise, so *itself* that it is totally detached from me, that it is really autonomous in the proper sense of the word, it obeys its own rules, and I have only to follow its instructions. The scenes are going to unfold, the characters are going to meet or provoke such and such a fate and I am merely the scribe in the matter. But before reaching this period of separation, where I am relieved of the anguish of the wait, a lot of time passes. Sometimes a very long time. It depends on the external and internal circumstances of the writing, the effectiveness of a prayer. Sometimes, I may not see what the characters have become for months, I may be in a prehistoric phase of preparation, hesitation, which may last for months. But as soon as the characters are born, things move quickly. Because at that moment there is Action, and action like everything in the theatre is extremely rapid. After having been lost and gone astray in wait in anxiety for six months or a year, *the action of writing* will take me two months. So that if I am asked "How long do you take to write a play?" I say two months, but it is not true. How long it takes me to reach the hour of writing, one year, two years, and then it goes quickly.

But the hour of writing is, for the author, *the final hour*. What I call writing, the textuality, the textility, the fabric, the style, and which, in fiction, is the beginning and the whole, is, in this

case, the *final hand*. It will come to give flesh and vision to psychic and dramatic constructions. It is the final wheel of a coach with a hundred wheels. But without it the coach will not move.

Now it is time for the soul of the characters in action to be painted in their words. For each, the author seeks the style of a singular soul, its treasure-house of metaphors, its inexchangeable word. Knowing that the inner world of each "self" is always much richer, refined, nuanced, variegated than we think. They have emotions, I supply the words.

In this respect incredible events may sometimes happen: a character may take wing in a way in which the author would never have imagined: there is for example the story of a scene which happened despite myself and of which I disapprove but in vain.

I was in my office, in the state of an author docile to the passions of the characters. I could see Barout, the rabbi, who is one of the three contrary "narrators" in *The Story*, looking through a Bible in a corner. Enter Snorri Sturlusson, the poet. He is agitated, overexcited, he can no longer find the manuscript of the play, it has been stolen from him, and suddenly he sees the rabbi with the manuscript in his hands, the rabbi, his friend, his pal! It's too much! In Snorri is awakened Sturla Sturlusson the Scandinavian father, the one-eyed and brutal Odin, he throws himself on Barout and with a stab of a knife . . . Wham! End of the friendship, of the history of trust between peoples and poets. Barout crumbles, I want to cry: he is innocent, but I have no voice: I am not in the play. Moreover Snorri realizes but too late his madness, the cruel unconscious blow. The irreparable has been committed. The irreparable? Ah, no. It's not going to happen like that! I get up, my legs trembling. Such a scene by me, in me? Never. I take the pages – because everything had just happened under My pen, by my hand – and with horror, I tear them up and throw them in the waste-paper basket. Then I go down for a coffee and tell my daughter about the terrible scene: "Snorri has just killed Barout," I murmured. I could not get over it. I stopped everything. I did not sleep. The next day I questioned myself about my reaction: "You have thrown out this scene?" "Am I not the author?" "But in the name of who and what are you condemning this scene? Do you want to save Snorri's reputation? Do you want to lay down the law on the characters?" "No, no." "You want to make morality prevail. No blood, no crime?" "No, no," I said, embarrassed. I rewrote the scene. After all, it had taken place. And now, I said to myself, what is going to happen? But that was the business of the assassin and the assassinated. It was up to Snorri to act. And the rabbi too. Both in the state in which they were. Killing each other. Between them they raised and embodied all the questions of homicide, injustice, the laws of blood, Germanic mythology and Judaeo-Christian mythology. The movement of creation does its work beyond the desires habits and laws of the author and takes him beyond himself.

The Theatre is no doubt a propitious place for the taking of action, the carrying out of all those things which in civilian life we repress and hold back. Thoughts, fantasies, virtualities, most of them murderous, take advantage of the exceptional temporality of the theatrical account to fulfil themselves "in reality." But it is precisely for this reason, because it is a magic mirror, that the Theatre is experienced as a necessity by all those who enter under its roof. You come to see yourself do what you swear you would never do: all the excesses. Good or evil.

I would like to speak at length of the language of bodies in the Theatre, but I do not have the time. So just a couple of words: we see, in the Theatre (therefore one sees *oneself*) thanks to acting, all the figures of our blindness, incarnate, visible in a way in which we do not see them in reality: in a real conversation the convention requires that the conversation unfold face to face. Furthermore most of the time we use the front, just one side, of the body in everyday life. But in the Theatre, the word goes, comes, strikes, sees, from all sides of the body. We speak *in the back* of the characters, in the back of the blind that we are, we strike, we see, the back of the characters, all the figures of misunderstanding, deafness, blindness, proximity, separation are present before our eyes, we see ourselves seeing seen from close up, from far away, foresee, foretoken see nothing

making mistakes, yes, we see ourselves from the back, we see ourselves believing we are alone while the entire world – or conscience is there. This makes it possible for the author to create an extraordinarily mobile, versatile and manifold discourse. A potential such as we can possess only in dreams. In the Theatre I let people see all the things I do not see and all *those* (beings) we do not see, we have never seen and whose presence around us is so strong and effective that the Greeks gave these presences proper names and the states of divine entities. In the Theatre I see the Night, the Dead, the Furies, the ghosts. This is the quasi-divine function of the theatrical word. One day I was writing a scene in which the guardian Aeschylus told the dishonest lawyers that he was going to have to close the gates of his cemetery. "Sirs," he said, to make them leave "the Night!"

The Night? I the author hear Aeschylus say: Here is the Night!

Whereupon *Night* in person entered. And became one of the most important characters in the play. The Theatre needs the economy of magic. It takes place in the world of the all-powerfulness of thoughts. Magic is necessary. The problem of the author is that I write at a time when magic has been repressed and denied. However, our unconscious which are our clandestine masters are magicians. So how can magic be reintroduced? It is the poetical function of language which holds the key: it makes an appeal to the ancient memory which lies dormant in the spectator, it revives images and visions. But this can happen only in the Theatre. He who goes to the Theatre consents. He who goes to the Theatre grants himself the ephemeral right to hear those who are deprived of speech in the city speak: children, poets, the dead, animals, thoughts at the back of our mind, outcasts, the homeless. In that, in this giving of speech, the poetic Theatre is political.

You will note that authors, in speaking of the Theatre, say: "the theatre is . . ."

Conjuration, conjuration of that which is only: convoked. By convocation. Or conjuration. I.e. the Theatre.

And for it to take place, all that is required is a magical object always small in size. For example, at the Théâtre du Soleil, a small rug is placed on the floor. And the theatre is.

The end of my time of speech is drawing nigh. And I have promised to speak of the end. It is difficult, because for me, there is no final end. The spectators end up by observing, and I too, that often my plays do not have any conclusive end. But the play has to end, it will soon be time for the last metro, and this I don't forget because the audience is an essential character in any play: it is there, everything is addressed to it, *and it is the watch* and it calls the tune.

Now from the beginning, the play has been seeking its end.

At the beginning we were already wondering, Ariane and myself how will it end? But this question conceals a concern. Deep down we probably wanted it to "end well," that is, not too badly. With all our strength the characters and myself try to break out of the mortal trap, the circle of blood, the ineluctable repetition. If we knew how to, there would be no play.

On our side, we want the end. Who would not want the end of a tragedy? It will be tragic but it will at least put an end to the agony. Everyone will be dead. Then Fortinbras will arrive and our mourning can begin. In a secret way even a bad end is always at the same time the beginning of a consolation.

One wants to see the end. I too. But as I have said to myself since the age of four in Oran, it is the sign itself of tragedy that *we shall not see the end*, it will come but we will no longer be there to greet it and for it to greet us. There will be no greeting and no salvation. The war will necessarily finish, but my grandfather the soldier died on the front without seeing the end. Hitler died without six million Jews knowing it, at least during their lifetime. I know Khmers who, although saved from the Khmer Rouge camps and living among us, were unable to resume their lives because, since Pol Pot was alive, they had not seen the end of their torture.

It will end nevertheless. But, before the end, I do not know how. At the Théâtre du Soleil,

there is a tradition, it is not commented upon, it comes from the well of time: it is understood that I will not write the last scene until the last days of the rehearsal. And it is right. Thus we all experience uncertainty. The players are unable to plan, to cheat. They are in the present.

"How is it going to end?" the characters, the prophetic humiliated souls of the cemetery ask their friend Aeschylus, the guardian.

"Very quickly, very violently. The hour is not far off. The end is coming. I can already hear the axe breathing. Can you hear it?" replies he-who-knows-that-he-does-not-know.

It will be a surprise. It will happen where and when it is not expected. It is like that up until the last minute.

Now I must write it. I have just seen its face at the window of time: it has come. Not chosen. It is the result of so many so-called "intradiegetic" and "extradiegetic" events.

It must be admitted. It enters. Undeniable. It could not end otherwise, despite our efforts. When a world is rotten to the core, it is condemned to the flood. It has been so since the first play in the Theatre: God recognizes that this entire world is evil, all that remains is to wipe it out. For us, it's the same.

The mathematically elegant solution: you wipe everything out. After, we shall see. But it is terrible, cry the spectators. It is unbearable. Then God provides the spectators with an ark. But I am not God, and I was not able to save anyone. When everyone was dead, at the end of *The Perjured City*, and when for the first time the members of company discovered the last scene, they were paralysed with terror and grief. It was worse than *The Eumenides*. At the end of *The Eumenides*, everything is unbearable, the mother does not obtain justice, the matricidal son recovers his assets, and the old goddesses that called for vengeance let themselves be buried like old lambs under the earth. You come out of the theatre with a pang of anguish. But even so the old disappeared goddesses are immortal. Whereas we are mortal. At the sorrow caused by this ending, I, the author, allowed myself to add another scene. Because I, H.C., do not believe that the end ends and closes. Furthermore neither do the players and the people at the Theatre believe in an end which encloses: they are by definition on the side of resurrection.

So we were all agreed that, after the end, there should be a continuation. Objectively, it happens *elsewhere* and *after* death. All our dead character friends reappear. From where they are, they have an extraordinary point of view over the Theatre of the Earth which they have just left. From this distance the Earth resembles an orange of soft light. They see, they see us. How small, agitated, threatened we are.

I must finish my account here now.

This continuation beyond the end had a very interesting fate: the public was split in two. Those who, like us, relished the suspension and the impossible. Those who did not tolerate this fantasy, this childishness. The latter came to see me and asked to cut and condemn to the waste-paper basket this moment of transgression, a caprice, an unreality. The Theatre, they said, must obey, it must not overflow. Once it's finished, it's finished. Remove this filth, this obscenity. It is outrageous. An insult to political borders.

And so the play overflowed into the hall and continued, the battle raged between those who had a conception of tragedy which obeyed the Graeco-philosophical prescription programme, for whom history is an uninterrupted net, and those who like me can breathe only through its interruptions, going over the edge between the threads. For me the Theatre is itself the Proof of the real transgressive force of the Dream, it is a meteor from the other world. The magical place of a story and a history which we will never know, which awaits us and promises always to exceed – all that we have ever feared desired. It is the temple of our fortune. That is why "at the end" of the play-without-end the players return for the final bow, salute and salvation. Ours.