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HÉLÈNE CIXOUS'S MISSED ENCOUNTER  
WITH THE REAL

*Reading "The-Book-I-Do-Not-Write" alongside Seminar XI*

**A**mong the many works of fiction in Hélène Cixous's voluminous textual output, some of which are interconnected in open-ended sequences, one increasingly prominent 'project' stands out, circling around what crystallized as "The Book I Don't Write" (*le livre que je n'écris pas*)—variously formulated and often hyphenated to emphasize its conceptual uniqueness.<sup>1</sup> In a 2006 interview, three years after Cixous's eponymous lecture on this theme at the "Genèses Généalogies Genres" symposium,<sup>2</sup> Frédéric-Yves Jeannet retraced to *Tours promises* (2004)<sup>3</sup> and, more tenuously, *Tombe* (1973),<sup>4</sup> the origin of this impossible unwritten/unwritable book, although *Jours de l'an* (1990) could equally be credited with the formula's 'official' patenting, in a symptomatic admixture of forgetting and repression, past and present tenses:

And for thirty years I have been writing [...] now, suddenly, I sense it: among all these books is the book I haven't written; haven't ceased not to write. [...]

[...] for thirty years we never think about the book we do not write. There is a book. That we do not write. We barely think about it, almost not at all, almost never; it does not exist. I forget about it.<sup>5</sup>

In her lecture Cixous herself attempted to date and enumerate the several attempts, each time failed, to tackle this elusive book: "I'd already tried in 1991, 93, 94, 96, 97 and each time there was a diversion, a dispersion of notes and evasions. And before that I'd had a go in the 70s [...]. I never stopped constantly not writing this book for decades and face to face on a dozen precisely dated previous occasions" (*VH*, p. 207). Just before the mention of "The Book of Life"<sup>6</sup> a similar statement, with a more pliable temporality suggesting that the impossible book may indeed be envisaged as co-originating with the beginning of life, had appeared in *Benjamin à Montaigne*: "It's been dozens of years, forty let's say, I can say sixty or eighty while addressing the 2020 reader, that I have-not-stopped-not-writing the famous book" (*BM*, p. 66).

"[T]his bookidontwrite" (*VH*, p. 193) did not take off fully until the sequence of three texts to date in the Hamletian *Abstracts et Brèves Chroniques du Temps*, which foregrounds the impossibility to arrive at *the* bookstory as final destination, "perhaps a dream-that-does-not-arrive."<sup>7</sup> Before that, in the years following both Cixous's lecture and the interview with Jeannet, several narratives had kept the (theme of the) missing, negated, substitute book both at bay and at the forefront of her writ-

ing, with the occasional record of precisely-dated notes corroborating its historical significance.<sup>8</sup>

Addressing the “*B. that...*” more closely in the interview, Cixous clarified that there were in principle two kinds of such books: those “that I aim at, and whose failure causes [...] a ‘diversionary’ book, an unexpected, an as-good-as-I-could” (*VH*, p. 254), written by default, for want of a better book, in a serial substitution, and “*The Book*, the only one, the unique, still uninterrupted, which is everywhere and nowhere” (‘*B*’, p. 256). She also highlighted both its originary status as “the first cause of all my books” and its ominous, sacrificial resonances, to which I will return: “maybe it’s the book left for dead by each book I write at the expense of a book I do not write” (*VH*, p. 213, p. 193).

*Abstracts et Brèves Chroniques...* was inaugurated by *Chapitre Los* (2013), whose very title hints, via a multilingual pun involving the mother’s native German language, at the *los*(t), detached (*los*), episodic (‘chapter’) nature of the series, and whose insert (“To My Readers”) recalls those “thirty years’, barely updated since the dream of the Book formed, as if the inchoate project had frozen time and stood still in the narrator’s memory:

This book is a chapter of *The-Book-I-Don’t-Write*. [...]

There is a book I call *The-Book-I-Don’t-Write* that I’ve been dreaming of for over thirty years. It is the master, the double, the prophet, almost the messiah of all the books I write at its call. This book precedes me and sums me up. It collects all my lives and all my volumes. It haunts and guides me.

This is one petal of the Book-I-Don’t-Write. A petal. Detached from the rest of the flower of the Book. *Los*, as my mother would say in her German language. *Los*: detached.<sup>9</sup>

In the Prologue to the 2008 re-edition of *Tombe*, Cixous had written that “*Tombe* senses in advance, writes in advance the book which haunts it, unknowingly. Keeps watch. Waits. Unbeknownst to me. Waits thirty years.”<sup>10</sup>

First to be preserved but perhaps ultimately destined not to remain more primordial than any other (*L*, p. vi), *Chapitre Los* was followed by *Le détronement de la mort* (2014), its “shadow book [...]. Its witness and its double”,<sup>11</sup> before *Corollaires d’un voeu* (2015), whose own insert begins by rephrasing its lineage and status as “part object” equally explicitly. Playing on the polyglottal resonances of loss and German *los* (*L*, p. 3, p. 7), these loose (fly)leaves or “petals around the heart of the flower”<sup>12</sup> are haunted by substitutions, produced and detached *in the place of* through some kind of kenotic writing or *circum-scriptio* which writes around in order not to write—the absent Book, compared to an empty grave, is called “The Empty Book” (*BM*, p. 67).

How can one interpret this “more and more present, more and more insistent” (‘*B*’, p. 249) Book and return of serial books, which are all “deviations of the Empty

Book" (*BM*, p. 67) which subsumes them all, in the place of the one that never materializes? Notwithstanding the seemingly *conscious* nature of Cixous's articulation of the Book's problematic, mentions of "unknowingly [...] Unbeknownst to me", seen above, but also the paradoxical concession that "*The Book* [...] is the object of an unconscious pursuit" ('B', p. 256), authorize a rapprochement with Jacques Lacan's conceptual redeployment of the Aristotelian couple *automaton*, "the return, the coming-back, the insistence of the signs", versus *tuché*, or the encounter with a real that eludes us.<sup>13</sup> "[A] second life off to the side of my life, my other life which gives life to my life" (*VH*, p. 215), the Book-I-Don't-Write, which "[s]ince the beginnings [...] contains my lives and their deaths/dead [*morts*]",<sup>14</sup> would signify the real which "is beyond" / "lies behind the automaton" (*Sem XI*, pp. 53, 54) or, here, those sequential, "automatic" repetitions around an absent centre or "Ground Zero" of writing, an "essential encounter" which is always missed until that ineluctable event which awaits us all and yet at which we cannot be present: our own death. It is in this sense perhaps that one can construe Cixous's intriguing remark, in the Prologue of the 2008 re-edition of *Tomb(e)*, that "This Book-which-I-Do-Not-Write [...] will come only one day after the last page of the last book in my lifetime",<sup>15</sup> once the implacable appointment with death as the utmost elusive Real has taken place, with nobody to substitute in one's place. Or else and more strikingly at the end of the eponymous essay: "The-book-I-don't-write, the night I die I'll spend reading it" (*VH*, p. 219). Meanwhile, "I went on writing-but-not-this-book, this book, I wasn't writing but another. An other" (*VH*, p. 207).

But the book-I-don't-write is also a "shortcut to the house of the dead" (*VH*, p. 194), a "yawning coffin on end, a customs house for ghosts" (*VH*, p. 196), as Cixous recalls entering into writing as "a descendent of the dead" (*VH*, p. 197)<sup>16</sup>—for instance, her dead father in *Dedans*, her very first novel, but also Cixous as a successor to dead writing masters whose masks she takes on and whom she impersonates. And these spectral, sepulchral entities include her former selves, who may or may not be "Hélène Cixous"—cf. *VH*, p. 195: "I do not take myself continuously or deeply or simply and comfortably for Hélène Cixous"—who therefore may no longer recognize herself as the writer of these books—cf. *VH*, p. 195: "I could say that each of "my books" is a book I don't write, I who sign Hélène Cixous, I she whom I often, too often, hear speak up with authority"—as the subject emancipates itself "in a magic asyndeton" which amounts to an interminable writing cure: "Here the epiphany of *You* flares up. This You I shall be one day and that I already am. [...] I am the one you were. You are the one I shall be" (*VH*, p. 197-8).

Dates and numbers return incessantly like haunting, cyclical anniversaries.<sup>17</sup> It is thus not a chance paradox that Jacques Derrida, who might have said "the one you don't write writes itself differently" (*L*, second page of insert) and who is himself called "a book which existed" and which "I'd already read", should stalk into Cixous's essay, especially as her reiterated recollection of his recollection, pronounced in 1998 at the first Cerisy *décade* on Cixous's work, that "I-met-her-some-thirty-five-years-ago", adding that Cixous subsequently told him that she had already seen

him from behind lecturing on “the subject of death” (*VH*, pp. 199, 200). Nor is it “by accident, as if by chance” (*Sem XI*, p. 58) that, uttered in 2003, this statement of a thirty-five-year gap—coincidentally also the number of years which Cixous spent away from their native Algeria until her hesitant return in 2005—would take us back to the years when *Tombe*, itself haunted by (memories of) death, was soon to be conceived.<sup>18</sup> Before that statement Derrida, then Cixous, in *H. C. pour la vie, c'est à dire...*<sup>19</sup> and *Portrait de Jacques Derrida en Jeune Saint Juif* respectively,<sup>20</sup> had repeatedly recalled and restaged their first ‘real’ meeting at a Paris cafe in 1963, some seven years after the primal scene of an asymmetrical missed encounter *a tergo*.<sup>21</sup>

Cixous’s relation to the Book, full of digressions<sup>22</sup> and battles fought (and lost) as if they were real (*vrai*; cf. *VH*, pp. 196-7, in a passage referring to Stendhal’s *The Charterhouse of Parma*), is of such ambivalence that it also recalls the tug-of-war between the reality and pleasure principles evoked in *Seminar XI*. On the one hand, Cixous often stresses the imperious as much as imperative urge to write “*The-Book-I-Don’t-Write* that I’ve been dreaming of for over thirty years” (*L*, p. 6), while conversely she constantly reneges on it in repeated, apotropaic gestures of denial that however seem to perversely turn against her as soon as they are sketched:

I won’t write this book. I write this sentence down in my scribbler “I won’t write this book.” There, it’s written. There it is in the book. (*VH*, p. 206)

Ten times in ten years I wrote: “I won’t write this book.” and “How can I have confidence in whatever or me when, upon opening the files in which I archive my quarrels I find myself repeating the same sentence three months or three years later? I promise myself in vain?” (*VH*, p. 207)

Why have I so often written (and for starters, said and thought): I won’t write this book? (*VH*, p. 208)

Yet, as Cixous declared in a forum on France Culture,<sup>23</sup> one must do everything one can in order to write what one cannot write, and the best-known instance of such an endeavour to defy the impossible relates to her solemn declaration “in October 1991”, then recantation twelve years later (cf. ‘B’, p. 252: “the book” “*denounced* and renounced” in 2003), that she would not write about her mother:

As for writing about my mother, I’ve done it with extreme succinctness. What I’ve done, in fact, amounts to nothing. It seems to me that we can’t write about our mother. I’m sure about it. It’s one of the limits of writing.

Yet, in October 91, I wrote and declared publicly in Kingston, Canada, in front of my friend Mireille that I will never write a book about my mother, I even dated my declaration of faith with my mother’s anniversary, you could hardly be more credulous and solemn than that, and afterwards right away I did the contrary, a model of innocent forswearing, or forswearing rather.<sup>24</sup>

But as Cixous soon readily admits, “October 91 must have been too late, the book had no doubt already begun [...] Often books begin concealed in non-books, as

prenatal spectres.”<sup>25</sup> since indeed, as we saw previously, “[t]his book precedes me” and originates from the dead. The Book is thus tensed between a pre-existential “always already there” and—to echo Derrida’s critique of Lacan’s notorious formula closing the “Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter’”—a letter whose fate (*destin*) is to structurally never arrive at its destination,<sup>26</sup> until we reach the end of the line, the incontrovertible real of death itself. Or, in response to part of Jeannet’s first question whether this book was a *f*/phantasm, the book-as-phantasm (to which I will return) “is an other presence. And there are two kinds of that: the phantom of a “past” and the phantom of a “not-yet” [...] pledged to a *never*” (‘B’, p. 249), about which one can legitimately ask: “what is the first encounter, the real, that lies behind the phantasy?” (*Sem XI*, p. 54).

However, the counter-performative nature of forswearing what was inherently an impossible promise contrasts with the perlocutionary effects in the real of the resisted book:

How does it happen that I came down with pneumonia the very week I embarked on all these stories of lungs and consumptive man? On the one hand I didn’t want to write this book. [...] Can you give yourself pneumonia via a book? [...] Did the thought of the book contaminate me? Or did the illness call up the book I wasn’t writing? (*VH*, p. 208)

This symptomatic, contagious porosity between the book and the authorial agency, the repeated, ‘automated’ phantasm and the subject affected in the real, brings us to the (reality within the) dream famously analysed by Freud, then reinterpreted by Lacan, of the father waking up to hear his dead son whispering reproachfully: “Father, can’t you see [...] that I am burning?” (*Sem XI*, p. 58). More often than not, Cixous equates the (impossible) book with a dream, specifically “a dream-that-does-not-arrive”, but the status of this book-as-dream not infrequently hesitates between the imaginary (ideality<sup>27</sup>) and the real, as if poised on the intersection of the two orders for its effectiveness:<sup>28</sup>

I may tell myself I’d like to write it but that’s a thought that belongs to the realm of neverwrite, you are happy to toy with ideas that stand no chance of ever becoming a threat of reality. Nor is it exact to say I don’t write the Book I-don’t-write, this would be restricting myself to believing that what is called writing is only the tracing of dark words on bright paper, many are the ways, I wish to believe, of writing the Book I don’t write [...]. (*VH*, p. 213)

[The-book-I-don’t-write] is itself a dream but ongoing not always noted down but indelible which leaves no pages, real or imaginary, blank. (*VH*, v215; translation modified)

An inkling of a clarification can be glimpsed still in the reply to Jeannet’s first question, which stresses the symptomatic, transactional nature of the book/dream-that-does-not-arrive,<sup>29</sup> ultimately related to the unassimilable traumatic real (cf. *Sem XI*, p. 55) of family deaths:<sup>30</sup> “There is a lot of death inside there, even if I have

“learned” to think that not-to-do (not to write, to say, and so on) can be converted, through displacement, just as a “not to dream”, a “do not dream” produces symptoms” (VH, pp. 249-50). This conversion or transference of sorts is central to Cixous’s resistance to psychoanalysis<sup>31</sup> through the very nature of dreams, one of its traditional interpretive tools but one which she reinvents not so much as a process disclosing the traumatic real behind the repeated stagings of the fantasized book-I-don’t-write but as constituting in itself its own reality seen as the ‘truly real’ or *vrai* (cf. ‘B’, p. 252), thanks to what she calls, after George du Maurier’s precursory *Peter Ibbetson* (1892), “*rêver vrai*” (dreaming true),<sup>32</sup> in the light of which one should perhaps (re)read her insistent questioning of the status, “truly real” or illusory, of the graphically depicted battle in *The Charterhouse of Parma* (VH, pp. 196-7). Here is how Cixous accounts for her “gift of dreaming true” in *Philippines*,<sup>33</sup> which elaborates it through a patient analysis of du Maurier’s book:

Why have I always responded to *Peter Ibbetson* and to Peter Ibbetson as if *this lesson in dreaming true* were addressed to me?

My apocalypse takes place the moment I write this. I hear inwardly (but what does “inwardly” mean?) Jacques Derrida responding to me in the same second, the very second, it seems to me, “there is only autoteleanalysis.”<sup>34</sup>

Thus, the Calderonian formula “*life is a dream*”, dismissed by Lacan towards the beginning of the session on “Tuché and Automaton” (*Sem XI*, pp. 53, 55), is redeemed in Cixous’s writing, and the “Book of Life”, despite never materializing as such, is as if (in a) “true dream.” One may oppose the Cixousian *vrai* to the Lacanian real, the importance for her of, in Derrida’s felicitous formula, *écrire au rêve* (writing on dreams, running on them as fuel),<sup>35</sup> of writing a “*book of dreams without interpretation*”,<sup>36</sup> to his (Freudian) interpretation of the dream and its (non)relation to life.

As we saw earlier, the dream(t) Book-I-Don’t-Write acts as an irresistible guide whose call Cixous heeds, a conception which conjures up Lacan’s view of the dreamer’s position as “profoundly that of someone who does not see. The subject does not see where it is leading, he follows” (*Sem XI*, p. 75). Blindly, we might add, and indeed “writing blind”, at night, when “I write without seeing that I write, what I write”,<sup>37</sup> is the activity that the near-sighted<sup>38</sup> Cixous herself privileges as her paradoxical *modus operandi*; in her eponymous essay she also confesses that “I cannot write without *distracting* my gaze from capturing.”<sup>39</sup> Cixous’s genius as a writer is to have turned her innate condition into a fortuitous blind spot from which her writing and even non-writing (*nécrire*) can find expression, symbolized in the Book-I-Don’t-Write.

It is no coincidence that Lacan’s reconceptualization of Aristotelian *tuché* as missed encounter with the Real appears in the vicinity of the section about the split between the eye and the gaze, in the anecdote of Petit-Jean in which the subject is made to feel like a stain/spot out of place (*faire tache*) in a *tableau vivant* where s/he does not belong (*Sem XI*, pp. 95-96)—as well as near the evocation of mortality in the *vanitas* of Hans Holbein’s anamorphosis *The Ambassadors*, for which Cixous

offers as an (albeit “conscious”) equivalent her own sidelong glance into the impossible book: “sometimes I don’t think about it face to face but obliquely, off to one side” (*VH*, p. 213). For Lacan, “[t]he picture, certainly, is in my eye. But I am not in the picture” (*Sem XI*, p. 96), to which we could add that likewise what I read, and even write, leaves an impression on me, even as it springs from me, but I am foreclosed from its scenes of representation, scotomized (cf. *Sem XI*, p. 84) as a writing subject, absorbed as a blind spot in the scene of a writing over which I cannot have a commanding view.

Such a perspective also accounts for the Orphic nature of Cixous’s notwriting (*nécrire*) which, while not generalizable as the condition and “experience” of all literature—the desire and search for the work (Eurydice) by the poet (Orpheus) leading to its disappearance and the forbidden, trespassing gaze revealing its essence as inessential (Maurice Blanchot)<sup>40</sup>—illustrates the (impossibility to look at the) elusive nature of the unwritable book (cf. ‘B’, p. 251). With each serial attempt at approaching the-book-I-don’t-write, the repetition of this disappearance resembles the game of *fort-da* evoked by Lacan as the staged repetition of a repetition (the mother’s departure), causing a *Spaltung* in the subject: “Orpheus is any creature who writes, and divides itself in two, dies in writing, lives in writing, dies in living in writing” (‘B’, p. 251), and Cixous’s iterative yet absent book “is aimed at what, essentially, is not there, *qua* represented” (*Sem XI*, p. 63).

Prompted by death(s), Cixous’s performiterative notwriting is aptly called *nécrire*,<sup>41</sup> in which one should also hear the Greek *nekros*: dead body/person since it pertains to necroneurography. Fuelled in a large measure by the living memories of her tale-spinning ancient mother (“Homère”) until the latter’s death, Cixous’s apotropaic notwriting of the Book of Life / of the Dead operates as some sort of *nekuia*, this ritual form of necromancy in ancient Greek cult-practice and literature by which ghosts were called up and questioned about the future (cf. *VH*, p. 196: “a customs house for ghosts”). A book “to come and never” since “[i]t does not belong to this world, but rather to the other world” (‘B’, p. 252, p. 251).

#### Notes

1. The English phrase can also be translated as “the book I am not writing”, i.e. it can refer, as we shall see, both to a general condition of Cixous’s writing, the diversionary nature of her books, and to Cixous’s awareness, in the act of writing, that something is being written that is other than what was intended.

2. See Frédéric-Yves Jeannet, “The Book That You Will Not Write: An Interview with Hélène Cixous”, translated by Thomas Dutoit, *New Literary History*, vol. 37, no. 1: “Hélène Cixous: When the Word is a Stage”, edited by Eric Prenowitz, 2006, pp. 249-61 (hereafter ‘B’ with page references in the text), and Hélène Cixous, “The Book I Don’t Write”, translated by Beverley Bie Brahic, in *Volleys of Humanity: Essays 1972-2009*, edited by Eric Prenowitz (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), pp. 193-220 (hereafter *VH* with page references in the text).

3. Hélène Cixous, *Tours promises* (Paris: Galilée, 2004), especially p. 146. In her reply to the first question bearing on the status of this elusive 'book', Cixous resorts to the pun on *tour* (p. 249), a frequent leitmotif in her works on account of Montaigne's Tower and the 9/11 attack on the Twin Towers, associating *des tours* with the *détours* or circumvention of (non-) writing: *nécrire* (see *infra*).
4. See Cixous's retrospective reminiscences, "Mémoires de Tombe", in the book's 2008 republication: "That is how *Tombe* comes close to what, much later, I will eventually call The-Book-which-I-Do-Not-Write." (*Tomb(e)*, translated by Laurent Milesi (London: Seagull Books, 2014), p. 24.)
5. Hélène Cixous, *FirstDays of the Year*, translated and with a Preface by Catherine A. F. MacGillivray (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), p. 5. See also Eric Prenowitz, "Fleurir", in *Hélène Cixous. Corollaires d'une écriture*, edited by Marta Segarra (Paris: PUV, 2019), p. 115, n. 10 for a partial genealogy of the motif in relation to the then two chapters of *Abstracts and Brief Chronicles*, to which he adds another prefigurative passage, from *O R, les lettres de mon père* (Paris: des femmes, 1997), pp. 14-15.
6. Hélène Cixous, *Benjamin à Montaigne. Il ne faut pas le dire* (Paris: Galilée, 2001), p. 67, translations mine; hereafter *BM* with page references in the text.
7. Hélène Cixous, *Osnabrück Station to Jerusalem*, translated by Peggy Kamuf (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020), p. 6. See *infra* for the book-as-dream.
8. Hélène Cixous, *L'amour du loup et autres remords* (Paris: Galilée, 2003), pp. 109, 151, 159, 160, 161, 163; *Love Itself in the Letter Box*, translated by Peggy Kamuf (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), p. 43; *So Close*, translated by Peggy Kamuf (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), 24 (referring to a note dated 27 July 2006); *Hemlock: Old Women in Bloom*, translated by Beverley Bie Brahic (Cambridge: Polity, 2011), p. 42: "I won't write the book I'm writing, I'll write the book I don't write."; *Mother Homer Is Dead*, translated by Peggy Kamuf (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), p. 1.
9. Hélène Cixous, *Abstracts and Brief Chronicles of the Time I. Los, A Chapter*, translated by Beverley Bie Brahic (Cambridge: Polity, 2016), pp. vi, viii; hereafter *L* with page references in the text. Cf. already 'B', 252: "At this moment, it haunts me—or its double haunts me in an even more insistent manner."
10. Cixous, *Tomb(e)*, p. 9. For a brief development on the "thirty years' motif, see also my "Enacting Postmemory in Hélène Cixous's 'Jewish Family Romance'", *Parallax*, "Holocaust Narratives in the Post-Testimonial Era", edited by Arleen Ionescu and Simona Mitroiu, vol. 29, no. 1 (2023), pp. 47–66.
11. Hélène Cixous, *Death Shall Be Dethroned: Los, A Chapter, the Journal*, translated by Beverley Bie Brahic (Cambridge: Polity, 2016), p. 1.
12. Hélène Cixous, *Abstracts et Brèves Chroniques du temps II. Corollaires d'un Vœu* (Paris: Galilée, 2015), second page of insert; translation mine.
13. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated by Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), pp. 53-54; hereafter *Sem XI* with page references in the text. Cixous's 'consciousness', however, can equally be described as "*l'inconscient à fleur de mot*", or the unconscious itself on edge, on the surface of language; see René Major, "L'inconscient d'Hélène Cixous", in *Genèses*



*Généalogies Genres. Autour de l'œuvre d'Hélène Cixous*, edited by Mireille Calle-Gruber and Marie Odile Germain (Paris: Galilée / Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 2006), p. 203.

14. Cixous, *Corollaires d'un Vœu*, first page of insert; translation mine.

15. Cixous, *Tomb(e)*, p. 24. See also, for instance, *L*, p. vii: "I would have liked to see it one of these days before I die" and, in the interview with Jeannet: "It is not to come. In any case not in my lifetime"; "This book is not already written, nor is it not-yet-written. It is of a kind that is not reducible—and I fear that it will never be "written", neither by me, nor in my lifetime" ('B', pp. 249, 250).

16. I have analysed how this open-ended project of the Book-I-Don't-Write intersects with a more sombre memorial project of writing the impossible trauma of the Jewish family saga during World War Two in "Enacting Postmemory in Hélène Cixous's 'Jewish Family Romance'."

17. For the theme of the annular anniversary as repetition, see Jacques Derrida, "Shibboleth: For Paul Celan", translated by Joshua Wilner, in *Word Traces: Readings of Paul Celan*, edited by Aris Fioretos (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), pp. 3-72.

18. The beginning of the text's composition can be inferred from the remark, in "*Memoires of Tomb(e)*"—a pun on Chateaubriand's famous *Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe*, recalled soon after—that it was "about the age of thirty-three" that the 'author', born in 1937, decided "to look Tombe in the face and side-on" (*Tomb(e)*, p. 2), some thirty-three years before the "Genèses Généalogies Genres" colloquium...

19. Jacques Derrida, *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say...*, translated, with additional notes, by Laurent Milesi and Stefan Herbrecter (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 5.

20. Hélène Cixous, *Portrait of Jacques Derrida as a Young Jewish Saint*, translated by Beverley Bie Brahic (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), pp. 5-6, where Cixous also speaks of Derrida as "[t]he book of books", a phrase which uncannily echoes Cixous's description of *Tombe* as "but a faint emanation of the book of books" (*Tomb(e)*, p. 154).

21. See the "Translator's Preface: Taking Sides in Translation", in *H. C. for Life*, p. ix, and, for a more ample development of this *Urszene*, my "Portraits of H. C. as J. D. and Back", *New Literary History*, vol. 37, no. 1: "Hélène Cixous: When the Word is a Stage", edited by Eric Prenowitz, 2006, pp. 51-70.

22. Cf. 'B', p. 251: "approach [the book] through detours, reveries, dreams."

23. "La Masterclasse d'Hélène Cixous", 50:50, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O1jKX3No3IU&pp=ygUcSGVsZW5lIGNpeG91cyBsYSBtYXN0ZXJjbGFzcw%3D%3D>; accessed 12 September 2023.

24. Hélène Cixous, "In October 1991...", translated by Keith Cohen, in *Stigmata: Escaping Texts*, with a foreword by Jacques Derrida and a new preface by the author (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 39; *Tours promises*, p. 95 (translation mine), recalled in condensed form in *L'amour du loup*, 161, and *VH*, p/ 211. For critical developments, see, for e.g., Elissa Marder, "Birthmarks (Given Names)", *Parallax*, vol. 13, no. 3: "before the book—hélène cixous", edited by Eric Prenowitz, 2007, pp. 49-61; Mairéad Hanrahan, *Cixous's Semi-Fictions: Thinking at the Borders of Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), pp. 161-2. The (discreet) intrusion of the mother into Cixous's writings occurs as early as the inaugural short story in her very first work of fiction, "L'outre vide", which closes on an

ominous “*Deuxième conversation et meurtre de ma mère*”, after a “*Conversation avec la mère*”; see Hélène Cixous, *Le prénom de Dieu. Nouvelles* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1967), pp. 29-32. For other instances of forswearing, see, for e.g., *Manhattan. Lettres de la préhistoire* (Paris: Galilée, 2002), p. 99; and, related to dreaming, *Dream I Tell You*, translated by Beverley Bie Brahic (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), pp. 1-2.

25. *VH*, 211. Compare with *Tours promises*, p. 96.

26. Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, translated, with an introduction and additional notes, by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), *passim*, especially pp. 33, 121, 123, 136, 195, 324; (in “Le facteur de la vérité”) pp. 444, 489.

27. For the equivalence between ideality and the imaginary in Lacan’s writings, see, for example, *Écrits. The First Complete Edition in English*, translated by Bruce Fink et al. (New York: Norton, 2002), p. 76, and *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book I: Freud’s Papers on Technique 1953-1954*, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated with notes by John Forrester (New York: Norton, 1988), p. 282 (about the tie of the ideal ego to the specular image).

28. Cixous, *Osnabrück Station to Jerusalem*, p. 6.

29. Or even ambivalently desired journey and destination, as in *So Close*, p. 12: “To go there as in a dream, that would be the ideal I used to say to myself. To go there as a dream, I dreamt.”

30. See, for example, the evocation of ancestral graves in *VH*, pp. 194, 213, 214. About the “book of death”, see, for e.g., *Déluge* (Paris: des femmes, 1992), p. 96, and especially *Tomb(e)*, p. 110: “That’s why this book lacks the book of death which this book is only a parody of. But this book does not come far from the book of death, and at times even brushes against it.”

31. On the occasion of a conference in Paris dedicated to her work, Hélène Cixous recounted a dream she once had, in which she was shivering after coming out of a psychoanalyst’s practice. The implication that what she jokingly yet derogatorily called “pissanalyse” (pissanalysis) in *Partie* (Paris: des femmes, 1976), p. 53, somehow leaves her cold should not be lost, nor should the inversion of the father’s dream of the burning son into an underlying formula such as “Uncle [Freud], can’t you see that I am shivering?” from a writer whose work, especially in the 1970s, is known for overturning psychoanalytic concepts and their phallogocentric underpinnings, often with the help of (rewriting) ancient mythology. (References to “(n)uncle Freud” first appeared with *Neutre* (Paris: Grasset, 1972), p. 36, then *Souffles* (Paris: des femmes, 1975), pp. 94, 122, 148, 173.)

32. George du Maurier, *Peter Ibbetson, with an Introduction by his cousin Lady \*\*\*\*\* (“Madge Plunkett”)*, edited and illustrated by George du Maurier, Preface by Daphne du Maurier (London: Victor Gollancz, 1969), pp. 164, 166, 167, 179, 212, 224, 227.

33. Hélène Cixous, *Philippines*, translated by Laurent Milesi (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), p. viii, p. 25.

34. Cixous, *Philippines*, 42, referring to Derrida’s statement that “there is only tele-analysis” in “Telepathy”, translated by Nicholas Royle, *Oxford Literary Review*, vol. 10, no. 1, 1988, p. 26. See also pp. 55, 60, and the interview by Ginette Michaud, “L’avenir de la scène primitive. Entretien avec Hélène Cixous”, *Spirale*, vol. 231, 2010, pp. 21-27.

35. Jacques Derrida, "Ants", translated by Eric Prenowitz, *Oxford Literary Review*, vol. 24, no. 1: "Reading Cixous Writing", edited by Martin McQuillan, 2002, p. 25; *H. C. for Life*, p. 75; *Geneses, Genealogies, Genres, and Genius: The Secrets of the Archive*, translated by Beverley Bie Brahic (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), p. 39ff. (with *réveil*: waking). Cixous's major titular "oneirographies" to date include *Dream I Tell You, Reveries of the Wild Woman: Primal Scenes*, translated by Beverley Bie Brahic (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2006); *Hyperdream*, translated by Beverley Bie Brahic (Cambridge: Polity, 2009); *Révoir* (Paris: Galilée, 2021).
36. Cixous, *Dream I Tell You*, p. 7.
37. Hélène Cixous, "Writing Blind: Conversation with the Donkey", translated by Eric Prenowitz, in *Stigmata*, p. 123.
38. For Cixous's short-sightedness, see also "Savoir", in Helene Cixous and Jacques Derrida, *Veils*, translated by Geoffrey Bennington (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 1-16.
39. Cixous, "Writing Blind", p. 115.
40. See, in particular, "The Gaze of Orpheus", in *The Gaze of Orpheus and Other Literary Essays*, preface by Geoffrey Hartman, translated by Lydia Davis, edited, with an afterword, by P. Adams Sitney (Barrytown, NY: Station Hill Pres, 1981), pp. 98-104. For the interdiction to write the Book, which could be tacitly compared to Orpheus being forbidden to gaze back at Eurydice, see 'B', p. 250, p. 253 ("an eleventh commandment: 'Thou shalt not write.'")
41. The most significant uses of this nonce verb can be found in "Le Livre que je n'écris pas" (in *Genèses Généalogies Genres*, pp. 234, 248, 249), partially overlapping with *Tours promises*, p. 25 (about the passage from nocturnal obscurity to the night of day), pp. 59, 114, 171. See also *Portrait du soleil* (Paris: Denoël, 1973), p. 65, and *With ou l'art de l'innocence* (Paris: des femmes, 1981), p. 51.

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