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POPULAR THEATRE AND POLITICAL UTOPIA IN FRANCE, 1870–1940

Active Citizens

Jessica Wardhaugh

Palgrave Studies in Theatre and Performance History

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Jessica Wardhaugh

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Abbreviations

Abbreviations in the text

- ACJF Association Catholique de la Jeunesse Française
- AEAR Association des Artistes et Écrivains Révolutionnaires
- CGT Confédération Générale du Travail
- CGTU Confédération Générale du Travail Unitaire
- FNC Fédération Nationale Catholique
- FTOF Fédération du Théâtre Ouvrier de France
- JOC Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne
- PCF Parti Communiste Français
- PDP Parti Démocrate Populaire
- PPF Parti Populaire Français
- PSF Parti Social Français
- SFIC Section Française de l'Internationale Communiste
- SFIO Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière
- TL Travail et Loisirs
- TNP Théâtre National Populaire
- URB Union Régionaliste Bretonne
- UTIF Union des Théâtres Indépendants de France

Abbreviations in Archival References

- AN Archives Nationales de France, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine
- APP Archives de la Préfecture de Police de Paris
- BN Bibliothèque Nationale de France

- CNC
- Centre National de la Cinématographie, Bois d'Arcy Bibliothèque Nationale, Département des Arts du Spectacle DAS

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Introduction

A bright Sunday afternoon in May 1934. In the Parisian cemetery of Père-Lachaise, communists and socialists are paying annual homage to their revolutionary ancestors of the 1871 Paris Commune. They parade to the place of their martyrdom, singing the *Internationale*, mourning the past and yet hopeful of victory in the newly forged solidarity uniting communists and socialists in militant anti-fascism.¹ The cemetery becomes a place of celebration and conviviality, memories and dreams.

High astride the roofs of two of the grander tombs is an agit-prop drama group. One member is the female militant Sarah Rochvarger, another the well-known singer Francis Lemarque. A third, Charles Dinerstein, will later die in a concentration camp. The word *Mars* is emblazoned on their tops;² they hold megaphones to their lips. For the martyrs who died in May, they proclaim a new spring in which the proletariat will—with the uniform resolution symbolized by the actors' attire—take power into their own hands as active citizens in a new state. With supreme disregard for the behavioural conventions of a cemetery, they shout out their faith in a new world, joining art and politics in a restless quest for utopia.

Their art is powerful, political—and paradoxical. This is a theatre explicitly subservient to political ends, drawing on the model of Soviet agit-prop in the earlier 1920s. Yet by this point, Soviet artistic policy has moved on. Its own most influential agit-prop groups have been subject to state repression; comparable French groups will shortly be sidelined by a similar shift in party priorities. Equally, although this is a theatre by the people—a self-consciously militant, proletarian people—there are also rival theatres for other 'peoples', each aspiring to totality. While successive governments are seeking to create a national popular theatre for docile republican citizens, alternative groups are drawing on more partisan sympathies to appeal to narrower and often more subversive peoples: Breton or Provençal, anarchist or socialist, Catholic or royalist. They are weaving art into politics and politics into daily life as never before, turning to theatre to imagine their ideals and to create hubs of community, militancy, and belonging. For each of these groups, popular theatre is a means of exploring what community could—and should—become in the age of the masses.

In France, the idea of *communautarisme*-promoting the interests of a particular community over the general interest-is controversial. French historians and politicians often prefer a linear narrative of democratization, according to which partisan attachments are progressively interiorized, and subjugated to a more formal adhesion to the secular national community.³ The more this republican model is challenged, especially by those who identify themselves outside it, the greater the temptation to spring uncritically to its defence. And yet popular initiative and allegiance to rival communities-whether in elections, strikes, demonstrations, identity politics, or, most poignantly, in tragic acts of violence-consistently frustrates this narrative.⁴ For better or worse, it is the contrasting communities to which French people belong that have driven (and continue to drive) political dynamics, ideologies, and opposition. To understand how and how far French people belong-not only as citizens of a Republic but equally as individuals shaped by personal and sometimes passionate attachments that may be, for example, religious, ethnic, or political-it is the communities and the dialogues between them that matter.⁵ Studying these dialogues makes it possible to test the strength of competing attachments, to probe what unites and what continues to divide.

Popular theatre offers a unique insight into political communities in both theory and practice. The imagined, theoretical construction of the masses as 'the people', whether on stage or in the public space, was of inescapable importance across Europe in the years 1870– 1940, as war and revolution tore apart nations and empires and radically redrew mental and physical boundaries. It was in the people that leaders, movements, parties, and nations sought ideological coherence, legitimacy, and support. Not only did these people matter as the electorate, or as workers, soldiers, and citizens, but they also mattered as the body politic, re-imagined for a new world. In this imagination, politics went beyond the pragmatic to the ideal, as party leaders, militants, writers, and intellectuals looked to—and sometimes sacralized collective experience as a source of transcendental belonging. This was an ideological framework with significant foundations in the French Revolution,⁶ not least in concepts and moments such as the Festival of the Supreme Being, with its intention to dissolve the boundaries between theatre and politics, actors and spectators, politics and religion. But while such images of total community were eulogized by more totalitarian regimes, France, too, was part of this reconfiguration of the European political imagination. Indeed the Third Republic of 1870–1940 was quite self-consciously heir to those first revolutionaries of the 1790s.

In the French Third Republic, popular theatre was inseparable from questions of citizenship and utopia. Anarchists and communists, royalists and fascists, Catholics and regionalists—and of course successive governments of the Republic itself—turned to theatre for the purpose of political integration and subversion, to shape the active citizens of the present and to imagine those of the future. Their achievements ranged from hopeful projects and proposals to popular experiments and government initiatives, and from clandestine sketches in the back streets of Paris to mass spectacles in stadiums and amphitheatres. Their efforts are richly documented in public and private archives, with the potential to illuminate the struggle for republican integration, and the search for 'total communities' encompassing the social, cultural, even spiritual dimensions of human experience. This theatre has never been fully studied; many of its initiatives remain entirely unknown.

Active Citizens offers the first history of French popular theatre from left to right: a new and exciting story of how theatre shapes political acts, ideals, and communities in the modern world. Whereas previous studies have tended to privilege selected initiatives, striving to slot them into a linear narrative of cultural democratization, this study looks at new evidence with new questions. Rather than assuming that this theatre tells a single successful (or unsuccessful) story, it presents popular theatre as a dialogical space for the playing out of complex relationships between rival communities—central and peripheral; real and imagined. In this way, the problems and paradoxes of popular theatre, not least its overwhelming diversity, become the key to understanding the dynamic conversations between politics, culture, and community. As a linear narrative of cultural democratization, popular theatre can only ever offer a story that remains frustratingly incomplete. But as a series of concurrent narratives in dialogue with one another, it offers an exceptionally rich insight into the relationship between competing ideals and identities. It facilitates a deeper understanding of the social, political, and ideological character of rival communities, and the identification of areas of confluence and divergence between them.

To tell these stories, *Active Citizens* draws on a wealth of new primary material from government, police, theatre, and film archives, as well as from private archives and the press. With a comparative approach spanning the political spectrum and placing France in its wider European context, it examines popular theatre in both theory and practice. Popular theatre is thus explored from conception to reception: from amateur drawings and architectural plans to government-funded productions, folk theatre, and clandestine drama; from Breton mystery plays to *The Claws of the Prole*; and from the experiences of rehearsal and performance to the critical responses of audiences and the press.

The contribution of this book is threefold. As the first comprehensive study of French popular theatre in this period, it challenges the often-assumed connection between cultural and political democratization. In particular, it demonstrates that the relationship between culture and republican citizenship was complex and often uneasy, with radical ideas of the people much clearer and more powerful than those of the republican centre. It takes the ongoing debate over the existence of 'two Frances' (Catholic and right-wing; republican and secular)⁷ to a new level, using the theory and practice of popular theatre to reveal where competing identities converged, and where they pulled painfully apart. Here, intriguing paradoxes are explored and explained: Parisian regionalists, secular critics intrigued by medieval mystery plays, state funding of a formerly anarchist theatre director better known for his interest in the 'red Messiah' than in republican citizenship, and democrats who contended that the performance of popular plays should never be left to the people themselves. New strength and detail are added to the contention that contradiction and ambiguity can offer a fruitful pathway into French political experience: 'a glimpse', as Sally Debra Charnow argues, 'of a differently imagined France, de-centred and comprised of marginal hybrid identities and ideas.'8

Second, *Active Citizens* offers a substantial case study of the problems and potential of political art—an ongoing debate for scholars of performance history, and of particular relevance when the impact of the arts is an inescapable research concern.⁹ By exploring the theory and practice of popular theatre from the far left to the far right, *Active Citizens* demonstrates its importance as a locus for the discussion of culture and citizenship, and its significance in the evolution of popular communities. But it also reveals that—whatever the political and numerical strength of these rival communities—they all grappled with similar challenges in seeking a utopian role for theatre, out of step with time and place. The depiction of the people on stage; the attraction of audiences to didactic spectacles; the degree to which the people—as actors or audiences—should be directed, edified, and controlled: these were complex questions to which the answers were often elusive.

Third, this book also offers the first detailed analysis of French popular theatre in its European context. The lively and developing research field on fascist and communist aesthetics has typically paid little attention to France.¹⁰ Yet French writings on and experiences of popular theatre were explicitly influenced by their European counterparts, and sometimes motivated by a powerful desire for emulation. In its groundbreaking analysis of mass theatre and the right, *Active Citizens* explores how the cultural life of the French extreme right was influenced by Italian and German fascism. Through the study of hitherto unexplored documents on the clandestine theatre of the Parti Communiste Français (PCF), it equally uncovers new connections between French agit-prop and its German and Soviet counterparts. In both cases, *Active Citizens* reveals that French initiatives were sometimes far closer to those of more totalitarian European neighbours than either contemporaries or historians have been able to admit.

This is, therefore, a significant new insight into the relationship between French politics and culture in the age of the masses. It moves beyond the notion of 'two Frances', raising new questions over French cultural difference and exceptionalism in twentieth-century Europe, and offering a timely reflection on the potential and limitations of political art. At a deeper level, it explores how the backstage communities—in which popular theatre played so important a role—both shaped and sustained a country of spectacular politics.

1 POPULAR THEATRE: A QUESTION OF DEMOCRACY

France is not only a country of spectacular politics. It is also a nation in which state patronage of the arts, and the concomitant assumption that high culture should be disseminated to the people, has remained particularly dominant. Inevitably, the study of popular theatre to date has been shaped by conflicting attitudes towards this wider project of cultural democratization. On one hand, there have been favourable-and often Francophone-studies in which popular theatre forms part of a linear narrative of democratization: the liberal dissemination of an elite (but also national and even universal) culture to the people with the intention of achieving their emancipation. On the other, more critical and sceptical analyses have both highlighted the underlying paternalism in such a project while simultaneously suggesting the elusive or constructed nature of its intended beneficiaries. Fundamentally, both approaches grapple with one of the fundamental contradictions in representative democracy itself: the fact that the 'people' are in principle sovereign, but in practice contained—or even constrained—by a system that requires their integration and docility.

For those favourable to the liberal, emancipatory interpretation of cultural democratization, French popular theatre (especially as a restricted range of examples) offers a case study of republican idealism. Pascal Ory, a pioneering scholar of cultural policy, has described 'citizen' theatre as the ideal forum for the development of democracy (even while eschewing the term 'popular' because its implications are too 'highly debatable').¹¹ For Ory, enthusiastic about the dissemination of culture to the people, republican initiatives exhibit a continuity of thought and practice that can be followed back through the Enlightenment to the classical precedents of ancient Greece.¹² If this democratization can be traced back to the ancient world, it can also be traced forward to Jean Vilar's post-war Théâtre National Populaire (TNP), the ultimate achievement against which projects of the Third Republic are often judged as incremental progress.¹³ Emmanuelle Loyer, for instance, contrasts Vilar's success with the heterogeneity of pre-war initiatives;¹⁴ while for Colette Godard, Vilar's TNP exemplifies the happy paradox of an 'elitist theatre for everyone.'15

There is a conviction here—shared by many popular theatre proponents of the Third Republic, and rooted in classical theories¹⁶—that high culture is a self-evident benefit, with real and democratic consequences for those who become its consumers. Such a conviction shapes Jann Pasler's detailed study of music as a 'public utility' in late nineteenthcentury France. 'It broke down the barriers of class and politics,' she asserts, '[...] reminded everyone of a tradition the French shared as a nation, infusing a sense of fraternity, albeit limited, among elites and workers.¹⁷ Similarly, the assumption that popular theatre can be both a civilizing and a democratizing force has influenced studies of initiatives across Europe and beyond. In pre-revolutionary Russia, Gary Thurston contends, popular theatre encouraged the development of 'complex, modern people,' from 'those people formerly called "dark"'.¹⁸ In West Germany in the 1980s, Jürgen-Dieter Waideliche drew on the methods of psychiatrists to advocate theatre, especially role-play, as a means of social, cultural, and political development.¹⁹ More recently, with an international range of case studies that encompasses not only contemporary Europe but also Asia and America, Susan Haedicke and Tobin Nellhaus have reinforced this vision of theatrical participation as intrinsically democratic and socially transformative. Their particular focus is community theatre, which, they suggest, 'has found ever-deeper ways to integrate a democratic agenda into its processes and products and to promote social change'.²⁰

Against these optimistic portrayals of the relationship between popular theatre and democracy, there is an equally powerful trend towards a more sceptical analysis, critical of the implicit connection between theatre and moral improvement, and suspicious of cultural paternalism. This is particularly pronounced in the work of Jacques Rancière, whose presentation of the individual spectator denies both the inevitability of the desired cultural and moral transfer but equally the collective experience of a theatre crowd.²¹ In the case of mass theatre such as that of Antonin Artaud, Kimberley Jannarone has similarly acknowledged that 'the desire for self-loss—both terrifying and sublime—is obviously not necessarily progressive', reinforcing the earlier contention of Edward Timms and Peter Collier that 'there is no easy equation between experimental art and progressive politics'.²²

Second, and usually developed in more detail, is the argument that popular theatre entails not so much the enlightenment of the people as their potentially deliberate repression by the political and cultural elite. Émile Copferman reflected in 1965 on the resurgence of popular theatre in post-war France with the provocative title *Le Théâtre Populaire*, *Pourquoi?*, warning that 'popular theatre can—rather than becoming a critical conscience-act as a form of social adaptation, and acquiescence to the values of repressive society.'23 Similarly, Baz Kershaw's influential theories on radical political theatre hinge on a sharp binary distinction between the democratization of elite culture-'a hegemonic procedure that aims to cheat the mass of people of their right to create their own culture'---and their more democratic, grass-roots empowerment by cultural means.²⁴ More recent work has consolidated this position, with James Lehning contending that 'the projects that yoke together popular and theatre seem finally unable to escape the persistently patronizing rhetoric of general edification,²⁵ and noting the more general role of spectacles and ceremonies as agents of capitalist social control.²⁶ Even the most emancipatory rhetoric of popular sovereignty can, as Loren Kruger observes, be 'harnessed to reinforce popular consent to continued subordination;²⁷ and even intellectual interest in popular culture can, according to Brian Rigby, risk 'complicity with a state system concerned only with controlling and repressing this culture.²⁸

Both of these narratives of cultural democratization, whether sympathetic to a utopian rhetoric of emancipation or concerned by paternalistic social control, highlight the binary relationships at work in the theory and practice of popular theatre. Not least, they explore in favourable or critical vein the relationships between state and citizen, elite and popular culture, popular sovereignty and social control. They also touch on the elusive, constructed nature of the national community, and on the difficult, overlapping definitions of popular culture—conceived as national, but also as working-class or folkloric—that will be discussed in more detail below. Popular theatre thus emerges as a vital means of interrogating political imagination, identity, and conflict.

Yet the problem with basing a narrative on cultural democratization is that this tells only part of the story. If popular theatre were only about democracy, how can one account for the fact that extreme-right royalists also developed a theatre for the French people, likewise based on classical precedents, but inspired by Aristophanes' mockery of Athenian democracy in the fifth century BC? How should one analyse initiatives less preoccupied with culturally enfranchising the people than with reinforcing their identity as Breton or Poitevin rather than French? Popular theatre might well be 'citizen theatre', but its proponents did not necessarily aspire to the same kind of city. Often, critical studies of cultural democratization highlight a binary conflict between 'state' and 'people'. Crucially, however, this conflict was not only binary, but also multivalent. Indeed, Loren Kruger makes a vital point when she suggests the contradiction between plans for a centralized national theatre and 'rival, perhaps antagonistic, "popular cultures" on the social and geographical periphery.²⁹ Yet the geographical breadth of her own study, which encompasses England and America as well as France, makes it impossible for her to pursue this contention in the detail it deserves, and her French examples rely on traditional case studies such as Romain Rolland, studied through printed rather than archival sources.

The fact that popular theatre was a space for a multiple and concurrent dialogues between different 'peoples' is surely what secures its greatest value as a source of political ideas and experiences. While previous studies have sometimes acknowledged the ambiguous, plural character of popular theatre, they have, however, considered this a problem rather than an opportunity. The relationship between popular theatre and the right, for example, has been entirely neglected. Cecilia Beach's study of feminist political theatre in the early Third Republic acknowledges the political importance of some right-wing theatre-including that produced by women-yet her own examples are taken from those with an 'overt commitment to socialist, anarchist, or feminist ideals'.³⁰ Marion Denizot's edited collection recognizes that 'the notion of popular theatre remains ambiguous, allowing multiple readings', yet retains a traditional selection of case studies. Right-wing initiatives are not mentioned, but no more is left-wing political theatre, for the final chapter explores Piscator's political theatre in Weimar Germany, and ends with an unanswered question about the influence of such theatre in France.³¹ Much of clandestine communist and trade union theatre, as well as many amateur productions in anarchist circles and communes, remains unknown.³² Similarly, no study has so far examined regional theatre in a way that encompasses the lesser-known initiatives in Brittany and Poitou alongside the better-known example of the Théâtre du Peuple in the Vosges.³³ Nevertheless, to consider only a limited range of left-wing examples limits the possibility of exploring the very dynamics of rivalry and conflict that continue to shape French politics and culture.

This book is not about a linear narrative; it is about a conversation. Analysing for the first time the full range of popular theatre initiatives, it privileges the concept of theatre as a dialogical space in which conflicting and converging identities were explored and negotiated. For theatrical writing and performance are in themselves a 'dialogic process', with the potential both to reinforce but also to challenge the ideas of community with which they are associated. As Tobin Nellhaus and Susan Haedicke have suggested, even theatre specifically intended to reinforce the identity of a particular group can 'subvert the very idea of community boundaries through its dialogic process' including text, performance, and reception.³⁴ A focus on dialogue can act as an important reminder of the ways in which identities are created in a dynamic and relational manner;³⁵ and of how ideas of 'people' and 'nation'—so shifting and often elusive—depend on evolving relationships of power and influence.³⁶ As Seyla Benhabib suggests, 'cultures themselves, as well as societies, are not holistic but polyvocal, multilayered, de-centred, and fractured systems of action and signification.'³⁷

But not all voices are of equal resonance. To study the dialogues between them creates a clearer picture of political realities, as well as illuminating the accompanying (and sometimes dissonant) dreams. Performances of popular theatre-especially for more partisan groupswere often closely connected to the expansion of politics into daily life. Private or clandestine meetings; the intricate networks of groups and societies; public protests, strikes, and demonstrations: in such contexts, popular theatre both infiltrated the everyday and also engaged with the dynamics of power.³⁸ Anarchists and communists used mainstream theatres as places of public protest, and deliberately blurred the boundaries between an art of revolt and acts of protest and violence in the public sphere. But royalists too saw the streets of Paris as their theatre, and created carnival worlds on stage and in the streets that were mutually reinforcing, with the success of their drama a means of financing their often costly encounters with socialists, communists, and the police. Such performances and public protests also involved women and children as well as men, expanding active citizenship beyond the confines of the electorate, and drawing a wider people into the ideals and practices of the communities to which they belonged.

2 POPULAR THEATRE: A SPACE FOR DIALOGUE

The term popular theatre ('théâtre populaire' or 'théâtre du peuple') is, however, initially confusing.³⁹ Its most obvious association might seem to be with theatre that is popular in the sense of being widely appreciated, such as the café-concert. But this was precisely what partisans of popular theatre did not mean. Indeed, one of the areas in which they concurred was in their opposition to the ways in which many ordinary,

working-class French men and women chose to spend their leisure time, especially if they happened to be consuming alcohol and unedifying culture in a café or cabaret. 'Everything there is green', exclaims the heroine of a play by the Théâtre populaire antialcoolique, fulminating against cafés in general and absinthe in particular: 'the glasses, the mirrors, and the customers.'40 Popular theatre in its political sense was also a rejection of both mainstream and avant-garde bourgeois theatre, whether this meant high culture disseminated only to an elite, wealthy audience; comedies, tragedies, and melodramas intended primarily to entertain and make a profit; or new drama intended to shock or provoke. Commercialism, consumerism, and the cult of celebrity-these were subject to persistent criticism by those for whom culture was supposed to have a higher political and civic mission.⁴¹ Turning away from contemporary working-class and bourgeois culture, partisans of popular theatre also converged when seeking inspiration in other countries and other periods: in the classical theatre of Ancient Greece, for example; in medieval mystery plays that united actors and audience; or in Elizabethan theatre that brought audiences together across social boundaries.⁴²

If there was a characteristic common to French proponents of popular theatre-whether they were anarchists, royalists, regionalists, or government officials-it was their consideration of such theatre as a collective art form, a shared space, and an alternative time. Unlike solitary reading, popular theatre was a form of culture intrinsically associated with the collective, in both performance and reception. In contrast to the collective viewing of a film, it involved the physical proximity of actors and audiences in a shared space. As the writer Jean Viollis explained in La Revue d'Art Dramatique in 1898, 'One has a much greater thrill in an auditorium-which creates a real sense of solidarity between the individuals in the audience-than when reading alone.²⁴³ Indeed, partisans of popular theatre were often particularly concerned that the structure, décor, and lighting of this space should maximize rather than minimize the audience's self-awareness. They were also conscious that popular theatre offered opportunities for dialogue not only on stage or within the audience, but equally between the two. There was the concurrent potential that the scripted action of a play might be disrupted by audience reactions, and that the performance itself might foment subsequent disorder or even revolt.

This shared space presented opportunities for real and imagined peoples to intersect and collide. Here, the physical incarnation of an

imagined or utopian people by the actors on stage could be particularly significant. According to the socialist leader Jean Jaurès in 1900, plays staging the working people could have an extremely potent visual and emotional effect, bringing the audience into contact with the proletariat 'in flesh and bone, in a sense, and in front of them, demanding liberation.⁴⁴ The fact that the theatre itself could thus become a space for disorder, with both stage and auditorium potential foci for protest, was why censorship dealt more severely with dramatic performance than with the written text, especially in the nineteenth century.⁴⁵ 'Drama', Jaurès had concluded, 'is already in a way the prologue of the Revolution itself, because, like the Revolution, it projects the crowd into action.'46 Theatre engages the emotions-this was why Plato would have banned it from his ideal city, and why Aristotle conceived of tragedy as having a purifying and socially beneficial role⁴⁷—but it also adjoins other spaces into which emotion may seep. The connections between the audience within a theatre and the crowd outside, between working-class actors and spectators at a factory performance, or between royalists fired up by a satirical sketch and the enemies they might encounter on their walk home-all these could hold potential for theatrical and political spaces to merge in sometimes unpredictable ways.

Most powerfully of all, theatre is itself a magical, liminal space outside of ordinary time in which boundaries become permeable and new worlds can be imagined. Theatre, as Joe Kelleher has argued, 'would appear to be perennially out of time, both with the world it addresses and itself as a mode of address,' and can therefore harbour 'whatever the political agenda at hand, the constant promise-or threat-of another politics.⁴⁸ This was what gave popular theatre its particular power as a means of engaging with politics and envisioning utopia, which, so William McCord reminds us, can signify with slight variation in its original spelling either a 'non-place' or a 'good place', representing 'future possibilities and perhaps future realities.'⁴⁹ Indeed as the sociologist Karl Mannheim argued in Ideology and Utopia (1936), a utopian vision is not only-or necessarily-a form of idle escapism, but rather an important form of 'non-congruence with the real' that may inspire its partisans to action and innovation in their quest for change.⁵⁰ It is thus rich in potential, as Martyn Cornick, Angela Kershaw and Martin Hurcombe have recently contended, to 'shatter the existing order.' Certainly, the utopia of a novel or play may take the form of a reconfigured politics or society. But it may exert equal power as an 'education of desire', heightening the awareness of dissonance between current circumstances and an improved or ideal state in an alternative time. 51

Some of this temporal (as well as utopian) disjunction is inevitable. Given the time needed to write, rehearse and produce, there is almost invariably a temporal lapse between the conception and performance of a dramatic text. This can be problematic when political events accelerate past cultural production, leaving topical references anachronistic, or authors and their works out of step with the party line. But this dissonance—a double rhythm, as this book will explore, especially in the final two chapters, between art and politics-can also be highly productive. Royalists, communists, anarchists, indeed all of those who felt sidelined by the official Third Republic, found in popular theatre a means of envisaging other times, past and future, that more closely matched their own character and aspirations. Indeed in their performances they sometimes experienced the sensation of a 'time outside time': the kingdom of France transiently reconstructed in a prison cell in which royalists performed to each other and scribbled graffiti on the walls;⁵² a libertarian future briefly adumbrated in a performance organized by an anarchist commune on the outskirts of Paris.⁵³ It was not only in the context of Catholic popular theatre that such experiences, whether lived or imagined, were described in transcendental terms.

Popular theatre as an ideal, and popular theatre created by particular groups and communities, was thus not only linear in conception but also circular and diagonal.⁵⁴ It was theatre *for* the people, through which they might progress in linear fashion to become cultured and democratic citizens, for instance, or socially conscious members of the working class. It was—in some though not all cases—theatre by the people, in which political and religious communities performed amateur drama for themselves in a circular arrangement that reinforced conviviality and existing beliefs. It was also theatre with the people, in which the people were political actors in a theatre that might develop at a tangent into festival, revolt, or communion. In this final vision, popular theatre was essentially only the means to an end at which theatre would no longer exist at all, because there would be no distinction between the real and the represented, actors and spectators. This was the utopian vision of theatre that would break diagonally out of both time and space: a dream that could seem both enthralling and elusive.

Although there were important areas of convergence around the character and ambitions of popular theatre, however, there was also a

crucial area of conflict: the concept of the people themselves.⁵⁵ In the Third Republic, the competing ideologies of the revolutionary period and their contested legacies meant that the nature and significance of the people in politics remained bitterly controversial. For the republican state-consciously heir to the first revolutionaries yet also concerned to secure social and political integration-the people were symbolized by 14 July, which was established as a national festival in 1880.⁵⁶ This festival celebrated not so much 14 July 1789, with its connotations of popular violence and destruction, as 14 July 1790: the Fête de la Fédération that had brought together representatives of the nation on the Parisian Champ de Mars. As a democracy based on popular sovereignty, the Third Republic officially celebrated the people less as the revolutionary crowd than as a republican nation in which working and middle classes could collaborate in harmony. This was the image of the people championed, for example, by the Radical Party, which recognized that the 'supreme authority is that of the people,'57 but preferred these people to act within official channels of representation rather than as the disorderly crowd.

Nevertheless, the image of the people promoted by the official Republic remained deeply at odds with images sustained by many rival communities. Continuing the centralization of the Bourbon monarchy, the Third Republic sought through its processes of integration to effect what Eugen Weber famously outlined as an internal 'colonization', through which peasants would be transformed into Frenchmen.⁵⁸ Even so, regional attachments were not so easily effaced: indeed 'by refusing to take into account regional particularities,' as Denis Jallat and Sébastien Stumpp have recently argued, 'those who subscribed broadly to "Jacobin" values would allow the culture of the "petite patrie" to develop.⁵⁹ In Provence, for example, regionalists harmonized ideas of the Provençal and French people: the Provençaux came first, of course, as bearers of the classical inheritance, and Provence was therefore 'mother' to later civilization—and to the French nation.⁶⁰ In Brittany, meanwhile, regionalists also spoke of the 'nation': but this nation was Breton, not French. Even left-wing folklorists who sought Breton engagement with 'the concert of modern social forces' deferred to popular preferences for medieval mystery plays instead of more contemporary subject matter.⁶¹ Such preferences also drew strength from the abiding sense of a Catholic people-the peuple fidèle-who sometimes felt scorned by the anti-clerical Republic, and who could therefore be called upon to offer popular resistance in defence of religious ideals and communities.

While the centrist image of the republican people was countered by narrower images of regional peoples, and by the broader image of a national (and international) peuple fidèle, it was also vigorously opposed by images on the radical left and right. Shaped by theoretical writings on the crowd in the fin de siècle-not least those of Gustave Le Bon, Hippolyte Taine, and Georges Sorel-the association of the people with the politically active and potentially violent crowd was particularly strong. Whereas Le Bon had greeted the 'age of the crowd' with a wariness of popular emotion and susceptibility to illusion,⁶² and Taine had emphasized 'barbaric' and 'primitive' violence in his history of the Revolution,⁶³ Sorel explored popular violence as a source of regenerative potential.⁶⁴ In late nineteenth-century France, radical groups on both left and right identified powerfully with this promise of renewal. Anarchist-terrorists fomented upheaval with acts of 'propaganda by the deed' (whether in cafés or in the Chamber of Deputies), while their more literary counterparts sought in popular art a means of revolt and a symbolic welcome to the barbarians at the gates. Meanwhile, rightwing leagues such as the nationalistic Ligue des Patriotes and the royalist Action Française turned to street politics as a means of drawing popular support away from the left, and (so they hoped) of forging a path towards a counter-revolutionary coup d'état. After the First World War, new leagues and movements on the extreme right would be inspired not only by military experience but also by radical regime change across Europe to elaborate their own plans for an 'H-Hour' that might bring down the Republic and lay the foundations for more authoritarian rule. And while socialists were more divided over the question of violence,65 communists-at least until the formation of the Popular Front-openly welcomed the potential of the revolutionary proletariat to undermine the existing Republic, whether in strikes, demonstrations, or on the stage.

To examine these competing communities, the structure of this book is both chronological and thematic. The Third Republic remains France's longest-lived regime since the Revolution and also encompassed the devastation of the First World War, in which an estimated 1.37 million French soldiers were killed and a further 4.26 million injured: the highest losses for any nation except Russia.⁶⁶ Popular theatre projects discussed here thus developed in strikingly different chronological as well as political contexts. In particular, while there was important continuity in utopian aspirations for what such theatre might achieve, its form and

subject matter in the later years of the Republic also bear traces of the complex processes of 'remembering, repressing, and forgetting' the First World War.⁶⁷ This was evident as much in socialist commemorations of the war dead as in right-wing spectacles that sought in the sacrifices of wartime France an ongoing source of national fraternity.

Spanning the Republic as a whole, the first case study is the republican project to use popular theatre as political integration: a flawed master-narrative against which other conversations take shape. In particular, Chapter 2 demonstrates that popular theatre was as integral to the republican project of using culture to shape citizens as education and music, even though there were persistent difficulties in finding suitable playwrights, locations, and funding—as well as in attracting the people themselves. In its post-war development as the Théâtre National Populaire (inaugurated on 11 November 1920), this project was also strongly marked by the conception of a militant republican people bound together by wartime sacrifice and commemoration—although the association of patriotic and republican defence was by no means uncontroversial.

Subsequent chapters examine the challenges to this republican project-regionalist, Catholic, and politically partisan. Chapter 3 focuses on popular theatre in the provinces, bringing to light the Breton plays and productions of Anatole Le Braz and Joseph Le Bayon; the operas, plays, and poetry staged at the Roman amphitheatre of Orange; the folkloric endeavours of Maurice Pottecher in the Vosges; and the populist efforts of Pierre Corneille Saint-Marc in Poitou. In these initiatives, the war was sometimes an empty chapter (Pottecher's Théâtre de Bussang, close to the German border, was even used by French troops and their horses), although it could also be an impetus to regeneration following personal loss. Chapter 4 explores Catholic theatre and its aspirations to reach the masses, especially in the interwar years in which Catholic writers sought a new role for faith in the public sphere. This was the single most extensive variety of popular theatre in France in this period, and here the better-known examples of Henri Ghéon and Léon Chancerel are discussed alongside neglected initiatives by Catholic workers' groups in local patronages and in the larger Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne.

Moving to the political peripheries, the last three chapters of the book trace evolving experiments with popular theatre by anarchists, socialists, communists, and the extreme right in both the pre-war and interwar periods. Focusing on Paris, Chapter 5 draws on anarchist writings

and journalism as well as on police archives to highlight the connections between popular theatre and individual revolt, and to uncover the importance of drama within experimental communes in the years before the First World War. Chapter 6 pursues this art of revolution forwards into socialist and communist initiatives of the interwar period, following a shifting focus from the libertarian individual to the collective potential of the working people. It explores the socialist Fêtes du Peuple, which formed in their early years an important framework for spectacles of mourning and commemoration, and uncovers new evidence of Communist agit-prop in the early 1930s. Chapter 7 examines how this art of revolution was opposed by the counter-revolutionary culture of the right, whether in satirical sketches by the royalist Action Française or in the films and mass spectacles of the Parti Social Français. Like their left-wing counterparts, these theatrical initiatives were explicitly influenced by other European models. Equally, all of these projects-whether inspired by political integration or subversion-sought in theatre an experience of transcendental community. Exploring popular theatre across the spectrum thus illuminates a vital characteristic of the contemporary imagination, just as it sheds light on otherwise lost worlds of political conviviality. It reveals the importance of drama as both context and motivation for political acts, beliefs, and belonging.

Notes

- 1. Socialists joined Communists in the demonstration of Sunday 27 May. See *L'Humanité*, 29 May 1934.
- 2. March, but also the god of war.
- 3. See Sudhir Hazareesingh's reflections on France's 'anti-pluralist tradition' in his conclusion to Émile Chabal, *France since the 1970s: History, Politics and Memory in an Age of Uncertainty* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 265, and also Émile Chabal on 'communautarisme', p. 16.
- 4. See Béligh Nabli, La République identitaire: ordre et désordre français (Paris: Cerf, 2016).
- 5. Alexis de Tocqueville's interest in the politically formative role of the 'passions' has come to renewed attention through the more recent work of François Furet and Christophe Prochasson. See, for example, Prochasson's introduction to Furet's *Lies, Passions and Illusions: The Democratic Imagination in the Twentieth Century* (ed. Christophe Prochasson, tr. Deborah Furet) (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

- 6. See, for example, George Mosse, 'Fascist Aesthetics and Society: Some Considerations', Journal of Contemporary History, 31 (1996), pp. 242–252, Jeffrey Schnapp, Staging Fascism: 18BL and the Theatre of Masses for Masses (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 2, and Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy (London: University of California Press, 1997), p. 5.
- 7. See, for example, Herman Lebovics, *True France: The Wars over Cultural Identity*, 1900–1945 (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), xiii.
- Sally Debra Charnow, 'Cultural Encounters in Modern France', French History, 27 (2013), p. 495. Cf. Roderick Kedward and Roger Austin, Vichy France and the Resistance: Culture and Ideology (London: Croom Helm, 1985), Introduction, p. 6; Ruth Harris, Lourdes: Body and Spirit in a Secular Age (London: Penguin, 1999), epilogue.
- 9. On this problem, see Joe Kelleher, *Theatre and Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Tobin Nellhaus and Susan C. Haedicke, *Performing Democracy. International Perspectives on Urban Community-Based Performance* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2001), p. 6; and Jacques Rancière, *Le Spectateur émancipé* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2008), especially pp. 22–23.
- 10. See, for instance, Günter Berghaus's edited collection Fascism and Theatre: Comparative Studies on the Aesthetics and Politics of Performance in Europe, 1925–45 (Oxford: Berghahn, 1996), in which the chapter on France concerns Vichy rather than the Third Republic.
- 11. Pascal Ory, *Théâtre Citoyen: du Théâtre du Peuple au Théâtre du Soleil* (Avignon: Association Jean Vilar, 1995), p. 13.
- 12. A similar but more hagiographic approach can be found in Melly Puaux et al., *L'Aventure du théâtre populaire, d'Épidaure à Avignon* (Paris: Éditions du Rocher, 1996), where the broad chronological sweep links the better-known French examples such as that of Romain Rolland and Jacques Copeau with their classical forerunners.
- Vera Lee, for instance, criticizes the lack of homogeneity in pre-1945 initiatives and their 'naïve, old-fashioned idealism'. *The Quest for a Public: French Popular Theatre since 1945* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman, 1970), p. 20.
- 14. Emmanuelle Loyer, 'Le Théâtre National Populaire au temps de Jean Vilar (1951–1963)', *Vingtième Siècle*, 57 (1998), pp. 89–103.
- 15. Colette Godard, *Chaillot: Histoire d'un théâtre populaire* (Paris: Seuil, 2001), p. 65.
- 16. This conviction is grounded in assumptions on the emotional and social benefits of culture, for example classical tragedy. 'Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is admirable, complete, and possesses magnitude [...] effecting through pity and fear the purification of such emotions.' Aristotle, *Poetics* (London: Penguin, 1996, tr. Malcolm Heath), p. 10.

- 17. Jann Pasler, *Composing the Citizen. Music as Public Utility in Third Republic France* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2009), p. 155.
- 18. Gary Thurston, *The Popular Theatre Movement in Russia*, 1862–1919 (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1998), p. 290.
- 19. Jürgen-Dieter Waideliche, Durch Volksbühne und Theater zur Kulturelle Demokratie (Berlin: Bundesverband der deutschen-Volksbühnen-Vereine, 1981), especially Chap. 1.
- 20. Nellhaus and Haedicke, introduction to Performing Democracy, p. 22.
- 21. Rancière, Le Spectateur emancipé, p. 59.
- 22. Kimberley Jannarone, Artaud and his Doubles (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), p. 196; Edward Timms and Peter Collier, Visions and Blueprints: Avant-garde Culture and Radical Politics in Early Twentieth-Century Europe (Manchester: MUP, 1988), xi.
- 23. Émile Copferman, Le Théâtre populaire, pourquoi? (Paris: Maspero, 1965), p. 8. Philippe Poirrier has also explored this state use of culture in a much longer-term perspective, including a study of the creation of the Académie Française in 1635 as Richelieu's means of channelling the power of contemporary writers to royal ends. Histoire des politiques culturelles de la France contemporaine (Dijon: Bibliest, 1996), p. 8.
- 24. Baz Kershaw, *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 12.
- 25. James Lehning, *The Melodramatic Thread: Spectacle and Political Culture in Modern France* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), p. 81.
- 26. Lehning, *The Melodramatic Thread*, p. 9. Similarly, Sally Debra Charnow emphasizes the 'paternalism' of popular theatre initiatives in the Third Republic, even while acknowledging their 'pluralism' as indicative of democracy. *Theatre, Politics, and Markets in Fin-de-Siècle Paris. Staging Modernity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 166–168 (see also p. 180).
- 27. Loren Kruger, *The National Stage. Theatre and Cultural Legitimation in England, France, and America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 4.
- 28. Brian Rigby, Popular Culture in Modern France: A Study of Cultural Discourse (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 14.
- 29. Kruger, The National Stage, p. 3.
- 30. Cecilia Beach, *Staging Politics and Gender* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 4.
- 31. Marion Denizot (ed.), *Théâtre populaire et représentation du peuple* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2010), p. 8.
- 32. Despite Pascal Ory's work on cultural policy in the 1930s, his *Théâtre citoyen* mentions neither the extensive government studies of popular theatre of the early 1900s, nor the theatrical endeavours of political groups and parties, other than a very brief reference to agit-prop.

- 33. For example, Charnow offers a detailed study of Maurice Pottecher's theatre in the Vosges, but refers in only one line to other regionalist initiatives. (*Theatre, Politics, and Markets, pp. 183–184*). Denizot even rejects the notion of popular associated with 'culture populaire'—that is, with regional populations and minorities—in her introduction to *Théâtre populaire.* (p. 9)
- 34. Nellhaus and Haedicke, Performing Democracy, p. 7.
- 35. Cyril Lemieux, 'De la Théorie de l'habitus à la sociologie des épreuves: relire L'expérience concentrationnaire' in Liora Israël and Danièle Voldman (eds), Michaël Pollak. De l'Identité blessée à une sociologie des possibles (Paris: Complexe, 2008), pp. 179–206.
- 36. See, for example, Pierre Rosanvallon, Le Peuple introuvable: histoire de la représentation démocratique en France (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), but also Rigby, Popular Culture in France, p. 8: 'France's national identity and cultural unity are themselves not a natural given but needed to be constructed.'
- 37. Cited in Gerald Delanty, *The Cosmopolitan Imagination: The Renewal of Critical Social Theory* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), p. 72. Matt Perry's analysis of culture as a dynamic process rather than a series of representations is also an important influence here. Perry, *Memory of War in France*, 1914–45: César Fauxbras, the Voice of the Lowly (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 12.
- 38. This book contributes to the ongoing study of the relationship between politics and performance in France. The Revolution has been a particular focus here, although Paul Friedland's Political Actors and Susan Maslan's Revolutionary Acts draw divergent conclusions about the relationship between theatre and democracy. With regard to later periods, Napoleon III's pageantry has been analysed in Matthew Truesdell's Spectacular Politics, while the official and subversive use of the streets during the Third Republic has been explored in Charles Rearick's Pleasures of the Belle Epoque, as well as in Corbin et al., Les Usages Politiques des Fêtes. See Friedland, Political Actors: Representative Bodies and Theatricality in the Age of the French Revolution (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), Maslan, Revolutionary Acts: Theatre, Democracy, and the French Revolution (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2005), Truesdell, Spectacular Politics: Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte and the Fête Impériale, 1849–1870 (Oxford: OUP, 1997), Rearick, Pleasures of the Belle Époque: Entertainment and Festivity in the Turn of Century France (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), and Alain Corbin et al., Les Usages Politiques des Fêtes aux XIXe-XXe siècles (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1994).
- 39. As Rigby notes: 'the French term "culture populaire" carries a different range of meanings from those conveyed in English by "popular culture". What also makes the term "culture populaire" interesting and rather complex is the fact that its meanings in French are unstable and overlapping.' (*Popular Culture in Modern France*, p. 9).

- 40. Benjamin Arbousset, *La Vielle fille, saynète en un acte* (Paris: Théâtre populaire antialcoolique, 1909), p. 4.
- Jacques Copeau formulated such criticisms with particular clarity. See the discussion in Serge Proust, 'La Communauté théâtrale: entreprises théâtrales et idéal de la troupe', *Revue Française de la Sociologie*, 44 (2003), especially pp. 99–100.
- 42. See, for example, Léon Chancerel's *Panorama du Théâtre, des origines à nos jours* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1955).
- 43. 'Enquête sur la question sociale au théâtre', *Revue d'Art Dramatique* (February 1898), p. 250.
- Jean Jaurès, 'Le Théâtre social', La Revue d'Art Dramatique, 10 (1900), p. 1066.
- 45. Robert Goldstein, 'Fighting censorship in France, 1815–1881', *The French Review*, 71 (1998), pp. 785–786.
- 46. Jaurès, 'Le Théâtre social', p. 1066.
- 47. Rancière, Le Spectateur émancipé, pp. 8-9.
- 48. Kelleher, Theatre and Politics, p. 54.
- 49. William McCord, Voyages to Utopia: From Monastery to Commune, the Search for Utopia in Modern Times (New York and London: W.D. Norton, 1989) pp. 17, 19.
- 50. Mannheim himself intended the work as 'a call to action, an attempt to involve intellectuals in the political process.' Colin Loader, *The Intellectual Development of Karl Mannheim* (Cambridge: CUP, 1985), p. 95; Martyn Cornick, Angela Kershaw, and Martin Hurcombe, *French Political Travel Writing in the Interwar Years: Radical Departures* (London: Routledge, 2017), Introduction, p. 9.
- 51. '[Utopia] is not, then, a flight from reality but a challenge to it, and finds expression in a range of cultural forms.' Cornick et al., *French Political Travel Writing*, Introduction, p. 9.
- 52. Maurice Pujo, Les Camelots du Roi (Paris: Flammarion, 1933), p. 149.
- 53. 'P.P. le 15 septembre 1913', AN F7 13055.
- 54. Léon Chancerel made similar distinctions—explored in more detail in Chap. 4—between theatre as exogenous, endogenous, and 'alchemical'. See Jean Cusson, Un Réformateur du théâtre, Léon Chancerel: l'expérience Comédiens-Routiers, 1929–39 (Paris: La Hutte, 1945), p. 42.
- 55. For a detailed discussion of rival political conceptions of the people, see also Jessica Wardhaugh, *In Pursuit of the People: Political Culture in France, 1934–39* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), Chap. 1.
- 56. See Rearick, Pleasures of the Belle Époque, p. 14, and also Chap. 2.
- 57. 'Commission sur la Réforme de l'État présenté au Congrès du Parti Radical et Radical-Socialiste, le 26 octobre 1934', AN F7 13192.
- Eugen Weber, Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914 (London: Chatto and Windus, 1979), especially Chap. 29.

- 59. Denis Jallat and Sébastien Stumpp, 'French Sailing in the Nineteenth Century and the Debate about Parisian Centralism', *French History*, 29 (2015), p. 533.
- 60. Élie Fourès, 'Les Fêtes cigalières', *Journal des Fêtes romaines d'Orange*, July 1888, BN DAS R 138902.
- 61. See Anatole Le Braz's speech at Quimperlé, 3 March 1888, reproduced in Yann-Ber Piriou, *Au-delà de la Légende: Anatole Le Braz* (Rennes: Terre de Brume/Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 1999), p. 58.
- 62. Gustave Le Bon, *La Psychologie des Foules* [1895] (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998), p. 37.
- 63. Hippolyte Taine, Les Origines de la France contemporaine (Paris: Hachette, 1902), Vol. 1, p. 84.
- 64. Georges Sorel, La Décomposition du Marxisme (Paris: Marcel Rivière, 1926), p. 11.
- 65. This also made their exercise of power within the existing regime particularly problematic. Tony Judt, *The Burden of Responsibility: Blum, Camus, Aron and the French Twentieth Century* (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 53.
- John Horne, A Companion to World War I (Oxford: Wiley/Blackwell, 2012), p. 249.
- 67. Leonard Smith, Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, and Annette Becker, France and the Great War (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), p. 161.

Citizens of Utopia: Popular Theatre and the Republican State

Delicately etched into paper that almost crumbles into fragments is a design by Catulle Mendès for a wooden popular theatre in 1902.¹ The theatre is exuberantly neo-classical in style-ornamental flourishes dance onto the surrounding page-and would, had it secured the state funding for which it was submitted, have been capable of seating 1500 in an octagonal auditorium. It would also have been dismountable for ease of transportation around the country. This was a theatre designed to bring beauty to the masses, entertaining and elevating the citizens of the Third Republic. With a state subsidy, such a theatre could, so Mendès contended, make high culture freely available to working men and women, drawing them away from 'the ever-increasing number of bars, cafésconcerts, and cabarets that are accessible to the less wealthy, and where the shameful nature of songs, dances, and speeches performed [...] defies the imagination'.² Mendès's imagination was a fertile one: in 1861, he himself had been fined and imprisoned for a comic verse-drama branded an offence to public morality.³ Now he was seemingly rejecting his scandalous past—as well as his belief in art for art's sake—in an idealistic endeavour to form the active citizens of the future.

Mendès's delicate design encapsulates the ephemeral yet also powerfully utopian quality of the popular theatre projects associated with the republican state. This initial proposal was ultimately rejected by the government as impractical. Not only did Mendès submit a similar project to the popular theatre commission of 1905, however, but his designs were also requested by Firmin Gémier, who created a peripatetic theatre that toured France with traction engines in 1911. Later, Gémier would become the first director of the grandiose Théâtre National Populaire, established at the Palais du Trocadéro in Paris in 1920.⁴

Most importantly, Mendès was not alone. His proposals were only two out of a multitude of now-forgotten projects for popular theatres as temples of the new republic, in which citizens would be edified, uplifted, brought into closer communion with each other and with the transcendent beauty of art. Indeed throughout the Third Republic the creation of republican popular theatre attracted the attention of parliamentary deputies, government commissions, theatre directors, journalists, and playwrights; as well as prompting fervour, idealism, shameless self-advertisement, and successive promises of substantial funding. Meanwhile, the relationship between popular-although not necessarily republicantheatre and political idealism was simultaneously seizing the imagination of literary anarchists, royalist street fighters, and regionalists from Brittany to Provence; as well as inspiring Catholics, communists, socialists, and members of right-wing associations and parties. Common to this extraordinarily varied selection of friends and enemies of the Third Republic was the conviction that art could and should serve a political function, and that popular theatre, however problematic to define and difficult to realize, held the potential to visualize-and even achieve-a utopian experience of community.

The duty of a democratic republic to make culture more accessible to the people, inspired by an ideal of the educated citizen as well as by more prosaic aims of political integration and allegiance, has been a government priority in France since the First Republic.⁵ Even today, this constitutes an important focus for the cooperation of French politicians and researchers—as evident, for example, in a recent volume by historians Laurent Martin and Philippe Poirrier explicitly promoted by the French Ministry of Culture.⁶ As Martin contends:

For generations of administrators and key figures in cultural life, the objective of disseminating the benefits of culture to the greatest possible number, and of facilitating cultural access and participation for the majority if not all of the French, has been a clear imperative; not only for the sake of enjoyment but also because the spread of Enlightenment, the acquisition of knowledge, the sharing of artistic creation and emotion, and the transmission of our heritage have been considered in this country as inseparable from the democratic and republican project.⁷ Furthermore, France remains distinctive among European countries—and in comparison with Britain and the USA—in the extent of state intervention in cultural production and legitimacy. State patronage and censorship of the arts, already strongly established under the *ancien régime* with the creation of royal *académies*, has continued, despite radical regime change, into the Fifth Republic.⁸ This has clear economic and cultural benefits, for example in the case of state subsidies to theatres such as the Théâtre Français (Comédie Française). But it also has its drawbacks, not least in the close connections between subsidy and supervision, especially censorship.⁹ Censorship of the theatre, and of the visual more generally, was particularly strict in the early Third Republic, to the extent that it was possible to watch a censored version of a play while holding the unexpurgated textual version in one's hand.¹⁰

The degree to which this cultural control is deemed desirable has been a guiding influence on previous studies of popular theatre and the state. For those confident in the duty of the Republic to subsidize and democratize elite culture for the people, the story often culminates with the post-war Théâtre National Populaire under the direction of Jean Vilar. According to this narrative, the designs and initiatives of the Third Republic, rather than being considered in their own right as part of a conversation (or argument) between friends and enemies of the regime, are necessarily overshadowed by such post-war success. The earlier initiatives may be praiseworthy: '[Firmin] Gémier laid the foundations of Jean Vilar's Théâtre National Populaire', writes Jacqueline de Jomaron, 'as well as those of theatrical decentralization and state subsidy'.¹¹ But they are also immature, even laughable: imbued with 'a romanticism on the limits of the chimerical',¹² 'old-fashioned and utopian'¹³; or close to incomprehensible in their 'exclamation-point oratory and their naïve, old-fashioned idealism'.¹⁴ In the optimistic republican narrative in which 'after the Liberation, everything once again becomes possible',¹⁵ only the victorious post-war context is deemed capable of realizing the fusion of people, culture, and citizenship that was imagined-vet only clumsily fumbled towards-during the Third Republic.

There is no doubt that the popular theatre projects of the Third Republic bordered on the utopian. The point of this chapter is to understand how—and why—this was the case, exploring them on their own terms rather than seeing these projects as merely unsatisfactory chapters in a teleological narrative towards post-war success.¹⁶ What ministers, deputies, government commissions and their would-be collaborators

understood by 'popular theatre', exactly how they intended culture to transform masses into citizens, and how far they can be deemed successful, represents the central focus. Here, the aim is to establish both why the connections between theatre, idealism, and community were so powerful, and also why they were so problematic in practice. Drawing on new archival and printed material, this chapter offers the first detailed analysis of state popular initiatives throughout the Third Republic, and so contributes to a deeper understanding of the relationship between republican culture and citizenship.

To tell this story, this chapter draws on a broad range of case studies and source material, including ministerial archives, reports, and press articles neglected in previous research.¹⁷ First, it demonstrates that popular theatre was as vital to the republican project of using culture in the creation of citizenship as the more widely studied examples of state education and popular music.¹⁸ For the politicians of the Third Republic, popular theatre promised a pathway towards what Brian Rigby has described as a 'national popular culture', intended to replace rival or archaic forms of popular culture with a 'modern culture of the people, a secular, rational, and national culture, which was seen as the only possible culture that could lead France into the twentieth century.¹⁹ In this, the interest of the French state echoed that of authorities elsewhere in Europe and equally in Russia, where popular theatre was also seen as an important means of fostering 'a new perception of the self', and drawing the people away from less edifying folk culture.²⁰ For the French Third Republic, in which the formal exercise of citizenship at election time was restricted to men over the age of 21 (women were enfranchised only in 1944), popular theatre also represented a form of education and involvement open to all citizens, regardless of their ability to vote.

Second, this chapter explores how the governments of the Third Republic conceived of popular theatre (and education more broadly) as a means of countering Catholic precedents, structures, and traditions with a secular space for the experience of civic communion and republican morality.²¹ Here, the case study of popular theatre offers new evidence to support, for example, Daniel Hervieu-Léger's contention that the French republic seeks its own 'counter-model of a "genuine civil religion", which includes 'its own pantheon, martyrology, liturgy, myths, rites, altars and temples.²² Popular theatre, discussed and supported by a Ministry responsible for education and the arts (and initially also religion), was explicitly described as a means by which a united, republican

people could be imagined, gathered, instructed, and morally elevated, as well as entertained. Yet the realization of these goals was problematic in ways that related both to the specific historical context but also to the intrinsic character of the project.

Third, therefore, this case study examines how and why these state initiatives were marked by both controversy and fragility. It highlights the persistent difficulties in imagining the ideal republican people and in finding playwrights to depict them; the practical problems of location and funding; and finally the fundamental paradox that theatre offered to the 'people' (even with the best of intentions) did not necessarily attract or represent its target audience.

Underlining these ambiguities, this chapter thus introduces the central themes and conflicts in the book as a whole. It illuminates the deep-rooted desire to employ theatre in the creation of 'total communities', and the often-authoritarian manner in which popular theatre was conceived. It suggests some of the tensions between the people as actors and the people as spectators. Equally, it explores the complex dialogues between state initiatives and those of the political and geographical peripheries, which in turn contribute to a deeper understanding of how far the Third Republic attracted—and failed to attract—its divided citizens.

1 POLITICS, CULTURE, AND THE THIRD REPUBLIC

The republican aim of creating obedient and cooperative citizens out of a diverse range of people whose primary identities may be shaped by very different political and religious communities is always a live political issue. Despite the confidence of some of its politicians, the success of the Third Republic in this area was by no means a foregone conclusion. Created after the collapse of Napoleon III's Second Empire in 1870 and resolutely voted out of existence after France's defeat by Nazi Germany in 1940, this was a regime whose republican character and depth of allegiance needed to be fought for. Only the votes of a few Orleanists secured the definitive republican form of the new regime in a vote of 5 February 1875,²³ while the question of whether or not this would be France's final republic remained open. Not only was the Third Republic characterized by extreme governmental instability, but it also provoked vigorous opposition from more radical political groups and parties on both left and right, as well as from populist leaders taking advantage of the constitutionally weak character of the regime's executive.²⁴ Time and again—during the Boulangist crisis of the late 1880s, the Dreyfus Affair, and the violent street politics of the 1930s—there were fears that the regime was in danger of imminent collapse.

Often citing Jules Michelet's earlier assertion that 'an immense popular theatre' would ensure national education and renewal,²⁵ politicians of the Third Republic were convinced that theatre would play a crucial part in this battle to create republicans. A new, edifying, popular theatre would establish the moral credentials of the nascent Republic, insisted government employee Jules Bonnassies in 1872,²⁶ while forty years later the lawyer and member of the Conseil des Beaux-Arts Joseph Paul-Boncour similarly underscored the duty of the regime to make art and (high) culture popular. Yet where—he asked—could the models for such popular art and culture be found? Ancient Greece and Rome possessed amphitheatres, the Middle Ages their cathedrals, and the Revolution its festivals. What would the Third Republic offer in its turn?²⁷

One clearly republican pathway was to pursue the rhetoric and initiatives developed by the First French Republic after the Revolution of 1789. Idealistic conceptions of popular enlightenment through the theatre could, indeed, be traced both to these revolutionaries and also to the writers whose ideas they sought to realize. Under the ancien régime, philosophers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Denis Diderot, Louis-Sébastien Mercier, and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre had all discussed the importance of theatre in educating the people, with Rousseau's Lettre à d'Alembert (1758) the most renowned example. Here, Rousseau had expressed his wish to transform the theatre under the inspiration of its Greek origins into a more didactic tool,²⁸ issuing what Joseph Harris has recently described as 'a call to arms, a challenge to the reader to recover the self-reflexivity and self-awareness needed to combat the theatre's harmful effects.²⁹ In 1773, Diderot had, like Rousseau, called for theatre to be inspired anew by its Greek origins in his Paradoxe sur le comédien. While Rousseau's emphasis had been on the theatre's moral importance, Diderot preferred to underline its aesthetic appeal, while emphasizing both the immediacy and distance experienced by the spectator.³⁰ In 1773 and 1778, Mercier had propounded the argument that the people deserved their own theatre, which would not only depict them with verisimilitude but also serve as a form of education.³¹

Inspired by these concerns with the didactic importance of theatre for the people, the First Republic made serious efforts to establish a new model of republican theatre-even at the height of the Terror. In response to petitions, the Committee of Public Safety decreed on 10 March 1794 to open a new 'Théâtre du Peuple' at the Théâtre Français. This theatre was intended to offer three state-subsidized popular spectacles every revolutionary décade (ten-day week), and under the aegis of their manager Joseph Payan, republican poets began to prepare their offerings.³² Although this particular project did not come to fruition, revolutionary festivals did provide another variety of spectacle for the people, especially in the streets of Paris already so closely associated with the drama of Revolution. Under the direction of the artist Jean-Louis David, for example, the festival of the Supreme Being of 8 June 1794 moved through the capital from sunrise to sunset, culminating in a pledge on the Champ de Mars (site of the present Eiffel tower) to 'uphold virtue and the Republic'.33 Only a month later, however, the Thermidorean reaction was to sweep Robespierre and the Committee of Public Safety from power, while the utopian projects for popular theatre were of necessity set aside.³⁴

Drawing on these ideological and revolutionary precedents, the Third Republic not only renewed state interest in popular theatre, but also sought to develop the relationship between drama, education, and citizenship through state-led festivities for the people. These festivals, so politicians hoped, would foster the 'social joy' described by contemporary sociological Gabriel Tarde and so overcome the notorious divisions between the French.³⁵ The most enduring example remains the national festival of 14 July, first celebrated by the Third Republicans in 1880. This was intended not so much as a commemoration of 14 July 1789 but as a homage to the Fête de la Fédération of 14 July 1790, when representatives from across the nation had gathered on the Champ de Mars for a mass celebrated by Talleyrand and an oath of allegiance to 'the nation, the law, and the king', as inscribed on the altar.³⁶ In 1880, the celebration of 14 July was noisily republican, not only to honour first decade of the new regime, but also to rival both royal and Catholic festivals.³⁷ It was only a pity that, unlike many of the Church's celebrations, 14 July fell at a very busy time of the agricultural year. It therefore assumed the character of an urban celebration, which in turn was to give later critics of the Third Republic the grievance that official festivals lacked not only spontaneity but also an engagement with existing cycles of work and festivity.38

2 EARLY DISCUSSIONS AND INITIATIVES, 1870–1900

Given the Third Republic's desire to use culture—especially festivals and theatre—to create active citizens, it is not surprising that popular theatre should have appealed so strongly to successive governments. As early as the mid-1870s, politicians began to redefine and reorganize the role of the arts within the Ministry of Public Education, Art, and Religion (Ministère de l'Instruction Publique, des Beaux-Arts, et des Cultes). In May 1875, the Minister Henri Wallon (whose amendment of 30 January had famously established the regime as a republic in constitutional law) created the Conseil supérieur des Beaux-Arts. This was a separate body within the Ministry: a kind of 'artistic parliament' in which representatives—who included administrators, artists, connoisseurs, and collectors—would meet to advise the Minister, initially on a monthly basis.³⁹

Meanwhile, government officials and supporters were earnestly debating the particular role that popular theatre should play in the Republic. One of the first contributions was by Jules Bonnassies, the government employee whose Le Théâtre et le Peuple had appeared in 1872. Enthusiastically partisan, Bonnassies described the Republic as 'the definitive regime to which human society tends, the only regime that is logical, and that brings unmitigated progress, truth, justice, and morality.²⁴⁰ Within this definitive regime, Bonnassies portrayed the theatre—'a secular church'-as essential to popular and civic education. He further insisted that the new Republic should reject the prevalent understanding of the 'people' as only 'the inferior classes', embracing instead the idea of 'the collective assembly of citizens who are unequal as men, but equal as citizens.'⁴¹ Theatre itself could play a vital role in this enterprise: a place where citizens of all classes could assemble, and a form of communication, instruction, and morality that influenced the senses more powerfully, he believed, than either literature or the press. Indeed, Bonnassies referred admiringly to the Athenian model of theatre at the heart of the city, as to Athenian reverence for patriotism and civic virtue.⁴²

Bonnassies's vision for republican popular theatre was twofold. First, the Republic should democratize accessibility, bringing theatre beyond the bourgeoisie (and beyond the limits of the electorate) to include children and workers. Second, the drama represented should heighten the moral calibre of the French, assembling and instructing them as a nation of citizens rather than as a specific class. The first goal would require the expansion of the existing network of municipal theatres, the distribution

of tickets to pupils in schools and at adult education lessons, as well as the development of new, popular theatres. This was explicitly intended to act as a safeguard against the café-concert, and to counter the latter's exemption from the heavy taxes imposed on theatres.⁴³ To achieve the second goal, the nature of productions at popular theatres would need to be closely regulated by the government, and Bonnassies therefore envisaged a theatre so centralized that there would be only a limited number of touring productions at any one time. Troupes and stage properties would be transported by the ever-widening railway network, while the centralization of productions would provide an effective means of replacing indisposed actors at short notice. Given that theatre fell under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Public Education, Art, and Religion, it should be recognized as a form of instruction and appropriately subsidized. In terms of plays to be performed, Bonnassies remained unspecific (a common trait of proponents of popular theatre), but he insisted that they should, mirroring the theatre of ancient Greece, include:

the solemn representation of the great events of our national history; tragedies that analyse those feelings that ennoble the soul; and comedies that are always in the public interest because they satirize the vices that harm the state, and the foolishness that corrupts the citizen.⁴⁴

Later, when the Republic was firmly established, would 'pure beauty' flourish: but in the present climate of battle, satire was an essential weapon. Thus, argued Bonnassies, would theatre become a means of regenerating the country and of heightening France's moral stature in the eyes of her European neighbours.⁴⁵

The large-scale reform of national theatre on a Greek model to encourage greater patriotism and citizenship was by no means easy to transform into practice. Indeed, several important challenges immediately presented themselves, among them problems of production, repertoire, location, funding, and publicity. Would popular theatre involve new productions of existing plays, or even new tours of existing productions, or would it require new troupes of actors, or even new drama in a new genre? (In Germany, the contemporaneous development of popular theatre was closely associated with naturalism; in France, there was never any such close association).⁴⁶ How should the moral and civic messages best be conveyed? Should popular theatre be centralized by the state, and identified with a single (new or existing) theatre in Paris, or should it be concerned primarily with decentralization, with bringing theatre to the provinces or encouraging regional and local initiatives? Would popular theatre be different from its 'elite' counterpart in appearance or seating arrangements? How would it be funded, particularly if ticket prices were to be subsidized in order to make performances accessible to the culturally disenfranchised? By no means least, how were the people themselves to be attracted? Would the nature and economic accessibility of productions prove sufficient to convert the *habitués* of the café-concert?

All these—and other—challenges meant that the development of state popular theatre in practice was both complex and slow moving, especially in the early decades of the Third Republic. There was certainly no lack of government interest and activity, or of wider enthusiasm and suggestions, but the sometimes lively relationship between the two did not necessarily result in concrete developments.

As early as the 1870s, for example, the Ministry, the Prefect of the Seine, and the Municipal Council of Paris received regular letters and proposals from writers, architects, and theatre directors determined to offer their services in the name of the new ideal of republican popular theatre. In 1878, the poet, playwright, and philosopher Eugène Nus wrote to the Ministry to denounce what he described as the monarchical tradition of providing theatre only for the elite. Instead—echoing the appeals of Bonnassies—he urged the Republic to subsidize and supervise a new form of theatre for the people:

A theatre that will provide human drama that is patriotic and democratic, bringing to the stage the great figures and episodes of our history, as well as the virtues and humble devotion that make the honest man and citizen.⁴⁷

By the end of the 1870s interest in popular theatre had heightened still further, and in 1879 the government decided to subsidize one municipal theatre to become a new popular theatre for drama, complementing the creation of a popular opera.⁴⁸ In support of the government's proposal, the Municipal Council of Paris subsequently resolved at a meeting on 10 July 1879 to waive its right to the rent and utilities fees for the chosen theatre, provided that the government would promise an annual subsidy of 100,000 francs for the theatre itself.⁴⁹ This joint decision by national and Parisian authorities prompted a flurry of excited

proposals from playwrights and theatre directors, rivalling each other in fervent commitment to the moral and republican value of popular theatre-and in the hope of securing its direction and subsidy. One former director of the Théâtre de la Porte Saint Martin insisted that with twenty years' experience as a director and an equally deep-rooted wish to establish a popular theatre, he was perfectly placed to provide brilliant plays at low cost, supporting the current trend of liberal ideas and aiming above all at the 'instruction and edification of the people'.⁵⁰ Another group of artists and playwrights under the aegis of Georges Richard, playwright and former actor at the Théâtre de l'Odéon, adopted the 'democratic principle of association' with the explicit conviction that collective rather than individual direction would be more appropriate to the function of popular theatre-and they too, insisted that 'theatre can and must complement general education'.⁵¹ Their preference was for the Théâtre de la Gaîté, principally for its potential to be restyled in the form of an amphitheatre to accommodate approximately 3000 spectators.

Despite this significant concordance between government objectives and individual or group aspirations, practical collaboration tended to founder. In March 1880, a committee met at the home of the deputy Charles Lecomte to consider the relative costs of various theatres, and in June the Gaîté theatre was announced as the successful candidate for the government subsidy of 80,000 francs.⁵² But there was no immediate sign of the expansion of a new form of popular theatre that would provide education and lessons in morality. In 1883–1884, there was a shortlived attempt by Georges de Lagrenée to found a 'popular opera' at the Château d'Eau with a municipal subsidy of 300,000 francs, but this was subsequently declared bankrupt.53 Similarly, when in 1895 the Théâtre des Nations (then occupied by the Opéra-Comique) was returned to municipal authorities, a government commission was created to study the possibility of a municipal popular theatre in this location. Despite the enthusiastic proposals of Vaudeville theatre director Albert Carré, however, arrangements faltered on financial and administrative practicalities: the Municipal council refused to grant the level of subsidy demanded, while the Chamber of Deputies agreed on the possibility of a subsidy but insisted that the initiative should come directly from the City of Paris.⁵⁴

Meanwhile, government authorities were keenly aware of the contrast between tentative French initiatives and the more flourishing efforts of their European neighbours, especially in Austria, Germany, and Belgium. In 1889, the Vienna Volkstheater was inaugurated with a play by Ludwig Anzengruber, famed for his realistic depictions of peasant life. In 1894, the Schiller Theater opened in Berlin with the support of public subscription; and in 1889, Otto Brahm's Freie Bühne association was founded, in which members paid subscriptions to support regular performances—thus securing the kind of stability that French initiatives so often lacked.⁵⁵ The Maison du Peuple in Brussels had also been offering musical and literary evenings since 1892, including performances of social plays such as Gerhart Hauptmann's *The Weavers*.⁵⁶

When in November 1899 the *Revue d'Art Dramatique*—which had a particular interest in popular theatre—published an open letter to the Minister of Public Instruction to suggest the provision of a popular theatre in Paris, the journal therefore recommended a government study of popular theatre around Europe and especially in Berlin. In response, the Minister of Education, Art, and Religion Georges Leygues appointed Adrien Bernheim—whose initiatives will also be discussed—to travel to Berlin for this purpose. Yet the Minister's concern to maintain government control over a project for which the *Revue*'s writers had more radical intentions curtailed further collaboration between the two. Once again, despite good intentions and considerable willingness for cooperation between individuals, groups, and government administration, it remained difficult to translate desires for popular theatre into more practical realities.

3 WIDER INTEREST AND ENTERPRISES

These debates, however halting and circuitous in retrospect, were followed with interest, curiosity—and, of course, a certain degree of frustration—by journalists, theatre directors, playwrights, and the wider artistic and literary community. Octave Mirbeau, the well-known anarchist playwright and journalist, composed a remarkably apt satire on the process for an article in *Le Journal* on 28 January 1900 in which he imagined the trajectory of a proponent of popular theatre. First, this enthusiast would encounter directors such as M. Lemmonier of the Théâtre de la République, who would insist that they had already created popular theatre by making their performances more accessible: 'but then, the people did not come ... the people are foolish!' Next, he would take his project to the Ministry and meet with a rapturous response: A popular theatre? But I think of nothing else [...] Ah, if only I were the minister, the humble minister who helped bring to fruition this grandiose project! What an honour! And above all, what satisfaction! To love the people! To serve the people ... instruct the people—only, of course, insofar as the state demands that the people be instructed—to give to the people, the beloved people, access to beauty ... authorized by regulations and traditions ... approved by our masters the secular bishops! What a beautiful defence of the Republic!

This minister might then direct the enthusiast towards Adrien Bernheim, who would send him on with equal enthusiasm ('this new theatre must be new, immense, and modern! Nothing can be too modern for the people, nothing too immense ...') to the Municipal Council. Surely they would be only too happy to grant one of the best locations in Paris ('I can guarantee this in advance! The Council can refuse you nothing... can refuse nothing to the people...'). Finally, the Municipal council would respond, with well-tempered enthusiasm:

Popular theatre? We've been thinking about it for thirty years. It is the dearest of our wishes! Do we share your vision? Can you even doubt it? You see, the people... the education of the people, the proletariat, the employees etc. etc. ... The only problem is, we have no location to offer you; we cannot offer you anything at all.

And the only practical consequence of such a lengthy and tortuous trajectory might be a government decision to send an elderly actor on a recital tour of the more 'popular' suburbs of the capital, such as Batignolles, Belleville, or Montmartre.⁵⁷

Mirbeau juxtaposed these governmental (and municipal) hesitations against the more dynamic initiatives of other groups of popular theatre enthusiasts. He himself was very closely linked to the Paris-based *Revue d'Art Dramatique*, whose sometime director Eugène Morel, also an author and playwright,⁵⁸ submitted the winning proposal for popular theatre to the review's competition of 1899. By the 1890s, the *Revue* was contributing to discussion of popular theatre in theory and practice, providing an important focus for a debate intensified by the profound disagreement between its editors over the relationship between popular theatre and state funding.⁵⁹ The *Revue* published articles, for example, by organizers of popular theatre in the provinces such as

Maurice Pottecher, Pierre Corneille Saint-Marc, and Charles Le Goffic (whose initiatives will be discussed in Chap. 3), and raised the possibility of organizing an international conference on popular theatre within the International Exhibition of 1900. It nourished a national interest in successful popular theatre initiatives in the provinces, while also revealing that these enterprises were both separate from and yet often partly funded by the state.

Eugène Morel's winning project-published in the Revue in December 1900-concluded as a letter to the Minister of Education and Art, even though his own hope had been for popular theatre to be sustained through public subscription rather than government subsidy. Subscription, he contended, would involve the people materially in the creation of their theatre, and equally encourage their perception of theatre as a weekly commitment rather than an impossible luxury. Yet the state was a nonetheless invaluable patron. With official support, and the publicity that would be assured by the education system, news of the project would be disseminated throughout the country, with potentially transformative consequences. We would like to cover France with theatres', he insisted. 'We dream of there being millions of theatres for the millions of French people, theatres as beautiful as those built for several thousand in ancient Greece.⁶⁰ As for other, practical details-authors, actors, and repertoire-he remained, for the time being, vague.

While the collaboration between the *Revue d'Art Dramatique* and the Ministry led only to Bernheim's study of German popular theatre rather than to state sponsorship of a French counterpart, the *Revue* itself did support the creation of some short-lived Parisian initiatives in working-class localities. Two of these were the Théâtre Populaire de Belleville and the Théâtre du Peuple in the district of Les Batignolles: two ventures of similar conception but differing fortunes.

The creation of Émile Berny's Théâtre Populaire de Belleville in 1903 was supported not only by Eugène Morel, who delivered the opening address,⁶¹ but also by the 'committee of patronage of popular theatre' to which he belonged, and which also included the senator Élisée Deandreis and the deputy Maurice Couyba, together with authors, playwrights, and directors such as Victorien Sardou, Romain Rolland, Octave Mirbeau, André Antoine, and Maurice Pottecher. The impetus behind its foundation was a rejection of the idea of a central popular theatre, and a determination to create a new theatre in a strongly working-class area of

the capital with a repertoire of 'historical, philosophical, moral, or social works that make one think'.⁶² Plays performed in 1903-1904 ranged from one-act comedies by Octave Mirbeau and Georges Courtelinewhose brilliant satires of French bureaucracy were highly popular and much performed-to contemporary French and European drama by Romain Rolland, Émile Zola, Victorien Sardou, Eugène Brieux, Guy de Maupassant, Gerhart Hauptmann, and Henrik Ibsen, some of which had already been performed in German popular theatres. There were also a number of new plays that seem to have been specially commissioned, and the second season of 1904-1905 broadened the repertoire to include five comic operas, among them Rossini's Barber of Seville. In the first season alone, 307 performances were given of 35 different productions, attended by a total of 134,500 spectators. Certainly the moderate prices made this potentially accessible to a genuinely popular audience: seats ranged from 25 centimes to one and a half francs,⁶³ with the lowest priced costing the same as attendance at a political meeting of the time. Romain Rolland wrote enthusiastically of the raw intelligence and lively involvement of the working-class spectators, who offered the potential, 'with a few years' experience of good theatre', to become 'an ideal public, witty and impassioned.'64

The creation of Henri Beaulieu's Théâtre du Peuple at the Théâtre Moncey-likewise supported by writers from the Revue d'Art Dramatique such as Morel-was shaped by similar aspirations. The theatre was situated in a working-class district in the eighteenth arrondissement of the capital, and Beaulieu himself, a former actor at the Théâtre Antoine, was keen and ambitious. Not only was he prepared to offer seats priced from 50 centimes to two francs, but he also promised to share his profits with the actors, and envisaged preparing exhibitions and touring productions. Like the Théâtre de Belleville, the Théâtre du Peuple offered a wide-ranging programme, including contemporary social dramas such as Hauptmann's Weavers together with Romain Rolland's Danton and Mirbeau's Les Mauvais Bergers, as well as Courteline's popular farces. Yet despite the parallels in programme and pricing to the Théâtre de Belleville, and what seemed to be an auspicious location, the Théâtre du Peuple soon foundered, meeting with hostility not only from the local bourgeoisie but also from the more working-class population of the area. By 1905 it had already reverted to its original programme of vaudeville and melodrama.⁶⁵ Rolland suggested an explanation:

The bourgeoisie would only come to a popular theatre if they had specially reserved seats. Those who ventured there saw the advertised prices and said, 'It must be terrible if the prices are so low!'

But the worst enemies were the people themselves. They didn't want to be 'the people'. They said to M. Beaulieu, 'People yourself! We're just as bourgeois as you are...' To attract the people, the theatre should surely have been called *The Bourgeois Theatre.*⁶⁶

4 GRANDIOSE PROJECTS (1900–1920)

Considering the development of popular theatre by the state in the first thirty years of the Third Republic, one could say that little had been produced but the very best of intentions. Mirbeau's satire nicely captured the flowery rhetoric and thinly veiled cynicism that so often attended the idea of the 'people'—worthy, sovereign, and yet somehow incapable of discerning or acting in their own best interests. It also explains the apparently paradoxical stalemate by hinting at the clash between genuine enthusiasm and an equally genuine reticence to commit to locations and funding for the realization of this republican ideal. Despite the many municipal, ministerial, and parliamentary discussions; despite the drawing up of careful proposals and detailed plans, the major popular theatre initiatives realized in the first half of the Third Republic were either in the provinces (often with state funding but with a rather ambivalent relationship to the state itself, as Chap. 3 will suggest), or on a smaller scale in Paris, without state subsidy.

It was the second half of the Third Republic that produced more concrete results, beginning with the government surveys and commissions of the earliest years of the twentieth century, and culminating in the establishment of the Théâtre National Populaire in 1920. The early surveys and commissions testify to continuing concerns to seek out and instruct the working people, to democratize elite culture, and equally to develop a specifically French form of popular theatre that would continue the classical tradition while diverging from a contemporary German model. The realization of these designs in the postwar Théâtre National Populaire demonstrates continuity not only in the ideological conception of popular theatre but also in the complex relationship between the regime and its sometimes elusive citizens. In January 1900, Adrien Bernheim submitted his substantial report on popular theatre in contemporary Europe to the Ministry. In it, he concluded that despite successful initiatives in Germany, Austria, and Belgium, the advantage still remained with the French, and he cited as evidence the development of popular theatre in the provinces. His own recipe for (national) popular theatre was the subsidized performance of classic works through cooperation with state-funded theatres such as the Opéra, Opéra-Comique, Comédie Française, and the Odéon. These theatres could supply the lead roles, he suggested, while the popular theatre in question would maintain its own orchestra and supply the remainder of the cast.⁶⁷

Though the Minister rejected Bernheim's specific proposals on financial grounds,⁶⁸ the Ministry itself continued to prioritize both the study and the support of popular theatre—with a noticeable peak in activity in 1905. This year, which witnessed the separation of Church and state,⁶⁹ also saw a heightened government interest in creating rival spaces for assembly, education, and citizenship. Notably, it was at this point that Étienne Dujardin-Beaumetz, himself an artist who had newly become Under-Secretary of State for Art,⁷⁰ created two new committees on popular theatre. The first examined proposals for the creation of popular theatres in Paris, while the second studied popular performances in Paris and the provinces.

Proposals submitted to the government commission of 1905 were rich in idealism and ambition in their solutions to the 'problem' of popular theatre. Catulle Mendès, for example, took this opportunity to reiterate his plans for a peripatetic theatre devoted to moral uplift.⁷¹ His initial survey of the café-concert denounced these debased forms of entertainment, against which his touring theatre was intended to provide a refreshing contrast. Indeed, his fervent condemnation of the café-concert coexisted with an equally fervent faith in the power of beauty to strike 'the very sensitive, impressionable soul of the crowd'⁷²:

More certainly, more purely, more luminously than when listening to the emotive words of a speaker or the quiet, patient voices of books, the people will develop and flourish in the theatre; they will enter into communication with a higher world to which they have the right of entry.⁷³

The vision of such beauty would inculcate a desire for beauty; a desire for beauty would lead the masses to search for her constant companionship; and through beauty, he said, democracy would be enhanced, and 'the masses would learn to act nobly'. Mendès was not blind to the fact that such an outcome would not be possible without a wholesale transformation of popular habits, to which end he proposed a theatre that could be rapidly assembled either in the working-class suburbs of Paris or in the provinces. With tickets priced from 50 centimes to one and a half francs, a repertoire of established and contemporary works,⁷⁴ and actors drawn from talented first-year students at the Conservatoire (who would, moreover, participate in the cooperative owning and managing the theatre), this venture would be a focus for experimental performance and organization.⁷⁵

For Mendès, the peripatetic nature of popular theatre addressed the related problems of selecting a location and securing an audience sufficiently numerous and committed to be able to support the theatre financially. But others sought alternative solutions. The government commission also received plans from the architects Ernest Herscher and M. Feine for an amphitheatre intended for the Jardin des Tuileries, where its concave construction below ground level would ensure that the view from the Louvre to the Arc de Triomphe remained uninterrupted. This proposal was much commended to the government by the republican composer Alfred Bruneau, who liked to imagine 'colossal music' being performed there for a vast audience. Such an amphitheatre would recall 'the incomparable solemnity of the performances of ancient Greece', he argued, while the location (being the site of the Tuileries Palace that had been destroyed during the Commune of 1871) would epitomize the Republic's desire to emphasize popular sovereignty, while simultaneously providing for the people the quality of entertainment previously enjoyed by kings and emperors.⁷⁶

Choosing an amphitheatre as the most apt form for the new (national) popular theatre expressed an obvious desire to reconnect with Greco-Roman tradition. But it also revealed a determination to articulate a French relationship to the classical past and its legacy superior to that of other European countries, notably Germany. Smarting from the humiliation of defeat in the Franco-Prussian war and with anti-German sentiment a powerful mobilizing force, the French were acutely susceptible to this desire for national pre-eminence, as some of the 1905 proposals for popular theatre suggest.

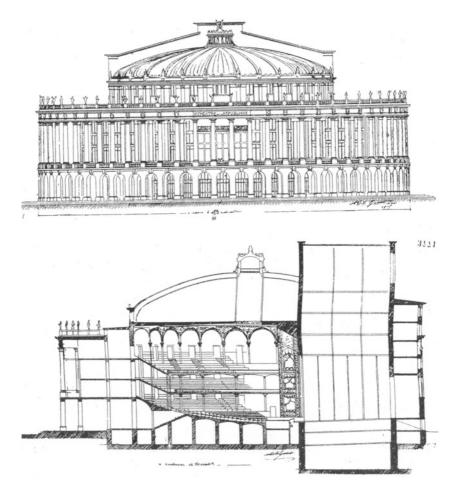


Fig. 1 Alphonse Gosset's design for Le Théâtre de la République, 1905 (Archives Nationales de France, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, AN F21 4688. Photograph courtesy of the Atelier Photographique des Archives Nationales)

Concern for a neo-classicism that would privilege France over Germany clearly inspired the project submitted by architect Alphonse Gosset, famous for his design of the theatre at Reims as well as for numerous books on the architecture of churches and theatres (see Fig. 1). Gosset's project for the 'Théâtre de la République' was intended to recreate the popular theatre of Antiquity with the industrial techniques of the early twentieth century, so transforming popular theatres into temples of the modern world. Holding an elevated view of classical drama-no doubt he would have found the cross-dressing comedy of Aristophanes' The Poet and the Women better suited to the café-concert-Gosset conceived of the theatre as a focus for assembling a visible, united community in common respect for religion, the city, and the fatherland.⁷⁷ With a particular concern to rival those nations continuing 'a religious observance of their popular traditions',⁷⁸ he offered a carefully conceived contrast between the 'German auditorium' (of Bayreuth) and the 'French auditorium' of the new republican theatre. The principal difference between the two lay in the seating, triangular in format in Bayreuth, but semi-circular-as in the Chamber of Deputies-in the proposed French version. The theatre at Bayreuth had been designed not only to permit an adequate view of the stage for every spectator, but also to minimize the awareness that the spectators would have of one another. Gosset's 'Salle Française' was conceived with the opposite intention: to maximize the number of spectators while also promoting their sociability.

The form of a semi-circular amphitheatre has the advantage of grouping the spectators, bringing them close together, allowing them to see one another, to be aware of each other and thus to share in the same emotion and experience the same thrill. This is, in its sociability, *a French form of design*, for the French man also sees the theatre as a place of assembly in which the attention he devotes to the stage is inseparable from that devoted to the auditorium.⁷⁹

Both the form of the theatre and also its interior decoration were thus to privilege the 'sovereign people',⁸⁰ while the modern concern for hygienic and orderly public spaces would be satisfied by the spacious corridors, metal seating, and a plentiful circulation of air throughout the building.

The projects submitted for government consideration in 1905 encapsulate both the ideals and failings of popular theatre as a state-led enterprise. Rhetorically, they shared in government enthusiasm for popular theatre as a means of reinforcing civic engagement and republican devotion, and in the predilection for grand, hygienic, state-controlled spaces as an alternative to decadent, immoral, and less easily patrolled cafés-concerts. The new popular theatre or theatres would improve the working classes both morally and physically (some popular theatre projects even suggested serving lemonade in the refreshment rooms, while the 'purity' of the refreshments was likewise an explicit government concern),⁸¹ while at the same time transforming them into active citizens. For these reasons, it was important that these theatres should be both materially and practically accessible to the working people, with cheap tickets and either a central Parisian location or a peripatetic character. There was much genuine idealism here, as well as a striking combination of rhetorical reverence for the sovereign people with an underlying cynicism about their fallible moral character and seemingly unshakeable preference for liquor over literature.

Echoing Mirbeau's satirical predictions, however, the pre-war government commission on popular theatre achieved more in administrative efforts than in practical results. There was, as ever, no lack of enthusiasm. When on 15 February 1906 Étienne Dujardin-Beaumetz reported to the Chamber of Deputies on the work of the two committees, the result was general approval and a resolution that a law be voted on the organization of popular theatre in Paris and the provinces. In June 1906, three consultative commissions were established to continue the project: administrative, architectural, and financial. And in November the government even suggested that the most 'social and patriotic' means of financing popular theatre would be through the national lottery.⁸²

Yet the closest the government came in this period to realizing a Parisian popular theatre bringing classics to the masses was its subsidy of Adrien Bernheim's Œuvre Française et Populaire de Trente Ans de Théâtre. Primarily a charity intended to amass funds for those who had devoted at least thirty years of their lives to the theatre, and who risked financial insecurity in retirement, the Œuvre organized classical performances in a variety of theatres, mainly in the Parisian suburbs, with actors from state-subsidized theatres. Bernheim himself died in 1914, but the charity continued to organize performances throughout the First World War, expanding its repertoire from classical drama to more modern pieces. In April 1916, for example, the Œuvre offered a mixed programme to celebrate 'the glorious line of French genius',⁸³ while also campaigning against the government closure of theatres in wartime, arguing that their own theatre fostered national solidarity, not frivolity.⁸⁴

The Œuvre de Trente Ans was highly acclaimed by the Republic, and certainly encapsulated many of the aspirations of popular theatre enthusiasts. It drew on the resources of state-subsidized theatres; it presented classics for a popular audience at accessible prices; and it sought its audience in the Parisian suburbs rather than requiring a journey to a more central location after a long day's work.⁸⁵ The Société de l'Encouragement au Bien awarded it a gold medal; the state officially recognized it as being of public utility; and the Académie Française accorded its founder the Prix Monthyon.⁸⁶ Yet its detractors either refused to describe it as popular theatre at all, or acknowledged its charitable value while suggesting that the 'utopia' of popular theatre as communion and citizenship remained to be realized. They were disappointed, for example, that the usual gradations of seating according to price were undemocratically maintained and observed that the cheaper seats were often empty.⁸⁷ Even Jean Frollo, a theatre critic for *Le Petit Parisien* whose general approval of the project Bernheim was at pains to cite, described the Œuvre in 1903 as only 'the well-meaning promise of national popular theatre, which after thirty-three years of the Republic still remains to be founded.'⁸⁸

5 The People and the Stage, 1920–1936

The First World War brought an abrupt end to many—although not all—popular theatre initiatives. But it also provided an impetus for the Third Republic's most successful popular theatre project, which would ironically diminish in importance just as the idea and reality of the people on stage attained particular prominence.

National sacrifice, victory, and regeneration offered a potent context in which to rethink the relationship between culture and the people, as the Radical Socialist deputy and former actor Pierre Rameil argued in parliament on 24 October 1918.89 Given the wartime 'decimation' of the French, he urged the Chamber of Deputies to consider a reform of education-not only physical but also civic and aesthetic. 'We must', he asserted, 'create popular theatres in our cities, places where workers can receive recompense for their labours: we must provide some Sunday respite for these men who, for the last four years, have never been able to rest on the seventh day!'90 In so doing, the French could build on the foundations already laid in the debates and initiatives of the pre-war period-a time when, as a young law student in Paris, Rameil himself had served as secretary to an amateur theatre group known as the Théâtre des Poètes.⁹¹ 'It is unimaginable', he concluded, 'that a democratic state should not have in its cities a theatre-or, to be more precise, a common house—where art, our common inheritance, should be available to all."92

The result of what became known as the 'Rameil project' was the designation in 1920 of the Palais du Trocadéro as the new Théâtre National Populaire, with an annual government subsidy of 100,000 francs. A vast building in exotic style that had been constructed for the International Exhibition of 1878, the Palais du Trocadéro occupied a commanding position on the summit of the hill opposite the Eiffel tower and could hold an audience of approximately 5000. Close to the grand boulevards of elite, western Paris, it was however far removed from the capital's more popular quarters, and both heating and acoustics left much to be desired. Nonetheless, Rameil was enthusiastic about its potential as the Théâtre National Populaire, with an official status that would grant access to actors and repertoire from other state-subsidized theatres. It could also, he anticipated, host other cultural events such as concerts and educational films.⁹³ Rameil's proposals were warmly welcomed, drawing much of the now habitual enthusiasm for 'the popular theatre that has been demanded for more than thirty years', a theatre 'issuing from the spirit of the Revolution, [which] will be popular, didactic, recreational, and national.'94

The experience of war influenced not only Rameil's proposals for the new theatre but also the approach of its first director, Firmin Gémier (1869-1933). Gémier was a well-established figure in the theatrical world, renowned as both actor and director, and had a particular interest in popular theatre. In the 1890s he had played in Émile Veyrin's Pâque socialiste (to be discussed in Chap. 5), as well as assuming the leading role in Alfred Jarry's controversial Ubu Roi.95 Shortly before the First World War he had experimented with the Théâtre National Ambulant, a peripatetic popular theatre based on the ideas of Catulle Mendès,⁹⁶ which toured France in 1911.⁹⁷ During the war itself, Gémier had pursued similar preoccupations through his work with the Théâtre des Armées, in which he faced the challenge of creating a repertoire suitable for soldiers from extremely varied social, political, and regional backgrounds. He later claimed to have found 'only two authors capable of uniting in fraternal joy all the sons of France: Molière and Courteline.⁹⁸

The Théâtre National Populaire was, moreover, formally inaugurated on 11 November 1920, a day of national festivity during which a lavish programme of Parisian celebrations associated military victory in the First World War with the fiftieth anniversary of the Third Republic. Exactly two years after the Armistice, the official and unofficial commemorations of loss and victory that had marked the intervening period were brought to a symbolic conclusion on this day with the solemn interment of an unknown soldier from Verdun under the Parisian Arc de Triomphe. This was an example of a new type of 'national funeral' also being held elsewhere in Europe (an unknown soldier was buried in Westminster Abbey in London on the same day; similar symbolic burials took place in other capitals such as Rome, Lisbon, and Brussels in 1921).⁹⁹ Yet the Parisian festivities were also-especially for some-strikingly political. The Arc de Triomphe had been constructed to commemorate the revolutionary armies of the 1790s. To inter the unknown soldier in its shadow implicitly associated his sacrifice with the earlier defence of the Republic by those whom Georges Leygues, president of the Chamber of Deputies, described in a bitterly divisive parliamentary debate on 8 November as 'the crowd of unknown heroes, sons of the Revolution...¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, 11 November 1920 also witnessed the solemn transferral to the Pantheon of the heart of Léon Gambetta, republican patriot of 1870, thus associating this day of national festivity with a vision of republicanism rather than with a more widely shared experience of mourning and triumph. Despite efforts at reconciliation (the archbishop of Paris, for instance, was called upon to bless the soldier's coffin before his burial), this moment of national commemoration proved divisive as well as unifying, with Catholics complaining of its overly secular character, and socialists of its excessive militarization.¹⁰¹

Held on a day of intense national importance, Gémier's inaugural festival for the TNP reflected a very particular association between the people, the Republic, and military prowess. Certainly, it was attuned to the shared emotion of wartime commemoration—what Annette Becker has described as 'a fervour born of war'¹⁰²—but it also projected its own image of ordinary French people following in the footsteps of their revolutionary ancestors. It was, as Gémier described it:

A festival in which the people play the principal part on a day when, as well as celebrating their heroes, they also celebrate themselves. Perhaps we will find in this spectacle, improvised at short notice and in spite of the present difficulties, an example of a festival that is at once collective, regional, and national: a festival of democracy; a festival of the future.¹⁰³

As a celebration of the Republic and its people, especially the heroes of the First World War, the festival was both militant and exultant in character. Presented in three parts—in tribute to the three republics—the performance took the form of a festival of republican song, and included 300 singers from choirs in both central and suburban Paris, such as La Lyre de Belleville and Le Choral Mixte de Saint-Mandé. The front cover of the programme featured a photograph of *La Marseillaise*: the haut-relief sculpture created for the Arc de Triomphe by François Rude in which a winged figure of Liberty urges the volunteers on to revolutionary war and victory in 1792. This was an image that epitomized the TNP's inaugural production: a tribute to a Republic defied, repressed, but ultimately triumphant.¹⁰⁴

The First Republic was commemorated as a time of popular victory and enlightenment. A hymn of triumph by the revolutionary army of 1794 opened the performance, while subsequent scenes moved back in time to suggest the importance of popular education, including the learning of *La Marseillaise* by a 'woman of the people' in the newly formed Paris Conservatoire. Civic and moral education were further highlighted by the performance of songs from the 'Festival of married couples' in 1798 and the 'Festival of old age' in 1799, and the first part concluded with renewed focus on popular military might: a *Chant martial* from 1796, and a *Chant de retour* from 1797.

The commemoration of the Second and Third Republics pursued the theme of popular strength. Men and women in bourgeois and workingclass attire stood together to represent the Revolution of 1830; music by Béranger and Berlioz evoked the Revolutions of 1830 and 1848; and the people themselves were represented as the new conquerors, following in the footsteps of Napoleon. In striking contrast to the physical strength and visible unity of the people on stage, the Bourbon and Orleanist monarchs appeared only in two dimensions through the caricatures of Honoré Daumier. The loss of Alsace-Lorraine and the birth of the Third Republic were commemorated with a military tableau, with soldiers standing alongside Alsatians for a rendition of Gounod's Gallia: a powerful musical lament over the plight of the patrie that concludes with a plea for Jerusalem to return to her God. In a deliberate parallel, a similar tableau of soldiers and Alsatians then accompanied the musical celebration of victory in 1918, which had led to the return of Alsace-Lorraine to France. The finale was a performance of Augusta Holmès's L'Apothéose de l'Ode triumphale,¹⁰⁵ with singers dressed as soldiers from 1793, 1870, and 1918.

The character and focus of this festival encapsulated Gémier's vision for popular theatre. First, it was an ambitious venture that made the people physically present on stage as well as in the audience by featuring amateur choirs from across Paris: very different from state-subsidized productions by professional actors for popular spectators. Second, it was a spectacle that moved beyond drama into festival, drawing on the revolutionary and republican symbolism that Gémier himself considered such a vital source of national unity. He even appealed directly to the audience through the distribution of fliers entitled Au public! to demand their support: 'The Théâtre National Populaire will be made by the people,' it insisted. 'It will exist only through you. Nothing is durable without the people.'106 Lastly, the festival drew deliberately on existing and continuing forms of popular culture. Not only was there-in Gémier's eyes-a dearth of suitable popular drama, but popular songs from the eighteenth century onwards were numerous and in many cases still familiar to the French in both official and partisan contexts.¹⁰⁷

The lavish inauguration of the Théâtre National Populaire offered a promising beginning. Not only had Gémier and his associates apparently achieved more in a few months than the governmental debates of the preceding fifty years, but the première had also been widely acclaimed. Indeed, Gémier prided himself that despite a potentially divisive celebration of revolutions and republics, he had received words of encouragement even from some of the 'most notorious reactionaries', who had been sufficiently impressed by the production on 11 November to clamour for more.¹⁰⁸ Inspired by this success, Gémier envisaged that the Trocadéro might be placed at the service of groups or municipalities seeking a location for 'popular festivals'-and by the end of the month he had already received a number of such applications. His role, as he saw it, would be to manage and coordinate these initiatives, provided that the impetus came from the popular groups or associations in question. An executive committee including playwrights such as Romain Rolland and Saint-Georges de Bouhélier would offer advice and assistance,¹⁰⁹ while the TNP's specifications would determine the range of performances and their associated ticket prices. Indeed, article six stipulated a repertoire both classical and modern, with ballets, concerts, and films as well as plays and operas, while article seven required the director

to organize at least 100 performances a year at 'popular' rates, with half or more taking place in the Palais du Trocadéro.¹¹⁰

In the early years of the venture, many of Gémier's aspirations were indeed fulfilled. A detailed report compiled for the Ministry in preparation for the budget of 1923 gives an illuminating insight not only into the range of works performed but also into their relative success at attracting audiences and financial support. In 1922, the requisite one hundred performances were given at the Trocadéro and at other venues. More than a third of the forty-four works performed were Operas, with Tosca (on 11 November) the most popular. Of the evening performances of dramatic works, plays by Victor Hugo (Ruy Blas and Hernani) and Corneille (Le Cid) attracted the largest audiences; at the Thursday 'classical matinées', Molière's Le Malade Imaginaire proved the greatest draw-not only for spectators paying the full ticket prices, but also for teachers and pupils whose tickets were subsidized.¹¹¹ Ticket prices remained resolutely low, making it possible to attend the production of an Opera from one of the other state-subsidized theatres at only a fraction of the cost. With the more popular performances and a nearly full house, such prices allowed the Theatre to make a narrow profit margin, although this was not the case with productions that were less well attended or in suburban venues.

Gémier has been much praised by subsequent historians, both for his achievements with the TNP and equally for his vision—never fully attained—of its future development. 'Gémier is great just as Vilar is great', asserts Claude Mossé, while suggesting a linear path towards the final success of Vilar's post-war TNP.¹¹² Colette Godard has been similarly enthusiastic, with Pascal Ory offering a rarer, more sceptical voice by styling the TNP as a flawed initiative, if also a valuable point of reference.¹¹³ Yet the 'flawed' character of Gémier's TNP deserves closer scrutiny, for it is this that reveals the rival assumptions and practical problems to which state popular theatre continued to give rise.

In the later 1920s and 1930s, Gémier's initiative prompted heated controversy over its purpose, usefulness, and success. Gémier himself, increasingly ailing, abandoned his direction of the Théâtre de l'Odéon to Paul Abram in 1930, and began to share the organization of the TNP with Albert Fourtier, a former editor of the *Revue d'Art Dramatique*. Following the death of Gémier on 26 November 1933, Fourtier assumed sole direction of the TNP, while confronting some of the more strident criticisms of its character. Despite Gémier's grandiose

visions of popular festivities, educational films, and new drama, the TNP had become predominantly (and perhaps inevitably) associated with a 'democratization' of existing productions: a worthy but in many ways dissimilar project. Certainly there were endeavours to use the Trocadéro for popular festivities, but the ventures to which Gémier had been sympathetic did not always meet with the same welcome from the Ministry or Prefect of Police. One such case was Albert Doyen's Fêtes du Peuple (discussed in Chap. 6), which according to the Prefect of Police should not be held at the TNP, given that the association in question was of partisan and trade unionist composition.¹¹⁴ More long-running debates, however, concerned the nature of the repertoire and audience: whether the TNP was merely a poor relation to the grander state-subsidized theatres,¹¹⁵ and whether its moderately priced tickets to these same productions were attracting a working-class audience, or simply a clientele of committed bourgeois theatre-goers eager for a bargain.¹¹⁶ (Comparable criticisms were made of the German Volksbühne).117

Such debates highlighted conflicting opinions over whether popular theatre should be aimed primarily at the people as workers or the people as nation. In 1935, this particular clash resounded loudly between Gabriel Boissy, editor of the well-known dramatic review Comadia, and Alfred Fourtier, director of the TNP. Boissy agreed with Gémier's original intention that the TNP should be for the people as a collective body, not as a single social class. Yet the audiences at TNP performances were becoming more class-based, and petty bourgeois rather than workingclass at that.¹¹⁸ Alfred Fourtier was vehement in his response, which Comadia published as an open letter. His audiences were, he insisted, 'worthy, simple, and poor folk' who often wrote to him to express their sense of comfort and ease in this popular venue, so different from the society theatres elsewhere in the capital. Of course, he admitted, there were those who could afford to see the productions elsewhere and were merely profiting from the cheap tickets: this was only to be expected. But the audience was nonetheless a truly mixed one. Nor was there any cause to suggest that the Trocadéro was poorly placed to attract the workers, given the excellent transport connections in contemporary Paris. Indeed, he could prove that audience members came not only from the twenty arrondissements of the capital but also from the suburbs.¹¹⁹

This debate took place a mere few months before Alfred Fourtier was obliged to leave the Trocadéro with his Théâtre National Populaire in search of temporary quarters, while the old Palais was demolished and the new buildings prepared for the International Exhibition of 1937.¹²⁰ Although the Palais du Trocadéro had been the symbol and main focus of the TNP, performances had from the beginning also taken place elsewhere, and so Fourtier's theatre became of necessity peripatetic, following Gémier's earlier example. Continuing with a similar programme of mainly well-established repertoire, the TNP was lodged temporarily in and around Paris—in the Théâtre Antoine, for example, as well as in suburbs such as Asnières and Saint-Denis. It also travelled further afield to Versailles, Orléans, Strasbourg, and Verdun.¹²¹

The new buildings at the Trocadéro were intended to house a theatre in a luxurious, modern hall of impressive dimensions¹²²—but as a national popular theatre it was not until the 1950s that the Trocadéro assumed a position of greater stability. On 24 February 1939, the Théâtre de Chaillot was officially inaugurated at the site in the presence of the President of the Republic Albert Lebrun, together with the Minister of Education Jean Zay. And on 20 November, Paul Abram, Gémier's former associate, was nominated director of the theatre, with the brief of organizing and managing popular spectacles. But Abramwho was Jewish-was forced to leave his appointment during the war, and replaced by Pierre Aldebert, a director whose open-air staging of Le Vray Mistère de la Passion outside Notre-Dame in June 1935 had sparked much interest on both left and right.¹²³ Aldebert reopened the theatre with Alphonse Daudet's L'Arlésienne on 28 September 1941, but the building was commissioned for diverse uses during the Occupation, being requisitioned by the Germans for their spectacles, used for a retrospective homage to Gémier during the Liberation, and occupied by the United Nations from 1948. Although Aldebert remained director until 1951, his time in office is usually passed over rather swiftly in studies of popular theatre in the post-war period. There the real focus is on Jean Vilar, who assumed direction of the TNP in 1951 and began an extensive programme of cultural decentralization.

Although the destiny of Gémier's Théâtre National Populaire was becoming increasingly uncertain in the 1930s, this was nevertheless a time at which the relationship between politics, theatre, and the people was becoming ever more spectacular. Across Europe, governmental instability and the deepening crisis of the Depression brought crowds into the streets in strikes, riots, parades, and hunger marches, as well as in more established patterns of demonstration and commemoration, for which various political groups and parties in France had their own clearly defined trajectories in major cities.¹²⁴ Increasing doubts-especially among more extreme groups on left and right-about the efficiency and even legitimacy of Parliament as a true representative of the people prompted an often dramatic descent of politics into the streets. Here, rival groups battled out their own claims to articulate the popular will through their occupation of key symbolic sites, as well as through their subsequent depiction of their own demonstrations as drawing on substantial popular support and approval. Of course, this was merely a new chapter in the long history of the crowd in French politics, and one that consciously evoked historical precedents in festivals and revolutions from the eighteenth century onwards. But it was an important one, and the debate over how and by whom the people were represented was equally of much wider European significance, as monarchies and Empires that had claimed legitimacy from tradition were tumultuously replaced by parties and leaders proclaiming their incarnation of the popular will. To make such claims convincing required bringing these people onto the public stage both physically and symbolically, as the spectacular politics of Soviet Russia, Fascist Italy, and Nazi Germany demonstrate all too clearly. Indeed, such politics-as Günter Berghaus has argued with particular attention to fascism—'employed a performative language that had a captivating force unequalled by traditional means of propaganda.¹²⁵

Could (and should) the French do likewise? This was a question much in the minds of political leaders, militants, parties, and observers—and others. Theatre and film critics, whether or not they approved of the political ideologies of their European neighbours, were nonetheless struck by the innovative (and in their view, often exciting) fusion between politics and spectacle in the creation of new regimes. Some even longed explicitly for the French to emulate their European neighbours in the creation of new relationships between the people and their leaders.¹²⁶ 'If France does not sense this renaissance,' warned Gabriel Boissy, 'then we will be overtaken, submerged by these new modes of being.'¹²⁷

It was ironic that the Palais du Trocadéro should be demolished at the very time of the French Popular Front, an anti-fascist coalition that had come to birth in the streets and would come to power as government in 1936–1937 and (more briefly) in 1938. Of all the governments of the Third Republic, the first Popular Front government of 1936– 1937 was the most committed—not only in theory but also in practice—to developing and supporting popular culture, whether literacy, sport, theatre, or cinema.¹²⁸ As Pascal Ory has painstakingly emphasized in his work on cultural policy, it was the Popular Front that pioneered the shifting emphasis from Art (Beaux-Arts) to culture and leisure.¹²⁹ With their coming to power under the Socialist premier (Président du Conseil) Léon Blum in June 1936, what was once the Ministry of Public Education and Art was subdivided. The Radical deputy Jean Zay became the Minister for Education, while one of Blum's two new ministerial portfolios was that of Undersecretary of State for the Organization of Sport and Leisure, attributed to the Socialist Léo Lagrange. The youthful dynamism of these two new officials has been much emphasized; and many pioneering initiatives—from the late night opening of the Louvre to travelling libraries and improved municipal sports facilities—owed much to their efforts.¹³⁰

For popular theatre, too, the first Popular Front government held great expectations, although the emphasis was more on cultural democratization than on grander projects for new drama in new spaces. Interviewed on the Popular Front's artistic programme in November 1936, Léo Lagrange responded that there was no official artistic doctrine, and that the new government was concerned principally to facilitate contact between art and the masses, not least through the development of the theatre. 'In my view,' he confided, 'popular theatre should be first and foremost a theatre where seats are accessible to all citizens because of their reasonable price [...] It is clear that one would have to begin by performing plays that are already well known and especially classical plays, but I would hope that in the future authors might be found who would write works specially for the people, responding to their needs and ideals.¹³¹ In short, Lagrange was restating the aspirations of Gémier for the TNP-staging Molière for the masses-but without the latter's vision for a new kind of theatre that would transform the people into actors as well as spectators.

The closest the Popular Front government came to a more utopian form of popular theatre was in its subsidy of productions that deliberately verged on the festive: Romain Rolland's *Le Quatorze Juillet*, the collectively-composed *Liberté*, and Jean-Richard Bloch's *Naissance d'une cité*.¹³² Rolland's play, initially performed in 1902 and under Gémier's direction, represented the storming of the Bastille with a particular focus on the crowd as historical actors. Rolland's intentions for popular theatre at the turn of the century (discussed in more detail in Chap. 6) had been decidedly militant: he believed that popular theatre should act as a battering ram against the state, even proclaiming, 'let popular art arise from the ruins of the past!¹³³ It was therefore ironic that the play should, in its 1936 performance, be accorded a quasi-official status, even if the government in question were Socialist-led. Supported by a government loan, performed on 14 July itself and broadcast on *Radio-Paris*, the play was intended to celebrate the victory of the Popular Front as a movement and now government.

It was Jacques Chabannes who, at the request of the Education Minister Jean Zay for a 'grand popular festival' to celebrate the Popular Front's electoral victory, had first suggested a revival of Rolland's play. Zay approved, Chabannes travelled to Switzerland to secure the approval of Rolland himself, and the production was prepared not only with professional actors but also with the assistance of amateur working-class troupes, who joined rehearsals after their working day was done. In the crowd scenes, Chabannes deliberately followed the techniques of Gémier himself to achieve the most effective impression of movement, 'diverse but natural, as harmonious as a ballet', designating certain actors as 'leaders' who were to be followed in both their spoken lines and trajectories across the stage by five or six other actors.¹³⁴ Rolland's original conception for the finale of the play, in which the revolutionary fervour and fraternity of the crowd on stage was meant to spill over into the audience-'the people themselves becoming actors in the festival of the People¹³⁵ also proved well suited to the context of summer 1936, when audience and actors joined in the singing of La Marseillaise, followed at the end of the première by L'Internationale. Indeed, on the very day of the première there also appeared in Comadia an article by Rolland calling for a new 'theatrical architecture based on vast spaces', with particular attention to the fusion of actors and audiences.¹³⁶ Following the enthusiasm generated by the production, Chabannes's friend Henri Lesieur renamed the Théâtre de la Renaissance as the Théâtre du Peuple and staged Rolland's Les Loups, written as a reaction to the Dreyfus Affair.¹³⁷ He also offered a number of 'free performances in solidarity'.¹³⁸ Yet this dependence on the mood of the moment for dramatic effect meant that the revivals of Rolland's Théâtre de la Révolution retained a somewhat exceptional character, rather than blazing a trail for a more well-established form of state-sponsored theatre.¹³⁹

The difficulties of maintaining a harmonious relationship between political coalitions and cultural manifestations was amply demonstrated by the 'fiasco' of *Liberté*, commissioned by Léon Blum in October 1936 for performance at the International Exhibition the following year (and intended as a socialist counterbalance to the production of *Le Quatorze Juillet*, deemed to have been monopolized by the Communists).¹⁴⁰ *Liberté*, collectively written and produced with the particular assistance of the Socialist Party's *Mai 36* group, traced the development of the Third Estate from the Middle Ages to the present day, encompassing its heroes and heroines as well as popular participation in the Revolutions of 1789, 1830, and 1848, and in the swearing of an oath of unity on 14 July 1935. Yet arguments over production details—even the colours of the set—revealed the growing rift between Socialists and Communists. The play was performed only a dozen times at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées at a time of growing dissatisfaction with the Popular Front as both movement and government: 'disorderly strikes on one side, and disgruntled businessmen on the other'.¹⁴¹

Naissance d'une Cité was the most innovative of these governmentsponsored productions. Written by Jean-Richard Bloch, produced by Pierre Aldebert, and performed in the Vélodrome d'Hiver on 18 October 1937, it was a bold attempt to imagine a new kind of drama for the masses.¹⁴² Not only did it reject the confined stage and auditorium of the nineteenth-century theatre building by occupying a stadium originally designed for bicycle races, but it also sought a new form of collective drama or 'total spectacle', based on mass movement, a mass audience, and an ambitious use of technology. The plot, originally with a tragic conclusion but altered to suit the hopes of the Popular Front era, traced the journey of a group of workers from the mind-numbing monotony of the production line to the creation of a utopian, fraternal community on an island in the Atlantic Ocean. With 1000 actors and stagehands on stage, working together in an 'essential ballet',¹⁴³ the spectacle focused not so much on individual trajectories and dilemmas as on the common condition of the working masses in an industrialized society. Trapped within physically demanding jobs, threatened with unemployment by the Depression, and bombarded with propaganda through newspapers and other media, these were women and men made prey to claustrophobia, confusion, and despair. It was only through common action-a common desire to start life anew on a utopian island on which a new city could be built-that individual voices, relationships and fulfilment could prove possible. Bloch's ambitious mass spectacle, with a score by Arthur Honegger, Darius Milhaud, and Roger Desormières, and sets by Fernand Léger, also sought to spill out from the stage to the

stadium, concluding with displays of gymnastics and with bicycle races around the audience.

Through its sponsorship of *Naissance d'une Cité*, the Popular Front government associated itself with a genuinely experimental type of mass theatre. Bloch himself conceived of the play as an impetus towards a new type of drama inspired by mass experience and designed for actors and audiences as bodies with collective rather than individual identities. The very use of a stadium made it challenging to focus on the words or gestures of an individual actor, who would be almost invisible and inaudible:

[Individual] speech is not possible for him. It would not be noticed. Emotion that is of an individual, psychological, or passionate kind must be avoided: it cannot be communicated to the crowd. With the protagonist reduced to the proportions of a pygmy, the mime of an individual comedian would be mostly incomprehensible.¹⁴⁴

Even so, and perhaps ironically, Bloch—like Gémier—also insisted on the important guiding role that the principal actors would play on stage in influencing the action and character of this apparently collective creation:

Actors and actresses, strategically placed among the crowd of extras, play an essential role there—that of group leaders, an intelligent and powerful framework. The homogeneity of this kind of mass spectacle owes everything to them.¹⁴⁵

Whether in fact a mass spectacle for a mass audience actually led to the effacement of individual identity is a more controversial question (and one at the heart of the 'efficacy' of popular theatre as a path to political utopia). Certainly, the inadequacy of the loudspeakers meant that both the text and music of *Naissance d'une cité* were often distorted. But the reception of the play also suggests that Bloch was utopian in his assumptions about collective reactions to collective drama, and that the line of emotional identification between individual members of the audience and individual characters on stage was less easily sundered. 'Does anyone really believe that the people can be moved only by the sound of screaming sirens and sudden changes of lighting?', complained the composer René Leibowitz on his return from the spectacle.¹⁴⁶ At least for these members of the audience, Jacques Rancière's emphasis on primacy of the critical individual over the projected fiction of the mass would seem to

hold true¹⁴⁷—although how typical such sceptical spectators were, it is now impossible to know.

There were, however, more prosaic reasons why *Naissance d'une cité* would not be the next step to innovative state-sponsored popular theatre. By late 1937, the Popular Front government was already struggling to resolve severe political and economic problems, and lacked the resources to pursue its earlier cultural aspirations. Although a theatre was re-opened at the Trocadéro, the site of the most substantial state achievement, the promise of popular theatre to facilitate republican integration and citizenship remained both alluring and elusive.

6 CONCLUSIONS

There was never a single, homogenous state plan for popular theatre in the Third Republic. Projects for popular theatre offered vital spaces for dialogue in which rival ideas and rhetoric contrasted and collided. On one level, it would be artificial to draw too strong a dividing line between state employees and the playwrights, actors, journalists, and other men of letters (and it was principally men) who discussed popular theatre and created their own initiatives. Deputies could be former actors; government ministries were inspired by discussions in other domains such as the *Revue d'Art Dramatique*.

Nevertheless, there were influential and abiding convictions at state level about the potential of popular theatre in a republican regime. Central to these was the assumption that culture offered a vital means of political education and integration, which should be aimed at all citizens, within and beyond the electorate. Many of these proponents of popular theatre did not question the didactic power of art: show the audience something inspiring and noble, they believed, and the audience will surely be inspired and ennobled. In this they were often explicitly sharing the assumptions of their classical predecessors, nicely exemplified in the debate that Aristophanes stages between Euripides and Aeschylus in The Frogs, where they discuss what the poet's political role should and could be. Children have a schoolmaster, Aeschylus tells the touchy Euripides, while adults have a poet.¹⁴⁸ For Third Republican politicians, well versed in such texts through their classical education, the conviction that theatre could play a role in popular and civic education needed no further justification. Such beliefs have, moreover, continued to be espoused by subsequent republics, and are both exemplified and continued in a work such

as Pasler's *Composing the Citizen*. Music 'not only helped [the French] develop their taste and their critical judgement', she writes, 'teaching them the habits of citizenship and preparing them to make better choices in the voting booth, it also contributed to the consensus of public opinion.'¹⁴⁹

Exactly how culture could achieve political integration, and by what means, remained a theoretical and practical challenge. In terms of popular theatre, state officials aspired towards both cultural democratization and also—more idealistically—some form of civic communion. Cultural democratization meant initiating the masses into 'high' culture whose moral value was perceived to be self-evident, drawing them away from inferior entertainment and creating a shared intellectual capital among citizens. Popular theatre, as well as providing affordable access to France's literary grandeur, was thus explicitly intended to play a role in educating the labouring classes in French language and history. 'It is greatly distressing', wrote Victor Lesté, a writer whose proposals for popular theatre were recommended to the Minister by Aristide Briand:

to hear a hundred thousand people hum *Viens Poupoule*, and yet remain ignorant of Corneille, to know nothing of Voltaire except the Boulevard that bears his name, and to speak of Beaumarchais simply to complain of the slowness of the omnibus that circulates in that quarter.¹⁵⁰

Such concerns for moral uplift were ones that government ministries and their would-be collaborators were at pains to share, for both philanthropic and opportunistic reasons. Firmin Gémier hoped that his audiences would be instructed through his productions in the virtues of family life and fidelity to the state, in war as in peace, and offered his new Théâtre National Populaire as emblematic of the high moral standards to which popular theatre should aspire. Indeed, he even encouraged contemporary writers to come to the Palais du Trocadéro and witness the auditorium, full of mothers, children, and young women (all of whom, though unable to vote as electors, were nonetheless to be instructed in their rights and duties in a manner befitting their role as current and future citizens of the Republic). Those who write for the people, he proclaimed majestically, should respect their purity.¹⁵¹ This concern for purity also extended to the explicit preoccupation with hygiene in the design of new theatres and the beverages to be supplied in their refreshment rooms, as both proposals for new buildings and the records of government commissions testify.

More powerful, but more problematic, was the desire for popular theatre to create community and even communion at a political level. As reporters to the government commission of 1905 insisted:

We do not conceive of popular performances as an assembly of different classes where, from the stalls to the shadowy summits of the upper galleries, different social categories sit in successive rows, but as assemblies of art, rest and joy, in which the unanimous people, artisans and bourgeois alike, will be overwhelmed at the same moment, elbow to elbow and heart to heart, by the same emotion.¹⁵²

While government commissioners were aware that some might view their project as a 'utopia',¹⁵³ they themselves took such plans perfectly seriously, and their language was echoed by other enthusiasts, such as Catulle Mendès, who insisted that art presented the people with the passport to a higher realm of experience 'to which they would have the right of entry'.

Could it be that the Third Republic, which established the separation of Church and state in 1905, looked to popular theatre as the framework for its own 'civic religion'? In 1872 Jules Bonnassies described theatre as a 'secular church';¹⁵⁴ in 1926 Gustave Charpentier referred to popular art as 'an eternal and superhuman task, in which may be realized the most pure and complete form of communion.'¹⁵⁵ As places of assembly and instruction, of democratic gatherings and secular sermons, such theatres certainly offered striking parallels to places of worship, an enticing prospect for the Republic to develop its own variety of 'civic religion'. And it is particularly striking that the highpoint of public and parliamentary debate over the building of a network of popular theatres should come in 1905, the very year of separation of Church and state.

If communion were the most fundamental aim of popular theatre for some of its state proponents, it was also the most problematic and elusive. Neither the TNP at the Trocadéro nor the fleeting festive collaboration between politics and theatre under the Popular Front could match in scale (and expenditure) the political spectacles of Germany, Italy, or Russia in the same period. These, too, played with the form and experience of religious belonging (the word religion deriving from *religare*, to bind), and with profound desires for unity and wholeness that participants might or might not have found in other political and social relationships. As an ideal, such spectacles both fascinated and repelled. As a reality, they certainly shaped some of the rhetoric considered in this Chapter (and that of other popular theatre proponents, as subsequent chapters will demonstrate). Some criticized the Third Republic for its failure to incorporate the people more fully and more emotionally into its political liturgies. Others would argue that for the Third Republic to seek a level of integration overriding any other political, social, regional or religious allegiances would signify a desire for totalitarianism.¹⁵⁶

The aim here is not to praise or blame the Third Republic, but rather to explore what relationships were imagined, created, or left unrealized between popular theatre and politics. What this chapter has demonstrated is the abiding importance of two key aspirations for state popular theatre-cultural democratization and civic communion-and the persistent challenges to their realization. These challenges took many forms. Some were financial: the Chamber of Deputies repeatedly discussed and voted in favour of granting large sums of money for this enterprise, but was never fully committed to the long-term subsidy of such a project. There was also opposition from theatre directors who felt that cheap performances subsidized by the government would deprive them of their own markets. More importantly, although there was considerable consensus about the need for new plays that would provide examples of patriotism and republican morality, there seem to have been few authors interested in writing this kind of play. Firmin Gémier's celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Republic was a rare example, and even this was a spectacle of song and dance rather than a fully scripted drama.

Indeed, perhaps the most important reason for the failure of this project—a reason that its supporters never took very seriously—was the inability of this kind of popular theatre to attract the people themselves. Much of the problem lay with the concept of the 'people', often assumed to be cohesive and homogeneous, yet always contested and divided. Politicians of the Third Republic knew that the French were fractured along political, social, religious, and regional lines: this was partly why these projects of realizing a national unity over and above such divisions were so important. But exactly what form the united republican people should take; which characteristics they should have; which moments of the past they should celebrate; how their narrative should be written and depicted on stage: these were more intractable problems. If state popular theatre were conceived in utopian form, then this utopia—or 'non-place'—could sometimes prove more elusive than attractive. And because popular theatre enthusiasts were inevitably preoccupied with the 'people' as an idea, they rarely devoted enough time to considering what might encourage an individual citizen to attend one of their performances. Nor did they ask themselves whether the people (working-class or bourgeois, or both) actually wanted state-funded popular entertainment provided for their cultural benefit.¹⁵⁷

The real challenge for state initiatives, and especially for a single national and popular theatre, was that there were other groups at the political and geographical peripheries, sharing state convictions about art's didactic power but preferring to use it for their own ends. To be sure, they had different and more partisan ideas of the people. Their 'people' were Breton or Provençal, a faithful people of Catholic believers, a militant proletariat, or even a royalist people faithful to what seemed to others like a reactionary fantasy. But as it is so often easier to sustain unity in opposition than in coalition, their narrower ideas of the people, as opposed to the 'elusive' republican people of state rhetoric, represented greater poles of attraction. Such 'peoples' were usually also more sharply defined and easier to stage. This did not necessarily mean that rival projects for popular theatre were more successful or long-lasting than state ones, but it did strengthen their appeal to preexisting communities of thought, and thus to ready-made audiences. These audiences did not want to be citizens of utopia; they wanted to be socialists, communists, royalists, Bretons or Provençaux, meeting and seeking entertainment in communities to which they already belonged.

As for those who preferred the café-concert, it is doubtful that many were converted by the well-meaning state initiatives to more civic and less alcoholic pleasures. 'There one can drink, smoke, take up the refrains of the songs in chorus,' wrote journalist Maurice Cabs of the café in 1901, 'all things that a goodly number of the Parisian public—and the public in general—rate more highly that the highest of artistic considerations.'¹⁵⁸ Surely writers such as Catulle Mendès were closer to these people when writing daring comedies than when dreaming of peripatetic popular theatre.

Notes

- 'Inspecteur général, Commissaire du Gouvernement près les Théâtres subventionnés (Adrien Bernheim): Rapport à M. le Ministre de l'Instruction Publique, le 25 mars 1902', AN F21 4687.
- Catulle Mendès, 'Rapport sur les représentations populaires en province', AN F21 4688.
- 3. Isidore Singer and Cyrus Adler, *The Jewish Encyclopaedia* (New York and London: Funk and Wagnalls, 1904), p. 487.
- 4. 'Lettre de F. Gémier, Caen, 18 août (1908)', AN F21 4687.
- 5. Theatre is 'a priesthood of thought', insisted the revolutionary Fabre d'Églantine to the Convention on 25 Brumaire, Year 2 (15 November 1793). Suzanne Bérard, 'Aspects du théâtre à Paris sous la Terreur', *Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France*, 4–5 (1990), p. 611.
- 6. See Philippe Poirrier and Laurent Martin (eds), 'Démocratiser la culture! Une histoire comparée des politiques culturelles', *Territoires contemporains*, 5 (2013). The cultural historian Philippe Poirrier is vice-president of the historical committee of the French Ministry of Culture.
- 7. Martin, 'La Démocratisation de la culture en France: une ambition obsolète?' in Martin and Poirrier, 'Démocratiser la culture'. This is also available on the government website: http://www.culturecom-munication.gouv.fr/Ministere/Histoire-du-ministere/Actualites/Democratiser-la-culture-!-Publication-en-ligne.
- 8. Poirrier, Histoire des politiques culturelles, p. 8.
- In 1807, for example, Napoleon issued a decree that both reorganized theatre according to type of production but also retained it under close control. See Robert Gildea, *Children of the Revolution: The French*, 1799–1914 (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 177.
- 10. Quoted in Goldstein, 'Fighting censorship', p. 786.
- Jacqueline de Jomaron, Le Théâtre en France (Paris: Armand Colin, 1989), Vol. 2, De la Révolution de 1789 à nos jours, p. 316. Likewise, Colette Godard sees Gémier's descriptions of popular theatre as foreshadowing those of Vilar. Godard, Chaillot, p. 8.
- 12. Jomaron, Le Théâtre, p. 316.
- 13. Loyer, 'Le Théâtre national populaire', p. 93.
- Lee, *The Quest for a Public*, p. 21. Lee's book was prefaced by Émile Biasini, director of theatre, music, and cultural action in the French Ministry of Cultural Affairs in 1960–66.
- 15. Loyer, 'Le Théâtre national populaire', p. 93.
- 16. How far Vilar was indeed successful is yet another question, outside the scope of this particular study.

- 17. Sally Debra Charnow refers to government documents for the early years of the Third Republic, but with an overall focus on modernist rather than popular theatre. Neither Loren Kruger, nor Jacqueline de Jomaron, nor Marion Denizot refer to archival material in discussion of state initiatives (which in fact receive little treatment in Denizot's volume). Chantal Meyer-Plantureux offers some invaluable source material on this period in *Théâtre populaire: enjeux politiques* (Paris: Éditions Complexe, 2006), but as an edited collection this does not offer a narrative of the projects in question. See Kruger, *The National Stage;* Denizot (ed.), *Théâtre populaire;* and Jomaron, *Le Théâtre.*
- 18. Eugen Weber famously argued that education was one of the means by which the Third Republic 'assimilated' its citizens in his *Peasants into Frenchmen*. More recently, Jann Pasler has explored the ways in which music could 'contribute to the formation of citizens, the health of the democracy, and the unity of the French Republic'. Pasler, *Composing the Citizen*, xii.
- 19. Rigby, Popular Culture in Modern France, p. 9.
- See Gary Thurston, 'The Impact of Russian Popular Theatre, 1886– 1915', Journal of Modern History, 55 (1983), pp. 240–267, especially p. 265, and idem, The Popular Theatre Movement in Russia, pp. 286–287.
- 21. Previous studies of popular theatre refer to but do not necessarily explore its religious dimension. Colette Godard, for example, cites Firmin Gémier's description of popular theatre as 'a new Church', but compares this with Malraux's vision for 'cathedrals of culture' rather than situating the idea in its early twentieth-century context. Godard, *Chaillot*, p. 7. Jacques Rancière, however, addresses the question of religion more directly in *The Intellectual and his People*, Vol. 2, *Staging the People* (London: Verso, 2012), p. 20.
- Daniel Hervieu-Léger, 'Le Miroir de l'Islam en France', Vingtième Siècle, 66 (2000), p. 82. Hervieu-Léger is consciously suggesting the position adopted by Pierre Nora in Les Lieux de Mémoire (Paris: Gallimard, 1992). On Republican 'religion', see also Rearick, Pleasures of the Belle Epoque, p. 14.
- 23. Kevin Passmore, *The Right in France from the Third Republic to Vichy* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), p. 42.
- 24. On the variety of challenges to the Republic, see Wardhaugh, *In Pursuit* of the People, pp. 11–17.
- 25. Jules Michelet, L'Étudiant. Cours de 1847-48 (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1977), p. 25.
- Jules Bonnassies, Le Théâtre et le peuple: esquisse d'une organisation théâtrale (Paris: Armand Le Chevalier, 1872), p. 165.

- 27. Joseph Paul-Boncour, Art et Démocratie (1912), reproduced in part in Meyer-Plantureux, Théâtre populaire, p. 100.
- 28. Romain Rolland, Le Théâtre du Peuple, essai d'esthétique d'un théâtre nouveau [1903] (Paris: Albin Michel, 1926), p. 69.
- 29. Joseph Harris, Inventing the Spectator: Subjectivity and the Theatrical Experience in Early Modern France (Oxford: OUP, 2014), p. 201.
- 30. Frederick Burwick, *Illusion and the Drama: Critical Theory of the Enlightenment and Romantic Era* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), pp. 41–42.
- Mercier, Du Théâtre (1773), discussed in Stefano Castelvecchi, Sentimental Opera: Questions of Genre discussed in the Age of Bourgeois Drama (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), p. 87.
- 32. Mark Darlow, Staging the French Revolution: Cultural Politics and the Paris Opera, 1789–94 (Oxford: OUP, 2012), p. 170.
- 33. On the symbolism of these festivities, see Dan Edelstein, *The Terror of Natural Right: Republicanism, the Cult of Nature*, and the Revolution (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), Chap. 5.
- 34. See Adolphe Brisson, 'Le Théâtre populaire et ses précurseurs au dixhuitième siècle et sous la Révolution', *Feuilleton du Temps*, 18 February 1907 (BN DAS, 8 Rj 4699). Strikingly, Payan was concerned that revolutionary drama should not be entirely subservient to political ends, and criticized the 'mediocrity' of the pieces performed at the Festival of the Supreme Being. Rolland, *Le Théâtre du Peuple*, p. 82.
- 35. Rearick, Pleasures of the Belle Epoque, p. 220.
- 36. Pascal Dupuy, *La Fête de la Fédération* (Rouen: Publications de l'Université de Rouen et du Havre, 2012), p. 14.
- 37. Rearick, Pleasures of the Belle Époque, p. 14.
- Jean-Richard Bloch, Carnaval est Mort: premiers essais pour mieux comprendre mon temps (Paris: Éditions de la Nouvelle Revue Française, 1920), pp. 122–123.
- On the role of the Ministry of Public Education, Art, and Religion in the early Third Republic, see Marie-Claude Genet-Delacroix, 'Le Conseil supérieur des Beaux-Arts: histoire et fonction (1875–1940)', *Mouvement Social*, 163 (1993), pp. 45–65.
- 40. Bonnassies, Le Théâtre et le Peuple, p. 10.
- 41. Bonnassies, Le Théâtre et le Peuple, p. 7.
- 42. Bonnassies, Le Théâtre et le Peuple, p. 43.
- 43. This was often discussed in letters to the Ministry (see AN F21 4687).
- 44. Bonnassies, Le Théâtre et le Peuple, p. 23.
- 45. Bonnassies, Le Théâtre et le Peuple, p. 190.

- 46. Nevertheless, popular theatre enthusiasts in Berlin also lamented that there was insufficient naturalist drama for their cause. See, for example, Conrad Schmidt in *Freie Volksbühne*, 2 (April 1897), p. 5.
- 47. 'Eugène Nus à M. le Ministre, 8 mars 1878', AN F21 4687.
- Georges Ohnet, 'Le Feuilleton du Constitutionnel, 25 janvier', AN F21 4689.
- 49. Georges Richard, 'Project de Création d'un Théâtre de drame populaire, demande adressée à M. le Sénateur, Préfet de la Seine, et à MM. les Membres du Conseil Municipal de Paris,' (BN DAS Rt 750).
- 50. 'M. Sauchelle à M. le Ministre, le 12 décembre 1879', AN F21 4687.
- 51. Richard, 'Project de création', p. 2.
- 52. 'M. Lagrange à M. le sous-secrétaire d'État au Ministère des Beaux-Arts, le 6 juin 1880', AN F21 4687.
- 53. See Henri Turot and Alphonse Deville, 'Rapport sur la création d'un théâtre populaire' (1904), BN DAS Rt 750, p. 2.
- 54. Turot and Deville, 'Rapport', p. 6.
- 55. Cecil Davies, The Volksbühne Movement: A History (Manchester: MUP, 1977), p. 22.
- 56. Rolland, Le Théâtre du Peuple, pp. 86–87. On the importance of Hauptmann's Weavers in German popular theatre, see Freie Volksbühne, 2 (April 1898), p. 114, where it is described as the first drama focusing more on the actions of masses than on individual destinies, and Franz Diederich in Die Volksbühne: eine Sammlung, p. 1.
- 57. Octave Mirbeau, 'Le Théâtre populaire' (*Le Journal*, 28 January 1900), reprinted in *Gens de Théâtre*, pp. 221–226.
- 58. See Meyer-Plantureux, Théâtre populaire, p. 45.
- 59. See David Fisher, 'Romain Rolland and the French People's Theatre', Drama Review, 21 (1977), p. 81.
- 60. Morel, 'Projet de théâtres populaires', *Revue d'Art Dramatique*, 10 (1900), p. 1118.
- 61. Morel, 'Discours pour l'ouverture d'un théâtre populaire', *Revue d'Art Dramatique*, 13 (1903), 277–287. See also Rolland, *Le Théâtre du Peuple*, pp. 99–102.
- 62. Deuxième congres international des auteurs et compositeurs: rapport sur le théâtre populaire à Paris, 1905 (BN DAS Rj 4450). Berny's emphasis on theatre as stimulating popular intelligence is discussed in Beach, Staging Politics and Gender, p. 16.
- 63. Rolland, Le Théâtre du Peuple, p. 99.
- 64. Rolland, Le Théâtre du Peuple, p. 102.
- Georges Pioch, 'Vers le Théâtre populaire', La Vérité, August–September 1919.
- 66. Rolland, Le Théâtre du Peuple, p. 105.

- 67. 'Inspecteur général, commissaire du gouvernement près des Théâtres subventionnés (Adrien Bernheim): rapport à M. le Ministre de l'Instruction Publique, le 25 mars 1902', AN F21 4687.
- 68. The deputy Maurice Couyba did, however, concur with Bernheim's suggestions. On Couyba's project, see L'Évènement, 7 October 1901 (AN F21 4687). Couyba had followed the debates on popular theatre in the *Revue d'Art Dramatique* with interest.
- 69. The division had also been proposed and prefigured earlier in the regime. See Jacqueline Lalouette, 'La Séparation avant la Séparation: 'projets' et propositions de loi 1866–91', *Vingtième Siècle*, 87 (2005), p. 45.
- 70. Jean Lefranc, 'M. Dujardin-Beaumetz et son septennat', Le Mercure Musical, 15 February 1912.
- 71. Catulle Mendès, 'Rapport sur les représentations populaires en province, décembre 1905', AN F21 4688. His suggestions had already been given a lukewarm reception in a report by Bernheim in 1902 as well as discussed in parliament.
- 72. Catulle Mendès, 'Rapport', AN F21 4688.
- 73. Mendès, 'Projet de théâtre ambulant', AN F21 4687.
- 74. Mendès mentioned Corneille, Racine, Molière, Regnard, Beaumarchais, Marivaux, Hugo, Shakespeare, Goethe, and Schiller. Mendès, 'Projet de théâtre'.
- 75. Although Mendès's peripatetic theatre was never realized, he did contribute to the democratization of culture by organizing evenings of poetry reading together with some of his acquaintances, including Gustave Kahn, Armand Bour, and Louis Payen. See J. Valmy-Baysse, 'Théâtre Populaire? Théâtre de la Nation? Nous aurons toujours un théâtre populaire', *Comadia*, 4 August 1920.
- 76. 'Rapport de M. Alfred Bruneau sur le projet de MM. Feine et Herscher', AN F21 4687.
- 77. Alphonse Gosset, 'Projet de Théâtre Populaire pour la Ville de Paris sur son terrain du Marché du Temple' (1905), AN F21 4688.
- 78. Gosset, 'Projet de Théâtre', p. 6.
- 79. Gosset, 'Projet de Théâtre', pp. 10-11.
- 80. Gosset, 'Projet de Théâtre', p. 8.
- Commission financière des théâtres populaires: rapport de M. Chéramy, 26 novembre 1906', AN F21 4688.
- 82. 'Commission financière des théâtres populaires'.
- 83. 'Discours de M. Paul Peltier, avocat à la cour, au grand cinéma Lecourbe, le jeudi 13 avril 1916', AN F21 4689.
- 84. 'Causerie de M. Gaston Lebel au Palais du Travail, le 22 novembre 1916.' F21 4689. The Théâtre Populaire Moral et Patriotique

organized similarly morale-boosting performances, with references to speeches by Poincaré. 'Représentation organisée par le Théâtre Populaire Moral et Patriotique, Paris, 24 février 1913'. AN F7 15980.

- 85. Rolland, Le Théâtre du Peuple, p. 54.
- 'Causerie de M. Antoine Banès au Théâtre de la Comédie-Moderne, 21 avril 1914', AN F21 4689.
- 87. Rolland, *Le Théâtre du Peuple*, p. 58. Following Rolland, Meyer-Plantureux also dismisses the project as 'more like a charity than the creation of a popular theatre'. *Le Théâtre populaire*, p. 91.
- 88. Jean Frollo, 'Le Théâtre populaire' (1903), BN DAS Rj 4694.
- 89. Rameil was also spokesman for the Arts budget.
- 90. Le Journal Officiel, 25 October 1918, p. 2772.
- 91. J. Valmy-Baysse, 'Théâtre populaire?'
- 92. Quoted in J. Valmy-Baysse, 'Théâtre populaire?' Rameil's report for the Finance commission, completed in April 1920, is reproduced in Meyer-Plantureux, *Théâtre populaire*, pp. 123–133. In this he names several colleagues, including Paul-Boncour, who had supported him in the request for a state subsidy of 100,000 francs.
- 93. For the details of Rameil's speech, see for example *Le Temps*, 23 April 1920 and *Comædia*, 25 April 1920.
- 94. 'Un Cinquième Théâtre national', Comædia, 25 April 1920.
- 95. On the performance and influence of Alfred Jarry's Ubu Roi, see Richard Sonn, Anarchism and Cultural Politics in Fin-de-siècle France (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p. 78, and Jannarone, Artaud and his Doubles, p. 83.
- 96. 'Lettre de Firmin Gémier', 18 August (probably 1908), AN F21 4687.
- 97. A similar project for 'popular education' had been launched a few years previously, in 1907, by M. Lucien Desplanques: Le Chariot Errant. Théâtre Humoristique et d'Éducation Sociale. L'Œuvre et l'éducation populaire par le théâtre (brochure) (1911) BN DAS Rt 3909. On the brief history of Gémier's Théâtre national ambulant, see also Godard, Chaillot, Chap. 1.
- 98. Firmin Gémier, 'Le Théâtre populaire', L'Ère nouvelle, 3 October 1920.
- 99. Annette Becker, 'Du 19 juillet 1919 au 11 novembre 1920: mort où est ta victoire?' *Vingtième siècle*, 49 (1996), p. 39.
- 100. Becker, 'Du 19 juillet 1919 au 11 novembre 1920', p. 40.
- 101. Becker, 'Du 14 juillet 1919', pp. 40-44.
- 102. Becker, 'Du 14 juillet 1919', p. 31.
- 103. Gémier, 'La Fête du Trocadéro', L'Ère nouvelle, 7 November 1920. The festival is referred to fleetingly by Catherine Faivre-Zellner: 'Firmin Gémier: un vieux tonton du théâtre populaire?'in Denizot (ed.), Théâtre populaire, p. 84.

- 104. Cinquantenaire de la République: inauguration du 'Théâtre Populaire', 11 et 14 novembre 1920 (Programme), AN F21 4691.
- 105. As described by Brian Rees in *Camille Saint-Saëns: A Life* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1999), p. 278.
- 106. Au Public! AN F21 4691.
- 107. P. Godeaux, 'Un Théâtre qui jouera tous les genres', L'Écho de Paris, 28 November 1920.
- 108. Gémier, 'L'Ère nouvelle du théâtre', L'Ère nouvelle, 21 November 1920.
- 109. Both were already closely associated with Gémier, who had directed the première of Rolland's 14 Juillet at the Théâtre de la Renaissance in 1902, and worked with Bouhélier on a production of *Œdipe, roi de Thèbes* for the Cirque d'Hiver in December 1919. See Louise Delpit, Paris-Théâtre contemporain: rôle prépondérant des scènes d'avant-garde depuis trente ans (Northampton, Mass., Smith College and Paris: Librairie Champion, 1925), p. 78.
- 110. 'TNP du Trocadéro: cahier des charges, mars 1922', AN F21 4691.
- 111. The first performance was to an audience of 4,000. 'Recettes brutes réalisées au Trocadéro', 'Ministère des Beaux-Arts. Note pour le budget de 1923. Le Théâtre National Populaire, année 1922'. AN F21 4691. By the same reckoning, Racine's *Phèdre* was the least popular.
- 112. Mossé et al., L'Aventure du Théâtre populaire, p. 197.
- 113. See, Godard, Chaillot, p. 7; and Ory, Théâtre Citoyen, p. 28.
- 114. 'Lettre du Préfet de Police à M. Le Ministre de l'Instruction Publique et des Beaux-Arts', AN F21 4691. His remarks on the trade-unionist character of the association had been made in an earlier letter of 2 December 1919.
- 115. Several newspapers made this observation at the beginning of the 1931 winter season, emphasizing that the programmes were identical, there being no attempt to render the productions at the TNP more 'popular'. See, for example *L'Écho de Paris*, 30 September 1931.
- 116. Georges de Wissant, 'Où est notre Théâtre populaire?', La Volonté, 5 February 1926. He admired the German system of subscription.
- 117. Karl Christian Führer, 'German Cultural Life and the Crisis of National Identity during the Depression, 1929–33', *German Studies Review*, 24 (2001), p. 466.
- 118. He based his contentions on a letter from Mademoiselle 'R.L.', who claimed TNP audiences were bourgeois rather than working-class. Gabriel Boissy, 'Qu'est-ce qu'un Théâtre populaire?' *Comadia*, 4 March 1935.
- 119. *Comædia*, 21 March 1935. Alfred Fourtier recalled here that, as former editor of the *Revue d'Art Dramatique*, he had experience of these academic debates over the nature and ideal of popular theatre.
- 120. Godard, Chaillot, p. 15.

- 121. Edouard Beaudu, 'Le TNP s'installera l'an prochain à la Salle Pleyel', L'Intransigeant, 1 May 1936.
- 122. Debates over possible designs included proposals for a French version of Bayreuth, a more experimental theatre, and an ordinary auditorium. Godard, *Chaillot*, p. 15.
- 123. Aldebert had long been interested in medieval theatre, as shown by his involvement in the Théâtre Idéaliste. See BN DAS Rt 4094.
- 124. See Wardhaugh, In Pursuit of the People.
- 125. Günter Berghaus, 'The Ritual Core of Fascist Theatre, an Anthropological Perspective' in Berghaus (ed.), *Fascism and Theatre*, p. 40. See also Dawn Ades (ed.), *Art and Power. Europe under the Dictators* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), and Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy* 1922–45 (London: University of California Press, 2001).
- 126. See, for example, the series of articles by Gabriel Boissy entitled 'Au Vent des jours' and published in *Comadia* in 1936, e.g. on 29 February.
- 127. Boissy, 'Au Vent des jours', Comadia, 4 March 1936.
- 128. See Wardhaugh, In Pursuit of the People, Chap. 5.
- 129. See Pascal Ory, La Belle Illusion: culture et politique sous le signe du Front populaire (Paris: Plon, 1994).
- 130. See Ory, *Théâtre citoyen*, p. 43, where he discusses the change in focus from *Beaux-Arts* to *Culture*. On Popular Front cultural policy more broadly, see Danielle Tartakowsky, *Le Front populaire: la vie est à nous* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996) and Julian Jackson, *The Popular Front in France: Defending Democracy*, 1934–38 (Cambridge: CUP, 1988), Chap. 4.
- 131. Jean Fabre, 'Théâtres populaires' (interview with Léo Lagrange), La République, 26 November 1936.
- 132. See Wardhaugh, In Pursuit of the People, Chap. 5.
- 133. Rolland, Le Théâtre du Peuple, p. 169. On the difficulties of staging the storming of the Bastille and on Rolland's ambivalent attitude towards the crowd, see Chap. 6 and also Jessica Wardhaugh, 'In the Shadow of Danton: Theatre, Politics, and Leadership in Interwar France' in Wardhaugh (ed.), Politics and the Individual in France, 1930–50 (Oxford: Legenda, 2015), pp. 13–27.
- 134. Jacques Chabannes, *Paris à vingt ans* (Paris: Éditions France-Empire, 1974), p. 276.
- 135. Rolland, 'Le Quatorze Juillet' in Le Théâtre de la Révolution (Paris: Albin Michel, 1909), p. 140.
- 136. Cited in Ory, La Belle Illusion, p. 345.
- 137. Lesieur's conception of popular theatre touched on the religious. 'To speak of the people is to speak of metaphysics', he asserted while discussing the definition of popular theatre in *Radio-Liberté*, 24 September 1937.
- 138. Ory, La Belle Illusion, p. 375.

- 139. Nonetheless, the Catalogue de la Société des Auteurs et Compositeurs Dramatiques records the titles of a number of spectacles in 1936–37 reflecting Popular Front interests and ideals, even if not necessarily supported financially by the government. These include: Paul Colline's CGT Roi, Roger Ray's Le Peuple est Roi, Henri Dallenne's Rive gauche laborieuse, Rive gauche joyeuse and two plays by the actress Muse Dalbray: Allons au-devant de la vie, performed in the Galeries Lafayette during the strikes and revived during 1937, and Le Peuple souverain, also performed in 1937.
- 140. Chabannes, Paris à vingt ans, p. 284. Ory refers to it as a 'fiasco' in Théâtre citoyen, p. 45.
- 141. Chabannes, Paris à vingt ans, p. 285.
- 142. For a fuller discussion of the production, see Jessica Irons (Wardhaugh), 'Staging Reconciliation: Popular Theatre and Political Utopia in Paris in 1937', *Contemporary European History*, 14 (2005), pp. 279–294.
- 143. Jean-Richard Bloch, appendix (instructions for performance) for 'Naissance d'une cité' in *Toulon et autres pièces* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), p. 295.
- 144. Bloch, 'Naissance', p. 295
- 145. Bloch, 'Naissance', p. 297.
- 146. Leibowitz, 'Naissance d'une cité', Esprit, 1 November 1937.
- 147. Rancière, Le Spectateur émancipé, pp. 22-23.
- 148. Aristophanes, *The Frogs* (tr. Jeffrey Henderson) (Indianapolis: Focus, 2015), p. 82.
- 149. Pasler, Composing the Citizen, p. 230.
- 150. 'Notice pour M. le Ministre de l'Instruction Publique: Le Théâtre Populaire', AN F21 4687.
- 151. Quoted in an article by A. Bayet in *Le Quotidien*, 21 May 1921 (BN DAS Rt 3277).
- 152. 'Rapport à la sous-commission sur la possibilité d'organiser à l'Odéon des représentations populaires, gratuites ou payantes' (M. Georges Bourdon, 11 septembre 1905), AN F21 4688.
- 153. 'Commission financière des théâtres populaires: Rapport de M. Chéramy, 26 novembre 1906', AN F21 4688.
- 154. Bonnassies, Le Théâtre et le Peuple, p. 18.
- 155. Gustave Charpentier, 'L'Art et le peuple' in *Le Chanticler*, 2 May 1926 (BN DAS Rt 4694).
- 156. Even Ory describes Bloch's *Naissance d'une cité* as presenting a 'totalitarian utopia'. *Théâtre citoyen*, p. 45.
- 157. David Fisher also highlights these 'miscalculations' on the part of popular theatre enthusiasts in 'Romain Rolland and the French People's Theatre', p. 89.
- 158. Maurice Cabs, 'Le Théâtre du Peuple', *La République*, 9 November 1901, AN F21 4689.

Folk Art, Faith, and Nationalism: Popular Theatre in the Provinces

Hot, cramped, and stuffy, with tired decor and lacklustre drama, how could the theatres of Paris compare with the Théâtre Antique d'Orange: a Roman amphitheatre open to the sky, the crowds, and the performance of mass spectacles of national regeneration? In Nîmes and Béziers, Roman amphitheatres were likewise being rediscovered as spaces for performance; in Bussang and La Mothe-Saint-Héray, new popular theatres were creating opportunities for local people to become both actors and audiences. While Paris vaunted its cultural pre-eminence, these initiatives suggested greater vitality elsewhere. Surely it was the popular theatre of the provinces—rather than the faltering efforts in the capital—that really merited state support?

These were the impassioned arguments of the journalist and drama critic Gabriel Boissy, as he penned an open letter to Aristide Briand, Minister of Public Education and Art, in 1907.¹ His letter was rich in contradictions. Pouring scorn on the efforts of the state, he nonetheless appealed to the government for support. Denigrating the 'corrosive' effects of Parisian influence, he was still convinced that this influence could—and should—benefit provincial initiatives that seemed to be flourishing very well on their own. Delighted by drama that often drew its inspiration and appeal from narrower, more localized ideas of the 'people', he nevertheless insisted that this regional (and often regionalist) culture would contribute to revitalizing the national soul and genius.

The contradictions in Boissy's missive offer a vital insight into the relationships between nation and region, Paris and the provinces. These relationships render national and republican integration as controversial in contemporary France as it was in the Third Republic.² Can national and partisan identities coexist? Should regional languages, traditions, and cultures be supported by or subsumed within the nation state? How should national culture and public space be ordered to facilitate the cohabitation of the Republic's diverse and divided citizens? Challenges such as these continue to provoke some of the most powerful political passions.

For some historians, the Third Republic offers an example of successful political integration according to the 'republican model', with national, republican allegiance progressively taking precedence over more geographically and politically partisan identities.³ According to Eugen Weber's classic 1976 study *Peasants into Frenchmen*, for example, the peasants of Brittany, Provence, the Vosges or the Pyrenees, who would have been unable even to have a dialogue with each other in standard French in 1870, were by the First World War transformed into assimilated citizens.⁴ This was in part the consequence of improved transport and communication networks, but it also derived from shared cultural, social, and linguistic experiences, shaped especially by the introduction of compulsory primary education and military service. Such changes, Weber contended, 'swept away old commitments, instilled a national view of things in regional minds, and confirmed the power of that view by offering advancement to those who adopted it.⁵

This argument for integration does not necessarily disregard regional identity, but rather suggests that regional and national allegiances succeeded in achieving a peaceful and mutually beneficial coexistence. Both before and after Weber's influential study, historians of regionalism have in fact highlighted examples of this cohabitation. In the 1950s, Alphonse Roche concluded his monograph on provençal regionalism with the conviction that, 'the average Meridional has always considered himself a loyal citizen of France'; in the 1970s, Jean-Yves Guiomar took such pains to emphasize the republican nature of Breton nationalism that he explicitly refused to consider associations between regionalism and an anti-republican right.⁶ More recently, Anne-Marie Thiesse has endeavoured to undermine the 'black legend' according to which Third Republican schoolteachers denigrated the *petite patrie*, and has focused especially on its favourable presentation in school textbooks.⁷ Similarly, though

with a more political focus, Julian Wright has highlighted the republican nature of regionalist thought (like Guiomar before him), drawing out the importance of realism and reconciliation to such nationally influential regionalist thinkers as Jean Charles-Brun, founder of the Regionalist Federation of France.⁸

As Boissy's letter suggests, the dialogues between nation and region were anything but straightforward. Certainly, the regionalists of the Third Republic were for the most part neither sufficiently separatist in aspiration nor sufficiently strong in number to pose a serious threat to national unity. Nor were their political doctrines primarily anti-republican, although there were of course exceptions to this rule. Nevertheless, it is important not to gloss over the very real divergences of ideas, opinions, and experiences that made the relationship between state and periphery, Paris and the provinces, so fraught with spirited dialogues of exactly the kind that Boissy's letter exemplifies. How can one make sense of the Breton folklorist who sought integration in Paris and instead rediscovered his Breton identity? Or the writer from Poitou who penned offensive satires of the Republic and then demanded government funding (and was most irate at its refusal)? Or the theatre in the Vosges that championed seemingly introverted drama of local legends for local people, and yet attracted audiences from across France and beyond?

To probe the workings of these relationships more deeply, cultureboth as practices and customs, and also as artistic creation-offers an extremely fruitful point of departure. Popular culture, notably in the sense of folk culture, is particularly important. It can, for instance, reveal the competing drives towards national and regional belonging: indeed a greater impetus towards national integration was often matched in reaction by a defensive attachment to the culture of the petite patrie.9 As grass-roots studies since the 1990s have convincingly demonstrated, rural identities could persist and even flourish in circumstances that might outwardly appear to suggest their disintegration. Significant examples include Elien Declercq and Saartje Vanden Borre's recent analysis of the songs of Belgian migrants, Kiva Silver's study of migrant workers in Paris, as well as Jean-François Chanet's study of republican schooling and the *petite patrie*.¹⁰ Such case studies examine both the coexistence of but also the power play between regional and national allegiances. Silver's case study, for example, foregrounds Limousin workers in nineteenth-century Paris who viewed their Parisian labours as a means of accumulating sufficient wealth to expand their land holdings 'at home'

in the provinces, rather than as a passport to a more Parisian identity. In such ways, she argues, 'the transformation of "peasants into Frenchmen" was thwarted by the migrant's emotional and financial investment in a rural order.'¹¹ Case studies such as these further reinforce Ruth Harris's earlier contentions that local beliefs, languages, and customs could be surprisingly resilient against more abstract notions of 'Frenchness' in the nineteenth century.¹²

Popular, folk culture was, moreover, also enmeshed in complex political claims and contentions both within and beyond the nation state. In France-as elsewhere in Europe-perceptions of national and regional identity were in a phase of significant evolution during the Third Republic. Not least, there was a shifting emphasis from universalism (whether associated with the Roman Empire, medieval Christendom, or the eighteenth-century Enlightenment) to particularism, often linked to ethnic groups and their geographical territories. This was a shift with historical, geographical, and social implications: it substituted the dark ages for antiquity, Northern Europe for the Mediterranean, and ordinary people for elite bearers of culture.¹³ Even the more left-wing and republican were not necessarily able to 'shake off the "phantoms of romantic nationalism", as David Hopkin has argued, 'the implicit, or even explicit, connection between a people, a territory and a culture.'¹⁴ A focus on the Latin peoples of southern France, for example, could have wide-ranging political implications: it could emphasize regional over national superiority; it could refract the image of the nation through the lens of Mediterranean characteristics or culture; and it could even be used to highlight France's latinity over that of its more northern neighbours.¹⁵

This chapter explores the creation of regional popular theatre in the four cases that were the most keenly discussed during the Third Republic itself: Orange, Brittany, Bussang, and Poitou. The first is an open-air theatre in classical surroundings, restored and reused from the late nine-teenth century as part of a project of cultural democratization. The other three examples presented themselves as 'théâtre du peuple' or 'théâtre populaire', and encompassed both the preservation and revival of folk-loric theatre, and equally the creation of new popular drama, sometimes in deliberately archaic form or setting.

Though the theatres at Orange and Bussang continue to be used for performance today, many of the initiatives discussed here are now little known. Marion Denizot, for example, deliberately excludes folk theatre from her study of popular theatre on the grounds that it was the expression of 'minority cultures—whether local, ethnic, social, or religious'.¹⁶ Other have praised Maurice Pottecher's Théâtre du Peuple in the Vosges as an exemplary project of democratization, while according little or no attention to contemporary initiatives that were nearly always discussed in parallel during the Third Republic itself.¹⁷ Some of these—such as the Breton theatre of Anatole Le Braz or Joseph Le Bayon—now receive only the most fleeting of references.¹⁸

Individually, these projects shed light on regional characters and characteristics. Cumulatively, they offer a fresh perspective on the relationship between Paris and the provinces within the broader context of national integration, highlighting in particular its more productive tensions. Provincial cultural initiative was often defined by strident regionalism: yet it relied on Parisian interest, influence, and often also practical and financial support for its existence and success. Writers who failed to achieve national prominence in Paris developed regionalist aspirations and achieved national prominence as folklorists instead. In such cases, regional popular theatre makes it possible to gauge the relative strengths of grande and petite patrie, and to trace where regional culture was used to unite and divide, both within France itself and also in a wider European context. Romans against Gauls, Gauls against Cimbri, Gauls against Franks, Bretons against French-such battles were of much more than purely historic interest for a Republic seeking national integration, and for a nation still reeling from defeat in the Franco-Prussian War.¹⁹ And in the playing out of these battles, one of the most spectacular settings was the Roman amphitheatre at Orange.

1 THE THÉÂTRE ANTIQUE d'ORANGE

Dedicated to the sun god Apollo, the amphitheatre of Orange was one of the architectural glories of the Roman province. Although Orange itself first enters recorded history as the scene of a defeat, having been conquered by the Northern European tribe of the Cimbri in 103 BC, its theatre dates from a time of imperial splendour. It was constructed in the first and second centuries on an impressive scale, reflecting imperial confidence and expansion.²⁰ Its intricate friezes were crafted with stone from across the Mediterranean, and depicted a golden age under the aegis of Apollo himself. The theatre also boasted a vast postscenium wall

separating the stage from the dressing rooms, later described by Louis XIV as 'the most beautiful wall in my kingdom'.²¹

Although by the nineteenth century this once glorious theatre was in a state of collapse,²² the following decades would witness its extraordinary renaissance. Indeed by the early Third Republic, not only had the theatre been excavated and restored, but it had also become the setting for spectacular performances, in which Parisian stars basked in the glory of the new electric lighting before audiences including political and literary dignitaries of national importance. Here, in what was quite self-consciously styled as a 'French Bayreuth',²³ the 'French Athenians'²⁴ of the new Republic applauded themselves as descendants and defenders of the classical inheritance.

Emblematic of this transformation was the shifting interest in Apollo himself. When an altar to Apollo was discovered at Orange during the excavations of the 1830s, the architect Auguste Caristie highlighted its interest for archaeologists and art historians.²⁵ But when the Fêtes d'Apollon were celebrated at Orange in 1897 with a prologue by the poet Louis Gallet, it was a matter of national interest and coveragewith even the President of the Republic, Félix Faure, in attendance.²⁶ In Gallet's prologue, a Faun awakens from his centuries-long slumber in a Roman amphitheatre once dedicated to Apollo, and engages somewhat bemusedly with various representatives of French identity, before encountering France herself in the final scene. Dramatis personae include a cicada (the 'Popular muse', and also the symbol of the Félibrige),²⁷ as well as Music, the Gallic muse, and Provence. They squabble, yet they are united in pious homage to Phoebus-Apollo, god of the sun, as well as in their determined spurning of 'those who venture into the mists'.²⁸ Music and Provence recognize in France the continuation of the classical legacy, while France herself, accompanied by a tricolour pierced with bullets and shredded in battle, provides an emotionally-charged focus for unity. Gallet's narrative may be somewhat unconvincing, but it was politically astute. 'To celebrate Provence without also offering some favourable remarks on France would hardly have been very polite,' the dramatic critic Lucien Besnard observed, 'given that M. Félix Faure happened to be present."29

Surprisingly, this nineteenth-century restoration and reconception of the Théâtre Antique d'Orange has received little attention.³⁰ In tracing its renaissance, this case study sheds light on dialogues that powerfully shaped conflicting identities and the relationships between them:

Greek, Roman, and Gallic; French and provençal; French and German. In so doing, it also probes the dynamics between nation and region and between Paris and the provinces at a time when ethnic origins and inheritances were a subject of increasing political dispute.

1.1 A National Project

The restoration of the amphitheatre at Orange for theatrical performance was by no means a foregone conclusion. Auguste Caristie had intended to excavate it for archaeological and artistic interest (and made clear just how expensive this might prove to be).³¹ Later excavations by Jean-Camille Formigé and subsequently by his son Jules Formigé were certainly inspired by an interest in performance,³² but to organize successful productions required relationships with artists and directors as well as costly archaeological and architectural development. It was in fact a journalist, Fernand Michel (better known under his *nom de plume* Antony Réal) who was so struck by the theatre's excellent acoustics during a visit to the site in 1840 that he resolved to restore it to its original purpose,³³ both to further France's cultural prestige but also to improve the moral health of the nation 'rather more than those bawdy spectacles that make the fortunes of most Parisian theatres.³⁴

The path from initial inspiration to première in the restored theatre in August 1869-which was far from smooth-depended crucially on the relationship between regional initiative and Parisian support. Michel's intention was for a lavish programme that included Étienne Méhul's Biblical opera Joseph, Nicola Vaccai's operatic version of Romeo and Juliet, and Michel's own prologue, Les Triomphateurs. Yet to engage Parisian artists for what seemed like a prestigious programme proved initially frustrating. Even by July, few artists had deigned to reply to Michel's invitations, and when he undertook personal visits of entreaty with his colleague and fellow enthusiast Félix Ripert, he met with responses from the dismissive to the perplexed. 'I simply do not perform in the provinces', answered one singer. 'Orange, Orange,' murmured another agent, 'but there is no theatre in that region, and no performers!' Villaret from the Paris Opera seemed keen, but his manager was adamant in refusal: 'I can't let him go and sing in your windswept theatre!' Eventually one tenor proved willing to take the risk, and his example inspired other performers, some from the Opéra Comique in Paris, others from the Théâtre d'Avignon and the Théâtre de Strasbourg.35 Finally, the première was able to take place as planned in August 1869, and met with an enthusiastic response from an audience that mingled provençaux and Parisians.

Subsequent productions of the 1870s and 1880s drew similarly on artistic and economic cooperation between Paris and the provinces, while staging subjects of both regional and national interest. Orange's classical past clearly influenced programme choices in August 1874, for example, when there were performances of Vincenzo Bellini's Norma, set during the Roman occupation of Gaul, alongside Alphonse Adam's popular comic opera Le Châlet, and Franz von Suppé's operetta Die schöne Galathée (in which Pygmalion's living statue frustrates his intentions to such a degree that he successfully implores Venus to turn her back into stone). In 1886, the theatre staged the première of L'Empéreur d'Arles by the Avignon poet Alexis Mouzin, paired for the occasion with Molière's Les Précieuses Ridicules. This particular programme was a triumph for the cooperation between Paris and the provinces. Organized with the financial support of two local patrons, Auguste Palun and Henry Yvaren,³⁶ the programme attracted actors from three Parisian theatres (Odéon, Châtelet, and Ambigu), as well as performers from Marseille, Toulouse, Lille, and Constantinople. While focusing on local history, Mouzin's play also looked hopefully towards greater harmony between competing ethnic groups. Set in fourth-century Arles, the plot represented the struggle between 'old Rome, pagan and tyrannical' and 'young Gaul, Christian and civilizing.'37 It was Gaul, Mouzin suggested diplomatically, that represented the harmonious mixing of races capable of securing future greatness:

Southern Latins, and Barbarians from northern skies Unite in you, making a people strong and wise.³⁸

Increasingly, performances at Orange drew support not only from local and regionalist sources, but also from government ministers. Indeed, provençal regionalism was in itself both regional and national in dimension: by the 1880s, the literary Félibrige founded by Frédéric Mistral in Avignon in 1854 to promote provençal language and literature had already evolved into a federation of national proportions,³⁹ including félibre poets 'in Parisian exile' who gathered in such groups as La Cigale and La Société des Félibres de Paris.⁴⁰ Both of these latter groups contributed to the programme for Orange in 1888, which presented

Rossini's opera *Moïse* and also *Œdipe-Roi* (in Jules Lacroix's version) as the centrepiece of a series of 'Musical and Poetic Festivals of the South of France'.⁴¹ Other attractions included poetry readings, an art exhibition, and a ceremonial 'arrival of the ministers', with the premier (Président du Conseil) Charles Floquet, the Minister of Public Works Pierre Deluns-Montaud, and the Minister of Art Édouard Lockroy.⁴² Those attending would no doubt have been still further impressed by the list of participating actors from Parisian theatres, not least the celebrated Mounet-Sully (Jean-Sully Mounet) in the title role of Oedipus. In 1894, *Œdipe-Roi* was staged alongside *Antigone*, when Mounet-Sully shared the public's acclaim with Julia Bartet and Lucienne Bréval. The same occasion brought to the stage a modern setting of the Hymn to Apollo recently discovered in Delphi, together with Camille Saint-Saëns's *Pallas-Athéné*.⁴³

Ministerial approval and even state support were an undoubted incentive to the organizers of Orange's artistic festivals. The presence of the head of state in 1897, and the support of the Comédie Française and the Colonne orchestra for performances of *Antigone*, Leconte de Lisle's *Les Erynnies*, and Gallet's *Fêtes d'Apollon* must have seemed the fulfilment of many long-held ambitions. Certainly, the Presidential visit remained vivid in local memory. When the theatre critic Pierre Scize attended a performance almost three decades later in 1924, he heard his neighbour reminiscing about the President's visit in 1897, when velvet chairs had been brought from the Theatre at Avignon in order to accommodate the party in suitable splendour.⁴⁴ In 1902, the government of the Third Republic even briefly considered making Orange one of the national state-sponsored theatres, with its productions regularly assured by the Comédie Française.⁴⁵

Yet official approval was not in itself enough to secure lasting financial stability. The particularly high expenditure occasioned by the celebrations of 1897 led Paul Mariéton to propose the foundation of a Société des Amis du Théâtre d'Orange, whose network of supporters would include Mounet-Sully, Camille Saint-Saëns, Benjamin Constant, Jules Claretie, Victorien Sardou, and Frédéric Mistral.⁴⁶ Although the Society never attained the form he intended, Mariéton himself continued to play a guiding role in the organization of performances until his death in 1911, fervently continuing the emphasis on classical subjects. (Indeed, when Jean Aicard offered him *La Légende du cœur* in 1901, he insisted that it was too early to depart from the classical theme, even for a play set in medieval Provence.) $^{47}\,$

The renaissance of Orange thus depended crucially on collaboration between Paris and the provinces. A clear focus for regionalist pride and culture, its productions could not have been successful without the support of Parisian theatres and artists; nor could they have achieved such renown without the very visible approval of government officials. To understand the deeper reasons for Orange's cultural renaissance, however, it is also necessary to move outwards to a broader narrative of national and cultural renewal. Certainly, the restored amphitheatre and its lavish productions were a source of local and national pride. But they also exemplified France's concern to privilege her relationship with the classical past over that of her German neighbour—and rival.

1.2 A Bayreuth for 'French Athenians'

National in significance, performances at Orange were increasingly imbued with a distinctively patriotic pride. Indeed, as the *Journal des Fêtes Romaines d'Orange* noted with particular relish, these productions suggested provençal superiority (and anteriority) in achieving a Wagnerian classical ideal. In 1888, for instance, the journalist 'Ré-mi' claimed first place for 'Orange-Bayreuth' as a neo-Athenian theatre capable of uniting poets, statesmen, and the crowd in common appreciation of Aeschylus and Sophocles:

No longer is this a theatre like those in the cities, a social meeting place where a few aimless characters come to spread their ignorant self-satisfaction. Quite the contrary: this is a spectacle for the people—the people for whom the usual suppliers of the Musical Academy have nothing but disdain.⁴⁸

As Ré-mi suggested—and as debates at both local and national level would increasingly demonstrate—this celebration of France's classical inheritance was often inseparable from an angry or defiant gesture of cultural superiority against the German nation. In February 1895, discussion of Orange's regional and national significance reached the Chamber of Deputies, where an amendment granting the theatre the sum of 70,000 francs was proposed by 25 parliamentary deputies, including Joseph Ducos, deputy for Orange, but also Maurice Faure, Pierre

Deluns-Montaud, Paul Deschanel, Alfred Naquet, Édouard Lockroy, Clovis Hugues, Joseph Reinach, Camille Pelletan, and Hyacinthe Camille Odilon-Barrot, among others. In the concomitant debate, Franco-German relations were frequently implicit. Édouard Lockroy commented favourably on the influx of tourists, 'Europeans from across the whole of Europe', drawn in admiration to France's classical monument, and augmenting national prosperity with their visits. In his view, Orange represented an international centre of cultural pilgrimage that would divert European tourists from their habitual destinations and present a grandiose rival attraction to the German open-air theatre at Oberammergau, renowned for its stagings of the Passion.

Why should we not aid the contrasting creation—in this Provence which is half Roman, and not far from that great interior sea around which the civilization, philosophy, and poetry of our race came to birth—of a great artistic centre where people may gather to celebrate Greek and Roman genius, the ancestor of our own?⁴⁹

Raymond Poincaré, then Minister of Fine Art, further reinforced this nationalistic aspiration by agreeing to a sum of 30,000 francs for the project, justifying this gesture with a concern 'to revive and maintain classical traditions, because we consider French civilization as the legitimate daughter of antiquity' (an observation greeted with hearty applause).

Created through cooperation between Paris and the provinces, and in the competitive neo-classicism of the fin de siècle, the restored Orange became a powerful focus for the discussion of different peoples-real and imagined; local, national, and international (see Fig. 1). Indeed, probing the associated political and literary discussions reveals just how complex the connections between ethnic and cultural considerations remained when defining the Greco-Roman legacy and its contemporary defenders. The poet Paul Mariéton, for example, conflated both ethnic and cultural traits in his contentions that the people of Provence remained essentially classical. While the Cimbri were, in his words, 'the Prussians of their time',⁵⁰ the people of Provence continued in contrast the (positive) attributes of both Greek and Roman ancestors. Contemporary inhabitants of Arles, for example, conserved 'traces of a civilization of beauty' in their physical appearance and demeanour. Meanwhile, their lack of interest in bull fighting-still popular in nearby Nîmes-could be explained by the argument that Nîmes had remained more of a Roman town, and

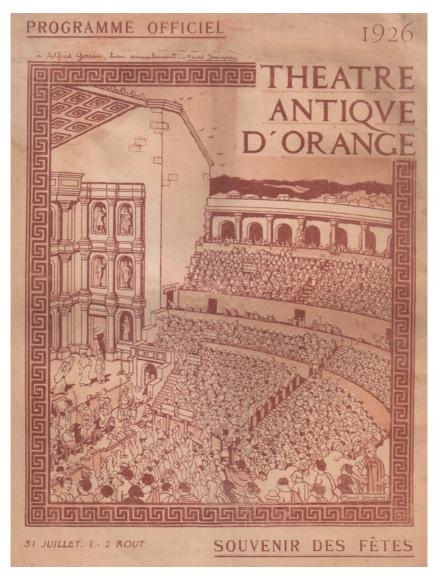


Fig. 1 The populus reimagined. Théâtre Antique d'Orange, programme, 1926 (author's collection)

Arles a Greek one.⁵¹ (As it happened, such arguments were more than poetic licence: Marseille had been founded as a port by Greek seafarers in around 600 BC, and though conquered by Louis XIV in 1660, continued to sustain important Mediterranean and Levantine connections into the early modern period.)⁵² For Mariéton, classical continuity was also about a certain similarity of geography between Provence and Greece, 'which would seem to render these two peoples of comparable temperament'.⁵³

Others likewise traced the classical character of Provence to temperamental rather than ethnic continuity. In 1899, the theatre critic G. Davenay attributed the particular appeal of Greek tragedy at Orange to the dominant 'Latin spirit', in which Greek, Roman, and Provençal appreciation of clarity and simplicity of structure and characterization were conveniently conflated. Such a spirit was ill-suited to 'the psychological complexities of modern drama', especially that produced by a dark, gloomy, and barbarian North.⁵⁴ In August 1906, the renowned actor Mounet-Sully articulated similar assumptions to the audiences of Orange itself, as he performed Marie de Sourmioc's *Ode à la Provence*:

O happy land, which cannot sink to pain Whose soul is classical, and will disdain Those shadowy scholars, Provence hot and bold Whose glorious dream is like a sky of gold!⁵⁵

Where these eulogies of Provençal classicism left the consideration of France itself was a slightly more delicate question. Certainly, the renaissance of the Théâtre Antique d'Orange was inseparable from a regionalism (both local and Paris-based) that focused on the *petite patrie* at the expense of the *grande*. This could even lead to quite explicit navel-gazing, with Gabriel Boissy going so far as to praise Mariéton's efforts 'to make Orange the navel of the great Mediterranean body'.⁵⁶ Yet given that the relationship between Provence and France was diachronic as well as synchronic, the elegy of Provençe and its people could privilege closeness to—as well as superiority over—France itself.

In writings about Orange, the language used to describe France and Provence was often warmly familial. While Gallet's (admittedly opportunistic) *Fêtes d'Apollon* presented Provence as Gaul's 'Roman sister',⁵⁷ others celebrated the *langue d'oc* as the 'older sister of the French language'.⁵⁸ If Provence were a sister to Gaul, this also made her, potentially, the mother of the *patrie* (ironically also a feminine noun). Echoing the same familial metaphor, Élie Fourès wrote of the performance of *Œdipe-Roi* at Orange in 1888 that Provence was the 'daughter of Rome, granddaughter of Athens, and mother of the whole civilization of the middle ages, which engendered the civilization of modern France.'⁵⁹ Some went further still, and attributed to Provence a primordial role in the creation of western civilization—even of humanity itself. If Provence had not been the first province to be civilized, asserted Gabriel Hanotaux, France itself might still be a barbarian country, and the same would apply to Great Britain, Germany, America, and the other civilized countries of the world.⁶⁰ Similarly, Charles Simond credited Mariéton with portraying Provence as a primal—and even paradisial—state, 'one that awaits and appeals to the forefathers of the [French] race.'⁶¹

Orange was far from being the only French amphitheatre re-used for performance in the Third Republic: Roman amphitheatres at Lyons, Vienne, Vaison-la-Romaine, and Arles were also reused as theatres in this period, as were the arenas at Fréjus, Nice, and Saintes.⁶² There was also a newly constructed neo-classical theatre in Marseille, the Théâtre d'Athéna-Niké.⁶³ Yet as the best-known example—and as the particular focus for discussions of popular theatre-the case study of Orange offers a rich insight into dialogues between classical and contemporary, nation and region, Paris and the provinces. On one hand, the successful restoration and reuse of the theatre at Orange represented the triumph of regionalist concern to emphasize France's classical heritage with particular praise for Provence. Yet on the other, these regional triumphs could be heavily dependent on the state. The desire to further artistic decentralization often translated into a straightforward exportation of Parisian repertoire to a provincial audience, and was in many cases boosted by state funding, as well as by sympathetic groups or influential individuals in Paris. Similar complexities can be found in the symbolic relationships between Provence and France in the writings and productions at Orange on classical themes, with the two imagined in familial but also quarrelsome closeness. One point, however, was clear. Both Provence and the 'French Athenians' who gathered there were to remain true to the appreciation of beauty and light, as befitted the symbolic descendants of the sun god Apollo to whom Orange had originally been dedicated. As the republican minister Maurice Faure proclaimed to the Chamber of Deputies in 1895:

The hour is propitious for the celebration in full sunlight in our very own Bayreuth, in this town of Orange, a true provençal Athens, of the clear and fiery genius of the Greek and Latin literature that so deeply permeates our national character. [...] Admirers of great art will gather, deeply moved and enthusiastic, to admire in the most magnificent setting imaginable, the living expression of antique genius which forms the very foundation of our French race, where the Greco-Latin soul still lives and shines.⁶⁴

2 BRITTANY: LEGEND AND FAITH

While France's Latin traits were being celebrated at Orange, its Gallic and Celtic inheritance was simultaneously inspiring a very different kind of regional spectacle in Brittany. Brittany was the region in which theatre produced by and for local people could boast the greatest continuity. Indeed, amateur troupes—the symbolic and actual descendants of their medieval predecessors—were still performing mystery plays in Breton when this form of popular theatre was deliberately 'revived' with regionalist support in the late nineteenth century.⁶⁵ This was a theatre far removed from the staging of the latest Parisian productions in the grandiose setting of Orange, where tourists and local enthusiasts alike could bask in the reflected glory of the most celebrated national stars. But it, too, claimed to be 'théâtre populaire'—theatre neither for the national people of France nor for the classical people of Provence, but for the Breton people (and nation) drawn to the dramatic representation of legend and faith.

The case of Breton popular theatre offers a particularly lively example of the dialogues between nation and region, for the debates on separatism and distinctiveness have long raged much more fiercely around Brittany than around Provence. Formally incorporated into France in 1532, Brittany has nonetheless been considered separate in character on account of its Celtic origins as well as its successive social, political, and religious allegiances. The extreme violence of counter-revolutionary warfare in the Vendée in 1793–1796 remains the most salient example of bitter conflict between Bretons and the state, but right-wing, Catholic, and (sometimes) anti-Republican sentiment has remained strong in voting patterns. Bretons were also particularly strident in their popular opposition to the Third Republic's secularizing laws.⁶⁶

At the same time, there have always also been rival visions of the Breton character and future, both among local writers and organizations

and equally in the attendant historiography. Nineteenth-century associations devoted to the study of Celtic history and literature often promoted-even if they did not always demonstrate-an eclectic membership. The noble-dominated Union Régionaliste Bretonne (1898), for example, was presided over by the left-of-centre Breton folklorist and popular theatre enthusiast Anatole Le Braz as well as by the colourful Marquis de l'Estourbeillon de la Garnache, and actively sought wide-ranging support. Indeed, its ten founders signed an 'appeal to the French people' in which they described the object of the association as the apolitical promotion of regional life while respecting French unity.⁶⁷ Although the twentieth century witnessed the establishment of more openly separatist and nationalist groups-including the Groupe Régionaliste Breton (1918) and the Parti National Breton (1927)⁶⁸ these were paralleled by the continuation of more moderate or eclectic associations. The Comité de Défense des Intérêts Bretons, for instance, was founded in Rennes in 1920 as resolutely open to all Bretons 'without distinction of party'.⁶⁹ Indeed, its statutes encouraged the defence of a wide range of Breton interests, from the 'moral, ethnic, traditionalist, and linguistic' to the 'economic, agricultural, commercial, industrial, and maritime'.70

Breton historiography, too, has been consistently diverse. To be sure, the image of a region apart, marked not only by a Celtic past but also by a deep and renewed sympathy with Church and counter-revolution, has remained powerful.⁷¹ Jean Balcou and Yves Le Gallo's large-scale cultural history of Brittany employs the perceived opposition between Brittany and the French state to determine both structure and content: their third volume is even subtitled 'the invasion of the profane'.⁷² Yet there have always been voices in opposition, from Breton and non-Breton scholars alike. Jean-Yves Guiomar has drawn attention to the federalism of Breton socialists such as Charles Brunetière, whose Fédération Socialiste Autonome de Bretagne had a brief existence between 1900 and 1907, and to the persistence of a left-wing federalism into the 1930s.73 Caroline Ford, while recognizing the importance of religion in determining Breton identity, has refused to characterize the Breton national community as fixed, arguing that such communities remain in a state of constant renegotiation.⁷⁴ More recently, Sharif Gemie entitled his study of Brittany The Invisible Nation on the grounds that divergent concepts of Brittany preclude the identification of any one as the Breton national community. 'Bretons can be divided many times over into countless

camps', he contends. 'They are Chouan or Republican, White or Blue, Catholic or anti-clerical, rural or urban; Breton-speaking or French-speaking.' There is, therefore, no single model of what this nation should be. 75

Is it possible, then, to discover the people of this 'invisible nation'? How have these people been imagined in past and present? How and where do intellectual constructs of the 'popular' meet or conflict with cultures and practices developed by Bretons themselves? How has the relationship between Paris and the provinces shaped these ideas and experiences of the people? On these questions, the case study of Breton popular theatre in the Third Republic casts new and valuable light. Throughout this period, Breton theatre and culture more generally were crucial to debates about the specificity of the Breton people, just as performances of Breton plays were a facet of popular culture that captured the imagination and enthusiasm of folklorists and regionalists in Brittany, Paris, and beyond. Meanwhile, the role and importance of Breton theatre also featured in wider discussions of popular theatre, whether in local organizations, national journals, international scholarly analyses, or even the Chamber of Deputies.⁷⁶ Surprisingly, however, more recent studies of Le Braz and Le Goffic have made little or no mention of their contribution to popular theatre,⁷⁷ which receives only fleeting attention in the work of Alain Déniel and Anne-Marie Thiesse.⁷⁸ Even Gwennolé Le Menn's history of Breton popular theatre in the modern period concludes that from the mid-nineteenth century its history 'remains to be written',⁷⁹

In piecing together this lost history, this case study examines the imagination and experience of the Breton people at a time of national integration. It explores the arguments surrounding assimilation and separatism, revealing the strength of opposition to the centralizing state, but also the vital degree of interdependence between Paris and the provinces in the making of regionalist identities. It also illuminates—more so than the other cases explored in this chapter—the dialogues between different constructions and experiences of popular culture, especially between those of writers and intellectuals and those of the popular performers themselves. Central to this study, indeed, is the productive tension that formed and united two very different experiences of Breton culture. The first was an often angst-ridden intellectual struggle to define what this culture had been and should become: a struggle to resolve once and for all its claims to distinctiveness. The second was a tacit assumption or

experience of this culture as a self-evident celebration of local history, legend, and faith.

2.1 Breton Drama: The Problem of Authenticity

For writers and intellectuals, Breton theatre and the wider Celtic culture of which it formed part were associated with complex questions of regional specificity, superiority, and separateness. How far was Celtic culture anterior to, generative of, or separate from other ethnic cultures in the territory now called France? Did the legends and plays performed and celebrated in Brittany really originate there, or were they servile imitations of cultural creations elsewhere in France or Europe? Was the Celtic language the mother of other languages or merely a version existing alongside them? And if Brittany was culturally, linguistically, and socially distinct, what did this distinctiveness entail?

From the early nineteenth century onwards, the study of texts and performances of Breton theatre fuelled this increasingly spirited debate, and would also provide the backdrop for the revival of such theatre itself. The scene was initially set by the provocative work of the aristocratic Breton writer Théodore Hersart de la Villemarqué (1815-1895), whose romantic vision of the Celtic peoples and their poetry inspired a succession of more sceptical and self-consciously scientific alternatives. La Villemarqué's engagement with Breton popular culture was multifaceted. In 1839, he published a collection of folk songs, Barzaz Breiz, subsequently translated into English, German, and Polish. To local organizations such as the Association Bretonne, he spoke in the 1850s of his discovery of manuscript versions of a number of Breton plays, and noted that plays in honour of local saints were still performed by amateur groups. In 1865, he published what he described as the culmination of his life's work on 'the poetry of the Celtic races': an edition of the medieval Breton mystery play Le Grand Mystère de Jésus prefaced by a historical study of theatre in Celtic nations.⁸⁰

La Villemarqué's principal contention was that the genius of the Celtic peoples had revealed itself not only in poetic but also in dramatic form, and from the earliest times. Although there appeared to be no evidence for early performances among the Irish or Scottish peoples, there was, he insisted, theatre to be found in Brittany from the first century AD. This theatre was initially concerned less with heroic or religious narrative than with dance and pantomime, and he cited with picturesque and unsubstantiated detail the 'Play of springtime and youth' accompanied by ivory harps with golden strings.⁸¹ With the coming of Christianity 'the actions of national [i.e. Breton] saints' then became 'the subject of dramatic composition',⁸² and it was in these popular dramas that the poetic spirit of Celtic Brittany flourished most fully—at least until the encroachment of French power and influence.⁸³ Indeed, the mystery play for which his hagiographical study served as preface had been written by a Breton 'exiled' in Paris after the official unification of Brittany with France in 1532. Its republication was intended both to strengthen Breton identity and also thereby deepen its resolution in the face of contemporary centralization.⁸⁴

By the time this vindication of Celtic dramatic genius was published in the mid-1860s, La Villemarqué's reputation was made—but not uncontested. *Barzaz Breiz* had already been challenged by a number of writers, including his fellow Breton Ernest Renan,⁸⁵ not least with the allegation that this collection of traditional folk songs had been considerably embellished by La Villemarqué's 'ingenious' imagination.⁸⁶ Meanwhile, other writers were also collecting and interpreting similar sources: not least the left-wing Breton folklorist François-Marie Luzel (1821–1895), who from the 1840s onwards had been gathering songs, stories, and reminiscences from elderly Bretons who had themselves participated in popular drama.⁸⁷

Both Ernest Renan and François-Marie Luzel were more circumspect as to the antiquity and originality of Celtic language and theatre. The two Breton writers chanced to meet during the former's trip to the Bibliothèque nationale de France in 1857–1858,⁸⁸ and while Renan was enthusiastic as a literary patron, he was cautious about Luzel's choice of subject. 'Dramatic literature is not the most striking aspect of our Brittany,' he confided. 'I do not believe the genre indigenous to the country; I am led to think that performances in our land were in imitation of [French] mystery plays.'⁸⁹ From the fourteenth century onwards, Renan was convinced, Brittany had instead offered an appreciative audience for dramatic works from around Europe, particularly France. Moreover, his scepticism of the literary authenticity of Breton traditions also extended to language. Breton was not, he suspected, the mother of European languages, but merely one dialect in the broad spectrum of languages that developed in parallel rather than sequentially.

Following his encounter with Renan, Luzel developed a very different perspective on Breton popular drama to that romantically proposed by La Villemarqué. When Luzel published an edition of one of the bestknown Breton mystery plays, *Le Mystère de Sainte Triphine* (1863), he prefaced his edition with an almost verbatim account of Renan's reservations regarding its Breton origins. In 1867, when preparing his own anthology of Breton popular songs for publication, Luzel confided in Renan his suspicions regarding the accuracy and scientific character of La Villemarqué's work: Renan, sharing such reservations, counselled caution and the avoidance of open denunciation. Nonetheless, when Luzel presented a damning indictment of La Villemarqué's *Barzaz Breiz* at a literary meeting in Saint-Brieuc in 1872, he made much of the rigorous, scientific character of his own research, in implicit contrast to that of his rival.⁹⁰

Underneath this clash of literary ambitions, serious questions were at stake. In effect, the whole question of popular theatre in Brittany was prompting a profound reflection on the nature and existence of an authentic, autonomous, Breton culture: the type of culture that could justify the claims to be a separate and superior Breton nation. Although both Luzel and La Villemarqué died in 1895, the former's sceptical appreciation of Breton theatre would be pursued by his colleague and disciple, the writer and folklorist Anatole Le Braz.

Le Braz (Anatole Lebras) was born in Saint-Servais in the commune of Duault in April 1859: his father was a schoolteacher and his mother the daughter of a tanner.⁹¹ The family spoke Breton at home, and as a child Anatole was deeply influenced by both his mother's Catholic piety and his maternal grandfather's entrenched revolutionary sentiments (a fervent republican, Le Guyader deliberately continued his revolutionary habit of addressing everyone in the 'tu' form). Anatole progressed with the help of scholarships to the renowned lycée Louis le Grand in Paris, and thence to the Sorbonne, where he was awarded a *licence ès lettres* and began preparation for the challenging agrégation. Living in an apartment on the Boulevard Port-Royal, not far from the Jardin du Luxembourg, Le Braz became acquainted with fellow Breton Charles Le Goffic, as well as with Joseph Berger, with whom he began writing a play. With a letter of introduction from Luzel, he also sought out the Breton poet Narcisse Quellien and began attending the *diners celtiques* frequented by Ernest Renan.⁹²

It was in Paris that Le Braz's Breton allegiance began to deepen, in proportion to his professional disappointments. Undermined by illhealth, piqued by the refusal of his play by the Comédie Française, and prevented from completing his agrégation in philosophy by lack of the appropriate baccalauréat, Le Braz began increasingly to emphasize the primacy of his Breton identity and allegiance. He altered the spelling of his surname from Lebras to Le Braz-the better to reflect its Breton character-and mused on Breton resurgence in his personal notebooks. He left Paris to accept an appointment as a philosophy teacher at a school in Étampes (and subsequently in Quimper), determined, as he later explained to his friend Yves Le Diberdier, 'to immerse myself among the people so as to write, to abandon myself for years to popular sources, to the primitive reservoir of Breton life, from which, indeed, I had come.⁹³ He also began to participate in regionalist circles, joining the Société Archéologique du Finistère under Luzel's patronage (and during a meeting presided over by La Villemarqué) and giving a celebratory oration in honour of the Breton writer Auguste Brizeux at the town hall of Quimperlé in March 1888. Here he urged Brittany to engage more fully in the 'concert of modern social forces', yet with a contribution to the modern world that was distinctively Breton, marked by 'its cult of the ideal, its preoccupation with the things of the spirit'.94

Turning to writing and research, Le Braz was drawn both to Breton Catholic traditions and equally to popular culture and theatre. With the encouragement of Renan, he applied for and was granted by the Ministry of Public Education, Art, and Religion the opportunity to undertake an official mission to research popular traditions surrounding local saints, and published particularly on the pardon, a penitential ceremony held on the feast of the patron saint of a church or chapel. His attraction to Breton Catholicism was, it must be said, rather more Breton than Catholic ('I am hopelessly Catholic, yet Breton, Breton first and foremost'),⁹⁵ and he emphasized a Breton piety deeply inspired by 'patriotic' saints with supernatural powers over the elements.96 Nonetheless, he was certainly sensitive to the transnational when it came to the idea of a Celtic diaspora. In 1900 he visited Cardiff to attend the Eisteddfod in celebration of Celtic literature and music, and even found his scepticism ebbing away as the 'powerful spell of the Scottish bagpipes' filled him with almost inexpressible nostalgia for his imagined ancestors.⁹⁷

The question of a united Celtic people, the long-standing and distinctive culture of Brittany, and the importance of the theatrical tradition in popular memory cumulatively encouraged Le Braz towards the study of Breton popular theatre. At the same time, he held in his possession letters from Renan to Luzel expressing doubts over the authenticity of Breton popular theatre, and shared at least some of his master's suspicion of the romanticized image of the Celtic past offered by writers such as La Villemarqué. In 1897, Le Braz began a doctoral thesis on the nature and development of Celtic theatre. The hypothesis of his resulting *Théâtre Celtique* (1905) emerged from the conflict between his interests and his scepticism.

La Villemarqué's contention that Celtic theatre was of antique origin and distinctive development provided Le Braz with a counterfoil for his own argument,⁹⁸ as did Renan's depictions of Celtic creativity in *La Poésie des races celtiques* (1854). Open to the possibility that a separate Breton drama had once existed, Le Braz doubted its survival into the high Middle Ages. Fifteenth-century Breton texts of mystery plays seemed to him more likely to be variations on French originals—even the *Grand Mystère de Jésus* that La Villemarqué alleged to have predated its French counterparts. Ironically, even plays with specifically Celtic or Breton subject matter—such as *Sainte Triphine et le Roi Arthur*, or *La Purgatoire de Saint Patrice ou la Vie de Louis Ennius*—could be found in dramatic form elsewhere in Europe before they appeared in Brittany.⁹⁹

Le Braz, however, drew a significant distinction between the Breton authenticity of such plays and the Breton character they acquired through a continuity in performance that shaped popular experience and memory. Even though a mere 18 years elapsed between the first Breton mystery play of certain date (La Passion, 1530) and the prohibition of performances issued by the Paris Parlement, the issuing of further prohibitions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was important evidence that travelling players and their performances continued to flourish.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, as Le Braz had already argued elsewhere, there was no legislation against the preservation of the plays in written tradition. Indeed, one literate peasant and former seminarian Claude Le Bihan spent much of the Revolutionary period composing tragedies in Breton, while fellow peasants suspected him of sorcery, alchemy, and visiting his intended wife through a keyhole.¹⁰¹ Similarly, attempts by the administrative authorities to exile theatre from the public sphere did not reach private 'performances': pious recitals around the hearth of Breton legends such as the misfortunes of Saint Triphine or the posthumous penitence of the licentious Ennius. Through such performances, Le Braz imagined the whole of Brittany becoming 'like a vast theatre', in which peasants gathered for the recounting of legends and mystery plays and then returned home, recalling their favourite verses.¹⁰²

By the time Le Théâtre Celtique was published, Le Braz had been instrumental in the renewal of the very theatre whose earlier existence had structured his research. Indeed, the revival of Breton popular theatre in the later nineteenth century depended on the fruitful cooperation between enthusiastic (and sometimes Paris-based) regionalists on one side and amateur local actors on the other. While regionalists might describe this revival as a first stage in the redevelopment of Breton culture, identity, and dynamism—potentially a stage to be swiftly surpassed—popular actors generally viewed such performances as a less complicated expression of shared culture, and were in any case unconcerned by intellectual altercations over the rival French and Breton origins of the plays in question. Even if regionalists shared reservations about the originality or distinctiveness of Breton culture, their pragmatic performance choices suggest they knew what Breton actors and audiences considered as their own.

2.2 Primitives and Intellectuals: Breton Theatre in Practice

The first self-conscious revival of Breton theatre involved François-Marie Luzel, a troupe of local actors, and a riposte to Parisian cultural dominance. In 1888, the recently completed municipal theatre in Morlaix was celebrated with a performance featuring Mounet-Sully from the Comédie Française. In explicit reaction, Luzel decided to organize a performance of Le Mystère de Sainte Triphine-a favourite play with regionalists as well as with amateur troupes, and which he himself had recently republished.¹⁰³ Both events received advance publicity in national publications. Le Monde Illustré and Le Figaro listed not only the names but also the professions of the amateur actors (tailor, cooper, day labourer, blacksmith, thatcher and sculptor)-who were all male, following the medieval tradition that allowed female performers in mimed rather than spoken performance (see Fig. 2). Le Figaro was convinced that many Parisians would make the journey to attend the popular performance, although Le Monde Illustré warned that there was nothing authentically Breton about Le Mystère de Sainte Triphine, which-containing not a single metaphor-was surely imitated from a French counterpart rather than expressing the poetic sensitivity of the Breton people.¹⁰⁴

Le Mystère de Sainte Triphine was not quite the successful defence of local culture Luzel had envisaged. Luzel himself had been more interested in the text than in either the choice of actors or their rehearsal,



Fig. 2 'Le Mystère de Sainte Tryphine à Morlaix', *Le Monde Illustré*, 21 April 1888 (Courtesy of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France)

and the clash between their primitive performance and the heightened expectations of theatrical *habitués* writing for the national press produced some witheringly scornful reviews. 'A saraband of delirious savages' jested one reviewer,¹⁰⁵ while the *Revue d'Art Dramatique* offered a similarly derisive depiction of the eccentric costumes, with the traitor Kervoura a cross between Harlequin and a Parisian fireman, the governor of Brittany in a contemporary-looking riding coat and black hat, and the eponymous saint in a voluminous red dress.¹⁰⁶ Such was the scorn of the critics that Charles Le Goffic, Le Braz's fellow regionalist, refused to submit his own review on the grounds that the reputation of the troupe and their performance was already in tatters. Instead, he published an open letter—in French, and in *Le Monde Illustré*—to the actors in question: a letter, of course, that they would never read, but that vented his anger at their humiliation, and his acute consciousness of a failed encounter between the primitive and the intellectual:

You fought to the bitter end against the laughter of the public. But that public is not for you. Stay where you belong, dear friends. Prop up your theatre against the walls of the village cemetery. And in the evening, oh cowherds, oh labourers, oh rugged men of suffering, in the purple mists of sunset that envelop your lofty forms in mystery, return as in the olden days declaiming the tirades of Abacarus, king of Hibernia, and of Saint Guénolé the apostle. But never again succumb to the fever of the towns!¹⁰⁷

No doubt the municipal authorities considered their invitation of Parisian actors amply vindicated, while Luzel himself surmised that it was more fruitful to research Breton theatre in the Bibliothèque nationale than to assist in its renaissance, and encouraged Le Braz in his choice of thesis.

Ten years later, in 1898, Le Braz and Le Goffic were involved in another-and more generally acclaimed-revival, once more the result of close cooperation between literary and amateur initiative. Le Goffic, whom Le Braz had met in Paris, differed in political sympathies from his Breton colleague: an acquaintance and admirer of Renan, he was an anti-Dreyfusard and a friend of the young Maurice Barrès.¹⁰⁸ Yet the two were united in defence of their homeland, and in heartfelt regret at the contemporary exodus of Bretons from Brittany to the capital.¹⁰⁹ When the mayor of Ploujean introduced Le Braz and Le Goffic to Thomas Parks, leader of a local theatre troupe, local and regionalist concerns began to converge. Parks-or 'Parkic', as he was more familiarly known-was a jack-of-all-trades: baker, barber, and sometime employee at La Bonne Rencontre. He had learned some French at school but preferred to speak Breton, and had been fascinated by the theatre since his earliest days, when as a child he had enjoyed reading the lives of Breton saints aloud to his family. Now with his own a troupe and a theatre in a working-class area of Troudoustin, Parkic produced plays on religious themes, the first being a series of scenes from the life of Jacob. The local audience, initially uncertain, was soon appreciative of the new venture, and the newly formed troupe decided on a season that would run from November to March.¹¹⁰

With support from both Paris and Ploujean, Parkic's local troupe became the focus of wider interest. Le Goffic obtained both moral and financial support for the new initiative from the Société des Bretons de Paris, while Le Braz chose a location for the new theatre in the cemetery at Ploujean (perhaps following Le Goffic's earlier injunctions), and devoted his attention to the production itself. His initial proposition-Le Purgatoire de Saint Patrice-was rejected by the actors on the grounds of immorality, for the play referenced (albeit without representing) the seduction of a nun by Ennius, prior to the latter's conversion by Saint Patrick. Such a choice of play, Parkic explained, would see the actors refused communion at Easter. Instead they agreed on La Vie de Saint Guénolé, a sixteenth-century mystery play depicting the saint's miraculous powers as a child, his call to repentance to the dissipated Bretons in Is, and the subsequent submersion of the town that left Guénolé himself and the penitent king Gralon the sole survivors. 'These two legendary figures symbolize for our race even today,' asserted Le Braz in November 1898, 'the double ideal of heroism and religion that it has never abandoned, and which can be found even in its most distant past.'111 The text of the play might be mediocre, yet both Le Braz and Le Goffic were confident that it attained an elemental force through popular performance, which they viewed with mingled romanticism and condescension. 'What they lacked in dramatic talent', explained Le Goffic for his national and Parisian audience in La Revue d'Art Dramatique, 'they more than compensated for with the ardour of their conviction and the divine innocence of the simple.'112

Preparations for the performance itself likewise depended closely on both local and national cooperation, with politicians, clerics, writers, artists, and deputies offering both moral and practical support. De Kerjégu, deputy for Finistère, offered financial assistance; the Bishop of Quimper formally lifted the ancient prohibition on popular theatre; and the wellknown medievalist and member of the Académie française Gaston Paris was engaged to deliver a closing address.¹¹³ Several artists contributed their talents: Ary Renan designed the costumes, Maxime Maufra painted the sets, and Guy Ropartz contributed to the musical score. The date of the performance was also chosen so that it should serve as a prelude to the founding meeting of the Union Régionaliste Bretonne (of which Le Braz was named president), and on the day itself, numerous journalists attended from the national and international press, with Le Monde Illustré detailing the names and professions not only of the actors but also of those in the audience.¹¹⁴ Before the performance began, journalists and more well-to-do audience members alike were instructed by Le Goffic to imagine themselves in the mindset of the people, and to 'retrace their steps, with [the people], through time and space, to the enchanted age of legend and faith.'115

Whether or not they engaged in this self-conscious primitivism, the 2000-strong audience responded enthusiastically to *La Vie de Saint Guénolé*. The weather was fine; the play was followed by a banquet; and Gaston Paris was generous in his praise of Thomas Parks and his companions. Reports of the occasion reached newspapers in Paris, Rome, Vienna, and even Cairo, while Gaston Paris's speech was widely described and reproduced. Paris placed the performance in the context of the wider concern with 'popular' art, and referred specifically to Tolstoy's reflections on the subject. Indeed he argued that while Tolstoy would certainly have welcomed Thomas Parks's efforts, he might have cavilled a little at their choice of subject matter. *La Vie de Saint Guénolé* emerged from the religion of a different age: surely the Bretons would achieve greater and wider theatrical success if they addressed more topical questions? And he concluded with an appeal to the poets of Brittany to produce plays for the contemporary world.¹¹⁶

The speech by Gaston Paris provided an apt conclusion to an occasion whose character was determined by two contrasting influences: the practices of the popular actors, and the aspirations of local and national artists and regionalists. Both Le Braz and Le Goffic were receptive to Paris's call for new drama, and Le Goffic even encouraged the Union Régionaliste Bretonne to initiate a competition for new plays in one of four Breton dialects, with a prize of 500 francs and the promise of performance in 1900 for the winning play.¹¹⁷ Yet the enthusiasm of the local audience for La Vie de Saint Guénolé was in no way diminished by its archaic quality. Rather, the esteemed place of the play within Breton dramatic tradition, together with its patriotic celebration of a Breton saint, seems to have secured its enduring success. It should not be forgotten that even Le Purgatoire de Saint-Patrice had been rejected by Parks and his companions for its suggestion of immorality, or that the actors began the play by making the sign of the cross (followed by many in the audience).

Would such a troupe—and such an audience—have welcomed new plays on more secular and less Breton themes? Certainly the troupe at Ploujean diverged little from its largely traditional repertoire in the years that followed. *La Vie de Saint Guénolé* was performed a further four times in 1899 and five in 1900;¹¹⁸ there were performances of *La Vie de Sainte Triphine et du Roi Arthur* in 1899, *Les Quatre Fils Aymon* in 1900,¹¹⁹ and two new plays in 1901: *Ar Vezventi* (Drunkenness) by the local poet Rolland, and *Ar Bourc'hiz* (The Glorious Bourgeois), by

François Jaffrennou.¹²⁰ While popular theatre could be both an unsolved problem and an elusive ideal for intellectuals, it could also be a much more self-evident form of entertainment for its creators.

Strikingly, the most long-lived initiative in Breton theatre in this period was that of Joseph Le Bayon-priest, writer, and later Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur.¹²¹ Le Bayon's didactic plays on religious and usually Breton themes receive brief and favourable mention in Le Braz's Théâtre celtique,¹²² and one of the submissions to the URB's competition in 1901 was his Amzer er Heneu, in which a young man fails to persuade his Breton maiden to gather hazelnuts and shoot rabbits with him because it is Sunday and she prefers to attend mass.¹²³ Born at Pluvigner in 1876, Le Bayon was another youthful enthusiast for theatre: he had in the 1880s discovered a manuscript of Le Jeu des trois rois at the home of his grandmother and acted it out with friends.¹²⁴ His study with the eminent Celtic scholar Joseph Loth at the University of Rennes inspired an interest in Breton literature, and by the time he was enrolled at the seminary of Sainte Anne d'Auray, Le Bayon was assisting with the organization of religious tableaux. In 1902 he composed his own play, encouraged by his religious superiors, who arranged for its performance at the close of the congress at Sainte Anne d'Auray in the same year.¹²⁵ Le Bayon's plays and performances would subsequently continue into the 1920s, interrupted only by the First World War in which he fought with distinction.

The creation of Le Bayon's popular theatre sprang both from his own conception of popular drama and also from the active clerical encouragement of his endeavours. Le Bayon himself was convinced that for such theatre to be successful in Brittany, it should be based on two themes, religious and patriotic: 'a national theatre in the service of the Breton language', as it was enthusiastically described in L'Ouest-Éclair.¹²⁶ His plays therefore lauded traditional rural piety and (largely local) saints, while also offering an implicitly militant stance towards the secularizing Third Republic. At Pluvigner, he worked closely with an existing theatre troupe that had previously been performing works in French, providing them with both texts and direction.¹²⁷ Meanwhile, Le Bayon's clerical colleagues and superiors-especially vicar Buléon, canon Louis Cadic, and the Bishop of Vannes Monseigneur Gourand-saw in such theatre a means of assembling and instructing the faithful, whether these were pilgrims attending the festival of Saint Anne, or young people for whom theatre might be integrated into a broader Catholic sociability.¹²⁸

Le Bayon's production of Nikolazig in 1909 is a case in point. Yves Nicolazig (1591-1645) was a labourer whose visions of Saint Anne in Auray had led to the reconstruction of the ninth-century chapel built in her honour, and to the establishment of the town as a centre for pilgrimage. His visions had prompted initial opposition, not only from the peasants who dismissed them as a 'farce' but also from clerical authorities.¹²⁹ The dramatic retelling of this story thus offered a strong emphasis on the triumph of faith over scepticism, and deliberately reached outwards from its narrative of times past to its contemporary Breton audience. The play concludes with the repentance of Nikolazig's former enemies and an 'apotheosis' in which the Bretons offer the fruits of their labours to Saint Anne, who appears in a vision described by the ecstatic chorus. The chorus addresses the audience directly, and the male voices declare their intention to 'remain Christian, remain Breton', anticipating the support and approval of those who had only recently opposed the secularizing laws of the earlier 1900s.

The performance of Nikolazig was, moreover, closely integrated into the pilgrimage for which his visions had provided the initial inspiration. The first performance was arranged for the evening of 25 July 1909, when the pilgrims gathered in honour of Sainte Anne d'Auray would be assembled in the basilica, and was met with considerable enthusiasm from both clerics and pilgrims, whether or not they were Breton speakers.¹³⁰ Le Bayon himself recruited and trained the actors (mostly workers and farm labourers), providing each with a copy of the text and visiting them in their respective workplaces so as to hear their parts. In collective rehearsals after vespers on a Sunday, he took the opportunity to expand their cultural education by delivering talks on artists such as James Tissot and Gustave Doré. Not only did he intend this experience of popular drama to be of educational benefit to the individuals in question, but he also strove in his choice of actors to include families divided by ancient quarrels or political differences, seeing in theatre a means of reconciling local communities.¹³¹

Despite considerable local support and encouragement, performances were not always straightforward. As in the case of Ploujean, the theatre at Sainte Anne d'Auray certainly benefitted from wider interest and support. Boris, the set-painter, was a summer visitor to the area who had also decorated sets for the Paris Opera and the Théâtre Français; an enthusiast from Vannes acquired tunics from Franciscans in Bethlehem; and Buléon the curate bought a lavish outfit suitable for one of the Magi when passing through Constantinople. But Le Bayon and Cadic's determination to emulate the open-air performances of ancient Greece was a poor match for the Breton weather, and it was only in 1911 that a substantial donation allowed for the construction of a more durable and practical structure.¹³²

Not all of Le Bayon's plays aspired to the solemnity of Nikolazigwhich was, after all, destined to be performed at the symbolic climax of the pilgrimage to Saint Anne d'Auray. In the years before the First World War, in addition to a number of mystery plays, Le Bayon also wrote farces such as En Ozenganned, in which two drunkards lost in the depths of the Breton countryside are suitably petrified by the thought of evil spirits emerging from behind the dolmens.¹³³ But Le Bayon's strident defence of Breton Catholicism-and gentle mockery of the pagan superstitions likewise associated with his homeland-continued in the publication of post-war plays, not least Kado, roué er mor (Kado, king of the sea) (1924) and Sant Izidor, Labourér (1925), both of which appeared in French as well as in Breton.¹³⁴ Le Bayon's version of the life of Saint Kado was based on various modern retellings of the tale, including one by La Villemarqué,¹³⁵ and recounted the triumph of this Christian missionary over a druidic high priest in Brittany, and the resulting abandonment of pagan deities and practices by 'the people' (represented by the chorus). Conversely, Sant Izidor, Labourér represented the triumph of Christianity not over druids but over the Moors. The play opens with a poignant lament over their oppression of Spain, followed by noisy joy that military triumph has now secured 'the delights of peace' for the capital, Madrid.¹³⁶ Although its hero Saint Isidore the Labourer is obviously Spanish, not Breton, this does not preclude his appearance in the final scene of apotheosis dressed in traditional Breton costume, clearly associated in Le Bayon's mind with sanctity. Indeed the message of the play (as in Nikolazig) is that pious cultivation and defence of the land will offer a sure path to salvation.¹³⁷ For Le Bayon, as for Le Braz and Le Goffic, presenting the Breton people with an image of themselves-transfigured by faith and legend-seemed integral to the very concept of popular theatre.

The development of popular theatre in Brittany in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries thus offers a strange paradox. On the one hand, such theatre represented a problem for regionalist intellectuals such as Luzel, Le Braz, and Le Goffic. They challenged the romantic claims of Celtic scholars such as La Villemarqué, doubting that the Bretons could boast of a dramatic tradition traceable to their Celtic ancestors; doubting even the existence of distinct, indigenous literary creation. They contributed to the revival of popular theatre projects such as those at Morlaix or Ploujean in the late nineteenth century, and yet they were also concerned for regional cultural life to move beyond mere revivalism, and certainly beyond the performance of religious plays identified with the stereotype of Breton Catholicism, far from the 'progressive' region whose future they wished to shape. On the other hand, these doubts as to the quality, credentials, or separateness of Breton culture never seemed to undermine their idea of a distinctive Breton people shaped by 'legend and faith', nor was there any real doubt in their minds as to the type of plays that would appeal to these people in popular performance. The repertoire of Thomas Parks's troupe, or of the prolific writer and producer Joseph Le Bayon, only rarely deviated from pious homage to local saints. Aided in their production by local regionalists and—on occasion—Parisian support and enthusiasm, these plays attracted Breton audiences over a considerable period of time. Regardless of intellectual quibbles over its historical credentials, Breton popular theatre thus demonstrated a solid pride in its national and religious past.

3 Maurice Pottecher and the Théâtre du Peuple de Bussang

In 1895, Maurice Pottecher established the Théâtre du Peuple at Bussang, a spa town in the Vosges Mountains close to the border with Germany. Predated by regional popular theatre in both Orange and Brittany, the theatre nevertheless proudly claimed to be the first of its kind. Pottecher himself saw it as the inspiration for popular theatres in the Jura, Brittany, and the Vendée;¹³⁸ *Paris-Soir* contended that neither popular nor open-air theatre was familiar before the Théâtre de Bussang; David Bradby later described it as the first popular theatre in France since the French Revolution.¹³⁹ In a hagiography perpetuated not least by the theatre itself—which continues to operate¹⁴⁰—Pottecher's enterprise has been lauded as advancing democracy and artistic decentralization,¹⁴¹ and even as a 'Rousseauist utopia'¹⁴² in which the republican people have been edified by its 'great, revolutionary scenography'.¹⁴³ Even today, scholarly studies of Bussang praise its 'complete fidelity to its original

project',¹⁴⁴ insisting that 'its sustainining utopia has never been called into question.'¹⁴⁵

Yet the Théâtre du Peuple was, from its very beginnings, also a more complex and controversial enterprise. Although Pottecher did compose plays on national themes-Joan of Arc, or the coming of the Revolution-his theatre was also self-consciously regional. Joan of Arc came from Lorraine; Pottecher's revolutionaries sought out a remote mountain community; and most of his dramatic output played out against the symbolic and actual background of the Vosges. Pottecher was a left-wing republican, yet the people in his plays were often primitive and even violent beings whose behaviour suggested more an atavistic tendency to excess than an orderly progression towards reason and democracy. Some critics praised its depiction of local folklore as 'ancient and naive poetry adapted to contemporary reason',¹⁴⁶ others sneered at its vulgarity and deplored its pretensions to edification and high art.¹⁴⁷ Pottecher himself both celebrated his theatre's regionalism and simultaneously engaged into a dialogue with a national-and especially Parisian—public in defence of his artistic aspirations.

What in fact were Pottecher's aims and intentions? Was this a theatre conceived for a local or regional people or for a national one? If it was supposed to advance democracy, why was there such a potent focus on the power of place and race; on a local people steeped in folklore, magic, and superstition rather than on rational, modern citizens? If Pottecher aimed at cultural enfranchisement and 'liberation', why did he exert such unstinting personal control over repertoire, direction, and actors—even over the architecture—of his theatrical project?

This case study makes sense of Pottecher's Théâtre du Peuple as a place of popular encounter: not so much a linear impetus towards a more national or democratic people as a space within which these people might encounter both themselves and their 'shadows'. Through an analysis of Pottecher's books and articles on popular theatre, this study explores the deliberate and unintended tensions within his concept of the people as both local and national, inclusive and exclusive, violent and conciliatory. With its investigation of the plays, performances, actors, and audiences at the Théâtre du Peuple in Bussang, it pursues these paradoxes by examining the textual and social encounters between the 'civilized' and the 'primitive', the people and their folklore, the mundane and the magical. Some of these paradoxes have been thrown into particular focus by recent research. Sally Debra Charnow, for instance, has discussed how the development of Pottecher's theatre in the pre-war period can broaden our understanding of left-wing regionalism¹⁴⁸; Jacques Rancière has highlighted the cultural tourism promoted by a self-consciously regionalist theatre whose neo-primitivism also attracted a more literate audience.¹⁴⁹ With a longer timeframe and the additional analysis of Pottecher's plays themselves, this study makes it possible to elucidate the nature and range of these social and literary encounters, within and between the characters in the texts, the troupes, the audiences, and the critical reception. It reveals in particular the essential relevance of Pottecher's own Parisian networks to his evolving ambitions, and thereby also contributes to this chapter's broader analysis of the dialogue between nation and region in the construction of ideas and experiences of popular identities.

3.1 Pottecher: A Parisian Regionalist

It was the combination of Maurice Pottecher's family background and Parisian connections that made his concept of and commitment to popular theatre possible. Maurice's father Benjamin was a powerful local industrialist as well as mayor of Bussang: it was the latter's economic success that underpinned the Théâtre du Peuple.¹⁵⁰ The Pottecher factory provided actors and musicians for the plays, and made its own contribution to the soundscape of performance: 'a rhythmic murmur as if from a giant beehive', as the Parisian critic André Warnod described it in 1911.¹⁵¹

Family fortune also secured a Parisian education for the young Maurice, and a passport to the cultural scene of the capital. Completing his studies in law at the Sorbonne in 1890, Maurice began to frequent the home of Alphonse Daudet: a veritable literary hub where regular attendance at the Thursday salons established his acquaintance with such well-known writers as Lucien Descaves, Georges Rodenbach, and Edmond de Goncourt. Through Alphonse Daudet's son Léon—later an influential figure in the royalist Action Française—Maurice Pottecher was further introduced to the symbolist writer Marcel Schwob, the playwright Jules Renard (whose *Poil de Carotte* would be performed at Bussang) and the poet and dramatist Paul Claudel. At the same time, he met other future collaborators: Lucien Michelot, conductor at

Notre-Dame des Champs, and Romain Rolland, who would dedicate his own reflections on popular theatre to Pottecher and invite him to lecture on the subject at the Parisian École des Hautes Études Sociales. Last but not least, Pottecher encountered 'Camée' (Camille de Saint-Maurice), an actress at Paul Fort's Théâtre d'Art who became his wife and one of his closest theatrical associates.¹⁵² By the time they married in 1894, Pottecher had secured prestigious positions as an editor of the *Écho de Paris*, theatre critic for *La République française*, and co-founder—with a number of his literary acquaintances—of his own periodical *L'Idée Libre*.

These were impressive cultural credentials. Moreover, they also ensured that by the time Pottecher began creating his own theatre in the Vosges (while continuing to spend the majority of the year in and around Paris) he could count on the literary interest, coverage, and potential support of a number of influential Parisian contacts. These contacts ensured his wider visibility: in addition to the lectures given for Romain Rolland, Pottecher was also invited to a conference associated with the International Exhibition of 1900, and to lecture in the Rhône valley and in Bucharest in 1913-1914. He was decorated as Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur in 1910 and named Officer of the same order in 1937. In 1931, he was awarded a prize for regionalist literature, by which pointas ministerial archives reveal-the annual government subsidy for his theatre had been raised to 5000 francs.¹⁵³ Pottecher would continue his involvement in the Théâtre de Bussang after the Second World War and until his death in 1960. Even today the character and repertoire of the theatre retain his imprint.

3.2 Le Théâtre du Peuple: A Vision

Closely caught up in the literary debates of his circle of acquaintance, Pottecher developed his own concept of popular theatre in explicit dialogue with Parisian colleagues. Indeed, his theoretical writings on popular theatre—which developed in tandem with his own theatrical productions—often took the form of open letters to Parisian critics with whom he had disagreed in more private conversations. Against assumptions that popular theatre was a debased art form suited only to the lower classes, Pottecher and his associates developed a concept of popular theatre encompassing both workers and the elite, and aspiring through its very particularism to a new interpretation of the classical legacy.

The contention that popular theatre both included and therefore also demanded the attention of the social and artistic elite became a particularly dominant theme. One of Pottecher's earliest and most lively contretemps over the question was with literary critic Ferdinand Brunetière, when the two found it impossible to reconcile their notions of popular theatre.¹⁵⁴ The most fundamental problem was with the word *peuple* itself, as Pottecher explained in his epistolary response of 1896, for it elided two concepts that in other languages-notably Latin-remained distinct: the nation or *populus*, and the working people or *plebs*.¹⁵⁵ Pottecher, together with his close associate Richard Auvray,¹⁵⁶ were emphatic that their concept of people was closer to the socially inclusive *populus* than to the narrower—and derogatory-sounding—*plebs*. The Théâtre du Peuple at Bussang was not, for example, the place to expect a staging of Émile Veyrin's Pâque socialiste, performed in the Maison du Peuple of Montmartre in 1891 for a combative and politicized audience (and discussed here in Chap. 5).¹⁵⁷ Instead, it was a place that symbolized fraternity across social and political divisions: 'a type of link between spectators whom everything else separates', as Auvray described it,¹⁵⁸ or in Pottecher's words, 'something fraternal, a common people who, united by the bonds of race and nature, perform their individual tasks as part of a common endeavour.'159 This, indeed, was why they had chosen the name 'Théâtre du Peuple' over 'Théâtre populaire'. Rather than excluding the social and artistic elite, their more broadly-conceived people 'considered them vital to ensuring the high aesthetic quality of the spectacles, and preventing these from degenerating into the vulgarity of cheap thrills, banal melodrama, and crude farce.'160 Artists in particular were enjoined to resist the temptation to consider themselves separate from the people, since they in fact 'incarnate the people's infinite strength.'161

By self-consciously privileging the 'bonds of race and nature' uniting the people, such popular theatre aspired to a level of social and artistic merit epitomized by classical precedents. When he returned from travels in Greece in 1894, Pottecher brought with him a stone from the Theatre of Dionysos in Athens, which he included in his own theatre in Bussang.¹⁶² Yet he explicitly disdained the performance of classical plays as a form of popular theatre—as on the model of Orange¹⁶³—precisely because these plays were popular not in any generic sense, but rather for the people and place for which they were originally intended. Instead, he encouraged writers to seek inspiration for their own popular theatre in more familiar surroundings. 'Whether it has as its backdrop the pine trees of the east, the hills of Arles or the heaths of Brittany', he explained, 'it is from its native soil that this theatre will draw its life and character.'¹⁶⁴ Close to the border with Germany, Bussang's Théâtre du Peuple was, unlike the more distant Théâtre d'Orange, not a focus for anti-German feeling. Its 'race' was essentially a Vosgian one.

The more self-consciously regional such popular theatre might be, suggested Pottecher, the more national its appeal and importance might consequently become. Plunging roots into regional surroundings could, indeed, offer a means of revitalizing the national 'soul' or 'genius'.¹⁶⁵ It would also capture the attention of-and potentially convert-critics such as Brunetière or Rodenbach who seemed sceptical that regional popular theatre could represent anything more than a transient theatrical experience.¹⁶⁶ The plays performed at Bussang, almost all written and produced by Pottecher himself, were evidence that popular theatre need not be equated with 'democratized' performances of the classics, nor with the melodrama that was the staple fare of much boulevard theatre of the period. Instead, by tackling subjects of human interest in a local setting, this theatre could aim for literary quality and innovation, as well as for a morally uplifting effect.¹⁶⁷ 'Each spectator will come seeking pleasure,' Pottecher observed, 'and will take away some food for thought, for his own destiny and for the future of his race.¹⁶⁸ Both Pottecher and Auvray thus intended their theatre as the explicit fulfilment of Michelet's prophetic vision of 1848, in which the French as a whole would be revitalized through the creation of open-air, popular theatres at village level.¹⁶⁹

Pottecher's theory of popular theatre was not, of course, without its own ambiguities. The question of how—and how far—a moralizing effect might be realized was a particularly complex one, as discussion of the plays themselves and their reception would reveal.¹⁷⁰ Equally, although he appeared to disdain the critics in his focus on art for the people, Pottecher's writings reveal just how sensitive he remained towards the reception and analysis of his enterprise by Parisian literary acquaintances. Indeed in many ways his regional attachment could hardly have been further removed from that of the local people he depicted in his plays, their experiences defined and encircled linguistically, socially, and professionally by the mountains in which they lived. Equally, although his popular theatre was intended as a place of cross-class fraternity where elite and popular elements might be brought together, Pottecher himself demonstrated an acute awareness of the gulf between 'that mysterious throne where the poet reigns through the strength of the word'¹⁷¹ and 'these rustics (it's hard to refrain from saying churls [*rustres*])',¹⁷² or, as Auvray described them, 'naive and sincere spectators.'¹⁷³ In moments such as this, Pottecher surely rejoined those he refuted by assuming an essential distance between art and the people.

3.3 Le Théâtre du Peuple: A Realization

Following his convictions, Maurice Pottecher's development of a popular theatre in the town of Bussang engaged socially, architecturally, and thematically with its regional specificity. Bussang, a small town in a remote corner of the densely forested Vosges mountains, was a liminal place close to the bitterly contested region of Alsace-which, together with the eastern part of Lorraine, had been ceded to Germany after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71. A spa town at an altitude of 650 m, Bussang was renowned for its ferrous waters that, according to brochures aimed specifically at the anaemic, would 'regenerate the blood' (advertisements offered the compelling equation: 'Bussang = sang bu' [blood drunk]).¹⁷⁴ Significantly, this meant that the town was already a focus for tourism in the early Third Republic, with a railway station on the expanding national network. Bussang's therapeutic associations also allowed Pottecher to play symbolically on its regenerative potential. 'Unlike in Paris', Pottecher informed his Parisian readers, 'there are no casinos, theatres, newspapers, literary circles, artistic or philanthropic societies.¹⁷⁵ Restyled as a source of vigour and purity rather than just a cultural desert, Bussang could thus be presented as a 'popular wellspring' from which to revitalize 'our dramatic genius [...] anaemic and corrupt'.¹⁷⁶

Not only was Bussang geographically conducive to regeneration, but—so Pottecher contended—cultural tourists would also benefit from contact with the 'rustic and mountainous character' of its population. Typical of farmers in isolated smallholdings, the locals possessed 'all the traits of the peasant: tenacious, conservative, short of words, and direct in language', and were given more to phlegmatic common sense than to political or religious passion. Bussang was a village where the locals were 'believers, but not overly pious; naive, yet quick to be ironic; patriotic, but not to excess'—a place where the very absence of highly charged political or religious sentiment created a more peaceful coexistence between local republican officials, church, and school than was sometimes the case. $^{177}\,$

For this small spa town with its phlegmatic population, Pottecher's first theatrical initiative took place in 1892, on the centenary of the First French Republic. In Paris, free performances were given at the Opéra; in Épinal, there were firework displays. In Bussang, meanwhile, Pottecher decided to stage an open-air performance of Molière's *Le Médecin malgré lui*, translated into the dialect of the haute Moselle and performed by a group of young enthusiasts.¹⁷⁸ Struck by local acclaim for this performance, Pottecher subsequently devoted his literary and organizational talents to the writing and production of his own play, *Le Diable marchand de goutte*, in 1895. This, too, was set in the Vosges and performed by amateur local actors against the backdrop of the mountains.

Socially and architecturally, the establishment of a more permanent Théâtre du Peuple sought to preserve the popular, local character of these earlier productions. In 1896, a stage was constructed with a roof and a removable backdrop, allowing a view onto a wooded area at the foot of the hill immediately behind. Over the proscenium arch was placed the cross of Lorraine, while the words *par l'art* and *pour l'humanité* (through art, for humanity) appeared on either side. Wooden benches on the grass sloping upwards from the stage made it possible to accommodate up to 2000 spectators. Although the material character of the theatre evolved (especially after the First World War, as will be discussed below), the emphasis on natural scenery, local actors, and the plays of Pottecher remained deliberately prominent.

Described by its founders as 'a theatre of the people where Vosgians of all classes can come once or twice a year to seek a Vosgian entertainment, a Vosgian feeling',¹⁷⁹ the self-conscious regionalism of the Théâtre du Peuple also had national implications. To be sure, there was an evident concern to open up theatre to the culturally disenfranchised: each season, a new production would be performed for a paying audience, while a previous production would be held free of charge. There was also an implicit opposition to the cult of celebrity in Parisian theatre in the scrupulously observed anonymity of the actors in posters and programmes.¹⁸⁰ Yet new productions maintained customary distinctions of pricing and seating, despite some discount for the block purchase of seats.¹⁸¹ Equally, although Auvray insisted that neither he nor Pottecher had any desire to 'rival the lucrative enterprise at Oberammergau,' or to 'divert from Bayreuth those pilgrims attracted by Wagner's dramatic masterpieces,'¹⁸² Pottecher did borrow elements from Bayreuth in his design of the orchestra pit (installed in 1898, when a roofed seating area was also constructed), and performances were specially timed to coincide with connecting trains to Nancy and Paris. Clearly, therefore, the Théâtre du Peuple was not just a focus for regional culture, but also a carefully marketed experience of 'picturesque' popular regionalism that was aimed at a national and even international audience.

3.4 Textual Encounters: The People and Their Shadows

Moving outwards from the initial conception of the theatre to Pottecher's dramatic texts and their performance, it becomes possible to explore his theatre as a place of encounter-especially encounter between the people and their 'shadows', whether in the text, on stage, or in the auditorium. Just as Carl Jung (1875–1961), across the border in Switzerland, was developing his own highly influential theories on the shadow as an unrealized part of the self, with both negative and positive characteristics, so was Pottecher engaged in bringing together contrasting and sometimes deliberately unacknowledged elements of the people, both symbolically and socially. Jung was convinced that engaging rationally with and coming to accept the shadow would bring 'aliveness, reality, integrity, and depth of being.'183 What Pottecher sought-sometimes explicitly using the words 'ombre' or 'ténèbre' [shadows] in his theoretical exposition,¹⁸⁴ and with an understanding of the shadow strikingly close to that of his Swiss contemporary-was to bring together unacknowledged facets of the same people. In his plays, the primitive encountered the civilized and poetic, emotion encountered reason, and magic infiltrated the everyday; just as in his troupes, workers encountered erudite Belgian professors or played alongside their manager and his extended family.

Pottecher's dramatic output was voluminous and generically wideranging, yet retained a number of key themes and preoccupations. 'Popular drama', 'rustic farce', 'village comedy', 'rustic tragedy', 'dramatic legend', 'mystery play', and 'philosophical drama' were just some of the classificatory terms used in the printed repertoires advertising his plays (which appeared not only with local publishers but also with Parisian firms such as Ollendorff and Gallimard).¹⁸⁵ Yet although his general aim was to move outwards from 'familiar characters, taken from the rural milieu in which he could easily observe them' to 'heroes of legend, history, and fantasy',¹⁸⁶ Pottecher never entirely abandoned either the themes or surroundings of his earliest works. Key among these were the overlapping encounters between the primitive and the civilized, between local (and national) people and their folklore, and between the people and the magic of the mountains, which formed symbols of both natural and supernatural significance.

Pottecher's first two plays, for example, present the Vosges Mountains as integral to a social and eschatological struggle between good and evil. 'The people of this region are obdurate and patient,' complains the devil in the prologue of Le Diable marchand de goutte (1895). 'Their mountains have long defended them against me.¹⁸⁷ For the remainder of the play, he therefore assumes the disguise of a travelling salesman with a pronounced German accent and the unfortunate name of Père Schnapps, his aim being to disarm the virtuous mountain people with alcohol. An upstanding elderly farmer, Dominique Hardouin, is horrified to discover that his youngest and favourite son Cyrille has broken his promise of temperance; arguments and drunkenness turn to violence, and the remainder of the play focuses on the conciliatory efforts of Cyrille and his wife Marianne, 'a tender and devoted creature whose mysterious origin suggests her essentially angelic quality'.¹⁸⁸ This explicitly Marian character also possesses a Christ-like acceptance of sacrifice for the sake of redemption. She finally frustrates the devil's designs through her own death-which, in its very altruism, escapes the posthumous penalty of suicide. Restoring the relationship between the wayward Cyrille and his father-who calls upon Marianne to 'pray for us sinners in heaven'¹⁸⁹this self-sacrifice nonetheless leaves Cyrille with the ongoing task of furthering the work of salvation 'in our gangrenous region...'¹⁹⁰

Pottecher's second play *Morteville*, performed in 1896 and one of the most widely debated by contemporaries, pursues this eschatological struggle in a still darker local context (see Fig. 3). Although he introduced his scenario as 'set far away in the mists of time', he quickly acknowledged that while chronologically distant, it remained geographically and ethnically close to both actors and audience. The action takes place in the Vosges Mountains, its characters are the 'savage ancestors' of their spectators, and 'most of the customs attributed to this tribe were still dominant, a century ago, in some communes of the mountainous region...²¹⁹¹ Pottecher further explained that Morteville was the name of a gorge near the local Ballon d'Alsace where a village had been destroyed by flooding (an incident recounted in the play). He had also borrowed



Fig. 3 *Morteville*: the people of the forest. (Postcard, author's collection)

loosely from local knowledge that a colony of Swedish workers had been brought by the duchess of Lovienne to work in the mines in the six-teenth century, and that their special privileges and customs had created tensions with the local population.¹⁹²

Morteville stages an encounter between the primitive and the civilized, reason and superstition, with initially tragic but ultimately redemptive consequences. Here, in a plot with some similarities to Fritz Lang's later film *Metropolis* (1927), the son of a manager and a working-class woman seek to civilize and elevate the people, but encounter only violent opposition. Laurent, son of manager Hagon in a town newly industrialized and wealthy from the success of the copper mines, leaves behind his urban existence to seek the primitive peoples of the forest. His aim is to draw them away from their ancient feuds with other tribes by persuading them of their common ethnic—or, at the very least, human inheritance: 'Aren't they from the same race as yourselves?' he berates them. 'And even if they were from another race, they're still men like you, aren't they?'¹⁹³ Laurent even offers to look after the children at school while their mothers work. Although some are convinced by the

new doctrines, including Thérèse, wife of the leader of the tribe Martin Bromerre, the leader himself dismisses Laurent's proposals as promises that are not only empty but also dangerous, in that they threaten to turn a 'wolf-like' people into defenceless, 'gentle, and timid sheep'.¹⁹⁴ The most devastating threat, however, remains elsewhere. The more civilized the primitive mountain-dwellers become, the more they envy the presumed luxury of the townspeople. After a fruitless battle, they turn against the suspected witch Marie Robin for having lured them with misleading tales of an urban 'paradise',¹⁹⁵ and execute Thérèse for-as they wrongfully believe-having informed the townspeople of their intended manoeuvres. In an ever-widening circle of destruction, Marie Robin and the former leader of the tribe Siméon Bromerre then burst the local dam, leaving the townspeople homeless and begging for mercy. In response, Martin Bromerre retreats with his grandfather to the depths of the forest to renew the tribe, while Hagon is reconciled to the rural people in recognition that 'united in suffering, we form only one people'.¹⁹⁶ Destruction forges a path to remorse and renewal, and in the concluding scene the bodies of the redemptive victims Thérèse and Laurent are strewn with flowers.¹⁹⁷

To those critics who found Morteville both difficult and unedifying, Pottecher and Auvray suggested a significance beyond the tragedies in the foreground. Like its predecessor Le Diable marchand de goutte, Morteville was not-despite appearances-a play designed to mock or patronize the 'primitive' people of the Vosges for their basic tendencies towards vice and excess, whether in intemperance, anger, or envy. Rather, it was an evocation of shadows that could have creative potential, and against which reconciliation and tolerance would assume a contrasting brightness. 'It is sometimes salutary,' Pottecher explained, 'like increasing one's rejoicing at morning by remembering a bad dream, to look back towards the shadows, and so to march with greater confidence towards the eternal light of the future!'198 Similarly, Auvray cited Michelet's injunction to 'nourish the people with the people' with the reminder that this people did not belong only to the present, for 'our distant ancestors were already the people.' Of course, the people should also be brought face to face with their contemporary incarnations, but it remained 'essential to show them that they come from a darker past and are charged with the mission of creating a more radiant future. The archaic character of *Morteville* is thus, we believe, fully justified.'¹⁹⁹ Only by encountering their shadows-historical and psychological-could the people progress. Nevertheless, it is striking that redemptive sacrifice is accomplished in both *Morteville* and *Le Diable marchand de goutte* not by the people as a collective and self-conscious agent of history, but rather by a pure (and rather two-dimensional) female character who is, according to Pottecher, 'free neither to choose nor to refuse' her necessary immolation.²⁰⁰

Not all of Pottecher's plays aspired to the dramatic intensity of Le Diable marchand de goutte or Morteville, and he was in any case touchy about being associated with a single genre. Indeed, many of his pre-war plays, while continuing the preoccupation with the people, their surroundings, and their folkloric inheritance, were in light-hearted and even farcical vein. Le Sotré de Noël (1897),²⁰¹ co-authored with Richard Auvray, was 'a rustic farce, totally imbued with the scents of the local terroir', 202 even if additionally dependent on Parisian cooperation. 203 Chacun cherche son trésor (1899) followed the fortunes of a melancholy prince in search of a happy man and subsequently entangled in local intrigue, and struck critics as 'a kind of Midsummer Night's Dream transformed into a legend of the Vosges'.²⁰⁴ Rustic farce also predominated in the plays of 1901 and 1904. C'est le vent staged a local feud between the rival villages of Haurupt and Basrupt, its Montague-Capulet quality offset by its 'picturesque popular characters,'205 while À l'Écu d'argent borrowed from Molière's Bourgeois gentilhomme to satirize a local worthy with pretensions to politics.²⁰⁶

The magic of the mountains remained, however, an abiding theme in Pottecher's depiction of more mystical and eschatological encounters. In Le Château de Hans (1908), the subject of the play was-as with Morteville-suggested by local geography, the Château in question being a spectacular rock formation resembling a ruined castle, and situated above Lac Blanc in neighbouring Alsace. Pottecher based his plot on the travel writings of Édouard Ferry, a lawyer from Saint-Dié who had visited the area with his more famous cousin Jules, the well-known republican politician. Possibly Édouard had invented the story, but Pottecher had himself largely fabricated the plot of Morteville and held none of the scruples about textual authenticity that tormented his Breton literary contemporaries. What mattered was not whether this was a long-standing local legend but whether it sounded like one. Pottecher was, indeed, instinctively drawn to Ferry's narrative because it seemed to combine the 'naive, malicious' aspect of a folk tale with a more self-consciously philosophical perspective.²⁰⁷

In Le Château de Hans, the eponymous hero is an honest woodcutter who, though tested by the devil in the form of a 'green huntsman', ultimately benefits from the protection of the benevolent mountain gnomes, Till and Froll. Till, a spirit of the air, represents 'malice and poetry', while Froll, a spirit of the earth, represents 'naive devotion'.²⁰⁸ The devil subjects Hans to the three challenges of renouncing love, possessions, and habits, first by allowing his beloved Catherine to marry a rival, second by offering his home to an ungrateful relative, and third by seeking to console an apparently despairing traveller (actually the devil himself) with his pipe—his one remaining possession—which the devil then casts into the abyss. Undeterred, the pure-hearted Hans regrets nothing, and in recompense the two good spirits, Till and Froll, construct him a spectacular castle and grant him a further thousand years of life. When the devil destroys this castle the good spirits respond gleefully that it was 'mere illusion', for the real castle where Hans will spend a millenium reunited with a youthful Catherine is hidden in the depths of the mountains themselves.²⁰⁹

In these early plays, Pottecher deliberately intended to encourage and exemplify a fruitful relationship between location, text, and performance: a 'fraternity of race', as he identified it, 'not only between spectators, and not only between the poet and the public, but also between the public and the play itself.'210 These were plays about the Vosges and its people, in which these same people performed on a stage visibly surrounded by their familiar forested mountains. The mountains themselves assume contrasting characteristics in his plays. They can be protectivesafeguarding the virtue of local populations, or Hans in his millenial slumbers-but also wild and dangerous, as in Morteville. They can dispel illusion: Hans cuts a branch from a real tree in Le Château de Hans, while the mountains form a living backdrop to the plays. Yet both forests and mountains can also offer pathways to the illusory or the supernatural, being-as so often in literary narratives-liminal places in which the boundary between the mundane and the magical or mystical is particularly permeable.²¹¹

While Pottecher repeatedly emphasized the relationship between the people and their folklore, he did not intend this to be the only character or function of his popular theatre. Both before and after the First World War, alongside his creation of local farces and tragedies, he also wrote and produced plays of a more deliberately national character, moving outwards from the *petite patrie* so as facilitate a further set of encounters

with national and religious history, as well as with elite culture and the wider theatrical tradition.

In striking contrast, therefore, to some of his more locally focused plays, both Liberté (1898) and La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc (1904) explicitly associate the peasantry with the grande patrie. Certainly regional contexts are still important: Liberté, for example, stages an imagined encounter between the revolutionaries of the early 1790s and the population of the 'wild mountains' of the Vosges. Yet as the young girl who both delivers the prologue and represents liberty declares, this is no local fairy tale but rather the history of 'a great voice that, more than a century ago, suddenly awakened the universe.²¹² Here, the mystical is associated with the words 'nation' and 'Republic'-to such a degree that some critics declared the play to be little more than political propaganda.²¹³ Here, the elderly Père Souhait who incarnates popular wisdom and tradition is overtaken by those who, unlike him, are able to see further than 'the fields in the shadow of the belltower.' 'From here to the sea there are thousands of belltowers,' insists the young Marie, 'but only one France!' Even Souhait himself, concluding the play with a gloomy meditation on future bloodshed,²¹⁴ proves susceptible to angry patriotism. He may die soon and be buried, he says, 'but make sure no foreigners walk on my grave!'215 Likewise, Pottecher's Passion de Jeanne d'Arc brings to the foreground patriotic peasants for whom both the 'good country of Lorraine' and also the larger *patrie* of France are worthy of veneration,²¹⁶ with the greater fatherland consistently inspiring more strident and articulate speeches.

Popular engagement with religious and literary tradition was also a focus in Pottecher's expanding and generically varied repertoire. With a concern both to appeal to a wider audience but also to advance his design of using drama to encourage unity and reconciliation, Pottecher was sensitive in his presentation of Catholic subjects. His religious drama is not written with spiritual intent: the praying of the *Hail Mary* at the Angelus is reduced to a mere murmur of voices in his stage directions for *Jeanne d'Arc*, while his treatment of *Le Mystère de Judas Iscariote* is far from a traditional Passion play. Yet Joan's passion is movingly presented, and Pottecher's *Mystère de Judas Iscariote* is not intended to unsettle the pious spectator by encouraging sympathy for Christ's betrayer. Instead, the question of how a chosen apostle could turn to revolt is treated 'not as a historian—for here history keeps silent—but as a poet.'²¹⁷

Pottecher's decision to write a mystery play was also integral to a project of expanding the remit of a regional theatre that he did not wish to confine to local folklore. The same can be said of his subsequent 'dramatic legend' *Amys et Amyle* (the retelling of a chivalric tale popular in late medieval Europe), his translation of *Macbeth* in 1903, and his postwar production of *L'Anneau de Sakountala*.²¹⁸ This last play, a Hindu tale translated by William Jones in the eighteenth century and popular across Europe (especially with Goethe), was indisputably a product of aristocratic culture. Yet Pottecher maintained that it also possessed elements of a popular tale; and lest his spectators should feel too disorientated by this 'excursion into the fantastical world of the Orient', he paired the new play with a revival of his resolutely local farce *Le Sotré de Noël*.²¹⁹

As this analysis suggests, the plays Pottecher produced at Bussang in this period both exemplified and strengthened the relationship between the local people and their geographical, literary, and legendary context, while simultaneously drawing them into dialogue with wider national, religious, and literary questions. Yet this was always a two-way process. Pottecher was never writing purely for local actors and audiences, for neither his troupe nor his audience, nor the wider readership of his plays, was circumscribed by the Vosges mountains. Pottecher's 'people'-just as he had first claimed to Ferdinand Brunetière-comprised not only the Vosgian peasantry but also the local and national elite. Both the dramatic texts and their production on stage were intended to engage this elite with popular (and Pottecher-inspired) folklore. They were designed for a prospective audience of tourists, artists, and writers who would travel to the Vosges not to see a mediocre production of a play they could find better performed in Paris but rather to immerse themselves in the more exotic experience of watching a 'picturesque' Vosgian play performed by 'primitive' actors. Even the sometimes wearisome journey to Bussangon the train, along the dusty forest roads bordered by foxgloves-was an integral stage in this cultural tourism. Indeed, it was described in often affectionate detail by the critics-'those refined representatives of civilization', as Pottecher's Parisian friend Jean Ajalbert described them, 'whom fashion brings back to nature.'220 Drawn to neo-primitivism, these elements within the people were also eager to encounter their own 'shadows'-whether these were to be found in the local and national tales performed on stage or within the other spectators in the auditorium.

Not all critics agreed, of course, on the picturesque merits of Pottecher's productions. There were some who felt that he had 'sacrificed too much for the sake of *local colour*' in his characterization;²²¹ others who would have preferred the scenery to have been evoked symbolically rather than revealed beyond the stage.²²² But many were drawn to precisely those qualities which were often, ironically, the most illusory-not least the impression that these productions were uniquely and authentically both Vosgian and popular. Although Pottecher sometimes sourced costumes from Paris,²²³ critics preferred to imagine them entirely homemade. 'The costumes are cut and sewn in the village, the sets designed and painted by artists and artisans from the valley, and all of the actors in the plays are local people,' rhapsodized André Warnod in 1909.²²⁴ And, blithely unaware of its recent fabrication, Warnod was particularly drawn to the apparently ancient tale of Le Château de Hans: 'this old Alsatian legend, which elderly folk like to recount when they gather on winter nights, while the wind whistling through the pine trees recalls the age of fairies, gnomes, and witches...' Such was the theatre that epitomized 'all the picturesque charm of the Vosges Mountains.'225 Similarly, postwar critics concurred in their conviction that there was 'nothing more curious, original, or characteristic than these performances at Bussang' which, in their local character, were accessible 'even to the most primitive souls.²²⁶

While Pottecher successfully attracted members of a national elite with this particular brand of 'picturesque' theatre, he also offered them quite explicit opportunities to experience his drama at a higher level than the more 'primitive souls' through a double reading of both texts and performance. Certainly, both contemporary and later critics puzzled over the moral messages and efficacy of his plays. Surely Le Diable marchand de goutte could not really hope to cure Vosgian alcoholics, mused Ajalbert?²²⁷ Pottecher himself, however, claimed he had 'neither the illusion nor the pretension' of achieving any such direct consequences, and always insisted on redemptive love as the underlying theme of the piece.²²⁸ Similarly, when writing of Le Château de Hans, Pottecher pushed the more reflective observer to move beyond the play's embodied presentation of the battle between good and evil. The mere fact that the gnomes and the devil were played on stage by 'solid Alsatians and Lorrains' did not signify that Hans had experienced his struggle in a tangible world. What if the whole story had taken place only in his mind? What if the castle of the legend were really 'the tomb in which the idealist lies down in a final vision of joy and serenity? Such possibilities could be envisaged, Pottecher suggested, by more informed or reflective spectators. And this would not preclude the more general audience from taking pleasure in the play at face value, or from gaining a legitimate sense of satisfaction at the triumph of good over evil.²²⁹ As the critic Noël Sabord astutely observed, each of Pottecher's plays 'introduced a symbol that only the more cultured spectators would be able to discover, although it would exercise its secret virtues on the more humble.'²³⁰ In this sense, whether writing, producing, or discussing his plays, Pottecher was never far from the more exclusive literary conversations that had brought his project for the Théâtre du Peuple into being.

3.5 Bussang: A Meeting Place

Like popular theatre in Orange and Brittany, Pottecher's Théâtre du Peuple would have been very different—even inconceivable—without the symbiotic relationships between national and local, Paris and the provinces. It was also characterized by a resolute openness beyond the frontier. This was as true of his actors and audiences as it was of the texts themselves.

Certainly, Pottecher and many of his critics always emphasized the local and cross-class character of his troupe. In apt reflection of their audience, wrote Pottecher in 1913, this troupe was drawn from all social classes, 'from the artist and scholar to the quasi-illiterate peasant, and from the worker to the factory owner,' and he took pains to contend that their collective enterprise facilitated greater mutual understand-ing.²³¹ For two months of the year these actors would meet for rehearsal every evening, integrating their acting into the pattern of their everyday lives, and—more importantly—cooperating more closely than normal in a common task from which the cult of the celebrity was rigorously excluded.

In reality, however, the composition of the troupe and its supporters was sometimes less local than the image they sought to project, a characteristic that also became more marked over time. When Henri Beaulieu, director of the Théâtre du Peuple in Paris, was invited to direct *Liberté* and *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* in 1904, he gained the collaboration of Parisian artists staying in Bussang, including Léon Guinet of André Antoine's Théâtre Libre.²³² In the re-established Théâtre du Peuple of the 1920s, Pottecher's widening circles of acquaintance were similarly

reflected in his troupe. In 1925, for instance, he engaged the Parisian actor Philippe Richard to participate in Amys et Amyle; in the same year, the troupe also included the sculptor and costume designer Pierre Richard-Willm (who would contribute to running the theatre both with and after Pottecher),²³³ as well as a drawing instructor from a school in Paris, a female English teacher Pottecher had met during summer visits to Toulon, and Pottecher's wife Camille, herself a former Parisian actor and pupil of the Conservatoire. Indeed, while the programmes maintained anonymity, it was nonetheless visible to the audience that the Pottecher family often supplied the lead roles: Camille as Lady Macbeth, or Maurice Pottecher himself as Hans in Le Château de Hans (for which the good spirit Froll was enthusiastically portrayed by a 'learned Belgian professor').²³⁴ Nor was the troupe or its productions entirely confined to Bussang. Pottecher brought Le Diable marchand de goutte to the openair theatre at Gérardmer, for example, while Le Château de Hans was staged at the grand municipal theatre in Nancy. Pottecher's Liberté was performed at the Popular University of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine in Paris, and Amys et Amyle at the Odéon theatre in 1928.235

Pottecher's development of a theatre intended to cross social, geographical, and political boundaries was certainly a factor in promoting its wider popularity. His political satire *A l'Écu d'argent* so adroitly avoided giving offence to any particular party that it was described by critics as bringing together audiences of 'reactionaries and republicans, antiparliamentarians and partisans of the Bloc des gauches' in common applause.²³⁶ One scene mocked the verboseness of political speeches as the hotel owner Fragon rehearsed his own while preparing aspic jelly (his servant Bénédicité meanwhile puzzled over what appeared to be a recipe for 'enormous vegetables', before discovering that this too was a political diatribe).²³⁷ Yet the final moral was that men were no better or worse in politics than anywhere else. And the tenth anniversary of the theatre was honoured by a formal visit from the Minister for Public Education, Art, and Religion—an honour recalled by Pottecher himself when writing to the Ministry for funding after the First World War.²³⁸

Furthermore, despite the proximity of Bussang to 'our tightened frontier²³⁹ and despite the patriotic rhetoric of *Liberté* or *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*, Pottecher himself was conspicuously distant from anti-Germanism. In 1907, when travel engagements prevented the writing of a new play, Pottecher organized a musical soirée based on a poem by Eugène Morand, *La Nuit de Noël*, which evoked a brief fraternization between French and German soldiers during the war of 1870.²⁴⁰ Similarly, when the popular theatre director Adrien Bernheim attended a performance at Bussang in 1908, he described nostalgically how he heard members of the audience singing popular songs from both Alsace and Lorraine, familiar to him because his father had come from Mulhouse and his mother from Nancy.²⁴¹ Indeed, later reviews from the 1920s mentioned motorists arriving from 'Paris, Lyon, Strasbourg, Nancy, and even from Switzerland and the Rhine borders.'²⁴²

This openness to fraternity and renewal rather than nationalism was, moreover, equally striking in the immediate post-war period. The First World War devastated and transformed the Theatre at Bussang, and yet it led, paradoxically, to a renewed emphasis on the continuity of its character and mission. Bussang was only a few miles from the border with Alsace, and as soon as war was declared in August 1914, French and German troops began exchanging fire through the tunnel that traversed the frontier.²⁴³ Soon, the theatre itself was commandeered as a shelter for the soldiers, together with their horses and mules, and over four years the animals so damaged the wooden structure that it became dangerously unsound.²⁴⁴ Maurice Pottecher, moreover, had lost more than the theatre, for his son Jean was also killed in battle. Surveying the ruins after the Armistice, he found himself caught between despair and determination. 'It's the best reason to stay alive', he concluded to his friend Georges Bourdon, and resolved, if he could, to take up and complete the work that the war had brutally interrupted.²⁴⁵ With the financial support of his friends, and the generous patronage of a Vosgian industrialist, Pottecher was thus able to realize his plans to rebuild the theatre with wood from the military barracks, this time as an enclosed structure in reluctant concession to the fact that the Vosgian climate was not that of 'our South of France, where Apollo, god of the arts, is also god of the sun.'246

Not only did the reconstructed, postwar theatre retain—as it still does—its characteristic feature of a removable backdrop to reveal the Vosges mountains,²⁴⁷ but it similarly continued closely in the paths that Pottecher had already traced before 1914. The formal reopening of 1921 witnessed a return to *Le Diable marchand de goutte* of 1895, introduced with a new prologue, *La Rúche reconstruite*, in which fictional characters implore a sleeping and saddened poet to restore them to life.²⁴⁸ Moreover, Pottecher's design of the enclosed post-war theatre was intended not only to shelter locals from the elements but also

to provide a more fitting welcome to Parisian actors and critics. For the 1921 season he therefore also engaged the celebrated troupe of Jacques Copeau from the Vieux Colombier to perform Molière's Fourberies de Scapin, and was especially concerned that they should not receive the dousing that had marred Antoine's production of Poil de Carotte (with its author, Jules Renard, in the audience), in 1901.²⁴⁹ Pottecher himself continued, in the 1920s and 1930s, to provide nearly all of the plays performed at the Théâtre du Peuple, with the only exceptions being works by Molière, Alfred de Musset, and Frédéric Pottecher. The vast majority were also revivals of pre-war plays and productions. L'Anneau de Sakountala (written before the war but not produced) was performed in 1922, as well as in the seasons of 1923, 1936, 1937, and 1938; Le Château de Hans featured in 1924, 1935, and 1939. The interwar years also saw the revival of Pottecher's patriotic, religious, and legendary plays La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc, Le Mystère de Judas Iscariote, and Amys et Amyle, as well as of the light-hearted farces C'est le vent! and Le Sotré de Noël. New plays, meanwhile, were written in now familiar genres, such as the mystery play-and second part of Amys et Amyle-Le Miracle du Sang (1925), the legendary Le Valet noir (1927), and the comedy Le Secret de la Montagne (1930).²⁵⁰ Unusual in its explicit acknowledgement of the war was the comedy Chacune à son tour! (1924) dedicated to the memory of Pottecher's son Jean and intended to exemplify 'the pure ideal of peace and fraternity that sustained our young people throughout the bloody conflict.'251 Overall, as Georges Bourdon surmised.

This is almost an entirely new theatre that has been constructed, and yet it is also a well-established project that continues. It continues to illustrate a great idea, that of popular art, and to bear witness to the Vosgian will that brought it into being.²⁵²

The material devastation of the original theatre—and Pottecher's deep personal loss in the death of his son Jean—made it all the more important that the reconstructed theatre should succeed, and succeed in attracting the interest and praise of the Parisian institutions, writers, and critics that had shaped its character from the very beginning.

Pottecher's project, therefore, may be seen as a literary, social and political design to facilitate dialogue between rival concepts of the people, as well as between national and regional publics, popular and elite culture, working men and women and the culturally privileged. If it can be considered democratic and decentralizing, it was not so much a linear trajectory as a series of overlapping encounters. In the texts of his plays and in their performance, there were powerful encounters between the people and their 'shadows': between the civilized and the primitive, the mundane and the magical, and between legend and fantasy and a supposedly more rational public sphere.²⁵³ The location of the theatreseemingly remote and on the border between France and Germany, yet connected with other towns and cities (including Paris) by a rail network that laid on special trains when required-both championed a firmly regional initiative and also made it available as a picturesque experience for cultural tourists from around France and beyond. Furthermore, Pottecher's own sustained engagement with literary critics in the pages of national journals, and carefully exploited connections with Parisian playwrights, directors, and theatrical troupes, ensured that his initiative began and continued as both local and national in character. Through Pottecher's efforts, and through his networks of local and Parisian supporters, an entrenched preoccupation with the geographical, social, and literary landscape of the Vosges became-and remains-of national importance.

4 PIERRE CORNEILLE AND THE THÉÂTRE POPULAIRE POITEVIN

One of the closest parallels to Maurice Pottecher's Théâtre du Peuple was the Théâtre Populaire Poitevin: an open-air theatre in the small town of La Mothe-Saint-Héray, south west of Poitiers. The theatre was founded in the late 1890s by a local doctor, Pierre Corneille (Pierre Corneille Saint-Marc, 1862–1945), who claimed to be the final descendant of his better-known seventeenth-century namesake, and particularly aspired to the dramatic success that had eluded him on the stages of Paris. Shaped by Parisian-born regionalism, the Théâtre Populaire Poitevin was also-like its counterparts in Orange, Brittany, and the Vosges-characterized by thematic and pragmatic encounters between nation and region, Paris and the provinces. It became an impetus towards the imagination of the people of Poitou, past and present, while simultaneously forming a focus for local recreation and regionalist initiative. With a generically wide-ranging repertoire-from historical dramas and mystery plays to social comedies and exotic musicals (nearly all of which were penned by Pierre Corneille himself)-the theatre drew the

local people into their history and culture just as it also sought to attract Parisian attention and government funding.

Unlike the Pottecher's Théâtre du Peuple, however, the Théâtre Populaire Poitevin has been a subject of both intense controversy and considerable neglect. Pierre Corneille himself wrote ardently to the Ministry of Education, Art, and Religion to describe his project as a vital focus for the cultural life of the region and as an impetus to the development of local democracy.²⁵⁴ Yet his detractors also wrote to the Ministry to accuse him of partisan objectives in an enterprise characterized more by nepotism and opportunism than by any real concern for the advancement of popular culture.²⁵⁵ By 1912, Corneille was involved in the local section of Action Française, and his Pétainism during the Vichy regime culminated in his arrest in 1944 by the young Communists of the liberation committee. He died only a few days after his release in January 1945. Yet his niece-who had secured his liberation-continued to work to rehabilite his memory, not least in opposition to a postwar radio programme explicitly denigrating 'The Other Corneille'.²⁵⁶ Similarly, local retrospectives have described the Théâtre Populaire Poitevin as a democratic initiative of which Rousseau would have approved, albeit while sidelining the character and writings of Corneille himself.²⁵⁷ Meanwhile, broader studies of popular theatre tend to accord it only the most fleeting of references.²⁵⁸ Democratic poet or self-serving royalist? The real Pierre Corneille remains curiously elusive.

During the Third Republic, however, Corneille's Théâtre populaire was integral to national debate on open-air theatre, and often considered in parallel to initiatives elsewhere in France. When the Revue d'Art Dramatique devoted a special issue to popular theatre in October-December 1898, there were articles by Charles Le Goffic and Pierre Corneille on popular theatre in Brittany and Poitou alongside a study by Maurice Pottecher of his theatre in the Vosges.²⁵⁹ When the Chamber of Deputies debated the financing of regional popular theatre in 1902 (with considerable input from the Breton deputy de l'Estourbeillon), La Mothe-Saint-Héray was discussed-and funded-alongside Bussang, Ploujean, and Orange.²⁶⁰ Examining the genesis and development of this initiative, and probing the little-known writings of Corneille for evidence of his political and cultural ambitions, not only sheds light on his character and aspirations, but also reinforces the broader contentions of this chapter. Not least, it further demonstrates the ways in which Parisian ambitions and government funding shaped the imagination of a regional

people that was, nevertheless, often more strongly delineated than its national and republican counterpart.

4.1 In the Shadow of Paris: The Regionalism of Pierre Corneille

There is no doubt that Pierre Corneille's initiative developed in conversation with Paris; and as with Anatole Le Braz, Corneille's fulsome acclamation of the petite patrie followed acute personal disappointment on the national stage. After medical studies in Bordeaux, Corneille arrived in the capital not only to complete his training but also-so he hoped-to attract literary acclaim. Yet despite publishing a novel, Corneille lacked the passport to literary circles of a Maurice Pottecher, and returned in straitened circumstances to his native Poitou. There he secured his social and financial position by marrying Isabelle Prouhet, daughter of a wealthy doctor-a fortuitous match that also established a connection with his wife's uncle, Eugène Giraudias, mayor of La Mothe-Saint-Héray.²⁶¹ Further boosting his status as a local personality, Corneille joined the local ethnographic society, became president of the association of poitevin regionalists, and both founded and directed a literary review, Le Mercure Poitevin. By the late 1890s, when he helped to create the Théâtre Populaire Poitevin, he was being presented in poitevin reviews as a rising literary figure, 'clearly set on the path to success in the radiance of the footlights.²⁶²

The Théâtre Populaire Poitevin developed from a fruitful relationship between Corneille's frustrated Parisian ambitions and the burgeoning interest of the poitevin literati in their local history and culture. As in Brittany, theatre in Poitou was a particular focus for literary debate. In June 1896, for example, when the Société d'Ethnographie Nationale et d'Art Populaire held its first regional conference in Niort, one of the key participants was the local dramatist Henri Clouzot. Clouzot had not only established his own review, Niort en Scène, in 1892, but was also composing regionalist plays (Le Sillon in 1895; Le Miracle des Blés in 1898) and conducting research into seventeenth-century poitevin theatre.²⁶³ To the debates on cultural decentralization that marked the conference of 1896, Clouzot offered a nostalgic pride in the literature of the petite patrie. Although regional literature was clearly in decline during the increasing centralization of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there was nonetheless—as he was keen to demonstrate—a final flourishing of dramatic poetry in Poitou, some of which had been performed on stage. Praising local writers such as sixteenth-century poet Scévole de Sainte-Marthe (he deliberately excluded the Poitou-born Richelieu on the grounds that he left his native region at too early a stage in his career),²⁶⁴ Clouzot called explicitly for a renaissance of local literary talent.

Corneille's first poitevin production, La Bonne Fée, began as a regionalist celebration and took flight in his imagination as a poetic mission to gather and reimagine the local people on stage. In 1897, the local Ethnographic society held a small-scale birthday celebration for the poitevin poet Émile du Tiers, combining open-air poetry readings with performances in the grounds of a ruined castle.²⁶⁵ Corneille contributed a short play entitled Bonne Fée, in which the eponymous fairy persuades Pierre, a young poitevin tempted by the promise of Parisian brilliance-(could this be Corneille himself?)-to prefer the solid virtues of his local fiancée, Suzon. Pierre recognizes in the fairy the incarnation of his petite patrie and particularly the Sèvre river, which the fairy contrasts favourably with that 'insatiable, insolent, proud river: the Seine!' He promises to remain and defend his native region, on condition that he may see the fairy again. She responds with a lyrical love poem about the beauties of the Sèvre, concluding with the reassurance that Pierre will find her frequently reflected in the eyes of the faithful Suzon.²⁶⁶

Spectators were expected to include only the members of the Ethnographic society and their invited guests. But word must have spread, for the final audience numbered several hundred (or, in Corneille's more ambitious account for the *Revue d'Art Dramatique*, several thousand).²⁶⁷ Watching the performance of his own contribution, Corneille suddenly saw the poitevin people represented not only in his romantic fairy story of innocent rustics, but equally in the eager, curious audience around him. He was surprised, flattered, and—following a noisy applause 'that was not displeasing to me'—swiftly convinced of his new mission as poet and muse. As he confided indulgently to a national and Parisian audience:

If a poet is more than an entertainer, a skilful tumbler, a juggler of words and rhymes; if he has a social mission to accomplish and if this mission is to carry to the heights of the ideal those souls that are heavier than his own, unable to reach them without his aid, then why should I not lift those goodly souls, ready to follow me, to the modest summits to which I can ascend?²⁶⁸

Through this performance, Corneille discovered a new role for the poitevin people on stage and in the audience, as well as a new means of legitimizing his literary persona as descendant of the great seventeenthcentury dramatist, which had hitherto failed to win over the Parisian public. Ironically-although, as the previous case studies have shown, not uniquely-his success as a regionalist writing defiant poetry about the superiority of the Sèvre was soon to open doors onto a national stage. Meanwhile, the establishment of the Théâtre Populaire Poitevin depended not only on literary ambition and national interest but also on municipal collaboration. Eugène Giraudias, mayor of La Mothe, was Corneille's uncle by marriage, and contributed to the establishment of a more permanent open-air theatre in the grounds of the Château des Bandéan-Parabère, La Mothe's public park, while at the same time providing extensive artistic and practical support through his own family (his sons Louis, André, and Émile were a musician, a painter, and an architect). For the wider troupe, Corneille and Giraudias turned to the local population to enlist students, journalists, seamstresses, a baker, a cobbler, a lawyer's clerk, a lady novelist, as well as gentlemen and ladies of leisure.²⁶⁹ The sizeable supporting cast of youthful *Mothaises* was a particular attraction, although the theatre sometimes also included actors and actresses from Paris. For Corneille's Biblical drama Marie de Magdala (1903), which featured music by Louis Giraudias, he succeeded in engaging the Parisian actor Léon Segond to play the role of Christ, a coup well advertised in the play's publicity.²⁷⁰ According to Corneille, the social variety of his troupe-together with the affordability of tickets and the open-air performances-was essential to its character as popular theatre. But it also justified in Corneille's mind the guiding role of the poet, and the necessity for poetry rather than prose. Whereas poetry imposed a certain rhythm on the amateur performer, prose 'would allow an initiative and independence'-which, in Corneille's opinion, 'could be dangerous.²⁷¹

4.2 Dramatic Output and Political Passion

The creation of the Théâtre populaire de la Mothe-Saint-Héray suggests opportunism rather than political design. How, then, can one account for its controversial political status? Certainly, Corneille's own theoretical expositions on popular theatre avoided partisan language, resounding instead with a determination to be taken seriously by a broader, national audience. In an article for *Le Monde Nouveau* in 1901, he defined popular theatre in unexceptional terms: generically varied but with straightforward characterization, and drawing inspiration from well-known historical periods. 'Show the people a figure they have formerly encountered in their school textbooks', he advised. 'Clovis, Charles VII, Joan of Arc, or Richelieu, and you are certain to captivate their attention.'²⁷² Essentially, however, the appeal of such theatre should derive not from its historical edification but from its power to move. 'As soon as they are moved,' observed Corneille of his poitevin public, 'they are conquered.'²⁷³

Similarly, an overview of Corneille's dramatic output during the Third Republic testifies to this conscious privileging of emotional over political appeal-even if his writing does offer glimpses of more particular attachments. Certainly, the recent and more distant history of Poitou offered plenty of examples of deep division. The area had experienced bitter conflict during the wars of religion, while the violence of counter-revolution in the 1790s would have been just within living memory when Corneille was growing up in the 1860s and 70s. Nor did Corneille shy away from controversial subject matter within his varied repertoire, which offered close parallels to Pottecher's work in its treatment of historical and religious subjects alongside comical ones. In parallel to Pottecher's Liberté, for instance, Corneille created his own revolutionary drama Blancs et Bleues, as well as reimagining conflicts variously involving Gauls and Romans, Joan of Arc, Richelieu, and contemporary trade-unionists. Yet in all his plays, the primary focus was less on historical detail and partisan contentions than on emotional turmoil, not least in the clash between love and patriotism.

Erinna (1898), Corneille's first full-length play for the Théâtre Populaire Poitevin, offered for example a model tale of patriotism and resistance, more than forty years before Vercors's *Le Silence de la Mer* became a classic in the genre. The play is set in Poitou in 57 B.C., and opens with the priestess Erinna's prophetic vision of impending Roman invasion and lament over the defeat of Gaul. Notwithstanding the horror that such a vision inspires, she prefers death to servitude, and remains implacably patriotic despite the wavering of her fellow Gauls. Her self-sacrifice is rendered all the more spectacular in that she is concurrently denying a secret love for Caesar—who has, moreover, offered the Gauls the prospect of self-government if he may marry one of their number. Erinna resists his advances, urges the Gauls to renewed resistance, and

dies at Caesar's feet to the musical accompaniment of a bard's song and a Gallic harp (with music, of course, by Louis Giraudias).²⁷⁴ The guiding theme of the play, as Corneille emphasized to Parisian readers in *La Revue d'Art Dramatique*, was 'the sacrifice of life in defence of land, with national sentiment silencing all other sentiments—even the strongest of all, love—in the case of the Gallic heroine'.²⁷⁵

Patriotism was also central to his 1900 play on Joan of Arc, Au Temps de Charles VII, which predates Pottecher's treatment of the same theme by four years and includes romantic intrigue of a less self-immolating nature than Erinna's passion for Caesar. Whereas patriotic sentiment in Erinna is presented in an inclusive manner, that of Au Temps de Charles VII has a more politically partisan flavour, with traces of anti-republican rhetoric. In particular, the audience are presented with a spirited opposition between the king's mistress Agnès Sorel and the poet and royal secretary Alain Chartier over the veracity of Joan of Arc's claims to divine inspiration. When Chartier dismisses Joan's visions as madness and calls for a more rational approach, Sorel berates him in one of the most impassioned speeches of the play, identifying true patriotism with faithfulness to God and to the king. It is not difficult to read into this opposition the conflict between rationalist Third Republic politicians and some of their Catholic (and potentially royalist) detractors: why must Joan be treated as mad, challenges Sorel, simply because she calls for the salvation of the king and the *patrie*, and because she speaks in God's name? Are not the 'eternal reasoners' like Chartier the real fools?²⁷⁶ Moreover, Joan's popular origin ('the soul of the people is my soul'),²⁷⁷ together with her assurance to the king of wider support, and emphasis on the need for a resolute leader to guide the nation, might also be seen as a veiled encouragement of a royalist coup. Even Chartier rhapsodizes about the 'collective soul', and suggests that 'if a leader would but appear and seize the standard, then France would be saved.'278

Yet if there is potential to read royalist conviction into Au Temps de Charles VII, the evidence remains inconclusive. Patriotism takes primacy over politics—just as in his Richelieu, performed the following year, in which the eponymous hero ascribes his ardent ambition to an equally fervent desire to serve the patrie.²⁷⁹ Ambiguity similarly characterizes Corneille's revolutionary drama of 1902, Blancs et Bleus, despite the controversial subject. Here, the scene is set in 1794 in the grounds of the Château des Olivettes, near Saint-Florent, and the drama is a tragedy on the model of Romeo and Juliet, with forbidden love between warring

sides leading to death but ultimately reconciliation across both social and political boundaries. (Similarly bitter family feuds had been explored in Pottecher's C'est le vent! the previous year.) In Corneille's play, Blanche, daughter of the local Marquis, is secretly pledged to the republican commoner Pierre, but expected by her family to marry the upstanding young counter-revolutionary Jacques de Chantecorps. Jacques is devastated by Blanche's rejection of his advances and joins the Vendéen uprising, while Pierre, arriving to visit Blanche, is presumed to be a republican spy. M. Gobin (Fig. 4), the father of Blanche's maid Suzanne, knows the real reason for Pierre's visit but conceals it to protect Blanche's reputation. Politics thus takes precedence over romance, and in the ensuing débâcle Jacques is wounded and Pierre subsequently condemned to death: Blanche rushes towards his executioners to die with him. The Prince de Talmont concludes with a speech on national reconciliation that imagines a patrie beyond division, where 'Whites and blues, forever united, will have, I dare to hope, the right to love and to admit it.²⁸⁰

Although the counter-revolutionary wars certainly heighten the dramatic tension in this romantic tragedy, the treatment of the warring sides is remarkably even-handed. One could argue that reluctance to condemn the Vendéen opposition might indicate approval, yet this would fit oddly with the favourable presentation of Pierre, who espouses the idea of a meritocratic society and opposes the esprit de caste that both grants Jacques military promotion and also leads to the Marquis's rejection of Pierre himself as a suitor for Blanche. Moreover, Pierre describes his motivation in a way that privileges patriotism over political allegiance: he cannot face the state of 'guilty inaction' when his country is in danger; and even Blanche concedes that a soldier may fight nobly in the republican army without necessarily 'being in solidarity with the monsters currently in power.²⁸¹ There are no villains in the play, and ideological opposition, other than between the Marquis and Pierre himself, is given little space. The emphasis is rather on the areas of common ground between the fratricidal opponents: while Pierre's motivation for combat is patriotic, so too is that of the counter-revolutionary peasants. Jacques, too, explains that the Vendéens are opposed to serving in the republican army not for political reasons but because of attachment to the petite patrie: 'their homes and their fields'.282

Even Les Adversaires (1909), the most contemporary and political of Corneille's plays, contrives to depict bitter antagonism between workers and employers without the passion of some of his right- and left-wing



Fig. 4 Monsieur Gobin in *Blancs et Bleues*, 1902. (Postcard, author's collection)

contemporaries. Social antagonism is certainly a guiding theme, but the play also encompasses romantic intrigues, a tale of devotion to the *petite patrie*, and—significantly—an impassioned opposition between candidates

in legislative elections. ('At election time', insists Paul, a young peasant standing for deputy, 'there are no longer masters, farmers, workers, and bosses: there are only candidates and voters.')²⁸³ Although the generosity of a wealthy American allows the workers of the play to buy shares in the factory and run it cooperatively, the failure of their enterprise leads some to join the 'anarchists' of the CGT, and others to return to the old order, while the play itself concludes on a note of reconciliation.

Plays performed in the theatre re-established after the First World War would, moreover, continue to pursue similar themes. As in the case of the Théâtre du Peuple at Bussang, performances in La Mothe were necessarily suspended for the duration of the war, and although the site of the open-air theatre had not witnessed military occupation, it had become densely overgrown during its time of abandon. Eugène Giraudias was by the 1920s dispirited by the loss of his position of mayor, and it was mainly the enthusiasm of a young lawyer, Georges Balde (whom Pierre Corneille had met during trips to the theatre in Poitiers) that inspired the reopening of the theatre in 1921.²⁸⁴ As at Bussang, productions of the 1920s and 1930s were either revivals of prewar plays, or newly composed plays on comparable subjects. Le Précurseur, the first postwar production in 1921, was a drama co-authored with Henri Martin in which a group of poitevins decided after the War to found an agricultural cooperative: there were clear parallels here with Les Adversaires. Aïscha (1922), an operetta for which Corneille provided the libretto, was set in Poitou in the reign of Louis XV; Un Complot sous la Régence (1923) was a tragedy with similarities to Richelieu. There were also postwar revivals of Marie de Magdala and Erinna. Furthermore, despite Corneille's closeness to Action Française, his postwar première won enthusiastic praise from even the socialist Le Populaire, which applauded the dramatic presentation of a cooperative as well as the 'courage, patience, and endurance' of the French peasantry that had contributed to French victory in the First World War. Le Populaire also commented on the breadth of interest in the revived theatre: in the front row of the spectators were Dr Griffault, the new mayor of La Mothe, together with the Prefect of the Deux-Sèvres, the sub-Prefect of Melle, and Colonel Borie, director of the military college at Saint-Maixent.²⁸⁵

4.3 Local and National Politics

In themselves, Corneille's plays epitomize the generic variety also characteristic of Pottecher's Theatre du Peuple, rather than illuminating his controversial political status. Certainly it is possible to read into them a desire for populist leadership, even for the return of the monarchy, as well as a respect for counter-revolutionary heroism, and a suspicion of the supposedly more rational Republic. But this is hardly counter-revolutionary theatre on the model of the contemporary Action Française (which will be discussed in Chap. 7). Stronger than the expression of any clear political preference is a self-conscious emphasis on the opposition between Paris and Poitou, between fleeting urban illusions and solid peasant worth, and between love and patriotic duty. If this was Pierre Corneille's fervent effort to offer something for everyone in his selfstyled role of popular poet, then why did he succeed in provoking such controversy? Why, in particular, did the Ministry of Education, Art, and Religion receive such angry denunciations of Corneille's plays, and of his cultural and political ambitions?

The timing of the controversy is of particular significance. In 1909, Pierre Corneille and Eugène Giraudias submitted a fiery report to the government, seething with self-righteous anger at the recent suppression of government funding, and insisting in bold type on the 'absolutely democratic' character of their popular theatre, which surely deserved the continuing support granted to Bussang and Orange.²⁸⁶ In 1910, the Prefect of the Deux-Sèvres submitted a related dossier, equally insistent that their initiative was not in the public interest and should not be subsidized. The definition of popular theatre had already been given by Michelet, explained the well-read Prefect: such theatre must instruct the people by 'showing them their own legends, their acts, what they have done.' The Théâtre Populaire Poitevin, however, had achieved little for the people of the countryside, 'these people who must be instructed, elevated, improved by spectacles that are both edifying and democratic.'287 Instead, as detailed by other letters in the dossier, this theatre was more of a vanity project for Corneille, Giraudias, and the latter's extended family, while the only winner of a competition to secure new texts for performance had been Henri Martin, who happened to be the caretaker at Giraudias's town hall. Finally, to support the Prefect's claim that Corneille's theatre was more concerned with politics and personal advancement than popular education, he included two poems by Corneille, published in *La Démocratie du Morbihan*, the organ of the Fédération des comités républicains du Morbihan (and run by Corneille himself). The first concluded with the memorable if politically incorrect stanza that Marianne gave him colic and he was fed up with the Republic;²⁸⁸ the second was an angry diatribe against an unnamed political opponent, published on 30 January 1910. Steeped in wounded pride and resentment that Corneille himself had not been chosen as candidate for deputy, the poem revelled in obscure references: the opponent was described as 'the white Pigeon', criticized for 'prostrating himself at Saint Étienne du Mont', and derided for his hypocritical support for Corneille himself. It concluded with a dark threat to wield his doctor's scalpel against the 'Federation'.

Deciphering the references and target of the poem illuminates this particular conflict but also sheds further light on Corneille's wider designs for popular theatre. Corneille's own newspaper, *La Démocratie du Morbihan*, is now too fragile for consultation, yet other local newspapers suggest some of the immediate context of the poem, published a few days after a fraught electoral meeting at La Mothe-Saint-Héray. During the meeting, the Federation of republicans to which Corneille referred had voted on which candidate to support for election as deputy.²⁸⁹ Their chosen candidate was the Parisian writer and journalist Gaston Deschamps (originally from Poitou), who would in the elections be narrowly defeated by Ferdinand Rougier, deputy since 1902.²⁹⁰

Gaston Deschamps was everything that Pierre Corneille had not quite managed to become. He had studied law at the Parisian École Normale, and attended the French School in Athens in 1885. He wrote for prestigious Parisian journals, including *Le Journal des Débats, Le Temps, La Revue des Deux Mondes*, and *Le Figaro*.²⁹¹ He had even published on Franco-American relations in the *North American Review* in 1902, where he made condescending remarks about the cultural preferences of provincials. ('The Moulin Rouge, my dear friends, is a place where one encounters only provincials and foreigners. Parisians do not go there. Many excellent men in Paris do not even know where it is.')²⁹² But he also knew to disdain Paris and praise the provinces when the situation demanded. In *Le Malaise de la Démocratie* (1899), he sought to become the Tocqueville of the Third Republic by urging fellow writers to forget their fixation with the capital in favour of a healthy interest in provincial life.²⁹³ By the time of his candidacy he had thus achieved a national and international reputation that Pierre Corneille would most certainly have coveted. Despite Deschamps's Parisian lifestyle, he had moreover many supporters in the local newspapers of Poitou, who considered him more a man of the people than Ferdinand Rougier. His detractors, mean-while, insisted that half of his supporters were clericals and reactionaries, claimed that he had attended mass regularly when at the École Normale (presumably at the nearby Saint Étienne du Mont) as well as frequenting Protestant temples in search of protestant votes. Moreover, when back in the provinces, he never failed to pay a visit to M. Gilles, 'leader of the most intransigent reactionaries.'²⁹⁴

It seems extremely likely that Deschamps was the unnamed rival of Corneille's angry poem. No doubt, had Corneille been chosen as candidate, his programme would have been as avowedly republican as that of Deschamps, for he had already demonstrated his ability to master republican rhetoric even while his plays hinted at more reactionary personal sympathies.²⁹⁵ And success would surely have rendered 'Marianne' attractive, just as failure made her sickening. But the dominant note of the poem is not ideological but personal. Why should he, Corneille, not be the one chosen to represent the people he felt a poetic mission to evangelize; the people who could have elected him to the Parisian life that he had failed to attain by other means? As he concluded in his infamous poem: 'Go! Be now the deputy of my town! / Yet I far more deserved this high renown.'²⁹⁶

Of course, this moment of controversy must also be placed in a more long-term perspective. By the early 1920s, when Corneille was re-establishing his theatre after its wartime interruption, he was only too willing to include an approving letter from Gaston Deschamps in his appeal to the Ministry for a renewal of state funding. After the War, he also succeeded in securing palmes académiques for two of his collaborators: Eugène Giraudias's son Louis, and caretaker Henri Martin. Yet further letters to the Minister throughout the 1920s suggest that debates over the theatre's popular status and ambitions continued. Corneille took pains to emphasize the artistic quality of his productions (including photographs of the comic opera Aischa, and letters from local literary supporters), and consistently underscored its educational and charitable functions, such as the performances given for war widows, orphans, and veterans. Meanwhile, the Prefect of the Deux-Sèvres maintained that the theatre had no need of the government's financial support, and that it appeared to be succeeding perfectly well in its designs for popular entertainment. Both the texts and performances of the Théâtre Populaire Poitevin but also the evolving local and national ambitions of Pierre Corneille held one thing in common. This—a concern that should not be forgotten in any popular theatre initiative—was the desire to make not only the theatre, but also its creators, popular.

5 CONCLUSIONS

Pierre Corneille's Théâtre Populaire Poitevin was neither democratic nor royalist in a partisan sense. All the same, it was not apolitical. Equally, while Corneille himself may have been idiosyncratic, he was also much more widely representative of regionalist writers whose popular theatre initiatives sparked national interest, discussion, and funding.

As these four case studies have shown, popular theatre in the provinces was a lively forum for the exploration of national and regional identities, whether individual or collective. Throughout the Third Republic, there was a space for dialogue, whether between regionalist intellectuals and the local people and culture they encountered and sought to reimagine, or between the same intellectuals and the Parisian literary and governmental circles whose support they pursued. It was a space for dialogue between rival images of the people: between local people and the nation, between peoples of past and present, and between France and Germany. In the texts of the plays performed at Orange, in Brittany, Poitou, and the Vosges, but also in the troupes who performed them and the spectators who attended, there were encounters between strikingly different elements within these 'peoples': encounters that in turn challenged or reinforced attitudes towards the 'primitive' and the 'civilized', reason and emotion, the literary elite and the working people.

From these complex and multivalent dialogues, two patterns nonetheless emerge. The first is that, contrary to more government-inspired efforts to create popular theatre, regional initiatives had less difficulty in finding writers, texts, troupes, and locations. This is not to suggest that any one of the initiatives discussed here was without its internal problems (and some of these projects were significantly more long-lived than others). Rather, it suggests that the imagination on stage of a Breton people, or a Provençal people, or a people of Poitou or the Vosges, presented less of a challenge than the imagination of the French people in the same context. A Provençal people drawn to reason and logic on account of their classical inheritance; a Breton people inspired by the heroism and sanctity of their Celtic predecessors; a Vosgian people at once phlegmatic and yet open to the magic of their forests and mountains; a Poitevin people seeking reconciliation after their counter-revolutionary rifts: none of these images was uncontroversial, but each was more easily identifiable than that of the French nation. Cumulatively, therefore, these case studies lend new evidence to the contention that the transformation of peasants into Frenchmen was more gradual and more complex than Weber's classic study would suggest. Indeed, the psychological effects of centralization might be slower or even contrary to its practical achievements.

Second, however, these examples also demonstrate that the shaping of regional images and identities was vitally dependent on the dialogue between Paris and the provinces. Some of the most feisty regionalist dramas were penned by writers who had 'discovered' their regional identities while trying (unsuccessfully) to make careers for themselves in the French capital. Parisian literary support, government funding, or the presence of Parisian actors on a regional stage—all these were common characteristics of initiatives that might nonetheless claim to be primarily a locally-inspired entertainment for local people. Indeed, the noisy championing of a Breton or provençal people could often prove a passport to the national renown that had eluded regionalist writers in their hopeful sallies into the Parisian literary scene. In these plays, in their performances, and in the lives of those who were their creators or spectators, the dialogues between state and periphery could be rich in ironies and surprises.

Notes

- 'Lettre à M. Aristide Briand, Ministre de l'Instruction et des Beaux-arts, 1907', BN DAS Rf 81108. Boissy was himself an ardent devotee of provençal regionalism, and had been closely involved in debates over the restoration of the amphitheatre at Orange (See BN DAS 8 Rt 11760).
- 2. Michel Wievorka offers a concise analysis of this 'contemporary crisis of the republican idea' in his preface to Nabli, *La République identitaire*.
- 3. Sudhir Hazareesingh has recently explored contemporary nostalgia for the 'republican model' of the Third Republic: 'France: the eternal crisis?' in Chabal (ed.), *France since the 1970s.*
- 4. Weber, Peasants into Frenchmen.
- 5. Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*, p. 486. On the formative influence of Weber's arguments, see for example Anne Barère aand Danilo Martuccelli, 'La Citoyenneté à l'école: vers la définition d'une

problématique sociologique', Revue Française de Sociologie, 39 (1998), pp. 651-671.

- 6. Alphonse Roche, *Provençal regionalism*: A Study of the Movement in the 'Revue félibréenne', 'Le Feu', and other Reviews of Southern France (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1954), p. 201; Jean-Yves Guiomar, 'Régionalisme, fédéralisme et minorités nationales en France entre 1919 et 1939', *Mouvement Social*, 70 (1970), pp. 89–108.
- 7. Anne-Marie Thiesse, Ils apprenaient la France: l'exaltation des régions dans le discours patriotique (Paris: Éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1997).
- Julian Wright, The Regionalist Movement in France: Jean Charles-Brun and French Political Thought, 1880–1914 (Oxford: Clarendon, 2003).
- 9. Jallat and Stumpp, 'French Sailing in the Nineteenth Century', p. 553.
- Elien Declercq and Saartje Vanden Borre, 'The Cultural Integration of Belgian Migrants in Northern France (1870–1914): A Study of Popular Songs', French History, 27 (2013), pp. 91–108; Kiva Silver, 'The Peasants of Paris: Limousin Migrant Masons in the Nineteenth Century', French History, 28 (2014), pp. 498–529, and Jean-François Chanet, L'École républicaine et les petites patries (Paris: Aubier, 1996).
- 11. Silver, 'The Peasants of Paris', p. 498.
- 12. Harris, Lourdes, for example, pp. 30 and 358.
- 13. Anne-Marie Thiesse, La Création des Identités Nationales. Europe, XVIII-XXième siècle (Paris: Seuil, 1999), p. 23.
- 14. David Hopkin, Voices of the People in Nineteenth-Century France (Cambridge: CUP, 2012), p. 42.
- 15. See, for example, Roche, Provençal Regionalism, p. 211.
- 16. Denizot (ed.), Théâtre populaire, Introduction, p. 9.
- 17. See, for example, Lee, *The Quest for a Public*, pp. 9–14, or Ory, *Théâtre citoyen*, p. 21.
- 18. Gwennolé Le Menn, for example, mentions Le Bayon briefly on p. 74 of her *Histoire du Théâtre Populaire breton*, XVe-XIXe siècle (Skol: Insitut Culturel de la Bretagne, 1983). Melly Puaux et al. briefly acknowledge Le Braz in their Aventure du Théâtre populaire, p. 191.
- 19. See Weber, 'Gauls versus Franks: Conflict and Nationalism' in Robert Tombs (ed.), *Nationhood and Nationalism in France, from Boulangism* to the Great War (London: Harper Collins, 1991), pp. 8–21.
- 103 by 150 metres long, the theatre originally stood 36 metres high and 77 metres deep. In 1981 it was classified by Unesco as a world heritage site. Renaissance Arts, *Le Théâtre Antique d'Orange* (Orange, 2003).
- 21. Antony Réal (fils) (Fernand Michel), Le Théâtre antique d'Orange et ses représentations modernes (Paris: Lemerre, 1894), p. 16.
- 22. The architect Auguste Caristie warned the government in a report of 1825 that both the theatre and the nearby triumphal arch were in

danger of collapse. Notices sur l'état actuel de l'arc d'Orange et d'Arles, sur les découvertes faites dans ces deux derniers édifices et sur les mesures à prendre et les moyens à employer pour préserver ces précieux restes de constructions romaines (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1839).

- 23. The description was used, for example, by Pierre Deluns-Montaud, Minister of Public Works. Réal, *Le Théâtre antique*, p. 56.
- Louis Gallet, Les Fêtes d'Apollon, prologue en un acte et en vers pour le théâtre antique d'Orange (Paris: Alphonse Lemerre, 1897), p. 19. On its reception, see Félix Digonnet, 'Les Fêtes d'Apollon' (1897) BN DAS R13902.
- 25. Caristie, Notice, p. 17.
- 26. Louis Gallet was directly inspired by the work of the archaeologist Théodore Reinach, who had discovered and deciphered a Hymn to Apollo at the French School in Athens in 1893 and invited the composer Gabriel Fauré to provide a score. See Combarieu, Histoire de la Musique, des origines à la mort de Beethoven (Paris: Armand Colin, 1913–1919), Vol. 1, Des Origines à la fin du XVIe siècle (1913), p. 139.
- The Félibrige was a movement of Provençal regionalists. Gallet's Cicada even refers explicitly to 'my sons the cigaliers, and my sons the Félibres'. (p. 7).
- 28. Gallet, Les Fêtes d'Apollon, p. 13.
- 29. Lucien Besnard, 'Deux Essais de théâtre populaire', Revue d'Art Dramatique, 2 (1897), p. 795.
- 30. There is a brief mention of this restoration in Agis Rigord, Le Théâtre antique d'Orange: ses chorégies de 1869 à 1959 (Avignon: Rhône-Durance, 1960), p. 17, Renaissance Arts, Le Théâtre Antique d'Orange, p. 28, and Martin Garrett, Provence: A Cultural History (Oxford: OUP, 2006), p. 35. See also Wardhaugh, 'Parisian stars under a Provençal sky: the Théâtre d'Orange and the making of Mediterranean culture', Nottingham French Studies, 50 (2011), pp. 7–18.
- 31. Caristie, Notice, p. 14.
- 32. Jules Formigé, *Théâtre d'Orange, notes sur la scène* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1933).
- 33. On Michel, see *Recueil factice d'extraits de presse concernant les spectacles donnés au Théâtre Antique d'Orange* (BN DAS).
- 34. Réal, Le Théâtre antique, p. 40.
- 35. Fernand Hauser, 'Bayreuth Français', Le Figaro, 8 August 1899.
- **36**. The financial challenges of organizing such performances were considerable; including the payment of performance rights to the Société des Auteurs dramatiques (required even when the work performed was a modern translation of a classical text).
- 37. Réal, Le Théâtre antique, p. 47.

- 38. Alexis Mouzin, *L'Empéreur d'Arles, drame en trois actes, en vers* (Paris: Alphonse Lemerre, 1890), p. 52. This extract is from a speech by the Emperor Constantine.
- 39. There were four sections or *maintenances* representing four principal dialects—Provençal, Languedoc, Aquitaine, and Limousin—and then subdivided into numerous schools or *écoles*.
- 40. Sextius Michel, La Petite patrie: notes et documents pour servir à l'histoire du mouvement Félibréen à Paris (Paris: Flammarion/Avignon: Roumanille, 1894), ix.
- 41. The musical prelude to *Œdipe-Roi* also included a setting of 'L'Hymne à Minerve' from Mouzin's *Empéreur d'Arles*. See Affiche: fêtes poétiques et musicales du Midi de la France, organisées par la Cigale avec le concours des sociétés méridionales de Paris, des Municipalités et des Comités locaux (1888), BN DAS R138902.
- 42. Fêtes romaines (programme, 1888) BN DAS R138902.
- 43. Mariéton gives a complete list of performances in Le Théâtre d'Orange.
- 44. The festival on which Scize was reporting also included *Les Erynnies*, as well as Georges Rivollet's *Les Phéniciennes* and Alphonse Daudet's *L'Arlésienne*. Scize, 'Fêtes d'art à Orange', *Les Œuvres Libres*, 37 (1924), pp. 225–262.
- 45. Discours de M. d'Estournelle de Constant aux Fêtes d'Orange, les 9 et 10 août 1902 (Paris: L. Duc et cie, 1902) (BN DAS R138902).
- 46. Mariéton, Le Théâtre antique d'Orange et ses chorégies. Suivi d'une chronologie complète des spectacles depuis l'origine (Paris: Éditions de la Province, 1908), pp. 8–9. Mariéton was a native of Lyon who abandoned his law studies to learn the langue d'oc. He also edited La Revue Félibréenne (1885–1909).
- 47. Jean Aicard, 'La Légende du coeur et Sarah Bernhardt à Orange', La France Nouvelle, 9 June 1923. (BN DAS R138902)
- 48. Ré-mi, 'Orange-Bayreuth', *Journal des fêtes romaines d'Orange*, July 1888 (BN DAS R138902).
- 49. Le Journal Officiel, 16 February 1895. See also the records of continuing government support for Orange in AN F21 4689.
- 50. Mariéton, À Travers la Provence classique: Saint-Rémy, les Baux, Arles grecque et chrétienne (Paris: H. Gautier, n.d), p. 4.
- 51. Mariéton, À Travers la Provence, p. 89.
- 52. Not only did Marseille receive substantial quantities of silk from the Greek archipelagos, but the Edicat of Colbert in 1669 even invited foreigners in Marseille to become naturalized French subjects. See Junko Thérèse Takeda, 'French Mercantilism and the Early Modern Mediterranean: A Case Study of Marseille's Silk Industry', *French History*, 29 (2015), pp. 12, 14.

- 53. Mariéton, À Travers la Provence, p. 95.
- 54. G. Davenay, 'Chez le chorège du Théâtre Antique d'Orange' (1899), BN DAS R138902).
- 55. De Sormioc, Ode à la Provence (BN DAS R138902).
- 56. Gabriel Boissy, 'Le Rôle esthétique d'Orange' (BN DAS R138902).
- 57. Gallet, Les Fêtes d'Apollon, p. 15.
- Edgar de Vernejoul, 'Echos et Horizons de Provence' (1925) (BN DAS R138902).
- 59. Élie Fourès, 'Les Fêtes cigalières', *Journal des Fêtes romaines d'Orange*, July 1888 (BN DAS R138902).
- 60. Quoted in Gabriel Boissy, Le Secret de Mistral: essai sur les bases celtiques et méditerranéennes d'une esthétique française (Paris: Éditions du Siècle, 1932), p. 12.
- 61. Charles Simond, introduction to Mariéton, À Travers, p. 1.
- 62. In Arles, the municipal council used the theatre for Arlesian balls and spectacles, including touring productions by the Théâtre Français and the Comédie Française such as Racine's *Phèdre* and Molière's *Tartuffe*. 'Préfecture Bouches-du-Rhône à M. le Ministre de l'Instruction Publique et des Beaux-Arts, 14 novembre 1924', AN F21 4689.
- 63. See Alphonse Roche, 'Le Plein air et le Théâtre d'Athéna-Niké', *The French Review*, 52 (1979), pp. 410–417.
- 64. Le Journal Officiel, 16 February 1895. Faure was a long-term supporter of the amphitheatre of Orange, and also favoured the teaching of local history and geography in schools. See Stéphane Gerson, *The Pride of Place: Local Memories and Political Culture in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), p. 167.
- 65. Émile Souvestre also referred to performances of Les Quatre Fils Aymon at Lannion in 1825 in an influential article in the Revue des Deux Mondes in 1835, an extract from his popular book on Les Derniers Bretons, though his account was not uncontested. See Narcisse Quellien, Chansons et danses des bretons (Paris: Maisonneuve et Leclerc, 1889), p. 54.
- 66. On the bitter repercussions of the Vendée, see Alan Forrest, *The Legacy* of the French Revolutionary Wars: The Nation-in-Arms in French Republican Memory (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), p. 69. David Bensoussan discusses Breton opposition to the secularizing laws of the Third Republic in 'Le Réveil des catholiques bretons, 1924–26', Vingtième Siècle, 57 (1998), pp. 57–75.
- 67. Piriou, Au-delà de la Légende, p. 108; Déniel, Le Mouvement breton, 1919–45 (Paris: Maspero, 1976), p. 51. Originally from Nantes and not a Breton speaker, the royalist and regionalist deputy L'Estourbeillon

encouraged the use of the Breton language and pointed to the correlation between *bretonnitude* and Catholic practice. He liked to appear in the Chamber of Deputies in traditional Breton costume.

- 68. On the character of these groups, see Sharif Gemie, *Brittany*, 1750–1950: The Invisible Nation (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007).
- 69. It included representatives from 124 Breton groups.
- 'Statuts, Comité de défense des intérêts bretons', 'Lettre du Préfet d'Ille et Vilaine à M. le Ministre de l'Intérieur, le 14 décembre 1921', AN F7 13244.
- Bensoussan describes the region unequivocally as 'land of Catholic and counter-revolutionary tradition'. 'Le Réveil des catholiques bretons', p. 57.
- 72. Jean Balcou Yves Le Gallo (eds), *Histoire littéraire et culturelle de la Bretagne* (Paris: Champion/Spezed: Coop Breiz, 1997).
- 73. Guiomar, 'Régionalisme, fédéralisme et minorités nationales'.
- 74. Caroline Ford, Creating the Nation in Provincial France: Religion and Political Identity in Brittany (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), especially p. 6.
- 75. Gemie, Brittany, p. 238.
- 76. See for example Maurice-Edgar Coindreau, 'Les Tentatives de théâtre populaire en France de 1900 à 1925', *The French Review*, 6 (1933), p. 188; Anne I. Miller, *The Independent Theatre in Europe, 1887 to the Present* (New York: Long and Smith, 1931) pp. 95–96; *Le Journal Officiel*, 6 March 1902, p. 1135.
- 77. See Jean-André Le Gall, 'Charles Le Goffic'; idem, 'Anatole Le Braz' in Balcou and Le Gallo, *Histoire littéraire et culturelle*, pp. 95–101, 103–108.
- 78. Déniel mentions Le Braz, although neither Le Goffic nor Le Bayon feature in his *Mouvement breton*. Thiesse refers briefly to Le Braz and Luzel in 'L'Invention du régionalisme'. Gemie likewise writes only briefly of La Villemarqué and Le Goffic.
- 79. Le Menn, Histoire du théâtre populaire breton, p. 74.
- 80. La Villemarqué, Le Grand Mystère de Jésus, passion et resurrection: drame breton du moyen âge, avec une étude sur le théâtre chez les nations celtiques (Paris: Didier et Cie, 1865).
- 81. La Villemarqué, Le Grand Mystère de Jésus, xlviii.
- 82. La Villemarqué, Le Grand Mystère de Jésus, xxxvi.
- 83. La Villemarqué, Le Grand Mystère de Jésus, lxxxiii.
- 84. La Villemarqué, Le Grand Mystère de Jésus, cxxxiv.
- 85. In Paris, Ernest Renan organized *Diners celtiques* in Paris from 1878 onwards. His 1882 lecture at the Sorbonne, *Qu'est qu'une nation?*, is a frequent point of departure for studies of nationalism, not least Benedict

Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism (London: Verso, 1983). (See, for example, p. 6.)

- Anatole Le Braz, Le Théâtre celtique [1905] (Paris/Geneva: Slatkine, 1981), p. 27.
- Le Braz, Le Théâtre celtique, p. 178. For a critical analysis of the methods of gathering and interpreting such popular evidence, see Hopkin, Voices of the People, pp. 31–41.
- The meeting was richly influential, as their correspondence testifies. René Galand (ed.), 'Trois lettres inédites de Renan', *Publications of the Modern Languages Association of America*, 73 (1958), pp. 545–548.
- 89. Renan to Luzel, Paris, 28 March 1858. Galand, 'Trois lettres inédites de Renan', p. 545.
- 90. Galand, 'Trois Lettres', p. 548.
- 91. On Le Braz's life and character, see Le Gall, 'Anatole Le Braz' in Balcou and Le Gallo, *Histoire littéraire et culturelle*, pp. 103–108; Piriou, *Le Braz*, and Dominique Besançon's preface to the recent edition of Le Braz, *Au Pays des Pardons* [1898] (Rennes: Éditions Terre de Brume, 1998).
- 92. Piriou, Le Braz, p. 44.
- 93. Letter to Yves Le Diberdier, 18 January 1911, reprinted in Piriou, Le Braz, p. 71.
- 94. Speech at Quimperlé, 3 March 1888, reproduced in Piriou, *Le Braz*, p. 58.
- 95. Letter to Édouard Beaufils, secretary of the review L'Hermine, 9 February 1891. Piriou, Le Braz, p. 83.
- 96. Le Braz, Au Pays des Pardons, p. 27.
- 97. Le Braz, La Terre du passé (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1901), p. 329.
- Le Braz is particularly critical of La Villemarqué's unscientific approach on pp. 90, 113.
- 99. Le Braz, *Le Théâtre celtique*, p. 340. He seems here to have borrowed from Renan's letter to Luzel, which was in his possession.
- 100. Le Braz, Le Théâtre celtique, p. 492.
- Le Braz, La Résurrection du théâtre populaire en Bretagne', La Grande Revue, 11, (1898), p. 145.
- 102. Le Braz, 'La Résurrection', p. 146. Cf. Charles Le Goffic, 'Le Théâtre breton', *La Revue d'Art Dramatique*, 5 (October 1898), p. 106.
- 103. Le Goffic mentions that it was performed for members of an international Celtic congress meeting in Saint-Brieuc in 1867. Le Goffic, 'Le Théâtre breton', p. 106.
- 104. Jules Préval, 'Courrier des Théâtres', Le Figaro, 1 April 1888; Le Monde Illustré, 21 April 1888.
- 105. Quoted by Le Braz in 'La Résurrection du théâtre populaire', p. 148.

- 106. P. L. de Pierrefitte, 'Les Mystères', La Revue d'Art Dramatique, 23 (1891), p. 11.
- Charles Le Goffic, 'Lettre à M. le Directeur', *Le Monde Illustré*, 28 April 1888.
- 108. Le Goffic had first encountered Renan at the famous Dîners celtiques. For biographical information on Le Goffic, see Le Gall, 'Charles Le Goffic', in Balcou and Le Gallo, *Histoire littéraire et culturelle*, pp. 95–101. Le Gall does not, however, mention Le Goffic's involvement in popular theatre.
- 109. Le Goffic has himself been described as 'an uprooted Breton from Paris'. Le Gall, 'Le Goffic', p. 100.
- 110. Le Goffic, 'Le Théâtre breton'.
- 111. Le Braz, 'La Résurrection du théâtre populaire', p. 156.
- 112. Le Goffic, 'Le Théâtre breton', p. 106.
- 113. This address is also discussed by Rancière in Staging the People.
- 114. Noël Nozeroy, 'Les Mystères de Saint-Guénolé', Le Monde Illustré, 20 August 1898.
- 115. Le Goffic, 'Le Théâtre breton', p. 108.
- 116. Le Braz, 'La Résurrection du théâtre populaire', pp. 165-166.
- 117. Le Goffic, 'Le Théâtre breton', p. 110. Le Braz similarly described Paris's proposals for the development of popular art as a 'noble dream' ('La Résurrection du théâtre populaire', p. 166).
- 118. 'Le Théâtre en plein air', BN DAS Rf 81325, p. 1088.
- 119. See Marius Sepet, Les Origines catholiques du théâtre moderne: les drames liturgiques et les jeux scolaires, les mystères, les origines de la comédie au Moyen âge, la Renaissance (Paris: O. Lethielleux, 1901), pp. 568–571. Several thousand attended the performances in Guingamp on successive Sundays (The Marquis de L'Estourbeillon and Anatole Le Braz among them).
- 120. See L'Estourbeillon's speech, reprinted in *Le Journal Officiel* on 6 March 1902, p. 1135. See also Sepet, *Les Origines catholiques*, pp. 561–562.
- 121. Le Bayon was also known by his Breton name Job er Glean. His initiative is briefly mentioned in Henry Philips, Le Théâtre catholique en France au XXe siècle (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2007), p. 406. Le Braz refers to contemporary pilgrimages to Sainte Anne d'Auray in his Terre du passé, p. 10.
- 122. Le Braz, *Le Théâtre celtique*, p. 514. Le Braz commented approvingly that Le Bayon wrote in the dialect of the Vannes region.
- 123. Job er Glean (Le Bayon), *Amzer er Heneu (Le Temps des noisettes)* (Concours de l'Union Régionaliste Bretonne) (Saint-Brieuc: Imprimerie Francisque Guyon, 1901).
- 124. See Miller, The Independent Theatre in Europe, pp. 94-95.

- 125. On Le Bayon's commitment to popular theatre, see his article on 'Le Théâtre populaire de Sainte-Anne d'Auray', La Revue Celtique, 35 (1914), pp. 515–527, (prefaced by Loth). Le Bayon's theatre, although apparently well known in the earlier twentieth century, is now scarcely mentioned. Le Menn, for example, refers to Le Bayon only once (Le Théâtre populaire, p. 74).
- 126. 'Au Théâtre breton', L'Ouest-Éclair, 30 August 1912.
- 127. 'G. C.' [possibly Gustave Cohen], 'Un Oberammergau breton', *Le Temps*, 10 September 1911.
- 128. Letter of Mgr Gourand to Le Bayon, reproduced in Le Bayon, Nikolazig, mystère breton en 5 actes et en vers (Rennes: Imprimerie Francis Simon, 1909), viii.
- 129. Le Bayon, Nikolazig, mystère breton, p. 176.
- 130. Gustave Cohen, 'La Renaissance du théâtre breton', *Le Mercure de France*, 1 January 1912, p. 61. Cf. 'La Renaissance de la tragédie', *Le Correspondant*, 91 (1919), especially p. 1000.
- 131. Miller, The Independent Theatre, p. 96.
- 132. G. C., 'Un Oberammergau breton'.
- 133. Such plays even formed the subject of a Celtic lecture at the Université de Rennes in 1921. 'Lettre du Doyen de la Faculté de Lettres à M. le Préfet d'Ille et Vilaine,' *Conseil général, Ille et Vilaine* (Rennes: Imprimerie Rennaise, 1921), pp. 668–669.
- 134. Le Bayon, Kado, Roué er Mor (Vannes: Imprimerie Émile Mahéo, 1924) and Sant Izidor, Labourér (Vannes: Imprimerie Emile Mahéo, 1925).
- 135. La Villemarqué, La Légende celtique.
- 136. Le Bayon, Sant Izidor: Labourér (Vannes: Imprimerie Emile Mahéo, 1925), p. 3.
- 137. Le Bayon, Sant Izidor, p. 33.
- 138. Maurice Pottecher, Le Théâtre du Peuple de Bussang (Vosges): son origine, son développement, et son but exposés par son fondateur (Paris: Stock, 1913), v. Pierre Chan is condescending towards the 'transitory wave of imitations' for which Bussang was the original inspiration. See Pierre Chan, Anne Hauttecoeur, Pierre Pelot, and Pierre Voltz, Les Vosges au pays de Maurice Pottecher: un siècle de passions au Théâtre du Peuple, 1895–1995 (Paris: Casterman, 1995), p. 18.
- 139. See *Paris-Soir*, 1 September 1924; David Bradby and John McCormick, *People's Theatre* (London: Croom Helm, 1978), p. 32.
- 140. http://www.theatredupeuple.com/le-theatre-du-peuple. Accessed 2 February 2017. The current organizers particularly emphasize the collaboration of amateurs and professionals.
- 141. See, for example, Copferman, Le Théâtre populaire, p. 20; Lee, The Quest for a Public, p. 9; Jomaron, Le Théâtre en France, p. 306.

- 142. Ory, Théâtre citoyen, pp. 19 and 21.
- 143. Loyer, 'Le Théâtre national populaire', p. 92.
- 144. François Rancillac, preface to Marion Denizot and Bénédicte Boisson, Le Théâtre du Peuple: cent vingt ans d'histoire (Arles: Actes Sud, 2012), i.
- 145. Denizot and Boisson, Le Théâtre du Peuple, p. 11.
- 146. Jules Case, 'École en plein air', BN DAS R106872.
- 147. See the mockery of Pottecher's 'intensely moral concerns, which would bring a smile to a Parisian audience' in Jean Ajalbert, 'Le Théâtre populaire: la résurrection du théâtre en plein air: à Bussang, curieuse tentative' (n.d.), BN DAS R106872.
- 148. Charnow, Theatre, Politics, and Markets, p. 184. Cf. Wright, The Regionalist Movement in France.
- 149. Rancière, *The Intellectual and his People.* Vol. 2, pp. 20–27. Rancière briefly outlines the plots of some of the pre-war plays but references only the text of *Morteville*, and does not explore Pottecher's Parisian connections.
- 150. Noël Sabord, 'Maurice Pottecher et le Théâtre du Peuple de Bussang', Les Nouvelles littéraires, 22 July 1925.
- 151. André Warnod, 'Comœdia à Bussang: avant la première de *Judas*', *Comœdia*, 17 August 1911. Maurice's brother was also a local factory owner.
- 152. For useful biographical details, see Chan, 'Portrait de Maurice Pottecher' in Chan et al., *Les Vosges*, pp. 11–28.
- Subventions aux théâtres en plein air: le Théâtre de Bussang', AN F21 4689.
- 154. Pottecher, 'Lettre à M. Ferdinand Brunetière'.
- 155. Pottecher, 'Le Théâtre du Peuple de Bussang', p. 187. He frequently returned to the distinction between people and populace, e.g. in 'Le Théâtre populaire', *La Revue de Paris*, 1 July 1897, and 'Théâtre de l'Élite ou Théâtre du Peuple', *La Grande Revue*, July 1921 (BN DAS Rf 81225).
- 156. Richard Auvray, who also wrote under the pseudonym Alfred Bourgeois, was a writer and archivist. He died in 1898.
- 157. On La Páque socialiste, see Chap. 4. Auvray criticized the play as being 'dedicated to a single class'. Richard Auvray, 'Le Théâtre du Peuple', *Revue Hebdomadaire*, 28 (1896), p. 505.
- 158. Auvray, 'Le Théâtre du Peuple', p. 504.
- 159. Pottecher, *Renaissance et destinée*, p. 175. Rancière describes Pottecher's use of 'race' as 'closer to its origins in Taine than to its future apocalypse' in *Staging the People*, Vol. 2, p. 23.
- 160. Pottecher, Le Théâtre du Peuple de Bussang (Vosges), p. 17.

- 161. Pottecher, Le Théâtre du Peuple. Renaissance et destinée du théâtre populaire (Paris: Paul Ollendorff, 1899), p. 175.
- 162. Autour du Théâtre du Peuple de Bussang (n.p., n.d.).
- 163. Pottecher, Le Théâtre du Peuple de Bussang (Vosges), p. 15.
- 164. Pottecher, Le Diable marchand de goutte: pièce populaire en trois actes (Nancy: Voirin et Kreis, 1895), Introduction, iii-iv.
- 165. Both Pottecher and Auvray avoided using the word 'race' in this context. Auvray (as Alfred Bourgeois), 'Le Théâtre du Peuple de Bussang', La Revue Encyclopédique, 12 September 1896; Pottecher, Le Théâtre du Peuple: Lettre à M. Ferdinand Brunetière (Paris: Paul Ollendorff, 1896), p. 22.
- 166. Pottecher, *Lettre à Brunetière*, p. 21; idem, 'Théâtre du peuple et théâtre populaire, une expérience d'art dramatique', *La Revue Hebdomadaire*, 9 (1913), pp. 210–211.
- 167. Pottecher, Le Théâtre du Peuple de Bussang (Vosges).
- 168. Pottecher, Le Théâtre du Peuple. Renaissance et destinée, p. 22.
- 169. This point is explicitly made in a letter from Maurice Pottecher to Jean Ajalbert, 1896 (BN DAS R106872).
- 170. Pottecher, 'Le Drame populaire', *Revue d'Art Dramatique*, 2 (1897), p. 36.
- 171. Pottecher, Le Théâtre du Peuple. Renaissance et destinée, p. 177.
- 172. Pottecher, 'Théâtre du peuple et théâtre populaire', p. 219.
- 173. Auvray, 'Le Théâtre du Peuple', p. 509.
- 174. Bussang, Vosges: station des anémiés (n.d.), BN DAS R106872.
- 175. Pottecher, 'Le Théâtre du Peuple', La Revue des Deux Mondes, 16 (1903), p. 187.
- 176. Letter from Pottecher to Ajalbert.
- 177. Pottecher, 'Le Théâtre du peuple', p. 185.
- 178. Auvray, 'Le Théâtre du peuple'; see also 'Le Théâtre au village' (1902), BN DAS R106872.
- 179. 'L'Amour du théâtre', Le Figaro (1902) BN DAS R106872.
- 180. 'This fact is, I think, unique in the history of theatre.' J.E. Aubert, 'Une Visite au Théâtre de Bussang', BN DAS R106872.
- 181. Le Théâtre du Peuple: organisation, fonctionnement (1896), R 106872.
- 182. Alfred Bourgeois [Richard Auvray] 'Le Théâtre du Peuple de Bussang', *Revue Encyclopédique*, 12 Sept 1896, BN DAS R106872.
- 183. Psychotherapist Elizabeth Howes on conversations with Jung, quoted in Claire Dunne, *Carl Jung: Wounded Healer of the Soul* (London: Watkins, 2015), p. 107. Sherry Salman explores Jung's conviction that 'it is of paramount importance to bring this [shadow] and other "opposites" into conscious awareness' in 'The Creative Psyche: Jung's Major

Contributions', in Polly Young-Eisendrath and Terence Dawson (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Jung* (Cambridge: CUP, 2008), p. 67.

- 184. See, for example, Pottecher, *Morteville* (Paris: Louis Geisler, 1897), prologue, 3.
- 185. Répertoire du Théâtre du Peuple (n.d.), R106872.
- 186. Pottecher, Le Théâtre du Peuple de Bussang (Vosges), p. 21.
- 187. Pottecher, Le Diable marchand de goutte, p. 3. The tale was based on Tolstoy's The Imp and the Crust, dramatized as The First Distiller (1886).
- 188. Richard Auvray offers this description in 'Le Théâtre du Peuple de Bussang'.
- 189. Pottecher, Le Diable marchand, p. 80.
- 190. Pottecher, Le Diable marchand, p. 80.
- 191. Pottecher, Morteville, preface, v.
- 192. Pottecher described this in conversation with André Warnod: '*Comædia* à Bussang: Théâtre du Peuple', *Comædia*, 25 August 1910.
- 193. Pottecher, Morteville, p. 44.
- 194. Pottecher, Morteville, p. 41.
- 195. Pottecher, Morteville, p. 112.
- 196. Pottecher, Morteville, p. 155.
- 197. Again, a name rich in hagiographic association suggests Thérèse's role as advocate and as accessory to redemptive sacrifice.
- 198. Pottecher, Morteville, prologue, p. 3.
- 199. Auvray, 'Le Théâtre du Peuplre', p. 520.
- 200. Pottecher, Morteville, preface, vi.
- 201. A sotré is a puck-like fairy.
- Pottecher, 'L'Anneau de Sakountala au Théâtre du Peuple', Le Journal, 22 July 1922. (Le Sotré de Noël was revived in 1922).
- 203. Its popular Vosgian songs were transcribed by Charles Lapicque, a conductor at Épinal, but also by Pottecher's Parisian friend Lucien Michelot.
- 204. André Warnod, 'Le Théâtre de Bussang' (8 August 1909), BN DAS R106872.
- 205. 'C'est le vent' (undated review), BN DAS R106872.
- 206. 'A L'Écu d'argent, de Maurice Pottecher', Pages Libres, 15 August 1903.
- 207. Pottecher, 'Au Théâtre de Bussang: le Château de Hans', L'Est Républicain, 3 August 1924.
- 208. Pottecher, quoted in 'Le Château de Hans' (undated review), BN DAS R106872.
- 209. Warnod, 'Théâtre de Bussang: Le Château de Hans', *Comœdia*, 11 August 1909. Spirits of the mountain, together with 'fairies and the

spirits of the wood, fauns, druids etc.' would also feature in Pottecher's *Le Secret de la Montagne* (Paris: Librairie Théâtrale, n.d.).

- 210. Pottecher, Morteville, preface, iv.
- 211. In Shakespeare's comedies, for example—such as a *Midsummer Night's Dream* and *As you like it*—the forest represents a liminal space in which the mundane and the magical, the people and the elite, can meet and interact. It is a space outside of the normal order of things in which boundaries can be tested and identities confused.
- 212. Pottecher, Liberté, prologue, iv.
- 213. Ferry, 'Le Théâtre du Peuple'.
- 214. In his earlier short story 'Les Délaissés', Pottecher explained how conscription would 'necessarily suspend the life of the whole community' in isolated villages such as this one. *La Revue Hebdomadaire*, (21 October 1893).
- 215. Pottecher, Liberté, p. 100.
- 216. Pottecher, La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc, drame en 5 actes (Paris: Ollendorff, 1904), p. 26.
- 217. Théâtre du Peuple, Bussang (Vosges), 1911: La Clairière aux abeilles; Le Mystère de Judas Iscariote (Programme). See also Henri Lichtenberger, 'Au Théâtre du Peuple de Bussang: Le Mystère de Judas Iscariote'. BN DAS R106872.
- 218. Pottecher, 'L'Anneau de Sakountala au Théâtre du Peuple'.
- 219. Pottecher, 'L'Anneau de Sakountala'.
- 220. Ajalbert, 'Le Théâtre populaire'.
- 221. 'À l'Écu d'argent', BN DAS R106872.
- 222. Besnard, 'Deux essais de théâtre populaire'.
- 223. La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc (programme), BN DAS R106872.
- 224. Warnod, 'Théâtre de Bussang: Le Château de Hans', Comædia, 11 August 1909.
- Warnod, 'Comadia à Bussang: Théâtre du Peuple', Comadia, 25 August 1910.
- 226. George Bourdon, 'La Resurrection du Théâtre du Bussang', (16 July 1921), BN DAS R106872.
- 227. Ajalbert, 'Le Théâtre populaire'. Cf. also Bradby, People's Theatre, p. 32.
- 228. Théâtre du Peuple: Le Diable marchand de goutte (brochure, 1921), BN DAS R106872.
- 229. Pottecher, 'Au Théâtre de Bussang: le Château de Hans'.
- 230. Sabord, 'Maurice Pottecher'.
- 231. Pottecher, Le Théâtre du Peuple de Bussang (Vosges), pp. 17-18.
- 232. Chan et al., *Les Vosges*, p. 94. Henri Beaulieu had formerly performed under Antoine. On his Théâtre du Peuple at the Théâtre Moncey, see Chap. 2.

- 233. Frédéric Pottecher, *Histoire du Théâtre du Peuple* (Belfort: CDAC, 1981), p. 30.
- 234. Warnod, 'Théâtre de Bussang: Le Château de Hans'.
- 235. La Revue Dramatique, 15 January 1928, BN DAS 106872.
- 236. M.K., 'A L'Écu d'argent, de Maurice Pottecher', Les Pages Libres, 15 August 1903.
- 237. Extract from À l'Écu d'argent, reprinted in Les Pages Libres.
- 238. 'Lettre de M. Pottecher à M. le Directeur des Beaux-Arts, 17 juillet 1921', AN F21 4689.
- 239. Case, 'École en plein air'.
- 240. Chan et al., Les Vosges, p. 95.
- 241. Adrien Bernheim, 'Trente ans de Théâtre: Le fondateur du théâtre en plein air', *Le Figaro*, 31 July 1911.
- 242. J.-H. Rosny, 'Théâtre régional', Comædia, 9 August 1922.
- 243. Emmanuel Bourcier, 'Le Théâtre du Peuple de Bussang: La légende d'Amys et Amyle', BN DAS R106872.
- 244. Pottecher, Le Théâtre du Peuple de Bussang (Vosges), iii, and 'Le Théâtre de Bussang' in Le Mercure de France, 30 May 1921.
- 245. Georges Bourdon, 'La Résurrection du Théâtre de Bussang' (16 July 1921), BN DAS R106872.
- Pottecher, 'La Réouverture du Théâtre de Bussang', L'Europe nouvelle, 24 August 1921.
- 247. Sabord, 'Maurice Pottecher'.
- 248. 'Le Théâtre de Bussang', 10 August 1921, BN DAS R106872.
- 249. Pottecher, 'La Réouverture du Théâtre de Bussang'.
- 250. See the list of productions in Denizot (ed.), Le Théâtre du Peuple, pp. 274–280.
- 251. 'Le Théâtre de Bussang', L'Est Républicain, 20 August 1924.
- 252. Bourdon, 'La Résurrection'. A similar concern for continuity would be evident in the reopening of the theatre in 1946 following the Second World War, with a programme including *Liberté* and *Le Lundi de la Pentecôte*.
- 253. For a spirited opposition to Habermas's vision of a declining public sphere, and the suggestion of an emotionally engaged mass public in the late nineteenth century, see Gregory Shaya, 'The Flâneur, the Badaud and the Making of a Mass Public in France, c. 1860–1910', *The American Historical Review*, 109 (2004), pp. 41–77.
- 254. In his letter to the Minister following the First World War, Corneille quoted from an admirer who had described his popular theatre as 'a democratic project *par excellence*'. 'Lettre à M. le Ministre des Beaux-Arts', AN F21 4689.

- 255. See the dossier compiled by the Préfet des Deux Sèvres in F21 4689.
- 256. Hélène Besnard Giraudias, Le Théâtre populaire poitevin: la Mothe Saint-Héray, 1897–1937, créé par le Docteur Pierre Corneille, dernier descendant du grand tragique (Niort: Éditions Imbert–Nicolas, 1993).
- 257. Bibliothèque de Niort, *Le Théâtre Populaire Poitevin, 1897–1937* (Niort: Bibliothèque Municipale de Niort, 1997).
- 258. Corneille's Théâtre Populaire Poitevin is not referred to in Noëlle Gérome's overview of 'Les Loisirs de Poitiers', *Vingtième siècle*, 27 (July 1990), pp. 81–90. There are brief references in, for example, Roche, 'Le Plein air et le théâtre d'Athéna-Niké', p. 412, and Melly Puaux et al., *L'Aventure du théâtre populaire*, p. 191.
- 259. The Théâtre Populaire Poitevin was also discussed in such national publications as *L'Illustration* and *La Revue du Théâtre*.
- 260. 'Théâtre Populaire Poitevin à la Mothe-Saint-Héray (Deux-Sèvres), 1902–1929: Demandes de subvention', AN F21 4689.
- 261. Brief biographical information on Corneille is provided in Gérard Guichard, 'Pour une histoire du Théâtre Populaire Poitevin' in *Le Théâtre Populaire Poitevin*, pp. 11–36, and in Besnard Giraudias's prologue, 'Un certain Pierre Corneille'.
- 262. La Vie bordelaise, 24 December 1899, cited in Besnaud Giraudias, prologue.
- 263. Henri Clouzot, Notes pour servir à l'histoire de l'ancien théâtre en Poitou: la poésie dramatique en Poitou au dix-septième siècle (Niort: L. Clouzot, 1898).
- 264. Clouzot, Notes pour servir à l'histoire, p. 14.
- 265. The event is described by Sauvage, 'La Renaissance du théâtre populaire', as well as by Corneille himself, for example in 'Le Théâtre poitevin', *La Revue d'Art Dramatique*, 5 (1898), pp. 111–117, and 'Le Théâtre en plein air de la Mothe-Saint-Héray', *Le Monde Nouveau* (1901), pp. 512–523. Corneille's short play was followed by poetry readings by other local authors, but these receive scant mention in his accounts.
- 266. Corneille, Bonne Fée (1897), BN DAS Rf 81325.
- 267. Corneille, 'Le Théâtre poitevin'.
- 268. Corneille, 'Le Théâtre poitevin', p. 114.
- 269. Corneille, 'Le Théâtre en plein air', p. 516.
- 270. Le Monde illustré, September 1902 (BN DAS Rf 81325).
- 271. Corneille, 'Le Théâtre en plein air', p. 516.
- 272. Corneille, 'Le Théâtre en plein air', p. 514.
- 273. Corneille, 'Le Théâtre en plein air', p. 514. Corneille also outlined some of his theories on popular theatre in the prologue to his historical play

on Joan of Arc, Au Temps de Charles VII: Comédie héroïque en 3 actes et en vers (Paris: Chamuel, 1900).

- 274. Corneille, Erinna, prêtresse d'Hésus: tragédie en 3 actes et en vers (Paris: Chamuel, 1898).
- 275. Corneille, 'Le Théâtre poitevin', p. 115.
- 276. Corneille, Au Temps de Charles VII, p. 44.
- 277. Corneille, Au Temps de Charles VII, p. 78.
- 278. Corneille, Au Temps de Charles VII, p. 141.
- 279. Corneille, *Richelieu: drame en cinq actes et en vers* (Paris: Chamuel, 1901). This is a less powerful play than *Au Temps de Charles VII*. Richelieu, who could have captivated the audience with the dark charisma of a Shakespearean Richard III, suffers from Corneille's deliberate lightness of touch in characterization.
- 280. Corneille, Blancs et Bleus, épisode des guerres de Vendée, drame en 3 actes et en prose (Paris: Société Parisienne d'Édition, 1903), p. 168.
- 281. Corneille, Blancs et Bleus, p. 24.
- 282. Corneille, Blancs et Bleus, p. 61.
- 283. Corneille, Les Adversaires, drame en cinq actes (Largentière: Imprimerie Mazel et Plancher, 1911), p. 9. The play was first performed at La Mothe-Saint-Héray on 12 September 1909.
- 284. See Besnard Giraudias, Le Théâtre populaire poitevin, Chap. 8.
- 285. 'Le Théâtre en province', Le Populaire, 18 September 1921.
- 286. Pierre Corneille, Eugène Giraudias, 'Rapport sur le fonctionnement du Théâtre Populaire Poitevin de la Mothe-Saint-Héray (1909)' AN F21 4689.
- 'Le Préfet des Deux Sèvres à M. le Sous-secrétaire d'État des Beaux-Arts, 18 novembre 1910', AN F21 4689.
- 288. Corneille, 'Les Imprécations de don Diègue', AN F21 4689.
- 289. La Fraternité, organe coopératif de la démocratie poiterine, 22 January 1910. Eugène Giraudias had declined to offer his own candidacy, and subsequently railed against the use of secret ballot to choose a single candidate.
- 290. Republican Ferdinand Rougier narrowly defeated Deschamps by 10,269 to 9206 in 1910. Fouladou, *Les Deux-Sèvres*, p. 146.
- 291. In 1893, 28 journalists were elected as deputies, and 66 doctors and pharmacists (in 1919 this became 45 and 49 respectively). Mattei Dogan, 'Les Filières de la carrière politique en France', *Revue Française de Sociologie*, 8 (1967), p. 472.
- 292. Gaston Deschamps, The North American Review, 174 (1902), p. 754.
- 293. See Deschamps's article on the 'salubrious nature of the French provinces' in idem, *Le Malaise de la Démocratie* (Paris: A. Colin, 1899), p. 347.

- 294. La Fraternité, 26 March 1910.
- 295. As Wileman observes, it was common for a local notable to stand for election as an independent candidate under the general heading of 'republican'. See Wileman, 'Not the Radical Republic: Liberal Ideology and Central Blandishment in France, 1901–1914', *The Historical Journal*, 37 (1994), pp. 593–614.
- 294. Corneille, 'Les Imprécations de don Diègue'.

Beyond the Peuple Fidèle: Catholic Theatre and the Masses

For the jubilee celebrations at Puy-en-Vélay in 1932, the young scout actors of Léon Chancerel created a new drama: *La Compassion de Notre-Dame*. Performed outside the Cathedral, the mystery play paid homage to the medieval practice of following the Passion of Christ through the Passion of his mother, bringing to the foreground an intimate encounter between the human and divine. Through text and performance, Chancerel invited both actors and audience to enter the joyful, sorrowful, and glorious relationship between mother and son, with Mary herself the most approachable of companions. 'A woman from among us,' Chancerel described her, 'accessible, human, at once both servant and queen'.¹ This was an invitation that challenged the distinction between stage and auditorium, transcending the unities of time, place, and action:

Before we return to the twentieth century, before we go our separate ways, let us all stand. Actors and spectators together, let us greet Our Lady with a triple acclamation. With one heart and voice, three times over, in unison:

Notre Dame! Montjoie! Louder than that. Notre Dame! Montjoie! Louder still. Notre Dame! Montjoie!

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With this dramatic 'communion of stage and auditorium, actors and audience',² Catholic popular theatre seemed to have everything that many other forms of popular theatre sought-and sometimes in vain. First, there was the self-evident subject matter. While state initiatives often struggled in their search for playwrights and subjects, Catholic theatre could draw on rich thematic, textual, and dramatic resources, from medieval Passion and mystery plays to seventeenth-century sacramental dramas and more recently composed dramatic versions of the lives of the saints. Second, there were ready-made communities within which such theatre could be staged and viewed. As Chap. 3 has already explored in the case of Brittany, Catholic theatre was created within existing communities that provided both actors and audiences. These Breton examples were specifically regionalist: yet on a national scale and sometimes also with a more national dimension, youth groups, workers' groups, pilgrimages, and other parish clubs all abounded as sources of amateur actors and sympathetic audiences. Third, there was consequently strong potential for communion of belief and experience between writers, actors, and their public.

Most strikingly, however, this was not enough. Catholic popular theatre might seem self-evident, but its practitioners agonized over what it was or should become. While its apparent medievalism fascinated outsiders, Catholic playwrights themselves scorned the idea of mere revivalism. While possessing the extraordinary advantage of ready-made popular audiences, they feared that enthusiastic, amateur dramatics would have little artistic merit. Simultaneously, they also worried that professional performances might privilege art and fame over popular engagement. Even though such theatre already held the potential for communion between actors and audiences, people and place, its practitioners looked for new publics and strategies for performance. They wanted plays for workers, mass spectacles, and spoken choruses as in Soviet Russia, while at the same time supporting a doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ that would offer a theological alternative to the 'merely human mysticisms' of contemporary political movements.³ Mirroring their political counterparts, they seemed almost to fall prey to the same utopian frustrations. How could this theatre be so powerful and yet so problematic?

Chapter 4 traces both the strength and fragility of Catholic popular theatre to the deliberate connections with its social and political context. Although contemporaries described Catholic playwrights such as

Henri Ghéon as 'medieval primitives' who wrote 'as if the Renaissance had never happened',⁴ and more recent scholars have often dismissed Catholic plays-unread-as 'boring in the main',⁵ such theatre was in fact shaped in both form and content by a concern for the contemporary, and also sought to innovate in its treatment of time and space. Surprisingly, even studies focusing on the creators of Catholic popular theatre have often neglected their plays and performances. This is true not only for Ghéon (whose dramatic output was voluminous),⁶ but also for Léon Chancerel and for the Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne, which staged several mass spectacles in the 1930s.⁷ Maryline Romain, for example, offers a valuable overview of Catholic popular theatre in Denizot's recent edited volume, including a discussion of both Ghéon and Chancerel, but this is based only on their theoretical writings and not on any of their dramatic texts.⁸ Equally, although the sharing of dramatic techniques between Catholic and Communist groups has been acknowledged,⁹ the dialogue between Catholic popular theatre and politics has rarely been explored in detail-with Helen Solterer's study of the Théophiliens an important exception.¹⁰

In broader research into French Catholic culture in this period, however, the relationship between Catholicism and the contemporary has become an increasing preoccupation. Building on earlier research into the political diversity of French Catholics,¹¹ scholars such as Stephen Schloesser have examined the creative interplay between Catholicism, artists, writers, and musicians on the one hand and 'modernity' or 'modernism' on the other, especially in the interwar years that witnessed a Catholic 'renaissance' or 'renewal'.¹² Schloesser's own contention is that the fascination with contemporary forms and motifs in the work of such figures as the organist and composer Charles Tournemire, the novelist Georges Bernanos, and the artist Georges Rouault cumulatively shaped a modernism that was both 'mystic' and 'sacramental',¹³ while the growing influence of such Catholic artists testified to their concern to 'move Catholicism from the margins of culture to its very centre'.¹⁴ Particularly rich, too, have been the explorations of the fervent neo-Thomists Jacques Maritain and his Russian and Jewish wife Raïssa, and of what Richard Burton has described as their 'Meudon conversion machine': the gatherings at their home in Meudon that contributed to high-profile conversions such as that of Jean Cocteau and Maurice Sachs.¹⁵

A similar interest in reconciliation, especially between Catholicism and the Republic or the public sphere, has also characterized recent work on

wartime and post-war ecumenism and spirituality. Schloesser and others have paid particular attention to the 'synthesis' effected by the First World War, in which the 'Sacred Union' (union sacrée) enlisted millions of Catholics-including priests, who were not exempt from conscription-in defence of both nation and Republic. When Raymond Poincaré coined the term 'Sacred Union' to initiate this truce between former opponents, he was not perhaps intending its sacred aspect to be taken literally-even if, by the end of August 1914, his desk was inundated with letters from Catholics demanding the redesign of the tricolour to include the Sacred Heart.¹⁶ Nonetheless, both suffering and mourning created new and sometimes unexpected opportunities for ecumenism. Annette Becker cites the case of Rabbi Abraham Bloch from Lyon, who offered a crucifix to a dying Catholic soldier, and later passed his own final moments in the care of a Jesuit priest.¹⁷ Later, in postwar commemorations, images of Joan of Arc on war memorials brought together her piety and patriotism; while specifically Catholic commemorations of the war dead elided the soldiers' sacrifices with those of the Passion, so that 'the soldiers became so many Christs, and Christ became a soldier.'18

To be sure, the depth and impact of such dialogues or reconciliations can be overplayed. Schloesser suggests that the 'eternal truths' of Jazz Age Catholicism 'were capable of infinite adaptation to ever-changing circumstances',¹⁹ while the 'Maritain–Cocteau marriage seemed finally to have reconciled the nineteenth-century divorce between Catholicism and modernity.²⁰ Maritain's response to Cocteau's subsequent lapse into opium and promiscuity was not, however, to adapt Catholic doctrine, but rather to exhort his friend to abstinence. Similarly, a disproportionate focus on left-wing Catholic movements and on moments of reconciliation with the modern Republic will, as Kevin Passmore has pointed out, dismiss the continuing strength of such traditionalist interwar movements as the Fédération Nationale Catholique,²¹ capable of mobilizing Catholic sentiment against the regime on an impressive scale in the 1920s. Yet if these reconciliations were neither straightforward nor always sustained, the dialogues themselves were real.

To investigate the dynamic conversations between Catholic popular theatre and the contemporary not only illuminates this theatre in a new light, but also relates these conversations to the wider patterns of cultural renewal revealed by recent research. At the same time, such popular theatre is also, because of its political dimension, integral to the conversations about community with which this book is most closely concerned. To explore its particular significance, therefore, Chapter 4 traces the evolution of Catholic popular theatre in both theory and practice, from the convergence of ideas on drama, liturgy, and community to the experiments of Jacques Copeau; and from the theatre of his disciples Henri Ghéon and Léon Chancerel to the initiatives of working-class Catholic groups such as the Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne. In terms of the sheer number of groups established and plays published and performed, Catholic popular theatre was undoubtedly the most widespread of all such initiatives under the Third Republic, and only a selection of its most salient achievements can be considered here. Nevertheless, these case studies reveal the national dimension of its social and political aims as well as the vitality of its dialogues within and beyond the *peuple fidèle* whether these involved Parisian theatre critics, youth groups, workers, or the militants of the Popular Front.

1 POLITICS, RELIGION, AND THE REGENERATIVE COMMUNITY

The expansion of Catholic theatre in this period-by no means confined to France²²—drew on a relationship between religion, theatre, politics, and the contemporary in which medieval concepts of community played a key role. Among scholars and theatre practitioners, for instance, there was an increasing interest in the liturgical origins of drama. 'Modern theatre began,' asserted Germain Bapst in his Essai sur l'Histoire du Théâtre in 1893, 'the day on which the first mass was said.'23 The mass itself offered a template for drama: it represented the Last Supper, renewed Christ's sacrifice through the transformation of bread and wine into his body and blood, and presented the priest-'acting in the name of Christ'-with the role of speaking his words and reproducing his gestures.²⁴ But the celebration of the mass also contributed to a 'real sketching out of dialogue' in which roles were accorded to a variety of members within a religious community, for example in narratives of the Passion with multiple voices.²⁵ Evidence from monastic liturgies in the ninth and tenth centuries revealed the introduction of short dialogues preceding masses at Christmas and Easter,²⁶ while scholars of religious theatre were convinced that the use of antiphonal chant from the ninth century onwards constituted a powerful link between the theatre of ancient Greece and the development of modern drama.²⁷ Spectacular liturgies such as the Easter Vigil, with its opening in darkness prior to

the kindling of new fire and the Paschal candle, also moved this drama beyond language to the stage management of space and lighting.²⁸

This scholarly interest in the liturgical origins and development of drama was paralleled by a wider-and often political-preoccupation with pre-modern ideas of community. Ideologies that privileged the ultimate transcendence of class conflict through some form of total community, be this the Volksgemeinschaft or the all-conquering proletariat, drew on medieval concepts of the Mystical Body just as they necessarily clashed both theoretically and temporally with the Church as a rival source of loyalty and legitimacy.²⁹ Fascism and Communism, insisted the Catholic orator Abbé Richard to a Parisian meeting of 1938, 'because they adorn themselves with a certain mysticism, rally to themselves those who, ignorant of the true mysticism, are nonetheless drawn to it nostalgically.³⁰ Indeed it was this dominance of the mystical over the rational (and of the group over the individual) in movements and regimes from the far left to the far right that led the Russian exile Nicolas Berdyaev to describe the postwar years as a 'New Middle Ages': 'the beginning of an era of new, religious collectivism.'31

Such preoccupations with the liturgical origins of theatre and with religious ideas of community created a certain degree of curiosity in Catholic popular theatre. They did not, however, predetermine the form it might take. 'Is it right to represent the sacred in such a profane space as the stage?' asked Maurice Talmeyr, in a survey on the meaning of Christian theatre in *Le Gaulois* in 1910.³² 17 years later, a similar survey in the leading theatrical review *Comædia* was no more conclusive. Many writers found the distinction between theatre and Christian theatre unhelpful, and insisted that there was just 'theatre—full stop'.³³ Others wondered whether a play based on a premise of shared faith between actors and audience could achieve any kind of 'total communion' if some of the audience were not, in fact, believers. 'To cite Jacques Copeau', wrote Henri Mugnier in *Comædia* in 1927, 'can the man in the crowd speak the same words as the man on stage if he doesn't believe in the saints?'³⁴

To the ongoing challenge of defining a relationship between the spiritual and the stage, the contribution of Jacques Copeau himself was certainly one of the most important. Born in Paris to theatre-loving parents, Copeau (1879–1949) was a theatrical renovator whose theories and direction were widely influential.³⁵ He was inspired in particular by a fervent opposition to what he described as 'mercantile theatre' and its associated commercialism, naturalism, and cult of celebrity.³⁶ On 1

September 1913 Copeau published his 'manifesto' in the Nouvelle Revue Française, venting his indignation at the 'unbridled industrialization that ever more cynically degrades our French stage, driving away the more cultured public'.³⁷ At the same time he founded his own counter-initiative, the Théâtre du Vieux Colombier, where he endeavoured to create a theatre purified from commercialism and excessive stage properties, and peopled by actors dedicated to serving dramatic art, the public, and each other.³⁸ Though the new theatre was closed in the First World War, Copeau continued to reflect on its development in discussion with other theatrical renovators around Europe, as well as during his troupe's 'cultural mission' to America.³⁹ After the War, his interests shifted increasingly from production to research, particularly into new forms of theatre and the training of the actors themselves. With the support of his sometime companion Suzanne Bing, Copeau founded the École du Vieux Colombier in 1921; after the lukewarm reception of his own play La Maison natale, he left Paris for Burgundy in 1924 to found his own 'school' of actors.

Copeau's specific contribution to Catholic popular theatre was theoretical, practical, and personal-as well as utopian and contradictory. More generally, his desire to 'restore to the theatre its religious character, its sacred rites, its original purity'40 would prove a powerful inspiration for partisans of popular theatre in France, just as it also exercised a wider influence on theatrical reformers in Europe.⁴¹ More specifically, Copeau's practical experiments with his school of actors in Burgundy would suggest ways in which the life of a theatrical troupe might come closer to that of a religious community. It was indeed with this in mind that he acquired the dilapidated chateau de Morteuil for the purpose of theatrical research and training; he also drove around the surrounding countryside with the Rule of Saint Benedict on his lap.42 Those who worked with him were expected to follow him obediently, submitting their individual interests to those of the group while seeking ways in which acting could simultaneously advance the life of faith.⁴³ Léon Chancerel, who spent some time at Morteuil and acknowledged his own indebtedness to Copeau's theories and methods, wondered whether Copeau were planning to run their community on Benedictine lines; Hubert Gignoux recalled Copeau's insistence that as they had joined him of their own free will, they must consent to 'recognize his law as true disciples.'44 There was little surprise when Copeau himself returned to Catholicism, making his confession and communion in Solesmes on 5 December 1925.

Copeau's relationship with his 'disciples' could, however, be tense at best. When he was obliged for financial reasons to return to Paris, some of his troupe-including Chancerel, and Copeau's daughter Marie-Hélène—remained in Burgundy as the 'Copiaus',⁴⁵ working closely with the local population to produce spectacles for festivals such as the wine harvest.⁴⁶ Yet only two months after Copeau had granted his disciples their freedom, he threatened to remove both his daughter and also their stage properties if they refused his leadership.⁴⁷ In 1926 Copeau was absent in America and on a lecture tour. When he returned to Burgundy to watch the performances of the Copiaus in 1928, he subjected them to searing criticism. It was only in 1929 that, accepting a position at the Comédie Française, he seemed willing to leave his disciples to their own devices, this time restyled as the Compagnie des Quinze.⁴⁸ As Serge Proust has argued, the example of Copeau and his disciples illuminates not only the relationship between the acting troupe and the ideal community, but equally the workings and fragility of charismatic leadership.⁴⁹

Furthermore, although Copeau's theories would offer considerable inspiration to popular theatre practitioners, his own writings on the subject are strikingly ambivalent. Chancerel described Copeau's 1942 reflections on Le Théâtre populaire as having 'clearly posed the problem of popular theatre, its aims and its nature',⁵⁰ and problematic the text certainly is. Despite Copeau's own personal research and practical experiments (albeit 'on an extremely modest scale'),⁵¹ his narrative of popular theatre as extant in ancient Greece, medieval Europe, and Elizabethan England, and elusive from the French Revolution onwards takes little account of its practice within specific communities in the Third Republic. Moreover, his own autocratic control of his disciples seems entirely forgotten in his utopian picture of the popular theatre of the futureemerging, 'as if were, spontaneously', in the form of open-air festivities that will rival Hitler's 'mass productions.'52 Notwithstanding his own concern for the director to initiate and control, he continues to pay homage in this text to the utopian conviction that popular theatre will emerge from the people themselves.

2 A Bridge from Earth to Heaven: The Theatre of Henri Ghéon

While Jacques Copeau inspired playwrights and directors with his reforming zeal for theatre in general, it was left to his disciples to realize more concrete experiences of popular theatre within Catholic communities. Two of the most successful of these initiatives were those of Henri Ghéon and Léon Chancerel. Both considered themselves Copeau's disciples, pursuing in theory and practice the idea of theatre as integral to the development of interior discipline and the submission of the individual to the collective. Both drew on medieval forms and subjects for inspiration, but also moved outwards to engage with contemporary mass movements, performance spaces, and techniques. Cumulatively, their theatre reveals a wide-ranging and often highly successful enterprise to develop Catholic popular theatre on a national scale and with a marked sensitivity to political context. This study highlights both the novelty and fragility of their experiments, drawing on their little-known plays but also moving outwards to performance and reception.

Doctor, playwright, and lay Dominican, Henri Ghéon (Henri-Léon Vaugeon, 1875–1944) created Catholic popular theatre not only out of personal faith but also from a deeply held conviction in its potential for national and popular renewal. This was by no means a self-evident trajectory. Born in Bray-sur-Seine in 1875, Ghéon had turned away from Catholicism as a young man, exploring his homosexuality with companions who included André Gide.⁵³ It was not until the First World War that he returned to the faith of his childhood, in a dramatic experience of conversion that followed the death, on Easter Day 1915, of a lieutenant of deep personal piety. This conversion would transform Ghéon's self-perception, as well as his sense of literary vocation. 'Art-even pagan art-is one of the means chosen by God to draw man towards his grace,' he confided in a letter written to the symbolist poet Francis Vielé Griffin in June 1916. 'There is nothing beautiful in the world that does not come from him.'54 Ghéon's new conviction also offered potential solutions to the 'problem' of contemporary theatre that had preoccupied him in the pre-war period.⁵⁵ Already in 1911 he had mused in La Nouvelle Revue Française over whether theatre might be renewed by 'common faith' in heroism, patriotism, or humanitarianism.⁵⁶ His newly kindled faith now suggested alternative possibilities.

Henri Ghéon was also a pragmatist. Although personally drawn to nationalism and a supporter of Action Française ('I'm not a monarchist for nothing', he would jest when seeking to impose his will),⁵⁷ he was persuaded that Catholicism was more likely than nationalism to unify the French. 'In our country,' he insisted in an interview of 1925, 'the people are Catholic by nature.'⁵⁸ Pragmatic, too, was Ghéon's focus on the parish group or *patronage* as fruitful terrain for theatrical renewal. Amateur drama by *patronages* was well known by the time it captured Ghéon's

attention,⁵⁹ although also notorious for its uneven literary quality.⁶⁰ Yet here, for certain, were the Catholic people in all their diversity: 'the immense people of the *patronages*, of Catholic groups and schools, all ages and all classes, in the image of Christianity.'⁶¹ Here, too, was an area in which 'the notion of community and of communion is not entirely absent';⁶² where, unlike the 'provisional unanimity' of contemporary communist or unanimist theatre, there was a deeper unity of experience and belief.⁶³ It was, indeed, when the performance by a *patronage* of Ghéon's *Trois Miracles de Sainte Cécile* (1922) succeeded in attracting large, popular, and enthusiastic audiences that he began to focus his attention more seriously on this type of theatre.⁶⁴ Catholicism, people, and theatre were thus for Ghéon mutually dependent and even inseparable. His faith drew him to Catholic literature; his desire for theatrical renovation drew him to the people; and his pragmatic concern to find actors and audiences drew him to Catholic popular theatre.

Despite this pragmatism, however, Ghéon never intended to write only for the *patronage*. Rather, his Catholic popular theatre developed sometimes with difficulty—along a line between amateur and professional, Catholic and non-Catholic. Inherent in his project for national renewal was a desire to reach out to a 'greater public: those lacking in faith, or semi-practising, as well as the faithful'.⁶⁵ Inherent in his own literary aspirations was a desire to win the acclaim of Parisian audiences and theatre critics. He therefore insisted that Catholic theatre should encompass two quite distinct forms of drama, one of which would depict Catholic subjects for a potentially non-Catholic audience, while the other would speak more closely to those of shared faith. 'Christian drama for miscreants', teased Lucien Debech in *Action Française* in 1922, and 'spiritual plays for the faithful people.'⁶⁶

Ghéon's own contribution to Catholic popular theatre was thus threefold. First was a concern to privilege a new relationship between daily life and faith—the *quotidien* and the *merveilleux*—that found particular expression in his writing and staging of the lives of the saints. Second was the development, especially with the help of his Compagnons de Notre-Dame in 1925–1930, of performances that often relied on a special relationship between subject and place, developing through their telescopic use of time a connection between modern audiences and the faithful people of the past. Third was an ongoing meditation on the relationship between the individual and the collective, as experienced within the community of the Compagnons but also (as will be considered in the final part of this chapter) within Ghéon's larger-scale mass productions of the 1930s.

According to Ghéon, the modern world-and the modern Parisianhad largely lost contact with the saints, except in the names of stations on line 4 of the metro.⁶⁷ His own desire to rewrite saints' lives in dramatic form thus sprang from a deep-felt desire to renew the types of conversations familiar to medieval Catholics: those 'comings and goings between earth and heaven' in which saints would be regularly invoked for their spiritual and practical assistance.⁶⁸ For this desire to bear fruit among his contemporaries, however, he recognized the need to move beyond medieval dramas that left man (almost) hapless in the clash between divine and diabolical designs, as well as the early modern classics that elevated man to an (almost) excessive self-sufficiency. 'We restore God [to literature],' he explained, 'but we also rediscover man in all his complexity, in all the grandeur of his self-awareness as revealed by the Renaissance.' To encounter the saints on stage as entirely believable human beings who were nonetheless distinctive in the depth of their faith was in his view the most effective means of reawakening a sense of the merveilleux chrétien.⁶⁹ His own life had been transformed by just such an encounter.⁷⁰

While the encounter with everyday sanctity could be transformative, so too could the mental and physical processes required of the actor who performed the words and deeds of a saint on stage. This was indeed the subject of one of Ghéon's first hagiographical plays, *Le Comédien et la grâce*, published in 1925 to considerable literary interest.⁷¹ The Comedian in question is the actor Genès, a pagan called upon by the emperor Diocletian to play the Christian martyr Adrian on stage. In Ghéon's play, the crux of the drama is Genès's public—and fatal acknowledgement that he has been converted by his own performance:

The tears that you see on my cheeks are not counterfeit: God drew them from my eyes. (Pause). The words I speak are no lies: my career is over, and I lie no more. (Pause). I am not Adrian and yet I am him. I am Genès and yet I am Genès no longer.⁷²

In this account of on-stage conversion, Ghéon drew not only on historical material but equally on his personal experience of actors in the *patronages*. In the preface to the play, he recalls an actor in his neo-medieval *Farce du pendu dépendu* who confided in him on the evening of the dress rehearsal that, while in character, he had just said the rosary 'for real'. Thus fiction transforms reality—and Ghéon provided several other accounts of how the rehearsal and performance of his own plays had produced similar results. One chaplain in the Parisian suburbs confided the experiences of his own young troupe, which had recently performed Ghéon's *Saint-Maurice* and *Le Mort à cheval*. 'Ever since my young men have performed two of your plays, do you know what they ask me when they find themselves confronted with a difficult matter of conscience? "In my place, what would Saint Maurice have done?"⁷³

Such examples bolstered Ghéon's conviction that the representation of saints on stage—in all their humanity as well as in their sanctity—was 'edifying' in the best sense of the word. Examples of transformative dialogue, notably between the actors and the characters they played, not only opened up pathways of conversation and prayer with the saints but also anticipated the renewal of both drama and society. For Ghéon's ambitions were on a grand scale: 'To sustain art, restore the state, and re-Christianize France', as he explained in an interview of 1925.⁷⁴ Ultimately, his vision was for every parish in the country to celebrate its patron saint through drama, which would both contribute to a necessary decentralization of the theatre while also associating drama more closely with its liturgical origins. Such a development would favour what Gaston Baty had described as 'the union of all the arts in total drama, both spiritually and aesthetically Catholic.'⁷⁵ It would also offer a particular boost to the prestige of France as the 'eldest daughter of the Church.'⁷⁶

Ghéon's resolution to re-establish 'the comings and goings between earth and heaven' influenced not only his representations of sanctity but also his strategies for performance, especially his treatment of spatial and temporal context. His plays were performed in a wide range of locations: schools, monasteries, parish centres, even stadiums, and sometimes with a deliberate connection between the place of performance and the drama itself. *La Rencontre de Saint Benoît et de Sainte Scholastique* (1927) was, for example, played by pupils in the Benedictine abbey school of Maredsous in honour of the school's patron saint and his sister.⁷⁷ *Saint-Maurice ou l'obéissance* was performed at Saint-Maurice, in the Valais region, where the saint had been martyred, and near where his relics were preserved.⁷⁸ Similarly, *La Merveilleuse Histoire du jeune Bernard de Monthon* was performed close to the place of Bernard's birth, a thousand years later.⁷⁹

More spectacularly, this special relationship between faith, place, and people was explored in plays such Le Triomphe de Notre-Dame de Chartres (1927), Le Mystère du Roi Saint Louis (1931), and Notre-Dame de Verdun (1937), all three of which were staged in locations also featured in their narratives. Le Triomphe de Notre-Dame de Chartres was performed outside Chartres Cathedral during the Marian celebrations of June 1927.⁸⁰ Here, Henri Ghéon directed his Compagnons de Notre-Dame with the assistance of Jacques Copeau and Suzanne Bing,⁸¹ and employed a simultaneous décor of various stages, staircases and porches to represent earth and heaven.⁸² The play entwined the national past with the story of salvation by depicting episodes from the history of Chartres that revealed its Marian protection and symbolized the faith of its people. But the performance also focused-as would Chancerel's plays on similar themes-on the shared faith of actors and audience, creating an experience somewhere between the theatrical and the liturgical. The compere made such designs explicit in his preface, in which he emphasized the interplay between theatre and religion, and described the Compagnons de Notre-Dame as 'restoring the bridge created by their ancestors between the Church and the stage, which the passing centuries have destroyed'.⁸³ He even invited the audience—in their role as the *peu*ple fidèle-to assist the Compagnons in creating this bridge by praving together before the performance.⁸⁴

In Le Mystère du Roi Saint Louis, the lot of explaining the action of the play falls to the chorus and to the fool, both of whom represent the people on stage in this celebration of servant-king and national saint. Directed by Ghéon himself and performed by his Compagnons (together with the Ghilde de Saint-Genest and the Compagnie des Quinze), the Mystère was staged in the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris on 8-9 June 1931.85 Since the chapel had been constructed on the orders of Saint Louis to house fragments of Christ's crown of thorns, it offered a particularly apt location for a play recounting Louis's crusade to secure the precious relics, within a broader narrative of his life and death.⁸⁶ In Ghéon's plot the principal characters are of royal blood, yet it is the 'chorus of the poor' that opens the play and carries the crown of thorns in procession. The king's closeness to the poor, the sick, and the ordinary Frenchman and woman also receives special prominence, not least his Christ-like gestures of embracing a leper and washing his people's feet.⁸⁷ After his sufferings in the crusades, his return to France to rule in justice and with regard for

the poor is described by the fool as preparing the way for a 'happy people': *un peuple heureux*.

The closeness of the French people to divine protection likewise dominates Ghéon's Mystère des Prodiges de Notre-Dame de Verdun, performed at the bishop's palace in Verdun by a local troupe in June 1937.⁸⁸ Following Hitler's occupation of the Rhineland in March 1936, the protection of France (and Verdun itself) against the Germans was more than a question of historical interest. The coincidence of place and space in Ghéon's play is thus noticeably also coupled with a defensive patriotism and a somewhat nervous concern for divine assistance. Successive challenges to Verdun (including attacks on its church and subsequent Cathedral) form the framework of the play, as assailants emerge in the form of Attila the Hun, supporters of the Huguenot François de Béthune, the Plague, and the Germans of the First World War. Like Le Triomphe de Notre-Dame de Chartres, Ghéon's historical pageant of Verdun employs spatial and thematic unity alongside a telescopic use of time that connects the audience with different points in their local and national history. The message remains the same: French Catholics-both men and women⁸⁹-will defend Verdun and its Cathedral in time of peril, with force if necessary, and the Virgin Mary will in turn defend and sustain them all. In the final tableau it is Mary herself, standing among the ruins of the Cathedral after its bombardment in the First World War, who promises protection against the Germans and insists Ils ne passeront pas [they shall not pass].⁹⁰ As in Le Triomphe, the audience are invited to take part in the choral responses, reaffirming the sense of a *peuple fidèle* across temporal (if not necessarily national) boundaries. The final words are thus spoken in unison by actors and audience:

Long live Our Lady of Verdun! Long live our Lady of France! Long live Our Lady of Peace! Mary! Mary!⁹¹

Ghéon's dramatic dialogues between past and present, actors and audience, theatre and liturgy were developed not only in the texts of his plays and in their performance, but also through the training and development of the Compagnons de Notre-Dame. Active in 1925–1930, this group of actors sought not only to realize Copeau's religious conception of the troupe but also to bring religious theatre beyond the *peuple fidèle*—and even as far as the theatre critics of Paris. Deliberately eschewing the title of 'Comédiens', the Compagnons were amateur actors and

practising Catholics for whom drama was integrated within a life of prayer and service, professional and family commitments.⁹² Explicitly commended to the protection of the Virgin, their mission was 'the praise of God and the exaltation of his saints, through art, in the theatre.' Yet as their internal regulations stipulated, they would perform Christian plays of artistic merit not only for the faithful but also for a wider public, whether in Paris, the provinces, or internationally. Unremunerated, the Compagnons were enjoined to humility and self-abnegation, and (following Copeau) required to treat major and minor roles equally and to assist with the creation of costumes and scenery. Their aim was to develop Copeau's 'theatre of movement': 'created for the spirit, the ears, the eyes, and the "whole" of the spectator—and thus also for his soul',93 and to counter the commercialism as well as the celebrity associated with mainstream theatre (an association, Les Amis des Compagnons, offered significant financial support). Playing out the life of faith, the work of the Compagnons was also integrated into prayer and liturgy: each season was preceded by a mass, and there were common prayers before and after every rehearsal and performance.94

Although the Compagnons were inspired by the spirit and precedent of the medieval Confréries de la Passion, they were not committed to revivalism for the converted. Instead, Ghéon intended 'through Molière, to rejoin Shakespeare, medieval authors, and the Greeks, in total modernity',95 and his most ambitious decision was to bring their drama beyond the patronage to more mainstream theatre. In 1925, he took his Compagnons to the empty stage of the Vieux-Colombier, vacated by Copeau's Burgundian retreat, and between 1925 and 1931 the Compagnons gave nearly 180 performances in theatres around Paris, in the provinces, and abroad.96 Their repertoire also expanded beyond Ghéon's own works, while remaining on similar lines. There were new plays by members and supporters of the Compagnons: Henri Brochet's Le Pauvre qui mourut pour avoir mis des gants, for example, or Jacques Copeau's Le Pauvre sous l'escalier. There were borrowings from a more international repertoire, including a Flemish version of Everyman as well as newly translated plays by the seventeenth-century Spanish writer Calderón de la Barca. There was, moreover, also a repertoire of *impromptus*, 'to which all the Compagnons collaborated, but anonymously', with stock characters in the style of Commedia dell'arte.97 These were often satirical, farcical, and even provocative. L'Impromptu du charcutier-'a modern farce'-reworked a legend of Saint Nicolas

by having the saint miraculously reconstitute three adolescents turned into sausage meat, before transforming the devil himself into inedible pâté. Its aim was hagiographical but also satirical and contemporary, mocking 'not the machine, but the abuses of the machine in our century'.⁹⁸ *L'Impromptu du 23 heures* offered a sardonic portrait of the life of Compagnons themselves, charting the practical conundrums of fitting rehearsals into daily life while being interrupted by audience members: 'Do you call this theatre?'⁹⁹

If this was 'popular theatre', it was popular in two ways. First, Ghéon's own plays deliberately eschewed the rules of classical (and by implication elite) theatre, not least the unities of time, place, and action. Critics, indeed, urged the public not to expect these plays to follow such conventions: 'the only link, the only unity of the play being the character, the psychology of the principal hero and his associates.¹⁰⁰ Similarly rejecting the convention of bienséance, according to which characters would act according to their social (and usually noble) status, Ghéon preferred the medieval practice of mingling edifying, pious behaviour with comedy and even grotesque farce. (The humour of his Vie profonde de Saint-François d'Assise was described in Comædia as 'robust' and 'as Rabelaisian as one could wish').¹⁰¹ Popular in its rejection of particular theatrical conventions, Ghéon's drama was also popular in the sense of reaching out to the widest possible audience, within which the peuple fidèle would form only one element. It was this concern that inspired Ghéon to seek new translations of Calderón de la Barca's plays, originally performed in public spaces and 'before the whole people'.¹⁰²

Most ambitiously of all, Ghéon's Compagnons presented their amateur dramatics for a people that included the notoriously unyielding Parisian critics. Though their reception was mixed, the interest they garnered was considerable. This was, after all, a troupe of Catholic amateurs, performing with extremely limited means, scenery, and stage properties (unable to hire an orchestra, the composer who wrote the music for their production of Calderón's *Le Magicien prodigieux* did so for three voices, drums, and an automatic piano.)¹⁰³ Their technical limitations and insufficiencies were always visible, and often derided. Nevertheless, their efforts were reported on by many of the leading critics of the day, both in France and abroad, both in major literary periodicals but equally in mainstream and partisan newspapers across the political spectrum.¹⁰⁴ Often it was a single reporter—Jane Catulle Mendès for *La Presse*, Lucien Debech in *Action Française*, or Raymond Cogniat in *Comoedia*—who would review successive performances; while *Le Soir's* accompanying column 'la soirée élégante' also detailed the social composition of the audience, which often included publishers and dramatic critics as well as other literary figures.¹⁰⁵

According to Jacques Reynaud-a member of the Compagnons-Ghéon 'died without ever conquering Paris and the greater public, which he had desired as the supreme consecration of his art.'¹⁰⁶ Certainly, there were sceptical reviewers who considered the plays 'Saint-Sulpician' in their cloving imagery,¹⁰⁷ too serious for a place of entertainment (a 'new kind of frivolous sectarianism', according to Action Française),¹⁰⁸ or too proselvtizing.¹⁰⁹ In 1930, the Compagnons were obliged to abandon their schedule of regular performances, difficult to reconcile with professional and family commitments.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, the more spectacular mass performances realized by Ghéon were not in Paris but elsewhere: in Lourdes and Reims; in England, Belgium, and Canada (in Montréal, a crowd of 200,000 spectators assembled in 1938 to watch Saint Laurent du Fleuve).¹¹¹ Nevertheless, there were also Parisian reviewers—Catholic and non-Catholic alike-who were intrigued by and enthusiastic about his work. They considered his plays 'accessible', their 'mysticism adapted to our contemporary existence'.¹¹² For some, Ghéon's theatre was the very antithesis of the imagery associated with Saint-Sulpice, with his three-dimensional portraits of the saints not only fully human but also eminently believable.¹¹³ Even to bring these saints to the stages of Paris, with a troupe of amateur men and women whose performances were chronicled by the leading critics, was in itself no mean feat.

3 Social Service on Stage: Léon Chancerel and the Comédiens Routiers

The self-conscious echo of Copeau's religious conception of theatre within the community would make itself heard not only in Ghéon's dramatic works and theatrical troupe but also in the wide-ranging initiatives of Léon Chancerel (1886–1965). Throughout the 1930s (and beyond),¹¹⁴ Chancerel contributed through research, writing, organization, and performance to a concept of 'social service through drama'. This was particularly evident in his development of theatre within the Catholic scouting community, but also in his establishment of training centres, theatres, and publications.¹¹⁵ Like Ghéon, he succeeded where

state popular theatre initiatives often failed by locating a specific community within which such theatre could be created—even with limited means—by members of the community itself, using existing ideological and material resources for subject matter and performance. Like Ghéon, he also rejected the celebrity and commercialism of mainstream theatre,¹¹⁶ and conceived of his theatrical work on a national rather than a regional level. This was a theatre about active citizenship—Pascal Ory similarly emphasizes Chancerel's concern to place theatre at the heart of the city—but which both meshed with and also diverged from its secular equivalents.¹¹⁷

In his theoretical writings from the late 1920s to the 1950s, Léon Chancerel developed the idea of drama as a form of social service benefitting both the individual and the community. Drama, he believed, should serve 'the superior and disinterested objectives of entertainment and ideally also improvement, both personal and collective, within the broader framework of social life.'118 For young people, play and especially dramatic play could encourage progression towards greater self-awareness and control, and act as preparation for adult roles and responsibilities.¹¹⁹ For the broader community too, drama could provide entertainment within a wider framework of education and collective development. In his more utopian writings on 'dramatic social service', Chancerel envisaged the development of three forms of drama. First, there would be 'endogenous' drama practised within social groups and communities by children, adolescents, and adults, and 'exogenous' drama brought by specialized peripatetic groups to new audiences, especially in schools and factories. Subsequently, these two forms-already, as previous chapters have shown, well established in both the theory and practice of popular theatre—would be completed by a third development through which drama would assume a festive role in education, citizenship, and community. This would be a coming together of art and life, rejoining both medieval and classical performance in its fusion of elite and popular theatre,¹²⁰ and challenging the very meaning of theatre as 'spectatorship'.¹²¹

We see this most sublimely in the liturgy; we also see it in formal and informal celebrations, in family and popular festivities, in schools, factories, at the Sorbonne, or in the public space. Growing, singing, praying, celebrating, acting collectively—yes, this is where dramatic art belongs.¹²²

Despite their idealistic character, Chancerel's writings on popular theatre drew on extensive practical experience, especially within the Catholic

Scouts and Guides of France. Within this particular section of the wider scouting movement, Chancerel discovered a series of 'open-air communities; communities that were well defined, with their faith, regulations, mystique, and ceremonial life'.¹²³ They were, in effect, exactly the kinds of groups for which amateur drama could be an inherent or 'endogenous' part. Their youthful character offered possibilities for play, experiment, and training: as one of his followers explained, it was 'only a short step from the spirit of the Patrol to that of a troupe of comedians.'124 Meanwhile, their Catholicism brought them close to the medieval concepts of religious and especially monastic community that Chancerel found inspiring, and created opportunities for collective drama around their participation in the liturgy. Above all, such groups were often marked by the desire for closeness and community that so often motivated popular theatre initiatives. This is poignantly expressed in the memoirs of Chancerel's disciple Hubert Gignoux, a child from a broken home who joined the Comédiens Routiers in 1931 as a percussionist so as 'to live with a group of brothers, in a family closer than a scout troop, more productive as well.'125 Gignoux was unimpressed by what he saw as Baden-Powell's superficial morality-as by the embarrassing zeal of certain leaders who, if they espied a uniformed scout in the Paris metro, would demand that he sing loudly to bring 'joy' to his fellow passengers.¹²⁶ Yet he and his friends were profoundly attracted by the associated benefits of belonging to such a movement: the chance to escape to the countryside with their peers, in small groups and often with leaders little older than themselves; the possibility of taking risks; and the pull of a certain imagery of chivalry and adventure.¹²⁷

In his collaboration with the scouting movement (which began with a Christmas production in Valenton in 1929),¹²⁸ Léon Chancerel made explicit the association between Christian and scouting ideology while also reaching out to a wider public. His regulations for the Comédiens Routiers, for instance, conflated drama with service of the community, calling upon the troupe to 'make a gift of themselves by acting on stage', and to contribute to a 'young, lively form of theatre with significant space for the collective personality of the team'. Twice a year, at Christmas and Easter, Chancerel stipulated that the troupe would 'go on retreat' by performing sacred works, 'on the margins of the liturgy but intimately associated with it'.¹²⁹ If this was endogenous theatre, it was also to have an important exogenous dimension, beyond the boundaries of the scouting movement itself. Notably, the work of the Comédiens Routiers entailed the creation of props and scenery suitable for peripatetic performance, especially in the suburbs and provinces, with the aim of bringing their productions to locations such as children's hospitals and factory towns.¹³⁰ Between December 1931 and June 1932 alone the Comédiens gave 46 performances to approximately 20,000 spectators: in Paris, its suburbs, and the provinces; not only within the scouting community but also to workers and employees, children, veteran soldiers, and the sick.¹³¹ Reflecting in 1939 on his own contribution to popular theatre through the work of the Comédiens, Chancerel particularly emphasized this concern to be 'accessible to all social classes and to contribute to their reconciliation and unity.'¹³²

Both endogenous and exogenous, this was a theatre that was popular in dramatic technique as well as in audience and repertoire. An amateur group dedicated to the importance of the 'collective personality' of the troupe, the Comédiens made particular use of the spoken chorus, echoing comparable political and religious drama groups across Europe. (Indeed, Chancerel enjoyed receiving requests from priests to be supplied with Catholic equivalents to the 'mimed and spoken choruses' popular in Soviet Russia).¹³³ In his theoretical work on the chorus, Chancerel described how this form of performance should represent 'the members of a self-conscious community',134 as well as entering into dialogue with the coryphaeus (leader) or compere.¹³⁵ Clearly, choral recitation could, when successfully mastered, exercise a powerful effect on an audience. But it could also prove a valuable 'schooling in scouting virtues and in virtue per se, especially strength, temperance, and charity.' And if the chorus could thus represent a particular community or people and contribute to their development, it could also lead to the development of stock characters that exemplified the people in singular rather than collective form. One such character in Chancerel's own 'album' was 'Mécano': 'the people of Paris, the artisan, the dweller of the faubourgs, to whom we dedicate our efforts as comedians, and who we would like to be the most vibrant and faithful of our audience.¹³⁶

The question of how far this theatre encouraged popular agency is more complex. Certainly, there are some choruses that echo those of contemporary political movements in their collaborative creation and depiction of popular initiative. *Chant de la route*, for example, was collectively prepared in a small studio in Belleville and later published in 1933 with the caveat that its printed form should not dissuade other groups from developing their own adaptations.¹³⁷ Written for six players, none of whom distinguishes himself as leader; *Chant de la route* is

short and repetitive: a focused celebration of fraternity and solidarity. Shoulder to shoulder, the characters discover the countryside in common emotion:

My stride alongside your stride A single breath from a single chest A single spiral of steam from a single machine Free, young, happy On the road, on the road, on the road.¹³⁸

In many ways, however, Chant de la route is atypical. Often, the chorus acts as echo rather than guide, and the impetus of the plot takes primacy over the agency or development of the characters in plays from which 'all naturalism is banished' and in which the narrative follows sometimes arbitrary directions.¹³⁹ Comme elle allait à la rivière, for example, stages the legend of a girl sold by her parents to the devil for no apparent reason, and who disappoints him by preferring simple village life to any of the temptations on offer in hell.¹⁴⁰ Le Roi Renaud, similarly brief, recounts the tale of the king's return, badly wounded, from battle. Too ill to rejoice at the birth of his son, he dies at midnight, and his wife, learning of his death, is swallowed up by the earth in her grief. In both tales-as in Chancerel's theatre more broadly-the female leads are pure and incorruptible, and the emotions starkly depicted. In the latter sketch in particular, the chorus adopts a subservient role in providing the soundscape or commenting on the action, rather than driving the plot line forward.

Alongside his own endogenous and exogenous drama, Chancerel also sought to realize his third ambition: the writing and direction of national plays or *jeux dramatiques nationaux* that would transform the commemoration of saints and heroes through performance in 'sites charged with memory'.¹⁴¹ This was Chancerel's endeavour to move beyond the *peuple fidèle*, and to search for a broader, deeper experience of the 'union between the actor and spectator' that he had found on a smaller scale in the scouting community.¹⁴² As with Ghéon's similar spectacles, it was also an effort to draw together national sentiment—the shared sufferings of the First World War; the shared fears of future conflict—and the faith of the individual and community. Certainly, there was still a strong reliance in such performances on the unifying potential of Catholicism itself. At Puy in 1932, Chancerel's *Compassion de Notre-Dame* was performed

for a pilgrim audience; in 1933 there was a production for a more secular audience in the Parisian Salle Pleyel, explicitly marking the 1900th anniversary of Christ's Passion.¹⁴³ Yet there was also a concern to move outwards, emphasizing the patriotic alongside the religious, which chimed with the noisier evocation of national strength and unity in the later 1930s.

In 1938, for instance, Chancerel organized the performance of two plays co-authored with Raoul Sérène, both of which-like some of Ghéon's plays-drew on a special relationship between narrative and location to bring together religious and patriotic faith.¹⁴⁴ Terre de France, Royaume de Marie, which was performed at Lourdes, was written to commemorate the tercentenary of the birth of Louis XIV, conceived following a novena to the Virgin by his infertile parents. Like Ghéon's Triomphe de Notre-Dame de Chartres, it emphasized the Virgin's particular favour for her French children: 'unlike any of my other children on earth, the French people, oldest sons of your holy mother the Church, chosen by God to accomplish his will'. Also on the model of Ghéon's plays, Terre de France employs a telescopic approach to time in its presentation of Marian devotion and apparitions, while similarly portraying such devotion as a source and realization of national unity. Nor does it shy away from contemporary concerns: in one scene, demons chase around with whips to a choral description of 'strikes, lockout [...] capital, proletariat, racism, fascism, bolshevism...' Yet the final image is one of reconciliation, with the French provinces uniting in Marian acclamation. The fact that the 1938 performance was by young scouts and guides rendered the maternal relationship particularly poignant, while its relevance to the wider audience was reinforced by a closing Hail Mary and Hail, Holy Queen, recited in unison by actors and audiences.145

La Mission de Jeanne d'Arc, performed at Joan's birthplace of Domrémy in Lorraine, focused on a figure long associated with patriotism, much celebrated by the extreme right, and canonized only in 1920. Moreover, the national dimension of the play was strikingly expanded beyond the drama itself, in that the fire kindled at Joan's stake during the play was subsequently carried in pilgrimage across the country, from Reims to Paris and finally to Rouen, where it was cast into the Seine.¹⁴⁶ This was in May 1938: the following November, to mark the twentieth anniversary of victory in the First World War, torches were brought from the French provinces to be kindled at the grave of the Unknown Soldier in Paris, and then returned to their places of origin, while further torches were carried by young athletes in relay to war cemeteries across the country. Just as Chancerel's vision of a theatre fully integrated into the celebration and development of the community converged at certain points with state proposals for popular theatre, so did his 'national plays' speak to concerns shared across the political spectrum. Indeed, in 1938 the annual commemoration of Joan of Arc in Paris (traditionally a rallying point for the right) was not only attended by Édouard Daladier as Président du Conseil but even praised by Communist daily *L'Humanité* as a suitable tribute to the 'national heroine'.¹⁴⁷

4 CATHOLIC WORKERS ON STAGE: FROM THE *PATRONAGES* TO THE JEUNESSE OUVRIÈRE CHRÉTIENNE

Catholic popular theatre in the writings and productions of Copeau, Ghéon, and Chancerel may have intrigued on account of its medievalism, but it would have been inconceivable outside of its twentieth-century context. The concern to place theatre at the heart of national and civic life, countering the spiritual insufficiencies of politics, drawing on the expanding mass (and especially youth) movements of the earlier twentieth century, playing with the idea of the spoken chorus and its potential for proselytizing: all this belonged to a dynamic dialogue with the contemporary. The particular dialogue between Catholic theatre and contemporary politics reached its culmination in the drama of one of the largest Catholic youth movements of all: the Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne. The mass spectacles of the JOC brought the engagement of Catholicism, workers, and theatre to a new level. But they also drew closely on the continuing practice of traditional religious theatre by more working-class patronages, and on the reconception of Catholic theatre by Henri Ghéon.

As Ghéon had discovered, the amateur religious theatre of the *patron-ages* was both widespread and flourishing during the Third Republic. Some of these groups, however, were more distinctively 'social' in repertoire and working-class in character. In the very early twentieth century, for example, there were texts and performances by Catholic *patronages* presenting frank and even provocative approaches to political and professional questions. Daniel Robert's one-act comedy *Les Palmes!!* (1905), offered in homage to the *Dames patronesses* of Neuilly as an example of

'Christian and social theatre', openly mocked writers whose revolutionary sentiments were adopted in cynical pursuit of official acclaim and funding.¹⁴⁸ In a particularly comic moment, an author who has already been decorated with *palmes académiques* performs a song about a sailor bathing in the Seine and emerging covered in mussels, then launches into a heartfelt tirade against the sovereign people, 'badly-taught monkeys who have proclaimed themselves kings.'149 He himself-he confesses-wears his *palmes* only to secure deference from these 'people kneeling in worship before equality/and who have only one concern: superiority!'150 In more serious vein, the work of the Théâtre Chrétien Social from 1905 onwards also sought to oppose republican ideas of popular equality with 'genuine equality, with, as its source, brotherly love.'151 Recruited among workers and intellectuals, the peripatetic troupe of the Théâtre Chrétien Social performed in Paris and its suburbs, often to large audiences. Notre pain quotidien: l'usine qui tue attracted an audience of 800 to the town hall of Saint-Mandé in April 1910, and was particularly well received. The subject was the forming of a workers' cooperative in the wake of a factory strike, and the play included the baiting of a Catholic worker by his anti-clerical colleagues, and his subsequent death for their ransom.¹⁵²

After the First World War, other Catholic and working-class theatre troupes continued, within the longer-standing model of the patronage, to offer drama as a means of reflecting on the relationship between work, workers, and salvation. One of the most widely publicized initiatives (whose performances were even attended by delegates from the mainstream Parisian press), was the series of Passion plays produced by Abbé Dhuit and his Patronage Saint-Pierre in the working-class district of Ménilmontant ('one of the most populous and "red" areas of the capital', as the right-wing Écho de Paris described it).¹⁵³ Dhuit, a Salesian priest, had been active in the area since the early twentieth century,¹⁵⁴ organizing activities for his *patronage* in the Rue Boyer until the separation of Church and State led him to seek alternative premises on the nearby Rue de la Retraite. By the 1920s this was a strongly Communist district: indeed, Communists once attacked Dhuit and his followers on their way home from a local musical festival.¹⁵⁵ Yet Dhuit's own working-class drama continued to flourish. By the 1930s, the Théâtre de la Rue de la Retraite could accommodate an audience of 650,¹⁵⁶ and the Lenten performance of passion plays in which local workers played the parts of the artisanal apostles consistently attracted widespread attention (see Fig. 1).¹⁵⁷ Roger Mahieu, who in his professional life repaired radio sets, mimed the role of Mary (for the cast was all-male); Judas worked in a local co-op; Christ was—suitably—a local carpenter. As for Peter: 'He came to us from "the other side"', confided Père Dhuit. 'Three years ago, he was a militant Communist!'¹⁵⁸

In contrast to these important but smaller-scale initiatives, the Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne (JOC) realized several mass spectacles of a magnitude more closely comparable with that of contemporary political meetings.¹⁵⁹ With an estimated 90,000 members by 1938, the JOC formed part of the wider ACJF (Association Catholique de la Jeunesse Française), which also catered for students, rural and maritime workers.¹⁶⁰ The mass character of the JOC, together with its special emphasis on working-class dignity and agency, threw down a particular challenge to left-wing groups: indeed, Communists in 1930s Paris complained at their failure to recruit in factories where the JOC's influence predominated.¹⁶¹ Activities and publications of the JOC championed, for example, a distinctive pride in 'working-class dignity' and 'the moral values of the workers', and campaigned for better working hours and conditions.¹⁶² Members were enjoined not only to persuade factory owners and managers that workers were 'equal before God', but also to defend the specific needs of different sections of the workforce, including working mothers, the young, the sick, and the elderly. They were further reminded that the salvation of the working class would come from the workers themselves,¹⁶³ and exhorted to engage in active citizenship as 'the true builders of the workers' city, the true saviours of the people'.¹⁶⁴

The JOC was not, however, a political organization, and its role with regard to both right- and left-wing politics was often complex. This was a period in which Catholic political engagement was rapidly diversifying, with Catholic groups and parties such as the centre-left Parti Démocrate Populaire and the Christian–Marxist Terre Nouvelle emerging alongside more traditionalist and right-wing groups such as the Fédération Nationale Catholique.¹⁶⁵ *Jocistes* were thus frequently reminded that although they were to fight for workers' rights and dignity, they were to eschew the 'sterile battles' of strikes and demonstrations. Equally, while resisting right-wing nationalism by respecting and defending foreign workers, they were also to remain wary of political cooperation with the left, even in pursuit of common goals. 'Work, love, liberty—these are all very well,' wrote Marcel Muller, vice-president of the JOC, in response to Communist appeals for working-class unity in March 1936.

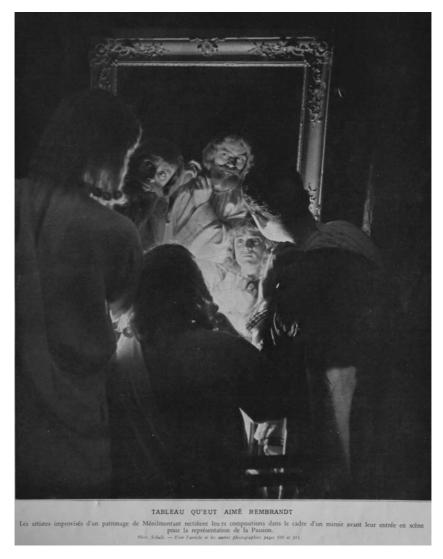


Fig. 1 Working-class actors prepare for their passion play in Ménilmontant. *L'Illustration*, 3 April 1937 (© *L'Illustration*. Courtesy of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and *L'Illustration*) 'But when we hold such different conceptions of these terms, it's difficult to see what kind of "union" could be realized.'¹⁶⁶ During the massive strikes a few months later, the national council of the JOC sought to distinguish between the defence of legitimate strikers' demands and the violence or moral danger that the factory occupations might engender and made a particular appeal for young working women and mothers to be allowed to return home.¹⁶⁷ At all times, *jocistes* were called upon to follow the guidance of a leader far removed from those of contemporary political movements: 'Christ the Worker, our Master',¹⁶⁸ who led by example as 'the ideal-type of worker, proud and conscientious, a devoted comrade even unto death.'¹⁶⁹

In its use of drama—whether smaller-scale choruses or mass spectacles—the JOC both echoed the concerns and techniques of its political counterparts and simultaneously developed its own distinctive image of the working-class builders of the ideal city. Already in the early 1930s there was a growing interest in developing the spoken chorus for meetings and congresses. Léon Chancerel, for instance, received requests from *jociste* chaplains for assistance in developing 'new forms of theatre suited to a large-scale working-class and popular audiences', and explicitly mirroring those used by Soviet groups in both Russia and France.¹⁷⁰ Spoken choruses were also subsequently used by the JOC in their national congress at the Palais du Trocadéro in 1934, as well as on a larger scale at the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the Belgian JOC in 1935, when the chorus comprised 1560 members.¹⁷¹

Two mass performances by the JOC in 1936–1937 developed these techniques for a mass, working-class audience on a still greater scale. In June 1936, to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the ACJF, a spectacle was staged in the Parisian Parc des Princes. This was for an audience of 40,000, and featured spoken choruses, speeches by senior members of the church hierarchy, and a performance of Henri Ghéon's *Mystère de la Messe* introduced by Ghéon himself. The ambitious production was driven by a series of dialogues: not only between actors and audience (united in common membership of the ACJF), but also between laity and religious, provinces and the nation,¹⁷² France and its neighbours, and ultimately also between the human and the divine. In the initial chorus, bright, contrasting colours distinguished the different groups who stepped forward to represent the sections of the ACJF: rural and urban workers, students, and sailors. To a series of questions—'Who wants to fight?', 'Who wants to triumph?'—they answered in the affirmative,

before the entire audience were invited to share in a militant commitment to the same task: 'to re-Christianize the family, work, and the city.'¹⁷³ An interplay of colour and dialogue then linked this commitment to the presence and speeches of bishops and cardinals, dressed in red and purple. Cardinal Verdier of Paris not only appealed to the patriotism of his audience—'as French people, you believe that victory is never impossible'—but also read a telegram from Cardinal Pacelli (later Pope Pius XII) that championed the international collaboration of young Catholics. 'The *Jeunesse Catholique*', insisted Pacelli, 'will rebuild the city and give it to Christ.'¹⁷⁴

The transformative role of both work and the workers was furthered explored in the dramatic centrepiece of the celebration: Ghéon's Mystère de la Messe. Adapted from a play by Calderón de la Barca, the mystery offers in simultaneous décor a meditation on the meaning of the mass alongside its celebration by a priest. It opens with a 'chorus of the ignorant' complaining of their lack of understanding; then follows their journey, guided by Wisdom, from the prefiguring of Christ's sacrifice in the Old Testament to a highly symbolic depiction of the Passion. Throughout the play the chorus plays a vital role, not least in reciting the creed—which, unlike in the masses that Jocistes would have attended, is spoken in the vernacular. But the mystery also holds a special place for workers.¹⁷⁵ For the offertory procession (integrated into the journey towards enlightenment as well as occupying its customary place in the mass), male and female agricultural workers carry to the altar wheat and grapes for the Eucharist, but also their sickles and scythes. Other workers-miners, housewives, businessmen, shopkeepers, and students-then join the procession and make their own offerings. When these are complete, Wisdom replies that God will, through the sacraments, render their tools, work, and intentions 'stronger, more active, more effective: sealed with the blessing of the Sacrament.'176

In July 1937, a dramatic diptych commissioned to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the French JOC similarly emphasized labour's spiritual and even liturgical dimension.¹⁷⁷ Performed, like *Le Mystère de la Messe*, in the Parisian Parc des Princes, *La Joie du Travail* and *Le Sens du Travail* reimagined work within a joyful working-class identity and as a contribution to the spiritual and sacramental life of the community. In the first spectacle, workers—playing themselves—danced around the instruments of their work on stage to suggest a balanced and harmonious use of the machine for the greater good (a theme frequently

pursued in *La Jeunesse Ouvrière*). As in the previous year's celebration, which brought together workers from across the country, the provincial specificity of labour was also fêted, with participants in local costume representing the florists of Nice, and the silk workers of the Rhône valley. In *Le Sens du Travail*, the workers' achievements became—as in *Le Mystère*—the physical and spiritual offerings of the mass, as well as its material context. The carpenters had built the altar, the bookbinders had bound the missal, the weavers had crafted the altar cloth, while the invalid workers had offered the cross. The following day, a mass was celebrated using these very creations, and was offered by a young working-class priest for fellow workers in Germany.

For Henri Ghéon, this spectacle represented the culmination of Catholic popular theatre in postwar France. It epitomized the new dramatic experience to which 'the *peuple fidèle*, both those accorded the heavy and brutal name of the "masses" and also the elite of the Christian world' were called. It offered workers the opportunity to represent themselves on stage, and it served the highest goals of popular theatre by favouring an intimate communion between actors and audience in a shared life of faith. Ghéon's only reservation was that the first three quarters of the performance seemed devoid of explicit religious content, so that a non-believer—even a Communist—could have accepted the vision of the people as presented on stage.¹⁷⁸ But this, so the producer explained, was exactly the intention.¹⁷⁹

5 Conclusion

Similar to the theatre of Ghéon himself, or to that of Chancerel and other Catholic groups, *La Joie du Travail* and *Le Sens du Travail* were designed and performed in explicit dialogue with contemporary concerns, images, and dramatic techniques. While observers of Catholic popular theatre were intrigued by or dismissive of its medieval character—the performance of mystery plays; the establishment of troupes inspired by monastic communities; or the bringing of saints' lives to the stages of Paris—the writers and groups creating such theatre were not circumscribed by revivalism for the converted. Inspired by the convictions of Jacques Copeau, writers and directors such as Ghéon and Chancerel shared in the concerns of other popular theatre enthusiasts in their rejection of commercialism and celebrity, and in their search for a purified theatre that would edify its audiences as well as offering a radically different experience of acting itself. In creating amateur troupes for which theatre was integrated into the life of faith, Copeau, Ghéon, and Chancerel engaged with communities of both past and present. They sought ways in which drama might draw on models of medieval piety and sanctity while also contributing to personal growth and collective life—whether this involved parish and youth movements, or the life of the nation as a whole.

Equally, although Catholic popular theatre was primarily religious rather than political, it engaged in a sometimes explicit dialogue with political ideas and movements. Chancerel had Communist friends who developed agit-prop theatre in Paris; he studied Soviet theatre whose repertoire and technique he described as 'in line with the still uncertain dogmas of a Messianic ideology both secular and obligatory.'180 Delegates from both Soviet theatre and the Hitler Youth movement attended a conference held by Chancerel's Centre d'Études in October 1937¹⁸¹; and when the *Jocistes* arrived for their celebration in the Parc des Princes in June 1936, they found a banner from PCF militants announcing that 'The Communists salute the members of the JOC.'182 In the imagination of the people and the ideal city, Catholic groups developed visions of working-class agency and citizenship that both paralleled and diverged from those of their political counterparts on left and right. Above all, they too wished to unite the people and the stage in the conviction that this encounter could be both transformative and transcendent—even if it might never be fully understood.

Notes

- Chancerel, Répertoire des Comédiens Routiers no. 4: La Compassion de Notre-Dame (célébration par personnages des mystères joyeux, douloureux et glorieux, scénario et mise en scène de Léon Chancerel) (Paris: La Hutte, 1933), preface, p. 7.
- 2. P. Werrie, writing in *Le Vingtième Siècle* (Brussels), quoted in *La Compassion de Notre-Dame: Programme* (BN DAS Rt 4438). See also René Salomé's assessment of Ghéon's theatre: 'Avec le Peuple fidèle', *La Revue des Jeunes* (25 June 1923), p. 674.
- 3. Chancerel, 'Rénovation dramatique en profondeur, sous le signe des deux Colombes, 1913-35', Études, publiées par des Pères de la Compagnie de Jésus, 214 (1935), p. 640.
- 4. Armand Praviel writing on Ghéon in 1927, in *Du Romantisme à la prière* (Paris: Perrin, 1927), p. 194.

- 5. Lee, In Search of a Public, p. 18.
- 6. Catherine Boschian-Campaner (ed.), *Correspondance Vielé-Griffin-Ghéon* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2004), p. 24. Similarly, Henry Philips's valuable *Le Théâtre catholique* details Ghéon's efforts to find publics for his plays rather than the plays themselves, referencing only his letters and articles.
- 7. Cusson mentions the performance of Chancerel's La Compassion de Notre-Dame in Un Réformateur du théâtre: Léon Chancerel: l'expérience Comédiens-Routiers, 1929–39 (Paris: La Hutte, 1945), but offers no analysis of the play; Ory is enthusiastic about Chancerel's theatre in his Théâtre citoyen (pp. 34–37), but does not focus on the texts. Philips refers briefly to mass performances by the JOC in 1937 and 1938 (Le Théâtre catholique, p. 587), and their celebrations in 1936 are fleetingly referenced in Paul Christophe, 1936. Les Catholiques et le Front populaire (Paris: Éditions Ouvrières, 1989), p. 189, and Yvon Tranvouez, Catholicisme et société dans la France du XXe siècle (Paris: Karthala, 2011), p. 119.
- 8. Maryline Romain refers fleetingly, for example, to Chancerel's *Compassion de Notre Dame* at Puy, and describes Ghéon as a 'prolific' author (p. 109), but does not include any analysis of the texts and their treatment of the people, or of time and space. Romain, 'Du Théâtre populaire et des catholiques', in Denizot (ed.), *Théâtre populaire*.
- See, for example, Jacqueline Levaillant, 'Henri Ghéon, genèse d'une esthétique théâtrale', *Revue d'Histoire du Théâtre*, 50 (1998), p. 66; Irène Slawénska, 'Le Théâtre liturgique au XXe siècle', *La Maison-Dieu:* cahiers de pastorale liturgique, 219 (1999), p. 77.
- 10. Helen Solterer focuses primarily on the theatre of Gustave Cohen and his Théophiliens rather than on the groups discussed in this chapter, but with great sensitivity to the interplay between dramatic and theological concepts in reimagining the community. See, for example, 'The Waking of Medieval Theatricality in Paris, 1935–95', *New Literary History*, 27 (1996), pp. 357–390.
- 11. With a particular focus on the 'outstretched hand' of Communists to Catholics in 1936, studies of French Catholicism in the 1930s have often privileged the growth of left-wing movements, challenging the association between Catholicism and the right. In the 1970s and 1980s, for example, John Hellman and Oscar L. Arnal highlighted the development of left-leaning Catholic publications such as *Sept, L'Aube*, and the Christian–Marxist *Terre Nouvelle*. See Oscar L. Arnal, 'Alternatives to the Third Republic among Catholic Leftists in the 1930s', *Historical Reflections*, 5 (1978), pp. 177–195, John Hellman, 'French Left Catholics and Communism in the 1930s', *Church History*, 45 (1976),

pp. 507–523, and Hellman, *Emmanuel Mounier and the New Catholic Left in France, 1930–1950* (Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press, 1981). On broader recent trends within this historiography, see Wardhaugh, 'Sacred Unions: religion and reconciliation in French society, 1919–1945', *French Politics, Culture, and Society*, 27 (2009), pp. 116–128

- See, for example, Stephen Schloesser, Jazz Age Catholicism: Mystic Modernism in Postwar Paris1919–1933 (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2005), p. 4.
- 13. See, for example, Schloesser, Jazz Age Catholicism, p. 209.
- 14. Schloesser, Jazz Age Catholicism, p. 5. Cf. also p. 119.
- 15. Richard Burton, Holy Tears, Holy Blood: Women, Catholicism, and the Culture of Suffering in France, 1840–1970 (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004). On the Maritains and the wider phenomenon of literary conversion in this period, see also Brooke Williams Smith, Jacques Maritain, Antimodern or Ultramodern? An Historical Analysis of his Critics, his Thought, and his Life (New York and Oxford: Elsevier, 1976) and Frédéric Gugelot, La Conversion des intellectuels au catholicisme en France, 1885–1935 (Paris: CNRS, 1998).
- 16. Jay Winter, La Première guerre mondiale, III, Sociétés (Paris: Fayard, 2014).
- 17. Annette Becker, La Guerre et la foi: de la mort à la mémoire (Paris: Armand Colin, 1994), pp. 44-45.
- Leonard Smith, Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, Annette Becker, France and the Great War (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), p. 162. Cf. Schloesser, Jazz Age Catholicism, p. 7.
- 19. Schloesser, Jazz Age Catholicism, p. 5.
- 20. Schloesser, Jazz Age Catholicism, p. 188.
- Kevin Passmore, 'Catholicism and Nationalism: the Fédération Républicaine, 1927–1939' in Kay Chadwick (ed.), *Catholicism, Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century France* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), p. 48.
- 22. In the 1920s and 30s, new dramatic interpretations of the Passion were staged in Flanders, Wallonia and the Tyrol; in 1924, a newly established fraternity entitled the *Bekroenungbruderschaft* staged the Passion in Lucerne. Slawénska, 'Le Théâtre liturgique', p. 80.
- 23. Germain Bapst, *Essai sur l'histoire du théâtre* (Paris: Hachette, 1893), p. 1.
- 24. Chancerel, Panorama, p. 28.
- 25. Sepet, Les Origines catholiques du théâtre, p. 17.
- 26. The dramatic elements of the Easter liturgy have since been much more widely recognized as forming the origin of modern drama. See, for

example, A.A. Cawley, *Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays* (London: Everyman, 1993), Introduction, xiii.

- 27. Sepet, Les Origines, p. 12.
- 28. Sepet, Les Origines, pp. 9-10.
- 29. Nicolas Berdyaev, Un Nouveau Moyen Âge (Paris: Plon, 1927), p. 120.
- 'P.P. 10 Juin 1938. Réunion organisée par les Catholiques, Salle Soulange-Bodin, 16, rue Vercingétorix, Paris, le 9 Juin 1938', APP Ba 1953.
- 31. Berdyaev, Un Nouveau Moyen Âge, p. 141.
- 32. See BN DAS Rt 4270.
- Paul Garcin, 'La Renaissance du Théâtre chrétien et les compagnons de Notre-Dame', *Comœdia*, 16 April 1927.
- 34. 'Réponse de M. Henri Mugnier', Comadia, 29 July 1927. The reference was to Copeau's much-quoted conviction that true theatre would exist only when the audience shared in the words and sentiments of the actors on stage. See Chancerel, Du Public (Lyon: La Hutte, 1944), p. 20.
- See, for example, Bettina Knapp, The Reign of the Theatrical Director: French Theatre, 1887–1924 (New York: Whitston, 1988), Chap.
 9, Mireille Bedeneau, 'Copeau et Antoine: un même idéal', Revue d'Histoire du Theâtre, 50 (1998), pp. 45–52, and Philips, Le Théâtre Catholique.
- 36. Bedeneau, 'Copeau et Antoine', pp. 46, 48.
- See Copeau, Journal 1901–15 (Paris: Seghers, 1991), p. 568; Serge Proust, 'La Communauté théâtrale: entreprises théâtrales et idéal de la troupe', Revue Française de la Sociologie, 44 (2003), p. 99.
- 38. Bedeneau, 'Copeau et Antoine', p. 49.
- 39. During the First World War, Copeau met Gordon Craig in Florence and Adolphe Appia in Switzerland. In 1917, Clemenceau offered him the 'cultural mission' of taking the Théâtre du Vieux Colombier to New York. They returned to Paris in 1919.
- 40. Quoted, for example, in Proust, 'La Communauté théâtrale', p. 101 and Bedeneau, 'Copeau et Antoine', p. 46.
- 41. Chancerel, 'Rénovation dramatique', p. 635.
- Copeau also liked to include this anecdote in later lectures. Hubert Gignoux, *Histoire d'une famille théâtrale* (Lausanne: Éditions de l'Aire, 1984), p. 90.
- 43. Chancerel, Rénovation dramatique', pp. 639-640, 645.
- 44. Extracts from Copeau's speech of 4 November. Quoted by Gignoux, *Histoire d'une famille*, p. 92,
- 45. The name signified both 'Copeau's children' and also 'the vine stocks' (*copias* in local patois). Gignoux, *Histoire d'une famille*, p. 97.

- 46. '14 novembre 1925', Suzanne Bing, Journal de Bord des Copiaus, 1924– 29 (Paris: Éditions Seghers, 1974), pp. 94–95.
- 47. Gignoux, Histoire d'une famille, p. 102.
- 48. Bing, Journal de Bord, p. 32.
- 49. Proust, 'La Communauté théâtrale', p. 108.
- 50. Chancerel, Panorama, p. 198.
- 51. Copeau, Le Théâtre populaire (Paris: PUF, 1942), p. 51.
- 52. Copeau, *Le Théâtre populaire*, p. 44. He does, however, paradoxically suggest that that such spontaneous theatre will emerge at the 'order' of poets and writers (p. 43).
- 53. Boschian-Campaner, Correspondance, p. 17.
- 54. Letter to Vielé-Griffin, 30 June 1916, reproduced in Boschian-Campaner, *Correspondance*, p. 213.
- 55. See Jacques Reynaud, *Henri Ghéon*, 1875–1944: Étude et bibliographie (Paris: Association des Amis d'Henri Ghéon, 1960), p. 6. He also wrote novels and plays, including *Le Pain*, a 'popular and lyric tragedy', in 1899.
- 56. Ghéon, 'Sur le Théâtre populaire', La Nouvelle Revue Française, 61 (1911), p. 505.
- 57. Henri Brochet, *Henri Ghéon* (Paris: Presses Îles de France, 1946), p. 111.
- 58. Frédéric Léfèbvre, 'Une heure avec Henri Ghéon', Les Nouvelles Littéraires, 22 August 1925. Cf. Philips, Le Théâtre catholique, p. 563. Cf. Romain, 'Du Théâtre populaire', p. 107.
- 59. See, for example, L'Écho du patronage Saint-Geniès de Thiers or Le Bulletin Semi-Mensuel de l'Œeuvre du Théâtre-Chrétien-Social.
- 60. Lucien Debech in Action Française, 14 August 1922.
- 61. Henri Ghéon, 'Les Compagnons de Notre-Dame pour nos amis, présents et à venir', *La Revue Fédéraliste*, October 1926, p. 258 (BN DAS 8 Rt 4270).
- 62. Léfèbvre, Une Heure avec Henri Ghéon'.
- 63. Ghéon, 'Les Saints et le théâtre chrétien populaire', pp. 190–191. Ghéon had previously been involved with the unanimist group. See Paul Achard, 'Henri Ghéon m'a dit...' (19 February 1925) in BN DAS 8 Rt 4270.
- 64. Ghéon, 'Les Saints et le Théâtre chrétien populaire', *La Revue des Jeunes* (25 April 1922), p. 190.
- 65. Paul Garcin, 'La Renaissance du Théâtre chrétien et les Compagnons de Notre-Dame', *Comædia*, 16 April 1927.
- 66. Debech, Action française, 14 August 1922.
- 67. Ghéon, 'Les Saints et le théâtre chrétien populaire', p. 183.
- 68. Ghéon, 'Les Saints', p. 186.

- 69. Ghéon, 'Les Saints', p. 126.
- 70. Jerome Keeler, 'Henri Ghéon and his religious plays', Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review, 26 (1937), p. 631.
- 71. See BN DAS, Rf 60441, and Louis-Richard Monnet, 'Le Comédien et la Grâce', *Le Mercure de France*, 1 September 1926, pp. 416–419. The saint's life had already been dramatized, but with less emphasis on his psychological development.
- 72. Ghéon, Le Comédien et la grâce (Paris: Plon, 1925), p. 225.
- 73. Ghéon, Le Comédien et la grâce, x.
- 74. Lefebvre, 'Une Heure avec Henri Ghéon'.
- 75. Ghéon, 'Les Saints', pp. 196–197. Stephen Schloesser suggests similar impulses towards the total transformation of both culture and daily life in his study of the Catholic novel in this period. See *Jazz Age Catholicism*, especially p. 281.
- 76. Ghéon, 'Les Saints', p. 197.
- 77. Keeler, 'Henri Ghéon', p. 635.
- 78. Première représentation des Compagnons de Notre-Dame: programme (BN DAS 8 RT 4270).
- 79. Ghéon, Les Compagnons de Notre-Dame Dame (pamphlet, 1 November 1924), p. 3 (BN DAS 8 Rt 4270).
- This is mentioned but not analysed in Romain, 'Du Théâtre populaire', p. 112.
- Both had also performed the previous year in Ghéon's Parisian production of *La Vie profonde de Saint-François d'Assise*, raising money for impoverished Italians in the capital. See BN DAS Rf 60444.
- 82. *Décor simultané* was also employed by Gustave Cohen's Théophiliens. See Solterer, 'The Waking of Medieval Theatricality', p. 371.
- 83. Ghéon, Le Triomphe de Notre-Dame de Chartres (Paris: André Blot, 1927), p. 6.
- 84. Ghéon, Le Triomphe, p. 8. A similar role is taken by the 'the excellent artifice of the reader' in Ghéon's Bernadette devant Marie, histoire véridique du fait de Lourdes. See Gérard d'Houville, 'Bernadette devant Marie', Les Cahiers du Théâtre Chrétien, 24 August 1931, BN DAS 8 Rf 60458.
- 85. The musical accompaniment (sacred and profane chants from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries) was directed by Félix Raugel.
- 86. Ghéon, Le Mystère du roi saint Louis, en 5 journées (Paris: André Blot, 1935), p. 13.
- 87. Ghéon, Le Mystère du roi saint Louis, p. 51.
- 88. Ghéon, Le Mystère des prodiges de Notre-Dame de Verdun (Bar-le-Duc: Imprimerie Saint-Paul, 1937).

- 89. The women in the chorus are specifically asked whether they will defend devotional images against attack, and respond affirmatively. Ghéon, *Mystères des Prodiges*, p. 44.
- 90. Ghéon, Mystère des prodiges, p. 66.
- 91. Ghéon, Mystère des prodiges, p. 70.
- 92. Ghéon envisaged that professional actors would contribute only if they were practising Catholics. Ghéon, *Les Compagnons de Notre-Dame* (1 November 1924): 'règlement intérieur', p. 4. (BN DAS 8 Rt 4270).
- 93. Ghéon, 'Les Compagnons de Notre-Dame pour nos amis, présents et à venir', La Revue Fédéraliste, October 1926 (BN DAS 8 Rt 4270), p. 263.
- 94. Ghéon, Les Compagnons de Notre-Dame (1 November 1924), p. 9 (BN DAS 8 Rt 4270).
- 95. Ghéon, 'Les Compagnons de Notre-Dame présentés par leur Directeur', Les Nouvelles Littéraires, 14 February 1925.
- 96. *Théâtre Albert 1er. Le Magicien Prodigieux* (programme), p. 1 (BN DAS 8 Rt 4270). See also Brochet, *Henri Ghéon*, p. 105.
- 97. Théâtre du Vieux Colombier. Avril–Mai 1925. Second spectacle des Compagnons de Notre-Dame (Programme) (BN DAS 8 Rt 4270).
- Maurice Brillant, 'Les Compagnons de Notre-Dame', Le Correspondant, 25 October 1925.
- 99. Les Compagnons. Comment ils travaillent. L'Impromptu du 23 heures, reproduced in La Revue Fédéraliste, December 1926, pp. 470–486 (here p. 474). (BN DAS 8 Rt 4270).
- 100. Jacques Boulenger, 'La Bergère au pays des loups', Les Nouvelles Littéraires, 13 February 1926.
- 'Deux pièces comiques pour honorer le joyeux Saint François d'Assise', Comadia, 23 January 1928.
- Théâtre Albert 1^{er}. Le Magicien Prodigieux (programme) BN DAS Rt 4270.
- 103. Louis Handler, 'Une pièce de Calderon au Théâtre Albert 1^{er}', Comædia, 3 December 1925.
- 104. Reviews can, for example, be found in Le Temps, Le Petit Bleu, La Presse, L'Action Française, Les Nouvelles Littéraires, L'Intransigeant, L'Écho de Paris, Comædia, Le Petit Parisien, Liberté, and L'Avenir, as well as in Turin's La Stampa and the Swiss Gazette de Lausanne. See the press cuttings in BN DAS 8 Rt 4270.
- 105. For example, 'La Soirée élégante', Le Soir, 2 May 1925.
- 106. Reynaud, Henri Ghéon, p. 24.
- Paul Souday, 'Hier, au Vieux-Colombier: Saint-Maurice ou l'obéissance' (20 February 1925), BN DAS Rt 4270.

- 108. Jacques Florange, 'Soirs de Paris: les "mystères" du Vieux-Colombier'. (BN DAS Rt 4270). See also Action Française, 26 February 1925.
- 109. See Paul Ginistry's article in *Le Petit Parisien*, 21 February 1925 (BN DAS Rt 4270).
- 110. Henri Brochet, with Ghéon's support, continued their work by establishing the Compagnons des Jeux, as well as the periodical *Jeux*, *Tréteaux*, et Personnages.
- 111. Reynaud, *Henri Ghéon*, p. 24. On Ghéon's reception in Canada, see also Marcel M. Veilleux, 'Ghéon parmi nous', *La Revue Dominicaine*, 1 (1945), pp. 376–377
- 112. Claude Berton, writing in Les Nouvelles Littéraires, 28 February 1925.
- 113. L'Avenir, 15 February 1926 (BN DAS Rt 4270).
- 114. Daniel Lee, for example, charts the involvement of Jewish youth in Chancerel's Comédiens Routiers under the Vichy régime. See Lee, *Pétain's Jewish Children: French Jewish Youth and the Vichy Regime*, 1942–44 (Oxford: OUP, 2014), Chapter Four.
- 115. Chancerel developed the Centre d'Études et de Représentations Dramatiques, the Compagnie des Comédiens Routiers, the Théâtre des Quatre Vents, the Théâtre de l'Oncle Sébastien, and the Centre Dramatique de la Jeunesse. The Comédiens Routiers published their own bulletin, *L'Art Dramatique*. In 1933 Chancerel was also one of the founders of the Société d'Histoire du Théâtre. See BN DAS Rt 4445.
- 116. Chancerel had worked in mainstream theatre alongside some of the most influential directors of the day. See Charles Vildrac's preface to Chancerel, *Le Théâtre et la Jeunesse* (Paris: Éditions Bourrelier et Cie, 1941), p. 9.
- 117. Ory does not, however, explore the texts or performance strategies used by Chancerel. See Ory, *Théâtre citoyen*, pp. 35–7.
- 118. Chancerel, *Le Théâtre et la Jeunesse*, p. 10 The text was complete by 1939 although not published until 1941.
- 119. Chancerel, Le Théâtre et la Jeunesse, p. 16.
- 120. Chancerel, Le Théâtre et la Jeunesse, p. 14.
- 121. Chancerel, Panorama, p. 47.
- 122. Chancerel, Les Jeux dramatiques, pp. 6-7.
- 123. Chancerel, Les Jeux dramatiques, p. 8.
- 124. Gignoux, Histoire d'une famille, p. 146.
- 125. Gignoux, Histoire d'une famille, p. 13.
- 126. Gignoux Histoire d'une famille, p. 144.
- 127. 'Little knights errant of the modern age, the *Boy scouts* understand what inspired the devotion of their knightly ancestors.' Paul Vuibert in *La Démocratie*, AN F7 13214.

- 128. See, for example, Gignoux, Histoire d'une famille, p. 148; Cusson, Un Réformateur, p. 25.
- 129. La Compassion de Notre-Dame (programme), BN DAS Rt 4438.
- 130. Les Comédiens Routiers (pamphlet, n.d.), BN DAS Rt 4423.
- 131. 'Comédiens Routiers, saison 1932-33: bilan', BN DAS BN Rt 4423.
- 132. Chancerel, Un Trésor est caché dedans, preface, p. 3.
- 133. Art Dramatique: Bulletin des Comédiens routiers (December 1932), p. 29.
- 134. Chancerel, Le Théâtre et la Jeunesse, p. 81.
- 135. Chancerel, Le Théâtre et la Jeunesse, p. 76.
- 136. Chancerel, 'Comédiens Routiers: Personnages'.
- 137. Chancerel, Récitations chorales, p. 6.
- 138. 'Chant de la route' in Récitations chorales, p. 7.
- 139. Chancerel, Un Trésor est caché dedans action chorale en trois parties, en marge du 'Laboreur et ses enfants' de La Fontaine (Paris: La Hutte, 1939), p. 4.
- 140. 'Comme elle allait à la rivière' in *Récitations chorales: deux complaintes de Cornouaille et comme elle allait à la rivière* (Lyon: La Hutte, 1942).
- 141. Gignoux, Histoire d'une famille, p. 173.
- 142. Chancerel, Du Public, p. 20.
- 143. 'Salle Pleyel, les 7 et 8 avril 1933 à 21heures, les scouts de France, pour le XIX anniversaire de la mort du Christ: La Compassion de Notre-Dame' BN DAS Rt 4438.
- 144. Chancerel and Raoul Serène, La Mission de Jeanne d'Arc (Paris: La Hutte, 1938); Chancerel and Serène, Terre de France, Royaume de Marie.
- 145. Chancerel and Serène, Terre de France, Royaume de Marie.
- 146. Chancerel and Serène, *La Mission de Jeanne d'Are*, p. 39. Joan's heart had also been thrown into the Seine.
- 147. See Wardhaugh, In Pursuit of the People, pp. 216 and 219.
- 148. Daniel Robert, Les Palmes!! Comédie en un acte et en vers. Théâtre Social Chrétien (Paris: Henri Jouve, 1905), p. 18.
- 149. Robert, Les Palmes!!, p. 31.
- 150. Robert, Les Palmes!!, p. 32.
- 151. 'L'Apostolat par le théâtre', Bulletin Semi-Mensuel de l'Œuvre du Théâtre-Chrétien-social (April 1910), p. 1.
- 152. 'Bulletin', Le Théâtre-Chrétien-Social, 2 (Juin 1910).
- 153. 'La Passion du Christ à Ménilmontant', *L'Écho de Paris*, 2 March 1937 (BN DAS Rt 4311).
- 154. Dhuit is mentioned, for example, in L'Écho du patronage Saint-Louis des Lilas, Seine (July 1902), p. 19.

- 155. Françoise Morier and Claire Reverchon, *Belleville*, *Belleville*: visages d'une planète (Paris: Creaphis, 1995), p. 40.
- 156. L'Illustration, 3 April 1937.
- 157. See the press cuttings in BN DAS R 430.
- 158. Le Figaro, 20 March 1937.
- 159. I have explored elsewhere the parallels between the JOC spectacle of 1937 and Jean-Richard Bloch's Naissance d'une cité. See Jessica Irons, 'Staging Reconciliation: Popular Theatre and Political Utopia in Paris in 1937', Contemporary European History, 14 (2005), pp. 279–294.
- 160. See Michel Launay, 'La JOC dans son premier développement' in Pierre Pierrard, Michel Launay, and Rolande Trempé, *La JOC: regards d'historiens* (Paris: Éditions Ouvrières, 1984), p. 42. See also Gignoux, *Histoire d'une famille*, p. 138.
- 161. 'P.P. 5 août 1933', AN F7 13131.
- 162. See, for example, La Jeunesse Ouvrière, 15 July 1930.
- 163. Jeunesse Ouvrière: petit guide des familles ouvrières (Spring 1933).
- 164. 'Notre Position dans la lutte en faveur des jeunes chômeurs', *La Jeunesse Ouvrière*, 1 April 1935. On the idea of building the city, see also *La Jeunesse Ouvrière*, 1 March 1932 and 1 February 1935.
- 165. Christophe, Les Catholiques, p. 12. On the FNC, see APP Ba 1905; on the 'jeunes gardes' created in Brittany to inculcate a 'spirit of resistance against the secularizing laws of the state', see 'Le Commissaire spécial à M. le Directeur de la Sûreté Générale, 15 novembre 1924', AN F7 13214.
- 166. La Jeunesse Ouvrière, 1 March 1936.
- 167. 'Les Grèves', La Jeunesse Ouvrière, 15 June 1936.
- 168. See, for example, La Jeunesse Ouvrière, 1 March 1932.
- 169. 'Notre chef: l'éternel meneur', La Jeunesse Ouvrière, 15 April 1935.
- 170. L'Art Dramatique, December 1932, p. 29.
- 171. '100.000 jocistes à Bruxelles', La Jeunesse Ouvrière, September 1935.
- 172. Some of the agricultural workers made their longest ever train journeys in order to attend the celebration.
- 173. 'La Manifestation jubilaire au Parc des Princes', La Croix, 3 June 1936.
- 174. Reproduced in La Croix on 3 June 1936.
- 175. Ghéon, Le Mystère de la Messe, sur un thème de Calderón de la Barca (Liège: La Vie Liturgique, 1934), preface. Members of the JOC had also participated in its original performance in Liège in 1934.
- 176. Ghéon, Le Mystère de la Messe, p. 107.
- 177. See Jean Rodhain, Dixième anniversaire de la JOC Française: la fête nocturne du samedi soir 17 juillet 1937 en la veille du congrès jociste-La Joie du travail', 'Le Sens du travail' (Paris: Librairie de la

Jeunesse Ouvrière, 1937). For a fuller treatment of this spectacle, see Wardhaugh, *In Pursuit of the People*, pp. 178–182.

- 178. Rodhain, Dixième anniversaire: 'Témoignages', p. 2.
- 179. Rodhain, Dixième anniversaire, footnote to p. 2.
- 180. See Chancerel, Le Théâtre et la Jeunesse; Études, p. 641; Panorama, p. 83.
- 181. Cusson, Un Réformateur, p. 33.
- 182. Tranvouez, Catholicisme et société, p. 119.

The Beauty of Revolt: Anarchist Theatre in the Belle Époque

Shortly after midnight, in those monasteries where the Rule still holds sway, shadowy figures slip along every corridor, silent and prayerful. We see them sliding like ghosts towards the chapel where, in fearful or jubilant chorus, their voices will soon be raised in supplication, joy, and ecstasy. The monks are singing the matins of the new day.

Thus began the spirited editorial of *Matines* on 1 October 1897. Yet this was no call to the religious life. Instead, the editor called upon his reader, specifically addressed as a 'young man of twenty', to join him in singing the matins of the dawning century: an age not so much of religion as of revolution, violence, and upheaval; trembling with the potential for 'universal happiness, uncontrollable light, definitive harmony, and irresistible love.' It was this vision of beauty and revolt that the editor instructed his young readers to realize. Now, he urged, was the time to turn aside from the doctrine of art for art's sake, and to create for the new century correspondingly new forms of art for the people: articles, lectures, novels, and plays, even impromptu outbursts in the streets. Now was the time for these young hopefuls to enter the fray, and so become the Messiahs of the future.

The author of this editorial was almost certainly Louis Lumet, a dandified young writer with anarchist sympathies whose presence made itself felt not only in journalism but also in wider anarchist networks and cultural initiatives around the turn of the twentieth century. As this editorial suggests, Lumet and his associates championed the relationship between

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sabotage and the sublime, between the destruction of existing society and politics and the imagined fraternity of the future. While other writers and politicians spoke with anxiety of the 'age of the crowd'¹ or feared the invasion of the 'new barbarians', anarchists such as Lumet seemed feverishly impatient to throw open the gates and welcome them in. Indeed, many such activists deliberately styled themselves as harbingers of a new age: 'the primitives of a new race', in the words of Lumet's contemporary and sometime muse Saint-Georges de Bouhélier,² or, to quote the anarchist playwright Auguste Linert, 'the barbarians of tomorrow' who would triumph over the 'decadent members of an enfeebled race'.³

The relationship between anarchism, art, and violence was not, moreover, the preoccupation of only a few fertile imaginations. In the 1890s, France was profoundly shaken by a series of terrifying anarchist attacks that were described by perpetrators and partisans as acts of 'propaganda by the deed'.⁴ These included not only the bombing of Parisian cafés and the Chamber of Deputies, but even the assassination of President Sadi Carnot on 24 June 1894 by the Italian anarchist Sante Geronimo Caserio. Unsurprisingly, these acts of violence fomented both fear and fascination in the public sphere. In particular, they proved difficult to categorize in that their perpetrators often challenged perceptions of the 'criminal type': Émile Henry, bomber of the Café Terminus, was a cultured and articulate young man, a brilliant student who had won admission to the prestigious École Polytechnique and seemed to have everything to gain from the society he sought to destroy. Even the condemnation of the violence involved was complicated by the fact that it received a sometimes explicit endorsement from writers and journalists. When anarchist Auguste Vaillant threw a bomb into the Chamber of Deputies in December 1893, the poet Laurent Tailhade quipped: 'what does it matter if swathes of humanity disappear, as long as that the act is beautiful?⁵

If violence could be aesthetic, so too could art be conceived as a source of violence. Writers of anarchist propaganda such as Jean Grave were put on trial on the understanding that their works were a direct incentive to insurrection, with Grave imprisoned under the so-called *lois scélérates* or 'villainous laws' of 1893–1894 for alleged incitement to violent revolution through his recently republished *Société mourante et l'anarchie.*⁶ When a miscellaneous selection of writers and criminals were arraigned in August 1894 in the so-called 'Trial of the Thirty', the art critic Félix Fénéon painstakingly explained that his visitors were painters and poets, not bombers. 'My concierge,' he jested, 'has trouble telling them apart'.⁷ Meanwhile, anarchists also believed drama to be capable of exercising a particularly inflammatory influence on its audiences. Speaking of 'social theatre', the popular anarchist newspaper *Père Peinard* put the point with characteristic frankness: 'However poorly constructed a play may be, it's better than a book or a newspaper in that even the greatest numbskull can grasp the author's point...'⁸ As the famous socialist militant Jean Jaurès argued in his lecture on 'social theatre' on 26 July 1900, the more 'social' the theatre became (whether socialist or anarchist), the more it suggested the imminence of revolution, both exciting the audience and alarming the censor.⁹

It is not surprising, therefore, that many anarchists also considered theatre—and culture more generally—as a pathway towards radical personal transformation. Literary anarchists in *Art Social* looked forward, for example, to a future in which greater leisure would allow for ever more fruitful intellectual and cultural development, culminating in an 'explosion'—if not of dynamite, then certainly of 'individual egotism'.¹⁰ Yet what did anarchist theatre mean? How did it engage with ideas of the people and the political (especially as anarchists often proclaimed themselves to be against politics entirely)? What role did theatre play in the anarchist communities of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries?

Exploring the theatrical dimension of anarchist activity adds new depth to the understanding of anarchist thought and practice. The apparent parallels between fin-de-siècle terrorism and its twenty-first-century manifestations have tended to direct recent scholarly attention away from anarchist cultural life and towards a narrower focus on 'propaganda by the deed'.¹¹ Anarchist trade unionism, a popular subject in the wake of 1968, is similarly enjoying a renaissance of interest.¹² Anarchist theatre, in contrast, remains a relatively neglected field. An enduring admiration of the social provocation of anarchist theatre has been maintained in some enthusiastically partisan Francophone writing,¹³ while dramatic depictions of violence brought by anarchist playwrights to mainstream theatre-Octave Mirbeau's controversial depiction of a failed workingclass revolt in Les Mauvais Bergers, or Alfred Jarry's incendiary satire of power and greed in Ubu Roi-have also received some attention.¹⁴ Yet as Cecilia Beach demonstrates in her study of theatre and gender, 'Anarchist theatre could be staged anywhere, from cabarets to private homes to non-commercial theatres',¹⁵ and popular anarchist theatre, which was staged in all of these places and more besides, remains little known. Illustrative examples appear in Richard Sonn's richly documented work on cultural politics,¹⁶ and the Théâtre d'Art Social and the Théâtre Civique have received some treatment, but there has been little sustained attention either to their wider context or to areas of potential overlap between anarchist and non-anarchist initiatives.¹⁷ Nonetheless, the creation of clandestine anarchist theatre, together with the infiltration of mainstream theatre for the purpose of subversion, played a key role in developing conceptions of both individual and collective revolt. And the importance of theatre in shaping subversive and working-class communities in Europe more broadly in this period has certainly been widely acknowledged. This is exemplified not only in Günther Roth and Gerhard Ritter's studies of German working-class culture but equally in Gary Thurston's focus on pre-revolutionary popular theatre in Russia as an impetus to individualism, and most recently in Constance Bantman's portrait of theatre as a place of solidarity for French anarchist exiles in London.¹⁸

This chapter analyses the relationship between anarchism, art, and violence by spotlighting the social and popular theatre created by anarchists in and around Paris in the years 1890-1914. Drawing on anarchist pamphlets and newspapers alongside under-explored police reports, it examines the development of social and 'citizen' theatre, then explores the wider role of theatre within anarchist communes, and finally reveals their use of mainstream theatre as a locus for violence and revolt. Building on existing research, it goes further in offering an original analysis of the role of the people (as represented in the texts performed, as actors, and as audience) in such theatrical experiments, and also in moving outwards from the Théâtre d'Art Social and the Théâtre Civique to shed fresh light on the wider importance of theatre in anarchist networks and communities. These related case studies make it possible to illuminate in new detail how and why such powerful connections developed between theatre, beauty, and revolt, as well as to probe anarchist conceptions of theatre as individual emancipation and as a focus for collective life in both present and future. They also cast further light on the areas of convergence in the ambitions of state and subversive initiatives, and on the rival utopias for which their citizens were supposedly destined.

These further examples of the dialogues structuring French politics introduce the defining concerns of the final three chapters of the book. Here, in a continuing exploration of the rival strengths of centre and periphery, the focus shifts from geographical peripheries to political ones. Moving from anarchist initiatives to those of socialists, communists, royalists, and the extreme right, these chapters make it possible to compare for the first time how political groups from across the spectrum used popular theatre to explore ideas, ideologies, and visions of the future, while simultaneously drawing their supporters into subversive 'counter-communities.'¹⁹ On one level, to be sure, this drama of dissent could be seen as testifying to partisan successes against state failure. Yet not only did political groups share important assumptions about the potential of art (even if the art itself varied widely), but dissenting popular theatre was not always as neatly delineated from state projects as might at first appear.

1 ANARCHIST COMMUNITIES IN BELLE ÉPOQUE PARIS

The variety of social and popular theatre created by Parisian anarchists was shaped both by their contrasting interests and preoccupations and also by their relationships with specific areas and communities. Anarchist thought and practice in this period was of its nature amorphousthe very word 'anarchy' signifying the absence of any central leader or authority-and Parisian anarchists encapsulated this diversity. Some were pacifists and anti-militarists, others violent activists and even terrorists. There were anarchist individualists-such as 'Alex', an anarchist of the fourteenth arrondissement who stood up at a lecture-debate organized by the Federation of Communist Anarchists to denounce patriotism, militarism, and anything that might 'demand love of others to the detriment of self-love'.²⁰ And there were anarchist collectivists, such as the well-travelled speaker Georges Butaud who founded an anarchist commune outside Paris and thereafter spent much of his time delivering eulogies on its success rather than living there himself. For Butaud, the goal of the anarchist was to reconcile individual interests with the common good: in a utopian future this reconciliation would be so complete as to obviate the need for political representation.²¹ Many, indeed, were the anarchists who explicitly spurned party politics and the apparatus of the state and sought autonomous working-class organization, such as trade unionism or the Bourses du Travail (labour exchanges). 'It's power itself that is cursed', concluded the anarchist and feminist Louise Michel, when even her comrades in the Paris Commune proved corruptible. 'And that's why I'm an anarchist.'22

Despite this diversity, however, the implantation of anarchists within specific areas of Paris forged connections with distinctive communities, and shaped in turn the kind of art and culture that these communities discussed and developed. Important connections were formed between anarchism, art, and social criticism, this being a time at which many artists and writers were turning away from realism and naturalism and seeking alternative means of engaging with social questions and challenging the status quo.²³ Montmartre, still liminal and village-like in character at the edge of the capital, and with its associations of bohemian artistic life, assumed particular significance as meeting place for anarchist and non-anarchist writers and artists. Here, the police frequented nightclubs where subversive political songs were performed-the Chat rouge, for example, where the musical number 'Dame dynamite' was a particular hit.²⁴ Montmartre was also the centre for the production of most major anarchist newspapers of the period, although Jean Grave's La Révolte and Les Temps Nouveaux were produced in the Latin Quarter.

Anarchist journalism also contributed more broadly to the development of relationships between anarchists and their sympathisers. Grave's readers, for instance, included the symbolist artists Stéphane Mallarmé and Leconte de Lisle, and he commissioned lithographs for *Les Temps Nouveaux* from artists such as Maximilien Luce, Camille and Lucien Pissarro, and Paul Signac, as well as from the Belgian sculptor Constantin Meunier.²⁵ Grave himself met with proponents of propaganda by the deed in his apartment on the Rue Mouffetard in the Latin Quarter, which also housed—if his memoirs are to be believed—model equipment for manufacturing explosives that the police somehow failed to notice.²⁶

Equally important were the relationships sustained between anarchism and artisanal and working-class communities. To the north east of the Latin Quarter and near the Père-Lachaise cemetery lies the suburb of Belleville, where the workers' cooperative La Bellevilloise was to become a focal point for anarchist (and later communist) activities.²⁷ Anarchists also met in popular universities or small groups associated with particular *arrondissements*, while short-lived colonies or *milieux libres* developed on the edges of the capital. Such communities exercised their influence in theory as well as in practice. In his *Mutual Aid* (1902), the aristocratic Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin considered the close artisanal and political communities in Paris one of the reasons why the city was so prone to revolution, and believed that such communities could form the basis for future anarchist communes.²⁸ Indeed, the concept of the working-class community as an experiment in utopian living represented a key difference between anarchists and Marxists, the latter seeing such communities as ultimately to be surpassed through revolution and the creation of a new society.²⁹

The association of Parisian anarchism with both artistic and workingclass communities exercised a powerful influence on the conception and creation of popular theatre. As the following case studies suggest, this type of theatre—eclectic in both genre and form³⁰—was being developed by socially concerned intellectuals for the 'people' at the same time as it was becoming integral to the social and recreational life of artisanal and journalistic communities. Meanwhile, theatre formed a concurrent focus for violent activism in the real and symbolic space of the stage and auditorium. As with other popular theatre initiatives, anarchist proponents were motivated by the desire for a radical departure from commercial theatre, as well as by the idea of theatre as a place for individual development and a collective communion. But their initiatives also reveal more specifically anarchist qualities, notably a concern to explore and develop the emancipated individual in both the dramatic text and its reception, and a restless preoccupation with the beauty of individual revolt.

2 The Théâtre d'Art Social

One of the earliest Parisian attempts to create anarchist theatre for a popular audience developed from a review entitled *Art Social* that led a somewhat turbulent existence in the 1890s.³¹ Edited by Gabriel de la Salle, administered by Eugène Chatelain, and bolstered by the participation and support of many anarchist writers and activists—including the feminist playwright Paule Mink, already closely associated with social theatre—the title of the review was clearly intended as a programme.³² But it was a programme that edged forward somewhat unsteadily as the contributors sought to grapple with what social art might entail, or how it might be distinguished from its more socialist counterpart.

Certainly, *Art Social* lost no time in defining its adversaries. Like other socially engaged writers (and sharing some of the concerns of the republican officials encountered in Chap. 2), its contributors rejected not only art for art's sake but also the cheap, lascivious fantasies of the café-concert, and the cynical consumerism that sought to profit from popular predilections for lurid literature. *Art Social* repeatedly refuted

such culture as 'poison' or 'tripe',³³ seeking a counterpart that would be 'young and virile',³⁴ presenting the people with a pathway to liberation that could not be found in contemporary populist theatre or literature. Social art would also—at least in the first instance—be developed by right-thinking intellectuals and provided in a suitable form for popular consumption. One early article of December 1891 thus called for the compilation of:

an anthology of poetry and prose in which our readers would be sure to find wholesome thoughts, good counsel, useful suggestions for their moral and intellectual life, as well as irrefutable arguments in favour of their rights and aspirations towards a better material future.³⁵

Here, *Art Social* came close to many other contemporary intellectual publications with popular aspirations, and its writers were conscious that their paternalistic philanthropism might seem to offer little that was specifically anarchist.³⁶ Nevertheless, and despite their evident suspicion of 'uncultivated' popular taste, writers in the review presented the people as a 'synthesis of thinking and militant individuals'.³⁷ In so doing, they endorsed an anarchist concept of the people as a gathering of critical individuals—even individualists—rather than as a more homogeneous single group or class.

As the young review gave its discussions of 'social art' a more anarchist inflection, noisily criticizing democratic suffrage and the republican preoccupation with material wellbeing, so too did it focus increasingly on drama as a form of militancy. Although initiatives such as André Antoine's Théâtre Libre were received with interest,³⁸ their contribution to anarchist social art was deemed insufficient, while the anarchist solution was increasingly seen to encompass not only novels and articles but also theatre. 'For the people, physical action is necessary', asserted the anarchist playwright Auguste Linert in January 1892. 'Books and newspapers are not enough. Drama and debate—that is to say direct communion and striking examples—are indispensable.'³⁹

In February 1892, *Art Social* therefore published the statutes and objectives of its own theatre group, the Théâtre d'Art Social. The aim was to serve the cause of revolution by describing 'the iniquities of the present time', and to prepare for liberation by studying human passions and offering idealized visions of the future.⁴⁰ Although extensive, the statutes retained a characteristic vagueness as to the aesthetic character

or genre that such 'social art' might assume, merely specifying that new groups would favour 'a critical approach to society and the production of works that could serve the revolutionary cause [...] free in spirit, the Théâtre d'Art Social does not impose any aesthetic rules or artistic vision on its members.'⁴¹ Members of the group would initially be artists, writers, and actors, male and female, and of any nationality, and would focus primarily on the 'social' creation of dramatic texts and performances rather than on attracting and engaging a popular audience. There was, however, a concern from the beginning that a certain number of the tickets should be free or at reduced price to open up such theatre to a wider public.

The one and only performance of the Théâtre d'Art Social offered a decidedly anarchist spectacle to a largely popular audience, and its printed programme also included polemical position pieces by some of the authors in question.⁴² Held at the Salle des Fantaisies Parisiennes in March 1893, the evening opened with a prologue in verse, Jean Richepin's *Baiser de la Chimère*, and continued with two short plays: Sébastien Lepaslier's *Reconquise* and Auguste Linert's *La Cloche de Caïn*. 'Ave, Libertas' concluded the spectacle—a poem by Gabriel de la Salle that had already been published in *Art Social* in September 1892 and also produced as a separate pamphlet.⁴³ Richepin's work was likewise already familiar, but its inclusion in the programme was seen as an important token of support by this established writer.⁴⁴

The two one-act plays seem to have been performed here in première, and focused in suitably anarchist fashion on the beauty and creativity of individual revolt. Reconquise was an anarchist variation on the adulterous love triangle so often deplored by popular theatre enthusiasts as dominating mainstream theatre. It staged the tale of an aristocratic anarchist militant, Philippe de Rude, who tours the country delivering speeches at anarchist meetings while his wife consoles herself with a lover, M. de Béryl. Falling pregnant, she is urged by the lover to seek an abortion, but refuses. The marquis, returning from a particularly successful lecture on marital tyranny, unintentionally precipitates a domestic crisis but accepts that his wife will leave with her lover. When the latter refuses on the grounds that he has no funds with which to support either his mistress or their child, the marquis not only pardons his wife and but even volunteers to bring up the child, and to call him Jean-after his natural father-if he is a boy. Although similar plots had been elaborated by other recent plays such as Auguste Germain's Paix au Foyer, Reconquise

was presented by *Art Social* as being particularly innovative in its treatment of the question of the child.

The second play, *La Cloche de Caïn*, was a similar eulogy of unconventional thought and behaviour, this time by a regular contributor to *Art Social*: the self-styled 'new barbarian' Auguste Linert. In his programme notes, Linert made no secret of his disdain for naturalism in drama, arguing that the concomitant obsession with supposedly 'realistic' details in both text and performance worked against the creation of verisimilitude. Instead, his point of departure was the recognition that theatre is artifice, and that stylized performance—a more 'primitive' form of theatre, as he added with pleasure—exercised a more powerful effect upon its audience. 'I want to return in sincerity to the source of theatre, to the primitive path', he insisted. 'I leap back through the centuries to reconnect with crude morality plays, reminiscent of the drama of antiquity, the only drama that is both philosophical and human.'⁴⁵

La Cloche de Caïn offered a three-part study of the battle between Labour and Capital, replacing a more straightforward conflict between these two opponents with a triangular relationship between the people, the employers, and an anarchist employee and dreamer, Rêve-Azur. In the first part, 'Pour la Patrie', the stereotypical capitalist Mangeor is shown in conversation with the dreamy anarchist in front of a symbolic safe, before agreeing to a new business proposition with his colleague de Ritch. Outside the window, meanwhile, can be heard the patriotic songs of a band of conscripted soldiers, and while Rêve-Azur pities them for their naive acceptance of the militaristic spirit, Mangeor urges them on to 'die for the fatherland'. In the second scene, 'Vox populi', Mangeor and de Ritch bemoan their dwindling fortunes, and decide to staunch the flow of capital by reducing the salaries of their workers, facing with composure the resultant complaints (which are sympatheticallyalthough no more constructively-received by Rêve-Azur). The third scene, 'La Cloche', charts the culmination of the crisis, the sounding of the knoll of fratricidal warfare that provides the play with its title. As the workers amass outside the building in a bitter strike, the two capitalists predictably resort to the army as a means of quelling their rebellious employees. As if in pious supplication, de Ritch turns to the safe (which has remained on stage throughout), and sings its praises. But the sound of an explosion signifies the demise of this manmade deity, and amid the resulting chaos the anarchist dreamer continues to muse on whether these warring classes will ever reach mutual understanding.

Reviews by those who attended were enthusiastic-if not entirely uncritical. According to the anarchist workers' newspaper Père Peinard, the audience's noisy acclamation of the play reached a point of frenzy with the explosive finale, which prompted prolonged applause and cries of 'Down with the fatherland! Down with the army! Long live dynamite! Long live anarchy!' The verbal lashing of the unfeeling capitalists by the anarchist poet was likewise gleefully applauded.⁴⁶ A longer and more analytical article in Art Social itself was slightly less fulsome in its praise: here, the critic Ludovic Hamilo took issue with Linert's conception of theatre as pure artifice, and argued instead for a 'social art' that would take life itself as a point of departure: 'Since all education is addressed to the ignorant or the hesitant, one must start with the facts in order to lead up to the Idea, begin with real life in order to develop a new theory of living...' The anarchist poet-excellently interpreted, he felt, by Andrélis, who was 'young, slender, with an expressive face, effective diction'-should have been rendered more 'fervently lyrical' by the author himself. Then would he have been able to enact his role of anarchist hero more effectively, analysing the action while retaining a certain personal detachment.47

Viewed against contemporary socialist plays, but also against the communist drama that would develop after the First World War, the anarchist character of such theatre is particularly striking. Although the martyred and militant working people are central to the conflict of the play, they are in practice off-stage, their voices heard through the window when they march past as conscripts, or when they vocalize their anger as strikers. Possibly the reason for such portrayal was partly pragmatic (Linert had designed his piece for a small cast), but it seems likely to have been ideological as well. Though there were many within the anarchist movement who would, especially from the 1890s onwards, devote themselves to working-class organization and militancy through the trade-union movement, plays such as *La Cloche de Caïn* aptly characterize the more intellectual anarchism that professed sympathy for the 'people' but nonetheless discussed them with marked social and often critical distance.

Although the Théâtre d'Art Social's inaugural performance was also its last, its programme relates closely in both theme and approach to other experiments with social and anarchist theatre in contemporary Paris. La Cloche de Caïn may have been distinctive in approach, but it also reflected a wider dramatic interest on both sides of the barricade with the battle between Labour and Capital, especially as represented by the strike.⁴⁸ Linert was quite possibly influenced by the controversial stage version of Zola's *Germinal* in 1885, which had shaped the anarchist playwright Octave Mirbeau's depiction of the strike in his 1898 drama, *Les Mauvais Bergers.*⁴⁹ In Mirbeau's social drama, the strike ends tragically for both workers and employers—and unlike in *Germinal*, takes the life of the anarchist 'hero' Jean Roule as well as of the charitable young son of the employer, Robert.⁵⁰

Similarly, Linert may have been familiar with Émile Veyrin's La Pâque socialiste, first performed at the Maison du Peuple in Montmartre on 20 July 1891.⁵¹ (Situated at no. 47, Rue Ramey, the Maison du Peuple was a spartan wooden structure with the anarchist slogan 'Ni Dieu ni maître'-neither God nor master-emblazoned in capital letters on one of the galleries.)⁵² Veyrin's provocative drama offers a curiously artificial presentation of a workers' cooperative, the consequence of the generous (and largely unappreciated) decision of the employer's son to share his father's riches and factory with his illegitimate half-sister Micheline. It is Micheline who presides over a workers' banquet, the symbolic 'Passover' meal during which the socialist utopia is dramatically evoked and indeed partially enacted, while Micheline likens suffering humanity to Christ on the cross (see Fig. 1).⁵³ The powerful religious symbolism is marred by Micheline's rather thin characterization: she is more of a threedimensional tract than a character, and her absence of grief when her brother, released from a gruelling imprisonment, dies at the foot of his own statue, renders her distinctly unsympathetic. ('Man is nothing', she observes philosophically over his lifeless body. 'The idea is all.')⁵⁴ The same Théâtre Social that had produced La Pâque socialiste proceeded to stage further performances in Montmartre, among them a private spectacle on 26 May 1894 in commemoration of the Commune that included Paule Mink's play Qui l'emportera?, some revolutionary poetry by Eugène Vermersch, and a further one-act social drama by Mink, La Pain et la Honte.⁵⁵

At the same time, anarchist plays—which may or may not have been performed—were being published by both mainstream and smaller publishers, sometimes with a broader commentary on 'social art' or 'social theatre'. Georges Leneveu's 'social drama in three acts', *Le Sape*, is one such example. In the published version the author rails against the state in whatever guise it should present itself—Monarchy, Empire, or Republic—and lauds the role of the 'stranger' to society who can urge individuals on to anarchistic revolt, given that 'the real and complete

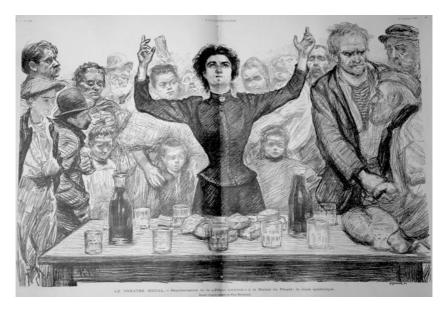


Fig. 1 'Le Théâtre Social'. L'Illustration, 19 January 1895 (© L'Illustration. Courtesy of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and L'Illustration)

emancipation of every human being is the true and great goal, the ultimate end of history'.⁵⁶ In words that could equally well have been used in Art Social, he also insisted that 'theatre is a weapon: let's use it!'57 Other, shorter anarchist plays could be purchased at bookshops selling newspapers such as Le Libertaire or Les Temps Nouveaux, as advertised in the front matter of Louis Grandidier's Théâtre Social: tuer pour vivre (1900). In this one-act play, hungry workers murder two policemen, justifying their act of violence as self-defence. 'They attacked me, they wanted to take away my liberty, my life; and I've killed them because these are the two things I want to defend.' Grandidier himself described the play as the 'genesis of the libertarian idea, the ultimate revolt of the rude Plebeian.'58 While the practical realizations of the Théâtre d'Art Social may have been limited, they nonetheless exemplified a spirit of libertarian revolt also developed in other anarchist dramas (both published and performed). This would in turn motivate the second popular theatre created by intellectuals for the broader anarchist community: Louis Lumet's Théâtre Civique.

3 Louis Lumet's Théâtre Civique

Louis Lumet, who was to pioneer the creation of the Théâtre Civique in 1897, certainly saw himself in this period as epitomizing the individual in revolt against society (indeed, both 'revolt' and 'society' were usually capitalized in such assertions). Later, he would obtain state funding for a project of artistic democratization; later still, with the outbreak of war in 1914; he would join many on the left in taking an abrupt patriotic turn and scorning his own earlier anti-militarism.⁵⁹ But in the 1890s he was a writer whose *raison d'être* seemed to be the denunciation of contemporary society and politics.

Originally from Issoudon (Berry), Lumet described himself in the finde-siècle as a man uprooted from his natural habitat and disgusted with the life of the city.⁶⁰ His first novel, *Contre ce temps*, outlined in literary form his advice to his young contemporaries: to mistrust religion, progress, patriotism, and the law; to reject the arid, book-based learning of the republican education system and the lure of the city, and to return to the rhythms of nature and the tangible realities of rural life. Lumet himself rained indiscriminate criticism on priests, deputies, magistrates, bourgeois culture, and proletarian cabarets, but concluded with a hopeful invocation of the 'red Messiah, a Messiah of hatred, a Messiah of love', whose advent would signal the triumph of nature and free will, and the sublime future of anarchism and fraternity. Indeed, the final illustration (provided by Lumet's friend Jean Baffier) offered an enigmatic image of Christ surveying the globe, ringed by a crown of thorns and holding in his hands what appears to be a guillotine.⁶¹

Lumet disdained his own advice by remaining resolutely in Paris. Here his emphasis on individual revolt, his lyrical exaltation of the ideal, and his literary interest in 'the people, always young and vigorous, if now corrupted by contagion with an artificial society'⁶² drew him into a number of literary and political circles. Among the writers he frequented was the naturist poet Saint-Georges de Bouhélier, who rejected the perceived crudeness of naturalism and looked instead to nature as a source of the sublime and the beautiful.⁶³ Lumet's literary acquaintances also included well-known anarchists, such as the sociologist Auguste Hamon and the writers Jean Grave, Laurent Tailhade, and Paul Adam. Moreover, he collaborated with the poet and novelist Charles-Louis Philippe and musicologist Jacques-Gabriel Prod'homme to found a review, *L'Enclos*, which showcased not only his own work but equally those of his anarchist

associates.⁶⁴ Among the contributors were Maurice and Fernand Pelloutier, key figures in contemporary trade unionism, and the review held together in somewhat fragile harmony the competing individualist and collectivist tendencies within the anarchist movement more broadly. Articles by Fernand Pelloutier sought to bridge this gulf by linking the sense of individual emancipation achieved through participation in the Bourses du Travail with collective working-class resistance to both capitalism and organized politics.⁶⁵

It was while exploring the intersections between individual revolt and collective experience that Lumet and his friends began their experiment with what, in 1897, they described as 'civic' theatre. Lumet himself was the principal organizer, working closely with Jean-Gabriel Prod'homme, the writer Charles-Louis Philippe, and the actor Mévisto (Auguste Marie Wisteaux), who also fulfilled the role of artistic director.⁶⁶ Their ambitions were certainly grandiose. In opposition to the decadence of his age, Lumet envisaged a theatre that would be created by pure young men abstaining from absinthe and debauchery. His ideal theatre would be addressed to the working people (initially those in Paris and its suburbs), drawing them away from immoral bourgeois theatre and the doubtful humour of the café-concert, and preparing them for what he described as the engagement (fiancailles) between the People and Beauty.⁶⁷ In opposition to commercialism, the new theatre would not charge for entry, but each member of the audience would be required to present an 'invitation' freely available from supporting newspapers (such selfstyled 'private' performances could also elude the censor).⁶⁸ Indeed, the new venture was widely advertized, not only in literary reviews such as L'Enclos, Lutèce, and La Revue Naturiste, but also in the wider-selling anarchist newspapers such as Père Peinard, Les Temps Nouveaux and Le Libertaire. Advertizements underscored its 'private' character, and called upon sympathetic writers and musicians to send them plays and poetry, or volunteer for the new symphony orchestra.⁶⁹

Thus far, Lumet and his associates very much reflected the concerns of his predecessors in *Art Social*, who had similarly envisaged the theatre as inspiring a sense of communion between artist and audience.⁷⁰ Where they went further was in describing the new theatre as not merely social or even socialist, but 'civic'.⁷¹ The choice of adjective naturally led to some confusion. This was not (as municipal councillors explicitly hoped), 'a theatre of citizenship, patriotism, moral and social education', 'a joyful and valiant companion to the army' that would dutifully bolster the initiatives of the Third Republic and contribute to regulating the moral and social life of the (male) citizen.⁷² Rather, in its own words, the Théâtre Civique aimed to shape 'citizens, but not voters' (a distinction often mentioned in reviews and retrospectives)73-and citizens not so much of the present as of a utopian, and more festive, future. For today, certainly, the theatre would provide plays, songs, and readings inspired by revolt and enthusiasm. But for tomorrow, its aims were to create mass spectacles and festivals that would structure and enrich the lives of the working people, refashion the public sphere and the life of the city, as well as transform individual experience. The guiding ideal, indeed, was to be 'a solemn festival where human passions and actions would be celebrated, magnified, and projected towards infinity'-a vision in which the experience of festivity would blur the boundaries between art and life and where, as for Rousseau, the people would become their own spectacle.⁷⁴ Such festivals would be agricultural, centred particularly on the harvest of grain and grapes (even if the Paris-based creators of the Théâtre Civique recognized that this might have to remain a more distant goal). Here, certainly, Louis Lumet edged beyond his predecessors in Art Social by defining theatre as not merely social, but equally didactic, festive, and religious-an experience of 'solemn communion' to which the poet, 'drunk with the forces of this world' while also fulfilling the role of officiating priest, would invite the faithful.⁷⁵

In practice, too, Lumet's experimental Théâtre Civique went further than the Théâtre d'Art Social by giving a variety of performances in Paris and the suburbs, and over a number of years. For the first performance, Lumet consulted with the Pelloutier brothers as well as with Saint-Georges de Bouhélier about the choice of location. They eventually decided on the Maison du Peuple in Montmartre, and in character with this anarchistic choice of location the first spectacle of the new peripatetic theatre featured a particular emphasis on the people and revolt. Reflecting common practice in popular theatre, the performance on 3 July 1897 offered a composite spectacle, with a series of readings, speeches, and songs as well as a piece of staged drama.⁷⁶ In this case, numbers included a speech by the anarchist militant Léopold Lacour, a reading of the introduction to Michelet's Le Peuple, and the performance of a one-act play: Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's La Révolte (the tale of a wife leaving her husband, although-unlike in Ibsen's Doll's Housereturning at the end of the play).⁷⁷ There were also songs, some from a traditional repertoire, and others (performed by Mévisto) of more sharply 'social' character. Although not uncritically received by reviewers, the spectacle was extremely popular with its largely working-class audience, with as many as 200 workers unable to enter the already densely crowded building.⁷⁸

The second production by the Théâtre Civique presented a similarly composite spectacle of drama, readings, and song, with works by Victor Hugo, Catulle Mendès, and Georges Clemenceau, and a performance of Henry Fèvre's *En Détresse*. This spectacle was held in the Salle des Milles Colonnes in Montparnasse, an area traditionally associated with the theatre and more newly associated with anarchism. Ironically—given the more conservative character of the programme—the performance was interrupted by the police and Lumet himself detained for questioning. 'I refuse to believe that a meeting attended by 1000 people can be considered private!' insisted the police officer; and, reluctantly, Lumet agreed to vacate the auditorium.⁷⁹ Yet this apparently arbitrary act of suppression merely boosted the status of the new theatre among many anarchist sympathisers, even if some derided Hugo for his association with bourgeois sentimentality, and grumbled that Lamoine's *Hymne à la Révolte* was—despite its title—too conservative.⁸⁰

It is clear from these initial performances that the Théâtre Civique was by no means solely anarchist in inspiration and choice of subject, and some performances engaged with concerns common to both socialists and anarchists.⁸¹ On 13 May 1899, a new spectacle was held at the Maison du Peuple in Montmartre, this time in honour of the poet Eugène Pottier, author of the famous working-class anthem L'Internationale. The following month, in explicit response to the Drevfus Affair, the Théâtre Civique organized an evening 'On Justice', with a rousing speech from the popular socialist leader and renowned orator Jean Jaurès. Jaurès spoke to similar effect at an evening devoted to 'Art and Socialism' at the Théâtre de la Porte Saint Martin, and also delivered a powerful preface to the Théâtre Civique's performance of Romain Rolland's Danton, held in 1902 to raise funds for striking workers in the Nord and (according to Rolland), attended by 'a revolutionary people from all countries: trade unionists, socialists, anarchists,' all determined to see their own leaders depicted in the characters on stage.⁸²

Other themed evenings likewise treated topics of wider social interest; not least the series of six spectacles of 1899–1900 entitled 'Down with War'. Among the invited speakers were the future Premier (Président du Conseil) Aristide Briand (well known in this period for his theories on the general strike) and the Italian deputy Enrico Ferri, as well as actors from the Théâtre Antoine and the Théâtre de l'Odéon. Other spectacles remained more anarchist in character. One such event was a spectacle of June 1900 entitled 'Solidarity', and produced at the Maison du Peuple. This included poetry by Hugo, Lamartine, Baudelaire, and Pottier, but also a speech by the anarchist poet Laurent Tailhade, together with the anarchist playwright Octave Mirbeau's scathing drama on middle-class self-protection in time of peril, *L'Épidémie*, in which Mirbeau himself played the role of the mayor.⁸³

In his 1900 overview of the Théâtre Civique's progress and objectives, Lumet mused on a future in which their focus would shift from thematic evenings on contemporary oppression and injustice to more lyrical evocations of man's relationship with nature and the elements in a utopian society.⁸⁴ In practice, however, his attention shifted from popular theatre to the democratization of art more generally. With an initiative entitled Art pour Tous, launched in 1901 as a series of museum visits and lectures, broadening to include guided tours of factories and national monuments in Paris and beyond (and still in existence today),⁸⁵ Lumet moved outwards from the Théâtre Civique to a more mainstream concern with popular artistic and literary education. Here, indeed, Lumet's initiative adds further weight to Janet Horne's contentions that 'the sources of welfare reform were multiple' in this period,⁸⁶ with debates and proposals in municipal and national government often relating closely to developments in what she describes as the 'parapolitical sphere'.⁸⁷ While the literary section of Art pour Tous explicitly continued the work of the Théâtre Civique, for example, and the musical section included Lumet's earlier collaborator Jean-Gabriel Prod'homme, the project nonetheless secured official approval and even state funding for its perceived public utility. In his proposals for the Fine Arts Budget of 1903, Julien-Antoine Simvan included a glowing report of this popular education group, which he described as encouraging the love of 'Beauty in all its forms',⁸⁸ and when Art pour Tous presented its the first series of concerts at the Théâtre du Peuple on the Avenue de Clichy, the president was no less than Joseph Chaumié, Minister for Public Education and Art. To develop its official profile still further, Art pour Tous even provided cultural activities for those undertaking their military service in the French capital, to which the Minister for War, General André, offered his particular approval.⁸⁹ Ultimately, however, its aims paralleled those of the Théâtre Civique in seeking to regulate and uplift

entertainment from a restricted or private experience to a collective one: Lumet himself campaigned through Art pour Tous not only against the crudeness of the café-concert but also against the 'ineptitude' of family festivities.⁹⁰

These two more literary attempts at anarchist popular theatrethe Théâtre d'Art Social and the Théâtre Civique-therefore suggest its eclecticism and porosity as well as its more distinctive characteristics. They held in common with each other and with more mainstream republican initiatives a conviction in the morally and socially uplifting quality of drama, and a desire for its centrality in a future society in which individual edification would take place in a collective and festive environment. The dialogue here between similar interests in state and subversive initiatives not only brought Lumet's Théâtre Civique to municipal attention, but also secured official approval and financial support for his Art pour Tous, just as he himself gradually slipped away from his initial literary persona of angry young man. 'Citizen Louis Lumet', as he styled himself in publicity material for Art pour Tous in 1901, would all too soon become the eminently respectable 'Louis Lumet, auxiliary inspector of education, drawing, and museums', as he was identified in his study of Napoleon I in 1908.91

A comparable porosity can be found between anarchist theatre and contemporary popular universities, which, as well as offering evening classes, also turned to drama as a form of education and association. Like the Théâtre Civique, popular universities offered composite spectacles and play readings (both relatively inexpensive to organize for a group of amateurs) alongside full-length performances. The Théâtre du Peuple et de la Coopération des Idées, attached to the Popular University of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, produced as many as 200 plays in 1899-1904, and continued to develop its repertoire until 1914.92 Reviews and advertizements evoke a 'theatre of extremely eclectic character', as Romain Rolland described it,⁹³ from its opening production of Maurice Pottecher's Liberté on 3 December 1899 to performances of social plays such as La plus belle Victoire to raise funds for trade unionism (and the Bataille Syndicaliste newspaper in particular) in 1914.94 The relationship between popular universities and the anarchist movement was a fluid one: anarchist meetings sometimes took place in their buildings, while the cultural activities organized by the Popular Universities could incorporate anarchist themes. To a certain degree, both movements reflected a still wider intellectual concern in the fin-de-siècle to further the

relationship between art and the people. 'Not since the years immediately preceding 1789,' as the journalist and literary critic Bernard Lazare contended, 'has there been such widespread concern for the people and for their good.'⁹⁵

4 POPULAR THEATRE AND REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNITIES, 1900–1914

If there were unexpected convergences between mainstream and anarchist assumptions on the nature and provision of art for the people, there were also radical differences of experience. As Günter Roth has shown in the case of late nineteenth-century Germany, cultural activities experienced within a class framework can potentially consolidate a class-conscious sub-culture.⁹⁶ The same play might be performed in mainstream theatres and in working-class meeting places-this was the case, for example, with Mirbeau's dramas and Courteline's comedies-yet this did not mean that the social and political experiences of attending these two performances would have much in common. To watch a performance in a non-traditional venue, surrounded by old or new acquaintances with similar social backgrounds and political aspirations, could play an important role in developing individual allegiances as well as shaping the lives of groups and communities. This was as true of anarchist groups in Paris as it was, for example, of the anarchist exiles in London in the same period, who likewise met for both social and political exchange around the staging of plays such as Le Mariage par le Dynamite in the Club Autonomie.97

The Théâtre d'Art Social and the Théâtre Civique were created by intellectuals for popular audiences. By the early twentieth century, however, theatre was also becoming integral to the social and political lives of anarchist communities motivated more by militancy than literary ambition. Here, themes already adumbrated or developed in the fin-de-siècle initiatives come to a fuller fruition: the potential of theatre to attract and educate the people, the importance of entertainment and conviviality in creating revolutionary communities, and the possibilities of both stage and auditorium as places for the sabotage of the status quo and the imagination of a utopian future. Now little known,⁹⁸ these communities are nonetheless painstakingly documented in the police archives that chart their ruses and strategies, successes and failures as models of anarchist life and culture. Anarchist communities conceived of drama as a means of boosting membership, militancy, intellectual engagement, and financial resources. In Paris, small-scale anarchist groups based around particular newspapers and districts turned to drama (as well as to song and early cinema) both to attract new members but also to develop the relationship between art and the people. In the Jeunesse Libertaire, for example, the motivation for creating a theatrical group was very similar to that in the Popular Universities. 'Since young people aren't interested in our theories', explained the anarchist militant Michel Léon in *Le Libertaire*:

Let's appeal to their weak spot: their love of pleasure. Let's [...] establish a friendly or sporting society for the young—the exact name does not really matter—which, while seemingly offering no more than entertainment, would actually draw together militants of all ages, and thereby propagate our convictions. Songs and libertarian plays would be skilfully inserted into the programme of recreation, predisposing young people to accept our ideas; and there would be debates and country rambles, where the fresh air and the sunshine would lighten their hearts and so open their minds to words of goodness and humanity.⁹⁹

Young contributors to *Le Libertaire* clearly approved of the new theatrical and sporting group, if for different reasons. 'Of course we want to devote ourselves to propaganda,' wrote one young convert, 'but we are young, and intend to take from this association the joys that it gives us, which will surely bring refreshment and renewed vigour.'¹⁰⁰ Both refreshment and renewed vigour certainly attended the meetings of this anarchist youth group and its associated cultural projects, often held in the 'Salle Chatel' (as advertized in anarchist newspapers) or 'Bar Chatel' (as identified by police spies).¹⁰¹ The police further reported that these meetings not only forged connections between revolutionary young people of contrasting sympathies, but also provided useful opportunities for planning common ventures, such as the anti-parliamentary and anti-military propaganda campaigns of 1910–1911.¹⁰²

Le Libertaire itself—one of the most influential anarchist newspapers—was further connected with theatre through the fund-raising activities of its circle of 'friends', many of whom were actually members of the editorial team.¹⁰³ 'Les Amis du Libertaire' was also known to the Police as 'Les Amis du Pittoresque': a legally constituted 'double' created to benefit from group reductions on railway excursions.¹⁰⁴ For this circle of friends, cultural events—often afternoons or evenings that included drama, song, and discussion—were a valuable means of raising funds for specific anarchist causes as well as for the newspaper in general.¹⁰⁵ In March 1914, for example, a festival organized by the group at the Pré Saint-Gervais in the north-eastern suburbs of Paris included an introductory speech on the recently established Cinéma du Peuple, followed by a performance of Jean Richepin's *Le Chemineau* by the drama club of the twentieth *arrondissement*. The entertainment closed with an appeal to promote *Le Libertaire* and to support political prisoners at Clairvaux and La Santé, for whom a special collection was taken.¹⁰⁶

Also interested in popular theatre-albeit with a stronger focus on revolutionary song-was the Club Anarchiste-Communiste, which sought to draw together the individualist and collectivist strains within the wider movement. Lively and sometimes divisive lectures were organized on 'the saboteurs of revolutionary song', in which the militant Henri Guilbeaux fulminated against songwriters such as the popular Montéhus, 'who call themselves revolutionary just to make money',107 while also denouncing the 'the artists of the left bank, who drown their dreams in glasses of absinthe.'108 Meanwhile, less controversial 'soirées artistiques' incorporated performances by songwriters such as Robert Guérard as well as plays by the drama club of the twentieth arrondissement.¹⁰⁹ On some occasions, the songs performed were available for purchase by the audience: a direct method of transmitting subversive texts within a clandestine environment. Booklets of revolutionary songs and monologues were also produced annually in the early twentieth century, and made cheaply available through anarchist newspapers. In January 1911, for instance, La Guerre Sociale urged militants to buy their latest edition of revolutionary songs from 1910, adding that the collections of 1908 and 1909 songs had long since sold out.¹¹⁰ Sometimes, such articles also list the songs in question: 'Free love', 'Why I don't vote', 'Let's live without prejudice', 'Down with the government', and others expressing comparable sentiments.¹¹¹

For the Jeunesse Libertaire, amateur dramatics were thus a source of conviviality and an impetus for propaganda; for the Amis du Libertaire they served as a valuable fund-raising source; for the Club Anarchiste-Communiste they formed part of a lively reflection on art and revolution as well as offering opportunities for assembly and conviviality. Similar motives were at work in the development of artistic and cultural projects within anarchist communes, reflecting the conviction that the ideal community—which such communes were intended to prefigure—would encourage the intellectual and cultural development of the individual as part of his or her evolving emancipation.

The idea of living in a colony or commune with a view to experimentation was not of course new in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In addition to literary precedents such as Thomas More's Utopia there were also more 'practical' predecessors such as the colonies established by followers of the socialist Charles Fourier (1772-1837) in the nineteenth century. Fin-de-siècle anarchists were equally inspired by the experience and writings of the American anarchist Henry David Thoreau, whose Walden (1854) mused on his experience of living in so far as possible in harmony with his human and natural surroundings in a simple cabin in the woods. What were called the milieux libres were, however, specific to the Belle Époque and to anarchist groups, and continued the interplay between literary interest in collective life and its development within a particular context. Such communes were established not only in France but also in Belgium, Holland, America (north and south), Italy, and Germany in the same period.112

Although one of the earliest such communes was founded in the Parisian suburb of Montreuil in 1892, the first of the more firmly established initiatives were the Milieu Libre de Vaux (Moselle) in 1902 and L'Essai d'Aiglemont, in the Ardennes, in 1903. The colony at Vaux prompted immediate interest. Enthusiastically publicized in L'Ère nou*velle*, one of the major anarchist newspapers, its members were chosen by lottery so as to represent diversity of outlook. In its first year it secured the financial support of 400 subscribers, and would even influence productions of Lucien Descaves's La Clairière: a play focusing on the life of the *milieu libre* that was first performed in 1900, but subsequently revised in the light of Descaves's own experience at Vaux, as well as in Aiglemont.¹¹³ L'Essai d'Aiglemont was founded by Fortuné Henry, who until his brother Émile's terrorism had been the better known of the two in anarchist circles. Fortuné was a keen orator and a contributor to Père Peinard, and while living at Aiglemont continued to take an active part in local strikes and meetings.

In the following years, colonies were founded closer to Paris and even within the city. In 1906, André Roulot (Lorulot) established a colony in the western suburb of Saint-Germain en Laye, allegedly inspired by conversations with Ernest Girault, a former companion of Louise Michel. The colony was a functioning farm where eight companions and their six children lived together, including Girault and his common-law wife Victorine Triboulet. It led a somewhat uneven existence, since members were, ironically, frequently absent on conference tours during which they extolled the merits of communal life. In 1913, the Milieu Libre de Saint-Maur (also known as La Pie because of its proximity to the Quai de la Pie) was founded to the east of Paris, and developed close connections to subsidiary groups within the city. Butaud, one of the founders, had previously lived in the colony at Vaux and was well known as an anarchist propagandist: the printing press at the Milieu Libre de Saint-Maur was used to produce his fortnightly newspaper *La Vie Anarchiste.* The milieu was on rented property (understandably difficult to acquire for communes of this kind), for which members paid 18 francs a week. Because of its proximity to Paris, most of its members worked in the city and returned to the commune only in the evenings.¹¹⁴

The Milieu Libre de Saint-Maur became an important centre for meetings, festivals, and propaganda. A police report of April 1914 describes one such event, in which Butaud's speech on the benefits of communal life (interrupted by complaints about the dirty and disorderly state of the commune) formed the prelude to recitations by anarchist poets and an evening concert with performances by Robert Guérard.¹¹⁵ This particular occasion had been organized by the Mille Communistes, one of the Parisian 'dependants' of the mother commune at Saint-Maur. Another such dependent group, known as Le Nid (the nest) was explicitly intended to represent an intermediary stage between anarchist life in 'contemporary society' and the 'overly integral communism' practised at the Milieu Libre de Saint-Maur.¹¹⁶ This group frequently proselytized through cultural events in collaboration with revolutionary songsters and the Théâtre du Peuple, the latter of which performed revolutionary monologues with titles such as 'The widow' or 'A letter from a political prisoner to his mother'.¹¹⁷

In their various ways, these communes or *milieux libres* were intended to be experiments in living out the anarchist ideal, and powerfully demonstrate the importance attributed to culture within collective life. None of them lasted more than a few years—much to the satisfaction of their critics—and the Milieu Libre de Saint-Maur collapsed during the First World War, although some of its members continued in the 1920s to pursue another path back to nature by campaigning for vegetarian restaurants in Paris.¹¹⁸ But for anarchists, the point was not so much that these initiatives failed as that they had been tried, and that an ideal form of communal life might still be found.

Just as these communes offered a kind of liminal space between ordinary life and the ideal community, so too was the theatre itself a liminal space—an opportunity for individual development and sociability, but equally for violent disruption. In the years immediately preceding the First World War, anarchist militants in Paris increasingly turned to mainstream theatre as a place in which to visualize and sometimes execute acts of propaganda and sabotage—a variation on the violent 'propaganda by the deed' that had secured such widespread (if often counterproductive) attention in the 1890s.

In December 1912, for example, militants with anarchist-communist sympathies gathered to plot the sabotage of a patriotic play, Cœur de Française, at the Théâtre de l'Ambigu. The play focused on Franco-German rivalry, and included a number of scenes with both French and German soldiers. The plan, therefore, was that the members of the Fédération Communiste Anarchiste who played the parts of these soldiers would deliberately distort the narrative, dismantling the barrier on stage that symbolized the Franco-German border before casting away their rifles and crying 'Down with war! Long live the working-class Internationale!' Further groups of anarchists concealed among the audience would at the same time distribute anti-militarist tracts, while burly working-class militants would be stationed outside the theatre building should the police decide to proceed to arrests.¹¹⁹ According to police spies, the mastermind behind this particular project was a member of the Foyer Populaire de Belleville called Henri Godefroy. But this 'intelligent and very active anarchist' was not always as careful in the execution of his projects as he was in their elaboration. In January 1913 he was arrested, together with the Libertaire journalist Michel Léon, for a bungled attempt at burglary. The two intended to infiltrate a business on the Avenue de la République, but having concealed themselves in a cellar were then unable to escape from their hiding place on account of a motorcycle parked over the trapdoor.¹²⁰

January 1913 was, nonetheless, also associated with projects of anarchist sabotage. A daring plan to disrupt performances of patriotic songs in theatres and cafés-concerts was conceived on 6 January by the Amis du Libertaire, with one anarchist proposing to release live rats and drop stink bombs during a performance at La Scala, and inviting others to join him through a coded message in *La Bataille Syndicaliste* ('Lucien Lacour informs his comrades that they may come to see him').¹²¹ A further meeting on 15 January elaborated the plan in more detail, specifying that the anarchists should, after releasing the rats, attempt to perform a revolutionary song before the inevitable attempts at their arrest. But perhaps this seemed too fraught with possible pitfalls: in any case, the project was later abandoned in favour of a similar plan to sabotage a performance at a theatre in Belleville later in the month. This project was elaborated by members of the Foyer Populaire de Belleville (with which Godefroy was associated) and took aim at a new play, Le Sang français, produced at the local Théâtre Nouveau. Joined by members of anarchist and socialist youth groups (and a fair number of 'toughs'), the saboteurs numbered as many as 150 as they took their places in different sections of the theatre on 21 January. At the sixth tableau and at a given signal, the anarchists sounded their whistles and shouted 'Down with war! Long live the Internationale!' A momentary pause was followed by a fierce battle between the police and the demonstrators, with injuries all round, and members of the audience fiercely applauding the actors on stage. By the end of the tableau the theatre had almost emptied, with only plainclothes policemen remaining to watch the final scenes of the play.¹²²

Such projects and acts of sabotage in many ways exemplified anarchist conceptions of the theatre in this period: a place for propaganda, common action, violent attacks on the existing order, and utopian visions of the future. In acts such as the disruption of *Le Sang français*, anarchist militants not only seized public attention but also forcibly changed the course of the play, causing antagonistic characters to unite in anticipation of a more fraternal and less militaristic society. Whether in so doing they made any converts in the audience is uncertain, and possibly irrelevant to their main preoccupation. To stage and celebrate individual and collective revolt against the patriotic and potentially war-mongering nation state was, after all, their main ambition.

5 CONCLUSION

The collective revolt prefigured by the fraternization in *Le Sang français* was, however, unusual in the relationship developing between anarchists and theatre, particularly in their own popular theatre initiatives. Projects for social and popular theatre in the anarchist milieu of the Belle Époque tended to emphasize the revolt of the individual rather than the collective, and even the primacy of the beauty of revolt over its more practical achievements. In *La Cloche de Caïn* the angry, rebellious people remained the background, while the audience encountered the dreamy Rêve-azur more directly. Some anarchist popular theatre demonstrated a willingness to engage with other European efforts at 'social theatre' in its focus on working-class problems: *Les Temps Nouveaux* records, for instance, a performance in translation of Gerhart Hauptmann's famous *Weavers*, introduced with a lecture by Henri Guilbeaux on contemporary German literature.¹²³ But many productions—not only by more literary groups such as Art Social and the Théâtre Civique, but also by popular anarchist groups—were difficult to associate with a single literary theme or trend. Often they combined revolutionary monologues and songs with extracts from anti-establishment works such as those of Mirbeau or Courteline, or with pieces from a more mainstream literary repertoire.

The very eclecticism of anarchist popular theatre was, however, often intended to promote revolt as a dual impulse towards the destruction of the existing order and the discovery of a new or deeper relationship with the sublime and beautiful within a community of like-minded spectators. Case studies throughout this chapter share common themes: the idea of the theatre as temple, the artist as priest, and the audience as a people in communion, not only with each other but also potentially with the divine and the beautiful. It is easy here to understand why municipal and state officials should have found something to admire in Lumet's Théâtre Civique or Art pour Tous, for there was much in the rhetoric of art as ennobling and edifying that echoed concerns in more mainstream republican projects to advance the artistic education of the masses. For anarchists, as for the state, popular theatre was seen as a form of education, an inspiration to community, and a pathway to utopia. But the utopias were very different. Anarchist efforts to integrate the performance and enjoyment of drama into propaganda campaigns, local meetings, and the lives of anarchist-communist communes testified to their desire to associate art with local anarchist networks and ultimately with the 'counter-community', that radically self-sufficient ideal that promoted individual emancipation without authority and outside the state. This was implicit in the very nature of such performances, as well as in the ruses adopted to avoid censorship: private performances, payment for a 'compulsory cloakroom' rather than for entry, the sale of the subversive songs performed in clandestine venues.

In some ways, and partly because of the necessarily eclectic nature of anarchism as a movement, the imagination of an anarchist 'people' through popular theatre remained hazy and undefined. Much more distinct images can be found in other chapters: the Breton or Provençal people, for example, which have already been explored, or the royalist people or Communist proletariat who will be encountered in Chaps. 6 and 7. But it is nonetheless clear that anarchist popular theatre provided a powerful riposte to state initiatives, not least in its variety, profusion, and restless pursuit of the emancipated individual.

Notes

- 1. Le Bon, La Psychologie des Foules.
- 2. Quoted by Maurice Le Blond, 'Le Mysticisme de la génération nouvelle', Le Rêve et l'idée: Documents sur le temps présent, 1 (1894), pp. 1–5.
- Auguste Linert, 'À propos d'Art Social: avant la Cloche du Caïn' (Programme for the Théâtre d'Art Social's first performance, 12 March 1893). BN DAS Rt 3833.
- 4. In 1880, the Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin had demanded 'permanent revolt in speech, writing, by the dagger and the gun, or by dynamite', and in 1881 Russian nihilists took this literally and assassinated Tsar Alexander II. In the same year, an international congress of anarchists declared their support for what was known as 'propaganda by the deed'. Gregory Shaya, 'How to make an Anarchist-Terrorist: An Essay on the Political Imaginary in Fin-de-siècle France', *Journal of Social History*, 44 (2010), p. 523.
- Howard G. Lay, 'Beau Geste: (On the Readibility of Terrorism)', *Yale French Studies*, 101 (2001), p. 83. Tailhade himself was to be injured in a later anarchist bomb attack on the restaurant Foyot in 1894.
- 6. Louis Patsouras, *The Anarchism of Jean Grave*, *Editor*, *Journalist*, and *Militant* (Montreal: Black Rose Press, 2003), p. 49.
- 7. Shaya, 'How to make an Anarchist-Terrorist', pp. 531–534. In this particular trial, all the writers in the dock were declared innocent.
- 8. 'Le Théâtre d'Art Social', Père Peinard, 19-26 March 1893.
- 9. Jaurès, 'Le Théâtre social', p. 1066.
- 10. Eugène Thebault, 'Inductions', Art Social, April 1893.
- 11. See especially John Merriman, *The Dynamite Club: How a Bombing in Fin-de-siècle Paris ignited the Age of Modern Terror* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2009) and Shaya, 'How to make an Anarchist-Terrorist'.
- See Jacques Julliard, 'Fernand Pelloutier et les origines du syndicalisme d'action directe', *Le Mouvement Social*, 75 (1971), pp. 3–32, Frederick Ridley, *Revolutionary Syndicalism in France: The Direct Action of its Time* (Cambridge: CUP, 1970), and, more recently, David Berry

and Constance Bantman (eds.), *New Perspectives on Anarchism*, Labour, and Syndicalism: the Individual, the National, and the Transnational (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010).

- 13. See, for example, Jonny Ebstein, John Hughes, Philippe Ivernel, and Monique Surel-Tupin, *Le Théâtre de contestation sociale autour de 1900* (Paris: Publisud, 1991). Here the plays are presented as a socially inspiring whole and there is little interest in identifying dissonances or parallels with less subversive writing.
- 14. See Reg Carr, Anarchism in France: The Case of Octave Mirbeau (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977), Christopher Lloyd, Mirbeau's Fictions (Durham: Modern Languages Series, 1996), and Lance Mekeel, From Irreverent to Revered: How Alfred Jarry's Ubu Roi and the U-Effect changed Theater History (PhD dissertation, Bowling Green State University, 2013).
- 15. Beach, Staging Politics and Gender, p. 6.
- 16. Sonn, Anarchism and Cultural Politics.
- 17. See Robert White, 'Democracy in the Theatre: Louis Lumet's Théâtre Civique', *Theatre Journal*, 31 (1979), 35–46, and Xavier Durand, 'L'Art social au théâtre: deux expériences (1893, 1897)', *Mouvement Social*, 91 (1975), 13–33. Durand suggests the possibility of other clandestine anarchist initiatives on p. 15, but without having consulted archival sources he supplies no further details. Lumet's theatre is also briefly mentioned in other works, e.g. Charnow, *Theatre, Politics, and Markets*, pp. 167–168. But he is not included in, for example, Melly Puaux et al., *L'Aventure du Théâtre Populaire*.
- 18. Günter Roth, The Social Democrats in Imperial Germany: A Study in Working-Class Isolation and National Integration (Ottawa: Bedminster Press, 1963); Gerhard Ritter, 'Workers' culture in Imperial Germany: Problems and Points of Departure for Research', Journal of Contemporary History, 13 (1978), pp. 165–191; Thurston, 'The impact of Russian Popular Theatre', especially p. 267; and Constance Bantman, The French Anarchists in London, 1880–1914: Exile and Transnationalism in the First Globalization (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013).
- 19. The term is used by Sharif Gemie and discussed in more detail in below, but Marc Lazar develops a similar concept (the 'contre-société) with regard to the PCF. See Gemie, 'Counter-Community: An Aspect of Anarchist Political Culture', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 29 (1994), pp. 349–367 and Lazar, 'Le Parti et le don de soi', *Vingtième Siècle*, 60 (1998), pp. 35–42, especially p. 38.
- 20. 'P.P. 11 juillet 1912. Meeting de la Fédération Anarchiste Communiste, Salle Madras, Rue d'Alésia', AN F7 13055.

- 21. 'Groupe de la *Vie anarchiste*', May 1914, AN F7 13055. This tension between individualism and collectivism can also be found much more widely in proto-anarchist and anarchist writing, from William Godwin to Max Stirner.
- 22. Louise Michel, *La Commune: histoire et souvenirs* (Paris: P.V. Stock, 1898), p. 149. Michel's own writings are marked by a powerful sensitivity to human corruption coupled with a belief in a utopia attainable on earth: a combination often found in anarchist writings in this period.
- 23. The relationship between artists and social criticism has of course long been a topic of interest to historians of nineteenth-century France. See, for example, T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984), Philip Nord, *Impressionists and Politics. Art and Democracy in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2000), and Robyn Roslak, *Neo-Impressionism and Anarchism in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).
- 24. Alexander Varias, Paris and the Anarchists: Aesthetes and Subversives in the Fin de Siècle (London: Macmillan, 1996), p. 39.
- 25. Robert and Eugenia Herbert, 'Artists and Anarchism: Unpublished Letters of Pissarro, Signac and others', *The Burlington Magazine*, 102 (1960), pp. 517–522.
- 26. Jean Grave, Le Mouvement libertaire sous la Troisième république (Paris: Les Œuvres représentatives, 1930), p. 20.
- Jean-Jacques Meusy (ed.), La Bellevilloise: une page de l'histoire de la coopération et du mouvement ouvrier français (Paris: Éditions Créaphis, 2001), p. 199.
- 28. Varias, Paris and the Anarchists, pp. 13 and 18.
- 29. Gemie, 'Counter-community', especially p. 357.
- 30. Anarchist 'popular theatre' evenings could in practice include lectures and songs, sketches, poetry, comedy and farce.
- 31. The initiative is described by Durand in 'L'Art social au théâtre', but he does not probe the anarchist character of the plays performed or of their ideas of the people in particular detail.
- 32. Already in the late eighteenth century there had been French advocates of *art social*, such as Condorcet. See Neil McWilliam, *Dreams* of *Happiness: Social Art and the French Left* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 4.
- 33. 'Le Peuple, ses prosateurs et ses poètes', Art Social, December 1891. Similarly, Eugène Thebault referred to 'the apotheosis of tripe' in his article 'Art social' of July 1892.
- 34. Gabriel de la Salle, 'Prises d'armes', Art Social, November 1891.
- 35. 'Le Peuple, ses prosateurs et ses poètes', Art Social, December 1891.

- Émile Portal, in 'Propos esthétiques', sought to counter some of these recent criticisms in the issue of April 1893.
- 37. 'Le Peuple, ses prosateurs'.
- 38. See, for example, Art Social, December 1891.
- 39. Linert, 'Le Socialisme au théâtre', Art Social, February 1892.
- 40. 'Statuts du Théâtre d'Art Social', Art Social, February 1892.
- 41. 'Statuts du Théâtre d'Art Social', Art Social, February 1892.
- 42. 'Théâtre d'Art Social: Spectacle d'Essai' (programme), BN DAS Rt 3833.
- 43. Gabriel de la Salle, Les Révoltes. I. Luttes Stériles (Paris: Art Social, 1892).
- 44. Ludovic Hamilo, 'Chronique dramatique: le Théâtre d'Art Social', Art Social, April 1893.
- 45. 'Le Théâtre d'Art Social' (programme).
- 46. 'Le Théâtre d'Art Social', Le Père Peinard, 19-26 March 1893.
- 47. Ludovic Hamilo, 'Chronique dramatique: le théâtre d'art social', Art Social, April 1893.
- 48. Conservative writer Paul Bourget, for example, tackled this social conflict in *La Barricade, chronique de 1910.*
- 49. Carr, Anarchism in France, p. 9.
- 50. Octave Mirbeau, Les Mauvais Bergers (Paris: E. Fasquelle, 1898).
- 51. Émile Veyrin, La Pâque socialiste, pièce en 5 actes et en prose (Paris: Stock, 1905). Beach also refers to the play, without detailing the plot, but conflates the Théâtre d'Art Social and the Théâtre Social. Beach, Staging Politics and Gender, p. 14.
- 52. Saint-Georges de Bouhélier, Le Printemps d'une génération (Paris: Nagel, 1946), pp. 318–319.
- 53. Veyrin, La Pâque socialiste, p. 45.
- 54. Veyrin, La Pâque socialiste, p. 54.
- 55. The cast (certainly for some performances) included Firmin Gémier. *La Pâque socialiste* was moderately successful, being performed at a number of suburban venues and then again at the Maison du Peuple in 1897. See BN DAS Rt 4472.
- 56. Georges Leneveu's Le Sape, drame social en trois actes, précédé d'une préface sur le théâtre social (Paris: Paul Ollendorff, 1899) was performed in Paris for the inauguration of the Théâtre du Peuple on 26 May 1899.
- 57. Leneveu, Le Sape, p. 76.
- 58. Louis Grandidier, *Théâtre Social: tuer pour vivre, pièce sociale en un acte* (Saint-Denis: La Librairie Ouvrière, 1900), preface. Grandidier was one of several hundred French anarchists to seek refuge in Britain, in his case in Birmingham. See Bantman, *The French Anarchists in London*, p. 48.
- 59. Lumet even contributed to a hagiographical biography of Clemenceau. Gustave Geffroy, *Clemenceau, suivi d'une étude de Louis Lumet, avec*

citations de G. Clemenceau, sur la Grande Bretagne pendant la guerre (Paris: G. Crès, 1919), p. 177.

- 60. Charles Max, 'Louis Lumet', La Province Nouvelle, 1897.
- 61. Louis Lumet, Contre ce temps (Paris: Bibliothèque de l'Association, 1896), p. 132.
- 62. Review of Lumet's *Contre ce temps* by Jean Gabriel Prod'homme, *La Revue d'Art*, 20 October 1896.
- 63. See, for example, Andriès de Rosa, Saint-Georges de Bouhélier et le Naturisme (Paris: Léon Vanier, 1910).
- 64. *L'Enclos* was closely associated with *Art Social* until a formal separation in December 1895, after which the two publications pursued similar objectives independently.
- 65. Fernand Pelloutier, 'Les Bourses du Travail', L'Enclos, April 1895.
- 66. 'De ci, de là', La Province Nouvelle, 1897.
- 67. 'Ce que nous voulons' (unsigned), Matines, 1 October 1897.
- 68. Durand, 'Le Théâtre Social'.
- 69. 'De ci, de là'.
- 70. 'Statuts du Théâtre d'Art Social', Art Social, February 1892.
- 71. 'Ce que nous voulons', Matines, 1 October 1897.
- 72. Hector Depasse, former vice-president of the Municipal Council of Paris, writing in *Le Réveil de France* on 27 June 1897.
- 73. See Besnard, 'Deux Essais de théâtre populaire', p. 785. See also J. Ferrière, 'Au Théâtre Civique', *Le Libertaire*, 15 August 1897, and Gérard de Lacaze-Duthiers, 'Il y a cinquante ans naissait le premier théâtre populaire', *Opéra*, 16 July 1947 (BN DAS Rt 3925).
- 74. Max, 'Le Théâtre civique', Matines, 1 October 1897.
- 75. Louis Lumet, 'Le Théâtre: critique', *La Plume*, 1 November 1897. Such perceptions of drama also brought him close to the naturists. Like Lumet, de Bouhélier developed a quasi-religious conception of the theatre, describing actors as 'officiating' at performances, and imagining a time in which theatre would become a 'temple, in which the comedians, like pontiffs of old, would glorify the earth.' Karl Walstroom, 'Un Entretien avec Saint-Georges de Bouhélier', in Le Blond (ed.), *Le Réve et Vidée*.
- 76. White also notes the dominance of the composite spectacle in 'Democracy in the theatre', p. 38.
- 77. Louis Lumet, *Le Théâtre Civique* (Paris: Édition de la Revue d'Art Dramatique/Librairie Paul Ollendorff, 1900), p. 28.
- 78. The Maison du Peuple could seat up to 800. See also Beach, *Staging Politics and Gender*, p. 15.
- 79. Lumet, Le Théâtre Civique, p. 34.
- 80. Ferrière, 'Au Théâtre Civique'.

- Louis-Frédéric Sauvage, 'La Renaissance du théâtre populaire', La Nouvelle Revue, 15 March 1900.
- 82. Romain Rolland, Mémoires et souvenirs (Paris: Albin Michel, 1956), p. 313.
- 83. 'Théâtre Civique: programmes', BN DAS Rt 3925. On Mirbeau's role in the Théâtre Civique, see also Coindreau, 'Les Tentatives de théâtre populaire', p. 182.
- 84. Lumet, Le Théâtre Civique, p. 47.
- 85. http://www.lartpourtous.fr/. Accessed 2 March 2017.
- Janet Horne, A Social Laboratory for Modern France: The Musée Social and the Rise of the Welfare State (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 275.
- 87. Horne, A Social Laboratory, p. 6.
- 88. Extract from 'Le Rapport de M. Simyan, député, sur le budget des Beaux-Arts pour l'exercice 1903, en faveur de l'Art pour tous (chapitres 33–35)', cited in Lumet, Art pour Tous, p. 324. Simyan's report was also discussed in detail (and more critically) in the press. See, for example, Le Courrier de la Nièvre, 22 November 1903.
- 89. Louis Lumet, Art pour Tous: conférences (Paris: Édouard Cornély, 1904), p. 32.
- 90. Lumet, Art pour Tous, 31.
- 91. Louis Lumet, Napoléon Ier, empéreur des Français (Paris: Nilsson, 1908), front matter.
- Jomaron, Le Théâtre en France, Vol. 2, p. 308; Lucien Mercier, Les Universités populaires, 1899–1914 (Paris: Éditions Ouvrières, 1986), p. 166.
- 93. Romain Rolland, Le Théâtre du Peuple, essai d'esthétique d'un théâtre nouveau [1903] (Paris: Albin Michel, 1926), p. 92.
- 94. Rolland, Le Théâtre du Peuple, p. 98.
- 95. Quoted in Mercier, Les Universités populaires, p. 44.
- 96. Roth, The Social Democrats, especially Chap. 9.
- 97. Bantman, French Anarchists, p. 67.
- An exception is Cécile Beaudet's laudatory Les Milieux libres (Paris: Les Éditions Libertaires, 2006).
- 99. Le Libertaire, 12 February 1911.
- 100. Le Libertaire, 4 March 1911.
- 101. This was on the Boulevard Magenta in Paris. See, for example, 'lère Jeunesse libertaire de la Seine', AN F7 13054.
- 102. 'Les Hervéistes, ce qu'ils sont', 'lère Jeunesse Libertaire de la Seine' (1911), AN F7 13054.
- 103. 'Paris, 21 janvier 1914', AN F7 13054.
- 104. 'P.P. 9 July 1914', AN F7 13054. The police also tracked down the identities of the members who called themselves 'Tolstoy' and 'La Gaufrette'.

- 105. While attendance at ordinary meetings was often no more than twenty, audiences attracted by cultural events tended to be larger: even a nugatory entrance fee could raise a valuable sum.
- 106. 'P.P. 16 mars 1914. Fête organisée par le Groupe des Amis du Libertaire au Pré Saint-Gervais', AN F7 13054. Collections for these prisoners continued into the First World War.
- 107. 'P.P. 16 décembre 1912. Club anarchiste communiste', AN F7 13054.
- 108. 'P.P. 25 février 1913'. AN F7 13054.
- 109. Le Libertaire, 19 October 1912.
- 110. La Guerre Sociale, 11 January 1911.
- 111. 'Chansons révolutionnaires', AN F7 13054.
- 112. Beaudet, Les Milieux libres, pp. 17-32.
- 113. Beaudet, Les Milieux libres, p. 24.
- 114. 'P.P. 23 juin 1913' and 'P.P. 13 avril 1914', AN F7 13055.
- 115. 'P.P. 13 avril 1914', AN F7 13055.
- 116. 'P.P. 24 juin 1913', AN F7 13055.
- 117. 'P.P. le 15 septembre 1913', AN F7 13055.
- 118. Beaudet, Les Milieux libres, p. 66.
- 119. 'Paris, le 6 décembre 1912. Projet de sabotage d'une représentation', AN F7 13055.
- 120. 'Paris, le 6 janvier 1913'. AN F7 13054. The police discovered that they both lived at 94, rue de Ménilmontant, a lodging shared by a number of anarchists.
- 121. 'Paris, 9 janvier 1913'. AN F7 13054.
- 122. 'Paris, le 22 janvier 1913', AN F7 13054.
- 123. Les Temps Nouveaux, 13 February 1914.

The Art of Revolution: From Romain Rolland to Communist Agit-Prop

On the evening of 1 October 1931, an audience of 350 crowded into a concert hall in the twelfth arrondissement of Paris for the première of Les Griffes du Prolo (The Claws of the Prole) by workers of the Théâtre Ouvrier de Paris. If anyone was expecting a risqué revue, warned the author Marcel Thoreux, then now was the time to leave. For if the play began and ended with a girl, this was not one of les girls popular in racy productions around the capital. More Louise Michel than Marlene Dietrich, red virgin than Blaue Engel, 'Bolcho'-as the girl was referred to-led the audience into a fast-paced satirical farce of political life in the Third Republic. First, drugged in the taxman's office, Bolcho dreams that she is in hell. There she meets revolutionaries past and present, and finds that Lucifer himself is noisily complaining at the betraval of the revolution by such contemporary socialists and trade unionists as Pierre Laval, Aristide Briand, and Léon Jouhaux. Next, a servant girl in Belleville unmasks an anti-Communist conspiracy hatched in the house of a local priest. Finally, a further girl assists her elderly father with securing the escape of a Communist militant under threat of arrest for anti-militarist propaganda-and is arrested in his place. Yet the concluding tableau is one of triumph: the girl reappears on stage dressed as the Red Republic, resplendent in scarlet garments and brandishing a hammer and sickle. Cheered by this image of proximate victory, the audience (who were being closely watched by police spies) applauded loudly, sang L'Internationale, and dispersed calmly into the night.¹

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Now long forgotten, *Les Griffes du Prolo* is just one example of an art of revolution that flourished in Paris and around France in the interwar years. Pioneered by the Parti Communiste Français, which was not only notoriously obedient to the Soviet party line but also closely connected with other Communist parties across Europe, this theatre focused on the mobilization of a militant people. Certainly they were active citizens but not avid supporters the current Third Republic, which they often sought vigorously to oppose. Militants male and female, young and old, organized in groups and movements and represented on stage in both struggle and victory, these people were the revolutionary proletariat to whom—as many believed—the future belonged. These were the people who, as writers such as Romain Rolland had predicted at the beginning of the century, would not only transform politics but also sweep away the elite culture of the past in favour of a new art, released from mere representation into an experience of life itself.

Could art and revolution really flourish in harmony? Which genres of drama and strategies of performance could serve the revolutionary cause? How could a theatre premised on working-class agency and initiative be imposed from above? Could ideological purity be guaranteed without compromising artistic liberty, and could heavily didactic plays also be entertaining? Would revolutionary art be capable of evolving at the same speed and in the same direction as revolutionary politics, or would the two necessarily be out of step, condemned to a dissonant double rhythm that undermined them both? All these questions-and more-were central to vigorous discussion and wide-ranging initiatives, from Romain Rolland's theoretical and practical contributions to popular theatre to socialist and communist efforts to realize his ideal of the utopian popular festival, and to break down the boundaries between art and life. Their debates and initiatives offer an exceptional opportunity to explore the relationship between art and revolution, theatre and politics, and to trace how French experiences related to those elsewhere in Europe and in the USSR.²

Yet clandestine communist theatre in France—and even the Théâtre de la Révolution of Romain Rolland, whose theoretical work on popular theatre is so well known—remain under-explored.³ Studies of Rolland's Théâtre de la Révolution tend to refer only to the plays written before the First World War, and especially to the enthusiastic portrayal of the crowd in *Le Quatorze Juillet* (which, as this chapter will show, was atypical).⁴ Marion Denizot's recent volume on French popular theatre offers

no discussion of left-wing (or right-wing) party initiatives, looking instead across the German border to the work of Erwin Piscator.⁵ Other scholars—such as David Bradby or Pascal Ory—who have included such theatre within their remit have studied it only through printed or secondary material.⁶ Nevertheless, the development of such theatre was closely observed and recorded by police spies in notes which, hidden among lengthy wider surveys of the party across different departments, offer rich and fascinating evidence of revolutionary theatre's strengths and paradoxes.

Drawing on hitherto unexplored archival material, this chapter offers the first analysis of Rolland's Théâtre de la Révolution in its wider political and cultural context, shedding new light on socialist, communist, and trade union popular theatre initiatives in France between the wars. This continues the narrative of revolutionary art begun in Chap. 5, but with important distinctions. The focus here is on socialists and communists rather than anarchists, and shifts away from the individual in libertarian revolt against society to the revolutionary people in anticipation of radical political change; from spectacles coupés to new plays, sketches, and spectacles written with this revolutionary people in mind. First, drawing on more recent studies of Rolland's ambiguous relationship to the revolutionary people and especially the crowd, this chapter examines his conflicting contribution to popular theatre. In particular, it tests the tension between his powerful and utopian theories on popular agency and the mass festival, and his more circumspect depiction of the people as volatile, 'feminine', and susceptible. It highlights the atypical character of his Quatorze Juillet within the Théâtre de la Révolution as a whole, in which the crowd is often darkly portrayed and confined off-stage in a theatre determined by nineteenth-century literary and architectural traditions. It also explores the paradox that, despite being prompted by war and revolution to continue his dramatic cycle, Rolland seems to have made little attempt to adapt the scope or character of his post-war plays. Second, the chapter analyses practical efforts to realize Rolland's ideals of the mass festival and the breaking down of boundaries between art and life, focusing on the decades after the First World War. Here, the particular case studies are the socialist Fêtes du Peuple created by Albert Doyen and Georges Chennevière (which continued pre-war traditions of popular entertainment, but on a larger scale and in particular response to the commemoration of the War), and the clandestine communist and trade union theatre of the 1920s and 1930s.

Above all, this chapter highlights the contradiction that where the rhetoric of popular theatre emphasized the political strength, spontaneity, and sovereignty of the people most clearly, there the practice of popular theatre was often at its most didactic and tightly controlled. It reveals that behind the revolutionary people could often be found the revolutionary leader. And it demonstrates that art and revolution often—and perhaps inevitably—exist in a dissonant double rhythm, out of step with each other as they evolve in different contexts and at different paces. Even the mass festival, the static communion that revolutionary theatre was intended to achieve, represents the paradox of a revolution that, in its very success, is no more: for the very word 'revolution' means motion, not stasis.

1 POPULAR THEATRE AND ROMAIN ROLLAND

The theory and practice of popular theatre developed by Romain Rolland (1866–1944) are essential to understanding the relationship between this theatre and revolution—whether the revolution in question was in eighteenth-century France or contemporary Europe. Not only was Rolland himself closely concerned with the intellectual and political legacies of the French Revolution of 1789, but his theoretical writings and plays also exercised a direct influence over revolutionary art across Europe and Russia in the earlier twentieth century. Furthermore, this influence prompted Rolland in turn to develop his dramatic writings on the French Revolution still further in the 1920s and 1930s. His writing therefore offers a unique insight into the challenges of imagining and creating a revolutionary people through drama, because these are challenges he grappled with himself for most of his long life.

Nonetheless, it was also ironic that Rolland should have found his plays and his writings at the heart of European revolution—and himself as honoured guest at the 1933 International Workers' Theatre Olympiad in Soviet Russia. For he was in many ways the archetype of an erudite, shy, and even reclusive writer and intellectual. Certainly he engaged with the idea of the people from his earliest involvement in literature, but he was both keenly and constantly aware of his distance from them in social and educational terms. He was, sincerely and paradoxically, elitist in revering genius in artists, writers, and musicians (indeed he devoted much of his life to writing about them),⁷ and yet also convinced that the people would make the future their own, even if this entailed destruction

or oblivion for the cultural inheritance he cherished.⁸ He was bravely independent in spirit, and his internationalism during the First World War was extremely controversial.⁹ Yet he was also prepared to limit his independence by supporting the PCF in the 1930s, much to the perplexity of some of his socialist friends.¹⁰

Rolland's theoretical and practical contributions to popular theatre-his Théâtre du Peuple and his Théâtre de la Révolution-have been seen as paving the way towards agit-prop and mass festival.¹¹ To be sure, they encompass an innovative vision and staging of the crowd, as well as developing in particular detail the conception of popular theatre as utopian community that was so powerfully shared amongst its partisans. Yet, as recent studies have shown with regard to some of his earlier plays, Rolland's vision of the people and their theatre was also complex and ambiguous.¹² Taking these contentions further, this study analyses Rolland's theoretical writings alongside his Théâtre de la Révolution as a whole to reveal the extent of his ambivalence towards the people as crowd, audience, and citizens, and the depth of his preoccupation with individual agency, conscience, and heroism. In so doing it sheds light on some of the problems in the relationship between popular theatre and revolution that would beset efforts to translate Rolland's theories into practice in both socialist and communist milieus.

Deeply committed to the concept and future of popular theatre, Rolland's theoretical writings-collated and published as Le Théâtre du Peuple in 1903-revolve around the idea of the people as both sovereign and speechless, condemned to eternal regency even though they are in principle to transform the world. No single individual or group can speak as the whole people, mused Rolland, and so the people's voice is always heard at one remove: 'the people, as usual, hardly speak at all, and everyone speaks for them.'13 Equally, it falls to others to decide what kind of theatre the people should experience in order to realize their full potential: and Rolland himself was extremely cautious regarding the genres and authors suited to popular drama. Classical tragedy, for instance, held the potential to speak to the people through powerful rhetoric and emotion-for 'the people are feminine', he believed, 'and act not so much from reason as from instinct and passion'.¹⁴ Yet it also abounded in arcane language and references beyond popular understanding, whereas popular theatre should strive always for accessibility. Similarly, the people's supposedly feminine characteristics—'the people, as I suspect, have a tendency to be seduced'-led Rolland to consider romantic drama unsuitable for their entertainment, and boulevard theatre ('the brothel of Europe') still less appropriate.¹⁵ Rolland's vision of popular theatre also excluded Shakespeare, not for playful obscenity but because too much of the original value might be lost in translation; and he was wary of contemporary social drama, which he considered too closely tied to the concerns of the present. Sympathetic to the smallscale popular theatre initiatives of contemporary anarchist or socialist circles, he nonetheless considered them no more than shadowy evocations of the 'cathedrals' of the future,¹⁶ while state-funded projects such as that of Adrien Bernheim were criticized as ineffectual dilution of high art for a mass audience. His generic recommendations for popular theatre thus remained fairly sketchy: such theatre might, he considered, draw effectively on rural traditions (the 'poetry of the earth, drenched in the smell of the fields and in humour'),¹⁷ on national epic or 'heroic history',¹⁸ or it could borrow from contemporary urban phenomena such as the circus, with its renewed emphasis on the movement and dexterity of the human body.

In contrast to Rolland's critical and often dismissive treatment of popular drama in past and present, however, his vision for the future was utopian in the extreme. With an ambition widely shared by popular theatre enthusiasts, Rolland proposed the final ideal of popular theatre as the disintegration of theatre within an all-encompassing and transcendent experience of spectacle. Not unlike the republican officials whose initiatives he often despised, Rolland looked backwards as well as forwards, and not least to the writings of the *philosophes* Denis Diderot, Louis-Sébastien Mercier, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (the last of whom would make an appearance as a misunderstood prophet in the 'preface' to the Théâtre de la Révolution as a whole). Diderot had praised the Ancient Greek theatres that had accommodated 80,000 spectators, wrote Rolland approvingly, while Mercier had in 1778 had called for a popular theatre 'as wide as the universe'.¹⁹ Rolland himself thus called for the popular theatre of the future to make room for the crowd:

There is but one necessary condition for this new theatre: the stage, like the auditorium, must be able to open up to the crowds, to accommodate a people and the actions of a people. Everything depends on this.²⁰

Opening up both the stage and auditorium to the crowd would bring new choices in terms of repertoire and performance as well as overall design. Mass theatre would, for example, require new strategies of performance, modelled on yet also surpassing those of the past. Rolland therefore suggested that spoken choruses by multiple groups could replace individual monologues, while personal dilemmas could yield to a grander overview of 'the conflicts of the masses'. Powerful and emotive effects could be achieved by the use of music and lighting, even if the acting—notwithstanding the employment of a mass cast—should remain restricted to professionals in order to attain maximum impact. Ultimately, such theatre would be subsumed within a mass festival in which representation would be unnecessary: the people would be their own spectacle, just as Rousseau had once imagined.

It is tempting to draw a line linking Rolland's utopian theories with the plays of his Théâtre de la Révolution in which he sought to dramatize 'heroic history'. The reality is less straightforward. Certainly the revolutionary people are present in these plays, even if rarely at centre stage, yet they are more of an untameable natural force than a body of rational citizens. Indeed as Rolland explained in the preface to his final contribution to the series, 'Nature is the protagonist of the drama in which we play.²¹ Nature, rather than citizenship, determines not only his characterization of the people but also of his overall structure and vision for the Théâtre de la Révolution:

The spectacle of a great natural convulsion, a social tempest, from the moment when the first movements arise from the depths of the ocean to the moment at which they return and disappear into the deep.²²

Furthermore, it is the effects of this tempest on individuals—and especially heroic individuals—that are most frequently in the foreground, while the people tend to appear as an instinctive, susceptible, and often bloodthirsty crowd.

Among his pre-war contributions to the cycle, only *Le Quatorze Juillet* portrays the revolutionary people at centre stage in a predominantly positive light, while *Les Loups, Danton*, and *Le Triomphe de la Raison* maintain them darkly in the background. *Les Loups*, for instance, is a powerful moral drama of individuals, with clear and intentional parallels with the Dreyfus Affair.²³ Here, the republican officer d'Oyron is suspected of treason on account of his counter-revolutionary origins ('You will not forgive me', he observes drily, 'for being of another race'),²⁴ and is convicted after a letter from a Prussian spy appears to

be in his hand. D'Oyron is in fact innocent—but although the morally upstanding officer Teulier discovers that the letter is a fake, and that the *sans-culotte* Verrat has destroyed all additional evidence, he is unable to persuade his colleague Quesnel to retry the victim. Public opinion is against d'Oyron, claims Quesnel: the mob would lynch him if he were not executed. Whereas to cast aspersions on the sans-culotte Verrat would seem to undermine the republican cause: better in this case that one man should die for the *patrie*, notwithstanding his innocence.²⁵ Public opinion thus weighs heavily in the balance, but the crowd are menacingly presented. The audience hears their angry cries of 'let's hang him!' as news of d'Oyron's alleged treachery seeps out; and they cheer when—following Verrat's brilliant military victory—the victim is wrong-fully executed.

Although the play was a success with contemporary *Dreyfusard* intellectuals, it is therefore unclear that *Les Loups* should, as some have argued, be seen as a 'model' for emulation by audiences of the Third Republic.²⁶ Rather, this is a sobering portrait of *Homo homini lupus*, man preying on man, in which Rolland deliberately sought to present 'the fierce grandeur ennobling both causes' rather than offering any consoling justification for the actions of one side over the other. Indeed, his presentation of rival points of view perhaps explains the bitter wrangling accompanying the performance of the play (with its initial title of *Morituri*) at the Théâtre de l'Œuvre on 18 May 1898. Inflamed by the subject matter, audience members shouted 'Down with the army!' and 'Down with Christianity', causing performances to be suspended.²⁷

In *Danton*, similarly, revolutionary heroes not only head but also almost entirely dominate the list of *dramatis personae*, in which the few female characters and *le Peuple* are listed only at the end. As in *Les Loups*, the action of the play takes place in enclosed spaces, reinforcing the claustrophobic effect: the first act is set in Camille Desmoulins' home, the second in Robespierre's spartan lodgings, and the third in the revolutionary tribunal of 1794 before which Danton, Desmoulins, and others are on trial for their lives. As in Rolland's dictum that the people speak only through their mediators, it is the revolutionary leaders who develop the contrasting images of what these people are or should be. For the cynical Hérault de Séchelles they are an unreliable 'brute' whose mind is a 'sea, swelling with monsters and nightmares,'²⁸ whereas for Desmoulins they are familiar and supportive.²⁹ For the earthy Danton, meanwhile, the people are a peaceable folk weary of bloodshed, war, and politics and yearning for simple human pleasures; whereas for the ascetic Robespierre, they are an abstract and idealized body of citizens, whose 'salvation $[\ldots]$ is our law.'³⁰

Only in the final trial scene does the audience encounter the people directly and here—as other scholars have noted—their depiction is strikingly ambiguous.³¹ Although the outcome of the trial depends on how they have supposedly been led astray, and on their reaction to the condemnation of their popular heroes, the people are curiously both central and marginal to the action on stage.³² The convicted revolutionaries play to the gallery (Danton with particular success), confident in avenging popular wrath. Yet the susceptibility of the people is not limited to rhetoric, and when Saint-Just announces the arrival of carts bearing flour and wood, the crowd flees the courtroom and abandons its charismatic leaders. Even in the stage directions, Rolland demotes these people from active citizens to 'a public watching a melodrama, both amused and moved,³³ while the reader faced with the printed text of the play finds them pushed visually and symbolically to the edge of the text, their shouts and movements indicated only in the footnotes. The clash of individuals rather than the role of the crowd seems, moreover, to explain the success of some of the popular productions of the play: at Louis Lumet's Théâtre Civique in December 1900,³⁴ Émile Berny's Théâtre Populaire in Belleville in 1903, and Henri Beaulieu's Théâtre du Peuple shortly afterwards.35

It is, therefore, in exceptional rather than typical character that Rolland's *Quatorze Juillet* (1901) brings the revolutionary people to centre stage. As in *Danton* and *Les Loups*, the audience is introduced to well-known revolutionary leaders such as Marat, Robespierre, and Camille Desmoulins (among others). But this time speeches are given to *le Peuple*, as well as to elements within the crowd—*l'homme*, *les femmes* and, in particular, to a fictional youthful incarnation of the people called 'Julie' (see Fig. 1 for her depiction in the production of 1936). This somewhat awkward device allows Rolland to isolate the more innocent and fraternal intentions of the people in visual and audible form, while corresponding to the belief expressed in *Le Théâtre du Peuple* that the people are both feminine and childlike in character and reactions. It also allows the people to dialogue with themselves rather than speaking only in response to the rhetoric of their leaders.

If the elemental and even violent behaviour of the revolutionary people is far from absent in *Le Quatorze Juillet*, Rolland is nonetheless



Fig. 1 Marat meets Julie in Rolland's *Le Quatorze Juillet. Regards*, 23 July 1936 (Courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale de France)

anxious to downplay its destructive qualities. In Les Loups and Danton the crowd are heard rejoicing at the deaths of fellow revolutionaries. Here, their anger and emotion is less vindictive: we witness their excitement at Robespierre's reading of the Declaration of the Rights of Man, for example, and their 'sacred anger'³⁶ at the news that the king has dismissed Necker. Yet even in the bloody storming of the Bastille, Rolland specifies in a footnote that no violence be shown on stage-and indeed the fictional Julie appears at the opportune moment to urge her fellow people not to massacre the Invalides. 'Kill! Kill!' scream the female revolutionaries-until Julie wins them over with the repetition of 'Brothers! Brothers!' Very different from nineteenth-century depictions of Liberty (not least Eugène Delacroix's famous Liberty guiding the People, in which a robust, semi-clothed Liberty strides across the barricades), the fragile Julie is nonetheless acclaimed in similar manner: placed on a pedestal as a miniature statue, and honoured by the crowd. The 'social tempest' is thus ultimately tamed by this Messianic depiction of the new Liberty, who also forms the focus of the concluding scene, with its move from drama to festival, as the revolutionary leader Hoche sings her praises.37

Not all contemporary spectators found this presentation of the people convincing. Following Firmin Gémier's staging of Le Quatorze *Juillet* at the Théâtre de la Renaissance in March 1902, Henry Béranger complained in *La Revue* that the taming of the crowd by a ten-year old was ridiculous, and the entire premise of making the crowd a collective hero fundamentally unsound. 'This revolts the spectator,' he asserted. 'The greatness of theatre is the triumph of a mighty individual will over itself, over its surroundings.³⁸ Even more sympathetic critics such as the socialist Jean-Richard Bloch were sceptical about the play's potential to speak to contemporary popular experience. 'What an illusion to think of inflaming a modern crowd with the taking of the Bastille!' he observed.³⁹

Within just over decade, however, the revolutionary tumult of Le Quatorze Juillet had assumed a dramatic topicality, with the boundaries of Europe and the lives of Europeans reshaped by the upheaval of war, revolution, and regime change. These were upheavals in which the movement of the masses-in military manoeuvres, unrest and revolt, expulsion and migration-had become for many an everyday reality, not a fiction of the stage. The 'people' were now central to political rhetoric, symbolism, and liturgy as new regimes sought to establish their legitimacy,⁴⁰ while cultural reactions to war and revolutionary change often converged on a search for radical renewal in which the masses would play a central role. Designs for 'total theatre' proliferated in the 1920s, especially in Germany, with the intention of providing the audience with a collective experience that was sensual, emotional, and religious.⁴¹ 'The victory of work. The age of the crowd. The reign of the collective. The triumph of the global and universal. It is under these signs, and in this climate, at the moment of this harvest, that theatre will be reborn', insisted the socialist Magdaleine Paz in Le Populaire in 1935.42 Meanwhile, Jean-Richard Bloch himself described this development of a total or 'universal' theatre as 'the only theatre capable of realizing those dreams of a Popular Theatre that so appealed to the generation of the Dreyfus Affair', while recognizing that only Russia and Germany had so far made significant progress towards this goal.⁴³

Surprisingly, Rolland's Théâtre de la Révolution was both integral to and yet at the same time aloof from this new cultural world. On one hand, countries in the throes of war and upheaval found that his revolutionary drama spoke powerfully to their own experiences. In 1918, the Petrograd Proletkult Arena celebrated the first anniversary of the October Revolution with a production of Rolland's *Le Quatorze Juillet*,⁴⁴ while a spectacular production of *Danton* was organized by Max Reinhardt at the Großes Schauspielhaus in Berlin, a city echoing from its own revolutionary upheavals. Meanwhile, *Le Quatorze Juillet* was performed in Cologne in 1924,⁴⁵ while *Les Loups* was performed not only in Germany and Russia but also in Czechoslovakia and even Japan.⁴⁶ Rolland himself, however, remained strangely reluctant to adapt his original scheme for the Théâtre de la Révolution in reponse to this radically new context. Even though it was the renewed relevance of his work in Europe that persuaded him to return to his dramatic cycle,⁴⁷ he remained faithful to the original structure and characterization that he had conceived at the end of the nineteenth century.⁴⁸ And despite its contemporary primacy, the revolutionary crowd remained—for Rolland—on the sidelines of dramatic action.

Le Jeu de l'Amour et de la Mort (1924) is, for example, another intensely personal moral drama. Here, the focus is on the choices of Jérôme de Courvoisier, who breaks symbolically and fatally with the 'dictatorship of blood' exercised by the Convention, and offers his wife the opportunity (which she refuses) to leave with her would-be lover. Certainly the central drama is intensified by the sense of external pressure, as in Rolland's previous plays. Danton has just fallen from grace, the angry crowd is heard beyond the high wall of the garden as 'an explosion of violent shouts and laughter',⁴⁹ and individual safety can be undermined at any time by a moment of suspicion or the caprices of the popular press. But as in Les Loups, the most powerful dialogues of the piece are about individuals, not the crowd. The relationship between personal conscience and the security of the state is a particular concern—and once again there are no easy answers.⁵⁰ Much depends on individual choice and courage-and for Maurice Pottecher, reviewing the 1928 première, the play thus exemplified 'the heroic theatre to which [Rolland] has never ceased to aspire.⁵¹

Pâques Fleuries and *Les Léonides* are conceived on a still smaller and quieter scale. As the preface and epilogue to the *Théâtre de la Révolution*, they are set at calmer moments in France's history, anticipating or reflecting on the tumult of Revolution rather than contemporary with its wildest excesses. Rolland himself portrayed *Pâques Fleuries* as the pastoral movement in his revolutionary symphony, an idyllic portrait of the late *ancien régime* in the style of the painter Jean-Honoré Fragonard.⁵² It is Rousseau (the 'myopic visionary', as Rolland describes him),⁵³ who is the symbolic centre and commentator in the play, appearing after the floral dance to make dark (if derided) predictions about the coming tumult.⁵⁴ For Rousseau the Revolution appears as a purifying fire, a

terrifying and diabolical force as well as—paradoxically—the judgement of 'the God of revolt and vengeance.'⁵⁵ And, although the parallels are only briefly explicit in the play,⁵⁶ Rolland chooses to situate the action of *Pâques fleuries* on Palm Sunday in order to suggest the calm before the storm, a prelude to the terrifying—if ultimately redemptive—destruction to follow.

The redemption and reconciliation that become possible through the trauma of Revolution are reflected in Rolland's epilogue to the series: Les Léonides. Set in Switzerland in 1797, the play was conceived during a visit to the area in summer 1898, shortly after the first production of Les Loups. Its inspiration was the curious trajectory of Louis-Auguste Le Tonnelier, Baron de Breteuil, who had led an extraordinarily rich and varied life as a royal minister in the ancien régime, and then continued his peregrinations in the very different circumstances of an émigré during the Revolution, before finally returning to Paris in 1802. This exile alone with nature, reflecting on the 'social tempest' at both physical and temporal distance from the events themselves, perhaps symbolized for Rolland the intellectual *au-dessus de la mêlée* that he himself had become during the First World War, striving to make sense of events that participants were necessarily unable to view with clarity. In Les Léonides, Nature is seen to have brought devastation and revolt; but now also reconciliation and renewal: 'the Old and New France, supporting each other, will make the whole world fertile.⁵⁷

Ending with a symbolic example of personal reconciliation-and set in 1797-Les Léonides does not address the question of how this reconciliation might be achieved on a national level, or what kind of leadership or regime might attempt to work with 'old' and 'new' France together. It remains for Robespierre, the last of the revolutionary dramas Rolland was to compose, to return to this particular problem, at a moment when France was struggling to find a model of republican leadership capable of opposing the more totalitarian models adopted in neighbouring countries. In his preface of January 1939, Rolland offered the play as a monument to 'the greatest man of the Revolution, who has as yet no statue in France'.⁵⁸ Though he claimed not to idealize this hero-Robespierre was 'truly the voice of the people' and yet 'the Revolution wore men out⁵⁹—he nonetheless believed that if Robespierre, Danton, and Desmoulins had remained united, then the First Republic would have been secured and the coup of 18 Brumaire averted. Robespierre, then, appears as a model of republican leadership with contemporary relevance. Like Communist Popular Front leaders in 1936, he stretches out his hand to 'men of goodwill of all parties' against the enemy,⁶⁰ and seeks to defend the Republic regardless of personal cost. Nevertheless, even Robespierre is circumspect about the people. Certainly he claims a place for all citizens in politics and not least the women who, following Charlotte Corday's assassination of Marat, can no longer be considered as passive observers. Equally, he is willing to offer himself in Messianic sacrifice: 'People, my people', he cries, 'take me, drink me, consume me'.⁶¹ All the same, he has no illusions about their fidelity.⁶²

Ascetic, courageously republican, deeply committed to the people yet profoundly sceptical of the constancy of their political engagement, the Robespierre of Rolland's 1938 play clearly struck a chord with the writer himself. Yet he also exemplifies the ambivalence of Rolland's attitude towards the people in both Le Théâtre du Peuple and Le Théâtre de la Révolution. Utopian in his perception of the citizen body while fearful of the instinctive and susceptible crowd, Robespierre generally prefers to exile them from centre stage. So too did the majority of Rolland's plays in this cycle remain confined by the mental and physical constraints of a small, nineteenth-century stage, with the shouts and violence of the crowd mainly invisible or inaudible. Even when the revolutionary people form the collective hero of Le Quatorze Juillet, they are symbolically divorced from their bloody violence on the actual 14 July 1789, which Rolland declines to depict. Rolland's own difficulties in imagining mass actors and a mass audience, as well as in displacing the individual and in reconciling himself to the radical violence of the transformative people, reveal some of the most profound tensions in the relationship between art and revolution.

2 The Fêtes du Peuple

The violent upheaval that brought Rolland's plays to new prominence also inspired other efforts—in France as elsewhere—to create a revolutionary new art for the people. In the years around the First World War, Albert Doyen and Georges Chennevière sought to develop practical ways in which Rolland's imagined festivities at the close of *Le Quatorze Juillet* could be realized, laying the foundations for the musical Fêtes du Peuple that lasted until 1939. Meanwhile, the establishment of the French Communist Party in 1920 brought a new impetus to the creation of proletarian theatre, prompted by Soviet initiatives that were themselves inspired by the works of Rolland, performed in Russia after the Revolution. These plays and festivals brought drama outside mainstream theatres to socialist and communist meetings, to the workplace, to strikes and demonstrations. They strengthened subaltern concepts of active citizenship in parties that existed in an often antagonistic relationship with the liberal, democratic, and parliamentary regime of the Third Republic. Yet they, too, were susceptible to the dissonant double rhythm of art and revolution, for politics—especially revolutionary politics—often changes faster than the cultural production it inspires.

Concerts rather than plays, the Fêtes du Peuple were supposed to move outwards from the eponymous celebrations in Rolland's Quatorze Juillet to create a more permanent framework for popular festivity. The Fêtes were the creation of the musician Albert Doyen (1882-1935) and the poet Georges Chennevière (Léon Debille, 1884-1927). Both lived in the experimental artistic commune at the Abbaye de Créteil in 1906-1908, which produced its own small-scale spectacle of music and poetry in 1907.63 Before and after this experience, Chennevière developed ideas on 'unanimism' with Jules Romains, reflecting in particular on the importance of art in community life, and on the community's potential for self-awareness and social transformation. Doyen, meanwhile, had entered the Paris Conservatoire in 1903, studying with the talented organist Charles-Marie Widor, as well as with Gustave Charpentier, who favoured a Wagnerian style. Like Chennevière, Doyen became increasingly preoccupied by the relationship between art and the people, and was particularly sensitive to Wagner's insistence on the role of the community in the creative process.64

The Fêtes du Peuple also owed a personal debt to Romain Rolland. During his musical training, Doyen was involved alongside both Rolland and Maurice Pottecher in the *Revue d'Art Dramatique*,⁶⁵ and one of his most successful compositions of the pre-war period was a setting of the final scene in Romain Rolland's *Quatorze Juillet* to music as *Le Triomphe de la Liberté*. Doyen prefaced his composition with appropriate quotations from Rousseau, Chénier, Danton, and Robespierre, and it was this piece that inspired both Doyen and Chennevière to develop their concept of the public festival. Excerpts from the score were therefore included in a series of three festivals organized with the newspaper *La Bataille syndicaliste* in the Salle Wagram in April–May 1914.⁶⁶ Combining poetry readings with musical performances, these events reflected the contemporary practice of the *spectacle coupé* favoured in socialist and anarchist circles and outlined in Chap. 5, but were conceived on a much larger scale, with audiences of up to three thousand. Little wonder that the journalists of *La Bataille syndicaliste* should have been so jubilant about the success of such gatherings, likening them explicitly to 'a religious festival, if I can dare to say it, with a significance that must be precious to all militants (...) a vast and profound human communion.⁶⁷ According to the self-styled historian of the Fêtes du Peuple, Jean Marguerite, audiences at such events found themselves 'immediately in harmony, as soon as they heard the voice [sic] of Beethoven, Wagner, or Hugo.⁶⁸

Shaped by Rolland's drama, the Fêtes du Peuple were also, however, developed in explicit reaction to the mass destruction of the First World War, and would provide a potent focus for both mourning and regeneration. In July 1914, Doven had planned a grandiose musical demonstration for peace at Saint-Gervais-but the urgent need to mobilize the people for war caused it to be banned by the authorities. It was not until July 1916, when Doven and Chennevière chanced to meet while on leave from the front, that they were able to continue with their plans for future spectacles of mass scale and pacific character. The occasion for their meeting was a commemorative ceremony in honour of Jean Jaurès, the socialist leader assassinated on the eve of the War, held at the Palais du Trocadéro in Paris. Doyen was the organist for the occasion, and Chennevière was standing near him. The two were struck by the festival atmosphere of the assembly, but convinced that a more musical eventa larger-scale variation on the musical and poetic celebration that they themselves had produced at Créteil in 1907-would surely act as a catalyst for greater harmony within the mass audience.⁶⁹

In 1917 Chennevière met his friend Georges Duhamel at the front, where against the backdrop of continued bloodshed, and conscious of the revolutionary upheavals further East, Chennevière described a series of twelve festivals that would, instead of destroying humanity, glorify its creative potential. The festivals were conceived on an explicitly religious model as liturgies of penitence, forgiveness, and regeneration, and were animated by the conviction that art would form the framework of the popular cathedrals of the future. The first, Chennevière projected, would be the *Chant du Midi*: an emotional recognition of the tragedy of warfare and death that would nonetheless testify to an underlying

faith in renewal, in which mourning would be transfigured into love and joy. Choruses of men, women, and children would pay homage to the dead while recognizing the still unbroken chain between generations; a funeral procession across the stage would include three young widows, an orphaned child, and a mother whose three sons had been killed in the War. Finally, a mother with a child in her arms would symbolize rebirth of life and hope. The secular liturgy would be set in spring—a counterpart to Paschal celebrations of the ultimate triumph of life over death. At its climax would be the participation of the audience themselves: a collective silence in which the symbolism of the actors would frame a context for mourning personal and communal losses, and a collective finale in which actors and audience would join together in song, acknowledging and experiencing the mystical communion between the living and the dead.⁷⁰

The formal inauguration of the Fêtes du Peuple was originally intended for December 1918, as a Socialist Party celebration honouring President Wilson and including readings from the Bible alongside extracts from works by Jean Jaurès, Romain Rolland, and President Wilson, together with music by Beethoven and Handel.⁷¹ In fact the performance was constantly postponed-not least on account of Clemenceau's differences with Wilson-but Doyen's mass choir performed instead for a commemoration of Jaurès in April 1919, and eventually inaugurated Les Fêtes du Peuple with a ceremony marking the centenary of Walt Whitman's birth in May 1919. Supported by the SFIO's daily newspaper L'Humanité, the event was a considerable success, and attracted an audience of 6000 to the Palais du Trocadéro. Indeed there was even a sufficient profit (despite the low ticket prices) to fund publicity, future work, and charitable donations. In the same year, the Fêtes became a legally constituted organization with the explicit aim of 'sharing the good will and artistic expertise of its members so as to disseminate, especially among the working class, the love of beautiful works of art.'72

The success of the Fêtes du Peuple as a musical association was considerable. Not only did it provide regular Saturday performances but it also created larger-scale festivals, which attracted the participation of such well-known intellectuals as Jean-Richard Bloch, Georges Duhamel, and Charles Vildrac.⁷³ By 1920, the Fêtes du Peuple association was being inundated with requests for assistance, and its sizeable choir (1000 nominal members, with 200 regular singers) was largely working-class, with only a handful of intellectuals and a solitary student. Early festivals included a *Fête de la Fraternité* in 1919 to raise money for soup kitchens, a *Fête du souvenir, à la mémoire de Jean Jaurès et des morts de 1914-1919* (organized jointly by the Friends of Jaurès and the Socialist Party/SFIO), and *L'Offrande à la Russie*, a festival of Russian music and poetry held in a large trade-union hall and exuberantly received by its audience. The *Fête de la Joie* on 24 April 1920—necessarily including Beethoven's Ninth Symphony—was another particular success. Georges Chennevière himself reviewed the concert for the Socialist daily *L'Humanité*, countering implicit objections that the people required a new art to create a new future, and that joy might seem an inappropriate reaction to a time of mourning. Instead, he insisted that the shared emotion of the auditorium was a joy respectful of sorrow; a joy capable of sustaining faith in times of hardship. 'People', he implored, 'do not deny the art that liberates you. Life is made of continuity.'⁷⁴

The Fêtes du Peuple association intended to develop a popular theatre movement in collaboration with its orchestral and choral groups, with visions of the future development of a 'Palais du Peuple' that could form the symbolic centre of working-class artistic and cultural movements of all kinds. For various reasons, these designs never assumed more concrete form.⁷⁵ Yet with the première of Doyen's own setting of Chennevière's Chant du Midi, held at the Palais du Trocadéro on 12 May 1923, the Fêtes du Peuple surely achieved some at least of what Rolland had envisaged for the popular festivals of the future, in which spectacle would harmonize with civic and emotional life while uniting popular actors and audiences. True to Chennevière's wartime aspirations, this première brought together amateur (as well as professional) musicians, many with no prior musical training.⁷⁶ But it was also explicitly open to the audience: in the days immediately preceding the performance, both Le Populaire and L'Humanité featured articles explaining in detail the form and degree of audience participation, and the particular expectations of their behaviour. On 11 May, for example, L'Humanité invited ticket-holders to attend the dress rehearsal that evening so as to learn the music for the collectively performed finale.⁷⁷ Le Populaire, on 12 May, specified that the doors of the Trocadéro would close at the start of the performance at 9 p.m., and reopen only after its conclusionfor there would be no interval, and no applause.⁷⁸ Not only were the wider working people thus invited to participate musically in the event, but they were also instructed to respect the emotional intensity of what

was specifically described as a *Fête pour la Commémoration des Morts*: a collective expression of grief and faith rather than a production defined by conventional divisions between audience and performers. 'It's a magnificent work', concluded Paul Bertrand in his review for *Le Menéstrel, journal de musique*, on 18 May, 'which belongs neither to the domain of the concert nor to that of the theatre, yet which makes it possible for the crowd to commune fully in a kind of sacred emotion.'

The première of Le Chant du Midi epitomized Doyen's and Chennevière's liturgical designs for art, with the anticipation that this could replace organized religion in a reimagined future. As such, it came close both to earlier anarchist visions but also to the theories of Romain Rolland that had inspired their work, and represented a substantial effort towards the realization of a revolutionary new form of popular art. To be sure, Doyen and Chennevière may have been more interested in music than politics, but the allegedly 'apolitical' character of the Fêtes du Peuple has been taken rather literally in studies of the movement.⁷⁹ Not only were their own left-wing sympathies clear, but Doyen and Chennevière naturally required players, audiences, and sponsors for their works to be performed. From the beginning the Fêtes were associated with socialist, anarchist, and trade-union circles, and also received the official backing of L'Humanité in the early post-war period. These necessary political associations were, moreover, both a benefit and a danger. In the tumultuous Congress at Tours in December 1920, the majority of the SFIO voted to join the Communist Internationale, and the Section Française de l'Internationale Communiste (SFIC, later Parti Communiste Français) was founded. L'Humanité was taken over by the new party, which rigorously defined the nature and scope of its journalists' activities.⁸⁰ Indeed the party's uncompromising stance, particularly on class against class warfare, led membership in the 1920s to drop from approximately 100,000 in 1921 to less than 30,000 in 1930.81

In this very different political context, the flourishing of a movement that had been primarily socialist was by no means assured. Chennevière, together with many other journalists whose conformism to the principles of the Comintern was deemed uncertain, was dismissed from *L'Humanité* in 1923.⁸² After 1920, the Confédération Générale du Travail (France's main trade union association) also denied the Fêtes the use of its auditorium. Financing and political backing became increasingly difficult to secure, and the Fêtes were also undermined by the deaths of Chennevière in 1927 and Doyen in 1935. Doyen's

demise was particularly devastating, as his unifying presence in such a large and potentially fragmented association had been all-important. Notwithstanding his own emphasis on the collective identity and agency of the group, none of this mass harmony would have been possible without a conductor. Such, too was the conviction of the Comintern—which of course believed that the party and its leadership were best placed to dictate the most effective course of action in artistic, as well as political, terms.

3 Agit-Prop Theatre and the Parti Communiste Français

This dissonant double rhythm of art and politics was still more powerfully evident in the proletarian theatre developed by French communists between the wars. Such theatre was developed with Rolland's theoretical resolution that dramatic art should spearhead the destruction of the existing state and society. Its groups performed Rolland's dramatic works; he himself joined such celebrated writers as Henri Barbusse, Erwin Piscator, and Käthe Kollwitz among the guests of honour at the International Workers' Theatre Olympiad in 1933 at which the French agit-prop Groupe Octobre won first prize.⁸³ And yet, as with the texts and performances of Rolland's plays themselves, French agit-prop theatre of this period reveals both the power and the pitfalls of politicallyengaged art. Drawing on unexplored police archives, this case study reveals how French communist theatre was strongly Soviet and closely connected with its European counterparts, and at the same time often out of step with the Soviet ideology it sought to further.⁸⁴ It offers a fascinating and complex model of internal dissonances and ambiguities in terms of texts, techniques, troupes, and audiences.

The source of this dissonance can be found in the relationship between Communist art and politics, notably in the challenge of matching artistic initiative to party objective. Following the Russian Revolution of 1917, the regime had been quick to consolidate its strength and disseminate its message through cultural channels, especially theatre and film.⁸⁵ While traditional playhouses staged plays by Chekov, Gorky, or Tolstoy, theatres with a more international and social repertoire performed plays by Romain Rolland and Ernst Toller. The first anniversary of the Revolution was even fêted with Rolland's *Le Quatorze Juillet*, while the new regime also experimented with mass spectacle inspired by the French Revolution—the *Mystery of Liberated Labour* was celebrated in 1920—and with performance in everyday locations such as schools, stations, cafés, and even the streets.⁸⁶

Yet the difficulty in harmonizing political and artistic evolution was soon apparent. Agit-prop was a case in point. In the earlier 1920s, some of the drama most closely associated with the new proletarian theatre included the revues of the Theatre of Revolutionary Satire (Terevsat) and the 'living newspapers' through which government decisions and recent events were related. Developed with particular effectiveness by the 'Blue Blouses', established in 1923 by the Moscow Institute of Journalism, the 'living newspapers' epitomized agit-prop art, with both form and content made subject to political principle. Their aim was to disseminate official news to an often largely illiterate audience, and the 'newspapers' would often begin with a series of 'headlines' before presenting a series of short sketches-which might include satire, song, and dance-to suggest individual articles.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, while agit-prop theatre was continuing to develop in Russia and also sparking interest and imitation across Europe and beyond, it was at the same time falling from favour within Soviet cultural policy. Its techniques were increasingly deemed primitive and formulaic, its satire a potentially dangerous weapon against the regime.⁸⁸ Although the Blue Blouses broadcast party news, they also sang songs critical of the New Economic Policy; and despite their growing influence, the group was officially dissolved in 1928.89 The art of agit-prop had evolved in one direction, the priorities of Soviet cultural policy in another.

The International Workers' Theatre Olympiad of 1933 therefore exemplified the paradox that while agit-prop was being denigrated within Soviet Russia, it was both expanding and developing in Communist theatre groups across Europe and beyond. In part, this evolution could be traced to the disbanded Blue Blouses, who had celebrated the tenth anniversary of the Russian Revolution with a European tour, giving a particularly successful performance at Erwin Piscator's theatre for the International Workers' Aid Congress in Berlin.⁹⁰ Until 1933, Germany was to prove a particularly fruitful field for the development of workers' theatre.⁹¹ Yet France, too, represents an important case study, as the study of neglected archival material strongly suggests.

An initial overview certainly provides strong evidence to suggest that French Communist theatre sought, in the 1920s and early 30s, to become a proletarian art of revolution and propaganda. To begin with,

the Russian Revolution, together with the French revolutions of the past and especially the Paris Commune, created an annual framework for meetings, festivals, and commemoration: a Communist liturgy with its own saints and martyrs. The 'Three Ls' (Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht) were commemorated at the end of January;⁹² the Paris Commune in March and also in May; the assassination of Jean Jaurès and the outbreak of the First World War in August; the Russian Revolution in October-to cite only some examples. In summer there was also a larger-scale Communist festival, often held at Garches to the west of Paris. This sometimes included orchestral music under the baton of Albert Doyen,⁹³ as well as plays and games of Aunt Sally in which the targets were models of political figures such as Léon Blum, Raymond Poincaré, and Joseph Paul-Boncour (these avoided police censorship on the grounds that the likenesses were so unconvincing).⁹⁴ In structural terms, too, French Communist theatre developed along two distinct lines already traced by Soviet initiatives. The first was the production of an international repertoire in fixed locations, some of which were theatres; the second was the creation of smaller and more peripatetic networks of amateur groups, sometimes in collaboration with theatrical professionals, and often drawing closely on agit-prop techniques.

Political theatre in fixed locations drew on party and trade union support, and also on intellectual initiative. In the north east of Paris, for example, the Communist-dominated Confédération Générale du Travail Unitaire (CGTU) established the Théâtre Confédéral, housed in the Maison des Syndicats on the Rue de la Grange aux Belles. Both the conception and the realization of this theatre owed much to the efforts of the CGTU's general secretary, Julien Lacroix,⁹⁵ and the theatre presented a social and international dramatic repertoire as well as holding proletarian musical evenings. Tickets were priced equally (with no gradation of seating) at 3 francs apiece. Meanwhile, and with the help of Jean Le Danois and the writer Léon Moussinac, the Théâtre d'Action Internationale offered a similarly social repertoire at the Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord from 1932 onwards.⁹⁶ This short-lived initiative was explicitly intended to bring revolutionary drama to Paris,⁹⁷ and its wider circle of 'Friends' included many contemporary writers with leftwing sympathies, such as Jean-Richard Bloch, Elie Faure, and Romain Rolland. Left-wing writers and musicians also supported the actors of the Théâtre Art et Travail,98 who described themselves in their publications as a 'group for the renovation of modern dramatic art'.⁹⁹ Both

their inspiration and programme were strongly Soviet. The actors of Art et Travail lived collectively, sharing the administration of the theatre and the creation of props, costumes, and sets, and the letters USSR appeared prominently over the stage.

In addition to the production of Soviet-style programmes in specific theatres, the mid-1920s to mid-1930s also witnessed the creation of more fluid and mobile drama groups with 'social' repertoires, again in close imitation of Russian models. Some of these groups were largely working-class in composition. This was the case for the Phalange artistique, formed by a group of workers who rehearsed in the evenings and produced plays in the so-called 'red belt' of the Parisian suburbs. Convinced that the full flourishing of proletarian art could come only after Revolution, they elaborated (in anticipation) a social programme that included works by Ernst Toller and Romain Rolland.¹⁰⁰ Proscenium, another amateur working-class group, likewise performed at a variety of venues in the 1930s. With their own rehearsal and performance space in a cellar on the Rue Fromentin in Montmartre, it also brought theatre to the Parisian suburbs as well as to the Cité Universitaire to the south of the city. Its repertoireinspired by unanimism-included works by Chennevière such as Le Chant du Midi.¹⁰¹

The amateur, working-class nature of some of these groups did not, however, preclude professional collaboration. Professional actors with Communist sympathies (often affiliated to the CGTU) sometimes played a leading role in organizing performances with like-minded colleagues.¹⁰² Proscenium may have been an amateur group, but its founder Jean Dorcy was a professional actor who had previously trained under such well-known directors as Jacques Copeau, Gaston Baty, and Charles Dullin. Dorcy was also a friend of Léon Chancerel, who referred admiringly to his work with Proscenium and to their 'most remarkable choral realizations of poems by Georges Chennevière, Jules Romains, and various revolutionary poets.'103 In 1929 Dorcy contributed to the founding of Prémices, a group that was to become closely associated with the PCF and specialized in 'collective drama, chorus work, comedy, [and] mime.'¹⁰⁴ Its first performance, presented to an audience of 600 at the workers' cooperative of La Bellevilloise on 4 January 1930, was in fact a spectacle coupé, a mixed programme of the kind popular with anarchist groups before the war, featuring dances, spoken choruses, and short plays by Prosper Mérimée and Octave Mirbeau.

Structurally and socially influenced by Soviet examples, French Communist theatre groups also drew on Soviet precedents in the creation of more focused agit-prop groups. Dorcy's Prémices is a case in point. Although not directly constituted by the PCF, it soon came under the control of their agit-prop section and was invited to perform at party events, especially those held at the Bellevilloise or the Maison des Syndicats. It was in this sense typical of the agit-prop drama groups that flourished—especially in Paris—in the early 1930s, basing their techniques, and often also their names, on both German and Soviet counterparts. The Groupe Octobre into which Prémices evolved surely remains the most famous. But other well-known groups of the time included Masses, Combat, and Mars, as well as the Théâtre Fédéral and the Théâtre Ouvrier de Paris under Marcel Thoreux. Meanwhile, local sections of the Party in Paris and the provinces formed related groups, with names like the Blue Blouses of Bobigny, the Wild Rose of Villejuif (later rebranded as the Red Megaphone), the Red Star of Noisy-le-Sec, and the Proletarian Poppies of Saint-Denis. A typical evening's entertainment by such a group would include songs and sketches, a militant speech from a representative of a Communist association such as the Secours Rouge International (an international workers' aid association), a short play, and often a dance until midnight.¹⁰⁵

Given the proliferation of these working-class troupes in the late 1920s and early 1930s, it is not surprising that the PCF should endeavour—with Soviet encouragement—to establish a wider federation with the ultimate aim of inspiring a Red Cultural Front (*front rouge culturel*).¹⁰⁶ The Fédération du Théâtre Ouvrier de France, closely modelled on its German counterpart, was thus secretly established on 25 January 1931,¹⁰⁷ and is richly documented in police archives. Its leaders were young, highly idealistic, and had already given proof of their political commitment: both the secretary and the treasurer had previously been arrested for Communist activities.¹⁰⁸

On one level, the FTOF offers a convincing case for the development of French agit-prop drama on the Soviet model. Inspired not only by contemporary European initiatives but also by French traditions of artistic subversion, its subsidiary groups were committed to undermining bourgeois art at every level. In its monthly publication *La Scène Ouvrière*, the Federation adopted a hard-line approach and advocated the wholesale rejection of bourgeois theatre, film, music, and photography. 'Social' plays by members of the bourgeoisie were to be particularly avoided, for a bourgeois sympathetic to the workers was as suspect as a worker untrue to his own class.¹⁰⁹ A Musical Commission concurrently encouraged the composition of new proletarian music to inspire sensations of class strength and joy¹¹⁰; while Léon Moussinac called for the development of workers' cinema (films imported clandestinely from Russia were particularly popular at Communist events).¹¹¹ At the same time, an association of amateur worker-photographers was established with the aim of exploiting the documentary power of photography and countering its status as a purely aesthetic and individual pleasure. Cumulatively, this represented a reaction against art for art's sake and the depiction of individual psychology, and the pursuit of a more universal, collective, and engaged art, very much in line with Soviet strategies of the previous decade.

Not only did the FTOF seek to undermine bourgeois art in theory, but there were also efforts to sabotage its practice, echoing comparable anarchist projects of the pre-war period. In November 1931, thirty members of the federation infiltrated the Théâtre de l'Atelier theatre to disrupt a performance of Charles Dullin's *Tsar Lenin*. The title of the play already suggested its satirical stance, and as soon as Lenin was represented telephoning to arrange the arrest of a workers' delegation, members of the Federation staged a noisy interruption, much to the irritation of the audience. In a further act of opposition they then tossed tracts at the spectators, calling upon the more 'avant-garde' to spurn the counter-revolutionary image of the USSR projected on stage.¹¹²

In practice, the sketches, songs, and plays of FTOF troupes likewise borrowed from the techniques of both Russian and German counterparts, not least in their use of the spoken chorus, masks, and self-consciously 'documentary' evidence. A concise, carefully learnt chorus could, they insisted, have an impact superior to that of a single speaker, even a good orator,¹¹³ not least in expressing 'the collective spirit of the masses,'¹¹⁴ while the use of masks could be an effective means of satirizing the bourgeois enemy.¹¹⁵ Meanwhile, and drawing explicitly on the techniques of the Russian Terevsat, the PCF's Théâtre Fédéral sought to apply a scientific, documentary approach to its political revues. In August 1924, one such revue was staged in the Parisian suburb of Clichy to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War. The central protagonist was a critical Frenchman intent on discovering the real causes of the conflict. Susceptible at first to prevalent anti-German propaganda, he was shown beginning to doubt this received wisdom while examining government speeches and letters from July and August 1914. A second tableau depicted the 'patriotic turn' of many on the left in 1914, with pre-war socialist leaders noisily voicing their hatred of war and capitalism before abruptly demanding munitions for the destruction of the enemy and the salvation of the fatherland. In a third tableau, the funeral of Jean Jaurès in August 1914 was followed by editors from *Le Temps* and *Le Journal* declaring their satisfaction at the widespread acceptance of the Sacred Union. The documentary approach continued with the projection onto a screen of scenes from the battle-fields (and behind the lines) during the First World War.¹¹⁶ No doubt the Communist message was intended to emerge all the more forcefully from what was presented as an objective search for historical truth.

As well as 'documentary' evidence, such drama also imitated Soviet models in its often pitiless satire of Communism enemies-not least the capitalist Third Republic, police, army, mainstream press, Church, and leaders of the Radical and Socialist parties. Regularly conflated into a single target, these enemies were often credited with an on-stage complicity quite absent from their actual relations.¹¹⁷ In Jean-Victor Pellerin's popular Têtes de Rechange, for example, their complicity adopted a striking visual form. An umbrella appeared, painted with a single body, but revealing the heads of five actors (this was the 'capitalist hydra'). There was also a safe from which the various servants of capitalism were conjured: an economist, a priest, a poet, a sociologist, and a philosopher. Each was enjoined to dupe the proletariat, represented by a group of workers on stage-and having tried and failed by milder methods, the capitalist hydra then released a policeman from the safe to chase the workers from the scene. (Though in an epilogue, the workers revolted and routed their oppressors instead).¹¹⁸ In similar cases, and despite the self-evident didacticism, the author himself appeared on stage after the performance of the play to expound on its significance. In January 1933, for example, Georges Beaugrand took to the stage following a production of Quand les Gueux voudront by the Théâtre Ouvrier de Paris to clarify the play's message that 'capitalism oppresses you' (which surely the audience could not have failed to notice).¹¹⁹

Mobile and didactic like the Soviet agit-prop groups of the 1920s, it was logical that these French counterparts should seek to take their political art into strikes and demonstrations, the workplace, and the streets. For even at its most caricatural, the ultimate aim of such theatre was to blur the distinction between art and life, realizing the theories of Rolland

(and others) that theatre should seek its own dissolution in a collective experience with no further use for the proscenium arch. 'A street, a courtyard, a wall, a hill-these are the best wings for our theatre', as La Scène Ouvrière argued in February 1931. A few months later, agitprop groups infiltrated the annual procession to the Mur des Féderés in commemoration of the Paris Commune (and would continue to play an important part in such demonstrations in subsequent years),¹²⁰ haranguing the demonstrators with placards and a megaphone. Their intention was not only to disseminate party propaganda, but also to gauge and refine the techniques of agit-prop by noting the reactions of their initially unsuspecting audience. And they noted with satisfaction that certain of the 'more vigorous' phrases of the sketches-such as an appeal to 'you, women, child-bearing machines!' aroused approving reactions. 'It makes a real difference to me to hear that', exclaimed one female spectator—'an exclamation summing up the impression of the masses', concluded La Scène Ouvrière optimistically.¹²¹

Strikes, too, offered particular opportunities to integrate drama into working-class life. Also in 1931, militants in the Red Megaphone (former 'Wild Rose of Villejuif') travelled to the department of the Nord in solidarity with striking textile workers, and intending to add their support to local artistic initiatives. As soon as the group arrived in Roubaix, they marched through the working-class areas of the town singing La Jeune Garde to draw attention to their presence, and acted out short sketches in the streets, encouraging those watching from their windows to contribute to the strikers' fund. Members of the troupe subsequently discussed the strike with those involved: then, on the basis of their observations and with the help of headlines from L'Humanité, composed and performed a spoken chorus on the theme.¹²² As well as raising the morale of the strikers, agit-prop actors thus took part in an exercise in collective composition, and returned home with increased political and dramatic experience, and a closer knowledge of the strikers' grievances. Indeed, such fluidity between theatre, work, and protest was often characteristic of FTOF productions. In March 1933, the celebration of the fifteenth anniversary of the Red Army at the Théâtre Confédéral included a play in which miners fired after presenting their grievances were supported in strike action funded by the FTOF. At the close of the evening, the audience were urged to spill onto the streets in violent protest against Nazi victory in the German elections.¹²³

Forging connections with strikers and demonstrators, and with other Communist-led or sympathetic associations such as the Association des Écrivains et Artistes Révolutionnaires, the FTOF also helped to develop international contacts and exchange. In 1922, one of the earliest festivals of L'Humanité at Garches included two talks on international communist theatre, one by Leo Poldès on art and communism and the second by Nguyen-Ai-Quao on annamite (Vietnamese) theatre.¹²⁴ Police reports on the performances of revolutionary sketches and songs by Communist groups in Paris mention an actor from Martinique, and a black dancer.¹²⁵ In the later 1920s, connections with German agit-prop groups were particularly important, and some of these visited their French counterparts to share their techniques of rehearsal and performance.¹²⁶ But there were also wider contacts. In 1926, for example, 400 people of different nationalities gathered at the Maison des Syndicats on the Rue de la Grange aux Belles to celebrate the anniversary of the Soviet Republic of Hungary with songs, dances, and a series of one-act plays in Hungarian.¹²⁷

By the 1930s, transnational anti-fascism was influencing both themes and participation in working-class theatre. In 1933 the FTOF organized a lecture in the Masonic centre by a German representative of the International Union of Revolutionary Theatre on the relationship between theatre and working-class struggle against fascism.¹²⁸ In the same location in 1935, the World Congress of Youth against Fascism provided an apt context for collaboration between Parisian and Czechoslovakian workers' theatre groups in an evening of sketches and song.¹²⁹ Meanwhile, La Scène Ouvrière provided regular updates on the development of agit-prop theatre worldwide in the early 30s, describing for example the celebration of the International Day of Workers' Theatre by groups in Paris, London, Budapest, New York, Moscow, Dresden, and Berlin, where there was an eight-day exhibition on workers' theatre.¹³⁰ The culmination of such international collaboration, at least for the French agit-prop groups, was their participation in the International Workers' Theatre Olympiad in 1933.¹³¹

So far, this overview of French workers' theatre has highlighted its efforts to realize the art of revolution. It has explored the extent to which these groups believed in art as a tool of political transformation, whether they were producing 'social' programmes at the Maison des Syndicats or agit-prop sketches for strikers. It has illuminated a little-known theatre that sought to instruct, attract new recruits, and reinforce the assumptions and expectations of existing party members with techniques often borrowed from German or Russian counterparts. Nevertheless, there is another side to the story, in which the relationship between art and politics was by no means as harmonious or Sovietinspired as it might at first appear.

Analysing this relationship more critically, it is easier to anticipate potential pitfalls. Politically correct militants are not usually trained actors or playwrights, and plays or sketches propounding the approved political message may not necessarily be the most engaging—as the Comintern itself was to discover. (In Russia, dramas about the New Economic Policy attracted meagre audiences, whereas the popular farce *Husbands of the world, unite!* played to consistently full houses).¹³² Furthermore, as the case study of Romain Rolland has already demonstrated, even literary figures with utopian ideas on political art and festival do not necessarily translate their theories into practice. In practical terms, too, the selection of musical or literary contributions for cultural events within the life of the PCF did not always prioritize ideological purity. Rather, as evidence from police archives and press reveals, the supposedly proletarian drama produced for clandestine edification could also be escapist, eclectic, and even politically perplexing.

The ambiguities of revolutionary theatre encompassed actors and performance, repertoire and audience. Indeed, the challenges of performance percolated even the columns of La Scène Ouvrière, which in April-May 1931 included an interchange between readers and contributors on the problems of collective work. What does collective theatre mean? Readers had asked. How was the actor to experience belonging to the masses? Contributors responded with the example of an orchestra, in which an individual could offer his or her artistic ability as part of a whole, as in the Fêtes du Peuple. Yet this raised the question of both composer and conductor, for the music was hardly a collective or spontaneous creation. Even a spoken chorus, the single voice of a group of workers supposedly emblematic of their unity, had first to be composed, and ideally receive some direction during rehearsals: it was only rarely collective in inspiration. Should actors vote on how a play or sketch was to be interpreted, mused the readers? Should one person take charge, perhaps chosen by the group as a whole?

A closer look at some of the well-known Communist groups provides a sometimes unexpected picture of their social composition. Investigating the Prémices group, one police informer observed that: 'they are for the most part mediocre artists or young men attracted by the life of [theatrical] stars.' Roger Legris, at whose house the group was based, was a family man who had previously worked as an insurance agent before becoming an actor and assuming minor roles at the Théâtre de l'Avenue and the Théâtre Pigalle. His wife, a former employee at the Crédit Lyonnais whose father was a property owner, had also left her job to become an actress. 'Both live a bohemian life', observed the police spy. 'They have even been obliged to sell their valuable furniture in order to settle their most pressing debts.' Legris had no previous record of political militancy, received no revolutionary publications at his home address, and the police assumed that his motives in helping to run Prémices were purely financial. Roger Trouve, another key player in the group, was also an actor in a number of second-rate theatres, and was already known to the police as having been the victim of threatening letters and attempted blackmail on the part of one of his former mistresses (he was apparently well known in the *brasseries* of Montparnasse). Georges Leporcher or 'Vitray' was also an actor, but with more pronounced political opinions, having been one of the founders of a union of communist comedians affiliated to the CGTU. He was considered to be the most artistically accomplished of the group, and served as one of its technicians.133

If the social composition and motivation of such groups could be eclectic, so too could their repertoire. Prémices, for instance, worked closely with the PCF and performed at their events, yet claimed inspiration from extremely diverse predecessors, including ancient Greek satire, Elizabethan comedy, and French classical tragedy. Likewise, the Théâtre Confédéral aspired to bring both classical and modern plays to a more working-class audience. Journalists in the mainstream *Comædia* and the partisan *L'Humanité* were similarly surprised by initial performances of Alfred de Musset's *Les Caprices de Marianne* and Anatole France's *La Comédie de celui qui épousa une femme muette.*¹³⁴ Certainly, subsequent productions included more overtly political works—such as Lucien Descaves's *Oiseaux de Passage*, which featured the anarchistic theories of the nihilist Grigoriev. But these were performed alongside comedies by Molière, popular farces from the fifteenth century, and contemporary one-act satires by Georges Courteline.¹³⁵

Other groups performed new plays that were evidently intended to project a strong political message, yet that failed to match the established patterns of agit-prop. In 1929, for example, the Communists of the third *arrondissement* of Paris organized a performance of *La Courroie* by Le Tréteau de Lutèce. The play begins with a trade union militant visiting a non-unionized, convalescing worker, and countering his reservations about membership by listing the benefits of collective action. The indisposed worker grumbles that strikes lead only to working-class deaths and that in any case, the employers are not as malevolent as their detractors suggest. On receiving a letter that he has been fired for his prolonged absence through sickness, however, the worker changes his mind, agrees to join the union, and accepts the financial support of a collection organized by his new comrades. So far, the play would seem to correspond neatly to the expected political message. But having accepted the benefits of organized activity and experienced the solidarity of his fellows, the worker then leaves to search for a new job and is killed in an accident, forming an abrupt and disheartening conclusion.¹³⁶

A similarly bleak image of working-class endeavour was offered by the more hopeful-sounding *Fraternité*, a play performed by the Muse Bellevilloise in November 1930. The play opens with a scene of fraternization, in which a Moroccan peasant offers to support a deserter from the Foreign Legion. Yet despite this initial suggestion of transnational solidarity, the narrative then verges into a highly involved romantic tragedy involving the peasant's sister, the deserter, the local governor, and the police. By the final scene several people have been shot for reasons that remain obscure, and the peasant and deserter are led away to prison.¹³⁷ Such examples suggest that the repertoire of workers' theatre groups, even when consciously political, could range from the eclectic to the bewildering. Indeed, sometimes the plays performed were scarcely removed from the supposedly outmoded bourgeois love triangle that proponents of proletarian theatre (and popular theatre in general) were so anxious to castigate.

Although the fact that such plays revelled in accidents, *crimes de passion*, and hopeless situations may seem surprising, similar fare was provided in the *faits divers* (news in brief) section of every issue of the PCF newspaper *L'Humanité*. Indeed, it is striking how the presentation of popular experience and potential in these accounts differs from that in main articles, in which the proletariat appear as martyred but ultimately triumphant.¹³⁸ Take 17 March 1929, for example: the date on which *La Courroie* was performed. Next to a complex article on whether or not to form a common front with Socialist workers, readers could learn in the *faits divers* of several armed robberies, two drunken quarrels that had ended in murder, the suicide of a man suffering from neurasthenia, and the accidental death of several workers, including a fourteen-year old ship's boy: apt material for a hybrid play that begins as agit-prop and ends as melodrama.

If PCF plays could present a surprisingly dispiriting staging of the proletariat, they also did so to audiences more mixed than party reports would suggest. Police reports provide valuable information on audience composition: noting, for example, the proportion of female attendees when particular invitations had been sent to the Ligue des Femmes contre la Guerre,¹³⁹ the involvement of Jewish groups performing in Yiddish,¹⁴⁰ or the participation of children in an event to publicize holidays organized by the Secours Ouvrier International.¹⁴¹ Yet it is often the newspaper reports that offer fuller descriptions of those present, coloured of course by the sympathies of the paper in question. A reviewer for Paris-Midi in 1930 was, for instance, particularly struck by the differing social composition of actors and audiences. He had encountered working-class members of the Phalange artistique troupe at the station after one of their performances, returning home with their families in second-class carriages. But there had seemed to him to be few workers in the theatre audience itself, which had appeared to consist principally of students, young employees, and readers of reviews. 'Someone was distributing the Communist newspaper. A calm public of left-wing intellectuals: many with glasses, some with long hair, and no one to join in L'Internationale at the close of the play.'142 No doubt with a similar concern to downplay the prevalence of home-grown revolutionaries, Benjamin Crémieux painted a reassuring portrait of proletarian drama evenings in the 'Lenin room' of the Bellevilloise for the right-wing weekly Je suis partout in 1933. The audiences, he insisted, were highly cosmopolitan-Italians, Poles, Spaniards, and German émigrés-and featured only a handful of French employees, and a scattering of local workers from Ménilmontant.143

What was a right-wing journalist doing in the Lenin room of the Bellevilloise, one might ask, and how did he know that such a theatre evening was taking place? Presumably he had found out about this particular evening by reading L'Humanité, where such events were publicized. Indeed, it is striking just how much interest was generated by such activities in the theatrical and journalistic world in general. Performances of agit-prop were reviewed not just in party newspapers like L'Humanité but also in the mainstream dramatic review Comædia, as well as in widely circulating newspapers such as Le Soir, L'Œuvre, Le Petit Journal, and La Revue de Paris. Indeed, judging from the number of reviews that certain

performances received, journalists must sometimes have formed a significant minority in the audience.¹⁴⁴ Nor were reviews by the 'enemies of Communism' entirely critical. Hard-line publications like *La Scène Ouvrière* never admitted that, if revolutionary art intends to *épater le bourgeois*, some of the bourgeoisie relish the surprise—or indeed the satisfaction—of having their 'avant-garde' opinions reinforced. Others, too, took a satirical delight in immersing themselves among their most fervent detractors.

On closer examination, the 'revolutionary' theatre of interwar France thus offers a rich variety of practices and experiences. Some sought opportunities to bring classics or modern social drama to the masses (and to any reviewers and left-wing intellectuals who might be in attendance), broadening the artistic experience of the workers while also embracing art's political potential. Others joined agit-prop groups to further their acting experience, or created hybrid plays that offered eclectic entertainment rather than focused propaganda.

In the end, the agit-prop theatre of interwar French communism would fall victim to the very Popular Front movement that brought the people to new prominence as political actors in the mid-1930s. In March 1935, the FTOF was dissolved at a mass meeting attended by 800 people, and reconstituted as the Union des Théâtres Indépendants de France (UTIF)-a title from which the reference to the workers was noticeably omitted. Writers including Jean-Richard Bloch and Léon Moussinac spoke to the gathering on Soviet theatre and on the 'crisis' in European and French theatre, but without defining a clear solution or direction. Over the following year the UTIF developed substantial objectives, such as bringing theatre to the entire French population through increased cultural decentralization, while also running workshops on dramatic technique and talks by intellectuals on theatrical movements throughout history.¹⁴⁵ But by 1936, agit-prop groups such as the Groupe Octobre were giving their final performances, with the frankness of their satirical-and especially anti-clerical-humour being increasingly at odds with the consciously inclusive stance of the Popular Front as a political alliance and mass movement.

4 CONCLUSION

In many histories of the Popular Front, 14 July 1936 is seen as the highpoint of victory, with the popular celebrations of the day continuing into the state-sponsored production of Romain Rolland's *Le Quatorze Juillet* in the evening.¹⁴⁶ If this was a transient realization of Rolland's dreams for mass festival—with actors and audience joining together in *La Marseillaise* and *L'Internationale* at the close of the performance¹⁴⁷—it was also a mark of political theatre's inherent fragility. In this production, a piece of theatre celebrating the transformative role of the revolutionary crowd was supported by a government of Radicals and Socialists whose leader Léon Blum was determined to defend the current Republic, not overturn it. At this moment of victory, the popular agency that had brought legitimacy to the Popular Front as a movement of opposition became a force liable to destabilize the new government. Already by July 1936, the largest wave of strikes in France's history had opened up the possibility either that the workers were dissatisfied with their elected government or that the Popular Front was no longer in control of its own supporters.¹⁴⁸

For the newly elected Popular Front, just as for Romain Rolland in his Théâtre de la Révolution, the emotional volatility of the crowd was a danger as well as a fascination. These people could be mature, self-conscious political actors, but they could also be a powerful but untamedand fundamentally untameable-force through which the 'genius' of Revolution might express itself in dramatic but also in devastating form. No wonder that it should prove so difficult, even for a Communist Party whose agit-prop theatre flourished so extensively in the interwar years, to realize an art of revolution in harmony with both political and cultural objectives. No wonder that, even in portravals of a proletariat conscious of its own agency, images of spontaneous popular action should coexist with powerful paternalism on the part of author or director. Successful revolutions generally choose a more scripted role for the people than is offered by the original revolutionaries. And in real life, as in Rolland's Théâtre de la Révolution, individual heroes often prefer to keep the people away from centre stage.

Notes

- 1. 'P.P. 2 octobre 1931', APP Ba 2032.
- 2. On Russia see, for example, Lynn Mally, 'Exporting Soviet culture: the case of agitprop theatre', *Slavic Review*, 62 (2003), pp. 324–342, and Laura Engelstein, 'Culture, Culture Everywhere: Interpretations of Modern Russia across the 1991 Divide', *Kritica: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 2 (2001), pp. 363–393. On Italy and

Germany, see Jeffrey Schnapp, 'Border Crossings: Italian/German Peregrinations of the 'Theatre of Totality', *Critical Inquiry*, 21 (1994), pp. 80–123 and Günter Berghaus (ed.), *Fascism and Theatre*.

- 3. A brief résumé of this cycle of plays (although without critical analysis of Rolland's dramatic concepts and their degree of realization) is given by Valérie Battaglia, 'Romain Rolland et le Théâtre de la Révolution', *Revue d'Histoire du Théâtre*, 41 (1989), pp. 178–195.
- 4. See, for example, Jackson, The Popular Front in France, pp. 126-127.
- 5. Denizot, Théâtre populaire, pp. 205-216.
- 6. Bradby and McCormick, People's Theatre; Ory, Théâtre citoyen.
- Rolland completed ten full-length plays between 1895 and 1905, including two trilogies. Yet his work also included the Nobel prize-winning novel Jean-Christophe (1904–12), a monument to art and internationalism, as well as biographies of great men such as Beethoven, Tolstoy, Michelangelo, Handel, Ghandi, and Péguy. See Maurice Nadeau, 'Romain Rolland', Journal of Contemporary History, 2 (1967), pp. 209– 220; Romain Rolland, L'Indépendance de l'Esprit: Correspondance entre Jean Guéhenno et Romain Rolland, 1919–1944 (Paris: Albin Michel, 1975); Fisher, 'Romain Rolland and the French People's Theatre', and Kvapil, Romain Rolland et les amis d'Europe.
- 8. Rolland, Le Théâtre du Peuple, p. 169.
- 9. He continued this internationalism in the 1920s by contributing to the establishment of *Europe, revue mensuelle*.
- See, for example, Rolland's letter to Guéhenno on 3 December 1935 in L'Indépendance de l'Esprit, p. 360.
- 11. Battaglia, 'Romain Rolland et le théâtre', p. 190.
- 12. See, for example, Denizot, 'Le Théâtre de la Révolution de Romain Rolland', in Denizot (ed.), *Théâtre populaire*, especially p. 198. Denizot references the texts of *Le Quatorze Juillet*, *Danton*, and *Robespierre*.
- 13. Rolland, Le Théâtre du Peuple, p. 2. Cf. Chap. 2.
- 14. Rolland, Le Théâtre du Peuple, pp. 14-15.
- 15. Rolland, Le Théâtre du Peuple, p. 38.
- 16. Rolland, Le Théâtre du Peuple, p. 52.
- 17. Rolland, Le Théâtre du Peuple, p. 48.
- 18. Rolland, Le Théâtre du Peuple, p. 144.
- 19. Rolland, Le Théâtre du Peuple, p. 71.
- 20. Rolland, Le Théâtre du Peuple, p. 122.
- 21. Rolland, Les Léonides (Paris: Albin Michel, 1928), preface, p. 15.
- 22. Rolland, Le Théâtre de la Révolution. Le 14 Juillet. Danton. Les Loups (Paris, Albin Michel, 1909), 1909 preface, vii. In this Rolland draws implicitly on the revolutionaries' own natural imagery, the subject of renewed scholarly interest in recent years. See Dan Edelstein, The

Terror of Natural Right: Republicanism, the Cult of Nature, and the Revolution (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

- On Rolland's writing of the play, see Antoinette Blum, 'Les Loups de Romain Rolland: un jeu théâtral sur l'histoire', The French Review, 66 (1992), pp. 59–68, especially p. 63. William Jewett also notes the crowd's peripheral presence in Les Loups. See Jewett, 'The Fall of Robespierre and the sublime machine of agency', ELH, 63 (1996), p. 441.
- 24. Rolland, 'Les Loups', in Théâtre de la Révolution, p. 26.
- 25. Rolland, 'Les Loups', p. 69.
- 26. Blum, 'Les Loups', p. 66.
- 27. Rolland, Mémoires, p. 292.
- 28. Rolland, 'Danton', Théâtre de la Révolution, p. 11.
- 29. Rolland, 'Danton', p. 12.
- 30. Rolland, 'Danton', p. 75.
- Charnow also notes that 'Rolland's relationship with the audience, the crowd, the people was a strained one,' and that Danton reveals his 'fear of the crowd'. *Theatre, Politics, and Markets*, p. 172.
- 33. Rolland, 'Danton', p. 80.
- 34. BN DAS Rf 71,140: Articles de presse sur Danton, de Romain Rolland.
- 35. The performance was prefaced by Eugène Morel, the recent winner of the *Revue d'Art Dramatique*'s competition for the best popular theatre project.
- 36. 'Le Quatorze Juillet', p. 50.
- 37. Rolland, 'Le Quatorze Juillet', p. 138.
- Henry Béranger, review of *Le Quatorze Juillet*, *La Revue*, 15 April 1902. (BN DAS Rt 71,145).
- 39. Jean-Richard Bloch, 'Le Théâtre du Peuple: critique d'une utopie', L'Effort, 1 and 15 June 1910, reprinted in Bloch, Carnaval est Mort: premiers essais pour mieux comprendre mon temps (Paris: Éditions de la Nouvelle Revue Française, 1920), here p. 36.
- 40. See, for example, Martin Conway and Peter Romijn (eds.), *The War for Legitimacy in Politics and Culture*, 1936–46 (Oxford: Berg, 2008).
- 41. Schlemmer, Farkas, Molnár, and Moholy-Nagy, *Die Bühne im Bauhaus* (1924), cited in Schapp, 'Boundary crossings', p. 93.
- 42. Magdaleine Paz, 'Théâtre 1935', Le Populaire, 29 December 1935.
- 43. Jean-Richard Bloch, *Destin du Théâtre* (Paris, Gallimard, 1930), especially pp. 136–138.
- 44. Bradby and McCormick, People's Theatre, p. 45.
- 45. BN DAS, WGT-834: Rolland, dossier biographique.
- 46. Romain Rolland, Le Jeu de l'amour et de la mort (Paris: Albin Michel, 1925), preface.

- 47. Rolland, Le Jeu de l'Amour, preface, p. 14.
- 48. Rolland, Mémoires, p. 303.
- 49. Rolland, Le Jeu de l'Amour, p. 64.
- 50. Indeed, in an extra section written for the French production of 1939, Rolland has Carnot suggest not only the selfishness of Jérôme's decision but also its potentially destructive consequences on a national scale. *Le Jeu de l'Amour*, p. 150.
- 51. Pottecher in *Paris-Soir*, 28 January 1928. Bérénice Hamidi-Kim also notes Rolland's emphasis on the individual in this cycle, although without analysing the plays themselves. 'Mythe du peuple et du théâtre du peuple chez Romain Rolland', in Denizot (ed.), *Théâtre populaire*, p. 191.
- 52. Rolland, 'Préface à 14 Juillet, novembre 1924', BN DAS WHT-834.
- 53. Romain Rolland, *Páques Fleuries* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1926), preface, p. 12.
- 54. Rolland, Páques Fleuries, p. 179.
- 55. Rolland, *Pâques Fleuries*, preface, pp. 10–13. The vision of the Revolution as both divine punishment and diabolical work has echoes of the counter-revolutionary Joseph de Maistre.
- 56. Rolland, Páques Fleuries, pp. 26-27.
- 57. Rolland, Les Léonides, p. 249.
- 58. Rolland, Robespierre (Paris: Albin Michel, 1939), p. 314.
- 59. Rolland, Robespierre, p. 315.
- 60. Rolland, Robespierre, p. 62.
- 61. Rolland, Robespierre, p. 123.
- 62. Rolland, Robespierre, p. 44.
- 63. Ben Stolzfus, 'Georges Chennevière and Les Fêtes du Peuple', *Comparative Literature*, 28 (1976), p. 352.
- See Nancy Sloan Goldberg, 'Unanimism in the Concert Hall: Les Fêtes du Peuple, 1918–39', *French Review*, 65 (1992), p. 786, and Stolzfus, 'Georges Chennevière', p. 347.
- 65. Goldberg, 'Unanimism in the Concert Hall', p. 786.
- 66. Jean Marguerite, *Les Fêtes du Peuple: l'œuvre, les moyens, le but* (Paris: Les Fêtes du Peuple, 1921), p. 5.
- 67. Michel de la Torre, cited in Marguerite, Les Fêtes du Peuple, p. 6.
- 68. Marguerite, Les Fêtes du Peuple, p. 6.
- 69. Stolzfus, 'Georges Chennevière', p. 353.
- 70. Stolzfus, 'Georges Chennevière', p. 354.
- 71. Marguerite, Les Fêtes du Peuple, p. 10.
- 72. Les Fêtes du Peuple (publicity brochure), BN DAS Rt 4035: Les Fêtes du Peuple, 1918–21.
- 73. Marguerite, Les Fêtes du Peuple, p. 21.

- 74. Georges Chennevière, 'Les Fêtes du Peuple: la célébration de la Joie', L'Humanité, 26 April 1920.
- 75. Marguerite, Les Fêtes du Peuple, p. 55.
- 76. Perhaps with this in mind, Doyen usually based his programme choices on well-known choral pieces from the nineteenth-century, rather than attempting contemporary numbers that would have presented such a choir with greater rhythmical challenges.
- 77. 'Le Chant du Midi', L'Humanité, 11 May 1923.
- 78. 'Le Chant du Midi: Fête pour la commémoration des morts', *Le Populaire*, 12 May 1923. There was also an instruction that the final chorus should be 'sung with conviction and not hummed.'
- 79. See Goldberg, 'Unanimism in the Concert Hall', p. 79. Likewise, Ben Stolzfus describes Chennevière as a 'spiritual revolutionary' while noting his closeness to pacifist circles around Rolland and Duhamel, in 'Georges Chennevière'.
- Claude Bellanger et al. Histoire générale de la presse française. Vol III. De 1870 à 1940 (Paris: PUF, 1972), p. 579. See also L'Humanité, 27 January 1931.
- 81. Guillaume Nahon and Serge Wolikow (eds), Réunions du Comité central du PCF, 1921–1977: état de fonds et des instruments de recherche, Vol. I. 1920–39 (Paris: Fondation Gabriel Péri/Archives de la Seine-Saint-Denis, 2007), p. 8.
- 82. Stolzfus, 'Georges Chennevière', p. 358.
- 83. Ory, La Belle Illusion, p. 349.
- 84. In this it adds weight to recent scholarship on the complex character of the PCF, caught between French and Soviet objectives. See Nahon and Wolikow (eds), *Réunions du Comité central du PCF*, I, especially p. 11.
- 85. See Bradby and McCormick, *People's Theatre*, p. 47, and Thurston, *The Popular Theatre Movement*, p. 290.
- 86. See Bradby and McCormick, *People's Theatre*, pp. 17–18; Orlando Figes and and Boris Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution: The Language and Symbols of 1917* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 8.
- 87. See Mally, 'Exporting Soviet culture', p. 326.
- 88. Mally, 'Exporting Soviet culture' p. 331.
- 89. John W. Casson, 'Living newspaper: theatre and therapy', *The Drama Review*, 44 (2000), p. 109.
- 90. See Marshall Soules, *Media, Persuasion, and Propaganda* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), Chap. 10.
- 91. Socialist groups from the pre-war Volksbühne movement continued to develop, while Soviet theatre was reported on in such publications as the Berlin periodical *Die Jünge Volksbühne*, which featured articles

by supporters of proletarian theatre from Piscator to Henri Barbusse. See, for example, Barbusse's article in *Die Jünge Volksbühne* 1.3, and Piscator's in 1.6 (August 1929).

- 92. Luxemburg and Liebknecht were founders of the Spartacus League from which the German Communist Party was created, and played key roles in the Spartacist uprising in Berlin in 1919. Both were subsequently executed.
- 93. 'Garches, 3 juin 1922', AN F7 13138.
- 94. 'P.P. 22 juillet 1928', AN F7 13138.
- 95. See BN DAS Rt 4074: Théâtre Confédéral de la Grange aux Belles.
- 96. Moussinac had already published on developments in contemporary European and especially Soviet theatre. See Léon Moussinac, *The New Movement in Theatre: A Survey of Recent Developments in Europe and America* (London: Batsford, 1931).
- 97. See Moussinac's article in *Comadia*, 17 August 1932. See also BN DAS Rt 3795.
- 98. For example, André Gide, Luc Durtain, Édouard Autant, Frans Masereel, Francis Jourdain, Arthur Honegger, Paul Gsell, Louise Autant-Lara, and Firmin Gémier.
- 99. Art et Travail, saison 1933-1934 (brochure), BN DAS Rt 3834.
- 100. 'À nos amis', La Phalange Artistique, Revue Mensuelle (Sept. 1929). BN DAS Rt 4323. The Rolland play was Liluli, not from his Théâtre de la Révolution.
- 101. Magdaleine Paz, 'Le Théâtre dans la cave: Compagnie Proscenium, 6, rue Fromentin' in *Le Populaire* (no date), BN DAS Rt 4355. See also BN DAS Rt 4355.
- 102. Charles Leveille, from the Odéon theatre, brought together one such troupe of Communist actors for the performance of *Odessa*—a play about the Russian revolution of 1905—for the Communists of Saint-Denis. 'Soirée théâtrale, le 22 mars 1933', AN F7 13131.
- 103. Chancerel, Le Théâtre et la jeunesse, p. 82.
- 104. 'P.P. janvier 1930', AN F7 13119.
- 105. See, for example, the 'Fête franco-italienne' organized with the help of the Proletarian Poppies in the Salle des Fêtes at La Plaine-Saint Denis on 29 October 1932. 'P.P. 30 octobre 1932', APP Ba 2032.
- 106. 'Vers le Front rouge culturel', *La Scène Ouvrière*, March 1931. The article was written under the pseudonym 'Germinal'.
- 107. 'A.S. des représentations données par la Fédération du Théâtre Ouvrier', APP Ba 2032. See also *La Scène Ouvrière*, February 1931.
- 108. 'FTOF-historique', APP Ba 2032.
- 109. La Scène Ouvrière, April-May 1931.
- 110. 'La Musique et la FTOF', La Scène Ouvrière, March 1931.

- 111. Police investigated a number of Communist film groups, e.g. the Phalange rouge in Nice. 'Nice, le 6 oct 1931', AN F7 13137.
- 112. Tract de la FTOF, 'P.P. 18 novembre 1931', APP Ba 2032.
- 113. 'P.P. 1er juillet 1931', APP Ba 2032.
- 114. 'Un peu de Théorie', La Scène Ouvrière, February 1931.
- 115. La Scène Ouvrière, February 1931. Two illustrations were also provided for the purpose.
- 116. L'Humanité, 26 September 1924. BN DAS Rt 4074.
- 117. See, for example, the performance of *Sabre, goupillon, et compagnie* in 'Correspondance, 4 octobre 1931', APP Ba 2032.
- 118. A (partially favourable) description of the performance of *Têtes de rechange* by 'Masses' was given by Benjamin Crémieux in *Je suis partout* on 29 July 1933. See also 'P.P. 23 juillet 1933', APP Ba 2032. The performance was part of an artistic evening in the Salle Lénine at the Bellevilloise on 22 July.
- 119. 'P.P. 1 January 1933', AN F7 13131. Paul Vaillant-Couturier offered similar explanations of his play *Le Monstre*. See 'P.P. 26 janvier 1926', AN F7 13103.
- 120. See the Introduction.
- 121. 'Au Mur', La Scène Ouvrière, June 1931.
- 122. *La Scène Ouvrière*, June 1931. See also 'Correspondance, 5 juillet 1931', APP Ba 2032.
- 123. '6 mars 1933', AN F7 13131.
- 124. P.P. 12 juin 1922-fête à Garches', AN F7 13138.
- 125. '20 octobre 1933: réunion privée organisée par le PC', AN F7 13131.
- 126. See, for example, an account of one such visit in *La Scène Ouvrière*, June 1931.
- 127. 'P.P. 21 mars 1926', AN F7 13103.
- 128. 'P.P. correspondance, 21 janvier 1933: réunion organisée par la FTOF, Salle du Grand Orient', APP Ba 2032.
- 129. 'P.P. 27 septembre 1935', APP Ba 2032.
- 130. La Scène Ouvrière, March 1931.
- 131. L'Humanité, 16 June 1933.
- 132. Claudine Amiard-Chevrel, 'Le Théâtre et le peuple en Russie soviétique de 1917 à 1930', *Cahiers du Monde Russe et Soviétique*, 9 (1968), p. 369.
- 133. 'Janvier 1930', AN F7 13119.
- 134. L'Humanité, 9 April 1922.
- 135. BN DAS Rt 4323.
- 136. 'P.P. 17 mars 1929', AN F7 13119.

- 137. 'P.P. 12 novembre 1930', AN F7 13119. The plot of *Odessa: les mutins de la mer noir* likewise evolves from a political drama into a convoluted romantic tragedy. 'P.P. 1.2.30', AN F7 13119.
- 138. This is explored in more detail in Wardhaugh, 'Crowds, Culture, and Power: Mass Politics and the Press in Interwar France', *Journalism Studies*, 14 (2013), pp. 743–758.
- 139. 'Mulhouse, 29 janvier 1931', AN F7 13127.
- 140. See, for example, '15 mars 1933', AN F7 13131 and '30 janvier 1931' in AN F7 13137.
- 141. 'P.P. 23 avril 1933', AN F7 13131.
- 142. *Le Soir*, 20 March 1930. It was noticeable, however, that as the Phalange became more actively supported by the PCF it lost favour with many reviewers, who began to find its performances too propagandistic and lacking in artistic merit.
- 143. Benjamin Crémieux, 'Théâtre prolétarien', Je suis partout, 29 July 1933.
- 144. A performance of Upton Sinclair's *Le Chant dans la prison* by the Phalange artistique prompted reviews in *Comædia*, *Paris-Midi*, *Le Soir*, and *Chantecler*, mostly observing that the audience included many Russians and Italians.
- 145. Ory, La Belle Illusion, p. 357.
- 146. See, for example, Jackson, The Popular Front in France, p. 127.
- 147. Chabannes, Paris à vingt ans, p. 277.
- 148. See Wardhaugh, In Pursuit of the People, Chap. 3.

The Art of Counter-Revolution: From Royalist Satire to Fascist Mass Spectacle

There is an emotionally charged moment in the 1935 comedy *L'Heure-H* when a Communist worker realizes in horror that his comrade—with whom he has been discussing social decadence and political militancy in hearty agreement—is actually on the other side of the barricade. 'So you're not affiliated to the Internationale?'—'And you're not from the Croix de Feu?' Their camaraderie suddenly dissipates. If they were in agreement, says the Communist tetchily, it was only in rhetoric. 'And that doesn't count. Only ideas count.' 'No,' retorts his right-wing adversary with a burst of feeling. 'The heart is the only thing that really matters! And don't you see, the main difference between us is that we move forward with outstretched arms, while you clench your fists!'¹

The title of *L'Heure-H* poked fun at Colonel de la Rocque, the leader of the right-wing Croix de Feu who was renowned for his military rhetoric,² and its light-hearted banter was intended primarily to amuse. Yet the comedy of this encounter between left and right derived from a very real topicality. While the Communist in this scene refuses to believe that their similarities surpass the rhetorical, the right-winger recognizes deeper parallels—not least in emotion, experience, and objective. Throughout the Third Republic and particularly in the 1930s, right-wing movements and parties were indeed deliberately rivalling their left-wing counterparts not only in political rhetoric and practice, but also in their social and cultural ambitions. When anarchists and socialists in the fin-de-siècle envisaged the end of the old order in revolutionary plays

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and sketches, they were mirrored in their dramatic aspirations by royalist counter-revolutionaries. In the 1930s, the left-wing Popular Front movement filmed its demonstrations for the benefit of its supporters, bringing its people face to face with themselves as actors and spectators and fashioning what Jeffrey Schnapp has termed a 'collective Narcissus'.³ But right-wing political opponents filmed their meetings and demonstrations as well, even though their cultural production is now rarely mentioned or discussed.⁴ Similarly, while the Popular Front government sponsored mass spectacles such as Romain Rolland's Le Quatorze Juillet and Jean-Richard Bloch's La Naissance d'une cité, deliberately uniting the theatrical and the festive, so too did the PSF create mass spectacles in which its youth sections-and even working-class children from its holiday camps-performed alongside professional dancers and musicians. The forgotten grandeur of these events (and of other similar projects, now preserved in the private archives of the La Rocque family),⁵ is epitomized by the Fêtes de Saint-Jean in 1938-1939, held for audiences of more than 45,000 in the Parisian Parc des Princes.

Theatre, film, and spectacle were integral to the changing conception and practice of mass politics on the right, as on the left. Yet relatively little is known of this aspect of the Third Republic. France is often neglected in studies of mass theatre addressing neighbouring European countries: Günter Berghaus's edited collection on Fascist theatre, for example, discusses France only in the context of Jacques Copeau's theatre during the Vichy regime; while Jeffrey Schnapp's explorations of politicized mass theatre focus on Germany and Italy.⁶ Meanwhile, studies of French fascism have tended to focus either on political groups and parties or on artists and writers, rather than on the collaboration between the two. Mark Antliff's work on fascist art presents a 'fascist revolution in France [that] was a decidedly artistic affair',7 but focuses on 'Sorelian fascists' such as the political leader Georges Valois and the literary critic Thierry Maulnier rather than on right-wing associations and parties. Kimberley Jannarone's study of the controversial director Antoine Artaud likewise locates a form of French fascism in Artaud's conception of mass theatre, but looks abroad to find parallels for his work, not to political movements in France.⁸

Equally, although there is a burgeoning literature on the cultural innovation of the interwar left in France, this tends to neglect right-wing comparison. Studies of popular theatre in France exclude the right,⁹ and it is rare to find reference to the plays created by the Francistes or by Action Française,¹⁰ or to the theatrical and film evenings of the Croix

de Feu/Parti Social Français. (The PSF screening of *La Bataille* in March 1937 in Clichy is notorious only for the riot that followed in the streets outside). This blind spot has led Alan Williams to contend that the French right produced no films at all in the 1930s.¹¹ Likewise, Jean-Pierre Jeancolas's study of cinematic responses to crisis in the 1930s—which includes extra-commercial films—looks only to the left, even though both Action Française and the Croix de Feu/PSF produced and distributed their own films within an extra-commercial framework.¹²

Exploring the place of the right in a book about popular theatre is thus both a necessity and a challenge. A necessity, in that right-wing movements and parties clearly countered the left on the stage—as in the streets—within their wider-ranging rivalry to represent the people. A challenge, in that right-wing militants did not necessarily use the term 'théâtre populaire' to describe their own initiatives, and might therefore seem to exclude themselves from its history.

Drawing on hitherto unexplored sources, this chapter presents a critical assessment of the nature, extent, and specificity of right-wing popular theatre in this period. It first addresses why the association between theatre, the right, and the people remains problematic, and suggests ways in which recent approaches to fascist theatre and film in Germany and Italy can be used to provide a framework of analysis for French initiatives. Second, it focuses on two important but little-known case studies: Action Française in the pre-war and interwar period, and the Croix de Feu/Parti Social Français in the 1930s. These examples make it possible to address a series of key-and previously unanswered-questions. How did the French right conceive of theatre and the people in the Third Republic? In what ways did these groups use theatre, film, and mass spectacle to subvert and create community? To what extent was there an implicit or explicit acknowledgement of Italian or German models? And how might such examples illuminate the importance of right-wing counter-communities in the Third Republic?

1 EVERYDAY AESTHETICS: THE RIGHT AND POPULAR CULTURE

Reticence in approaching right-wing popular theatre in France can be traced to three problems. First is an ongoing reluctance to associate the right with the people, despite the popular credentials of the contemporary Front National and its successful replacement of the Parti Communiste as representative of both working-class and protest voters. Old habits—scholarly and political—die hard. Socialists and communists of the interwar period cavilled at the 'pretensions' of the Parti Social Français or Parti Populaire Français to attract the workers that they considered (or wished to consider) inherently left-wing.¹³ Similarly, historians of French politics have often perpetuated this sense of effrontery that workers should be attracted to the right.¹⁴ Although there is now a shift in focus—'The idea of a left deeply rooted in the working classes and a right deeply rooted in the elites is anachronistic,' as Pascal Perrineau contends in a recent reassessment of the field¹⁵—this has been long in coming.

Second, the fact that the French extreme right was not in power in the inter-war period inevitably limited its own cultural initiatives. Its theatre and films were less spectacular in scale, if not necessarily in ambition, than their counterparts in Fascist Italy or Nazi Germany. They were also less visible when compared with left-wing initiatives under the Popular Front, such as Romain Rolland's *Le Quatorze Juillet*, which received both official endorsement and also a state subsidy from the Popular Front government.

Third, negative right-wing reactions to the popular theatre of the left could be extrapolated to suggest that their approach was inherently reactive, rather than constructive. In a satirical 'Letter to a provincial' on 4 July 1936, the extreme-right literary critic Robert Brasillach deplored the prospect of resurrecting Rolland's *Le Quatorze Juillet* from the dusty bookshelves where—rightfully, in his opinion—it languished in obscurity. Mocking Rolland's overly academic conception of popular theatre, however much this might enthuse 'the most bearded and moth-eaten professors of the Sorbonne', he pitied the 'poor people, naively demanding festivals,' for whom such efforts were destined.¹⁶ During the Vichy regime, Brasillach's fellow journalist Lucien Rebatet looked back on the 1930s in similarly scornful perspective. 'Popular theatre', he recalled, 'was the pet subject of a collection of bearded old fogeys who already smelled of the musty old days of the Dreyfus Affair'.¹⁷ Such theatre—at least in its left-wing incarnation—was a thing of the past, not the future.

Yet the apparently problematic relationship between popular theatre and the right could also be remarkably productive. Movements or parties are by no means entirely dependent on state support for their cultural initiatives, and as previous chapters have already shown, a clandestine existence can be an impetus as well as an obstacle to cultural production. Equally, the fact that right-wing critics sneered at left-wing popular theatre did not signify an opposition to popular theatre per se. Brasillach's letter derided left-wing attempts because they were elitist and superannuated, not because they were popular. Indeed, he was scornful of such schemes precisely because they were not popular enough, and proceeded to imagine popular cultural desires as better fulfilled by watching an American film, a Greek tragedy, or 'perhaps also a work that speaks to [the people] of their own poverty, grandeur, and hope.'¹⁸ Similarly, Lucien Romans responded in the right-wing weekly *L'Émancipation nationale* that real popular theatre was not that of the sectarian Popular Front but rather 'a deeply human theatre, accessible to all'.¹⁹ And when the Parti Social Français (the largest political party in the late 1930s) created its own spectacles for audiences of more than 45,000 in the Parc des Princes, it described them both as popular and equally as a new form of art for the masses.

Meanwhile, German, Italian (and Soviet) initiatives not only exercised a fascination on French drama and film critics but also helped to shape their approaches to the relationship between politics and culture in France. The renowned Histoire du cinéma by Robert Brasillach and his brother-in-law Maurice Bardèche is a case in point. Classifying cinema according to national origin, these two writers relished the presentation of the 'union between the people and their leader' in such films as Leni Riefenstahl's Triumph of the Will.²⁰ Although far from uncritical of politicized films,²¹ they nonetheless admired the determination to enlist cinema for projects of national regeneration. Indeed, they were quick to praise the project of giving '[Italian] fascism its own Battleship Potemkin, its Triumph of the Will' through filmic depictions of 'the glorious stages of conquest and national pride'.²² Conversely, they deplored the faintheartedness of French newsreel directors who brought images of political events and national leaders to the screen without their original soundtrack. 'Watching a riot or dictator is acceptable', they explained. 'But hearing them verges on the dangerous.' More fearful directors, they alleged, excised political material from newsreels entirely, concerned at its potential to arouse conflicting audience responses (a fear that-as police archives demonstrate—was not unfounded).²³ In consequence, the French were often protected from political realities at the cinema, and offered only the blandest of images:

anodyne boxing or tennis matches, bicycle races in France or Italy, viticulture in California, harvest-time in Denmark, regional festivals the whole world over, beauty contests on every beach, dog shows on every pavement, and truth nowhere at all. $^{\rm 24}$

Critically approached, the 'fascination of fascism' that so enthralled Brasillach and Bardèche can offer a lens through which to analyse the form and content of right-wing culture in France. Alice Kaplan describes these two French writers as 'professional aestheticizers of politics',²⁵ and as Sandrine Sanos has recently shown, their aesthetic sense shaped their political desires and dislikes.²⁶ As such, Brasillach and Bardèche exemplify a relationship between politics and aesthetics that has been the object of intense scrutiny over the past forty years. From the pioneering work by Susan Sontag and George Mosse on fascism's aesthetic and spiritual appeal to more recent studies of fascist leisure and culture, scholarly research has sought to explain how an extreme political movement acquired both support and consent. Sontag's influential article on 'fascinating fascism' in 1975 set the trend with a focus on how Leni Riefenstahl's Nazi-commissioned films achieved a new fluidity between the cinematic and the real. Indeed, Riefenstahl herself acknowledged in 1935 that the 'precise plans of the parades, marches, processions, the architecture of the halls and stadium were designed for the convenience of the cameras.²⁷ Yet such films also dramatized and illuminated fascist aesthetics, not least the regeneration of both body and community through the adulation of charismatic leadership. These were aesthetics that drew inspiration from the *völkisch*, the expressionist, and the neo-classical to achieve their ends, with an eclecticism that was also more broadly evident in Nazi theatre.²⁸ Such cultural products offer-as Alice Kaplan has argued-a glimpse of 'what fascism desired': an insight into how aesthetics was integral, not incidental, to fascism's nature and appeal. Little wonder that historians such as George Mosse would pursue this line of enquiry into an analysis of fascism as a form of civic religion, while also acknowledging the legitimizing function of its 'public standard of beauty', structured by classical norms.²⁹

The 'fascination of fascism' does not in itself explain the garnering of support for fascist movements or governments from those less attuned to its aesthetic qualities. Alongside the accent on the aesthetics of extreme politics, there has developed a related emphasis on its normalization through everyday culture and leisure. Victoria de Grazia's *Culture of Consent* (1981), for example, sought to explain working-class

support for fascism by turning not to rhetoric and ideology but rather to the more banal infiltration of everyday activity: a 'depoliticized underside of fascism' evident in its organization and funding of such aspects of popular culture as 'bocce groups, outing clubs, and choral societies.'30 Similarly, Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi have explored how, especially under the aegis of the Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro, the fascist organization of leisure pursued the ideological aim of national mass culture through the pragmatic organization and funding of traditional popular practices.³¹ Mobile theatres and lavish productions of new drama such as *18BL*—which featured a fascist truck known as 'Mother Cartridge-Pouch' as its protagonist-were, as Jeffrey Schnapp contends, intended to 'bind disparate people into a linguistic group that was also a political mass, one national-ideological body.'32 As these examples demonstrate, aestheticization and normalization could work together (if not always smoothly) to secure a degree of support or consent for politically extreme movements and regimes.

Of course, there are important caveats to be made about the coherence of this fascist cultural model, especially as a norm against which to judge French right-wing initiatives. Scholars such as Sontag have emphasized the unifying qualities of Riefenstahl's film despite the diversity of her output. Yet one of the noticeable dissonances in *The Triumph of the Will* is its juxtaposition of more heterogeneous everyday communities with the utopian community of the Nuremberg rally. Against the opening aerial shots that epitomize Riefenstahl's preoccupation with height and mountains as symbolizing striving and leadership, there are ordinary sights and sounds: geraniums on windowsills; a girl with plaits eating an apple; the playing of an accordion. The massed crowds of the rally shout out their regional origins—Friesland, Pomerania, Bavaria—only as part of 'one people, one leader, one Germany'. Yet there are also shots of locals in folk costume, whose heterogeneity seems at odds with the geometric uniformity of the party members.³³

Equally, commercial concerns could sometimes modify ideological messages. Some fascist films were not intended for public distribution: films of Nazi rallies from the late 1920s were, for example, produced primarily for party meetings.³⁴ Conversely, films such as Alessandro Blasetti's *Treno popolare* (much admired by Brasillach)³⁵ were created in implicit dialogue with more mainstream cinema. In this film, the fascio-bedecked train becomes a motor for social change (as well as for

romantic intrigue) as the lower middle-class characters find their lives transformed by a day out in Orvieto, and as they themselves become a 'public engaged in collective leisure.'³⁶ While the employee heroine is won over by the more virile, fascist man over her bookish and effete colleague,³⁷ minor characters too experience social and psychological transformation. An illicit affair is made public through an encounter on the train; an elderly middle-class character with a striking resemblance to Charles Maurras finds his determined individualism undermined by the end of the day, and seems reconciled to his place within a socially broader community. The political overtones are clear; and yet there is also a more 'American-style ending' in which the bookish character finds a second chance with the cast-off lover: a conclusion that, according to Ben-Ghiat, exemplifies the 'contradictions and complications that beset the fascist project of making a truly national cinema.'³⁸

Nevertheless, the analysis of fascist politics as a process of both aesthicization and normalization offers a useful means of assessing comparable French initiatives. Blasetti's and Riefenstahl's films date from the interwar period. Yet from the turn of the twentieth century, the monarchist right in France was already developing its own cultural politics in which art, and especially theatre, was conceived as a political weapon. Not only could theatre serve to satirize adversaries-thus explicitly engaging with the political art of the left-but it could also offer a means of imagining political salvation, and shaping ongoing solidarity. Moreover, Action Française's political conception of theatre merged with a theatrical understanding of politics, in which their members could create a carnival world that transformed the republic into illusion and-potentially-their own desires into reality. In the interwar years, the uses of culture and especially theatre by Action Française would find parallels in the backstage conviviality of other movements and parties on the extreme right. Through this conviviality, indeed, a more nuanced picture emerges of the character and constitution of these movements. Although their rhetoric celebrated combative masculinity, for instance, their social, cultural, and artistic worlds were in some cases powerfully fashioned by female involvement, patronage, and activism. Both political aesthetics and also the new relationship between politics and the everyday were crucial in shaping the right-wing counter-communities that continued to challenge the Republic. And, like their left-wing counterparts, they too experienced the dissonant double rhythm of art and politics, discovering in theatre a means of imagining an alternative time and space, but equally finding their artistic ambitions shaped and curtailed by their political strengths—and weaknesses.

2 Un Rire Nouveau: The Carnival World of Action Française

Action Française is one of the most frequently consulted newspapers at the Bibliothèque nationale, and the cultural importance and influence of this ultra-nationalist and royalist movement has been widely recognized.³⁹ Created in 1899 by Henri Vaugeois and Maurice Pujo, two 'converts' from republicanism to the extreme right, Action Française rapidly established itself as an intellectual centre and as a force to be reckoned with in the streets of Paris. In the first decade of the twentieth century it created a literary institute, a bi-monthly journal that became daily in 1908, and a notorious youth section known as the Camelots du Roi who began as hawkers (camelots) for the newspaper. Yet the theatrical endeavours of this powerful political movement have remained obscure.⁴⁰ This is all the more surprising in that the Théâtre d'Action Francaise, established by Pujo himself in 1907 and continuing to inspire satirical revues and spectacular street politics throughout the Third Republic, was intended to be integral to the wider political, social, and artistic aims of the movement.

The theatre of Action Française was, indeed, conceived as a political act. Maurice Pujo, who developed the theoretical framework for the new venture after an initial suggestion by the teacher and art historian Louis Dimier, described it from the first as deliberately rivalling the revolutionary theatre of the left.⁴¹ At the same time, it was always destined to have a right-wing specificity. Revolutionary theatre brought anarchy in its wake, warned Pujo, not only by propounding misleading ideology but also—more fundamentally—by mistaking the stage as the proper place for theoretical and didactic exposition. This tendency to view theatre as purely polemical, with the attendant simplifications of plot and character, was both a mark of intellectual decadence and also extremely tiresome for spectators. In contrast, the theatre of Action Française was intended to transcend the status of a mere 'theatre of opinion, party theatre' by proposing a reform of both style and content. Privileging indirect influence over direct didacticism, it would seek ultimately to provoke a 'new

laugh' (*un rire nouveau*) at the foibles of the Republic, contributing to a renaissance not only social and political, but also moral, cultural, and aesthetic. As Pujo contended:

Why shouldn't the new, counter-revolutionary theatre — with none of the reticence or weakness of so-called 'respectable' theatre, but conversely with all the vigour and boldness of the real — become a powerful agent in the work of the French Restoration?⁴²

To achieve these ambitious ends, Pujo preached a rejection of romanticism and a return to classical models of tragedy, comedy, and satire.43 Indeed, this particular line of argument was also pursued by other writers in Action Française, whose reaction against romanticism was both articulated and reinforced by Pierre Lasserre's influential Le Romantisme francais, also published in 1907.44 Lasserre's negative analysis of romanticism as 'the degeneration of art, because it is the degeneration of man'⁴⁵ gave particular attention to the artificiality of naturalist theatre.⁴⁶ Pujo likewise denigrated romanticism as undermining the depiction of real human emotions and characters by concentrating on the superficial or idiosyncratic. 'Realism' he considered a particularly nefarious-and misleadingly entitled-artistic doctrine, leading to a disproportionate focus on the décor (in drama) and the foreground (in painting). Naturalism, especially on the stage, seemed in his view only to bring Rousseau's individualism to devastating fruition. Why should audiences pay attention to these 'exceptional cases, impossible situations, and pathological characters', he questioned, when these were devoid of wider human interest and relevance?

The solution to such literary decadence was to be a return to the classical tradition, inspired (in Pujo's case) both by an admiration for the Ancient World and equally by a respect for the order and reason characteristic of the politics, philosophy, and drama of seventeenth-century France. Racine and Molière might employ convention and even fantasy in their drama, he acknowledged, yet their use of characteristic 'types' and respect for the rules of the literary game were compatible with verisimilitude of human character and emotion. Even their stereotypical characters were, in their accurate depiction of salient traits, 'simply human'.⁴⁷ And just as seventeenth-century classical drama edified through order and reason, so in a very different way did the classical drama of the ancient world inspire through its very absence of restraint. 'The comedy

of the classics' observed Pujo approvingly, 'provoked laughter, even wild laughter'.⁴⁸ With this in mind, he himself envisaged a new repertoire that would encompass not only 'new tragedy' and 'modern comedy' but also a third category of 'freer comedy, more audacious in character and more fantastical in form': a novelty in the French theatrical repertoire.

We will attempt to recreate, for our French democracy, that 'ancient comedy' with which Aristophanes castigated the democracy of the Athenians at the close of the fifth century B.C. We will bring to the stage a direct, personal satire (going as far as naming our targets and even further!), mocking and jesting at the men and ideas of the moment.

How could such theatre become reality? For the final category of 'free comedy', Pujo explained that the private character of the performances would guarantee a degree of freedom by avoiding republican censorship. More generally, he seemed in 1907 optimistic that in addition to his own dramatic efforts, plays and sketches would be forthcoming from Action Française's concentric circles of militants and sympathizers, many of whom were already supportive of the literary initiatives of the Institut. After all, André Antoine's Théâtre Libre had become a focus for a whole school of authors: why should the Théâtre d'Action Francaise not achieve similar radiance? More pragmatically, Pujo acknowledged that the new Theatre would not at first be able to provide a full season and a varied repertoire. Instead, they would aim to produce occasional plays, each with two private performances: a dress rehearsal and a première. Since their private character would preclude a box office, tickets would be made available via other channels, such as the headquarters of the newspaper. But if public enthusiasm warranted expansion, there was no reason why additional performances should not be provided, either in a private or in a 'public and popular' form. At the same time, local sections of the league should also be encouraged to give their own performances of plays in the Action Française repertoire. As for the actors, the important point for Pujo (as for so many proponents of popular theatre) was not that they should aspire to stardom but rather that they should collaborate as 'a good, homogenous whole,' in which individuals would subordinate their own desires to the demands of the dramatic work in question.49

Pujo's own contribution to the theatre of Action Française—and to the neo-classical revival—was a lively variation on Aristophanes' *The* *Clouds* in a twentieth century French setting.⁵⁰ Les Nuées was premièred in a private performance at the Théâtre Marigny on 12 December 1907 (see Fig. 1), and the play was subsequently published in 1908 together with Pujo's original article of 1907, a lengthy preface on realism and naturalism, and a response to the play's critical reception.⁵¹ In homage to Aristophanes, *Les Nuées* was intended as a 'light comedy'; in homage to seventeenth-century drama, it was presented as 'a work in the French tradition'.⁵²

Pujo's neo-classical comedy drew inspiration from both the subject and the tone of the original. Monsieur Larivé, the bourgeois-industrialist uncle in Les Nuées, has found an ingenious solution to his nephew's pleasure-seeking existence and spiralling debts:⁵³ the young Paul must be trained by a fashionable philosopher whose theories are as insubstantial as the clouds. This is not Socrates, of course, but a certain Ferdinand Broussaille who presides over the Union Jean-Jacques [Rousseau] and had no doubt personally supervised the interior of its Parisian meeting place, garishly adorned with impressionist and pointillist paintings. Departing from The Clouds, the uncle's scheme in Les Nuées is not to train Paul to refute the existence of debt, but rather to smooth his path to the only career suitable for such an unprepossessing young man: that of republican politician. And, following an initial show of resistance and a series of sub-plots and romantic intrigues, Paul does indeed consent to join the Union Jean-Jacques. Here, he assimilates and defends his newfound theories, not least against the conservative Baron Pié, an opportunistic convert to the Republic who is scorned by his fellow republicans as a closet reactionary.⁵⁴ Once elected in a scene worthy of Hogarth, and by suitably corrupt means, Paul Larivé turns treacherously on the faithful Démos, his uncle's servant and the incarnation of the implicitly royalist people, and orders his arrest. Abandoned by the Republic, the bemused Démos is led away: the final words of the play are his departing cry of 'Vive le Roi!'

Notwithstanding a certain divergence from the classical model, *Les Nuées* strives hard to preserve its generic qualities. The characters are easily identifiable types, and the play delights in mocking the self-serving philosophy of Ferdinand Broussaille, the modern Socrates, whose ideas are a mere caricature of reality. Of course, Broussaille pays lip service to liberty, equality, and fraternity. But his liberty is mere licence, his equality a grasping jealousy, and his fraternity an exclusion of anyone with clerical

ere enere and ion prançaise Les 12 0º 13 Décembre 1907 à Bhil2 Premières Représentations Comédie Contemporaine en trois Actes & en Prose De Caurice Pujo Précédéer d'une Conférence de Ceon Daudets alle Marig Champs Elysées じょうしょうでんしん

Fig. 1 Les Nuées (Programme, 1907) (Courtesy of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France)

or reactionary sympathies. It is Baron Pié who describes Broussaille's philosophy as 'the clouds' (*les nuées*), adding that their usefulness is to 'lull men to sleep with generous illusions and noble chimeras, to make them forget their true condition, the laws of nature, and their real interests.⁵⁵

The comedy of Les Nuées is multi-faceted, and many of its characteristics would become trademarks of what Léon Daudet termed the 'Camelot [du Roi] style' of political performance.⁵⁶ There is, to begin with, an obvious wordplay in the names of the principal characters: Monsieur Larivé exemplifies the self-made bourgeois arrivé, while Broussaille's surname ('undergrowth') suggests his shady character as well as the tangled nature of his philosophies. Second and contributing to the broader design of turning the republic upside down, Les Nuées also depicts republicans of a variety of social origins as cynically untrue to the principles they profess. Broussaille-the supposedly ascetic apostle of liberty, equality, and fraternity-is susceptible to bribery and greed, eagerly pocketing Paul's proffered payment and consuming chocolate éclairs with gusto while claiming to be deep in meditation. Monsieur Larivé is theoretically committed to the good of the people, but far too interested in profit-making to have time for their welfare. Conservatives likewise receive their share of mockery-especially in the form of Baron Pié, who represents the rallying of an 'old right' to the Republic that deprived the 'new right' of potentially powerful supporters. Strikingly, it is the ordinary French people, symbolized here by the aptly-named servant Démos, who are the most sympathetically presented, with the implication that they have been betrayed by their self-styled champions and would willingly support a monarchical restoration.

In the mockery of republican foibles there are parallels with contemporary farces such as those of Georges Courteline, which, although sometimes devastating in their critique, did not seek political alternatives to the Third Republic. Yet *Les Nuées* also goes deeper in its social and ethnic criticism. There is, in particular, a sustained and bitter anti-Semitism, also much more widely characteristic of extreme-right activism in this period.⁵⁷ The particular foci in *Les Nuées* are a German industrialist father and his son, a naturalist playwright. Anti-Semitism is thus associated with both patriotism and neo-classicism as Action Française's national, ethnic, and cultural dislikes converge on a single target. Indeed, *Les Nuées* was explicitly styled as a move to reclaim theatre from the Jew, described by Léon Daudet as particularly drawn to the stage, with its promise of metamorphosis. Daudet himself made strident appeals for large numbers of anti-Semites to attend performances.⁵⁸

Les Nuées represented more than the idiosyncratic project of a fervent royalist: the play not only dramatized themes and characters from the contemporary right-wing imagination but also aspired to the conquest of a wider public. Despite the private nature of the performances, they were given considerable advance publicity not only by Daudet in La Libre Parole (a notoriously anti-Semitic publication edited by Édouard Drumont), but also in Le Gaulois, Gil Blas, Comædia, La Gazette de France, L'Éclair (financed by Jacques Piou, on whom Baron Pié was modelled), and L'Intransigeant. Reviews of the play appeared in all of these newspapers, as well as in Le Journal de Débats, Le Figaro, and Le Soleil.

An article by Emmanuel Arène in *Le Figaro* is typical of the play's critical—but not unsympathetic—reception. While claiming that *Les Nuées* was more of a revue than a play, and almost more of a 'speech in dialogue' than a revue, Arène nonetheless conceded that it was 'bitterly, and sometimes wittily, satirical and political'. He also observed that the audience seemed 'visibly fanatical about this art of caricature', and that although many seemed already won over by the play's contentions, there were also a number of Jews in the audience.⁵⁹ There were in fact many critics who welcomed Pujo's attack on 'the current disorder', even if they did not share his monarchist aspirations. Some also described the play—much to Pujo's own satisfaction—as echoing Molière as well as Courteline.⁶⁰

Shaped by the classics, this was nonetheless a theatre whose primary objectives were political. Thus despite Pujo's homage to classicism, it was ultimately the primacy of politics (*politique d'abord*) that was to determine the evolving role of theatre for Action Française in general, and for its youth section in particular.⁶¹ The published version of *Les Nuées* anticipates the proximate appearance of Pujo's *Jeanne d'Arc*, 'a new tragedy, in five acts and in verse', but this seems never to have been completed. Instead, after a production of Jules Lemaître's *La Princesse de Clèves* at the Théâtre des Arts in June 1908, Pujo's initial project of three or four plays each season was abruptly abandoned.⁶² Yet Pujo was to rediscover something of what he had lost in abandoning neo-classical comedy and tragedy through the activities of the Camelots du Roi, both in the streets and on stage.

Like the characters in Pujo's plays, the Camelots du Roi found their raison d'être in turning the republican world upside down. Established in 1908, they rapidly became the shock troops who brought Action Française's battle against the Republic from the pages of the newspaper to the streets. As such, they sought to exemplify what Christopher Forth has described as the 'culture of force' celebrated by many political and physical culture movements in the fin-de-siècle and early twentieth century.⁶³ (One section of the Camelots even secured boxing lessons so that they could attack republican students in the Latin Quarter more effectively.)⁶⁴ Desperate times called for desperate measures, and the years following the Drevfusard victory seemed, to Action Française and its sympathizers, to entail the dispossession of the 'true' French-Catholic, patriotic, law-abiding-by the 'four confederate estates': Jews, Protestants, freemasons, and foreigners.⁶⁵ The dissolution of religious congregations and the subsequent separation of Church and State had left bitter memories, while the ongoing secularization of education seemed epitomized by the lectures of Professor Thalamas that challenged the divine inspiration for the visions of Joan of Arc. Meanwhile, republican hypocrisy seemed to reach new heights in the overturning of its own laws (most particularly article 445) so as to allow the retrial of Drevfus. Even the working people, courted by Dreyfusard intellectuals and claimed by the Republic as its own, had been brutally betrayed on the orders of its ministers, not least in the violent suppression of the strikes of 1906–1909 by Georges Clemenceau.⁶⁶ Such a reversal of the natural order of things justified violence in the name of order, and, in the words of Pujo (who led the Camelots for 25 years):

In this battle, the pen of the writer would no longer suffice: it was essential for men to engage their very persons, not only to realize the *comp* that alone could secure their final objective of overturning the Republic, but also to respond daily with concrete acts and demonstrations to the attacks of this regime on France itself. We wanted, in effect, to preserve the royal inheritance while awaiting the hour at which to return it to the pretender.⁶⁷

Of course, the acts by which such opposition took form appeared very different to a more mainstream public, as to the republican authorities themselves: youthful high spirits or *gamineries* at best,⁶⁸ wilful destruction at worst. 'Colossal pleasantry' ran the headline in *Le Matin* on 1

April 1909, when the Camelots du Roi played an April's Fool's trick on their appointed judge by sending him 322 items through the post, from cod's roe sweets to an upright piano.⁶⁹ 'Royal rubbish' (*camelote roy-ale*) was how they were ridiculed in republican plays,⁷⁰ while the satirical review *L'Assiette au Beurre* devoted an entire issue to the Camelots, presenting them as a motley collection of unruly children, doted upon by decadent, aristocratic parents.⁷¹ Even the fictional Baron Pié was allowed by Pujo to step out of *Les Nuées* and berate him severely for such 'public infelicities, contrary to the dignity of a self-respecting writer', and to which Pujo had succumbed 'out of giddy youthfulness.'⁷²

Yet for the Camelots themselves, the almost daily scuffles with republican students in the Latin Quarter-together with periodic attacks on republican buildings, monuments, and politicians-cumulatively represented a fruitful gesture of defiance. Especially in 1908–1909, symbols and characters of the Dreyfus Affair offered particular targets for iconoclasm. Statues of the founder of the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme Albert Trarieux, for instance, and of Bernard Lazare, opponent of anti-Semitism and a keen defender of Dreyfus, were both defaced. (The statue of Lazare, in the Jardin de la Fontaine in Nîmes, had its nose removed on 14 July 1909 and sent to Charles Maurras as a trophy.)73 In 1908–1909, when Thalamas's Wednesday lectures at the Sorbonne were parodied-and sometimes violently interrupted-by Pujo and the Camelots, their revelries often continued into street battles with republican students and nightly rampages through the nearby streets, seeking statues or monuments to attack or re-appropriate. The Rue Soufflot and the streets around the Panthéon were their particular 'theatre', Pujo recalled, but they also ranged further afield.⁷⁴ While republican students delivered addresses from the statue of Auguste Comte in the Place de la Sorbonne, royalists crossed the Seine to speak from the statue of Joan of Arc on the Place des Pyramides, near the Rue de Rivoli.

In such battles, the dialogues were part-scripted, part spontaneous. Both royalists and republicans knew the likely itineraries and meeting places, and their activism engaged not only one set of young people against another, but also, more symbolically, Thalamas against Joan of Arc or the Republic against the monarchy. Sometimes, carnival time itself (*mi-carême*, the middle of Lent) offered a particularly apt context for this symbolic play. On 18 March 1909, a group of Camelots travelled in a landau through the streets of Paris dressed as notable republican figures, such as the then President of the Republic Armand Fallières, the judge Alexis Ballot-Beaupré who had presided over the trial securing the rehabilitation of Dreyfus (and who therefore brandished the number 445), Aristide Briand, and Georges Clemenceau. In the ensuing scuffles, the police arrested 'Briand' and bore him away still wearing his cardboard condemnation for indecency.⁷⁵

There were, therefore, real consequences to such symbolic and physical violence, and members of Action Française, particularly the Camelots, were frequently arrested, tried, and imprisoned. But in their eyes the courts thus became opportunities to try the Republic and attract additional publicity to their cause, while the republican prisons became, in the words of Maurras, 'one of our most flourishing colonies.'⁷⁶ Smuggling in cake and champagne, the prisoners scribbled the number 445 on the walls and shared royalist songs and poems, transforming a republican space into a transient experience of royalist France in an alternative time. 'Dear prisons...' reminisced Maurice Pujo, with a fondness no doubt also coloured by considerable nostalgia for his misspent youth, 'the heart of France beats again within your walls.'⁷⁷

At the same time, there was also a very real economic connection between the Camelots' performances in the streets and on stage, since their theatrical ventures amassed vital funds in support of often costly street politics. The regular revues produced by the Camelots were a particularly celebrated feature of their social calendar, and were usually performed to audiences numbering several hundred supporters. On such occasions, the Camelots' revues certainly responded to Pujo's earlier call for 'free comedy', delighting in 'mocking and jesting at the men and ideas of the moment' while at the same time vaunting their choice of *politique d'abord*. They were also faithful to the generic traits of the revue—'a vast proportion of word-play, a dash of indecency, and some allusions to well-known personalities, always the same ones.⁷⁷⁸

Produced from the pre-war years until the 1930s (and possibly beyond), these revues varied little in tone or subject matter. Satirical sketches of republican figures and institutions (especially Jewish ones) were staple fare. *Dégonflons L'Y-outre*, for example, brought to the stage in December 1911 the rhetoric and physical battle between the Camelots and their adversaries, many of whom are symbolically assigned to the 'Club des Giflés de la République' for those who had been violently upbraided by the royalists (though Baron Pié begs the stage manager not to allow the revue to proceed if it is going to include violence).⁷⁹

Typical, too, were comic representations of the police, social Catholics in the tradition of Marc Sangnier, followers of the Jewish sociologist Emile Durkheim, and conservative republicans on the model of Pié himself. A particularly favoured target was the socialist journalist and later government minister Aristide Briand, regularly presented by Action Française as a 'mackerel' (slang for a pimp) on account of his relationship to an especially notorious 'loose woman' (the Third Republic). A revue of August 1909, for example, portrayed the unfortunate Briand languishing on a fish stall, rejected by a potential buyer as past his best,⁸⁰ while contemporary Action Française banquets served up miniature cardboard mackerels with the head of Briand to suitable hilarity.⁸¹

Similarly, revues from the interwar period continued the mockery of long-standing targets against wider satire of the parliamentary system. Briand's popularity as a target continued unabated, and he was sometimes presented in the company of his female admirer 'Léonie' Blum⁸² (the Jewish socialist and Popular Front premier Léon Blum who was by now a particular focus for rhetorical and even physical violence from Action Française supporters).⁸³ In other cases, the Chamber of Deputies was satirized *en masse*. In March 1933, a festival of the Camelots du Roi included the scene 'In the shower! The swimming pool of the Chamber of Deputies.' Here, the Radical Édouard Daladier was portrayed as having just lost his *portefeuille* (portfolio, but also wallet), and his fellow ministers were shown diving into the pool to look for it. Blum, in this instance, was even played by an actress to emphasize his supposed femininity.

As the satire of Blum shows with particular clarity, the play on stereotypes that structured these revues was durably shaped by gender norms and assumptions. The Camelots du Roi who created and watched these revues were a self-consciously combative group of young men, very much inspired by an ideal of action—often violent action—as opposed to abstract theory or effete intellectual pursuits. They tended therefore to satirize their (male) enemies as weak, cerebral, and overly feminized, thus implicitly reinforcing their own virility. Marianne, the female symbol of the Republic, was concurrently either 'the Wench' (*la gueuse*), a lascivious character favouring figures such as Aristide Briand, or an unattractive old hag guarding the *Hôtel des étrangers* that France had now become.⁸⁴ This both intensified Action Française's mockery of the Republic but equally strengthened its own assumptions about appropriate female behaviour and appearance.

Conversely, the sketches of the Camelots and also the contexts in which they were performed sought to celebrate royalist restoration of a moral and social order as well as a political one. Les Petits Pié se dégourdissent (The young Piés learn a thing or two), performed in its original version at the Camelot du Roi festival on 28 November 1912, contrasted women misled by contemporary doctrines with women grounded in patriotic fervour and militancy. A female Norwegian student sings of her confusion at the vagueness of Bergson's lectures; a ghostly marquise laments her folly at bringing up her children according to Rousseau and then facing the guillotine at the age of 20. Yet when the petits Pié (sons of the infamous Baron) arrive in Paris, they are charmed by a young newspaper salesgirl who insists that 'all the populus, I believe, loves the Camelots du Roi'. Moreover, Joan of Arc herself concludes the first act by forging a symbolic connection between her salvation of France and the Orleanist pretender to whom Action Française supporters were loyal—and 'whom your people expect.'85

Of course, Joan's militancy and masculine attire were not intended to inspire female aspirants to join the all-male Camelots. Yet young male protesters were certainly encouraged, if not necessarily accompanied, by female supporters. In early 1909, for instance, when two young siblings of well-known Camelots were imprisoned as a deterrent to other families, their mothers were fully supportive of their actions.⁸⁶ Meanwhile, Camelot festivals were often attended by considerable numbers of Action Française's female supporters, and presided over by the Marquise de Mac-Mahon,⁸⁷ renowned not only for her solicitude for the young street-fighters but also for her sustained apology for their violent behaviour. She called herself 'the mother of the Camelots', Pujo recalled,⁸⁸ and 'it is impossible to celebrate violence with greater maternal gentleness, or to offer a more delicate appreciation of why they are useful and why they are loved.'89 Traditional aristocratic and royal female patronage remained a celebrated feature of such events into the interwar period. In 1933, a Camelot festival in the Salle Pleyel on 22 March was honoured by the patronage of HRH Madame la Princesse de France, Comtesse d'Harcourt, while an artistic soirée organized by the related Œillet Blanc in May was attended by the Duchesse de Guise.⁹⁰

Women, too, were important not only to the presentation and reception of such sketches but also as performers. Maurice Pujo himself accorded particular praise to female contributors to Camelot revues—especially Léna Bruze and Fanny Lancret⁹¹—while accounts of

substantial artistic festivals mention numerous 'charming' female singers and instrumentalists. Reports on a Camelot festival that attracted an audience of 800 in January 1911, for example, mention 10 male and 8 female performers, with Mlle Simone Hubert singing *La Chanson Royaliste.*⁹² Clearly, there were excellent working relations between the Camelots and many professional actors and actresses. Not only did the latter perform at royalist events, but they also offered discounted tickets to their own performances. In December 1909, the renowned Sarah Bernhardt offered thirty complimentary tickets to members of Action Française to attend a play depicting the trial of Joan of Arc (at which their behaviour was—almost—exemplary).⁹³ Later, in 1933, Suzanne Devoyod of the Comédie-Française assisted with the production of the Camelots' revue *Marianne est servie.*⁹⁴

While these sketches and cultural events offer an original insight into the sustained dialogue between politics and theatre in the life of Action Française, they also reveal something of a backstage conviviality that is otherwise hard to trace, and yet was nonetheless essential to both the character and the strength of the movement. The habitual targets of political satire and the celebrated exploits of the Camelots might determine the nature of the revues, but their performance not only strengthened solidarity but also provided opportunities for shared entertainment across generational (and, to some extent, social) boundaries.

On 28 May 1928, for example, a festival was organized at the appropriately named Palais d'Orléans (Rue de Maine) for the 'denier Jeanne d'Arc', the fund compensating those who had suffered economically for their participation in street politics. The programme was a full one: royalist songs, a revue entitled Alerte au Gaz...Paris,95 a ball at midnight with two orchestras and a jazz band, and finally a Provençal farandole at 3 a.m. The festival (which was fully booked) was typical of the exuberant entertainment provided by the Camelots du Roi. Alerte au Gaz... Paris was a musical revue in two acts featuring Aristide Briand and all the usual republican suspects, and including a scene entitled 'Si le coup de téléphone est possible' ('if the phone call is possible'—a play on Maurras' 1910 book Si le Coup d'état est possible.) The sketch was a re-enactment of a particularly successful coup of 1912, in which Pinochet, one of the Camelots, had secured the release of his friend Baleine from prison by telephoning Aristide Briand's secretary and impersonating the President of the Republic. By the time the trick was discovered, Baleine had already been liberated, and Briand was obliged to save face by claiming

that he was already intending to commute the sentence, and that the Camelots had merely pre-empted his instructions.⁹⁶ Their re-enactment was particularly appreciated. Later, at the ball, girls could dance the tango and Charleston under the watchful eye of their mothers-until the lights were extinguished and red projectors illuminated for 'a quarter of an hour at the Bal musette'. Then participants were invited to disguise themselves with red paper caps and scarves ('ask for the Aristide Briand cap!' cried the assistants) and to enter into the spirit of the imagined milieu. But this brief foray into the communist underworld was not without consequences: when the lights were relit, dancers were disconcerted to discover bright traces of dye on collars and foreheads, where red caps and scarves had left their mark.⁹⁷ At 3 a.m., Charles Maurras joined the party directly from the printing of the latest issue of Action Française, and was immediately surrounded by admirers eager for his autograph. Finally, a Provencal farandole brought the evening to an exhausted but harmonious conclusion.

When Pujo looked back on his 'new laugh' at the Republic in 1933, he admitted that his trajectory had been unusual. Instead of depicting Joan of Arc on stage, he had praised her in an illicit lecture in the Sorbonne; instead of writing neo-classical comedies and tragedies, he had witnessed the exuberant street spectacle of the Camelots re-enacted in their musical revues. But the 'new laugh' at the foibles of the Republic had nonetheless resounded in the streets as on stage, and the satire of specific republican officials rather than social stereotypes had in its own way pursued some of Pujo's original artistic aims.

Moreover, the serious point of such *gamineries*, as of the political theatre of Action Française in general, was that the Republic was merely a farce. If the first aim of this theatre was to seize attention, the second was to turn the republican world upside down—to treat the laws, institutions, and figures of the regime with cavalier disregard, and to establish in its place a new kingdom, however transient and symbolic. In this carnival world, court proceedings became stages for the exposition of royalist doctrine, and prison cells at the Santé were transformed into royalist strongholds of poetry and song. During the Third Republic itself, such theatre and *gamineries* caused a certain amount of administrative and judicial trouble for the regime, and little more. But when the Republic fell in 1940 and Charles Maurras had the 'divine surprise' of seeing the authoritarian Pétain come to power with principles and policies closely aligned to those of Action Française, the 'new laugh' seemed—at least for a time—to be one of triumph.

3 MASS SPECTACLES AND THE MUNDANE: Culture and the Interwar Right

The carnivalesque theatre of Action Française exemplified the connection between politics, aesthetics, and the everyday. It both ridiculed the Republic on stage and in the streets, and at the same time created royalist counter-communities through everyday association, militancy, and conviviality. This was a theatre intended both to reinforce and render attractive the ideal and experience of a royalist people, whose vigour and humour—would outlast that of their republican opponents.

As the extreme right expanded and diversified in the interwar years, so too did its creation of counter-communities assume grander proportions. In January 1936, the government voted to dissolve several of the right-wing leagues and paramilitary organizations, such as the veterans' association Les Croix de Feu, created in 1927 by Maurice d'Hartoy and directed from 1931 by Colonel François de la Rocque de Sévérac. Following the attack on Léon Blum on 13 February 1936, there were urgent demands in parliament to apply the new law, leading to the official dissolution of both Action Francaise and the Camelots du Roi.98 Yet Action Française continued to appear, and the new laws merely provided an impetus for the extreme right to restructure and expand. By 1937, the Parti Social Français-successor to the Croix de Feu-boasted a membership of one and a half million, surpassing that of the Communist and Socialist parties combined. Though the exact membership total is unverifiable, even such an approximation would make PSF 'easily the largest political force in France' in this period, according to Julian Jackson.99

Smaller and more radical right-wing groups continued to proliferate both before and after the 1936 legislation. In the earlier 1930s, the Solidarité Française and the Francistes offered more limited but vocal challenges to the republican status quo, explicitly inspired by militarism, Italian fascism, and corporatism (the decorated war veteran Marcel Bucard, leader of the Francistes, even attended the international fascist conference at Montreux in 1934). The Francistes also made strident efforts to attract both communist and socialist voters to their cause, aiming for a nationalist revolution 'with the people and for the people.'¹⁰⁰ In June 1936, ex-communist firebrand Jacques Doriot adopted similarly revolutionary rhetoric for his new Parti Populaire Français, which sought to prise workers away from the bitterly denigrated PCF. 'These people are intelligent, combative,' he insisted, possessively. 'They do not need lessons from anyone in the art of revolution.'¹⁰¹ Had the elections planned for 1940 been held, it is likely that the PSF would have been triumphant—which was precisely why Colonel de la Rocque was wary of allying his fortunes with those of Jacques Doriot and refused to join the latter's Front de la Liberté in 1937.¹⁰²

Through both public and private meetings and spectacle, these rightwing groups sought increasingly to oppose republican ideas and experiences of community with 'counter-communities' of their own,¹⁰³ drawing on military ideology, symbolism, and practice. The Croix de Feu, for example, was firmly grounded in its military origins. Established as an elitist veterans' movement, it initially accepted as members only those who had been awarded the Légion d'Honneur or the Croix de Guerre, although membership of the associated Briscards was open to any veteran who had served on the front line. Its ideal of patriotic fraternity thus encompassed the 'horizontal comradeship' that Benedict Anderson describes as integral to nationalism,¹⁰⁴ as well as a more vertical closeness shaped by obedience to authority. Songs, speeches, and spectacles of the movement drew on both forms of fraternity, emphasizing the solidarity and self-sacrifice of veterans who had served the patrie in wartime as well as their willingness to continue fighting, where necessary, to defend their ideals against the left, the Republic, or other nations. Croix de Feu rallies and parades used aeroplanes until the ban on paramilitary leagues in 1936;¹⁰⁵ Gabriel Boissy's Chant des Croix de Feu et des Volontaires Nationaux called on the war dead to awaken from their sleep and witness the dynamism of their successors (in the words of the final refrain, 'The Croix de Feu are good young men/who will make France French again!').¹⁰⁶

Moreover, wartime fraternity was also explicitly cited as a source of ongoing collaboration across both social and religious boundaries. On 14 June 1936, the Croix de Feu caused outrage on the left by holding a commemoration of the war dead at the Synagogue on the Rue de la Victoire in Paris, which was attended by 1200 people (including 700 from the league itself). Here, Rabbi Kaplin praised the Croix de Feu for remembering and celebrating those who had died without the distinction of religious confession, and described the war itself as a source of unity: 'It was a sacred union,' he insisted. 'War is a melting pot in which all individual souls are drawn together into a single soul.' Equally, the Rabbi reiterated to enthusiastic applause that the defence of France in the contemporary world required a national union in which 'there should be neither Jews, nor Protestants, nor Catholics, but only Frenchmen.' ¹⁰⁷

As movements such as the Croix de Feu expanded in search of mass membership, however, so too did their ideas and ideals of community evolve from the martial towards the familial. Certainly, there was much that was militaristic in the Croix de Feu's associations for young people, and photographs in Le Flambeau of the Fils et Filles des Croix de Feu as well as the of the Cercle des moins de 16 ans showcased the rigorous discipline of their exercise routines.¹⁰⁸ Yet the increasing emphasis on female and youth membership not only expanded the range of the Croix de Feu/PSF's activities but also progressively altered the character of the movement.¹⁰⁹ In particular this expansion created a new persona for La Rocque-now not only a colonel with plans for the elusive 'H-Hour', but also the patriarch of a pyramidal, familial structure that was rapidly becoming the largest political party in France. Indeed, La Rocque himself deliberately turned to familial language when describing his new party, describing members as 'my PSF family' as well as speaking of their 'fraternal mission',¹¹⁰

Backstage activities became vital to the constitution and enlargement of this new community. As William Irvine has argued, the traditional right such as the Fédération Républicaine had small circles of membership and limited party life. In contrast, new right-wing parties such as the PSF stridently encouraged participation, to the extent of encompassing the social, cultural, and sporting lives of their members. There were PSF jazz groups and orchestras, PSF children's summer camps and youth groups, PSF charitable societies and garden parties.¹¹¹ While women were important supporters and patrons-but not necessarily street protestors-for Action Française, the expansion of the Parti Social Français from elite male military association to mass party included an increasingly visible role for women, as films and photographs of its meetings testify.¹¹² At the same time, female participation (often on a large scale) also characterized such traditional right-wing celebrations as the annual Parisian parade in honour of Joan of Arc, to which the Croix de Feu and PSF contributed (see Fig. 2). Indeed, the political



Fig. 2 Women in the traditional parade in honour of Joan of Arc, 15 May 1934 (Photograph, author's collection)

difference—and danger—of such groups, movements, and parties was that they offered not just a choice at the voting booth but instead a comprehensive way of life: a rival society within, but distinct from, that of the Third Republic.

Although this is not the place to review the inconclusive debate over French fascism,¹¹³ these right-wing groups and parties certainly conceived of culture in a manner influenced by fascism in both Italy and Germany. Their politics was visual and symbolic as well as intellectual; their wider mobilization of supporters in communities that shared social and cultural lives as well as political ones was vital to their identity and importance.

Films in particular attained increasing significance: not only films produced by the groups in question but also commercially available films that were collectively viewed and discussed at party events. One evening organized by Action Française in April 1935 included the projection of *La Croisière de Campana*, in which the 26-year old Orleanist pretender meets with members of Action Française (including Charles Maurras) as well as shaking the hands of his fellow passengers without distinction of class: engineers, doctors, teachers, artisans, workers, and employees.¹¹⁴ Subsequently, *Le Sentiment populaire en monarchie* presented a series of encounters between the people and their leaders across Europe, prompting a variety of responses from the Action Française spectators. They greeted images of a meeting of 60,000 workers with derisive whistling, but audibly approved sequences showing the mourning of King Alexander of Yugoslavia by his people, and the mass celebrations at the coronation of King Leopold III of Belgium, and at the wedding of the Duke of Kent.¹¹⁵

Such private film evenings could themselves be on a massive scale. In July 1935, 800 members and supporters of the Francistes met to watch Alessandro Blasetti's La Vecchia Guarda (The Old Guard). In an introductory speech, leader Marcel Bucard not only thanked an Italian fascist organization for providing the film but also offered a more extensive eulogy of fascism and corporatism, and called for France to imitate the national regeneration of her German and Italian neighbours.¹¹⁶ La Vecchia Guarda (hailed as a 'masterpiece' by Bardèche and Brasillach)¹¹⁷ offered a particular impetus to the imagination of national renewal, since the action culminated in the gathering of peasants to participate in the March on Rome in 1922. A similar emphasis on renewal was meanwhile developed in Franciste holiday camps, where young men were exposed to military-style training and discipline that was intended, in Bucard's words, 'to prepare them in due course to be good soldiers.' In September 1935, a play at one of these camps in Breuil-Bois Robert, near Mantes (Seine-et-Oise), depicted the 'conversion' of a young revolutionary drawn to this militaristic ideal.¹¹⁸

Party-produced films could also play a more sustained role in imagining, documenting, and reinforcing the political character of the movement, as the case of the Croix de Feu/Parti Social Français demonstrates in particular detail. The amateur films produced by this political group—24 of which are now preserved in the collections of the Centre National de la Cinématographie at Bois d'Arcy¹¹⁹—were produced by a propaganda section variously entitled Le Groupe Photo-Ciné and Cinémalik.¹²⁰ They were created, as the propaganda director Charles Vallin explained at a National Congress in Lyon in 1937, largely for dissemination within the party itself, and could be hired by local sections for a small fee.¹²¹ With this objective in mind, they were probably intended to complement the souvenirs of regular and exceptional activities offered by the photographs and articles in *Le Flambeau* or *Le Petit Journal*, or the recordings of La Rocque's speeches.¹²² Silent and only occasionally employing inter-titles, they document both exceptional and everyday events in the life of the movement and party: commemorations of Armistice Day or Joan of Arc Day, mass meetings, and family outings.

The amateur and documentary character of the remaining films should not obscure the fact that they were produced by the propaganda section and with propagandistic intent. As police records show, some of the films were rehearsed and staged rather than offering real-time depictions of actual meetings and demonstrations. In February 1936, for example, 100 members of the Volontaires Nationaux (the youth section of the Croix de Feu) were required to mime attendance at a speakermeeting and shout 'Vive la Rocque!' for the film crew 'documenting' their activities.¹²³ Furthermore, the depiction of Croix de Feu/PSF members to themselves and to each other could be an important means of building up a sense of pride and community, as well as indulging the pleasure of self-representation in a relatively new medium ('collective narcissism' was not restricted to the left). Some films reinforced this solidarity through the satire of political opponents: one of the earliest, for example, features an incident in which members of the Croix de Feu deal with a troublemaker intent on disturbing their commemoration of the war dead at Notre Dame.¹²⁴ Indeed, graves and commemoration of wartime sacrifice often feature prominently, just as in the broader rhetoric of the movement and its leaders.

There is also in these films a wider satire of the Popular Front, especially the PCF. In 1935, the coincidence of two rival political commemorations on 19 May—the Commune at the Mur des Fédérés; Joan of Arc on the Rue de Rivoli—offered a suitable pretext for representing the Croix de Feu's enemies as partisans of revolution and disorder. In the propaganda section's most technically ambitious film, *La Fête de Jeanne d'Arc, 1935*, newspapers headlines such as 'Long live Stalin, leader of international Revolution!' contrast with images of their own disciplined crowds, who represent patriotism and obedience by acclaiming La Rocque and singing *La Marseillaise*. In a film of 1938, Léon Blum serves once again as the unfortunate target for satire, this time for his part in the dissolution of the Croix de Feu, and is represented ironically as 'a true Frenchman.' (Indeed when founding his new party, La Rocque had criticized Blum's leadership of the Popular Front government with the observation that 'his commanding action was not taken from the front lines of trench warfare.')¹²⁵ The same film also shows the targets at a PSF fairground coconut shy, with Socialist Léon Blum, Communist Jacques Duclos, and trade union leader Léon Jouhaux alongside Mussolini and Hitler.

While reinforcing a sense of solidarity among members, these films also pay particular attention to the presentation of the CDF/PSF leader Colonel de la Rocque. Although some adopt photographic conventions for depicting the providential leader-viewed slightly from below in an attitude of resolution-others aim for a more relaxed presentation, with La Rocque more paternal than militaristic. Les Croix de Feu se déplacent (1935-1936) and Une Réunion du PSF à Lille (1937) are cases in point. Although the two films represent different phases in the development of the movement and party, they both depict La Rocque as an inspired leader, speaking energetically from the platform to a calm, disciplined crowd below, and include images of his passage through the crowd, greeting adults and children alike, laughing and at ease.¹²⁶ His attire is formal, but non-military.¹²⁷ Les Croix de Feu se déplacent shows La Rocque addressing his supporters informally, pipe in hand; in Une Réunion du PSF en plein air à Lille, he smokes a cigarette while addressing the crowd with a casual demeanour. Following the evolution of the movement from veteran association to mass party, La Rocque is no doubt intended to appear more as the benevolent leader of a the 'great reconciled family' of the PSF than as the commander of an all-male battalion of shock troops against the Republic.

The visual heterogeneity of these meetings, and the absence of massed military uniforms, certainly presents a strikingly different aspect to that sought in Leni Riefenstahl's depictions of the Nuremberg rallies. Of course, male camaraderie has its place, particularly in the Croix de Feu films in which members are shown marching along arm in arm.¹²⁸ But this is nonetheless far removed from Riefenstahl's extensive and more intimate camera play over the bodies of young men preparing for the rallies: shaving, combing each other's hair, washing, wrestling, and spraying each other with water. Instead of physically powerful young men ready for battle, the Croix de Feu films increasingly represent families (for example at the *Vente de charité*), young girls at a local PSF section (*La section PSF de Montrouge, 1938*), and women dressed in regional costume in the procession celebrating Joan of Arc (*Paris, le 14 mai 1939*). Many

of the families depicted in *La Vente de charité* are well dressed, and the children appear neat and smart. In *La section PSF de Montrouge, 1938*, for example, a 'rallye de jeunes filles' is addressed by Pierre Levet, and viewers see a priest with a group of PSF boys, one of whom wears a sailor suit. The films also depict crowds including both working- and middle-class supporters. 'The social movement of the Croix de Feu', insisted Colonel de la Rocque in March 1936, 'must create throughout the whole country a network that draws together all the true French.'¹²⁹

Strikingly, although the camera often pans across the crowd to give a sense of its density, and although the focus is often on the people's relationship with their leader rather than with each other, the cameraman generally remains sufficiently close to the spectators that they appear as individuals, rather than as a more uniform mass. Unlike in caricatures of the movement in the left-wing press (or in L'Heure-H), the attendant crowds are never shown in these films giving the fascist military salute. Discipline, order, and admiring respect for their leader matter, but so too does the presentation of a broad movement that reaches across classes and generations. Emblematic of this shifting emphasis is the specific film documenting the transformation of the Croix de Feu into the Parti Social Français, in which members at a family day out in Tirmagny in July 1938 wave playfully to the camera before returning to their dance: men with women, women with women, and fathers with their young children.¹³⁰ As well as offering images of heroic or providential leadership, these films thus offer-as they are surely intended to do-a glimpse of the banal, everyday, and familial activities of an 'antipolitical' movement and party.¹³¹

Theatre, too, played a significant part in the self-fashioning of this movement and party, both in its everyday conviviality but also in its more spectacular depiction of present and future. Police records reveal that large numbers attended the artistic evenings organized by the Croix de Feu and PSF: in March 1936, for example, 1000 members and supporters gathered at the Palais de la Mutualité in Paris to watch well-known performers, including Georges Chepfer and Dorival from the Comédie Française, and Mirieille Berton from the Paris Opera.¹³² But even more homegrown attractions could amass audiences of several hundred. At a banquet in March 1931, 500 Croix de Feu members were entertained by M. Dambrire and his wife, supporters of the Toulouse section. First, they appeared as an elderly couple reminiscing over the songs of their youth: then the wife flung off her disguise and appeared as a young woman

dressed in a tricolour and symbolizing the rebirth of French song. M. Dambrire continued his entertainment with vivid recollections of trench warfare, followed by what the police spy allusively described as 'Gallic anecdotes prompting general hilarity.'¹³³

Meanwhile-and for a rather different audience-amateur theatre was also being developed within the children's summer camps organized by Travail et Loisirs. This was an association both staffed and 'spiritually' inspired by the Parti Social Français, and which fulfilled what its organizers described as a 'strictly social and patriotic mission in the most "red" working-class districts as well as in artistic and literary milieus."¹³⁴ The summer camps were one of their most extensive undertakings, and catered for working-class children who were often from left-wing households (TL leaders recorded sightings of L'Humanité in letterboxes in the course of their home visits). Despite an emphasis on the collective, those arriving at the camps were frequently surprised by the greater scope offered for individuality: children accustomed to sleeping several to a bed at home were given beds of their own; those accustomed to being dressed identically received their own clothes. ('We're brothers,' they exclaimed, 'we're always dressed the same.')¹³⁵ For these children, short plays and sketches were deemed a valuable part of their general education, as well as forming a focus for festivities around the concluding campfires, or for the celebration of the Assumption on 15 August. Some of La Fontaine's fables were acted out in costume in one of the camps of 1938, for example, which also featured a dramatic tour du monde with a more political flavour, in that Germany was presented not in Nazi guise but rather 'as it should have remained.'136

Much more spectacularly, however, working-class children from Travail et Loisirs were also accorded a key role in the PSF's mass festivities of the late 1930s. As La Rocque's private archives reveal, plans were being formulated even shortly after the formation of the new party in 1936 to emphasize and extend its influence through a programme of mass spectacles. For December 1936, these archives include detailed proposals for a 'cycle of festivals of propaganda', intended 'firstly to give a demonstration of our organization, youth, and mass character, and secondly to make money.¹³⁷ Designed for theatres but also for stadiums and amphitheatres across France, these spectacles would require audiences of several thousand in order to cover their costs, and would present spectacles of song and dance determined both by professional participation but also by the talents and availability of local PSF groups.

Some of the projects-especially those of 1939, which seem to have remained mostly unrealized-were more overtly political in content. The celebration of '25 ans de lutte de L'Esprit Croix de Feu (1914-1939)' was, for example, designed to include an evocation of war, armistice, and the foundation of the Croix de Feu, before a celebratory depiction of the PSF's successes across France. The wartime scene was to emphasize 'all classes together at the front' as well as decorations for military bravery and prowess; the 'Armistice' and 'Post-war' sections were more downbeat, representing the 'disgust' of veterans at political intrigue and inefficiency, and of the younger generation at the 'negation of patriotism etc.' As in Riefenstahl's Triumph of the Will, both generations were shown as anxious for leadership and direction, and as potential recruits for a new political movement.¹³⁸ Subsequent scenes, therefore, juxtaposed the Croix de Feu/PSF emphasis on 'Work, Family, and Fatherland' (Travail, Famille, Patrie) with left-wing alternatives of 'class warfare', 'free unions', and 'the Internationale', and the spectacle was to conclude with an illuminated map of a France renewed by its adherence to the PSF.¹³⁹ Meanwhile, and with a particular focus on the new party newspaper, the 'Projet de fête pour Le Petit Journal' imagined a night at the newspaper headquarters through drama and dance, concluding with a 'ballet of printing presses' and a 'waltz of [newspaper] kiosks.'140

While some of these projects remained tentative, others were realized in spectacles that sought-like those of the left-a fusion between art and politics. They were, moreover, described both as popular celebrations and equally as a new experience of art for the masses. In 1938–1939, the PSF celebrated the Fête de la Saint-Jean: a festival of Saint John the Baptist on 24 June, near the summer solstice, traditionally celebrated by the lighting of a fire in the evening, and often associated with a particular emphasis on youth. For its own festivities, the PSF hired the Parisian Parc des Princes, a sports stadium capable of seating 45,000, and which was in both 1938 and 1939 full to overflowing. (Indeed in 1938 there were even spectators perched on the ledges where the football scores were usually displayed, and crowded onto the rooftops of nearby buildings). These festivals of the late 1930s offer a fascinating insight into a little-known aspect of right-wing culture. Their explicit emphasis on youth and sport, politics and religion, and their dramatic play with light and darkness (and especially with fire), brought them close to such fusions of art and popular politics as Riefenstahl's Triumph of the Will-although there were also significant divergences.

The celebration of Saint-Jean by the PSF in 1938 was particularly spectacular—so much so that its photograph even appeared alongside the *Petit Journal*'s account of the festival of 1939, the latter somewhat marred by the rain.¹⁴¹ A festival of politics, music, dance, and sport, this was both a deliberate revival of an older French tradition and also a more overtly political commemoration of the 'Archangel' Jean Mermoz, a popular and heroic aviator lost during a flight in the South Atlantic in December 1936. (Not only had Mermoz been on the executive committee of the PSF but he had also lauded La Rocque as the supreme 'pilot').¹⁴² Catholic traditions of honouring saints and martyrs and praying for the souls of the dead thus converged—sometimes slightly awkwardly—with the fervent acclamation of patriotism, heroism, and party leadership.

Certainly, politics was visually and symbolically at the centre of the occasion: not least in the prominence on the platform of La Rocque, Jean Ybarnégaray, and the parliamentary group of the PSF, as well as in the leaders' speeches. Yet these speeches were also integrated within a wider programme of music, ballet, and sport that created a symbolic drama of nature and youth under threat, then subsequently defended and redeemed by the PSF. Madame Samuel, a Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur, conducted the professional musicians of the Orchestre Columbia in a musical evocation of French countryside and childhood. Among the pieces performed were Saint-Saëns's Marche française as well as en passant par la Lorraine, 'which our children, soon leaving for their summer camps, will sing at the seaside.' Next, Jean Ybarnégaray delivered a eulogy in honour of Jean Mermoz, offering not a physical wreath of remembrance but a collective and spiritual act of homage. 'What a glorious privilege is held by heroes and saints', he insisted: 'to be capablethrough their sole invocation-of drawing us outside of ourselves.' This homage was followed by a performance from the well-known Loie Fuller ballet company,¹⁴³ which evoked in symbolic form the various threats to French youth through the interplay of darkness and light. Pursuing this theme-as well as enacting the kindling of fires traditionally associated with the festival-the young athletes of the PSF ran relays around the stadium with flaming torches, setting light to braziers on their route. The spectacle of light and darkness then merged into one of colour, as the same athletes carried their torches across the grass to form the letters PSF, while 20 projectors illuminated the stadium in a tricolour of blue, white, and red. At the same festival in 1939, working-class children from Travail

et Loisirs joined the Loie Fuller ballet company on stage, further emphasizing the traditional place of youth in this popular celebration.

In both 1938 and 1939, Colonel La Rocque delivered the closing address. In 1938, he emphasized the importance of French traditions, while at the same time imagining a utopian future in which the 'joyful and peaceful' fires spreading across France would 'bring to the fatherland and to the world the great and good news that France has returned to her age-old mission.¹⁴⁴ In 1939, he paid particular homage to 'working-class youth, manual and intellectual labourers' for providing the performers from Travail et Loisirs. These young people, he asserted, had offered 'not the spectacle of art adapted for the masses-an unacceptable debasement-but the spectacle of the masses serving, for the first time, the highest forms of art.'145 Although there were aspects of both festivals reminiscent of more fascist equivalents-the emphasis on youth and physical prowess; the play with light, darkness, and fire in accentuating the heady atmosphere of a mass political meeting (The Triumph of the Will includes night scenes with flaming torches)-there were also distinctive differences. Mermoz may have been described as a 'fiery prophet' in the image of John the Baptist, yet his commemoration was (just) within the limits of Catholic piety, rather than seeking to displace traditional religion from the political and public sphere. La Rocque himself was portrayed in specifically familial terms, as a father figure rather than as a male leader of what had originally been an all-male group. Indeed, the role of female participants-in the Loie Fuller ballet company, under Madame Samuel as conductor, and in the form of female gymnasts from the PSF—was also particularly prominent. There were echoes here of the total communities imagined elsewhere in Europe, but there were French differences as well. Some of the other projects for PSF spectacles are, in this sense, more utopian. Certainly, it would be a brave new world indeed in which a ballet about the printing press of a party newspaper became the new normality.

4 CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored why the French right deserves consideration in a study of popular theatre. Although right-wing critics necessarily denigrated the popular theatre of the left, movements and parties on the right developed theatre as a political weapon in explicit opposition to left-wing opponents, and sought a similar fusion of art and politics. For them, as for right-wing groups and parties elsewhere in Europe, culture in general and theatre in particular offered a means of both aestheticizing and normalizing extreme politics, as well as of building up the 'counter-communities' that exercised such an important influence on contemporary mass politics. In the early twentieth century, Action Française developed an explicitly counter-revolutionary theatre, blending neo-classical satire with more ephemeral sketches celebrating street politics and popular royalism. In the interwar years, other movements and parties of the right explored both theatre and film as a focus for political imagination and conviviality. Most dramatically of all, the Parti Social Français realized mass spectacles in the late 1930s that drew audiences of tens of thousands to the Parisian Parc des Princes for an experience of music, drama, dance, and political community. These initiatives provide vital insights into the double-mobilization of left and right in the 1930s-and into why the extreme right had become so powerful, and so popular.

Notes

- Pierre Chaine, L'Heure-H, comédie en 3 actes, published by La Petite Illustration, 772 (9 May 1936), here pp. 32–33. The première was on 20 December 1935 at the Théâtre de l'Humour in Paris.
- 2. La Rocque was both admired and derided for his strategic references to the 'H-Hour' that would spell the end of the old order. See, for example, 'P.P. 19 juin 1035', AN F7 13241. Members of the Croix de Feu were offered discounted tickets to *L'Heure-H*. 'P.P. 9 janvier 1936', APP Ba 1902.
- 3. Schnapp identifies this staging of the people for themselves as a salient trait of revolutionary theatre. Schnapp, *Staging Fascism*, p. 4.
- 4. Jacques Nobécourt mentions but does not analyse the silent films of the Croix de Feu/PSF in his biography, Le Colonel de la Rocque, 1885– 1946, ou les pièges du nationalisme chrétien (Paris: Fayard, 1996). Nor are these films explored in Sean Kennedy's Reconciling France against Democracy: The Croix de Feu and the Parti Social Français 1929–1945 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007).
- 5. 451 AP 187 (Archives Nationales, Archives Privés du Colonel de la Rocque). I am grateful to the La Rocque family for their permission to access these archives.
- 6. See Berghaus (ed.) *Fascism and Theatre*, and Schnapp, 'Border crossings' and *Staging Fascism*.

- Mark Antliff, Avant-garde Fascism: The Mobilization of Myth, Art, and Culture in France, 1909-39 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 254.
- 8. Jannarone discusses left-wing popular theatre in France and its efforts to orchestrate the crowd, but turns to Italy and Germany for right-wing examples. See *Artaud and his Doubles*, pp. 96–100.
- 9. For example, Denizot (ed.), *Théâtre populaire*, and Ory, *Théâtre citoyen* (although Ory does include some Catholic theatre, such as that of Chancerel).
- 10. The theatre of Action Française is not mentioned in Eugen Weber's Action française (Paris: Fayard, 1982), François Huguenin's, À l'École de l'Action Française. Un siècle de vie intellectuelle (Paris: Le Grand livre du mois, 1998), or Paul Renard's L'Action Française et la vie littéraire, 1931-1944 (Villeneuve-d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2003). For an overview of this theatre, see Wardhaugh, 'Un Rire Nouveau: Action Française and the Art of Political Satire', French History, 22 (2008), pp. 74–93.
- 11. Alan Williams, *Republic of Images: A History of French Film Making* (Harvard and London: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 215.
- 12. Jean-Pierre Jeancolas, 'Cinéma des années trente: la crise et l'image de la crise', *Mouvement Social*, 154 (1991), pp. 173–195.
- 13. See, for example, the PCF's *En avant pour une France libre, forte et heureuse*, which ridicules the popular claims of such 'enemies of the people' as Jean Renaud, Charles Maurras, Pierre Taittinger, and Colonel de la Rocque.
- 14. Danielle Tartakowsky, for example, equates right-wing opposition to the Popular Front with a dislike of the people in *Le Front populaire: la vie est à nous* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), p. 59.
- 15. Pascal Perrineau, 'The Great Upheaval: Left and Right in Contemporary French politics' in Chabal (ed.), *France since the 1970s*, p. 33.
- Robert Brasillach, 'Lettre à une provinciale: loisirs, délices, et orgues', *Je suis partout*, 4 July 1936.
- 17. Le Cri du Peuple, 11 February 1943. In the 1930s, Rebatet had been a regular film critic for the extreme right weekly Je suis partout under the moniker Dorsay.
- 18. Brasillach, 'Lettre à une provinciale'.
- 19. L'Émancipation nationale, 25 July 1936.
- 20. Robert Brasillach and Maurice Bardèche, *Histoire du cinéma* (Paris: André Martel, 1948), p. 418.
- They acknowledged the failings of *The Hitler Youth Quex*, and considered that Italian fascist films lacked the 'furious beauty of Russian films' (pp. 343 and 415.)

- 22. Brasillach and Bardèche, Histoire du cinéma, p. 343.
- 23. In July 1935, for example, documentary films on the recent demonstrations prompted cries of 'Vive la Rocque!' and 'La Rocque au poteau!' in the cinemas, as in the street. 'P.P. 18 juillet 1935', AN F7 13305.
- 24. Brasillach and Bardèche, Histoire du cinéma, p. 284.
- 25. Alice Kaplan, 'Fascist film Esthetics: Brasillach and Bardèche's *Histoire* du cinéma', Modern Language Notes, 95 (1980), p. 864.
- Sandrine Sanos, The Aesthetics of Hate: Far-Right Intellectuals, Anti-Semitism, and Gender in 1930s France (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).
- 27. Susan Sontag, 'Fascinating Fascism', New York Review of Books, 6 February 1975.
- An excellent overview of German theatrical production in this period is provided by Gerwin Strobl, *The Swastika and the Stage: German Theatre* and Society, 1933–45 (Cambridge: CUP, 2007).
- 29. Mosse, 'Fascist Aesthetics and Society', p. 246.
- 30. Victora De Grazia, The Culture of Consent: Mass Organization of Leisure in Fascist Italy (Cambridge: CUP, 1981), viii.
- Ruth Ben-Ghiat, 'Envisioning Modernity: Desire and Discipline in the Italian Fascist Film', *Critical Inquiry*, 23 (1996), p. 114.
- 32. Schnapp, Staging Fascism, xiii.
- 33. Leni Riefenstahl, The Triumph of the Will [Triumph des Willens] (1935).
- 34. David Welch, Propaganda and the German Cinema 1933-45 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), Chap. 1.
- 35. Brasillach and Bardèche described Blasetti as a 'director of the first order'. *Histoire du cinéma*, p. 343.
- Steven Ricci, Cinema and Fascism: Italian Film and Society, 1922–43 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), p. 115.
- Although this is an explicitly fascist film, the characterization and dynamics in the romantic triangle are strongly reminiscent of E.M. Forster's *Room with a View* (1908).
- 38. Ben-Ghiat, 'Envisioning modernity', p. 117.
- See, for example, Wilson, 'Action Française in French Intellectual Life', *The Historical Journal*, 12 (1969), pp. 328–350, Huguenin, À l'École de l'Action française and Renard, L'Action française et la vie littéraire.
- 40. For an overview of this theatre, see Wardhaugh, 'Un Rire nouveau'.
- 41. Maurice Pujo, 'Le Théâtre d'Action française' (Extract from Action Française, revue bimensuelle, 1 October 1907), BN DAS Rt 3794.
- 42. Pujo, 'Le Théâtre d'Action française'.
- 43. Maurice Pujo, 'Le Théâtre d'Action française', and 'Examen des Nuées' in Les Nuées: Comédie contemporaine en trois actes et en prose, imitée d'Aristophane (Paris: Nouvelle Librairie Nationale, 1908), xix-xli,

reproduced in abridged form in *Action Française, revue bi-mensuelle* on 15 March 1908.

- Pierre Lasserre, Le Romantisme français (Paris: Mercure de France, 1907). Cf. Charles Maurras and Raymond de la Tailhède, Un Débat sur le romantisme (Paris: Flammarion, 1928), pp. 25–39.
- 45. Lasserre, Le Romantisme, p. 320.
- 46. Lasserre, *Le Romantisme*, p. 232. Pujo invited Lasserre to introduce the première of *Les Nuées*, although in the event this role was fulfilled by Léon Daudet.
- 47. Pujo, 'Examen des Nuées', xxx.
- 48. Pujo, 'Examen des Nuées', xxviii.
- 49. Pujo, 'Le Théâtre d'Action française'.
- 50. Pujo, *Les Nuées*; Aristophanes, 'The Clouds' *The Complete Plays* (tr. Paul Roche) (London: Penguin, 2005), pp. 129–200.
- 51. Action Française, revue bi-mensuelle, 15 March 1908.
- 52. Pujo, Les Nuées, xxxix-xl.
- 53. Aristophanes's play featured a father and son rather than an uncle and nephew. Pujo's diversion from the original allowed for romantic tension between Paul, the principal protagonist, and his cousin Hélène.
- 54. Pié is almost certainly a caricature of the Catholic politician Jacques Piou, who rallied to the Republic and created an Action Libérale Populaire that soon outnumbered more hard-line conservative groupings.
- 55. Pujo, Les Nuées, p. 78.
- 56. Daudet recalled the street politics and theatrical revues of the Camelots in the early twentieth century in an article for *Action Française* in 12 November 1931.
- 57. See, for example, Michel Winock, *Nationalism, Anti-Semitism, and Fascism in France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989).
- Léon Daudet, 'Un Théâtre d'Action française' (1907), BN DAS Rt 3794.
- 59. Emmanuel Arène, 'Théâtre Marigny: premier spectacle du Théâtre d'Action française' (undated), BN DAS Rt 3794.
- 60. Maurice Pujo, 'Le Théâtre d'Action française: la représentation des Nuées', Action Française, revue bi-mensuelle, 1 February 1908.
- 61. Maurice Pujo, 'Le Rire nouveau', 'La Fête des Camelots du Roi, 22 mars 1933' (programme), BN DAS Rt 3794.
- 62. 'La Princesse de Clèves, comédie en 3 actes et 1 épilogue de M. Jules Lemaître. Théâtre d'Action française, 15–17 juin 1908, Salle du Théâtre des Arts', BN DAS Rt 3794. There are also photographs of the performers.
- 63. Christophe Forth, *The Dreyfus Affair and the Crisis of French Manhood* (London and Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2003), especially Chap. 6; and pp. 203–204 on the Camelots du Roi.

- 64. 'P.P. 8 septembre 1909', AN F7 12864.
- 65. The expression was widely used by Maurras and within Action Française. It also featured on royalist posters, often confiscated by the police. See, for example, 'Amiens, le 23 août 1912', AN F7 12854.
- 66. Pujo, *Les Camelots du Roi* (Paris: Flammarion, 1933), xii-xiii. On this repression, see Danielle Tartakowsky and Françoise Tétard, *Syndicats et associations: concurrence ou complementarité?* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2006), p. 72.
- 67. Pujo, Les Camelots du Roi, xi.
- 68. Pujo recalls how conservatives such as Ernest Judet (editor of *L'Éclair*, which nonetheless advertized *Les Nuées*) considered the actions of the Camelots as 'childish play' or 'youthful pranks.' Pujo, *Les Camelots*, p. 118.
- 69. 'Colossale plaisanterie', Le Matin, 1 april 1909, AN F7 12864.
- 70. 'P.P. 6 mai 1912', AN F7 12864.
- 71. L'Assiette au Beurre, 27 March 1909.
- 72. Pujo, Les Camelots, 52.
- 73. Charles Maurras, La Contre-Révolution spontanée: la recherche, la discussion, l'émeute (Paris: H. Lardanchet, 1943), p. 93.
- 74. Pujo, Les Camelots, p. 124.
- 75. Pujo, *Les Camelots*, p. 199. The police often supervised the Camelots particularly closely at carnival time. See, for example, 'Paris le 26 mars 1909, d'un correspondant', AN F7 12864.
- 76. Charles Maurras, writing in Action Française on 29 January 1909.
- 77. Pujo, Les Camelots, p. 149.
- Jacques Bainville, Une Saison chez Thespis (Paris: Éditions Prométhée, 1929), p. 38 (an extract from his dramatic criticism for Action Française in 1913).
- 79. This was performed for the Camelots' annual festivals in December 1911 and published as Maxime Brienne, Bernard Denisane, and René Richard, *Dégonflons l'y-Outre, revue en 3 actes* (Paris: Maison Rapide, 1912).
- 80. The same revue also represented the Camelots' revenge on professor Thalamas. 'Paris, le 18 août 1909, d'un correspondant', AN F7 12864.
- 81. 'P.P. 30 September 1909', AN F7 12864.
- 82. 'Ohé! Les Locarno...frageurs...', La Revue des Camelots du Roi, 27 juin 1930, *Action française*, 30 June 1930, BN DAS Rt 3794.
- 83. Blum was attacked on 13 February 1936 by dissidents from Action Française. See Jessica Wardhaugh, 'Fighting for the streets of Paris, 1934–1938' in Wardhaugh (ed.), *Paris and the Right in the Twentieth Century* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars' Press, 2007), pp. 55–58.

- 84. See the posters taken down by the police on the night of 17 October 1931, now preserved in AN F7 12854.
- 85. Bernard Denisane, René Richard, and Maxime Brienne, Les Petits Pié se dégourdissent, BN DAS Rt 3794.
- 86. Pujo, Les Camelots, pp. 51-52.
- 87. See, for example, *Action Française*, 4 and 18 January 1911. The Marquise, who had married into the family of the former (and highly conservative) President of the Republic Patrice de MacMahon, presided over the Dames d'Action Française.
- 88. Pujo, Les Camelots, p. 150.
- 89. Action Française, 18 January 1911.
- 90. 'Fête des Camelots du Roi, 22 mars 1933' and 'Soirée de Gala de l'Œillet Blanc', BN DAS Rt 3794.
- 91. Maurice Pujo, 'Le Rire Nouveau' (1933), BN DAS Rt 3794.
- 92. Action Française, 18 January 1911.
- 93. 'P.P. 21 décembre 1909', AN F7 12864.
- 94. 'Soirée de Gala de l'Œillet blanc, honorée de la présence de Mme la Duchesse de Guise, 1893–1933', Salle d'Iéna, 23 Mai 1933 (programme), BN DAS Rt 3794.
- 95. A pun on the name of Cardinal Pietro Gasparri, Papal Secretary of State at the time of Action Française's condemnation by the Vatican in 1926.
- 96. Louis Dimier, *Vingt ans d'Action Française*, et autres souvenirs (Paris: Nouvelle Librairie Nationale, 1926), p. 121.
- 97. 'Fêtes des Camelots du Roi', BN DAS Rt 3794, *Action française*, 6 May 1928, and *Candide*, 10 May 1928.
- 98. 'Deuxième séance du 13 février', Journal officiel, 14 February 1936.
- 99. Julian Jackson, *France: The Dark Years*, 1940-44 (Oxford: OUP, 2001). La Rocque was, however, put on trial for reconstituting a dissolved league.
- 100. 'P.P. 13 juillet 1935', APP Ba 1907.
- 101. Jacques Doriot, *La France ne sera pas un pays d'esclaves* (Paris: les Œuvres françaises, 1936), p. 97.
- 102. 'P.P. 8 juin 1937', APP Ba 2002.
- 103. Irvine makes this point in 'Fascism in France', p. 283. The term 'counter-society' is used in a similar sense in Lazar's study of the PCF: 'Le Parti et le don de soi', and in Bensoussan, 'Le Réveil des catholiques bretons', p. 75. Sharif Gemie explores a similar concept with regard to anarchist culture in 'Counter-community'.
- 104. Anderson, Imagined Communities, p. 7.
- 105. Joan Tumblety, Remaking the Male Body: Masculinity and the Uses of Physical Culture in Interwar and Vichy France (Oxford: OUP 2012), p. 186.

- 106. Gabriel Boissy and Claude Delvincourt (music), Le Chant des Croix de Feu et des Volontaires Nationaux, APP Ba 1901.
- 107. 'P.P. 14 juin 1936', APP Ba 1901.
- 108. Le Flambeau, 9 March 1935.
- 109. For a fuller treatment of this transformation, see Wardhaugh, *In Pursuit* of the People, chap. 2.
- 110. See, for example, 'Le 14 juillet 1939: Fête du réveil national' in *Le Petit Journal*, 15 July 1939.
- 111. William Irvine, 'Fascism in France and the Strange Case of the Croix de Feu', *Journal of Modern History*, 63 (1991), pp. 271–295. See also Jean-Paul Thomas, 'Les Effectifs du Parti Social Français', *Vingtième siècle*, 66 (1999), pp. 61–83.
- 112. The role of women within the Croix de Feu has been studied by Cheryl Koos and Danielle Sarnoff, although they focus more on rhetoric than on activity. Koos and Sarnoff, 'France' in Kevin Passmore (ed.), *Women, Gender and Fascism in Europe, 1918–45* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 168–189.
- 113. See, for example, Zeev Sternhell, La Droite révolutionnaire: les origines françaises du fascisme, 1885–1914 (Paris: Fayard, 1978, 2000); Robert Soucy, French Fascism: The Second Wave, 1933–39 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995); Kennedy, Reconciling France against Democracy; and Chris Millington, From Victory to Vichy: Veterans in Interwar France (Manchester: MUP, 2012).
- 114. 'P.P. le 4 avril 1935: Réunion organisée par la ligue d'AF le 3 avril (Mutualité)', APP Ba 1893.
- 115. 'P.P. le 4 avril 1935', APP Ba 1893.
- 116. 'P.P. 12 juillet 1935', AN F7 13241. The police speculated over whether the Francistes also received direct subsidies form fascist Italy. 'P.P. 15 juillet 1935', APP Ba 1907.
- 117. Brasillach and Bardèche, Histoire du cinéma, p. 343.
- 118. 'P.P. le 2 septembre 1935', AN F7 13241.
- 119. I am grateful to the Centre National de la Cinématographie (CNC) for granting permission to view their collection of these films.
- 120. The films name a variety of directors: Couffin (1935), Louis Carrot (1935–1936), and Jean-Paul Guittard (1945).
- 121. Charles Vallin's report to the congress was subsequently published as L'Activité du PSF (Paris: Bureau d'Éditions, 1937). Not all of these are among the films now preserved at the CNC: it is hard to be certain what proportion of the overall output this collection represents.
- 122. In 1937, both Colonel de la Rocque and Jacques Doriot signed a contract with 'Technisonor' to produce audio recordings of their speeches

(the company had recently recorded the PSF's national congress). 'P.P. le 7 janvier 1937', APP Ba 1945.

- 123. 'P.P. 10 février 1936', APP Ba 1901.
- 124. La Messe des morts (CNC).
- 125. 'P.P. 12 juillet 1936, réunion du PSF', APP Ba 1952.
- 126. Comparable images appear in Un Meeting du PSF en plein air, 1938 (CNC).
- 127. He does, however, wear his medals in 80.000 Croix de Feu se rassemblent Rue Royale le 10 mai 1936 pour la fête de Jeanne d'Arc (1936), associating his sacrifice for the patrie with that of the national heroine.
- 128. Activité de section des Croix de Feu en 1935 (1935).
- 129. 'P.P. 31 Mars 1936', APP Ba 1901.
- 130. Des Croix de Feu au PSF (1938).
- 131. 'La Rocque challenged parties and systems. His party was an anti-party; his system an anti-system.' Michel Winock, 'Populismes français', *Vingtième Siècle*, 65 (1997), p. 85.
- 132. 'P.P. 1 mars 1936', APP Ba 1901.
- 133. 'P.P. 9 mars 1931', APP Ba 1901.
- 134. 'Lettre à M. Perroud, 6 juin 1937', 451 AP 180. On the functioning of these holiday camps, see also Laura Lee Downs, "Each and every one of you must become a *chef*": towards a social politics of working-class childhood on the extreme right in 1930s France', *Journal of Modern History*, 81 (2009), pp. 1–44.
- 135. Such details are provided in the anonymous diary of one of the camp leaders in 1938, preserved in 451 AP 178.
- 136. Anonymous diary, 31 July 1938, 451 AP 178.
- 137. 'Étude d'un projet de fêtes françaises', 20 December 1936, 451 AP 187.
- 138. In *The Triumph of the Will*, the rallies encompass a moment of commemoration of the war dead when flags are lowered onto the field, and a representative of the younger generation states that although they did not fight in the trenches, they are willing to fight with shovels and axes. There is also a strong emphasis on the older generation continuing the struggles of the First World War.
- 139. '1914–1939: 25 ans de lutte de l'esprit Croix de Feu', 451 AP 187.
- 140. 'Projet de Fête pour le P.J. (Petit Journal)', 451 AP 187.
- 141. See Pierre Apestéguy, 'La grande évocation lumineuse au Parc des Princes', *Le Petit Journal*, 25 June 1938, and idem, 'La Fête de la Saint-Jean', *Le Petit Journal*, 25 June 1939.
- 142. See Mermoz's speech at the founding meeting of the PSF in July 1936. 'P.P. 12 juillet 1936', APP Ba 1952.
- 143. Fuller was an American dancer who had taken Paris by storm in 1892 with the première of her 'serpentine dance' at the Folies-Bergère. On

her life and influence, see Sally R. Sommer, 'Loie Fuller's Art of Music and Light', *Dance Chronicle*, 4 (1981), pp. 389–401, and on the resurgence of interest in her work, see Martha Ullman West, 'New light on Loie Fuller', *Dance Chronicle*, 21 (1998), pp. 485–487.

- 144. Le Petit Journal, 25 June 1938.
- 145. Le Petit Journal, 25 June 1939.

Conclusion

Popular theatre is a political act. To associate theatre with the people engages with powerful concerns about who these people are, what they should see, and how they should behave—as actors, spectators, and citizens. It also colours utopian visions about the transformative potential of drama and its related communities. What does popular theatre signify in terms of design, location, repertoire, and funding? How far can it shape political opinions or create a sense of mass communion? How should the people relate to the stage as actors and audience? These were the questions mobilizing French governments, writers, parties, and militants in the Third Republic, as they sought to redefine the relationship between politics and culture in a rapidly changing Europe.

Active Citizens has offered the first comparative study of French popular theatre: a rich insight into the relationships between theatre, politics, and community from left to right. Countering previous studies of popular theatre as a linear process of cultural democratization and binary understandings of its people as either the 'nation' or the 'oppressed proletariat',¹ this analysis has explored the diversity of initiatives created and discussed during the Third Republic. It has employed the concept of popular theatre as a dialogical space within which relationships were played out between a wide variety of different peoples—central and peripheral, real and imagined. Based on extensive and sometimes hitherto unexplored source material, this case study has shifted the focus from a reassuring portrayal of democratization and popular initiative to a more challenging picture of communities in conflict, in search of leadership, and longing for transcendence.

The first main conclusion is that popular theatre reveals a significant distinction between the national republican people and narrower, more partisan peoples in strength and character, theory and practice. Despite tirelessly enthusiastic rhetoric (not to mention extensive surveys and commissions), the Third Republic never realized its vision for a national popular theatre that would draw the people to self-contemplation in new and republican drama. Certainly there were considerable related achievements, not least the funding of popular theatre initiatives in both Paris and the provinces, and the creation of the Théâtre National Populaire at the Palais du Trocadéro in 1920. But even the inauguration of the TNP-through which the director Firmin Gémier did indeed depict on the stage the people from the First, Second, and Third Republics-was a festival of song rather than the kind of scripted play that government officials had originally intended. It was also associated with the official festivities of 11 November 1920 that, in conflating the defence of nation and Republic, sparked division even as they sought a unifying focus in the commemoration of wartime sacrifice and victory. Equally, although the Third Republic established 14 July as a national festival, it never succeeded in sustaining popular enthusiasm in the public sphere in the manner of other European regimes, as otherwise sympathetic left-wing writers sometimes observed. In the words of Jean-Richard Bloch in 1914:

A festival represents a kind of climax in activity in the public sphere, which allows the people to develop a sense of direction. It exemplifies their civilization and synthesizes their currents of thought.

That is why carnevale è morto [carnival is dead].

We are now brought sensuality, poetry, and heroism by a week of aviation, a strike meeting, or an election.²

Only in such partisan occasions, Bloch argued, could one experience a sense of the 'commotion of unanimity' (to cite the unanimist writer Jules Romains), whereas the public life of the democratic republic lacked 'liberty and fantasy', and was imbued with a profound sadness.³

Yet if, as Gilbert Chaitin has argued, 'the goal of republican education for utopia [was] to eliminate heterogeneity, if at all possible',⁴ then in this respect the Third Republic did not succeed. Against the emotional quietness at the centre of the Republic, other communities noisily championed images of the people inspiring some, at least, of the 'commotion' that citizens such as Bloch desired. Often at France's geographical and political peripheries, these popular theatre initiatives were not necessarily more long-lived than their state counterparts. But they were more effective in attracting writers and audiences to the production of new drama. They also visualized partisan peoples with distinctive characteristics, capable of generating more fervent attachments than the national and republican equivalent.

Some of these partisan peoples were regionally specific. In Provence, the Théâtre antique d'Orange symbolically fêted the people of Apollo the sun god, bearers of the classical inheritance. In Brittany, folk theatre represented a people peculiarly sensitive to legend and faith, and in the Vosges, a pragmatic race of farmers nonetheless conscious of the mystical qualities of their surrounding mountains. Such images may have been stereotypes, even caricatures. Yet even those who sought to move beyond them recognized their power to awaken both popular enthusiasm and intellectual interest. Maurice Pottecher marketed an experience of Vosgian legend performed by local people for a national elite drawn to neo-primitivism; Anatole Le Braz yearned for Brittany to move beyond its clerical associations yet acknowledged the predilection of the Théâtre populaire de Ploujean for medieval mystery plays. Certainly, these regionalist depictions of the people also addressed national subject matter, but often through the lens of the petite patrie that kept the national people consistently out of focus. Pierre Corneille set Erinna, a tale of Gallic resistance, in Poitou; Maurice Pottecher retold the story of the patriotic Joan of Arc-who came from Lorraine. Meanwhile, a vision of a Catholic people more national than regionalist was concurrently developed by playwrights such as Henri Ghéon and Léon Chancerel, whose popular theatre moved beyond the *peuple fidèle* and also sought to counter republican models. Cumulatively, such intricate case studies offer an important counterbalance to the more linear narrative of peasants into Frenchmen, adding new detail to recent research that highlights a continued emotional investment in rural and Catholic France throughout the Third Republic.

The concept of a national, republican people was equally opposed by more politically active 'peoples' on left and right. For anarchist creators of popular theatre such as Louis Lumet, 'civic' theatre was not to educate voters but to form individuals in revolt against society, as well as anticipating the mass festivals of the future. Socialists and communists continued this emphasis on the festive, drawing on Romain Rolland's theories and plays to create the Fêtes du Peuple, and to experiment with agit-prop in the 1920s and 1930s. Communists in particular defended the image of a violent proletariat, whose growing self-awareness in opposition to the capitalist enemy held the potential to topple the Third Republic in favour of a more class-based—and authoritarian—alternative. But royalists and other movements on the extreme right similarly believed in drama as integral to the militancy of street politics, and to the collective depiction and experience of an alternative community.

Tracing the theoretical distinctions between rival images of the people, Active Citizens has also illuminated the workings of these communities in practice. Indeed, the exploration of popular theatre groups that have never been previously studied-or only partially examined-reveals otherwise unknown facets of the social and cultural lives that developed backstage to public party-politics. Anarchist communes and networks; trade-union drama groups; the entirely neglected theatrical projects and productions of Action Française and the Parti Social Français: such case studies uncover the debates and dynamics of the 'counter-communities' against which the liberal parliamentary regime sometimes appeared so fragile. Particularly during the crisis of the 1930s, when citizens sceptical of the current regime's ability to address the challenge of the Depression began searching for more radical alternatives, these counter-communities gave scope for an active citizenship beyond the adult male electorate of the Third Republic. The case studies in this book have revealed the extent of young and female participation in political theatre on both left and extreme right, as well as exploring new ways in which the double mobilization of left and right was pursued not just in politics, but equally in culture. In testifying to the growing strength of political 'counter-communities' in the 1930s, these case studies also offer a means of understanding the striking absence of support for the Third Republic after military defeat in 1940.

Yet if the first conclusion of this book is to emphasize what divided the French, the second and third conclusions highlight what united them. Despite important distinctions between images of the people, and their very different powers of political attraction, these images (and the communities sustaining them) existed in complex and mutually dependent relationships. Centralization nourished peripheral defiance; regionalist writers were often profoundly shaped by Parisian experiences and networks of acquaintance; Catholic theatre borrowed techniques from Soviet agit-prop; right and left developed politically-engaged theatre in spirited dialogue with one another. Furthermore, popular spectacles on both left and right looked to common sacrifice in wartime as a source of new fraternity, whether this was in the socialist Fêtes du Peuple or the mass spectacles of the PSF. At a still deeper level, studying popular theatre across the spectrum also reveals what its partisans shared in terms of political and cultural assumptions and aspirations, notwithstanding their differences. Not only was there an ambivalent relationship towards popular agency, and a preoccupation with individual leadership; there was also a fascination with popular theatre as a source of transcendence and mystical—perhaps even 'total'—community.

The second conclusion is that while popular theatre necessarily implied an interest in the people, it rarely entailed unqualified admiration. More frequently, indeed, the enthusiasm with which popular theatre was described as heralding cultural democratization or the renewal of art and politics was coupled with extreme caution about popular behaviour and initiative. Government projects rhapsodized about popular theatre while seeking to wean workers away from their alcoholic and cultural consumption at the café-cabaret. Utopian designs were submitted to government commissions that underlined the hygienic characteristics of the proposed buildings, with their plentiful airflow, large corridors to avoid the accumulation of the crowd, and rigorously supervised refreshment rooms. Pierre Corneille wrote in verse because prose would allow his amateur actors too great a scope for personal initiative and 'could be dangerous'-but many proponents of popular theatre refused to countenance amateur actors at all. Even Romain Rolland envisaged the use of professionals in the mass spectacles of the future; while Maurice Pottecher, whose Vosgian troupe was socially varied, described this as a regional expedient: in Paris, the use of professionals would be infinitely preferable. Catholic drama groups borrowed from monasticism an emphasis on obedience and self-abnegation with regard to the collective and to the leader-and though Henri Ghéon joked about his leadership, Jacques Copeau did not. Even Communist agit-prop drama, which did project an image of working-class initiative, was sometimes performed with the participation of the author, who would appear on stage to elucidate a highly didactic piece to a (probably already converted) audience.

Often, this scepticism of popular initiative was coupled with an explicit emphasis on the individual leader. Romain Rolland's theory and practice of popular theatre elevated the ideal of the mass festival, yet denigrated the people's susceptibility, and his Théâtre de la Révolution focused far more on individual heroes than on the crowd. Similarly, the developing emphasis on the theatrical director accompanied a concurrent preoccupation in popular theatre with the artist as mediator between the people and artistic experience.⁵ Anarchist Louis Lumet saw the ideal theatre as 'solemn communion' in which the poet would be the priest⁶—but so, too, did Pierre Corneille, who described in *La Revue d'Art Dramatique* how he and his actors and audience had 'communed in common aesthetic emotion, [...] drunk from the same chalice of divine liquid.'⁷

Images of individual leadership were, moreover, in constant dialogue with those of the people. For Action Française, there was the pretender, dependent on the fervour of his supporters for a potential coup d'état; for workers of the Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne, the role model of Christ as ideal worker, comrade, and servant-king. Perhaps, according to the socialist writer Jean Guéhenno, art necessarily reinforced leadership, and 'the only object of culture is to make leaders and justify them at the same time.'8 Reflecting on his own passage from an inarticulate member of the working people to a self-conscious spokesman who hadthrough his very education-removed himself from their number, he exemplified Rolland's insistence that the people can never speak directly for themselves. Popular theatre would always involve a mediator to frame it as popular. Indeed, amateur groups such as that of the Breton Thomas Parks were merely the unassuming 'troupe de Ploujean' until marketed by regionalist intellectuals for cultural tourists as an exciting experience of the 'primitive'.

The third main conclusion—as suggested by the recurrent motif of the poet as priest—is that popular theatre reveals powerfully shared assumptions about the relationship between performance and religion. For Catholic groups offering new or revived mystery plays to the *peuple fidèle* (and the wider people), this was a guiding and implicit assumption. Here, ideally in a situation in which actors and audiences could sincerely join together in prayer before the performance, was an opportunity to experience a religious sense of communion outside the liturgy. But secular popular theatre could be similarly religious in language and aspiration. Popular theatre proponents called explicitly for such theatre to 'become for the multitudes what the Church was in the Middle Ages: a central focus and pole of attraction'⁹; reviewers of performances at Bussang described the expectant silence of the audience as 'even less troubled than in the nave of a Cathedral during a midday mass.¹⁰ Though previous scholars have sometimes described the competing definitions of popular theatre as demonstrating 'pluralism',¹¹ rival communities often looked to a more authoritarian model in which art would be integrated within an experience of total community. Their ultimate aim was not coexistence but conquest. Ghéon's aspiration was to re-Christianize the state and for every parish to celebrate its own saints in drama; Communist agit-prop was intended to destroy bourgeois art and society; the sketches and street politics of Action Française were explicitly intended to turn the Republic upside down. Even the anarchist Louis Lumet dreamed of collective festivities putting an end to the 'ineptness' of private family celebrations.

How totalitarian these popular theatre initiatives were is a complex question. Certainly, there is no doubt that a number of the proposals and initiatives discussed here were totalitarian in design, marked by the 'pursuit of a totality of being whereby the tensions between the private and the political are resolved.'¹² Some of the more radical theatre on left and right was openly inspired by fascist and communist examples abroadand this book has broken new ground in expanding our knowledge and understanding of these connections, situating France within European efforts to reimagine art and politics in reaction to war, Depression, and the fragility of parliamentary regimes. But, significantly, neither the extreme left nor the extreme right was unequivocally in power in France in this period: none of the more radical movements explored here ever possessed the financial or political means to realize their artistic designs in full. Meanwhile, other groups and individuals were keenly concerned to differentiate their projects from those of their European neighbours: arguing for the rival merits of a 'French auditorium' against a 'German one', or, in the case of Catholic groups, seeking through drama a path to a mysticism rooted in the divine rather than in more transient human ideals. Moreover, despite the conviction of popular theatre proponents in its political and moral impact, its effectiveness could never be guaranteed. As the more didactic forms of popular theatre studied here reveal with particular clarity, the most self-consciously edifying drama did not necessarily attract its target audience.

Inevitably, even a broad comparative study of popular theatre leaves much unsaid, and the constraints of space mean that some initiatives have been considered in more detail than others. Socialist theatre in the departments, for instance, presents rich material for future research, as does Jewish theatre (only fleetingly referenced here), and the cultural networks and experiments of right-wing groups beyond the case studies in Chapter Seven, especially the Parti Populaire Français.

Yet in seeking an overview of French popular theatre from left to right, this study has offered compelling evidence for the importance of French initiatives in their European context. Moving beyond the linear model of popular theatre to an understanding of its importance as a space for dialogue, this book has explored the centrality of such theatre to political integration and subversion, as well as analysing the potential and the pitfalls of politically engaged art. It has revealed that there was no easy equation between left-wing popular theatre and rational popular agency, and that both left and right used such theatre to search for both leadership and transcendence. Above all, it has demonstrated that France is a country of active citizens. They do not necessarily act according to their scripts, but they do believe that in pursuit of utopia, they have an inalienable right to take to the stage.

Notes

- 1. Cf. Bradby and McCormick, People's Theatre, p. 11.
- 2. Bloch, Carnaval est mort, p. 121.
- 3. Bloch, Carnaval est mort, p. 122.
- 4. Gilbert Chaitin, *The Enemy Within: Culture Wars and Political Identity in Novels of the French Third Republic* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2009), p. 237.
- 5. On the rise of the director, see for example Jannarone, *Artaud and his Doubles*, p. 133.
- 6. Louis Lumet, 'Le Théâtre: critique', La Plume, 1 November 1897.
- 7. Corneille, 'Le Théâtre populaire poitevin', p. 114.
- 8. Jean Guéhenno, *Caliban parle* (Paris: Grasset, 1928), p. 8. Cf. Jean-Paul Sartre's preface to Frantz Fanon's *Les Damnés de la terre* (Paris: Maspero, 1961), in which Sartre reflects on the process by which the oppressed, educated by their oppressors, develop a voice of their own.
- 9. M. Latreille, 'Le Théâtre du Peuple', p. 4, BN DAS Rf 81218.
- Uzanne, 'Visions de notre heure: choses et gens qui passent' (1899), BN DAS R 106872.
- 11. See for example, Charnow, Theatre, Politics, and Markets, p. 180.
- 12. Northrop Frye, quoted in Cornick, Kershaw, and Hurcombe, French Political Travel Writing, Introduction.

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