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*Violence tragique et guerres antiques  
au miroir du théâtre et du cinéma  
(XVII<sup>e</sup>-XXI<sup>e</sup> siècles)*

sous la direction de  
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THE SO-CALLED 'VOGUE' FOR OUTDOOR THEATRE  
AROUND THE TIME OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR:  
MEANINGS AND POLITICAL AMBIGUITIES  
OF THE REFERENCE TO GREEK THEATRE

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**Résumé :** Cette étude part d'un double constat, d'une part, celui d'une rémanence conséquente de la référence au théâtre grec à la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> et au début du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, à travers ce qu'on a appelé la « vogue » des théâtres en plein air ; d'autre part, celui d'une double dimension, esthétique et politique, perceptible dans cette référence, puisque revenir au théâtre grec passe également alors, semble-t-il, pour une tentative de retour à l'assemblée démocratique. Dans ce cadre-là, le théâtre antique d'Orange fait figure de paradigme, depuis la représentation d'*Œdipe-Roi*, interprété par Mounet-Sully en 1888, et qui reste dans les mémoires comme une représentation charnière. Mais la fascination pour le « dehors », qui s'exprime dans les premières décennies du siècle, n'est pas dénuée d'ambiguïté et de paradoxes. Cette vogue du plein air prend place dans une période politique marquée, sur le plan théorique, par les débats entre cosmopolites et nationalistes, par le développement de l'idéologie maurrassienne, et sur le plan historique par le souvenir de la défaite de 1870, par l'affaire Dreyfus, et par la rupture constituée par la Première Guerre mondiale. Il s'agit donc ici d'étudier les échos entre les évolutions politiques de l'époque (notamment autour de la question du nationalisme) et ce phénomène théâtral du plein air, à partir, notamment, des discours relayés par la presse de l'époque. La « renaissance » d'Orange présente en effet des contours idéologiques marqués : la rhétorique de la nature, l'exaltation de l'esthétique classique contre les attaques de la modernité, et enfin la volonté perceptible de construire, sur la scène d'Orange, *via* un retour aux origines pour partie fantasmé, une forme d'épopée nationale, en sont les principaux traits. À une époque où l'équilibre entre « nationalisme républicain » et « nationalisme des nationalistes » est en train de se repenser, le mot de Louis XIV pour désigner Orange semble résonner tout particulièrement : en désignant le mur de scène comme « la plus belle muraille de [son] royaume », le monarque nous invite à comprendre les guerres (idéologiques, historiques, esthétiques) que ce lieu a pu cristalliser.

**Mots-clés :** Gabriel Boissy, Grèce antique, mythe, nationalisme, Orange, Première guerre mondiale, théâtre en plein air, théâtre grec, tragédie.

**Abstract:** This study takes two facts as a starting point: on the one hand, the persistent reference to Greek theatre at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century, especially through what will shortly be called a 'vogue' for outdoor theatres; and on the other hand, the both political and aesthetic dimension of this reference. Indeed, Greek theatre seems to be understood as a model of a democratic assembly, which some therefore are trying to rebuild. In this understanding, the antique theatre of Orange can be seen as a paradigm, mostly since the performance of Mounet-Sully playing *Œdipus* in *Oedipus the King* in 1888, which is remembered as a turning point. But this fascination with the 'outside' is not deprived of certain ambiguities and paradoxes. The period we are studying is politically marked by the development of conservative ideologies, personified most notably by Charles Maurras but also noticeable in all the debates between different understandings and experiences of nationalism. On an historical level, the period is also marked by the memory of the 1870 defeat, the Dreyfus 'Affaire' and the breaking point constituted by the 1st World War. Therefore, this study will try to show how the political evolutions of the time, mostly through the question of nationalism, echo this phenomenon of outdoor theatre. We will rely mainly on press clippings for this study, in order to reveal the type of discourse surrounding the phenomenon. The 'renaissance' of Orange has a solid ideological foundation: its main characteristics are the rhetoric of nature, the exaltation of classicism against modernity, understood as an attack, and, lastly, the will to stage in Orange, through a return to origins which is partly a fantasy, a 'national epic'. At a time when the balance between different kinds of nationalism is being reconsidered, the words of Louis XIV are particularly meaningful: he said once that the outside wall of the Orange theatre was 'the most beautiful rampart in his kingdom'. Saying this, he induces us to understand the wars (ideological, historical and aesthetic) which have sprung up about this place.

**Keywords:** Ancient Greece, First World War, Gabriel Boissy, Greek theatre, myth, nationalism, outdoor theatre, Orange, tragedy.

This study takes two facts as a starting point: on the one hand, the persistent reference to Greek theatre at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century, especially through what will later be called a 'vogue' for outdoor theatre; and on the other hand, the political and aesthetic dimension of this reference. Indeed, Greek theatre seems to be understood as a model of a democratic assembly, which some therefore try to rebuild. In this understanding, the antique theatre of Orange can be seen as a *paradigm*, mostly since the performance of Mounet-Sully as Œdipus in *Oedipus the King* in 1888, which is still remembered as a key moment. In 1869 already, Alphonse Bernard, Anthony Réal and Félix Ripert, all members of the artistic movement called the "Félibrige" tried to promote the Occitan culture and organised the "Fêtes romaines", later called the "Chorégies" in 1902, thus named after the reference to the choir of the Greek tragedy. But this fascination for the 'outside' is not deprived of certain ambiguities and paradoxes. First of all, the theatre performances given in Orange illustrate both a will of decentralisation (the 'Comédie-Française' accepts to "lend" some of its shows) and an attempt to promote local authors. We must keep in mind, though, that the 'Comédie-Française' and the 'Opéra de Paris' hold a monopoly on the productions in the antique theatre until the second world war. The period we are studying is politically marked by the development of conservative ideologies, personified most notably by Charles Maurras but also noticeable in all the debates between different understandings and experiences of nationalism. On a historical level, the period is also marked by the memory of the 1870 defeat, the Dreyfus 'Affaire' and the breaking point constituted by the First World War.

This breaking point is crucial to this study: when I was going through the collection regarding outdoor theatre in the National French Library<sup>1</sup> and reading the press of the time, I noticed a change, between before the First World War and after, in the references to Greek theatre. While, before the war, Greek theatre was seen as a necessary myth to unite the national community, after the war, the current history seemed too significant to have to refer to a fantasy of the past.

We will try to highlight the social and political evolutions implied by this change. We will focus mostly on the rhetoric that surrounds this phenomenon of outdoor theatre, especially in the contemporary press and in the book written by Gabriel Boissy, *The Dramaturgy of Orange*, particularly since he wrote the foreword on the front line during the First World War<sup>2</sup>.

First of all, we will describe quickly this 'renaissance' of the antique theatre of Orange (since it is the word used in the press clippings, and it is not meaningless), then we will try to figure out the ideology surrounding these experiences and, above all, how the First World War caused a profound change in the reference to ancient Greece.

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<sup>1</sup> See Rondel collection, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département Arts du Spectacle, microfilm files Rf 81108 to Rf 81149, which compiles several press clippings about outdoor theatre. [Recueil factice d'études générales concernant le théâtre de plein air]. Unless otherwise specified, the quotations are coming from these files.

<sup>2</sup> We have made the choice, throughout the article, to keep the quotations in French, since the words and lexical choices are really important in a study focused on ideological and political backgrounds. From time to time, we will translate some parts into English, for general understanding.

‘WHEN EUROPE WAKES UP FROM BARBARISM, HER FIRST CRY IS TO GREECE’:  
THE ‘RENAISSANCE’ OF ORANGE

During the period of time we are focusing on, it was quite common to speak about the ‘renaissance’ of Orange: this dates back approximately to the play *Oedipus the King* in 1888, with Mounet Sully playing Oedipus. It is not the first time plays were being held again in the antique theatre, but this particular play was to be remembered as a key moment, a revival of what would soon be called the ‘vogue’ for outdoor theatre. Not long after the French defeat of 1870, and before the First World War put an end to the shows in Orange, the period was deeply marked by wars (past and to come) and political tensions. The use of the word ‘renaissance’ is not neutral at all: it is a way to provide continuity between ancient Greece and France at the beginning of the twentieth century. The first criteria seems to be the number of spectators, seen as a resemblance with ancient Greece : the theatre of Orange can accommodate around 9000 people. The analysis of the archival collection dedicated to outdoor theatre in the French National Library attests to the importance of this phenomenon and its large coverage by the press of the time, mostly from 1902. Two examples can illustrate this:

Ailleurs encore, on organise une semblable fête dramatique ; voilà la preuve que cette mode nouvelle a pris, et que la vogue ira bientôt à ces représentations en plein air, à ces théâtres à ciel ouvert. Il faut voir dans ce goût nouveau l’effet de plusieurs influences heureuses. Le succès qu’ont remporté les hardies représentations d’Orange et de Nîmes ont fait comprendre quel intérêt offraient de tels spectacles, ont fait sentir tous les agréments des théâtres établis selon la conception antique. Et puis nous prenons chaque jour une plus fervente envie de vivre au jour, à la lumière, un plus vif désir de jouir de l’espace et de la mouvante beauté de la nature<sup>4</sup>.

What is important here is the focus on the ‘antique conception’ and the lexical choices, which are quite lyrical and embody a wish to celebrate the reunion with the beauty of ancient Greece. A few years later, in 1910, Maurice Magre, a writer, poet and playwright, goes further:

Un grand mouvement artistique commence et grandit en province. Paris considère encore ces manifestations comme des tentatives, une forme de théâtre « à côté », une manière de curiosité d’art. Il n’en est rien. Nous assistons à une renaissance de la tragédie, à un renouvellement de notre forme dramatique. Des essais, d’abord confus, puis plus précis, qu’a donnés le théâtre en plein air, un genre nouveau est en train de sortir, ou plutôt de renaître de ses cendres, un genre qui unira trois arts, danse, poésie, musique<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> François-René Chateaubriand, *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem*, Paris, Gallimard, « Folio Classique », 2005 [1826, première version définitive], p. 219. Extended quotation : « Quand l’Europe se réveille de la barbarie, son premier cri est pour Athènes : « Qu’est-elle devenue ? » demande-t-on de toutes parts. Et quand on apprend que ses ruines existent encore, on y court, comme si l’on avait retrouvé les cendres d’une mère. »

<sup>4</sup> The BnF microfilm indicates as a source the journal *Le Gaulois*, 23 juin 1904, but the consultation of the original clipping does not permit to confirm it. (See BnF, département Arts du spectacle, Rf 81108-81149).

<sup>5</sup> Maurice Magre, « L’Union des trois arts », 1910, the BnF microfilm does not indicate a newspaper title (See BnF, département Arts du spectacle, Rf 81108-81149).

Two things must be noted here: the 'renaissance'<sup>6</sup> is specified as an aesthetic one ('a renewal of our dramatic form'); the difference specified between Paris and provincial life is quite interesting because the pejorative tone associated with Paris reveals the will to praise the beauty of nature, as opposed to the dissolute Parisian lifestyle. By doing this, Maurice Magre, who was a strong advocate of a national reunion, focused on the need to reenact a national epic, and Orange seemed to be the perfect venue for it.

If we try to sum up, two levels can be highlighted. On the social level, the word 'renaissance' is a way to provide continuity between ancient Greece and France. The search for a return to nature in an increasingly industrialized and urbanized society is combined with profound renewals in the ways of thinking about the body<sup>7</sup> and all this can take political aspects: this 'fervent wish to live outdoors' which the *Gaulois* newspaper spoke about comprises ideological assumptions, which can be either modernist or conservative. On an aesthetic level, then, the 'renaissance' is quite paradoxical: in fact, the 'renewal' was not quite a modern one. The aim was to recall antique tragedy via a national reference to the Renaissance of the XVI<sup>e</sup> century and to make it a synonym of modernity, which is not without contradiction. Outdoor theatre in Orange was seen as a way of making antique tragedy modern. To sum up this idea, Michel Autrand evokes an 'unpowerful wish of renewal'<sup>8</sup>. The outdoor theatre, or more precisely the outdoor theatre in Orange, is mostly seen as a way to adapt the classic form to the modern times.

#### FIRST HYPOTHESIS: REFERENCE TO ANCIENT GREECE, A WAY TO REBUILD A CULTURAL AND NATIONAL IDENTITY?

First of all, we have to remind ourselves of the political and social French context: as a lot of historians have shown, it was this period which saw the birth of a new social body soon to be called the '*masses*'. And the republican government tries to set up a '*vivre ensemble*', literally a 'living together', by encouraging cultural events outside of Paris and trying to build a 'proximity democracy'. For the theatre, leaving Paris – even briefly – was not at all meaningless, and its significance was all the greater when it was the troupe of the '*Comédie Française*' going to Orange: such a move is understood as the circulation of a national identity. The big political question of the moment seemed to be, as quoted by historians specialised in this period:

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<sup>6</sup> It may be relevant to note the choice of the term 'Renaissance': it refers both to the European Renaissance of the XVI<sup>e</sup> century and to the German conception of the greek tragedy. If this last reference tends to be hidden because of the growing opposition between France and Germany at the beginning of the century, it is still perceptible, mainly in the research for a total work of art echoing the German romantic '*Gesamtkunstwerk*'. The antique theatre of Orange is constantly praised as a perfect place to gather music, dance and theatre in the same work of art. It is noticeably paradoxical that the research for the renewal of a national French myth can also be based, even implicitly, on a German reference.

<sup>7</sup> We may think to the publication, in 1936, of the *Journal de Psychologie* by Marcel Mauss, which constitutes a deep change in the way to consider the body and its social dimension.

<sup>8</sup> Michel Autrand, « Le théâtre du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle et l'Antiquité », in *Tradition classique et modernité, Actes du 12<sup>e</sup> colloque de la Villa Kérylos à Beaulieu-sur-Mer, Cahiers de la Villa Kérylos*, 13, Paris, Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres, 2002, p. 193-204.

Comment faire participer pleinement les masses impatientes, désormais mobilisables sous des bannières jusqu'alors inconnues, au jeu de la démocratie inscrit dans le cadre républicain<sup>9</sup> ?

Outdoor theatre seems to be an answer, among others. The renaissance of antique classical tragedy appears as a possibility to create a 'democratic game'; even more, the very *nature* of tragedy is supposedly to be performed in front of a large audience. In August 1905, an article in the magazine *Lectures pour tous* acknowledges this fact:

La tragédie antique, en effet, composée pour toute une cité, n'est vraiment à sa place que dans ces vastes espaces où elle peut faire vibrer l'âme d'une foule immense<sup>10</sup>.

This 'large crowd' is supposed to overlap the whole city, and we can already understand the democratic ambitions of outdoor theatre in Orange. That is why it is interesting to focus for a moment on the lexical choices made in different press clippings of the time, as they reveal the different meanings of the rhetoric of 'living together', which the outdoor-theatre policy tries to implement.

First, the term '*foule*' in French, approximately '*crowd*' in English, has an aesthetic connotation in French. The great and open space of the antique theatre should, in this conception, be conducive to the gathering of an harmonious crowd. In the continuity of the Baudelairian imaginary, but for the rural environment, this 'crowd' would be a sign of modernity, but a healthy and united one, as opposed to the dissolute urban crowd.

Then, the term '*peuple*' in French is also used, mostly by Gabriel Boissy, author of *The Dramaturgy of Orange*. One example of 1907 is very indicative of the democratic ambitions that outdoor theatre, in some people's minds, should have :

Cet accroissement est dû aux avantages multiples que ces spectacles offrent non seulement à ce que l'on appelle le public, qui est familier des théâtres, mais surtout au peuple, qui ne va au théâtre que dans des conditions spéciales. Ces conditions, le peuple les rencontre rarement et ce sont précisément celles qui caractérisent le théâtre de plein-air<sup>11</sup>.

Coming from Gabriel Boissy, a known nationalist writer close to Charles Maurras, the use of the term 'people' is a way to underline the democratic, but also the nationalist, ambitions of outdoor theatre in Orange.

Finally, the term 'nation' is not often used; in its place, we find the humbler word 'city', which is a direct reference to the Greek period. Joseph Péladan, a French writer known for his tendency to occultism, in an article entitled 'Oxygen and Theatre' in 1905, writes in such terms:

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<sup>9</sup> Jean-Pierre Rioux and Jean-François Sirinelli (dir.), *Histoire culturelle de la France*, Tome 4, *Le temps des masses. Le vingtième siècle*, Paris, Seuil, 1998, p. 52.

<sup>10</sup> « Le théâtre dans les ruines antiques », *Lectures pour tous*, n. 11, août 1905 (See BnF, département Arts du spectacle, Rf 81110).

<sup>11</sup> Gabriel Boissy, « Les spectacles de plein air et le peuple », *Mercure de France*, 1<sup>er</sup> novembre 1907 (See BnF, département Arts du spectacle, Rf 81120).



[L]a clameur prend l'envergure antique d'une cité entière, criant et gesticulant son enthousiasme ; ce n'est plus un public, c'est un peuple, (...) <sup>12</sup>.

The association of the terms 'people' and 'city' suggests the dream of a popular assembly and, above all, of a communion of bodies, which echoes the conception of the nation which is theorized at the time. We may recall here the historian Michel Winock, when he says, in his book on nationalism <sup>13</sup>, that one thing is common to all kinds of nationalism at this time, and it is their anti-individualism.

What is at stake in outdoor theatre in Orange is, indeed, a conception of the audience as a metaphor of the nation, and the reference to ancient Greece serves as a model. It is actually a complex one, and there is a large part of fantasy in it. But this model is not used in the same manner before and after the First World War. Our second hypothesis is that a change occurs, mostly because the need for a myth is not so acute when history, *via* the war, is so significant. The building of a 'living together', after the war, may rely more on the current history than on a mythical past one.

## SECOND HYPOTHESIS: THE WAR AS A BREAKING POINT IN THE WAY TO REFER TO ANCIENT GREECE

### *Before the war*

Before the war, in the different press clippings at our disposal, the Greek reference is both very common and very fantasized. The Greek fantasy appears in two ways, either political or aesthetic, which both echo the concerns of the time: first, by urging for a 'popular' theatre (what Greek theatre is supposed to have been), and, secondly, by encouraging a parallel between theatre and religion, as far as the 'communion' of an assembly is concerned.

The 'popular' question becomes central at the time, and Greek theatre appears as a sort of solution. Maurice Magre refers to Greek theatre in such terms:

Dans l'antiquité et au Moyen-Âge, le théâtre avait un caractère populaire et religieux. C'était une sorte de festival, une solennité à laquelle on se préparait longtemps avant au foyer, qui demeurait ensuite longtemps dans le souvenir. Toutes les classes aimaient les mêmes spectacles, qui étaient écrits pour les simples comme pour les esprits cultivés. Que nous sommes loin de ce temps ! Nous n'avons plus de représentations populaires <sup>14</sup>.

Here, Greek theatre is a way to theorize the beginning of 'popular theatre' which will develop afterwards, but it is also a way to bemoan the disappearance of a united nation.

Secondly, the parallel between theatre and religion is also very remarkable in the rhetoric used in the press, but it is interesting to notice that the idea of theatre as a

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Péladan, « Théâtre et oxygène », 1905, no newspaper title mentioned. (See BnF, département Arts du spectacle, Rf 81142).

<sup>13</sup> Throughout this article, we rely on the categories described by Michel Winock in his book on nationalism : he makes a difference between « opened nationalism » and « closed nationalism ». See Michel Winock, *Nationalisme, antisémitisme et fascisme en France*, Paris, Seuil, 1990.

<sup>14</sup> Maurice Magre, « L'union des trois arts », 1910, *op. cit.*

modern religion is what remains after the war, even though the reference to ancient Greece has almost disappeared. But before the war, most of the accounts we read are tinged with a form of mysticism, which reveals the part of fantasy lying in the reference to Greece. And first of all, it is illustrated by the dream of a large crowd united in an almost religious communion. The words of Alfred Mortier speak for themselves:

[...] Quiconque n'a pas assisté à certains de ces spectacles, quiconque n'a pas communiqué dans le silence ardent de dix mille spectateurs suspendus à la véhémence des passions éternelles qui conduisent l'humanité depuis son berceau, celui-là n'aura pas connu la puissance mystique de l'art, n'aura pas entrevu le lien qui unit la Poésie à la Religion comme aux temps primitifs, et n'aura jamais accédé à ces hauteurs magnifiques où l'émotion d'art rejoint la Prière<sup>15</sup>.

Those words, written by a journalist and playwright, describe the symbolic value attributed to the outdoor theatre of Orange: the large meeting permitted by the outdoor place is seen as the ideal venue for the nation to reunite itself and become a 'people'.

These two points (the desire for a popular theatre and the religious model) are the basis of a paradoxical aesthetic position regarding outdoor theatre in Orange: the idea was to build in Orange a resistance to a modernity seen as decadent but still to claim a 'renewal' of the dramatic form, based on a return to Greece. The same contradiction appears in the political rhetoric of Charles Maurras, leader of a strong right-wing nationalism and who wrote on outdoor theatre in Orange: he is known for having based his nationalism on an instrumentalisation of Greek Antiquity while presenting it as a way for the nation to rebuild itself; he sees in Orange an aesthetic metaphor of this process.

#### *After the war*

After the war, another nationalism (a 'republican' one, as the historian Michel Winock would say<sup>16</sup>) rises and dominates, directly and, in a way, 'naturally', and it seems that the reference to Antiquity is not needed as much as before.

The reading of the journalism concerning the antique theatre after the war is quite enlightening: since the war is a recent and real historical experience, there is no need to refer to ancient Greece to build a form of 'national epic'. Gabriel Boissy was a major advocate of the outdoor theatre in Orange, and in the foreword of his *Dramaturgy of Orange* (which was written during the war on the front line), he clarifies the transition between a mythical tragedy and a historical one:

Par delà le plaisir et les insouciances partout répandus, ce rappel à la nature tragique des êtres et des choses n'était pas sans soulever de fines railleries. Hélas! Il fallait une autre tragédie et d'autre sang que celui du Bouc dionysiaque pour purger les délires et les erreurs<sup>17</sup> !...

<sup>15</sup> Alfred Mortier, « Théâtres en plein air », *Comoedia*, 19 août 1922.

<sup>16</sup> Michel Winock, *op. cit.*

<sup>17</sup> Gabriel Boissy, *De Sophocle à Mistral*, Aix en Provence, Société de la revue Le Feu, 1920, introduction, p. XII. L'ouvrage rassemble plusieurs essais : *Introduction à la connaissance de la Méditerranée, la Dramaturgie d'Orange*, et *Recherches pour une esthétique française*.

The first world war is indeed understood as a break in the need (and possibility) to refer to ancient Greece. Boissy goes on in his foreword:

Aujourd'hui, – et depuis combien de mois !... la bataille a passé des jardins de l'intelligence dans les boues infernales de notre sol : Poésie et réalité, dirait, de son haut, le satanique Goethe. Les combats ont succédé aux disputes et notre fierté sera d'avoir participé aux uns, comme aux autres<sup>18</sup>.

Boissy opposes 'the gardens of intelligence' (supposedly outdoor theatre) to the 'hellish sludge', as well as poetry to reality. When he says that the 'battles' have succeeded the 'quarrels', he sums up, in a way, the evolution of the reference to ancient Greece: whereas, before the war, Greece was needed to unify the nation and to give it a 'national epic', after the war, history itself seems to play this role. As Gabriel Boissy reveals it, the 'tragedy' has become a real one and the aesthetic debates have turned into actual battles. By using the word 'fierté' (*pride*) for both, Gabriel Boissy tends to put them on the same level, or more precisely, to declare the latter a consequence of the former.

In the end, this change also has aesthetic consequences: after the war, there will be doubts about the theatrical choices of Orange. Lugué-Poe, for example, calls for a true modernity: the point is not to imitate ancient Greece any more, but to create a genuine French and European modernity. In 1922, he spoke quite radically about Orange:

La vérité est qu'il ne faut pas s'alarmer de ces spectacles donnés dans les ruines. C'est un cap à dépasser, une époque ; ils appellent cela spectacles d'art, mais personne ne s'y trompe ici et ne prend au sérieux des vessies pour des lanternes magiques<sup>19</sup>.

The chosen words are enlightening: there is, here, an acknowledgement of the 'mythical', fantasized part of these shows. But later, he also specifies:

Vienne ici le créateur, l'arrangeur, l'auteur, nous aurons la plus merveilleuse renaissance d'art théâtral que nous puissions souhaiter [...]<sup>20</sup>.

It seems that, after the war, the sense given to 'modernity' has evolved: it has become a need to establish a new way to write and perform theatre, not specifically continuing ancient Greece but precisely in accordance with the current history.

## CONCLUSION

At a time when the balance between 'republican nationalism' and the 'nationalism of the nationalists' (if we keep in mind the categories settled by Michel Winock) is being reconsidered, the words of Louis XIV on Orange are particularly meaningful: he said that Orange was « the most beautiful wall of his kingdom ». Saying this, he induces us to

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<sup>18</sup> Gabriel Boissy, *op. cit.*, p. XVI.

<sup>19</sup> Lugué-Poe, « Les théâtres de plein air de Provence », *La Semaine théâtrale*, 1922 (See BnF, département Arts du spectacle, Rf 81108-81149).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

understand the wars (ideological, historical, aesthetical) which have sprung up about this place. That is what we tried to do here, and a lot remains to be done concerning the devices of the shows (audiences, stage, actors, chosen texts...). In any case, we tried to describe a 'social discourse', some words that can not exactly be attributed to a specific person but that reveal the social and political tensions of a time. In this frame, we can finally say that the reference to ancient Greece has been paradoxical, sometimes manipulated, but studying these evolution helps to understand how myth and history can fight and mix up. Later, some other outdoor experiences, those of Jacques Prévert and his activist 'October group' for example, will borrow ideas from Greek theatre but for a completely different purpose, actually much more literally 'popular'.

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