**A Meridional manifestation: Déodat de Séverac's and Emile Sicard's *Héliogabale* as produced at Béziers**

On August 21st 1910 the spectacular 3 act tragedie-lyrique, *Héliogabale* was performed for the first time in the arena at Béziers South of France in front of crowds numbering 15,000. This work – presented as an unequal collaboration between the lesser-known southern French poet and journalist Emile Sicard and a rising star of the Parisian and hence national musical scene, Déodat de Séverac, – produced a flurry of critical opinion. The press – local and national – noted the enthusiastic popular approbation, extolled the beauty of Séverac's music and praised Sicard for his evocative, yet sometimes overly Symbolist verses. Robert Oudot claimed in the Parisian journal *Comoedia* it as a key date for the renewal of our tragedie musicale**.'** However, *Héliogabale* troubled some critics and among them notable Parisians. On the basis of Séverac's status *Héliogabale* was of undeniable national importance, but it comprised elements that meant it could not be wholly integrated into the national tradition.

The critical discussion surrounding the Béziers representation reveals issues important for an understanding of French artistic culture in the Third Republic. It exposes the prevailing ambiguity as to what actually constituted a national work, which in turn brings to the forefront the conflict between different approaches to the creation of an image of the nation: especially during a time of increasing international tension. For, *Héliogabale* reveals the distinctive approach offered by the Regionalists: and in particular a means of manifesting the outspoken regionalist beliefs of the composer.

Whilst the benefits of centralisation had been questioned since the 1789 Revolution, it was the 1870 Franco-Prussian defeat and the Commune of 1871 that reinforced the need for a system which guaranteed social stability. For some, centralisation was not simply the most effective approach to maintaining social order, but was also the best way of achieving national unity: it was considered a powerful means of assuring French identity both within and without the borders. However, an extremely vocal and politically important group maintained that such centralisation took no account of the

cultural diversity within France and was thus dangerous and debilitating for national cohesion. They protested against the current regime with the slogan, ‘unity is not uniformity’ and proclaimed that the significant dangers of centralisation could be reduced by engaging in policies that stressed regional importance. The Regionalists, as they came to call themselves in the beginning of the twentieth century developed a political system aimed at rejuvenating a sense of national identity and patriotism by ensuring that the individual loved his ‘pays natal’. They declared that a strong national identity could only be developed through the use of sources internal to the nation (for example folk traditions, regional languages and customs). These were re-written and presented as pure and free from negative foreign influence. Each patriotic Frenchman was called upon to reaffirm his links with the *sol natal* of his *petite patrie* and to inculcate and disseminate its traditions. Regional rootedness would generate a sense of national unity free from the potential dangers associated with centralisation.

At the heart of the Regionalist manifestos were the ideas of the Provençal poet and author of *Mireio*, Frédéric Mistral, for whom the regional identity itself took on a form of national identity through the South’s greater perceived affinity to Mediterranean and other Latin nations. It was in 1854 that Mistral established his literary-political group called the Félibrige aimed at ‘preserving Languedocien language, character, freedom of spirit and national honour’. The group’s labours produced both considerable literary and political outcomes and during its heyday it became almost impossible for any young southern writer or artist to escape entirely from its influence.

Indeed, by the 1890s several Félibrigians – by then resident in Paris – had drawn on Mistral’s system and transformed it for new nationalist ends. Chief among them were Charles Maurras, who wrote a well-publicised and influential polemic entitled *L’Idée de la decentralisation*(1898), and Jean Charles-Brun who established the Fédération Régionaliste Française in 1900. Regionalism differed from the Centralist method of nation-building in stressing the role of the petite-patrie in fostering the individual’s sense of self as national. Artists and intellectuals were given the role of educators of the masses (to help bring about rootedness) and were also responsible for writing works that could compete with rival traditions such as that of the Germans.

Emile Sicard, a Félibrigian and committed Regionalist exemplified this spirit both through his considerable theatrical and poetic output celebrating the south of France and its reputedly Greco-Latin heritage and also through his important bi-monthly journal of 'régionalisme méditerranéen' *Le Feu* - which was established in 1906.

Regionalism, as a means of re-creating tradition and identity, also made a profound impact on the composers Vincent d'Indy and Charles Bordes (both were Félibrigians and members of the Féderation Régionaliste Française). In contrast with the State-sponsored Paris Conservatiore they based their teaching institution – the Schola Cantorum – on regionalist principles, establishing a network of independent regional Scholae across France. D'Indy and Bordes also promoted the collection, publication and performance of regional idioms: activities that were presented as patriotic acts aimed at the revival of music and culture in the regions. This mission was largely carried out by their pupils, who were encouraged to use the collected folk sources when composing music. The Schola gained the reputation for attracting composers with regionalist sympathies. Among the most outspoken was Déodat de Séverac whose thesis ' La Centralisation et les petites chapelles musicales' outlined his view of the destructive impact of a centralised musical culture and the reforms necessary to permit the creation of a healthy and vibrant musical tradition. This manifesto and his subsequent permanent return to the Languedoc in June 1907, marked a decisive point for indicating commitment to his regionalist philosophy. On leaving Paris with his thesis in the press he gave a strong justification for his absence. Séverac was not opting out of the French musical crisis over how to write national music, he was demonstrating actively what he believed to be the only solution.

What distinguished regionalist authors and composers and determined a work's status as regionalist was the doctrinally directed use of local sources. As these were perceived as pure, timeless and communal creations that embodied the soul of a specific region, they could only be used by someone who had a strong attachment to and understanding of that locality. The term that was frequently applied to the state of local situatedness was *enracinement*: the state of deep entrenchment or to be rooted in the land of

one's ancestors. Thus a regionalist had to manifest an awareness of his roots by only using subject matter specific to his region as the basis for works.

## The work: significance – genesis - production

Séverac's justification of *Héliogabale* reveals both the significance he ascribed to his southern identity, and by its publication in the Parisian journal *Excelsior*, the necessity for the appeasement of the French musical establishment in Paris for its composition. He writes:

> The reason I took so much please in writing *Héliogabale* is because I'm Meridional, very Meridional. I adore open-air performance. Northern artists have little understanding of these shows. It's all down to latitude. They cannot count on the sun. The Greeks and the Romans on the other hand, did not know anything else.

In highlighting the 'spectacle de plein air' and the direct inheritance of the Greco-Latin tradition, Séverac isolated and then linked two of the most significant factors through which his meridionalism was asserted. The 'spectacle de plein air' reputedly had its roots in ancient Greek tragedy and Roman spectacles, and both Greek and Roman cultures were represented physically in the Midi. Furthermore, a simple yet essential factor for the sustained success of the spectacle in the South was, as Séverac put it, the 'affaire de latitude ' – the sun. This combination of good climate, inherited tradition and already-existent theatres, coupled with the support of regionalist organisations for the genre's educational aim, made the Midi an especially fertile area for the establishment of theatres like that of Béziers. In addition, these elements helped confirm the southern belief that the 'spectacle de plein air' was a manifestation of Meridional culture and was, therefore, owned by them.

Taken on a literal level, 'spectacle de plein air' simply referred to open-air theatre. However, it was much more than a drama put on outside. As a genre, it presented an approach that was Wagnerian in its emphasis on the

combination of music, drama, dance and art in a large-scale form: in its southern manifestation in ancient edifices it was both vast and impressive. Moreover, as music it celebrated a particular place through the use of local sources and by endeavouring to take advantage of acoustic characteristics specific to being outside. Outside performance was of particular interest for contemporary composers (among them Claude Debussy) as music developed for the out-of-doors offered the possibility of escaping some of the aspects of Parisian musical overindulgence. What was perhaps of greater significance, especially for southern regionalists, was the general appeal of and belief in the genre as a way of combining musical novelty and grandeur with a social strategy. As such, the 'spectacle de plein air' played a significant socialising role in terms of both the national drive for decentralisation and also in its potential as a vehicle through which the masses could be educated by presenting them with a high quality art form. The development of 'spectacle de plein air' was an ambitious project that aimed to generate works of national consequence (high art) and that functioned as a means of educating all French nationals.

Such ventures were by no means new. A national movement for a popular quality genre had been influential since the late 1880s. Not only had there been efforts to reopen existing theatres, but also a number of new open-air theatres had been founded. For southerners, the movement that encouraged such spectacles was particularly significant as it built on what they considered to be a pre-existent tradition that was reputedly of Roman origin. The performances were not one-off events, but were part of what was frequently a week-long festival that climaxed in the playing out of a tragedy.

Of the Meridional open-air theatres, the arena of Béziers was set apart from the others as a place of both national and regional importance. It was the millionaire viticulturer and amateur musician Fernand Castelbon de Beauxhostes who had the inspiration to develop a French Meridional 'spectacle de plein air' at Béziers and brought the town a national reputation as one of France's leading cultural centres.

Between 1898 and the beginning of the First World War, annual musical celebrations took place as part of a week-long August festival. Where Castelbon's conception of open-air spectacle expanded on that of other

impresarios, was in his commissioning of large-scale works by leading French composers. His most notable and long-term collaborations were with Camille Saint-Saens (*Déjanire*: libretto by Louis Gallet, and *Parysatis*: libretto by Jane Dieulafoy) and Gabriel Fauré (*Prométhée*: libretto by Fernand Hérold and Jean Lorrain). All the works written specifically for Béziers were characterised by colossal musical forces, comprising parts for local military bands and choirs, plus ballet corps and leading soloists from professional opera houses and theatres. Castelbon's open-air theatre was a popular genre that exemplified the regionalist socialising ideal in its involvement of the masses in the production itself and as the audience. His formula was hailed as a national success and drew full-capacity crowds that included important critics and participants from Paris. Some even went so far as to claim Béziers' theatre as the 'French Bayreuth'. Whilst this turned out to be rather premature, it did indicate both a French desire to possess a rival dramatic centre to that of Wagner (a centre as close to the Mediterranean and as far from Bayreuth as possible), and also the national prominence, albeit brief, that Béziers attained.

The appeal of such a genre for Séverac was vast: especially as it had been sanctioned by Saint-Saens, and in particular for Severac, by Fauré. It was in fact Fauré who recommended Séverac as a worthy composer for the Béziers production. And a letter from Séverac to Castelbon in September 1909 (15 Sept 1909) confirmed Séverac's interest and meridionalist intentions. He writes:

> I know that the Master [G Fauré] has told you of my strong desire to compose a 'spectacle de plein air' and especially for a magnificent theatre like yours. It is a dream I've had for a long time as I have been one of your most loyal supporters. In any case, for me – Meridional, uncompromising – it would be a great delight to compose the music of an utterly Meridional piece and then to see it performed in the admirable atmosphere of Béziers.

Through 'spectacle de plein air' Séverac could fulfil both aesthetic and regionalist beliefs. He could write music that did not pander to the Parisian mania for following trends and that also educated the populace in matters of good taste. Furthermore, by raising local and national awareness of southern

culture, Séverac believed that he was, like Mistral, writing works that added to the southern tradition and that simultaneously conformed to the national goal of creating a tradition free from external influence. It was therefore perhaps unsurprising that the 'spectacle de plein air' dominated Séverac's theatrical output. Whilst the loss of unpublished manuscripts makes it difficult to gauge the development of such works, the Meridional significance of the spectacle for Séverac is indicated through his choice of author and subject, and by comments in private correspondence. All of the texts chosen are written by Meridionals with Félibrigian affiliations, and the subject matter reflects dominant regionalist concerns (such as the**,** preservation and promotion of folk tales, more politically, the problem of urbanisation which set the evils of the city or town against the purity of the countryside and for southerners the association of Meridional culture with its supposed noble Greco-Roman antecedents). In addition, many texts are written in the local language (Occitan or Catalan) and are set with extreme care by Séverac. The ultimate choice of language – French or local – is significant in that it indicates the potential scope of the performance. Just as Mistral provides a French text for *Miréio's* acceptance into Parisian society, so Séverac sets Félibrigian texts in French for national consumption. No nationally intended works, even those performed at such regional centres as Béziers, were performed in the langue d'oc. Of these works for open-air performance, *Héliogabale* was by far the most impressive, both through its sheer scale and association with Béziers.

The *Album Officiel* printed for the first performance of *Héliogabale* highlighted both the genre – spectacle de plein air – and the subject – Roman legend – as Meridional elements that also bore out the regionalists' role of educating the masses in aspects of their cultural heritage. The *Album* asserted that:

> 'literary artists, journalists and dilettantes have found that this formula increases the impact of dramatic works tenfold. Furthermore, it plays to a certain taste for visual splendour enjoyed by our meridional population. Such performances – where thousands of spectators are assembled – can not be bettered for educating the masses in the tales of great heroes and the noble teachings of history and legend.'

The spectacular element of the Béziers performance of *Héliogabale* was readily apparent. The production boasted over five hundred performers, including vast choirs and orchestra, dancers from the Opéra-comique and La Scala Milan, actors from the Odéon and singers from the Opéra. Notable characters were Monsieur de Max in the title role and Madeleine Roch of the Comédie Française as his mother Soemias. Added to this, the mis-en-scène by Eugene Ronsin – the acclaimed designer of the sets for both Debussy's *Pélleas et Mélisande* and a new production of Charles Gounod's *Faust* - presented classical Rome, complete with Panthéon and colonnades, rising up out of the Béziers arena. The subject, the demise of Héliogabale and dawning of a new era, was claimed by its author Emile Sicard, to be based on his own 'faithful interpretation' of such historical sources as Lampride and Duruy.

The action of *Héliogabale* takes place in Rome in 222 of the Christian Era. Bassien Elagabal, or Héliogabale, of Syrian origin, is high priest of the phallic cult of the sun and, through his mother's machinations, is the emperor of Rome. Héliogabale embodies and accentuates the potential decadence and depravity of the Empire. Politically he rocks Rome by sacking the entire senate and replacing them with women, dancers and magicians. In a controversial attempt at deific unification, he elevates the sun god, incarnate in himself, to a position above all other Roman gods. Héliogabale also indulges in rape, incest, mass murder, cannibalism and persecution of Christians. Against this background the drama tells of Héliogabale's demise through the collaboration of members of his household and the newly emerging Christian cult. In Séverac's and Sicard's version he dies in ecstasy whilst intoning an hymn to the sun – in the actual performance as the sun sets dramatically over the arena.

Given the constraints of writing for an open-air production of this scale, the division of material into acts is simple and clearly defined. Each act corresponds with one of three main themes – the Occident, Christianity and the Orient.

Act One focuses on Rome and the decadent acts of Héliogabale. A Prologue by a minor local Félibrigian Charles Guéret entitled 'Les Deux Triomphes' and

set as an impressive choral number by Séverac outlines the key themes of the work. This leads directly into the opening scene in which Héliogabale's courtesans and favourites acclaim the visceral joys of their decadent lives but hint darkly, at the end of the scene, of fears for the future. They exit and Soemias, mother of Héliogabale, and her sister Julia Mammoea the mother of Cesar Alexanius, enter. In a touching scene Soemias opens her heart to her sister about her belief that Julia, along with the Christians is plotting Héliogabale's downfall and desires to replace him with Alexianus. Julia lies and reassures her that she has no such aspirations for her son. As they embrace, Héliogabale makes his first entrance. Suffering from ennui and exhaustion, he laments that he's slept so badly that he's had his naked body flagellated by a torrent of rubies and then slain one of his favourites whose heart he will eat the next day. Brusquely changing his tone he rounds on Julia and demands whether she knows who is betraying him. He capriciously declares that he has a lavish means of eliminating the traitors before reverting to his more voluptuous and hallucinatory declamations. As his disquiet subsides Soemias leaves to try to find out more about the plot and Claudien – soldier and Héliogabale's leading favourite – enters.

Héliogabale rebukes Claudien for his absence but Claudien has 'discovered the true virtues and heights' through his love for a pure young Christian called Coelia. Héliogabale leaves and Claudien expresses his concern that unless he renounces all that Héliogable stands for and becomes a Christian Coelia will refuse him. He wants to leave the perils of the city for the safety and purity of exile. Julia promises Claudien a good position in the next regime as well as Coelia if he helps her to make her son Emperor. Claudien accepts and Héliogabale returns followed by a cortege of dancers, favourites and a Christian called Rusca who is trying to secure the return of his two daughters whom Héliogabale has taken for his own pleasure. Héliogabale refuses and graphically describes the fate that awaits them: they are to lie bound and naked on a bed in the arena awaiting the pleasure of the spouses he has chosen for them…two lions. Here, Marcius Decavata, critic of the *Éclair de Toulouse*, noted the 'frisson d'horreur' that ran through the audience (28.10.10). Rusca is thrown out and Héliogabale entices his magicians, whom he believes to be the traitors, to a feast. The First Act ends

with the abrupt transformation of joyous strains of bachic choirs (extolling virtues of wine!) to pitiful laments as the magicians are gradually smothered by an extravagant but deadly torrent of blood-red rose petals.

With its focus on Christian austerity Act 2 contrasts starkly with the first. Set in the catacombs that significantly form the foundations of the temples and palaces, this world is the domain of the proletariat. Bishop Calixtus is present to convert Claudien who subsequently becomes formally engaged to Coelia. The *Album Officiel* presents this act as a faithful reconstruction of early Christian rites and Séverac matches the biblical readings, sermon and baptismal procession with recitative chants and four-part choral fugues based on the Christian musical theme, with the addition of a medieval liturgical trope: hardly a reconstruction of third-century music. After the service is over and the people exit, Julia arrives to remind Claudien of the promise he's made. He hesitates as now he is certain of having Coelia he wishes to 'leave this city of madness and excess' but Rusca overhears and promises vengeance on Héliogabale. Calixtus has a premonition that the end of 'des temps impurs' is coming, and the Act is brought to a close by a choir of Christians who sing of the promised new beginning.

The Final Act is set on a terrace of Héliogabale's palace overlooking the Tiber river and opens with a festive cortege and lasciviously danced baccanale. Soemias tries to rouse Héliogabale against the forthcoming revolt but he is exhausted from pleasure and apparently indifferent. The futility of a final confrontation between Julia and Soemias is underscored by the ominous off-stage soldiers' cries for Héliogabale's death. This leads to a lengthy final scene comprising a mimed Masquerade, a procession for the cult of the Sun and a ballet entitled 'the Ressurection of Adonis' in which Héliogabale dances the role of Adonis. Rusca and the soldiers break into the palace and as Héliogable deliriously cries that he is flying towards the sun and towards love, they lift him up to throw him to his death in the Tiber. The Christians enter at the back of the stage, as if on the Apian Way, and dressed in white with their palms in the air bring the work to a close with a triumphantly sung Alleluia hailing the new era free from debilitating Oriental influence.

Sicard's text reveals his abundant manipulation of related thematic parallels to contrast Oriental decadence with Christian purity in the battle for the Occident and a cleansed Rome. For example, physical aspects like blood, light, sun, wine, water and ideals like unity, serve to fuse and yet contrast Héliogabale with Christ. Héliogabale's fetishistic perception of blood is singularly different from that of the Christians yet it forms a useful pivot through which the drama can be propelled**.** There are similarly obvious parallels that can be drawn between Héliogabale and Christ: both die young, retaining an element of beauty, are killed by their own subjects or followers and later experience some form of resurrection. The chief point of difference lies in Héliogabale's supposed vulgarity and cruelty. Moreover, he is a 'foreign influence and not truly Roman: thus he deserves to die.

At the centre of *Héliogabale* lies the struggle between cultures: that of Rome – the great Latin culture, but off-balance owing to the exotic and external influence of Héliogabale – and Christianity, representing the restoration of equilibrium and a new age through the adherence to ideals. A proletarian aspect, consistent with the political concerns of the regionalists, is apparent in this thematic denouement. The Christians in *Héliogabale* are not glorious heroes (Rusca is a simple 'marchand des fruits') but are the ordinary masses: it is they who begin to take part in changing destiny. As the *Album Officiel* attests: '**here the beliefs of the weak and oppressed begin to influence the future of the Roman world.'** As such the thematic discourse of *Héliogabale* could be read as a mapping of the problems that regionalists, and certainly meridionals like Séverac, felt concerned France. Like the Rome of *Héliogabale*, France had lost integrity owing to dangerous external influences (French art was suffering invasions from both Germany and what Séverac described as the fake). The new age – a solid identity and strong tradition – was only possible if guiding principles natural to the culture were followed (this meant the return to Latin values and the associated Classical models). To what extent either Sicard or Séverac actively considered such a reading is uncertain**.** There are considerable literary associations of Héliogabale with the negative characteristics of the town and the Christians with the restorative powers of the countryside. Moreover, it is clear from his

writings that Séverac did see decadence as an intrinsic part of 'foreign influence' and that the possession of a belief, which was powerful through its emphasis on collectivity, was a means of creating a renaissance. In a letter to his close friend the artist and musician Carlos de Castéra he remarked:

> There are some beautiful things to do in Héliogabale! In sum it is the freefall of paganism into oriental decadence followed by the sunrise of Christianity!

Although Séverac was highly aware of the musical possibilities offered by the three main literary themes, he selected only those parts of the work that lent themselves to exploitation by the huge musical forces. The roles of Héliogabale, his mother, aunt Julia, chief guard, Claudien and his Christian love interest, Coelia remained the preserve of the actors, but the voice of the people – be they courtesans or Christians – was evoked by choirs and soloists from the Parisian Schola Cantorum and the Opéra. In the first act Séverac represented decadent Rome by superimposing bold fanfares with choirs on 'gammes orientales'. In stark contrast the Christian rites of the second act were based on carefully researched 'gregorian cantilènes' and the third made use of a variety of modes and slippery descending chromaticisms voluptuously orchestrated to create an image of the orient. The music for *Héliogabale* worked primarily through the opposition of diatonicism with chromaticism and reflected stock devices common to much music in Third Republic France. No doubt the simplicity of Séverac's writing was also due to his awareness of the constraints of writing effective music for the out-of-doors and in particular for a theatre of the scale of that of Béziers.

Of the critics, Raoul Davray writing for the *Courrier musical* discussed the work and particularly its music in the greatest detail.[1] Remarking on its excellence he associated movements of *Héliogabale* with the influence of then notable and mainstream French composers. Thus, to his ears Séverac's 'style décoratif' recalled Saint-Saëns in *Déjanire*, the melodic writing was

[1]Davray, '*Héliogabale*', pp. 596-97.

similar to Fauré's *Prométhée*, and the use of 'thèmes orientaux' were similar to *Thamara* by Bourgault-Ducoudray.[2] Only the dances of the third act -- the Masquerades -- were allied with Séverac's own compositional style: these were compared with the 'danses rustiques du *Cœur du moulin*' and comprised 'raffinements debussystes' and 'couleurs impressionistes'. In many respects, Davray's discussion was more revealing for its preoccupation with the state of the musical culture in Paris. He uses Séverac's musical ability to exonerate the Schola Cantorum from claims that it stifled talent through its obsession with tradition and 'scientific procedures', whilst at the same time praising most the non-Schola elements. Nonetheless, his comparisons do establish Séverac as part of the national tradition as determined by Paris. For him only one musical element warrants particular mention through its unusual nature. Séverac's own comments in a letter to René de Castéra support his conventional conception of the music and hint at the element that had surprised Davray and that most underscored Meridional difference:

> I conceived this music as a series of decorative panels, frescos of grand brush-strokes, creating clear contrasts. I am very satisfied with my *choirs* -- I think they will produce a good sound -- we shall see! As for the orchestration, I consider the huge mass of sound available to me to be like a great organ, primarily made up of the *oppositions between keyboards*. […] In the dances I shall try out a sound effect that Bordes was dreaming of for the open air... we shall see what will come of it. Should I receive a slap that will be tough luck for me. [3]

The 'sound effect' of which Séverac spoke took place in the danced processional 'cortèges' of Act Three and represented an ebullient aspect of Meridional culture. Gabriel Boissy, one of Séverac's collaborators on

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[2]Davray, '*Héliogabale*', pp. 596-97.

[3]Déodat de Séverac to René de Castéra (Castelnaudray, 22 April 1910); Private Collection: SS.

*Héliogabale* and the critic for *Le Théâtre*, developed the 'cortèges' as a 'faithful' reproduction of ancient Roman festivities.[4] Consistent with the educational aims of the production, Boissy linked ancient times to the modern through recourse to Masquerades; the carnivals or 'végliones' of nineteenth-century southern France.[5] Thus, in the same way that the 'spectacle de plein air' was itself of Greco-Roman origin, so too were the carnivals that formed part of the week-long celebrations of which the spectacle was the high point. The parallelism created -- the current spectators doing as their forebears -- fostered an imagined tradition with a sense of circular eternity.[6]

This circularity was emphasised further by dramatic content. Traditionally, the Masquerade consisted of a group of grotesquely masked characters, each one caricaturing a town functionary or a social type. In that of *Héliogabale*, Boissy endeavoured to recreate the myth of Bellerophon and Pegasus, in which Bellerophon attempted entry into heaven on the back of Pegasus, only to be thwarted by the irritated action of Zeus. Consistent with the role of Masquerades, the failure of Bellerophon satirised the plot of *Héliogabale*. Musically this section was based on three recurring themes all with a folk-like character.[7] Séverac rarely cited folk-song directly in his works as was the case here. Rather, he assimilated the sources and was able to create his own 'authentically' southern themes because of his 'enracinement'.

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[4]According to the *Album Officiel*, p. 14, the 'cortèges' preceded or 'accompagnaient les empereurs romains, lorsque les goûts fasteux venus d'Orient, eurent remplacé, la simplicité des premiers temps romains'.

[5]*Album Officiel*, p. 14; Private Collection: SS.

[6]See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York, rev. 1991). This device -- creating parallels with past traditions or events -- was common to all three works examined in this study: remembering the past and finding links with it was an important part of the regionalist model.

[7]All three themes are modal, with a circular melody in 6/8 over an accompaniment that simply marks the time. No alternation, save timbre, is made on any repetition.

If the musical material hinted at the Meridional, the use of the Catalan cobla sealed the signification.[8]

Writing in an article on Catalan music, Séverac remarked that:

> The 'prima' and 'tenor' possess an astonishing combination of qualities that were, until now, unknown. No other open-air instrument can match them in expressing the joy and sorrow, the passion and calm of the countryside. In a word, these instruments translate into music the soul of this land that you love as much as I do, but know even more intimately. [9]

The use of such instruments reflected the idea that -- as with folk-song -- the 'soul' of the region could be caught up in popular sources: the cobla too was an emanation of the 'petite-patrie'. In the Masquerade, renditions of the themes were played first by the orchestra and then by the cobla. Not only was this the first time that such instruments were used as part of a high art production, but they also gave a very distinctive reference to locality. The unusual effect created by them was commented on by several Parisian critics, Pierre Lalo of *Le Temps* declared that:

> In *Héliogabale*, they alternated with the ordinary woodwind instruments of the orchestra, each enunciating in turn the same phrases and fragments of phrases. Each time it was the turn of the Catalans to play, the rhythm would take on a cleanness, an accent, a biting and superb sharpness. [...] Is the sense of rhythm a primitive musical virtue that has degenerated among the civilised? [10]

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[8]The Catalan cobla is an ensemble of wind and brass instruments; some common and others of a regional origin (specifically, two types of oboe). See Joseph Canteloube, 'La Musique populaire, les coblas et les instruments Catalans', *Le Courrier musical* (1 November 1929), pp. 581-82.

[9]Déodat de Séverac, 'Monsieur Déodat de Séverac et la musique Catalane', *Revue Catalane,* Perpignan (15 May 1912), in Guillot, *Écrits,* p. 96.

[10]Pierre Lalo, 'Critique musicale', *Feuilleton du Temps* (10 September 1910), p. 1.

The association of 'primitive' and 'oddity' (a word used by the critic of the *Courrier musical*) with what was considered a 'French' source, revealed the problem of incorporating regional elements into the mainstream idea of what was French.[11] Whilst the cobla was national through its attachment to the earth, it was 'alien' -- especially for Parisians. Notably, Séverac did not help reduce the 'oddness' of these instruments -- he used them to create an effect, and because of their attachment to popular culture in the Masquerade they were reinforced as regional and local. Whilst his use was a reflection of the quest for the 'authenticity' that was so essential for the regionalist programme -- for if 'false', art could not be educative -- such truthfulness emphasised his most obvious reference to southern culture as 'musique paysan'. To Parisian minds these instruments seemed -- much like Héliogabale and the Meridional -- to represent the lack of moderation and taste that were felt to be the essential, French characteristics.

For a prominent artistic sector the production of *Héliogabale* caused concern because it did not affirm what Paris wanted to see as national music. The critic E.D.'s five page article for the *Revue musicale* sheds some light on the reasons for the partial rejection of *Héliogabale* from the French musical tradition. Having both extolled Séverac as a composer of considerable talent, and praised his music for *Héliogabale*, E.D. criticises the production for the disunity and fragmentariness caused by the genre. Séverac is condemned for failing to write *Héliogabale* as an opera -- a truly French idiom and a task for which he possesses the skills.[12] By isolating the genre as a major problem E.D. poses a fundamental question about the work's status as a national work and as a piece of high art: Séverac wrote *Héliogabale* as 'spectacle de plein

[11]Reviews of the concert version of *Héliogabale* in the Salle Gaveau (November and December 1910, February and March 1911) presented the sound of the cobla as an oddity. See Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal: Rondel 4398 (154 pages) for a range of articles relating to the Salle Gaveau performance.
[12]E.D., '*Héliogabale* aux arènes de Béziers', p. 398.

air' because of its traditional association with the Midi, and because of this link, E.D. finds Séverac's taste or 'goût français' wanting.

E.D.'s following remarks reveal further elements of the problem:

> [In such a grandiose atmosphere as the amphitheatre of Béziers -- a place so suited to the creation of a *national* lyric theatre through its revival of the great solemnities of antiquity -- why put so much effort, money, science, art and other skills to the service of a subject like ... Héliogabale? In Paris, a work about this pathetic emperor -- this 'poor young man' to cite Renan's description of Nero -- could succeed as a curiosity appealing to a public that is fond of variety shows. But does it merit the honour of being staged in a theatre, like the Dionysian at Athens, that affects the periodicity, brilliance and character of an annual festival? I would prefer us to treat national subjects at Béziers. These should be capable of inspiring noble sentiments and encouraging healthy enthusiasm. The resources are not lacking. We have, we French, a wonderful history of unparalleled richness, in a land that has seen a feudal and Christian Middle ages, a series of magnificent Kings and superb Knights, Joan of Arc, the Revolution, the epic Imperial epoch, in a word, the most beautiful epic and lyric material imaginable, I regret that energy is channelled into magnifying a... Héliogabale.] [13]

Notably missing the message of the work -- the renaissance of Rome through Christianity -- E.D. instead focuses on the character Héliogabale as unfit subject matter for the prominence of national theatre. In a way this could indicate a certain sadness at the organisers' desire to present the inadequacy of an Imperial ruler rather than the caring duty of the Republic. Béziers' lofty status as national theatre is affirmed by his declaration that it has an affinity with the bastion of Ancient Greek theatre: an instance of 'translatio studii' and suggestion of the high degree of expectation that was felt about Béziers' role.

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[13] E.D., '*Héliogabale* aux arènes de Béziers', p. 398.

His comments indicate that this institution had a national, if not international reputation and that this necessarily affected the type of work that one could put on there: Paris continued to exert its centralising force. His marked stress on 'Nous avons, nous français', affirms his contention that national works should invariably have Parisian origins and sets apart, what he considers, truly French concerns from the inappropriate and marginal. E.D.'s comments are particularly notable for their emphasis on *Héliogabale* as a failed national work because of the 'un-French' or Meridional elements. Or, as Gabriel Boissy comments, that such a work no doubt appealed to the 'goût un peu truculent et vulgaire de ces populations'.[14] Héliogabale himself, rather like the Meridional, lacks control; he is a decadent anti-hero. As the production and reception of *Héliogabale* suggest there were times when, for vast staged-works in theatres considered 'national', subject and genre became a key issue and the work had to fulfil centre-dominated notions of appropriateness. Under these circumstances and despite a renowned composer and a prestigious theatre, *Héliogabale*'s presentation of an alternative manifestation of France meant that it could only gain regional acceptance.

[14]Boissy, 'Théâtre des arènes de Béziers', p. 17.