

CALL FOR PAPERS

Theatre in Wartime. Actors, Authors, Audiences

27-28 May, 2019

Ecoles de Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan (CREC Saint-Cyr)

Université Rennes 2 (CELLAM, Tempora)

While many studies have been devoted to the role of theatre in the construction of war memories, as well as to the depiction of war on stage, the same attention has not been given to the role and the multiples manifestations of theatre during conflicts.

In times of war, inside the armies or in prisoners camps, behind the lines as in besieged cities or in occupied areas, the theatrical activity went on, finding new forms of expression and providing people a help to cope with extreme situations. This symposium will explore the many facets of theater in wartime, without chronological restrictions, in a resolutely interdisciplinary way. This call for papers is intended for scholars of all disciplines, whose research interests cross with drama and theatrical activities.

We will focus on the three categories of actors, authors, audiences. The few non-exhaustive reflections that follow will allow us to better understand their limits, the roles played by each of them and their possible interactions.

Actors

Papers may focus on all the “actors” of theater in wartime, in a broad sense. One may think first of professional actors, men or women, civilians or members of the military, real troops or artists gathered for the occasion to visit or follow the armies and stage shows. However, many actors in wartime may not be professional : they may be soldiers, officers, prisoners who organize and perform their own shows. We will focus on the link between the status of these actors and the plays they choose to perform. We will analyze, whenever possible, the way these performers act, their postures and gestures, the way they interact with the scenery, the sound, the music.

The performers are not the only “actors” of theatre in wartime : the civil and military authorities play a necessary role when they authorize, sometimes encourage, or even organize such events. Directors, musicians, costume-makers, scenographers, technicians are all “actors” of this theatrical activity which constitutes a means to escape - sometimes literally - from the pressure of war, a

feeling of emptiness, or simply boredom.

Authors

Writing a play about war while being involved in it can be risky. “the Greek theatre begins with a scandal, which is intimately linked to the war and the point of view we choose to analyze it “¹: Phrynichos was heavily condemned for the *Sack of Miletus*, the first play on which we have precise information, because his play had apparently undermined the morale of the Athenians. The author in wartime, whether writing about current events or echoing them, may have a powerful political function.

Staging the war makes it possible to express the experience of it differently. Professional authors as well as civil or military amateurs can be critical, express resentment or even caricaturize themselves, while diluting their voice and their responsibility in the poliphony of theatre. The contributors to the symposium will have an opportunity to focus on the different forms of engagement that theatre in wartime makes possible.

Wartime plays are often authored by classical, well-known and famous playwrights, but many others are the result of an individual or collective work aimed at a single performance for a restricted or chosen audience. These authors, who are living the hardship of war, may want to arrange a moment of peace and carelessness, by staging a light and joyful play.

What sort of plays are staged during wartime? Which classical pieces are chosen and why? Can we define a typology of authors who adapt to war? How do they adapt to it?

Audiences

Wartime stages are often unconventional: barns, gardens, or other makeshift solutions, sometimes near the front, are the places where actors play and audiences are entertained. What sort of plays are staged in these unconventional situations? How does the audiences react? If the purpose of these kind of shows is to strenghten the morale of the troops, devoured by anguish and boredom, is this purpose fulfilled, and how? Does the theatre meet the expectations and the needs of these particular audiences? The concept of “encounter” can be a fertile one: the ephemeral frame of the theatrical performance allows crossings, contacts or even clashes. A classical play performed near the front, during the First World War; troops sitting in a barn, assisting at a Parisian show: constantly causing shiftings and movements, war creates these peculiar situations, in most cases completely new for both the performers and the audiences. Civil populations, armies, but also companies and actors are displaced during wartime. Therefore, theatrical practices are upset and

1 François Lecercle, « Dans la douleur de l'autre (Eschyle et Phrynichos) », in M. Finck, T. Victoroff, E. Zanin, P. Dethurens, G. Ducrey, Y.-M. Ergal, P. Werly (éd.), *Littérature et expériences croisées de la guerre, apports comparatistes. Actes du XXXIX^e Congrès de la SFLGC*, URL : <http://sflgc.org/acte/francois-lecercle-dans-la-douleur-de-lautre-eschyle-et-phrynichos/>

people who would never have met in peacetime can sit side by side in the audience. Even when the show takes place in a regular theatre, the place and the audience may have been transformed by war. And if the purpose of theatre in wartime is mostly to entertain, to make people look the other way, thus providing an escape from the horrors of war, the show also brings together oddly composed audiences, professional actors and absolute beginners, theatre directors and army officers, to share the same attention and possibly the same feelings. While offering escape, theatre is also building a group, in which actors, authors and audiences are involved.

Proposals (up to 500 words) and a small biography should be sent to the organisation committee (email addresses below) by **15 november 2018**.

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Acceptance and a provisional schedule will be notified in **January 2019**.

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