



Hemlock

HélÃ..ne Cixous

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A compelling work of autobiographical fiction, Helene Cixous's *Hemlock* weaves tragedy and comedy, narrative and meditation in its exploration of various human attachments: between an elderly but still truculent mother and her writer-daughter, between the mother and her sister, and between the writer and her vanished but nonetheless intensely present friend, Jacques Derrida, whose death is movingly evoked. "I have in mind two lovely faces, old women in bloom," writes the author with a backwards nod to Proust's 'jeunes filles.' "Here," she says in her preface, "the criss-crossing paths of my mother and my aunt will come to an end at last. When one old flower is left, what becomes of the other face?" Socrates is conjured up, along with the poisonous plants of Hamlet, the human comedies of Balzac and Proust, and other literary and philosophical ghosts who find themselves drawn into the fabric of Cixous's text: "I'm not sleeping," writes the protagonist. "A worm is drilling my brain. It's a phrase I heard in the hellish juice of the jusquiame. I pour it into my own ear. 'I'm afraid Mama will die'."

In this new work Helene Cixous continues to explore and expand the boundaries of narrative, slipping from thought to thought and from image to image, so as to render every action, fear and thought palpable to the reader.

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