

TABLES RONDES

Malérargues, *Centre Roy Hart*

Proposées par Enrique Pardo dans le cadre du stage/symposium *Panthéâtre* 2003

Mercredi 28 mai 2003: Le modèle du chaman dans le théâtre contemporain.

Sur <http://www.pantheatre.com/6-reading-list-shaman-gb.pdf>

Dimanche 1er juin 2003 : La Voix, Le Chant et le Protestantisme.

La Voix, Le Chant et le Protestantisme

Protestantism, The Voice and Singing

AGENDA

What happened in les Cévennes, probably even in Malérargues itself, during the Protestant cults of the late 17th and early 18th century, during the Camisards religious wars, had a crucial impact on the perception, use and status of the voice and singing in Protestant Europe, in the United States, and, later through large parts of the world due to the protestant missionary zeal.

What actually happened in les Cévennes? Louis the XIVth revoked the Edit de Nantes in 1685 (“revoked”: took his voice / his word back): Protestants had to convert to Catholicism. Most converted, many left the country and went to the “Refuge” the Protestant countries (mainly Geneva, Amsterdam and London), many were massacred. The Camisards went into hiding and guerrilla resistance in les Cévennes. Louis the XIVth sent his *élite* army to persecute them (Les Dragons). Imagine the fervor, the intensity, and the sense of danger in those assemblies in Anduze, Lasalle and Saint Jean du Gard!

What happened is that some of the younger members in those assemblies, mainly young women, went into forms of trance, vocal-singing trance, with quite extraordinary body manifestations. It usually started like all trance phenomena with inarticulate pre-verbal sounds, screams, convulsions, quivering, shakings, in their case, interpreted as the catharsis of sin and guilt. As this “theological therapy” proceeded, some lapsed into miraculous speech, forms of glossolalia or recitations of the Bible (by girls who were not supposed to know such extracts by heart... let alone babies reciting the Bible in French – the Camisards spoke almost exclusively Langue d’Oc).

This “performance” model, actually called “Sacred Theatre” by the Protestants of the time, is the model that prevailed in Protestantism: it is a direct form of communication with God (the inspired “advent” of the “Pentecostal” spirit.) It is based on the Reform’s rejection of the Catholic iconic and liturgical mediation (the instituted theatre of the mass.) Its main medium was the voice, and singing became the “royal road to God”, superior and sublime. Like in all iconoclastic movements, image was banned, the imagination replaced by more abstract forms of spirituality – in this case singing. What is interesting too, (and today’s Protestants are working earnestly on it), is that the more physical, bodily first cathartic manifestations (the body trances) were to a great degree hidden and repressed, and only remained the proper, upwards, pure, clear-sounding, sublime singing (even if on the edge of ecstasy...)

When the *Roy Hart Theatre* first moved from London to Malérargues, there were plenty of vague references to “the return of the voice and singing” to Les Cévennes. I recently discovered

that in the very first years of the XVIIIth century the reverse had happened: the Camisards started “performing” in London, caused quite a stir, and were called “The French prophets”! Is not the coincidence worth another discussion? Especially since for a Catholic / Pagan / Mediterranean (if I may define myself like that) the *Roy Hart Theatre’s* very ethos (and predominant ethnicity) is actually protestant (of the Anglo-Saxon kind). Certainly, Roy Hart, and Alfred Wolfsohn were Jews, and the Jewish cantor model was very important in their philosophy, especially in the way they spoke and dealt with the shadow in the work, but a certain Britishness was of the essence too.

The Camisards influence “spread to Britain in the early years of the eighteenth century and, via Annie Lee’s Shakers, to America.” In North America, Protestantism met the African slaves’ culture and produced what came to be called “Negro Spirituals”, and all that that syncretism has given back to the world of music, voice and singing. African-Americans actually reversed the trend back to the body, and in a sense rebelled against the spiritualism of Protestants by later using the word “soul”, a word that had all but disappeared in its deeper cultural meaning from most Christian movements (including Catholic.) What came to rule was “The Spirit” as the sublime master of “The Body”. Soul, also known as “Psyche”, and for some as “Imagination”, was the excluded third. In mythology, Soul, Psyche, is the lover of Eros: she seeks and mediates both Body and Spirit. She came back with a bang through the voice of James Brown, the “sexual beast” of “soul”.

One last debate point. Did Les Camisards also give us the model of “born-again” therapies like “rebirthing” – which are new forms of “sacred theatres”? A last quote: “The enactment here is of a travail, an almost conscious borrowing of the pseudo-parturition of hysteria.” A form of birthing, or re-birthing of the word?

This discussion will be a contribution towards a *Myth and Theatre Festival* on “**Myths of the Voice**” which Pantheatre hopes to organize in 2005.

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