Guilt and the War Within: The Theater of Jean-Paul Sartre and Jean Giraudoux

by

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Romance Studies in the Graduate School of Duke University

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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

The moral and ethical choices made during the Nazi Occupation of France would echo for generations: they served as a source of pain and pride when the French sought to rebuild their national identity after the ignominy of the defeat, and acted as the foundation for the intellectual legacy on which post-war life stands.

In my dissertation I examine the diverse trajectory of two writers, Jean-Paul Sartre and Jean Giraudoux, during the Occupation by focusing on their dramatic works. During this period, no writer could legally exercise his vocation and receive compensation without submitting to certain legalities designed to monitor the content of artistic output. Therefore, any author who published did, at least in some small way, collaborate. This particular line in the sand has become blurred with time and usage. Critics and intellectuals, not to mention the legal system, have initially categorized artists’ politics, then, when the boundaries (or public opinion) have shifted, they have chosen to reclassify. Collaborationist, resistant, or neutral – these three convenient labels cannot do justice to the vast array of colors in the Occupation-era landscape.

Writers, like the public at large, responded to the Occupation by becoming extreme collaborators, opportunists, simply earning their daily bread, or becoming fierce resisters, with an infinite number of various roles in between. Although critics have historically attempted to evaluate Jean-Paul Sartre’s and Jean Giraudoux’s actions in order to classify them as “resistant” or “collabo,” this is a
reductive act. Both men, like so many Frenchmen of this period, made an infinite number of small and large decisions that refracted their post-war image according to which critic held the prism. The historiography with regards to this era has dramatically changed. Must the manner in which we “categorize” these two authors not change accordingly?

With this question in mind, I have carefully studied the authors’ primary texts (plays, essays, critiques, memoirs, and letters). In particular, I focus on their theatrical offerings: Les mouches, Huis clos, and La Folle de Chaillot, as these are their best-known works of the era. Next, I examined biographies of the Sartre and Giraudoux (as well as other major historical, political, and literary figures) in order to gain as much background information as possible, and moreover, to identify both tendencies and discrepancies with regards to the authors. After this I sifted through the contemporary press related to these two authors, including theatrical reviews of their plays, their own publications in order re-evaluate the Occupation-era theatrical offerings of Sartre and Giraudoux. I have chosen to focus mainly on their plays from the era, as it those are their best-known works, and the those which had the most influence, in creating their political legacy and reputation during the Occupation. Finally, I applied the theories from contemporary historians – Robert Paxton, Henry Rousso, Philippe Burrin, and Gisèle Sapiro among others – in order to develop my own analysis of the theater of Sartre and Giraudoux and their post-war legacy.
Themes centering on guilt and condemnation abound during the war, especially in these three works. Fueled by De Gaulle’s myths of an almost unilateral resistant French population, the immediate post-war period focused on deliverance from an *exterior* enemy. However, contrary to popular interpretation, the plays in my corpus condemn the enemy *within*, the French betrayal of the French.
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Richard and Ann LaMarca, who always said I could do whatever I set my mind to, and who gave me the strength, confidence, and moral support that I needed. It is also dedicated to my sister Roxanne, whose many phone calls and help though any number of moves kept me smiling. And also to the friends who kept me sane through this process. I love you all!
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Introduction

The German Occupation forced artists, politicians, factory workers, teachers, housewives (in fact, the entire population) into ethical gray areas. Many activities taken for granted before the war were suddenly illegal. For example, if you wrote a letter to the newspaper criticizing a decision by a certain member of the government, you might hear a knock at the door and find two policemen waiting. Or if your neighbor disliked you they might send an anonymous letter denouncing you with the same result. If you were a Jew, you suddenly lost any government contracts or could not exercise your profession. ¹

What was right? What was moral? Indeed, how does one even define the word “moral” when it is so open to interpretation given an individual’s religious, social, ethnic, and political background?

A writer, for example, had to pass a wide variety of censors, both German and French. Post-war critics have often categorized these criteria in the same manner. Nazi and Vichy censors did not necessarily impose the same restrictions. Vichy censors were in a sense even stricter, in that they also tried to impose a convoluted Catholic sense of morality on published texts or performances. ² For example, Cocteau’s Les parents terribles, although famously lambasted for its immorality by the Collaborationist press in

¹ André Kaspi, Les Juifs pendant l’Occupation (Paris : Seuil, 1991), 114-117. Kaspi details the situation of the Jews of both French and foreign origin, and explains the social, personal, and economic effects of the economic Aryanisation in France. René Château also explains the effects the Aryanisation of the cinema, including the take-over of such cinematic firms as Pathé, as well as the vilification of its former president, Bernard Natan, in the press. Château., René. Le cinema Français sous l’Occupation: 1940-1944. (Courbevoie: Editions René Château et La Mémoire du Cinéma, 1994), 120.

² Patrick Marsh, Eds Gerhard Hischfeld and Patrick Marsh, “The Theatre” in Collaboration in France:Politics and Culture during the Nazi Occupation, 1940-1944 (New York: Berg, 1989). According to Marsh, the Germans at first attempted to reestablish “an air of normality to the capital,” but in Paris Jews and foreign nationals were prohibited from working in the theater. Texts had to pass German and Vichy censors, and authors of Jewish origins or suspicious political leanings were automatically banned. Parisian
Paris,³ actually passed the German censors but was banned in Vichy. This interdiction by Vichy was due both to the playwright’ s “unacceptable” lifestyle, as well as underpinnings of an incestuous relationship between mother and son depicted within the play. Incest and homosexuality clearly did not have a place in the National Revolution.

Playwrights in particular had to ask themselves a myriad of questions, among which: Was it even ethical to produce a play when one needed approval from the enemy or the collaborationist government? Should you sign a form declaring that you were not Jewish (among other things) so that you could continue to earn a living in the theater? Should you put on a play when many of your friends had been banned from all theatrical activities or even from attending performances? How did you function in a society where government propaganda reinforced notions of the traditional family and vilified anything different? How could you get past the censors and send secret messages to your audience? Would you risk prison to do so? If you were apolitical before the war, was it acceptable to remain so, or at least to ignore the current restrictions and keep on working? Or should you take advantage of the politics of the day, cynically exploit them, collaborate, and go for broke in order to build your career?⁴

In my dissertation I examine the diverse trajectory of two writers during the Occupation, Jean-Paul Sartre and Jean Giraudoux, by focusing on their dramatic works. These plays, Les mouches, Huis clos, and La Folle de Chaillot, are the author’s most right-wing journals such as La Gerbe and Je suis partout were allowed to openly attack the Vichy censorship criteria that had their basis in Christian morality. 142, 148 150.

³ Laubreaux’s virulent attacks on Cocteau’s work and sexuality eventually caused Jean Marais, Cocteau’s lover and star of the play, to physically attack the Je suis partout critic.

⁴ Gisèle Sapiro, La Guerre des écrivains 1940-1953 (Paris : Fayard, 1997). Sapiro gives an exhaustive account of the politics of authors and publication in France during the Occupation, as well as the impact that war-time publications had on their post-war careers.
well-known works of the era, and helped to found their post-war political and literary legacies. In this period, no writer could legally exercise his vocation and receive compensation without submitting to certain legalities designed to monitor the content of artistic output. Therefore, any author who published did, at least in some small way, collaborate. This particular line in the sand has become blurred with time and usage. Critics and intellectuals, not to mention the legal system, have initially categorized artists’ politics, then, when the boundaries (or public opinion) have shifted, they have chosen to reclassify. Collaborationist, resistant, or neutral – these three convenient labels cannot do justice to the vast array of colors in the Occupation-era landscape.

Before we discuss the specific role of the theater and how it has been understood since 1945, it will be helpful to give a more general sense of the historiography of the period, since it has been understood in radically shifting ways since 1945. In order to discuss the dilemmas of the playwright during the Occupation, one must begin with a discussion of the writer in general. Indeed, very few writers only wrote for the theater – most had multi-faceted careers, and the authors in my corpus, Jean Giraudoux and Jean-Paul Sartre, are no exception. Each regularly contributed to literary and political journals during the span of their career, in addition to authoring novels, short stories, essays, and film scripts. Each author’s texts were subject to similar censorship criteria as the work of a novelist, for example. However, a theatrical production implied many additional layers: a director, actors, funding for the production, theater space, and goods in scarce supply during this era.

The moral and ethical choices made during the Nazi Occupation of France would echo for generations: they served as a source of pain and pride when the French sought to
rebuild their national identity after the ignominy of the defeat, and acted as the foundation for the intellectual legacy on which post-war life stands. Immediately after the war, during the official and unofficial Purges (starting with the Liberation in August 1944 to the fall of 1946 for writers in particular) it was important to be on the right side, to prove one’s resistance credentials (or at least that one did not collaborate).

The idea of proof of a writer’s political activities cut in both directions. For example, if before the war, you were active in the Communist party, became a member of one of the earliest resistance networks, and published in clandestine journals, your credentials were impeccable and you could prove your resistance pedigree through various means. If you were apolitical or right-leaning, it might become necessary to show an evolution or at least a relatively neutral stance. If, to the other extreme, you were a reactionary anti-Semite who published in Collaborationist journals during the war, such as Robert Brasillach, proving your guilt became easy, as the prosecution could point to your published writings in order to illustrate the fact that you denounced people in the press, that you “slept with the Germans” politically and that you enjoyed the experience, to quote a charge made against Brasillach’s own rhetoric.

According to Gisèle Sapiro, the author of *La Guerre des écrivains*, by the end of 1943 the Comité Nationale des Ecrivains began to formulate the manner in which they would begin a purge of their own profession. On September 4th, 1944, the CNE voted in favor of a motion inspired by the August 26th French government order, which had created the crime of *indignité nationale* (national degradation). The CNE called for the government to prosecute

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5 Ibid., 583-584. According to Sapiro, the Comité Nationale des Ecrivains, the resistant writer’s organization, officially began the purge of their profession in May 1945, and effectively ended with the resignation of Charles Vildrac in October 1946, and did not reassume its functions until 1949.

6 Alice Kaplan, *The Collaborator: The Trial and Execution of Robert Brasillach* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 58 – 59. Brasillach was tried during the height of post-liberation rancor and was executed in February 1945, before members of the Pétain government and fascists writers such as Lucien Rebetet of *Je suis partout* were even brought back to France and tried. None of those who were part of the *Je suis partout* trial in 1946 were actually executed. 213-214.
Collaborationist and pro-German writers, including those who had made the writer’s propaganda tour of Germany in October of 1941. At this time, the members established a black list of twelve authors (including Brasillach, Céline, Drieu la Rochelle, and Montherlant among others), a list which quickly grew to ninety-four and appeared in *Les Lettres françaises* the following week. Disputes immediately broke out within the group itself, as to how each author should be classified, as a “grand coupable” or not, in particular with regards to an author’s support of Pétain. Finally a compromise was reached that established two black lists.7

As Alice Kaplan discusses in *The Collaborator: The Trial and Execution of Robert Brasillach*, the French magistrature had to purge its own collaborators before beginning work on purging those outside of the judiciary. It would have been impossible to eliminate everyone who worked with the Pétain government or pledged their loyalty to Pétain, but those who had committed the most serious offences were removed. Kaplan states that

> Out of 3,000 magistrates, 370 were examined; of these 165 were removed from the magistrature, 100 others were sanctioned. Just as in the Purge trials themselves, acts of treason towards the nation, such as sentencing a resistance fighter, were much more severely sanctioned than acts of anti-Semitism.8

In a sense, judges were similar to writers in that their opinions and decisions could be easily traced through written documents, which facilitated the “ease” with which they could be purged.

Once the Courts of Justice were established, they

Operated in France from October 1944 until January 31, 1951. They condemned 6,763 people to death, of which 1,500 were actually executed. Another 2,702 were sentenced to forced labor in perpetuity, and 10,637 to lighter sentences of forced labor. 24,927 were sentenced to imprisonment,

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7 Sapiro, *La guerre des écrivains*, 571-575.

and another 3,578 people to national degradation. The Courts of Justice acquitted 6,724 people.\footnote{Ibid., 79.}

Journalists were among the first to be tried, as early as October 1945, while more prominent government figures, such as Pétain, were still in hiding in Germany.

In a sense, timing was everything. For example, if one compares those on the staff of the fascist weekly *Je suis partout*, Lucien Rebatet was even more rabidly anti-Semitic than Brasillach, publishing the vitriolic pamphlet *Les Décombres* in 1942, a text which blamed the 1940 defeat on the Third Republic and the Jews. Rebatet continued in the same mien in his regular cinematic column, written under the pseudonym of François Vinneul.\footnote{Rebatet also published *Les Tribus du cinéma et du théâtre*, a virulent attacked on the “Jewified” entertainment industry in France. According to him, the Jews held the financial reins, promoted a Marxist aesthetic and caused general corruption within the arts. He called for their elimination. Lucien Rebatet, *Les Tribus du Cinéma et du Théâtre* (Paris: NRF, 1941).} Rebatet, however, fled France for the relative safety of Sigmaringen castle in Germany, along with the group that included Philippe Pétain and Céline (yet another writer’s whose pen dripped toxic foam like froth from a rabid dog’s mouth). Both men, however, escaped the death penalty. Rebatet was not returned to France until 1946, and although he initially received a death sentence, it was commuted to forced labor, and he was freed by 1952 and began working as the literary editor for *Dimanche Matin*. Céline fled France and eventually received a pardon due to his status as a WWI veteran. As Kaplan details, Brasillach, tried in “the hottest moment of the Purge”\footnote{Ibid., 214.} was not so fortunate.

Writers who actively participated in the Resistance, as well as open collaborators such as the staff of *Je suis partout*, were the obvious extremes. The overwhelming
majority of writers, and indeed, French men and women in general, fell somewhere in the middle of the two. The very notion of identifying and categorizing has by no means been static, and in fact has gone through several important shifts throughout the six decades since the Liberation.

As Henry Rousso, author of *Le syndrome de Vichy: de 1944 à nos jours*, describes, the first phase began with General De Gaulle’s triumphant August 25, 1944 discourse at the Hôtel de Ville, in which he stated:

    Paris ! Outraged Paris ! Broken Paris ! Martyred Paris, but liberated Paris ! Liberated by the people of Paris with help from the armies of France, with the help and support of the whole of France, of France which is fighting, of the only France, the real France, eternal France.12.

He makes no mention of the Allied forces, nor of the Vichy government. Paris has suffered, but been liberated by her people, a myth of almost universal resistance against the invaders. One can argue that at such an emotional moment, when the Germans had finally vacated the city, when they had been replaced by the Free French or the FFI with their informal armbands, that the French needed such an affirmation, needed the psychological balm of the myth of a resistant France.

Rousso traces four phases in his work. The first, the time of mourning, took place roughly between 1944 and 1954. During this period, the French struggled with the idea of the “civil war” within France, the purges, and finally amnesty. From 1954-1971, the French appeared to bury this conflict under the idea of “Résistancialism,” the idea that the collaborators had been very few and that the great majority of the French had been bonafide Resistants. From 1971 to 1974, the image began to shatter, after the appearance of Marcel Ophüls’s groundbreaking documentary *Le chagrin et la pitié* (1971) which
offered a decidedly more complex view of the Occupation, Resistance, and Collaboration, by including interviews with former Occupiers, Resistants, and Collaborators from the Clermont-Ferrand region. This film was followed by Robert Paxton’s 1972 book *Vichy France, Old Guard and New Order: 1940-1944*, which showed, through careful research in both the German and French archives, that collaboration between the Vichy government and the Germans was not, as had been widely believed, *forced* upon the French, but was instead largely *voluntary*. The fourth and final stage of Rousso’s *Vichy Syndrome* continues today and is characterized by an obsession with the era to the point of being unhealthy (*malsain*).13

Rather than assigning straight, black and white labels of *resistant* or *collaborator*, Philippe Burrin, author of the 1995 socio-historical text *La France à l’heure allemande*, makes the case for the idea of degrees of *accommodation* with regards to the Occupation. Burrin presents the Vichy government as in a state of “constant negotiation” with the Germans, one in which the Vichy leaders became increasingly mired in a downward spiral, and whose often voluntary accommodations lead to the government becoming a virtual “satellite” of Nazi Germany.14

With regards to choices made during the Occupation, Burrin refers to them as those of *individuals*, rather than as strictly unilateral decisions by an overarching authority. He explains that

> The French, when confronted with the Occupiers, tended to behave in the same fashion as they did during their regular life, according to their habits and mentality, the strength or weakness of their national pride, which was

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12 Charles De Gaulle, “Discours de l’Hôtel de Ville de Paris, 25 août 1944.” This speech is reproduced online: [http://www.charles-de-gaulle.org/article.php3?id_article=514](http://www.charles-de-gaulle.org/article.php3?id_article=514)


sometimes whittled away by difficult living conditions, and how they juggled this sense of duty with their own personal interests.\textsuperscript{15}

At the heart of all this negotiation, of this flurried mediation between self-preservation and national duty, lay the question “How far can and should we go?”

As Burrin describes, the very existence of the Vichy government, a formalized body who would make decisions,\textsuperscript{16} lead by a World War I hero, Philippe Pétain, who was so willing to “sacrifice” himself, allowed for a degree of passiveness. Vichy propaganda gave the impression that Father was there to scold the children, to place blame, to tell them what should be done. After all, according to official speeches, they were “guilty” of decadence, and laziness, it was their “fault” they had lost the war. It was only right that they atone for these sins.

In like fashion, the Germans also encouraged passivity on the part of the French, first by

Encouraging the idea of unavoidable accommodation, then by outright oppression which strengthened with each successive execution of hostages. [The French asked themselves] what would have happened if the Germans decided to close their schools, theaters and publishing houses like they had in Poland?\textsuperscript{17}

In this manner of reasoning, daily life could have gotten even more difficult: if they struggled with rationing, food and gasoline shortages, power shortages, and the condemnation of Jews and communists, at least they had some remaining “privileges.”

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 184.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 194. Propaganda posters from the era showed Pétain pointing an accusing finger and saying “Vous avez la mémoire courte” (You have a short memory) and “Vous n’êtes ni vendus, ni trâhís, ni abandonnés. Venez à moi avec confiance.” (You have neither been sold out, nor betrayed, nor abandoned. You can trust me.), as well as posters with Pétain in the center of France. Pétain’s role was to scold the “children” of France, remind them of their sins, and like a good father, show them them what was “right.” These posters are published online at http://www.scholarsresource.com/ and www.amnistia.net

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 195.
In these difficult times, the majority of people attempted to keep their head down, take care of their immediate circle, and live as “normal” a life as possible. Burrin’s work has specific implications for our study of writers and playwrights in particular, as this sense of accommodation existed among writers just as it did among the population at large. Burin cites Cocteau (the consummate *mondain*), who wrote in his journal in September 1944, “Occupied France had the right and the duty to be joyful, to eat, shine, to face its oppressor and say ‘You are taking everything from me, and I still have everything.’” Every French book or film that appeared became a sort of triumph of the spirit, a display of the richness of French culture and an affirmation of *normalcy.*  Of course, this return to “normal” involved some sacrifices, namely the exclusion of authors on the Otto list, as well as Jews, Communists, and other official undesirables within the theater, cinema, and publishing circles.

Among authors, the question became: Should one publish, and if one did, where? Up until November 1942, when the Germans invaded the Unoccupied Zone, the South became a refuge for risky ideas as well as people at risk. In the Occupied Zone, one might perhaps contribute to purely literary magazines, magazines that presented a *neutral* face to the world. The problem was that even though their political agenda was not overt, such in the case of *Je suis partout,* these publications still underwent both German and Vichy censorship, and, as in the case of *Comœdia,* a newly-revived monthly dedicated to the arts, propaganda such as Cocteau’s 1943 “Salut à Breker,” a text written in honor of Hitler’s favorite sculptor Arno Breker, regularly appeared in the journal.

In fact, most writers, like the general population, chose to keep their heads down and keep on writing. Very few writers actually chose exile or to voluntarily stop

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18 Ibid., 329.
publishing in order to avoid the censors – some had no interest in politics and needed to
sell articles in order to support themselves. Between 2-3% of the public were bonafide
resistants, which left the overwhelming majority of the population, including writers,
somewhere in the gray zone.

The question of choosing to publish or not to publish presents even more
challenges when one looks at the genre of theatre during this era. Plays must undergo so
many filters: first, there are the words on the page, as well as the author’s non-dramatic
texts such as novels, essays, and political writings. Then one must remember that the
director and actors impose their own stamp on the production. For example, a scene can
be played seriously, with an ironic twist, or become campy according to who performs it.
Costumes and music add another layer: will they be traditional or modernized, and do
these changes add certain political connotations to the text. Next, what was their political
alignment? How and where was the play promoted and how did the author get
permission in order to stage his work? For example, did the writer have to make cuts in
order to “sanitize” the play of any outright political point of view, did a playwright in fact
add a political twist in favor of the Occupiers or Vichy in order to curry favor? Perhaps
the author had no intention of sending a political message, but the play was seen to have a
resistance or collaborationist message among critics and the public. Or perhaps none of
the above? The large number of X factors lent themselves to an almost endless variety of
interpretations.

Jean-Paul Sartre and Jean Giraudoux make for an excellent case study of the
myriad of choices that playwrights had to make during the Occupation. Although they
took very different political stances during the war, each garnered a mixture of praise and
criticism for his actions. Sartre served time in a prisoner of war camp (writing and producing the play *Bariona* while imprisoned), but his subsequent release and literary success during the German Occupation have provoked violent criticism, particularly as he would become the mouthpiece for the post-war movement of engaged literature: the writer is responsible for his actions, for his product, and has a duty to become politically active. The very voluble Sartre expressed his opinions in no uncertain terms, including his refusal to sign the writers’ petition in favor of clemency for the fascist journalist Robert Brasillach, who would later be executed by firing squad. Can Sartre be labeled a collaborator or resistant, an opportunist or sincerely politically engaged? Questions regarding Sartre’s position during and after the war continue to bring about fierce, sometimes vicious, polemics in critics’ circles.

The bibliography regarding Sartre’s work is extensive, yet often contradictory, especially with concerns to the emotionally-charged era of Occupied France. Annie Cohen-Solal presents the most exhaustive overall biography of the author, while glossing over some of the more negative aspects of Sartre’s choices, such as questions of anti-Semitism in the play *Bariona*, as well as Sartre and Beauvoir’s poor reaction to the plight of their Jewish lover and former student, Bianca Lamblin. At the other extreme, Gilbert Joseph blasts Sartre in his book *Une si douce occupation*, accusing him of collaboration, cowardice, and self-aggrandizing. Jean-François Sirinelli’s comparison of Sartre to his fellow normalien Raymond Aron *Sartre et Aron: Deux intellectuels dans le siècle* takes

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19 Jean Anouilh, François Mauriac, and Marcel Aymé circulated a petition for clemency for Brasillach, which writers such as Jean Cocteau, Paul Claudel, Colette, and Albert Camus signed (Camus only because he was personally opposed to the death penalty). Sartre refused to sign. Kaplan, *The Collaborator*, 194-201.

a more fact-driven, cooler tone, and points out factual discrepancies in Beauvoir’s chronicles of period, for example the question of “authorized” publication and Sartre’s supposed escape from a German POW camp.21

Several polemics also exist between Ingrid Galster and Jacques Lecarme, mainly with regards to the Affaire Condorcet, the school where, upon his release from the POW camp in 1941, Sartre accepted a coveted position in the philosophy department preparing students for entry into the prestigious Ecole Normale Supérieure, Sartre’s own alma mater. This job opening occurred after a Jewish teacher was fired in the wake of the new racial laws. Lecarme responded to Galster’s claims by attacking her in a series of articles whose tone is decidedly ad hominem. Considering Sartre’s moralizing stance after the war in several essays and in the pages of Les temps modernes, as well as questions regarding anti-Semitism in Bariona, author Susan Suleiman’s critique of the author’s depiction of Jews in his essay La république du silence,22 and Bianca Lamblin’s scathing condemnation of the couple,23 the question of opportunism with regards to his career is a valid one.

On the other hand, one can see traces of the philosopher’s nascent political awareness as early as the phony war, and Sartre did later found a short-lived group for intellectual resistance, Socialisme et Liberté, as detailed by Cohen-Solal in her biography

21 Simone de Beauvoir, La Force de l’âge (Paris: Gallimard, 1960). Given the fact that Beauvoir was writing about events from twenty years previously, it is unsurprising that some factual errors would occur. However, the types of errors lend themselves to the very self-aggrandizing of which Sartre has often been accused.


of Sartre. However, he did not become active in the main resistant writers’ group, the Comité National des Ecrivains, until near the end of the Occupation, when the political pendulum began to swing decisively in favor of an Allied victory. By this time he had already written and seen his first major play, *Les mouches*, staged at the newly Aryanized Théâtre de la Cité, formerly named the Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt. *Les mouches*, loosely based on the Electra legend, became one of numerous representations of Greek myth on the Parisian stage. In the past and at this time, myths and legends have been used to slip anti-government rhetoric past censors. However, critics and spectators alike found no coded message in the play, which flopped miserably despite its lavish production and renowned director.

Sartre’s second major theatrical production, *Huis clos*, had far greater success and would become his signature play. Although Sartre as well as critics have considered the play a classic act of intellectual resistance against the German Occupiers, the rather shocking moral content suggests a different interpretation. The main characters, a lesbian, an infanticide, and a coward, fly in the face of traditionalist Vichy policies of travail, famille, patrie (work, family, and country), not to mention the natalist policy implemented by Pétain in order to boost the flagging French birth-rate. As Ingrid Galster

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25 This was yet another example of the choices an author had to make: should one perform in an Aryanized theater?

26 Ingrid Galster, *Le théâtre de Sartre devant ses premiers critiques: “Les Mouches” et “Huis clos”*. (Paris: l’Harmattan, 2001), 115-120. At the time, Sartre was only known as an the author of *La nausée*, and was unknown in the theater. Critics inevitably unfavorably compared *Les Mouches* to Giraudoux’s *Electre*. They also blasted the avant-garde settings and masks.

27 Ibid., 272 – 275. Even the cast members, such as Gaby Sylvia, who played Estelle, were portrayed as resistant. Galster cites an article that appeared after the liberation in which Sylvia poses with a baby carriage full of weapons.
points out, just before Sartre wrote the play, his companion Simone De Beauvoir was dismissed from her high school teaching job on grounds of moral impropriety: more precisely, for her lesbian affair with a student. Sartre’s characters, all social pariahs, affront Catholic morals as exemplified by works by conservative dramatists such as Paul Claudel. Thus, the play challenges not the foreign occupying forces, but rather, the native enemy within, the French who have imposed moralistic laws on their fellow Frenchmen. Sartre’s Occupation-era theater, just as with his political writings, requires patient sifting in order to arrive at an alternative reading.

My second writer, Jean Giraudoux, also pursued a wide range of intellectual activities. By the 1940’s he held a more established position in French society than Sartre: the much older Giraudoux was a successful playwright and had already spent many years in the diplomatic corps. Author of the play Siegfried, in which an amnesiac German soldier discovers his true identity as a native of France’s Lorraine region, Giraudoux was one of the few Frenchmen fully capable of breaching the cultural gap between France and Germany, both before the outbreak of war, during the drôle de guerre, and during the Occupation period. Giraudoux was well-known in Germany, and in fact, his tenure as Minister of Propaganda from 1939-1940 prompted a wealth of political/literary articles about him in Germany, many of which praised some of the racially-oriented passages of Giraudoux’s 1939 collection of essays, Pleins pouvoirs.

Giraudoux displayed ambivalence during the Occupation, falling prey to the “mea culpa” complex that ran rampant throughout France. This complex, the idea that a morally bankrupt and decadent France had brought the defeat upon itself, was

subsequently fostered by the Pétain government. Biographers such as David Aurel\textsuperscript{29} often describe Giraudoux as solitary, living in isolation at his family home in rural Cusset during the Occupation. In contrast to this, Jacques Body,\textsuperscript{30} the editor of the Pléiade editions of Giraudoux’s work, as well as his most extensive biographies, shows that the time proved quite active for him: he drafted several plays, a collection of essays, gave lectures in Switzerland, and regularly contributed to the censored theatrical review \textit{Comœdia} in order to help promote his theatrical and cinematic offerings.\textsuperscript{31} Giraudoux’s premature death, falsely attributed to the machinations of the Gestapo, according to post-Liberation rumors fueled by statements by Louis Aragon\textsuperscript{32} and Jean Blanzat\textsuperscript{33} garnered the author the label of an official “resistant.” The 1945 production of \textit{La Folle de Chaillot} was perceived at the time as a resistance drama. Moreover, one of its first performances was attended by Charles De Gaulle for an evening honoring French resistants, which helped confirm the perception of \textit{La Folle de Chaillot} as a resistance drama. One cannot forget that Louis Jouvet, Giraudoux’s longtime director, spent the war in exile in South America, and stated that he left France because the censors initially banned Giraudoux’s plays.\textsuperscript{34} The patina of a Jouvet/resistant easily added to the myth of

\textsuperscript{29} Aurel David, \textit{La Vie et la mort de Jean Giraudoux} (Paris : Flammarion, 1967).


\textsuperscript{31} In particular, Giraudoux published numerous articles and excerpts of the scripts of \textit{La duchesse de Langeais} and \textit{Les Anges du Péché}, as well as an article on Marivaux in the period from 1941-1943.

\textsuperscript{32} “Jean Giraudoux a été tué par la Gestapo, nous révèle Louis Aragon” in \textit{Ce soir}. (September 20, 1944).

\textsuperscript{32} “La Gestapo aurait assassiné Jean Giraudoux: Les révélations de M. Louis Aragon” in \textit{Front National}. (September 20, 1944).

\textsuperscript{33} Jean Blanzat, “Giraudoux et la Résistance” in \textit{Le Figaro}. (September 23, 1944).

a resistant Giraudoux, a myth which has been fostered by Giraudoux’s son Jean, who, like Jouvet, left France during the Occupation, but in young Jean Giraudoux’s case, in order to join De Gaulle in England.

In spite of these contiguous “credentials,” the content of the La Folle de Chaillot gives cause to doubt its resistance message: oil speculators, accompanied by representatives of decadent French society, attempt to destroy Paris, representative of the whole of France. Although loyal Parisians come together to destroy the corrupt forces that threaten the city, the political connotations of the play coincide with the widespread “mea culpa” complex, the decadent French speculators who have wrought the destruction of their own country. Moreover, the play abounds with references to ideas of urban planning, ideas which Giraudoux proffered in his 1939 collection of essays, Pleins pouvoirs.35 This idea has been largely unexplored up until now. In this collection, Giraudoux, who reportedly hoped that the Vichy government would create the post of Minister of Urban Planning for him, condemns massive land speculation, government corruption, and the way in which it erodes the health and safety of city dwellers, key themes of the play La Folle de Chaillot.

More recently, critics such as Jeffrey Mehlman have created an elaborately anti-Semitic legacy for Giraudoux, a legacy that exists (according to Mehlman) most notably in the plays Judith and La Folle de Chaillot. Conversely, Pierre d’Almeida, who edited and wrote the introduction to the new edition of Pleins Pouvoirs and the unfinished collection Sans pouvoirs,36 glosses over the idea of anti-Semitism, even though several


passages in Giraudoux’s essay *La France peuplée* offer troubling ideas on immigration and the threat of unassimilated foreigners.

Perhaps even more remarkable is the idea that an author who frequented the German Institute, published in *Comœdia*, maintained close ties with German authors, and worked with the Vichy government as well as Occupation authorities, still has the reputation of a resistant. As in the case of Sartre, questions about Giraudoux’s theatre, political leanings, and critical reception necessitate more shading than can be conveyed by a tidy black and white stamp of resistant or collaborator.

Themes centering on guilt and condemnation abound during the war, especially in the three plays in my corpus, *Les Mouches*, *Huis clos*, and *La Folle de Chaillot*. Fueled by De Gaulle’s myths of an almost unilaterally resistant French population, the immediate post-war period focused on deliverance from an *exterior* enemy, the German Occupiers. However, the most recent historiography on Vichy by researchers such as Rousso, Burrin and Sapiro have shown that the issue was more complex, and that French reactions to the Occupation were as numerous and varied as the French themselves. These historians have given me new perspective on the era, and the desire to take a closer look at the best-known Occupation-era plays of Sartre and Giraudoux. This re-evaluation has lead me to the conclusion that contrary to popular interpretation, the plays in my corpus condemn the enemy *within*, the French betrayal of the French. In Sartre’s case he railed against the restrictive Vichy government with its moralistic policies. Giraudoux, on the other hand, decried the self-serving actions of the French who exploited the landscape of their own country to fill their own pockets, an idea not so much in keeping with the idea of the condemning the German Occupiers, but rather with the author’s pre-
war political essays and criticisms of modern-day land speculation. The historical perspective on Vichy has evolved, and in my dissertation I offer a new perspective on Sartre and Giraudoux that is in keeping with this evolution.
Chapter One
Sartre: Opportunistically Engaged, Engaged Opportunist, or Belated Prise de Conscience?

Sartre lies at the heart of many violent polemics in critical circles, the most serious charge among those made being that of opportunism: namely he used World War II as a launch-pad for his career as a post-war intellectual, and in order to do so, clearly fabricated (according to his most severe critics) or embroidered upon any real links to the Resistance or Resistant acts he many have performed during the Occupation.

When Sartre was born in 1905, one would have imagined a very different destiny from that which unfolded in the post-war years. His father, Jean-Baptiste Sartre, a native of Dordogne, graduate of the prestigious Ecole Polytechnique and naval officer, died when his son was fifteen months old. He had never fully recovered from the colitis he first suffered while living in Indochina. The tuberculosis Jean-Baptiste picked up on his last voyage to Crete sealed his fate.¹ Thus, Sartre spent the remainder of his early childhood with the Schweitzers, his mother’s family of Alsatian origin, in their Paris apartment. The young boy circled between an overly indulgent mother, a hypochondriac grand-mother, and his grandfather, a professor of German descended from a long line of teachers,² whose enormous library drew the child like a moth to a flame. As Sartre would later chronicle in his autobiography Les mots, his mother reverted to a childlike state once back at the family domicile, and their relationship more closely resembled one of an older sister/younger brother than that of mother/son. In this protected, bourgeois environment,

¹ Cohen-Solal, Sartre, 23-24, 62.
² Ibid., 54.
under the tutelage of his grand-father Charles (and amidst the effusive approval of those around him), the family carefully tended the intellectual hot-house flower, assuring him eventual entrance into the Ecole Normale Supérieure on the rue d’Ulm.

The devastation of World War I indelibly marked the generation of normaliens preceding Sartre’s: of those who left with their agrégation in 1914, approximately one third died in combat. The generation of 1905, as Jean-François Sirinelli calls it, had the great luck to be spared this ordeal due to simple demographic chance, i.e. they were too young to have fought in the First World War. Sartre’s main concern regarding this war related to the situation of Alsace, due to the influence of his mother’s family, and his powerful grandfather in particular. Charles Schweitzer had filled his young grandson’s head with the many injustices the Germans had inflicted on his region of origin. The young Jean-Paul, safe in his step-father’s home in La Rochelle, occasionally suffered at the hands of aggressive, fatherless classmates left to run quasi-wild, but aside from this, these war years left him relatively untouched.

Many of his generation, however, were old enough to feel the cold specter of war’s devastation looming over them, particularly if they had lost a father or older brother in the trenches. The majority of Sartre’s classmates, such as his close friend and philosophy co-disciple Raymond Aron, looked to pacifism and socialism in the wake of

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4 Op cit. 100.

5 Ibid., 102.

6 Sirinelli, Sartre et Aron, 54-55.
this prodigious loss of life (and in reaction to course boycotts by student adherents to right-wing groups such as the Action Française). Sartre’s other close friend, Paul Nizan, eventually became heavily involved with the French communists, until the signing of the Pact of Non-Aggression between Hitler and Stalin spoiled his taste for the Communist party. Sartre’s biographer, Annie Cohen-Solal, describes his detachment, “Sartre was not only apolitical, but totally bowed out of the great civic debates of his time.” She continues,

Sartre had interest in neither the established political parties nor parliamentary debates, did not demonstrate in the street, did not read newspapers, did not become passionate about any cause, and did not become disillusioned, because he had none to begin with. He found his pacifist friends’ verbal violence attractive, having a certain irony and distance that was well-adapted to his own personality, [and looked back upon] those four years at the Ecole as four years of happiness.

Sartre’s apolitical stance continued when he did his mandatory military service in the meteorological corps at Saint-Cyr, where he complained of boredom, the order, and military hierarchy in his many letters to Simone de Beauvoir, who chose to stay in Paris an extra year in order to be near Sartre. The army had no great effect on him, no awakening spirit of brotherhood with his fellow soldiers. Instead, he insulated himself from his surroundings by means of his writing, producing three rather unremarkable texts for which Sartre was unable to find a publisher. Although he had hoped for a teaching

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7 Sapiro, *La guerre des écrivains*, 491.
8 Op cit., 57-58.
9 Cohen-Solal, 133.
10 Ibid., 154. Cohen-Solal describes these as “textes de jeunesse”. The first, *La légende de la vérité*, was a three-part tale that dealt with the legends of certainty, the probable, and man alone, and drew on Sartre’s own philosophical questioning. The two remaining texts were plays called *Epiméthée*, after the Greek
position in Japan, one of many such slots reserved for ex-normaliens, in 1931 he instead received his first teaching position in the provincial town of Le Havre, far from Beauvoir (who was assigned to Marseille), where he quickly shocked the conservative parents of his students with his strange appearance and by calling cinema a new art form at the annual distribution of prizes. Beauvoir’s frequent visits also threw fat on the gossip fire.\textsuperscript{11} Sartre’s private antipathy for bourgeois attitudes began to take public form.

Study abroad trips to Germany for French students had been suspended for roughly ten years in the period during and after World War I, but the country of Hegel, Heidegger, and Nietzsche never fully lost its appeal, particularly for students of philosophy. It was under this aegis that Sartre’s friend Aron demanded a teaching post in Germany, spending a year in Cologne and two in Berlin, the last of which being the school year 1932-1933, coincided with Hitler’s rise to power.\textsuperscript{12} A conversation over a cocktail between friends revealed that Aron was leaving his post in Berlin, and it was decided that Sartre, enchanted by his new-found enthusiasm for the philosophy of Husserl, should apply for the Berlin position in order to do research.\textsuperscript{13} Sartre received the spot and spent the 1933-1934 school year in the German capital.

German society was in a state of upheaval both politically and socially. The Nazis had won the previous election, Hitler took office in January 1933, and used the burning of the Reichstag as an excuse to close parliament “for the protection of the

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\textit{legend, and \textit{J’aurai un bel enterrement}. According to Cohen-Solal, both would languish, forgotten, in a filing cabinet.}
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\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 155-159.

\textsuperscript{12} Sirinelli, 104.

\textsuperscript{13} Op cit., 181-183.
people and the state,” thus eliminating any dissenting voices in the government. Hindenburg’s death in August of 1934 gave the Führer his long wished-for chance to consolidate the powers of president and chancellor, thus giving himself absolute power.\textsuperscript{14} Civil liberties were slashed, new laws made the Communist party illegal, and Jews were “systematically eliminated from German economic, social, and cultural life, from a public and social existence in Germany.”\textsuperscript{15} The exodus of German Jewish intellectuals had begun, sending directors and actors, artists and physicists, professors and writers alike, abroad to find refuge from the new racial laws, seeking shelter in far-away lands such as the United States, or in nearby “safe” countries such as France or Holland. Nazi rallies were frequent, book-burnings had begun, and Himmler announced the establishment of the first concentration camp of Dachau, in a small Munich suburb, in March 1933.\textsuperscript{16} How could one pass through this burgeoning hell on earth and not notice it, much less spend a year in its capital and remain untouched?

Far from attempting to integrate himself into his host country’s culture, politics, and life-style, Sartre once again preferred to isolate himself in a rigorous study schedule of Husserl, as well as by taking refuge in his own writings. Although a habitué of the Berlin Kneipen, those dark bars found throughout the city, and a lover of German beer, Sartre chose to surround himself with young French students and researchers like himself, a type of camaraderie similar to that of his ENS years.\textsuperscript{17} Unfortunately, as the

\textsuperscript{14} Sirinelli., 117.


\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 170.

\textsuperscript{17} Cohen-Solal, \textit{Sartre}, 189.
voluminous letters sent to Beauvoir from Berlin have been lost, we can only guess from Beauvoir’s memoirs what they might have contained. She (as well as Sartre) admits to a lack of political engagement in favor of philosophical research. Indeed, the general impression Sartre left on his cohorts was one of indifference and detachment, untouched by the political tornado that swirled around him.18

In fact, this political “Sleeping Beauty” syndrome would continue for several years, in spite of the tremendous political upheavals within and outside of France. Spurred on by xenophobia and economic crisis, right-wing groups attracted more and more members in France and abroad. The Action Française made in-roads into France’s youth, recruiting them for their cause,19 a fact impossible to miss for a lycée teacher in daily contact with teenagers. Italy fell under Mussolini’s fascist spell in 1929, but Sartre’s letters from that country read like charming slice-of-life tourist descriptions, refraining from (or not noticing) political changes around him, changes that should have been especially noticeable in a large city such as Naples to which he made an extended visit. He and Beauvoir also had no qualms about visiting the Fascist Exhibition in Rome.

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18 Ibid., 195.

19 Michel Winock, Nationalisme, Antisémitisme et fascisme en France (Paris : Seuil, 1990), 256-258. In Vichy France, Robert Paxton also details the growing violence associated with the France’s extreme-right. According to Paxton, the February 6th, 1934 street demonstrations by nationalists and right-wing veteran’s groups, in which the French police attempted to suppress of these demonstrations, and subsequently fired into the crowd of demonstrators, causing sixteen deaths and wounding 655, caused a huge wave of political participation by formerly non-active conservatives. Robert Paxton, Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944 (New York: Colombia University Press, 1972), 244-245. As Alice Kaplan points out, in the case of French fascist writer Robert Brasillach, the events of that day were a key in pushing the Brasillach farther towards the right, from Action Française-style politics into “the camp of the French Fascists”. Although the writer did not take part in the demonstrations, the site of the riots became a type of memorial: each year on February 6th anniversary of the riots, Brasillach would leave flowers on the Champs-Elysées site. (Kaplan, The Collaborator, 11-12).
in order to obtain half-price train tickets. In a similar manner, a trip to Franco’s Spain left little impression on Sartre and Beauvoir.

On the political left, as well, loyalties were beginning to shift, particularly for young intellectuals who started to align themselves more and more frequently with the Communist party and with worker’s causes. Sartre’s ENS friend, Paul Nizan, became particularly involved with the Communist Party, and spent an entire year in the Soviet Union. He eventually worked as the correspondent for foreign political affairs for the newspaper *Ce soir.* Upon his return from the USSR in 1935, Nizan attempted to interest his friend in politics, but to no avail. Nizan eventually incorporated Sartre’s pessimism and anarchist tendencies in his novel *Le cheval de Troie,* which contrasted the energy of pro-Communist militants with that of an ex-normalien lycée professor languishing in the provinces, a character who utterly refuses to commit to or muster up enthusiasm for movements political or otherwise. Instead he revels in philosophical melancholia, much like Sartre, still stranded in Le Havre, did.

Sartre’s close friends and students also attempted to involve him in the “real world,” urging him to travel to Paris to attend rallies for the Front Populaire, which would gain power in 1936; instead, their pleas fell on deaf ears. Jacques-Laurent Bost, a student from Le Havre, talked at length with Sartre about going to Spain in order to fight in the civil war, but the only real impression he made on the professor was the idea for a

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21 Ibid., 238.

22 Ibid., 215-215.

23 Ibid., 215-216.
story, *Le Mur*, ²⁴ published by the N.R.F in July of 1937. ²⁵ Although a group of multinational prisoners awaiting death sentences made for an excellent story setting, Sartre’s lack of real political involvement during this period sheds doubt on some words that Contat cites from a 1967 interview that Sartre gave to *Jeune Cinéma*.

When I wrote *The Wall*, I was not familiar with Marxist theories. I was simply in a state of complete revolt against Spanish fascism. Consequently, as the Spanish defeat had just occurred, I found myself much more aware of the absurdity of these deaths than to the positive aspects that would occur after a fight against fascism. ²⁶

In spite of his supposedly vehement anti-fascist stance (in theory) of the time, affirmed 30 years later, Sartre had displayed only indifference when he himself actually lived in a fascist state, Nazi Germany, just two short years earlier. Although one can argue that Sartre began revolting through his writing, his lack of political militancy is disappointing when one compares him to his own militant, active political involvement after the World War II. Pre-war and post-war Sartre are two vastly different incarnations of the same man.

His short novel *L’Enfance d’un chef*, published in January 1939, shows a similar engagement/disengagement. In April 1938 Gallimard had published *La nausée*, helped along by the Sartre’s contacts Simone Jollivet and her lover Charles Dullin, who finally handed the manuscript to Jean Paulhan, who had already rejected it twice. ²⁷ Although most critics lavished praise upon *La nausée*, extreme right-wing critics from the *Action*

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²⁴ Ibid., 221-222.


²⁶ Ibid., 59. (my translation)

²⁷ Cohen-Solal, 217.
française (among other journals), such as Robert Brasillach, heavily panned it, citing their general disgust with its overwhelming sordidness.28 According to Contat, Sartre completed *L’enfance d’un chef* in July of 1938.29 Can one interpret the novel not only as a political act, but also as a counter-attack on those who had just condemned his novel *La nausée*? It seems so, as the main character, a rather lost boy named Julien, travels down many murky paths, including homosexuality (which Sartre later associates with fascism), and finally ends up as a right-wing anti-Semite who not only joins the Action Française, but who with a group of his militant buddies also nearly beats to death a foreign worker “guilty” of reading a communist newspaper. At end of the story Julien extolls the virtues of the virgin girl he will marry and with whom he will have many (pure French) children.30 Although Sartre had had many opportunities to witness similar trajectories of young men he had come into contact with in the lycée where he taught in the tony Paris suburb of Neuilly, the timing of the story, written so directly after the attacks by Action Française members, seems a clever riposte typical of French intellectuals of the era, a particularly *normalien* exercise. Cohen-Solal interprets the tale of the young fascist as part of Sartre’s political awakening, which in some sense, it was. A work of fiction touching on an important topic of day, in this case, the recruitment of young Frenchmen to ultra-right-wing, racist movements, often more effectively sways public opinion than a journalistic approach. One can easily envision one’s cousin, brother, son, or neighbor as a potential Julien, pulled into French fascism like someone hypnotized by a malevolent

28 Ibid., 237-238.
mesmerist. Outside of the realm of fiction-writing, however, Sartre still did not directly involve himself in any significant anti-fascist movement.

Further evidence of his lack of political awareness can be seen in his letters to Beauvoir and others, particularly those immediately preceding the outbreak of World War II. In late August 1939 he wrote to Louise Védrine “I do not really believe in the war. Obviously, this letter might arrive just when a general call to arms takes place. But I will still risk saying that I do not believe it will occur. […] I do not believe that Hitler is such an idiot.” 31 Sartre continued in the same tone on August 31:

It is impossible to think that Hitler is dreaming of starting a war with the current state of mind of the German population. It’s a bluff. There might be a general call to arms, but make note of this – no matter how bad it is at the moment. Furthermore, mobilization is not [the same thing as] war.32

As Cohen-Solal points out, the next day Sartre was mobilized.33 Sartre, like many other Frenchmen, appears to have existed in a state of denial regarding the outbreak of war. Given his close ties to politically active young intellectuals, such as Nizan and Bost, his denial of the rumblings of imminent war, rather like a child hiding his head under a pillow at the first crash of thunder, is surprising. Hindsight, however, is 20/20: critics frequently reproached the myopic philosopher for his lack of clairvoyance, while others are forgiven the same “flaw.”

32 Ibid., 271.
33 Cohen-Solal, 243.
By this time, Sartre had already assumed a minor role as a public intellectual, beginning when he returned from Germany to Le Havre. The philosophy professor gave monthly lectures in the Salle de la Lyre Havraise, concentrating on literary topics such as Faulkner, Woolf, Joyce, Huxley, and stream of consciousness in front of an audience of local literature lovers. Sartre eventually transformed several of these lectures into a series of articles that appeared in the N.R.F in 1938 and 1939.34

His nascent literary/philosophical star was also on the rise, as in the 1936 he published *La Transcendance de l’Ego* in an issue of *Recherches philosophiques*. Sartre’s critical article on Husserl

[Eventually] gave rise to reactions and disputes between clans of phenomenologists from Latin America to Portugal, in Israel and Sweden, […] Germany, England and the United States: shrill polemics, discussions between continents, a long chain of refutations between the initiated, a tossing around of the ball from 1936 and [continuing] for the next half century as to whether or not the transcendence of the ego established by Sartre was deeply flawed.35

Thus, from the very beginning Sartre displayed a talent for provoking polemics, intentionally or otherwise.

As his critics point out, the focus of Sartre’s writing changed greatly after the war, becoming more militant, overtly political, and now it is this work that has sparked recent accusations of opportunism, by feeding on post-war France’s debate regarding questions of responsibility. The worst-case scenario, as in Gilbert Joseph’s *Une si douce occupation*, paints an unflattering picture of Sartre as an unabashedly ambitious writer

34 Ibid., 186.

determined to carve out a niche for himself, both during the Occupation and after the Liberation. Sartre’s concept of the engaged writer would be his most well-known contribution to 20th century French literature, but as his critics argued, his war-time behavior did not give him the proper credentials to establish himself as such. Was he merely an astute judge of the flavor of the times, giving society what it craved? Or can this idea of engagement have had its roots in a real war-time evolution, thus affirming its genuineness?

Unfortunately, Joseph’s book cannot be judged as completely reliable and definitely not as unbiased. For example he makes factual errors, such as the date of Camus’ children’s birth. Conveniently, Joseph paints a picture of the pied-noir as a literary arriviste Don Juan who fled the responsibility of his wife and children in Algeria, only to get caught in France when British and Americans occupied North Africa.36 In reality, the Camus twins were born after the war ended,37 but this factual oversight paints Camus in a darker light.

Additionally, Joseph relies very heavily on interviews with people antagonistic towards Sartre (ex-soldiers who served with Sartre, literary rivals), many of whom appear in no other Sartre biographies, including Cohen-Solal’s exhaustive work, while leaving out interviews with people known to have been closer to Sartre. On the whole, the book lacks the balance that might have been provided by views from both sides of the pro/anti-

37 Albert Camus, Théâtre, récits, nouvelles. Preface by Jean Grenier, Critical Introduction and Biographical Notes by Roger Quilliot (Paris : Gallimard Pléiade, 1962), XXXIV.
Sartre fence, and it confines itself to that which is simply critical, scandalous, or downright inflammatory.

In order to gauge Sartre’s sincerity with regards to political engagement, the best tool for examination (or verification) would be his writings of the moment, *in the moment*. Sartre’s war diaries, which begin and end with the *drôle de guerre* (September 1939 to June 1940), prove that a real evolution *did* take place, at least in a philosophical sense. During these nine months, Sartre gave birth to a massive quantity of writing, often working ten to eleven hours per day. At one point in his diaries, he mentions, “I have written 100 pages since the day before yesterday.” His journal filled fourteen notebooks, which Sartre sent or gave piecemeal to Simone de Beauvoir, who quickly circulated them throughout their circle of friends. Unfortunately, all this lending resulted in the loss of all but five of the original notebooks, which would appear in publication only posthumously, according to Sartre’s wishes. Thus, the texts were not available to his earliest post-war critics, the people charging him with blatant opportunism, of plucking the idea of engagement out of thin air. Close-reading of the diaries not only proves that Sartre had, in fact, formulated an embryonic idea of engagement, as well as ideas for other war-time publications such as *L’être et le néant* and the *Chemins de la liberté* trilogy.

Jean-Paul Sartre, caught up in the national wave of inactivity that was the *drôle de guerre*, experienced a double shock to his system. Firstly, the draft made his utter powerlessness abundantly clear. He writes:

> Up til then I believed myself sovereign; I had to encounter the negation of my *own* freedom - through being mobilized - in order to become aware of the weight

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of the world and my links with all those other fellows and their links with me. The war really divided me in two.39

Secondly, the young scholar, raised among bourgeois intellectuals, found himself in a milieu which he had never before experienced. The individualist had never been compelled to live in close quarters with people who were neither of his class, nor his choosing. The wide exposure to all ranks of society, coupled with a strong feeling of impotence, acted as a catalyst: the period of war represented a metamorphosis in the intellectual and social thinking of the author. He writes, “You might say that in it I passed from the individualism, the pure individual, of before the war, to the social and to socialism.”40 This discovery (and self-criticism) would become essential to a shift in his writing from the loner who rejects society (as in the pre-war novel La nausée), to one who acknowledges the world around him and actively wishes to change it through his writing. Sartre’s War Diaries, written during the long months of the Phony War, contain vital elements later developed in Qu’est-ce que la littérature?, most notably that of the committed writer, who wields a pen and acknowledges his responsibility for that which he creates. Although Sartre does not specifically use the term littérature engagée in his war diaries, one can nonetheless trace an evolution of the writer’s attitudes toward himself, his comrades, society, and the political situation to reflect the coming of a future ideal.

Within the first few pages of journal entries, the reader finds an acknowledgement of the existentialist principle: one is responsible for oneself, that existence precedes essence, and that each of us simply exists in the world. What one does with one’s life is


40 Ibid., viii.
entirely up to the individual. Sartre expressed frustration towards one of his fellow soldiers, and wrote

If I tell you that in such a situation I acted like a bastard, you reduce this to words; you don’t see what the effort to judge oneself can be. And you don’t see it because you’re incapable of making that effort. The way you reason is: I’m not a bastard, because five hundred thousand other fellows are bastards just like me.” You run away from yourself and, instead of looking at yourself as a single, unique individual, you seek reassurance by dissolving yourself into a social category. You evade any examination of your own conscience. 41 (November 14, 1939)

Here, Sartre’s anger, emphasized by the word “bastard”, extends towards those who do not take responsibility for their own actions. The collective excuse that the masses all are engaging in the war, indicated by the large number, 500,000, is no longer valid. The very vehemence of this statement, as well as the pronoun “I”, indicate that Sartre includes himself as one of those half million sheep, and finds the situation galling. In this moment of awareness, he acknowledges his own guilt in participating in the pseudo-war.

Furthermore, the fact that he applies his personal philosophy towards the conduct of his comrades announces the awakening of that socially-conscious self. He is no longer just an individual, but part of a collectivity. As a member of such, he feels responsible for taking part in their actions. Sartre, the unique individual, feels the burden of his influence. This moment therefore signifies a prise de conscience regarding the war and his duty towards his fellow comrades.

It is not without some misgivings that Sartre accepts ultimate responsibility for his enlistment. A struggle also exists within the author’s own mind. On November 24, 1939, he wrote,

41 Ibid., 10.
It will be understood that what I will, at every moment, is precisely my situation in the world. I am what I will. And that is inevitably limited. I am a finite being, deeply and totally responsible for myself. [...] Options represent the real future, meaning of my present. But this future – future of the world, future of ipseity – transcends consciousness.42

Although Sartre is conscious of the freedom to forge his own path in life, the enormity of the war makes him feel as though that liberty were limited. A soldier, cog in the machine of conflict, views the power of battle as surpassing any will of his own. The conscript questions his power of choice when faced with the sweeping force of what he perceives as his insurmountable destiny. Thus, he sees himself as reduced from a free being into someone in a slavish state of compliance.

Ultimately, Sartre accepts the idea of taking responsibility for one’s actions, indicated by the statement, “total freedom can exist only for a being which is its own foundation, in other words responsible for its facticity. Facticity is nothing other than the fact that there’s a human reality in the world at every moment. It’s a fact.”43 Thus, the soldiers must conceive of their actions as being completely within the realm of their own choice. The draftees cannot claim to be mere victims of fate and the era, for their very existence testifies to their ability to choose their paths in life. War between nations is only a reality that exists at the moment, outside of the essential self. It is not inherently present at the most basic level of human existence, that is, within the mind. Thus, if human beings accept that they are categorically responsible for their own conduct, they will have the freedom to struggle against outside forces.

42 Ibid., 41-42.
43 Ibid., 109.
Sartre takes the idea of responsibility for one’s own existence to a further extreme when he writes of the possibility of physical torture.

It is always upon me that the terrible responsibility falls to acknowledging I am defeated; and, at whatever point I stop, it is I who have decided I couldn’t go on any longer [being tortured] - hence, I could have gone on a bit longer still. But if I admit - and wish - never to have any excuse, my freedom becomes mine, I assume for ever that terrible responsibility.44

(December 7, 1939)

In fact, this statement has a direct correlation in Qu’est-ce que la littérature?. Sartre writes that, “Whatever the sufferings which have been endured, it is the victim who decides, as a last resort, what the moment is when they are unbearable and when he must talk.”45 In both instances, these declarations are rooted in the experience of war, inspired by Sartre’s newfound awareness of human conflict. Although the usage of the pronoun “I” in the journal personalizes the statement, it is the victim who exercises final responsibility for his (and the nation’s) own choice.

Sartre’s contemplations on the nature of war and man’s final accountability for it, reach new heights with the statement,

Men […] do not deserve peace. That’s true. True quite simply in the sense that they make war. None of the men at present under arms (I make no exception for myself, of course) deserves peace, for the simple reason that if he really did deserve it he wouldn’t be here. – But he may have been obliged, forced…Fiddlesticks! He was free.46 (December 18, 1939)

Unlike in the first notebook, in which Sartre rails against the idea of taking full responsibility for his place in the war and then ends by rather covertly accepting ultimate accountability for his actions, he now overtly affirms his position. The insertion of

44 Ibid., 114.

“but…” implies an internal struggle which he has had to overcome, the idea that the initial justification of his actions no longer stands true. He formally acknowledges his own weakness, but at this point is unable to offer a viable alternative to his passive acceptance.

Sartre’s condemnation grows even stronger by the end of the fifth notebook, when after approximately three months of the drôle de guerre he offers the idea that,

The declaration of war, which was the fault of certain men, we all adopt as our own, with our own freedom. This war – we have all declared it at one moment or another. But then instead of paying for it, instead of saying “It’s my war” and trying to live it, they all take refuge from it in poses. They refuse it with bad faith, exactly as one refuses a fault one has just committed. (December 23, 1939)

Thus, the great ‘sin’ of the war is not only that one has passively accepted it, allowing the will of another to be imposed upon one’s own freedom, thus negating that liberty, but also that after the deed has been done, one refuses to accept responsibility for it. In fact, the war represents a double rejection of the inherent freedom of man: the failure to make one’s own destiny, exemplified by the conscious subordination of the will, coupled with the denial of that chosen fate.

At this point, the reader must ask what the essential purpose of writing these journals could be. According to Sartre, they are a “calling into question of myself […] I don’t do this calling into question with groans and humility, but coldly and in order to move forward.” Thus Sartre’s extensive journals become a tool of self-examination. They represent an active desire to progress, a will to investigate his innermost thoughts in

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46 Sartre, War Diaries, 127.

47 Ibid., 164.

48 Ibid., 169.
order to evolve. He applies himself in an almost scientific manner, re-working his point of view until it has become clear and fixed.

Furthermore, the journals serve as a source of testimony for the world, not just a private tool of self-development.49 He writes,

> It is above all the notebook of a witness. The more I go on, the more I consider it a testimonial: the testimony of a 1939 bourgeois draftee on the war he’s being made to fight. And I, too, write anything whatever in my notebook, but I do so under the impression that I’m justified in my testimony’s historical value. […] I’m at an artillery staff headquarters twenty kilometers from the front, surrounded by the petty and middling bourgeois. But, precisely because of all that, my journal is a testimony that’s valid for millions of men. It is a mediocre, and for that reason, general, testimony.50 (December 1, 1939)

This statement is revealing on many fronts. First, by classifying himself as “one among millions,” Sartre denies that he or what he is doing is anything exceptional. One sees here a more profound idea of kinship with those around him. If he, an extremely well-educated writer, views himself as a common man, one can further interpret he statement as an indirect plea for a classless society. Part of the historical value of this journal is his metamorphosis from an ardent individualist to one who becomes conscious of society and man’s relation to man.

Furthermore, the word ‘testimony’ invokes the idea of a juridical process. In his journals, Sartre takes an oath to himself and to his existentialist doctrine that necessitates a search for truth. His writings, an account of what befalls him as a soldier, takes on a

49 Philippe Lejeune attributes the fonctions of “testimony” and “guide to one’s life” to journal writing in his article “Cher Cahier”, which originally appeared in Magazine littéraire in April of 1988 and was republished in his book Cher Cahier : Témoignages sur le journal personnel recueillis et présentés par Philippe Lejeune (Paris: Gallimard, 1989), 11-12.

50 Sartre, War Diaries, 168-169.
sense of urgency. The essay “Writing for One’s Age”\footnote{Sartre, Jean-Paul, \textit{What Is Literature? and Other Essays,} Trans. by Bernard Frechtman, (Cambridge, MA : Harvard University Press, 1988). \textit{Qu’est-ce que la littérature ?} was originally published in \textit{Situations II I} (Paris : Gallimard, 1948). All the following references will be made to this version.} invokes a similar idea. “A book has its absolute truth within the age. It is \textit{lived} like an outbreak, like a famine.\[\ldots\] Later on, when the age is done with, it will enter into the relative, it will become a message.”\footnote{Ibid., 242.}

One can add to this statement by continuing that a book, with its sense of urgency, can be lived like a \textit{war}. Sartre’s affidavit ripens into the encapsulated truth of the era, and he accomplishes the goal of writing for his age.

Not only does Sartre write for his age, but he comes to a new understanding in regards to the war. In Notebook Five, he writes, “It’s \textit{during peacetime} that we should have had that dedication and that seriousness – we’d perhaps have avoided the war.”\footnote{Sartre, \textit{War Diaries,} 163.} At this point, he has come full circle. Formerly, he was the victim of circumstance, next he admitted responsibility for his choice to participate in the war. Now he stresses that action beforehand could have prevented the war altogether. His circuit from inactivity to activity is complete. In so doing, he displays the traits of the engaged writer of “Writing for One’s Age.” In this essay, he declares,

To write for one’s age is not to reflect it passively; it is to want to maintain it or change it, thus to go beyond it towards the future, and it is this effort to change it that places us most deeply within it, for it is never reducible to the dead ensemble of tools and customs; it is in movement; it is constantly surpassing itself; the concrete present and the living future of all the men who compose it coincide rigorously within it.\footnote{Sartre, Jean-Paul, “Writing for One’s Age ” Trans. by Bernard Frechtman in \textit{What is Literature? And Other Essays} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 243.}
Sartre has now taken a definite position in his writing; he has acknowledged guilt for past actions and shown the beginnings of a willingness to militate for change in his world.

Thus, in the course of reading Sartre’s *War Diaries*, one can effectively trace a definite evolution in the author’s attitudes towards the company around him, his society, but most importantly, towards himself. He commences the war experience as an intellectual segmented from the rest of the world, and undergoes a type of spiritual awakening prompted by close contact with his fellow draftees. No longer can he exist in a state which estranges him from society as a whole, for they share a common fate. The exposure to all walks of humanity gradually transformed Sartre into a writer who took a position in literature and actively worked for changes in the world around him.

Whatever one’s position may be on Sartre personally, as man, writer, critic, or political activist, it must be acknowledged that the seeds for his post-war behavior, the guidelines for engaged literature are visible within his war diaries, at a time when he could neither fully predict nor gain from their germination.

Critics might then respond, à la Gilbert Joseph, that although this may prove that Sartre had some nice ideas for concepts for the future, private notebooks intended for a small audience of friends did nothing immediate to help a country in crisis, that his diaries were only an intellectual exercise. Sartre actually risked *nothing* in writing these; in fact, this may have made his post-war moralistic stances even more galling, as he knew what should be done, then waited until the Germans were gone and his hide was safe in order to play the moralizer. Intent or private philosophical waking extended only as far as the immediate private circle. One can decry public abominations in the living room, but this serves only to vent bottled-up frustrations, which may help in a private,
psychological manner, but do nothing to correct the situation at large. This stance is not entirely invalid, but it relies on the idea that armed resistance was inherently superior to intellectual resistance, that somehow everyone, no matter what their physical fitness, should have physically risked themselves. As Philippe Burrin’s book *La France à l’heure allemande* argues, during the Occupation, the great majority of French adopted an attitude of accommodation, not resistance;\(^5^5\) therefore intellectual resistance was in itself an exceptional act.

Sartre did begin resisting, however, even while held captive in the Stalag XIID POW camp, although of course this manifested itself in the form of theatrical expression rather than a more flamboyant form of armed resistance. The prison-camp experience deepened Sartre’s new-found connection with his fellow soldiers. He stated, “In the Stalag, I found a form of collective living that I had not known since the *Ecole normale*, and I must say that on the whole I was happy there.”\(^5^6\) Sartre eventually ended up fraternizing with other writers and musicians, but surprisingly, his closest ties while a prisoner were with captive priests, such as the Abbé Marius Perrin. Given the fact Sartre was a confirmed atheist “and extremely proud of it,”\(^5^7\) this at first appears odd, but the Abbé had read widely from philosophical texts and was himself unconventional, therefore he and Sartre exchanged books and conversation on a daily basis.\(^5^8\) Cohen-Solal attributes Sartre’s friendship with camp priests to their similarity of lifestyle – both

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\(^{5^5}\) Burrin, *La France à l’heure allemande*, 468.

\(^{5^6}\) Jean-Paul Sartre, “Journal de Mathieu”, carnet inédit, in *Les temps modernes* (Septembre 1982), 460.


\(^{5^8}\) Cohel-Solal, 280-281.
had no real family ties outside of camp, and thus could devote themselves to their respective gods, be they spiritual or philosophical.59

Many of the discussions between Sartre and the camp priests focused on belief; these later influenced Sartre in the choice of his first dramatic subject, a nativity play, *Bariona ou le fils du tonnerre*, which was performed at Christmas 1940. Many years after the war, Sartre stated that the fact that he chose a topic from Christian mythology did not indicate a conversion on his part, but instead was intended to “unite Christians and non-believers alike.”60 Prisoners produced and performed the play with makeshift costumes, masks, and scenery constructed from the materials at hand or given to them by their German captors. Sartre directed as well as played the role of Balthazar, one of the wise-men.61

Theatrical performances sprung up in several prisoner of war camps, where French soldiers gradually banded together in order to lift each others’ spirit and while away the long days. Performances usually began in a small fashion, with small impromptu gatherings by imprisoned musicians, which in turn lead to organized performances and skits, finally leading up to a larger production with several cast members as well as costumes and scenery improvised from the materials at hand.62 Major camp productions included well-known plays such as Henri de Montherlant’s

59 Ibid., 282.


61 Galster, *Le théâtre de Jean-Paul Sartre devant ses premiers critiques*, 43.

tragedy *La reine morte*, performed at the Wistnitz Kommando at Christmas of 1942.\(^6\)

Other writers in addition to Sartre also used their ample free time in order to create new plays. Robert Brasillach, at this time best known as a polemicist and the editor-in-chief of the fascist journal *Je suis partout*, wrote a version of *Bérénice* while being held captive at in Oflag VIA in Warburg. According to Alice Kaplan, “on at least two festive occasions, fellow officers read the play out loud, part of evening entertainment at the camp.”\(^6\) While the famously anti-Semitic Brasillach wrote a play centering on Jewish heroine Bérénice (although his portrayal of Queen Bérénice as “an overly perfumed Jewish courtesan”\(^6\) was a far cry from the original noble Racine character), the atheist Sartre’s drama took place at the moment of the Jesus’ birth.

Although the nativity served as a backdrop for the action of Sartre’s *Bariona*, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph make no appearances in the play. Instead, they appear as distant figures, the *idea* of whom influences the main characters of the play. The action takes place during the time the Romans occupied Judea. Immediately following the establishment of the setting by a narrator, a scene takes place between the Roman tax collector, Lélius, and a Jewish publican. Here, the publican bows obsequiously, attempting to curry favor with the Roman, who insults him and the Jews of the village with stereotyped criticisms of the type one might find in contemporary extreme-right journals such as *Je suis partout*. Lélius states, “[…] You Jews, […] You’re real savages. […] You’ll never be rational, you all believe in witch-doctors. Your prophets have done you

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\(^6\) Ibid., 242-243.


\(^6\) Ibid., 41.
a lot of harm. They’ve gotten you used to an easy solution: the Messiah.” In other words, the Jews are superstitious, uncivilized and lazy, a statement that the Germans who allowed the play to be produced would have thoroughly applauded. Can this anti-Semitic rant be justified in a segregated camp where Jewish officers were allowed neither to perform nor to attend this play? In spite of Sartre’s later assurances, most notably in the 1968 interview for *Avant-scène Théâtre*, that everyone understood that the play was actually about liberty, many spectators interpreted the play as anti-Semitic because of these lines, thus defeating the intended purpose of the play. The charge of anti-Semitism, only partly stemming from *Bariona*, would regularly rear its head after the war.

However, if one can look beyond these lines, problematic as they are, to the larger action of the play, one sees a battle of wills between Bariona, the Jewish head of the village, and the Romans, who have come to impose a heavy tax levy on the long-suffering town. The distraught people turn to their leader for guidance, and he resolves

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68 Cohen-Solal, 285.

69 Although Gilbert Joseph’s book is far from unbiased, it is useful for its interviews. He cites three witnesses’ reaction to the play and their interpretation of it as anti-Semitic. He also describes the great enjoyment of the German officers who laughed at the depiction of the Jewish publican. As the lines provoke cringing and embarrassment for contemporary readers, and as I myself found them to be painfully and stereotypically anti-Semitic, it is reasonable to assume that a good portion of Sartre’s audience, a number of whom were uneducated and unsophisticated and therefore likely incapable of this “reading between the lines,” would have interpreted the scene as mocking the Jewish publican and “characteristics” of Jews in general.

70 Susan Suleiman, for example, who criticizes Sartre’s depiction of Jews as the “other” and the “authentic” and “inauthentic” Jew in Sartre’s *Réflexions sur la question juive*, and *L’Anti-Sémite et le Juif*, does not comment on anti-Semitism in *Bariona*. Susan Suleiman, “Rereading Rereading: Further Reflections on Sartre’s Réflexions” in *October* 87 (Winter 1999), 129-38.
that they should pay the tax, but no others after it, and moreover, have no more children as the ultimate act of resistance. If no more Jews are created, then the Romans will suffer because they will have no tax contributions to fund their armies, forces that in turn keep the people oppressed. Bariona proposes this “religion of nothingness” only to find that his wife is pregnant and happy about the coming event. Bariona then experiences a crisis of faith and demands that God send him a sign that He wants the baby, but when the Angel does appear announcing the birth of the Messiah, Bariona still does not recant. Sartre makes a direct appeal to his audience through his character of King Balthazar when he tells Bariona,

You suffer even though your duty is to hope. Your duty as a man. [...] They are in Bethlehem in a stable, gathered around the warm little body of a child. And all this future which fills mankind, all these summits, all the purple horizons, all these marvelous cities which he frequents without even having set foot there, that is Hope. That is Hope. Look at the prisoners in front of you, those who live in the mud and cold. Do you know what you’d see if you could follow their souls? Hills and the gentle meandering of a stream, and grape-vines and the Southern sun, their vines and their sun. They’re down there. For a frozen prisoner covered with vermin, Hope is the golden vines in September. Hope and the best of themselves.

According to the Abbé Perrin, these lines, which so closely evoked the POWs actual physical and psychological state, brought the audience to tears. The lines not only serve as effective drama, but also illustrate Sartre’s growing connection with the situation of those around him, much like the blossoming empathy one can trace in his war dairies.

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71 Sartre, Bariona, 581.
72 Ibid., 585.
73 Ibid., 604.
74 Perrin, 168.
The self-serving intellectual who isolated himself, much like Roquentin of *La nausée*, began to struggle out of his cocoon.

Indeed, the character of Bariona serves as a mirror for Sartre’s own evolution. At the beginning of the play’s fifth tableau, Bariona asks

A God who would become a man? The all-powerful, in his seat of glory, would look at these lice who swarm over the old crust of the earth and sully it with their excrement. He would say, “I want to be one of those vermin down there.” Don’t make me laugh.”

The words “crust,” “vermin,” and “excrement” recall the deliberately organic vocabulary of *La nausée*’s protagonist, as well as his negative view of those around him and his voluntary isolation in his own intellectual pursuits, much like Sartre’s view of Le Havre and at the beginning of army life. His nihilism metamorphoses into engagement, a willing assumption of his liberty as opposed to one trapped in a situation that others have willed upon him.

At one moment, Bariona contemplates killing the Messiah in order to reaffirm his position as leader, as well as to prevent his people from becoming distracted by the birth of this so-called savior. According to Bariona, any distraction takes away from the Jews’ struggle against their Roman oppressors, even a distraction which lends moral support to his people and gives meaning to their lives. Here Bariona exudes a type of radical egotism, verging on Sartre’s *théorie du salaud* (bastard theory), in which he gains his feelings of self-worth from acting as a tyrant to others, in this case, the others whom Bariona is supposedly bound to protect. If the subjugated party revolts against him, he

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75 Sartre., *Bariona*, 607.

76 Sartre develops this theory starting with the portrait of the sadist in *L’être et le néant* (Paris : Gallimard, 1943), 439-441 and explicitly uses the term *salaud* in his 1945 lecture *L’existentialisme est un humanisme* (Paris : Folio, 1996), 71.
loses his position as leader and becomes an outcast from his own society, an exile to his egotism. The Wiseman Balthazar (Sartre) points out that Bariona must let the Messiah live, and moreover, he must let his own child live in spite of his potential suffering, for they are by nature, free, and must be allowed to create their own essences. Once alone, Bariona meditates,

Free…Ah! Your chest tightens up with your refusal. You have to loosen up your fists and open yourself up, you have to accept it…You have to enter this stable and get down on your knees. It will be the first time in my life. Enter, stand apart from the others who betrayed me, on my knees in a darkened corner…the icy wind of midnight and infinite empire of this holy night will belong to me. I will be free, free. Free from God and for God, from myself and for myself. Ah! How hard it is…77

At this point, Bariona not only assumes his own freedom, the most difficult task in existentialist philosophy, but assumes it for the good of his community, by acting in the interest of the preservation of others and his people as a whole. Bariona becomes a true leader in that he looks beyond his personal problems to act in an idealist manner towards the members of his society. He effectively re-integrates himself in the community of Jews and follows the golden rule of existentialism – treating others as he would like to be treated by acknowledging their individual liberty.

Bariona’s reintegration into Jewish society becomes most strikingly apparent when he learns of a plot by the Romans to kill the newborn Christ. He organizes his men in an act of armed resistance against the Roman soldiers, a conscious act leading to certain death. He acknowledges this to his wife, but proclaims that he will suffer joyfully. “I am full of joy, like a cup running over. I am free, and I hold my destiny in

77 Ibid., 627.
my own hand. I march against Herod’s soldiers and God marches on my side.” In this final act of resistance, Bariona assumes responsibility for his situation and thus his destiny, thereby assuming the freedom that is often so difficult to shoulder.

One can draw a distinct parallel between the character of Bariona, a leader who mentally exiles himself, then reintegrates into his community, and Sartre’s later depiction of Oreste in his 1943 production of Les mouches. Oreste, an insider/exile seeks his homeland, only to condemn himself to wander for the good of the state. Like Bariona, Oreste harbors dreams of ruling over the city, but realizes that in order to effectively liberate it from the accursed invaders, he must endure a series of ordeals, beginning with the murders of his mother and stepfather in order to purify the city of the cancer that infects and condemns the populace. In assuming his freedom not to feel guilty for these deaths, thus rendering himself invulnerable to the wrath of the Erinnyes, he alienates his sister Electre, who denies her own freedom when she falls prey to her own guilt. In leaving the city, Oreste takes upon himself the burden of his freedom, exercised at its highest level in the service of his people. Thus, with one sacrificial act, Oreste abandons his dreams of ruling – a gesture that symbolically kills his former self, that self concerned with glory rather than community. To the Argan people, Oreste is dead, with no possibility of returning to assume the role given to him at birth. He will exist in a state of perpetual, self-imposed exile. Oreste, like Bariona, knowingly assumes the full consequences of his freedom, employs the word liberté again and again, and chooses to create his own destiny, his own essence, rather than accept his allocated position.

78 Ibid., 632.
Therefore, one cannot deny that fact that Sartre’s time as a POW launched a pattern of intellectual resistance that would continue throughout the war years.

One can, however, reproach Sartre for cultivating an image of himself as a more potent “resistant” than he ever was, an image far more flamboyant than in reality. He (with the later help of Beauvoir, who acts as the official “historian” of the couple’s activities during the Occupation some twenty years later) promoted the idea that he escaped from the POW camp, with all the romantic imagery of bravado that an audience would assume accompanied a daring flight – barbed wire, guards, dogs, tracking, discreet moonlit passages through open fields, and hiding during daylight hours so as to evade detection.\(^79\) In reality, the writer obtained a phony medical certificate that declared him to be “partially blind in the right eye, causing balance problems.”\(^80\) Thus, Sartre owed his release a physical defect, a partial blindness. The Abbé Perrin confirms this in his memoirs regarding the time spent with Sartre in Stalag XIID, and indicates that Sartre coached him (unsuccessfully) in order to mimic signs of epilepsy.\(^81\) Thanks to the intervention of a friendly German Catholic guard Sartre even managed to take his personal papers with him, including the draft of *L’Age de raison*.\(^82\) Instead of leaving on

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\(^79\) According to Yves Durand in *La France des années noires : Tome 1 De la défaite à Vichy*, edited by Jean-Pierre Azéma and François Bédarida, (Paris: Seuil, 1993, 2000) approximately 1,850,000 French soldiers were taken prisoner, of which 200-250,000 were either liberated or escaped, leaving roughly 1,600,000 who were actually transported to German POW camps. By the end of the war, approximately 1,000,000 Frenchmen remain in the camps (37,000 died of the 600,000 who were no longer in the camps) (261-262). Sartre was actually quite fortunate in his Stalag XIID, as approximately 95% of the POW’s were sent to work camps, while Sartre lead a life of comparative leisure. (264-265). His own camp appears to have been fairly easy to escape from, with few guards and a no electrified fence. Indeed the Abbé Perrin, Sartre’s priest friend, escaped shortly after Sartre obtained a medical release. (Perrin, 115)

\(^80\) Cohen-Solal. 289. (my translation)

\(^81\) Perrin, 115.

\(^82\) Ibid., 121.
foot in the dead of night, Sartre in fact took a train filled with other POWs who had also obtained medical releases. As Sirinelli points out, nothing indicates that Sartre directly collaborated with the German authorities in order to obtain his release, as insinuated by Gilbert Joseph in Une si douce occupation, but his liberation was also not due to an évaston (escape) as Beauvoir described in a dramatic fashion in La force de l’âge. Here, Beauvoir painted the picture of a secret resistance organization created by the prisoners, one which obtained the necessary false papers and necessary items such as clothing in order to help potential escapees. Sartre played up his wall-eyed state during the medical exam, and easily received a valid medical certificate, although Beauvoir insists that had he not passed, he would have “left eight days later, on foot, as planned.” Sirinelli accurately points out that the word escape has no place in the story of Sartre’s release, as he obtained a valid medical certificate. Thus, Beauvoir’s revisionism simultaneously strengthens and weakens Sartre’s image as a resistant: when she wrote La force de l’âge in 1960, she depicted an escapee who resembled the romantic image of someone courting danger in order to obtain freedom, but in the long run, her exaggeration hurt Sartre’s image and further opened him up to criticisms of self-aggrandizement, and to a greater extent, outright fabrication of his resistance activities.

In April 1941, Sartre returned to a very different Paris than the one he had left during the phony war. German soldiers roamed the streets, military vehicles had replaced private cars, and new restrictions on food and other goods forced people to shift for their

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83 Sirinelli, 169.
84 Beauvoir, La Force de l’âge, 551-552. (my translations)
85 Sirinelli, 169.
daily needs, creating an ever-growing preoccupation with what to put on the table, how to find and even purchase it, due to war-time scarcities and the unfavorable exchange rate between the French Franc and the German Mark. The Republic had effectively been killed, cut in two and occupied in the north, while an appointed, cultish leader, the Maréchal Philippe Pétain, held sway in the south, preaching “respectable” bourgeois values and guilt to a society eager perceive life as normal once again.

Fresh from writing a resistance drama in the POW camp, Sartre sought to found a resistance group, Socialisme et Liberté, composed of members of a pre-existing resistance group affiliated with the Ecole Normale. Members of Socialisme et Liberté also included many from the group of close friends and lovers known as the famille, most notably Beauvoir, Bost, and the Kosckiewicz sisters. Other intellectuals such as Nathalie Sarroute took part in the long meetings in Sartre’s or Beauvoir’s hotel rooms, meetings that generally consisted of interminable discussion sessions on the problems of the day, and theories on how to change them. In her memoirs Beauvoir insisted that their ultimate goal, in case of a total German victory, would be to make the Germans “lose the peace.” By this Beauvoir insinuated that they would potentially perform terrorist acts. Sarrute later took a highly critical stance towards the group. She stated, “It was a so-called resistance group. In fact, we [just] wrote compositions on the France of the Future! There were three or four meetings and that was all.” Although Sirinelli points out that Sarrute’s disdain for the group may be influenced by post-war conflicts

86 Sirinelli, 171.
87 Cohen-Solal, 297.
88 Beauvoir, 558.
between Sartre and the *Nouveau Roman* movement,\textsuperscript{90} her estimation of the group appears reasonable. After all, when one considers the nature of the group and its members, the majority of whom were academics or writers accustomed to certain forms of written expression as opposed to militant opposition, essay writing and theoretical discussion would be the group’s most logical form of action.

This said, the fact that the group (by which no written tract or subversive pamphlets exists) was relatively ineffectual in the world outside their small circle, does not *completely* negate its existence. At this time in particular, resistance groups were highly fragmented, generally formed among small bands of friends or colleagues that were thought trustworthy. Lack of gasoline and the other difficulties associated with transportation further contributed to the isolation (and ineffectiveness) of nascent resistance groups.\textsuperscript{91} Even the Communist party, which ultimately organized the best network of opposition to fascism, held an officially neutral stance up until June 1941, due to the German Soviet Pact of Non-Aggression signed in 1939.\textsuperscript{92} Therefore, although participation in *Socialisme et Liberté* implied very little aura of real danger associated with widespread, armed resistance groups (a link which Beauvoir at least appears to cultivate in the post-war years), this nonetheless does not nullify the sincerity behind the group’s formation. Even Sarraute’s criticisms lend weight to the *act* of forming the *Socialisme et Liberté*, for although she is a rather antagonistic outsider to the family circle, she still acknowledges a certain idealistic purpose behind the group.

\textsuperscript{90} Sirinelli, 172.

\textsuperscript{91} Kedward, *Occupied France*, 48.

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 52.
During the same period, Sartre received a promotion regarding his teaching position. At the beginning of the war, he taught in the affluent Paris suburb of Neuilly, but after his return from the POW camp in 1941, he took a position at the Lycée Condorcet, where he would be *professeur de khâgne* and prepare the most gifted students for entry into his Alma Mater, the prestigious Ecole Normale Supérieure. According to Ingrid Galster’s first article on the subject, the new post reduced his number of teaching hours from twelve to six, thus leaving extra time for his voluminous writing, from which emerged the 724-page *L’Etre et le néant*, two plays, numerous articles for *Les lettres françaises clandestines* as well as legal publications, journals, and letters.\(^93\)

This was a promotion indeed, and one that would later provoke a polemic among Sartre’s critics, for the teacher whose post Sartre eventually filled was Henri Dreyfus-Le Foyer, a Jew who lost his position due to the new racial laws barring Jews from certain liberal professions, among them, teaching. Dreyfus-Le Foyer, the grand nephew of Captain Alfred Dreyfus of the Dreyfus Affair forty years earlier, had been, according to an article by Jean Daniel, “A young and brilliant professor [replaced by] Jean-Paul Sartre.”\(^94\) As Galster points out, Sartre did not directly take over Dreyfus-LeFoyer’s post; instead, a professor and later well-known resistant, Ferdinand Alquié, took over Dreyfus’ duties during the interim, a temporary appointment of *dépannage*. After leaving the position at the Lycée Condorcet, Alquié went on to teach at the even more prestigious Lycées Henri IV and Louis-le-Grand.\(^95\) In the meantime, Dreyfus-Le Foyer held a

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\(^93\) Ingrid Galster, “Sartre et ‘la question juive’: Reflexions au dela d’une controverse” in *Commentaire*. (Spring 2000), 144-145. (my translations)


\(^95\) Op cit, 145.
provisional position in Lyon, in the unoccupied zone, while still officially employed at Condorcet until January 29, 1941. At this point, the Vichy government back-dated the Jewish professor’s enforced retirement date in order to make it effective as of October 15, 1940, thus effectively “erasing” the provisional position in Lyon. He was only forty-four years old. After losing his teaching position, Dreyfus-Le Foyer stayed in the Lyon area for a time, but upon learning that the Gestapo had designs on him, left on foot, hid in barns, and eventually ended up in La Chappelle, where he used his slight medical training to care for locals and the maquisards, until once again having to flee with the Gestapo at his heels. The end of the war found Dreyfus-Le Foyer in bad health and distraught at his countrymen’s lack of compassion.96 It must be noted that the Jewish teacher’s brave actions more closely resembled the romantic image that Sartre and Beauvoir cultivated after the war than any of their own.

Sartre’s post-Liberation essay, “La République du silence”, which appeared on September 9, 1944 in Les lettres françaises no 20, the first legal issue of that review to appear after the Liberation,97 rendered the situation even more hypocritical. He wrote, “They deported us en masse, as workers, as Jews, as political prisoners.”98 It is no wonder that his critics view this statement with a range of reactions from wry amusement to downright anger: it came from a man whose writing career sky-rocketed and who

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received a prestigious post at a celebrated prep school, while others lost their livelihood, lived in constant fear of discovery, or were actually deported and died in concentration camps. Although Sartre’s purpose in writing this essay was similar to that of De Gaulle’s purpose in his speech in front of the Hôtel de Ville in August of 1944, that is, to unite a fragmented, chaotic country into a semblance of pre-war democracy, his use of the term “us” implied that those who had suffered included him. Everyone has suffered, we have suffered right along with those people who were shot, fled, or transported to concentration camps. Therefore, my voice is legitimate, I am legitimate, authentic in my stance as a post-war moralizing figure.

As Galster points out, Sartre did in fact benefit from Vichy racial laws, and it is highly unlikely that he did not know that a Jew occupied such a prestigious post before him – after all, there were only four khâgnes in Paris, and these were (and still are) highly coveted spots.99 Sartre had taught at the Lycée Pasteur in Neuilly for several years at this point, and in spite of his absence during the drôle de guerre and his time in the POW camp, it seems highly unlikely that he would have been unaware of whom he succeeded at Condorcet. Moreover, in La force de l’âge, Beauvoir recounts how upon his return from the POW camp in Germany, Sartre berated her for signing the required Vichy oath of allegiance, which affirmed that she was neither a Jew nor a Free Mason. According to both Sartre and Beauvoir, Sartre himself never signed such a paper,100 but his dossier is missing from the archives of the Education Nationale,101 so we must take their word for it.

100 Beauvoir, La force de l’âge, 552-553.
it. In any case, his sanctimonious upbraiding of Beauvoir appears hypocritical in light of his promotion. Although only a very small handful of teachers actually resigned in protest of the unfair treatment handed out to their Jewish colleagues, and his behavior was in no way exceptional with regards to his career, given Sartre’s moralizing stance after the war, the Condorcet affair does leave a distinct smudge on Sartre’s image.

Jacques Lecarme’s virulent protest (and disparaging comments directed at Ingrid Galster) show an inflamed critic who seems determined to protect Sartre at any cost.102 He begins by stating, “Therefore, as Ingrid Galster informs us, there was fault on the teacher Sartre’s side, stemming from academic ambition, in that he accepted the post of a Jewish professor that was that had been dismissed in December of 1940.” Lecarme then disparages her sources, qualifying them as “old” and “flawed.” Lecarme continues, and attributes Galster with an attack that might be said to characterize his own prose: “But Ingrid Galster will not let go. ‘Objectively, [Sartre] benefited from the Vichy racial laws by taking over a job in October 1941, a position in which he only had to do six course hours per week.’103 Then, instead of addressing the issue at hand, the fact that Sartre did in fact assume the duties of a fired Jewish professor, Lecarme scolds Galster for not knowing how many hours a professor in a khâgne actually taught.

Throughout the article, Lecarme constantly repeats Galster’s name, which gives the effect of underlining the fact that she is a foreigner, and thus incapable of understanding the intricacies of the French educational system. Galster replies in a follow-up article:


103 Ibid., 26-27.
Of what would I “therefore” according to [Lecarme] have “informed” an enigmatic community of readers whom he designates by the pronoun “us”, having incessantly been mistaken because I lacked the necessary research and the competence apparently only possessed by a French-born researcher? […] According to Jacques Lecarme, I acted “like a cowboy vigilante justice, without fear and without reproach” fifty years after the Liberation, by so doing, deformed texts and perverted reading.  

Lecarme goes to extremes in his criticism of Galster, and accuses her of vilifying Sartre, when in fact she often defends the author and presents a very subtle portrait of his wartime activities.

Lecarme descends into nitpicking and accusations, but avoids the real question: the fact that Sartre did occupy the post of fired Jewish professor, and what this action implies in light of post-war claims, especially concerning reproaches Sartre made regarding the Germans and how they should have acted regarding the Nazi government.  

Lecarme continues, “[Galster] defends her two authors [Sartre et Beauvoir] so weakly that one cannot tell what she really thinks.” Thus, in the midst of Galster’s supposedly virulent attack on Sartre, Lecarme is unable to tell how she really feels about the author. Paradoxically, Lecarme appears offended that the question of Condorcet was even raised, all the while seeking to assert himself as the master of facts concerning Sartre.

In La responsabilité de l’écrivain, a November 1946 speech made at the first session of a general conference at UNESCO, Sartre states,

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105 Sirinelli, 45. Although we cannot claim to understand the strength of Lecarme’s attack, it is significant that Lecarme had family ties to Sartre through his father, Henri Lecarme. Both men attended the ENS at the same time as Sartre, and the two had a friendly relationship. Sirinelli notes that Henri Lecarme wrote his memories of Sartre at the rue d’Ulm for Michel Contat, was in the process of preparing the collection of Sartre’s Ecrits de Jeunesse. Jacques Lecarme himself lent his father’s text to Sirinelli and allowed him to directly cite from it.

106 Lecarme, 31.
We held every German who did not protest against the Nazi regime responsible for this regime, and if there existed here, or in any other country, any form of racial or economic oppression, we would hold any person responsible who did not denounce it. Today there are so many means of communication and information between nations. If any injustice is committed anywhere on earth, we will also be responsible for this injustice. [...]¹⁰⁷

He continues, “[In Nazi Germany] they could have acted, for example, if they were professors, they could have left the University or resigned their post when a Jewish professor was dismissed.”¹⁰⁸ (my italics) Thus, Sartre rebukes German teachers for not doing what neither he himself nor Beauvoir did – resigning in protest over the treatment of their Jewish colleagues.

Overall, Sartre appears to have forgotten the Jews and their suffering during the actual war years. His and Beauvoir’s Jewish former lover, Bianca Lamblin, wrote a scathing account of the couple’s actions prior to and during the war, which continued in the same tone in a letter to Ingrid Galster, later published with the texts of the conference La naissance du phénomène Sartre: Raisons d’un succès 1938-1945. Lamblin depicts a couple concerned with intellectual theory, but unwilling to take action or risks, and who abandoned her when she fled Paris for the South in order to take refuge in Vercors. Like Susan Suleiman,¹⁰⁹ she cites the first lines of La république du silence, where Sartre’s use of the pronoun “us” with regard to the deportations and deems it highly offensive. She justly points out that “[her] grandfather and aunt (the mother of Georges Perec) perished

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 12.
¹⁰⁹ In Susan R. Suleiman’s article “ Choisir son passé: Sartre mémorialiste de la France occupée ” she discusses the problematic of the idea of a “ national history ” of France during the war, at a time when many diverse realities existed, notably those of the French non-Jew and the French Jew.
at Auschwitz, really perished, smothered, authentically gassed to death. For [her] part, [she] spent the war hiding in different ways in order to avoid deportation.” In other words, Sartre attempted to appropriate the suffering of others after the fact, while at the time he wrote in safe, heated cafés such as Flore or Les Deux Magots, ignoring the authentic torment outside his privileged bubble.

In the post-war years Beauvoir herself acknowledges that the couple should have done more to help their Jewish friends, that they did not and could not fully comprehend their situation. On December 14, 1950, she wrote to Nelson Algren of her friend Bianca Lamblin:

I remember that in ’39-40, I expressed the idea to my Jewish friend […]that] I thought she was getting hysterically overly-excited about the concentration camps and the Jews, but she was right. When one isn’t [physically] threatened (in one’s flesh and bones), it remains unreal. I recall that she felt isolated and misunderstood by non-Jewish French.

It is significant that Sartre feels the need to speak out in favor of the Jews specifically only after the war. Although his novella L’enfance d’un chef, written in 1938, scornfully depicted the rise of an extreme-right wing anti-Semite, in the text he ignores the Jew in his plight. The Jew serves as a sort of window dressing, a generic victim, who could be any outsider – Black, North African, Immigrant. Sartre starts out in much the same vein in the provocatively-titled text Réflexions sur la question juive, a title which shows a certain lack of sensitivity to say the least just after the period where the solution to the “Jewish question” presented itself in the form of deportation,

10 Lamblin, “Lettre de Bianca Lamblin à Ingrid Galster”, 350. (my translation)

concentration camps, and gas chambers. The first section depicts the varying degrees of anti-Semitism, which Sartre analyses in an existentialist sense with regards to his théorie du salaud. Sartre opposes the authentic Jew, that is, one who assumes his Jewish identity, to the inauthentic Jew, one who attempts to dissimulate his identity or finds it an encumbrance. He later awkwardly attempts to define the Jewish race, or races, with generalizations about physical appearance found more frequently in the Jewish community, but as Susan Suleiman points out, Sartre only underlines biological similarities, not similarities of character or negative character traits. Suleiman also finds Sartre’s “systematic opposition of on and nous (‘we French’) to il (the Jew) reproduces on the linguistic level the opposition between Frenchmen and Jews that was (and is) a hallmark of racist anti-Semitic ideology.” Although Sartre had good intentions in writing this text (and indeed French Jews almost universally embraced it at the time when anti-Semitic activity was once again on the rise), according to an interview

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112 Henry Rousso’s Le syndrome de Vichy : de 1944 à nos jours evokes the peculiar blindness on the part of the majority of the French (what Rousso calls an official “policy of silence”, 168), who evoked the deportation and arrestation of Resistance members (such as in Alain Resnais’ 1956 film Nuit et Brouillard. 263) but conspicuously left out the question of deported Jews up until the 1970’s. He cites the public actions of Charte du Conseil représentatif des institutions juives de France (CRIF), which reaffirmed its policies of the defense of Jews and the state of Israel, as well as growing anti-Semitism and hidden fascism in France, for pushing this issue to the fore. Later public trials, such as Klaus Barbie’s 1990 trial in Lyon (156) also publicized the issue. The 1978 discovery in Spain of Louis Darquier de Pellepoix, a radical anti-Semite who under Vichy was the Commissaire general aux questions juives, and helped organize the rounding up of Jews for the Rafle du Vel d’Hiv. An unrepentant Darquier continued to spout virulent anti-Semitism in an Express interview, also stirred up public reaction. (163-165). Finally, the rights for the 1978 American mini-series Holocaust, were immediately bought by the Federal Republic of Germany as well as 28 other countries, with the notable exception of France. Antenne 2 bought the rights eight months later; it was shown in February 1979 and immediately sparked polemics across the board (170). Thus, Sartre fell into the same cultural trap that the overwhelming majority of French did.


114 Ibid., 214.
he later gave to Benny Lévy of the *Nouvel Observateur*,
he consulted no Jews before writing. Therefore, according to Suleiman, Sartre logically (and unwittingly) turned to the lexicon most familiar to him – the racist vocabulary of the 1930’s and the Occupation era. Thus, the Jew remained the “other”, defined “only as an absence, a negative quality” with regards to the Frenchman. Although Sartre cannot be called an anti-Semite, and indeed in the post-war years he made his horror of anti-Semitism well-known, he nonetheless absorbed the flavor of his time. Sartre himself admitted that he “should have approached the problem in a different manner, from a point of view that was both historical and economic” instead of phenomenological. His post-war essay on the Jewish question, coupled with his inactivity in this regard during the Occupation, leaves him open to criticism and charges of overcompensation.

Another criticism made of Sartre was his contribution of an article on Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* to the Nazi-censored journal *Comœdia* in 1941, as well as a 1944 tribute to Jean Giraudoux after the author’s death. The Melville article itself presented an inoffensive analysis of the literary masterpiece, but the tone of the censored review, although perceived as the most “neutral” of the censored arts journals, still strayed into

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116 Ibid., 215-216.

117 Ibid., 207.


119 Annette Wieviorka, in her book *Déportation et génocide : Entre la mémoire et l’oubli* (Paris : Plon, 1992) gives more validity to Sartre’s definition of the assimilated French Jew in particular as gaining their Jewish identity through the non-Jew, the *other*, particularly when Vichy’s racial laws defined them as such. On the whole, however, Wieviorka finds Sartre’s view to be “reductive” for it “only concerns a certain portion of Jews in France. [...] Some Jews defined themselves as such without the regard de l’autre. [and some held] an identity somewhere in between that vacillated.” (332). (my translation)
propaganda in the form of ever-present encouragements for the reader to get to know
German culture and authors. Sapiro, in her exhaustive study La guerre des écrivains, categorizes Comœdia as vaguely collaborationist, slightly more so than the publishing house Grasset, but less so than a newspaper such as Le Figaro. Sartre soon realized his mistake in publishing in Comœdia, but only after being named to as film scenario contest judge in November 1942 (along with Giraudoux). When the final list of judges came out in a subsequent issue (September 25th, 1943), both Sartre’s and Giraudoux’ names had mysteriously disappeared from the list (and the picture of the contest judges), indicating that they had rethought their position. In fact, very little work has been done on Sartre’s nascent cinematic career during this time, but it is interesting to note that the aryanized firm Pathé signed him on to collaborate on manuscripts.

Furthermore, in 1943 Sartre found Beauvoir a job at Radio Vichy where she presented 12 radiophonic sketches lasting approximately 10 minutes each. This was an ironic development, for the Vichy government had just fired her for corrupting a minor, which lead to the necessity to find another source of income, and quickly. In Lettres au castor et quelques autres: 1940-1963, Beauvoir inserts a note regarding Sartre’s letter,

120 Cohen-Solal, 317.
121 Sapiro, La guerre des écrivains, 88.
122 “Notre Concours de Scénarios : Le Jury est désigné” in Comœdia (November 14, 1942).
123 “Résultats du Concours de Scénarios organisé par ‘Gaumont’ et ‘Comœdia’” in Comœdia (September 25, 1943).
written on July 8th, 1943. “Radio-Vichy. Le C.N.E. autorisait les émissions en zone libre.” As Jean-François Sirinelli points out, the Free Zone had already ceased to exist, as the Germans invaded the South on November 11, 1942. Was this a simple error of memory forty years after the event, or a deliberate attempt to cultivate an officially resistant past? Both seem possible, but once again, neither can be documented, except for the fact that the Free Zone no longer existed.

These indiscretions aside, in 1943 Sartre began taking part in meetings of the resistant writers’ group the Comité National des Ecrivains. He also contributed regularly to revues in the Unoccupied Zone and later to “Resistance publications such as Cahiers du Sud, Les Lettres françaises, and Combat,” this last beginning in 1944, due to his friendship with its editor Albert Camus. In his three articles in the clandestine version of Les lettres françaises, he took particular relish in attacking those writers who had sold out to the Nazis. His April 1943 article, “Drieu La Rochelle ou la haine de soi” attacks the Nouvelle Revue Française editor as a neurotic homosexual; Sartre does not directly state this, but he names Drieu La Rochelle as following a list of other “pederasts” who during the first World War, “came back [to stick with the] women.” According to Sartre, Drieu la Rochelle, the editor of the NRF who wrote the novel Gilles, was like his protagonist: a sad hero who “attempts to cure himself with the blood of others.” Sartre implies that Drieu La Rochelle is a failed man, in fact, not a man at all, who “hysterically” insults the

125 Sartre, Lettres au Castor et à quelques autres, 312. It is interesting to note that Beauvoir mentions neither her dismissal nor her time at Radio Vichy in La force de l’âge.

126 Sirinelli, 173.

“real” men, the “real Frenchmen” who suffer and sacrifice for their country. Drieu has turned to Nazism in order to give release to the hatred of himself (presumably, for being gay) and the society that rejects him.

In his post-war essay “Qu’est-ce qu’un collaborateur?” Sartre continues in a similar fashion. He associates collaboration with other psychological manifestations of social illness such as suicide, or crime, and theorizes that

These elements of the collective remain in a latent state. Since these factors are flawed, the ‘collaborator’ never shows himself to himself or others. He attends to his own affairs, perhaps he is a patriot, because he ignore the nature that exists within himself and which will one day reveal itself under favorable circumstances.¹²⁸

Thus, the collaborator has a latent psychological illness that manifests itself under certain situations, although in the case of the Occupation, all persons with fascist tendencies did not necessarily collaborate, which lends credo to Sartre’s assessment. Sartre makes the gross assumption that the greatest number of collaborators came out of the bourgeois class, as they would naturally be protective of their money and social position.¹²⁹ Here, Sartre conveniently forgets some of the most virulent collaborators - those who joined the Milice, who in general, came from the ranks of the poor in Southern cities or from the country, and were most decidedly not bourgeois. We can effectively see Sartre’s personal (and well-known) disdain for the bourgeoisie under whose moral restraints he had so often chaffed. Moreover, these moral restrictions also cost Simone de Beauvoir her teaching position in 1943 (for corruption of a minor)

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¹²⁹ Ibid., 45.
and nearly cost Sartre his own for his rejection of social conventions (i.e. an unconventional lifestyle, living in hotels, and authorizing Beauvoir instead of his mother to receive his pay while away during the *drôle de guerre* and in the POW camp). In other words, Sartre not only rejected conventional morals regarding sexuality and lifestyle, he also openly defied them. This will be discussed in greater detail in the chapter on *Huis clos*.

Sartre cites collaboration as an indication of a “dis-integration” of certain elements of society. He writes, “[Collaboration] is at its origin an obsession with *foreign* collectives by those elements that are badly assimilated in the indigenous community,” i.e. that which is somehow marginalized and thus foreign to French society – the outsider. Sartre lists politicians such as Doriot or men of letters such as Ramon Fernandez who could not fit in with the communist party, and therefore turned to the most radical fascists, as among the political outsiders. Among literary collaborators, one finds on Sartre’s list only the failures, such as *Je suis partout* critic Alain Laubreaux, who sought to gain authority and prestige by aligning themselves with the Occupiers. Rather disturbingly, Sartre indicts the homosexual as the having the greatest tendency towards collaboration. He writes,

One sees curious metaphors throughout articles by Chateaubriand, Drieu, and Brasillach, [metaphors] which depict the relationship between that of France and Germany in the form of a sexual union, in which France plays the woman’s role. And most certainly the feudal bond (*liaison*) between a collaborator and his master, has a sexual aspect to it. As much as one can conceive of the state of mind of collaboration, one sees a *feminine* climate.

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131 Op cit., 46.

132 Ibid., 46.
The collaborator speaks in the name of strength, but he is not strength: he is tricky, a trickiness that feeds off of strength. It is even charm and seduction, because it claims to have the influence that French culture has over the Germans, according to him. It appears to me to be a strange mixture of masochism and homosexuality. The homosexual milieu of Paris furnished many brilliant recruits.\textsuperscript{133}

Sartre not only descends into his most dangerous (and insulting) generalization regarding homosexuals as a group over-sexed of masochists willing to sell themselves in order to have the joy of being “conquered” by a strapping blond in jack-boots, but he also utterly ignores the consequences of homosexuality in a fascist state, most particularly within the Reich itself. Homosexuals were regularly persecuted, starting with the June 30\textsuperscript{th} 1934 Night of the Long Knives, in which Hitler literally “purified” the SA with a mass killing of its members, including their homosexual leader Ernst Röhm, because the high percentage of gays in the group began to embarrass a government that so adamantly associated itself with virility and the “true” male. Even in France where homosexuality was more tolerated in cosmopolitan cities such as Paris (although at this time the conservative Vichy government had declared war on non-traditional lifestyles), gays generally stayed in the closet, as groups of young right-wingers did (and still do) enjoy attacking them.

Sartre continues to describe the typical collaborator. “They integrated themselves into German Europe in order to rape this proud nation. Being Hitler’s slaves mattered little to them, if they could infect all of France with this form of slavery.”\textsuperscript{134} The words “rape” (violer) and “infect” indicate a sort of delirious mass rape of the country, leaving it subjected, broken, and infected with a sexually

\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 58.

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 59.
transmitted disease. Is this not eerily similar to the vocabulary used in Nazi propaganda regarding the Jews or other decadent elements? In attempting to turn the tables on the collaborators, to indicate them as that which is foreign, strange, not French, Sartre actually falls into a trap by appropriating their own rhetoric.

The treatment of the collaborator as a foreign element is most striking when Sartre writes Robert Brasillach’s name with a “z”. In Alice Kaplan’s *Reproductions of Banality*, she points out that Sartre “(or his editors) even inadvertently (?) nazify Brasillach’s name by spelling it *Brazillach*!” She continues, “the fascist is empty (of Frenchness) and (hence?) weak: prey to foreign forces, without the courage to integrate.”

In his introduction to *Reproductions* Russell Berman cites Kaplan by stating that, “Sartre’s z marks the French fascist as a nazi and foreigner, and thus impedes any research regarding native sources of fascism.” Thus, Sartre effectively diverts our eyes away from what has been done in France, by the French, by the Vichy collaborators of whom Sartre himself was perhaps a greater victim than of the German occupiers, as in the case of the morals component of the National Revolution. German censorship in Paris differed from that of Vichy in that it often showed itself to be more flexible regarding morals issues, as in the case of a play such as Cocteau’s *Les parents terribles*, while in the Non-Occupied Zone for example, such an “immoral” play involving themes of incest and infidelity would have been impossible to perform.

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Can one, in fact, differentiate between the Occupiers and those who collaborated with them? While both functioned undemocratically and created racial laws, the Vichy government’s constant invocation of traditional morality, especially regarding the roles of men and women, lead in a certain fashion to an even more socially repressive atmosphere. In addition, are the collaborators not the ones acting in “bad faith”, as, according to Sartre, they seek their personal value and position by acting as the lap dogs of a totalitarian government?

Even during the Liberation, Sartre appears to switch sides yet again. In his articles for Combat entitled “Un promeneur dans un Paris insurgé”, Sartre makes no reference to the collaborators, and instead focuses his attention on the FFI/German opposition. In so doing, he also frequently employs the derogatory expression *les Boches* (August 30, 1944), an inflammatory term Sartre was not prone to use before this moment. He also continually uses the opposition ils/nous to indicate “them the Germans” as opposed to “we the French.” The author continues to underline the foreign nature of the threat when he describes a squad of Japanese *miliciens*. He writes,

> The F.F.I members enter the hotel and soon come back down with a dozen little yellow men with nervous and closed expressions, the JAPANESE (Sartre’s own capitalisation) who raise their arms in their air. Here are the men who made up the “very French” Vichy Militia.

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137 In fairness to Sartre, it must be noted that he decried the public shaving of “collabo” women’s heads in his sixth installment of “Un promeneur …” on September 2, 1944.

138 It is unclear whether or not the men were actually Japanese; it is more probable that they were Vietnamese, recruited by the *Milice* from among the ranks of the unemployed.

139 Jean-Paul Sartre, “Un promeneur dans un Paris insurgé (III)” in *Combat* (August 30, 1944).
Thus, in the heat of the moment, it is imperative that the Occupiers be *foreign*, just as it absolutely necessary that the liberators be *French*.

Moreover, Sartre’s man on the street chronicle and style of writing for the *Promeneur* columns inserts him into the action, making a participant of the fly on the wall observer that he is. He described the F.F.I.

Very few weapons, a few rifles, one or two grenades, some revolvers, no bullets. *We* [On] knew the orders: kill a German, take his revolver, with the revolver take a rifle, with the rifle, take over a car, use the car to get a machine-gun or a tank.¹⁴⁰

This fashion of gaining arms has become routine, as Sartre has seen it over and over again, as though he *himself* were a member of the F.F.I., armed with a machine gun rather than a notepad and pencil.

The image of Sartre *résistant* continued when the author traveled to the United States as one of eight French journalists at the invitation of the American Office of War Information. “Eight French journalists, active witnesses of the Resistance, invited to report on the American war effort to their respective newspapers.”¹⁴¹ Eager to identify a famous resistant in their midst, *The Atlantic Monthly*, who had just printed Sartre’s “République du silence” in translation, identified its author as a “poet and French playwright who had distinguished himself as one of the military heads of the FFI during the long years of the German Occupation.”¹⁴² Suleiman cites Sartre’s January 25, 1945 article in *Le Figaro*:


¹⁴¹ Cohen-Solal, 383.

What is sure in any case, is that the moving welcome given to us everywhere [in New York] is aimed at honoring the French Resistance through us. At first I felt very uncomfortable, because we weren’t sent as representatives of the Resistance and that, if the papers had known the real meaning of the invitation given to them, they would not have found it difficult to find someone worthier than me.143

Therefore, Sartre became a resistance hero for the Americans in spite of protests to the contrary (in France at least, where he would never have been mistaken for a real armed resistant). Sartre did not initially seek out the reputation as a resistance hero, but the reputation still stuck. The Americans labeled him a resistant, much to the consternation of real armed combatants, whose criticism of the author’s “appropriation” of the title of “resistance chief” would later cause Sartre much grief.144

As Philip Watts points out, in the post-war era, “Sartre consistently assigned to himself the roles of attorney, judge, and jury.”145 Beginning with his first open columns in Combat in August 1944, and especially regarding the later purge trials, Sartre vocally weighed in regarding what the role of the writer should be, and who he perceived as the enemy to modern France. In the first issue of Les Temps modernes, he harshly criticized the bourgeois homme de lettres (and once again, the homosexual), as an archetypal antithesis,146 the embodiment of negative qualities. As its opposite, Sartre formulated the idea of the engaged writer, the post-war writer morally responsible for his texts and their influence on society. Qu’est-ce que la littérature continued in the same vein, but in spite

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143 Suleiman. “Choisir son passé”, 233. (my translation)

144 Ibid., 215. Suleiman describes in detail how this label as well as the essays “La république du silence,” “Paris sous l’Occupation” and “Qu’est-ce qu’un collaborateur” helped make Sartre an “international star after the war.”

145 Watts, Allegories, 60.

146 Jean-Paul Sartre, “Présentation” in Les temps modernes. No. 1 (October 1, 1945), 12.
of Sartre’s claims in the “Présentation” of *Les temps modernes* that “We do not have a political or social program; each article will only *engage* its author” and that “in engaged literature, the engagement must not, in any case, forget literature and our concern should be to serve literature by injecting it with new blood while serving the collective by trying to give it suitable literature.” Sartre hardly presented himself as an impartial judge. Who can forget the violent polemic centering on Camus’ *L’homme révolté*? Does Sartre himself not become, in the post-war years, a literary and political tyrant, the *salaud* to which he refers in his *théorie du salaud*?

Francis Kaplan adeptly summed up Sartre’s relationship with critics: “If an intellectual had rarely been so admired, he had rarely been so attacked, so violently, in such an insulting manner, in such a hateful manner.” Sartre’s political position during the war was not always entirely clear, his career did advance amazingly, although due to some compromises regarding censorship (performing in Aryanized theaters for example), which were not at all uncommon. Upon examining his post-war creations, one is struck by the fact that he constantly revisits the Occupation in the form of novels (the *Chemins de la Liberté* trilogy), plays (*Mort sans sépulture, Les séquestrés d’Altona*), and essays. Had his resistance position been more clearly defined, Sartre would not have provoked such criticism with his many evocations of the past. But because he sets himself up as an official conscience of the second half of the twentieth century, we expect more from him. He did not quite display the pure actions in the time of danger that

147 Ibid., 19, 21.


149 In the chapter “Inter arma silent Musae” (329 – 345) of *La France à l’heure allemande* Philippe Burrin describes compulsory (official) as well as voluntary censoring on the part of authors and publishers.
would justify his position as a legitimate judge. We want Sartre to be perfect, but instead, he was human.
Chapter 2
Les Mouches: Flies and Existentialist Freedom

During the Occupation years, theatrical depictions of Greek myth abounded to such an extent that an irreverent observer of this phenomenon could justify remarking that the green-uniformed soldiers roaming Paris streets should really be of Hellenic rather than German origin. Classic tragedies by Sophocles played to packed houses, allowing the French public more insight into the power dynamics of ancient Greece than their own censored French newspapers offered on current events. These plays had already proven quite successful in the period between the wars, and revivals of modern adaptations of Antigone’s saga by diverse authors such as Jean Cocteau, Giraudoux, Léon Chancerel, and Thierry Maulnier received official sanction as well as copious praise from contemporary critics.

Moreover, these paved the way for yet another adaptation of the same story, the immensely popular (and hotly disputed) 1944 version by Jean Anouilh. The right, the left, and the politically apathetic all found something to admire in Oedipus’ daughter - her purity, her individualism, adherence to her religious faith, penchant for breaking or following the rules (depending on one’s point of view), tragic life,\(^1\) or quite simply the lavish productions (in a time of scarcity) featuring exquisite costumes, scenery, and music. Cultural recycling proved beneficial to the French theatrical bottom-line, and was therefore encouraged.

Why was Greek tragedy so popular in France? To some extent, these tragedies had *always* had their share of admirers. Many adaptations of Greek myth already existed before the war, and worked particularly well with 17th century French classical tragedy. Moreover, the great majority of these had proven successful, both artistically and financially. Therefore, their revivals were almost assured to appeal to a core number of spectators. French theatres presented *Antigone* for the same reason that American theaters routinely put on productions of *Hamlet* – although the play has its origins in a different era or culture, it has become such a dramatic staple that it has, in a sense, carved out a place for itself within the society.

In tumultuous times, familiarity itself becomes a precious item: *Antigone* will *always* bury her brother, be punished by her iron-fisted uncle Creon, and die tragically, just as the ghost of Hamlet’s father will *always* appear to the melancholy prince, urge him to seek vengeance, and thereby set off a chain of events that end tragically for all. *Antigone* *must* sacrifice herself, just as *Hamlet* *must* vacillate. Inevitability or a sense of destiny might make people feel slightly suffocated in stable, freer times, but when one does not know what tomorrow may bring – arrests, food and fuel shortages, suppression – the well-known linear progression of A followed by B followed by C is as comforting as coming home and putting on a warm pair of slippers after a day spent in endless shifting for basic goods. Theatrical constancy leaves energy for dealing with life’s more pressing problems.

Furthermore, the tragic nature of Greek myth allows for catharsis, Artaud’s lancing of the abscess, which drains the malignant infection from the body.² In this case,

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the unhealthy festering that stemmed from daily life and all its accompanying frustrations: the lines for food, the need for discretion, to look around and behind you in order to see who might be listening, who might be your secret enemy and write a letter denouncing you to the authorities. Tragic characters shout their ideas from the rooftops, a luxury denied French citizens in this period of oppression. Their words, feelings, and impressions would have swelled within them like an ever-expanding canker, slowly taking over their entire body, consuming them until they felt they might burst from the ever-mounting internal pressure. However, spectators could live through characters on the stage, empathizing with their outbursts, envying them their freedom to be themselves, and pitying their tragic demise. Tears could be shed publicly for the death of Greek protagonists, but had to be shed privately for the demise of French society and its pre-war freedoms. The more tragic the production, the greater the cathartic release for the spectator.

One can also see the adoption of classical themes by the political right in France. Throughout the 1930’s the French right-wing had grown steadily, but not so much as after the defeat, when it grew by leaps and bounds. As Henry Rousso describes in detail in *Le Syndrome de Vichy*, the French felt the loss deeply, a sentiment encouraged by the Vichy government’s mea culpa doctrine. The populace was deluged with feelings of guilt. According to government propaganda, the decadent culture of the inter-war period, with its immorality, speculation, and general lack of fortitude made the French responsible for the defeat. The younger generation was the opposite of that of the determined *poilus* who fought in the trenches of the Great War. After all, the phony war lasted less than a year, compared to the long fight of World War I. According to
propaganda, the younger generation clearly did not possess the same strength of character as their parents and grandparents. And who better to reinforce these feelings than one of the heroes of that war, the Maréchal Philippe Pétain, who “Christ-like”, was so willing to absorb (and reiterate) their sins? Pétain, who “gave himself to France in order lessen its pain.” Their guilt, which the collaborationist government constantly revisited and reiterated like a Latin litany, lead to feelings of inferiority. France deserved to lose as punishment for its transgressions, therefore the victors must be in some way superior.

This attitude can be traced in extreme right-wing journals such as _Je suis partout_. During the inter-war period, its columnists, while generally admiring the concepts of Fascism, often openly mocked Hitler and Nazi Germany, preferring a leader like Italy’s Il Duce, or wishing to push French society to the right of the political spectrum and create their own Mediterranean brand of fascism. The election of Léon Blum only reinforced their feelings of disdain for their decadent society - they saw France, then being run by a socialist Jew, as quickly going to hell. After the defeat, however, the tone of the journal swung wildly to a pro-German stance. Occupation-era censorship might have accounted for some of this endorsement of the Nazis, but not all, for some censored journals, such as _Comœdia_, adopted a more neutral tone and frothed at the mouth much less.

Nietzsche’s philosophy, popularized (and bastardized) by the Nazi party, steadily gained influence in Europe throughout the 1930’s and 1940’s. His Superman, described in the _Geneology of Morals_, was above all a warrior who acted on his own principles, and

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3 Philippe Pétain, Speech on June 17, 1940, “ Je fais à la France le don de ma personne pour atténuer son malheur ” as cited in Jean-Pierre Azema and François Bédarida, _La France des années noires. Tome 1 : De la défaite à Vichy_ (Seuil : Paris, 2000), 162.

did not slavishly subject himself to Christian rules. Purity existed in his own will; society’s dictums, and Christianity in particular, only served to corrupt that essential nature. The theme of purity was also essential to *The Birth of Tragedy*, with early Greek theater serving as the model for “pure” tragedy. Apollinian restraint acknowledged and harnessed man’s inherent Dionesian passion and will to destruction in order to produce theatrical art.

Nietzsche’s influence on French theatrical critics became more and more evident as the 1930’s progressed, when writers such as Thierry Maulnier sought to reinterpret and redefine classical French theater. Maulnier’s study on Racine developed the terms *grandeur* and *pureté* in order to define Racine’s sense of aesthetics. As Mary Ann Witt states, “Racine’s ‘pure’ heroes are not in the class of heroic figures who deny death by perishing for a higher value but rather in that of tragic figures who affirm death by making a sacrifice with no ‘bargain’.”5 They fully comprehend their tragic situation, the consequences of their actions, and refuse to compromise their essential selves. Racine’s heroes, “pitted only against the gods, are certain of defeat and concentrate on accomplishing their destiny. They do not die for a higher cause, but for themselves.”6 Additionally, the poetic purity of the author’s text presides over any additional movement or sound in the actor’s performance.7 In other words, the text can stand alone and still fully transmit the author’s message.

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6 Ibid., 148.
7 Ibid., 147.
In a similar manner, Robert Brasillach’s personal and professional evolution lead him from Action Française, with its xenophobic, nationalistic, and traditional Catholic royalists ideas\textsuperscript{8} to a more hard-line fascist ideology that sought to reconcile Italian fascism, nazism, and with the concept of nationalism socialism à la française.\textsuperscript{9} As Alice Kaplan states, “his fascism from all appearances, was founded on aesthetics and on racism, which together were supposed to restore national self-confidence and fortify a myth of the nation.” Along the way, his education at the Ecole Normale Supérieure ensured a thorough grounding in Greek and Latin classics, and one of his earliest essays, “Le Théâtre littéraire” focused on the rapport between Greek theater and Nietzsche.\textsuperscript{10} Like Maulnier, Brasillach turned to one of the great classical French tragedians, Pierre Corneille, for inspiration in finding links in French culture to fascist ideals. As Witt points out, Brasillach names the second part of his book on Corneille, “The Triumph of the Will”\textsuperscript{11} and quickly describes the playwright as “fascist,”\textsuperscript{12} all the while peppering his analysis of Horace with references to the Leni Riefenstahl film and comparing Corneille’s characters to rather stock images of Nazi type depicted by the German director. In fact, Brasillach sees Corneille as the French cultural equivalent of Richard Wagner for the Nazis, an omnipresent “eternal truth” to be respected.\textsuperscript{13} He states:

\textsuperscript{8} Kaplan, \textit{The Collaborator}, 5.
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., 13.
\textsuperscript{10} Witt, 154-155.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 158.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 187.
I do not know if, at the end of the day, this temptation has made him closer to us than we thought, and, whether, when Mussolini invites the Comédie Française to perform at the Forum, he doesn’t find the Corneille of our childhood, the great, daring anti-bourgeois, anti-capitalist, anti-parliamentary precursor to modern fascism.  

In other words, fascism has French roots, a Mediterranean fascism with a cult of “youth against age,” that values the triumph of the will alone.

Drieu La Rochelle more overtly politicized the situation of French theater, echoing the right-leaning cries of the era by criticizing its decadence and “Jewification.” The wide-spread mediocrity and pleasure-seeking of the inter-war years were reflected in the triviality of the theater. “Jews, moneyed industrialists, intellectuals, masons, parliamentary democrats, and women [were] responsible for the decline from a heroic and patriotic society.” The subsequent defeat “proved” the truth of these beliefs, and Drieu insisted that “France’s destiny…[had] always been joined to that of Italy and Germany. Without a ‘tragic philosophy’ there [was] only a sense of humiliation in defeat; with it there [was] a sense of destiny, of knowing joy through sorrow.” Thus, the demise of society, the French Republic, should be embraced because it is its destiny. France, like a true tragic hero, should relinquish itself, in complete clarity, to its fate.

According to Witt, “What Drieu seems to seek in an ideal tragic plenitude is first of all the recuperation of the aesthetic experiences of brotherhood, sacrifice, violence, youth,

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14 Ibid., 188.
15 Witt, 158.
16 Brasillach, 189.
17 Witt, 172.
18 Ibid., 175.
purity, grandeur, and a sense of destiny that he felt in the war, in reading Nietzsche, […] and in the defeat of France.”19

Thus, the convergence of theatrical aesthetics, political situation, and emotional need whetted Occupied France’s appetite even more for depictions of Greek tragedy. It is not surprising, then, that in addition to variations on Antigone, the French stage fostered multiple versions of yet another tragedy based on Greek mythology: the more disturbing house of Atreus. The saga of Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, Electra, and Orestes of Argos was first introduced in Homer’s epic poems The Iliad and The Odyssey, while its first theatrical version can be found in Aeschylus’ Oresteia cycle, a trilogy of plays respectively called Agamenon, The Choephori, and the Eumenides. This cycle centered on the murder of the king at the hand of his wife Clytemnestra, her subsequent execution along with her lover Aegisthus (also the slain king’s brother) by her son Orestes, and his eventual exculpation by the goddess Athena.20 The plays have undergone many different versions – Sophocles and Euripides quickly put their own twists on the original plays, and French writers such as Crébillon (Electre in 1705), Voltaire (Oreste in 1750), Lemercier (Agamemnon in 1797), and Chénier (Electre in 1792) offered their own interpretations of the original text.21 Paul Claudel translated Aeschylus’s Agamemnon in 1912, and the following two plays in the cycle as Les Chloephores d’Eschyle and Les Euménides d’Eschyle in 1920.22 Jean Giraudoux saw great success with his 1937 play

19 Ibid., 189.

20 All references based to Aeschylus plays are based on the translation by Ted Hughes The Oresteia. (New York: Farar, Straus, and Giroux, 1999).


Electre, which was revived in 1943. As can be seen by the titles of the plays, each writer has chosen to shift the focus of his work in order to emphasize the actions of a certain character. Therefore, even though the plays technically cover the same subject, that is, the tragedies that befall the house of Atreus, each playwright’s re-working is in fact unique.

Given the long-standing relationship that French theater-goers had with Electra and her cohorts, it would be logical to assume that Jean-Paul Sartre’s version would be a success when it was performed at the newly-Aryanized Théâtre de la Cité, formerly known as the Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt, in 1943. Jean-Louis Barrault, who later worked with Camus, originally accepted the job of directing, but Sartre withdrew Les mouches and offered it to Charles Dullin instead. Sartre wrote a bitter letter of dismissal to Barrault on July 9, 1942, complaining in painstaking detail that the director was dragging his heels, having first agreed to the new play, then seeming to hesitate, hemming and hawing about dates. One of the major bones of contention was the inclusion of Olga Kosakiewics, an inexperienced actress who happened to be an “intimate” friend of Sartre’s (although he vehemently denies this in the letter to Barrault). Sartre claimed that Olga’s talent alone made her capable of playing Electre, and that he had written the role with her in mind. Sartre went on to inform Barrault that Charles Dullin, one of the presidents of the Theater Director’s Association and therefore a much more powerful director than Barrault, had already agreed to stage the play at his enormous theater. The

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23 Galster, Le Théâtre de Jean-Paul Sartre devant ses premiers critiques, 70.

24 Ibid., 77.
Théâtre de l’Athénée, where Barrault would have staged *Les Mouches*, had a much smaller capacity. Moreover, Dullin himself would play the role of Jupiter.

Barrault made the right choice, for *Les mouches* flopped miserably. Originally envisaged to run for several months, the play closed after just three weeks (June 3-June 27, 1943) of pitiful receipts. The well-connected Dullin gave pre-performance interviews in Chateaubriant’s fascist *La Gerbe* and *Der Deutsche Wegleiter*. Similarly, the new-comer Sartre gave his own commentary to *Comœdia*, where he attempted to drum up enthusiasm for the new play, which was “to be considered the tragedy of freedom as contrasted with the tragedy of fate” according to the author. Given the contemporary penchant for embracing destiny, albeit a tragic one, Sartre’s stated intention boded ill for the success of the play – it flew in the face of everything the contemporary critics cherished. A first play from a philosophy teacher sounded as though it would be a philosophical text, and thus deprive them of the emotional catharsis associated with Greek tragedy. Indeed, after the first performance, most critics mercilessly ripped apart the khâgne professor’s first professionally staged play. Of these critics, the most well-known and vicious was Alain Laubreaux, the theater critic for *Le*...

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25 Ibid., 93.


Laubreaux then attacks the staging and the set, which he describes as both cubist and
dadaist and having its roots in the discovery of art nègre. Without going so far as to say
the actual word, Laubreaux decries the very appearance of Sartre’s play as decadent,
degenerate, like the Judeo-Bolchevik theater of the inter-war period. According to
Laubreaux, this monstrosity had nothing to do with its origins in Aeschylus, Sophocles,
and Euripides. Indeed, to look at the photo accompanying the text, one notes that even
the costumes, complete with bizarre interpretations of Greek masks (some with huge
foreheads with oversize almond eyes, others looking like African tribal masks brought
home as souvenirs) worn by some of the characters, make the actors resemble either alien
beings or sub-Saharan natives. Sartre’s text is heavy and long, and of a determinedly
literary style. In the theater it is listened to “in such an oppressive silence that not only
the flies are heard flying away” - the audience fled before it.

Laubreaux’s Je suis partout article of June 11, 1943 goes into greater detail,
partly because he had more time to think about the play, having now actually read a copy,
and partly because the supply of paper for the fascist journal was rather plentiful and
allowed for a longer analysis. Although he re-iterates many of the previous complaints
(adding “boring” to the list), much of Sartre’s fault appears to in not being Jean
Giraudoux, who was the favorite author of the Je suis partout staff. According to

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31 Alain Laubreaux, “ Le Théâtre ” in Le Petit Parisien. (June 5, 1943).
Laubreaux, Sartre had no sense of dramatic timing, especially in regards to entrances, exits, and stopping the action in order to underline the importance of an event, such as the murder of Clytemnestre and Egisthe. Sartre’s play was the polar opposite of that of Corneille, the genius of French tragedy. After reading *Les mouches*, Laubreaux acknowledged that ideas that make themselves apparent to the reader of the play are completely lost to the spectator, although as literary historian and Sartre critic Ingrid Galster points out, he does not specify what those ideas were. Finally, he states that while making the flies the center of the action (and the title) would have been an innovation akin to that of a poète du mal like Baudelaire, Sartre misses the boat and the significance of the flies is lost on the audience. In summation, Sartre is not a poet, but a literary or philosophical theorist with no particular dramatic skill.

Laubreaux further attacks the director, Charles Dullin, in his article “Bilans d’une époque” that appeared the following week in *Je suis partout*. On his staging of Sartre’s play, he cries, “It’s so ugly! It’s so old-fashioned!” He claims that Dullin’s style was utterly outdated, and that the “cubist” and “dadaist” elements brought to mind cheap imitations of Picasso and hearkened back to the 1920’s and surrealism. Laubreaux continues viciously, affirming that Dullin’s Atelier theater and theater school had produced no actor or dramatist of note, and that Dullin was basically a doddering failure past the age of retirement. This sparked a public feud, for on July 9th, Dullin counterattacked in an open letter published in the same journal, in which he defends himself and questions what Laubreaux has ever accomplished theatrically, a definite jab at the mediocre playwright’s ego. Laubreaux’s response, entitled “Dullin, Dullin seul…”

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32 Galster, *Le Théâtre de Jean-Paul Sartre devant ses premiers critiques*, 118.
affirms that he only had to sit in the theater (as he had been doing for the last twenty years), not actually write a play (he denies being a playwright!) in order to see what a failure Dullin’s new tenure at the much larger Théâtre de la Cité had become. According to Laubreaux, the man had obviously bitten off more than he could chew.

In fact, according to Galster, animosity already existed between the two men, possibly dating back from the 1920’s when Laubreaux was the secretary to Henri Béraud, who began a virulent campaign against the movement favoring visible stage supports begun by Jacques Copeau, who was Dullin’s mentor. At the beginning of the Occupation Dullin had also defended Edouard Bourdet, director of the Comédie Française from 1936-1940 and highly associated with the Front populaire. The principal attacker, oddly enough, was Alain Laubreaux, who had already firmly aligned himself with the collaborators, and had complained, pre-war, that the Comédie Française was enjuivée, Jewified. Therefore, Laubreaux clearly had his knife sharpened and ready for the director. And so goes the war of personalities in the Parisian theater scene.

The influential Laubreaux aside, most critics contented themselves with a description of the plot of Les mouches and expressed similar complaints (without the personally-charged aggressiveness): the play was long, wordy, lacking in dramatic sense, the costumes were weird, the theme of putrescence revolting, the play often sounded like a philosophical diatribe. These criticisms are completely justified – the action lacks cohesion, the dialogue is self-indulgent and often posturing, particularly in Act III.

34 Galster, Le théâtre de Sartre..., 147-48.
35 Joubert, 60.
Moreover, its long length of three hours makes the play, from a purely dramatic point of view, recall the painful duration a droning three-hour philosophy lecture with no bathroom break. Artistically, the play fails - whatever message Sartre attempted to inexpertly slip in is obscured by the sound of copious yawning.

That said, it is ironic that only one of the critics, Dr. Albert Buesche of the German language Pariser Zeitung, could sense that the extensive re-iteration of the word and idea of “liberty” had any direct correlation to contemporary society. In his article, entitled “Ein sonderbarer Befrierer” (“A Strange Liberator”), he stated that in the play, the people as a whole are directly opposed to the individual, with the flies symbolizing life’s burdens. The Herrschermensch (domineering person) becomes enlightened and commits the liberating act. He kills not out of a sense of vengeance, but out of a sense of liberty. He kills not to make the people happy, but for the “glory of the superman.” Thus, Sartre’s Oreste becomes a dramatized Nietzschean hero. Buesche speculates, “Is the spectator duped by the name of an idea completely different from that of liberty, or does it concern an epoch completely embroiled in it – that is what one must ask oneself.”

In spite of Sartre’s post-war claim that every critic panned the play because “they were all collaborating,” the play did garner a few positive reviews of varying degrees in the authorized press. According to Galster’s painstaking analysis, however, most appear to have completely missed any resistance message whatsoever. This renders illogical the

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36 Galster, Le théâtre de Sartre..., 123. (my translation)
37 Ibid., 113.
post-war claims by both Sartre and Beauvoir that in fact, the critics had understood the resistance message and only pretended not to for the sake of skewering the author.\textsuperscript{39} Sartre often referred to Michel Leiris’s December 1943 review of the play, which appeared in the clandestine version of Les lettres françaises, sponsored by the C.N.E., as support for his claims of resistance. However, Leiris did not spell out any resistance message in the play, but instead referred to it in very general terms. Leiris later specified that those who read the review would have been sufficiently capable of reading between the lines to see the contemporary message.\textsuperscript{40}

The play has undergone several shifts in perception since the end of the war. After the Liberation, Les mouches was labeled a resistance drama,\textsuperscript{41} but the author’s skyrocketing fame garnered harsh criticism from those who had chosen not to submit their work to the German and Vichy censors. Very quickly, at least for much of the contemporary press, the whole question of resistance was set aside. For example, in an article for the Nîmes Theater Festival of 1950, the reviewer, Yves Florenne, makes no reference to the Occupation context of the play, but instead focuses on the flaws of the drama.\textsuperscript{42} André Atter’s review of the 1951 revival at the Vieux-Colombier briefly acknowledges the play’s first staging, “sous la botte des Nazis”, but he finds Les mouches dated, irrelevant, and boring.\textsuperscript{43} Another review for the same revival, this time appearing

\textsuperscript{39} Galster, \textit{Sartre, Vichy et les Intellectuels}, 16-17.

\textsuperscript{40} Sartre, \textit{Un Théâtre de situations}, 21.

\textsuperscript{41} Galster, \textit{Le théâtre de Jean-Paul Sartre}, 186.

\textsuperscript{42} Yves Florenne, “Dernier regard sur la Provence dramatique” in \textit{Gazette des Lettres} (September 2, 1950).

\textsuperscript{43} André Atter, “Mais où sont les mouches d’antan ?” in \textit{L’Aube}, (January 19, 1951). (my translation)
in *Rivarol*, simply treats the play as a revival, the newest attempt for Sartre to succeed where he had failed in 1943. The author reiterates the same criticisms that appeared under the German censors: repugnant language, too long, wordy. The only resistance he sees in the play is that of “Oreste and Electre to Jupiter.”

Many attacks are personality-driven, particularly during the trend of the 1970’s that sought to “demystify Sartre and question the resistant nature of *Les mouches.*” Others have treated the work as simply a *pièce à thèse*, concentrating on the existentialist message, and analyzing the play in light of Sartre’s philosophical works. These tend to vaguely refer to a *mea culpa* aspect but do not fully take into account the circumstances under which it was produced. In either case, critics most often fall into the trap of polemics - they have a vested interest in proving Sartre to be either resistant or opportunistic collaborator, as in the case of Gilbert Joseph and will defend their point of view like a dog with his favorite battered toy.

More recent works, such as Ingrid Galster’s highly detailed literary study of Sartre’s popular and press reception during the war, as well as the historian Philippe Burrin’s *France à l’heure allemande*, seek to understand gradations of meaning. Even though Burrin is a historian and Galster a literary critic, they are similar in that their studies are more methodical and subtler, and avoid the overly simplistic labels of *collabo*,

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45 Galster, *Le théâtre de Jean-Paul Sartre*, 188.

46 Spreen, 50.

and résistant. As Kenneth Kraus points out, even the labeling of the period as Occupation versus Vichy years implies a political interpretation.

To call it ‘The Occupation’ implies a defeated France held hostage, and to refer to this time as ‘the Vichy Years’ suggests that under Pétain acted largely on its own volition and without much prodding from the Germans. Yet the power dynamic, both cooperative and competitive, between these two official centers was significant, and labeling the situation as either ‘captive’ or ‘fascist’ France tends to simplify the complexity of the actual circumstances.48

Thus critics played into the idea of a power dynamic, a country held at gunpoint, or a time of collaboration.

French life in all its aspects was in the process of shifting the power dynamic, which suggests a means of interpreting Les mouches. Although the play is clearly based on Greek myth, a fact acknowledged by critics, these same critics treat the play as though it had sprung out of thin air. In other words, they do not take the time to look at original versions. In order to fully understand Sartre’s message, one must first go back to his predecessors in order to ascertain how and why his offering differed.

In spite of Laubreaux’s estimation that Les mouches simply rehashed, in the worst fashion, a too-often performed play, Sartre makes significant changes to the power dynamic and action in order to reflect contemporary France. Many versions of the house of Atreus already existed, and each playwright chose to prioritize a different character, which in turn, helped to relay a certain message. Each of these plays has its own power dynamic, and it is only by understanding how Sartre manipulates the core story, or version of that core story, that one can understand the message he attempted to convey to the Occupation-era audience.

The power dynamic of Aeschylus’ earliest version functions as follows: Clytemnestra takes advantage of her husband’s long absence in order to carry on an adulterous affair with Egisthus. When Agamemnon returns, she kills him, thus founding an illegitimate government based on murder. Her exiled son Orestes later returns, and at the behest of the gods and the general populace, kills his mother and her lover. The ghost of Clytemnestra urges the Furies to seek retribution against her son, and they chase him from village to village, until Athena, representative of the gods and justice, exculpates him with the help of a human jury. Thus, deities and humans band together to judge right from wrong.

Aeschylus’ history of the house of Atreus underlines the importance of fate in the chain of events. At several points he mentions the corruption of the blood that began with the horrible, seemingly motiveless act of Atreus. Indeed, Clytemnestra herself is descended from Tantalus, who killed and attempted to feed his own children to the gods, and for which he was condemned to eternal thirst and hunger. Thus, through both the maternal and paternal lines of the family flows a sort of inherited disease that must out itself in each successive generation. Agamemnon fulfills his destiny by sacrificing his daughter Iphigenia, albeit in deference to the gods. Clytemnestra murders her husband as retribution for her daughter’s death, although her on-going affair with Aegisthus casts doubts on her true motivations. Aegisthus seeks his own revenge, but like the queen, his designs are riddled with self-interest: had they been pure, Orestes would not have been banished as a threat to their continued reign. And of course, the son and daughter seek justice by killing their mother for her misdeeds. Every action has its own reaction down

through the generations. Final order can only come thanks to the intercession of the gods. Thus, true order comes from following the path prescribed by the deities.

The chorus of the first two plays serves as a voice for the outraged public, horrified at what their queen has done, and chafing under an unlawful pair of regents. They cry out for the gods to help them correct this unbearable situation, but their consciousness of their place in social hierarchy does not allow them to remedy the situation themselves. Only one person is destined to punish the wrong-doers, doubly so by right of birth – Orestes is the son of the slain king, and thus it falls to him as the only living son to strike the blow of retribution. Furthermore, he is the true king who must reclaim the birthright that has been denied him. He serves at once as vessel of vengeance and active messenger of the gods – if he wishes to remain “just”, that is, following the laws of the gods and honoring his father, he must follow their commands and act.

Clytemnestra violates the laws of the gods in several ways. Firstly, she breaks her wedding vows by her adulterous act. Secondly, she devises the plot to kill Agamemnon, weaving the net that will entangle the king as he leaves his bath and render him helpless while she strikes him down with his own sword. It must be noted that the web she throws over Agamemnon effectively castrates him by making him unable to act as she pierces his body over and over, filling the tub with his blood. The symbolism of the sword in her hand, entering her husband’s flesh, re-enforces the reversal of the traditional male/female power dynamic. Clytemnestra is effectively the “man” and ruler, a recurring
idea underlined by the chorus, who insist, even before she commits the bloody act, that “She speaks like a man.”\textsuperscript{50}

Indeed, Aegisthus’ lack of involvement in the actual slaying renders him all the more despicable in the eyes of the public, for he has chosen deception, the “woman’s” tool, over virile action – he relies on Clytemnestra not only to lull their victim into a sense of security, but also to commit the final act. Thus, he willingly accepts a gender role-reversal in order to gain access to the throne and unlimited access to the marital bed. His justification, the crime of Agamemnon’s father, rings false, as decades have passed since that act – the only new development is his adulterous relationship with the queen, in itself a violation of the rules of hospitality, much like that of Paris and Menelaus.

Although later plays would greatly emphasize the role of Electra, it must be noted that the character only appears in Aeschylus’ second play, the \textit{Choephori}. Indeed, subsequent theatrical versions of the house of Atreus begin in medias res, picking up the thread of the story when Orestes returns from exile, and only recapping the murder of Agamemnon. Furthermore, here Electra plays a more passive role of \textit{victim} of the guilty couple, for she has been divested of her rightful role as princess and instead been forced into virtual slavery. She craves justice for her father and to a lesser extent, to regain her rightful place, and \textit{does} display hatred towards her mother. However, the streak of violence in Electra's character is controlled by her inherent nobility. She plays no active part in the execution, but instead it is the chorus, the outraged voice of the populace, who cries out for the justice of Orestes’ sword. The unmarried Electra’s purity lies in direct opposition to her mother’s corruption, both moral and sexual. Clytemnestra commits

monstrous acts and dreams of monstrous children, while her actual children engender
justice at the behest of the gods.

The Furies, alternatively called the Eumenides or the Erinnyes, only appear at the
very end of the second play, at the moment when Orestes publicly justifies his acts to the
Chorus. They comprise a menacing, feminine force that are urged on by the ghost of
Clytemnestra in the third play. If the dead queen now pays for killing her husband, so too
must her son suffer for his act of matricide. The Furies, not the citizens of Argos, now
comprise the Chorus that clamors for justice. They act as physical incarnations of
remorse, the mental torture that becomes tangible. Although these parasites feed off the
fears and regrets of mankind, they serve the purpose of keeping the populace within the
boundaries of the law. The fact that Athena designates a specific place for them in
Athens underscores their usefulness in keeping the divine order.

Thus power streams downward from Olympus: the gods set the laws, yet give
man the freedom of choice to disobey them. Only in extreme cases do the deities
intercede; instead they demand the sacrifice and aid of humans to bring back the
proscribed order. The nobility, as represented by the authority of kings, controls the daily
life of citizens, but when the laws of the gods are violated, they can express their desire
for justice, but even they cannot always mete it out. Lesser supernatural beings, such as
the Furies, can be called upon for aid, and exercise a largely punitive function. Social
hierarchy calls for the agent of justice to be of the same social level as the wrong-doer,
preferably the person who has been most seriously injured by the transgression.

Sophocles’ one-play depiction of the tragedy, Electra, roughly comprises the
action of the second play in Aeschylus’ cycle, and as the name indicates, focuses not on
Clytemnestra or Orestes’ dilemma, but instead on Electra. Rage and inconsolable grief drive the princess to play an integral part in the death of the two lovers. In Aeschylus’ version, she acted passively, waiting for justice to be carried out by her brother, but here she actively pursues retribution. Sophocles reinterprets the circumstances of Oreste’s exile: his sister Electra had confided her brother to the servant Paedagogus and seen that he was raised near Delphi, near Apollo’s oracle. Thus, she has effectively saved him from death and thus makes herself all the more powerful as a key figure because of the debt that her brother owes her. Orestes first sees his sister at their father’s tomb, where she begins a long monologue, crying out for justice, invoking the gods and the Erinnyes. She is unmarried and childless, not by her own choice, but by that of her mother. Sophocles emphasizes her enforced sterility – at this point she is bereft not only of her symbolic child, Orestes, but of any actual children who might threaten the stability of the Clytemnestra-Egisthus power structure. Electra herself has been threatened with exile and death if she does not learn how to contain herself like her two sisters, also unmarried and childless. At this point, she again invokes the Erinnyes, entities that are interchangeable with the idea of Justice in this version. Clytemnestra then appears, claiming that Justice helped her kill her husband, as her action represented retribution for her daughter Iphigenia’s death. Thus, she seeks reinforcement of her position via approval of the gods. The immortals can help assure continuation of terrestrial authority.

The announcement of Orestes’ return comes not from himself, but from his sister’s Chrysothemis’ interpretation of supernatural and physical signs at their father’s tomb: streams of milk flowed from the mound, and garlands of flowers and a freshly
placed lock of hair decorated the gravesite. 51 The supernatural sign, flowing of milk that provides life, suggests the approbation of the gods, that Orestes’ return will produce fruitful returns. Electra interprets this as reassurance that she should seek vengeance. Although Electra starts out enslaved, a victim of her mother, she sheds her bonds to take action, assuming the major role in the act of political upheaval. Indeed, after Orestes finally identifies himself to her, he immediately asks her advice in how best to accomplish the slayings. She consuls her brother, indicating her influence over his decisions as well as her newly-reinforced position. When her brother does slay their mother, she speaks for her brother and denies their mother mercy, and urges him to continue, to strike her again.52 She further directs the action just before Aegisthus is killed, delaying him so that her accomplices might get into a more favorable position. The circle is complete, and as the chorus states, the house of Atreus “hast…come forth at last in freedom, crowned with good by this day’s enterprise.”53 The play ends suddenly—the Erinnyes do not appear to torment Orestes, the spectator is left in silence to contemplate the act. No judgement of the gods, no trial, as in the earlier Oresteia, takes place. Moreover, they never appear on stage. Instead, their role in the play has been reduced to that of a back-stage worker. The audience effectively fills the role of the chorus in the earlier version. Thus, Sophocles’ Electra pushes aside the immortals’ judgement in favor of an act judged only by mortals.


52 Ibid., 271.

53 Ibid., 275.
With regards to Sartre, Giraudoux’s 1937 *Electre*, is particularly significant, both for its inter-war context and for its 1943 revival. Furthermore, it is the immediate predecessor to Sartre’s work, whose title is most likely inspired by a line from the Giraudoux play, and to which *Les mouches* is most often compared. Although Giraudoux’s tragedy respects the unities of time and place (the action takes place within one day and always in Argos), commonplace speech and actions often give the play a burlesque feel, such as the addition of a gardener or when the character Agathe confronts her husband with her love affairs. This further serves to distance the action from its classical origins, rendering the action more accessible to its contemporary audience. In addition, the play contains many anachronisms relating the material life of the ancient Greeks, anachronisms that have their roots in modern France. Moreover, Giraudoux sets up a time-line with mathematical impossibilities. We learn that Clytemnestre exiled her son Oreste twenty years prior to the start of the play, and that Agamemnon died seven years before its action. If Agamemnon were away for ten years, then this would indicate that Oreste was exiled *before* his father’s departure for Troy. Finally, Electre, Oreste, and the public at large are not aware of the exact circumstances of Agamemnon’s death – the entire truth comes to light only near the end of the final act.

Giraudoux also significantly shifts the prominence of certain characters in his version. This is can be seen most clearly in the character of Egisthe (Aegisthus), who attains greater prominence and whose motivations are much more closely detailed than in the earliest Greek versions. Giraudoux transforms him into a political animal who embodies the consummate strategist, with a Machiavellian understanding of action and reaction. Egisthe cannot kill Electre, but must instead crush her spirit, leaving her so
downtrodden that revolt does not occur to her. He fears that a marriage with a prince or king, that is, one befitting her noble standing, would awaken the true Electre, an Electre with a driving desire for vengeance.\textsuperscript{54} Thus rumor has it that he has threatened potential suitors with death. Instead, he handpicks the castle gardener, a kindly man but such a misalliance for Electre that it would simultaneously debase and remove her from the boundaries of the city. Electre would no longer have a place on the playing field – her power would be neutralized by removing the physical menace of rebellion from within the castle walls. The palace, symbol and vessel of power, ensures the stability of Egisthe’s reign by holding threat at a distance. Furthermore, in transferring the care of Electre to the gardener, he hopes that the curse of Atreus will go with her. In so doing, he seeks to deflect the inherited malediction by relaying the vessel of it to an innocent family.\textsuperscript{55} Thus, the inner sanctum of authority is fortified, while the outside opposition grows more susceptible to collapse.

Egisthe imposes a skewed, cynical sense of justice on Argos – murderers receive the same treatment as those who have stolen bread, that is to say, execution.\textsuperscript{56} He rules with an iron fist in order to impress the populace with his power, and thus pre-empt any serious thought of rebellion. In order to justify himself, he claims that the gods show a similarly random manner in dispensing justice.\textsuperscript{57} As an \textit{absolute} ruler, Egisthe actively eliminates anyone who invokes the gods, with the exception of Electre, who remains


\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 616.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 612.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 609
outside of his control. According to his reasoning, a city that does not communicate with
the gods will not invoke their wrath. In order to prove this claim, Egisthe points to the
long-standing prosperity and bountiful harvests from which the city has benefited in spite
of his crimes. The gods are better off left in their lethargic state, unaware and
unquestioning, as too is the populace. Thus, the political, earthly force takes
precedence over what the gods might deem just. The power dynamic has shifted in favor
of the terrestrial.

Far from Aeschylus’ virile, ever-present queen, Giraudoux’s Clytemnestre
occupies a rather secondary, almost frivolous place in the drama. She is the noble-born
counterpart to Agathe, the philandering wife of the Président, who also happens to be
carrying on an affair with Egisthe. When Egisthe’s indiscretions come to light, the queen
shrieks and takes on the shrill tones of a fishwife. Even her manner of killing
Agamemnon, by soaping the stairs of the bath so that he will fall and be skewered by the
adulterous pair, brings to mind the tableau of an unhappy wife pushing her husband down
the stairs. Aeschylus’ frightening, yet nobly defiant queen has disappeared and been
replaced with a mean-spirited, common strumpet. Thus, her role as a dynamic ruler has
shifted into one of relatively obscure weakness. She has become the means to an end, the
vehicle that Egisthe manipulates in order to gain control of the city.

Agathe and the queen argue that all women are weak, deceitful, and treacherous.
In a stunning reversal of roles, Clytemnestre begs Electre to protect her and to join her in
her particular brand of femininity, a request the young virgin vehemently dismisses.59

58 Ibid., 610.
59 Ibid., 653.
Her own pride lies in her strength and purity - others repeatedly refer to her as the embodiment of justice and truth. Thus, Electre’s power comes from within her character – it is intangible. Far from this, her step-father has gained his strength from the material, worldly wealth which he clenches so tightly.

Indeed, Giraudoux constructs the play as a search for the truth, circumstances that lend themselves particularly well to Electre’s eventual triumph, for she is both seeker and judge. He added the secondary character of the Mendiant, an innovation on the original, whom the other characters suspect of being a god in disguise, and who divines the darkest secrets of those around them. For example, the Mendiant immediately points out that Egisthe fears Electre and secretly wants to kill her. It is he who finally recites, in a long monologue, all the sordid details of Agamemnon’s murder. He acts as a clairvoyant, channeling the feelings and memories of those around them in order to reveal the Truth. Although he has no connections to the gods per se, at least that the spectator knows for certain, his uncanny ability to reveal what lies beneath the surface hints at supernatural origins, the hand of the divine playing a role.

Similarly, the Eumenides, portrayed by a group of three girls, take turns playing other characters and re-enacting key scenes, thereby creating a mise en abyme and giving new insight into characters’ motivations. They do not physically torture characters, but instead reveal that which they would rather keep hidden, and thus lead Electre (and Oreste) along the path of discovery. For example, they first appear with l’Etranger (Oreste in disguise), accompanying him inside the city, and recite a poem about

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60 Body, 609.

61 Ibid., 680-682.
Clytemnestre. It begins, “Queen Clytemnestra has a bad complexion. She puts on rouge.” And ends, “Queen Clytemnestra has a bad complexion. She paints her face with blood.” Although Oreste has no clue as to the despicable circumstances surrounding his father’s death, the Eumenides’ words suggest that something is rotten in Argos.

The Eumenides begin the play as little girls and as the action progresses, grow to adulthood and take on an appearance similar to that of Electre. Their unnaturally accelerated aging indicates their supernatural origin, and their endless irritation of other characters suggests they are a torment sent by the gods. Indeed, the aggravated gardener refers to them as flies. Their growth and quest for the truth reaches a crescendo when all is finally revealed to Electre. Their similar appearance to that of Electre suggests that they are her divine parallel, witnesses for the prosecution as she seeks the truth. They serve to fortify her position by acting as unbidden handmaidens in her service.

It is significant that the “true” Electre only comes into view when her brother, under the guise of the Etranger, offers to marry her. From this noble union with quasi-incestuous leanings (hinted at, but not actually acted upon), Electre gains the strength to carry forth her quest for the truth. In a sense, Oreste’s return prompts a rebirth. Electre throws off slavish bonds and fully assumes her role in political and social upheaval.

Giraudoux constructs his play as a struggle between an abusive dictatorship and truth during a period when Germany, Italy, and Spain all had fascist dictators; this lent contemporary meaning to ancient myth. The Président states that society has a short

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62 Ibid., 601.

63 Ibid., 600. “On dirait des mouches!”

64 Colette Weil. “Notice à Electre”. In the Pléiade edition of Giraudoux’s theater, 1554. Giraudoux was already known for depicting contemporary political subjects, such as in La Guerre de Troie n’aura pas lieu, which forshadowed the inevitable conflict between France and Germany.
memory for sins, and that “femmes à histoires” like Electre, the embodiment of justice, generosity and duty, ruin the State, for she shines light on individual and collective crimes.\textsuperscript{65} For the sake of political stability, she should be suppressed. An individual acting alone can threaten the stability of the state. Egisthe’s and Clytemnestre’s power was born of a blood-soaked act, and is thus illegitimate. The populace accepts their reign because they have swallowed the couple’s pleasing lie, or at least pretend to, for it allows them the comfort of disguising their own transgressions. If they are liars, let them seek the comfort of other liars. Electre’s search for the truth threatens to expose the falsehood that lies at the very heart of their power.

Even though Sartre’s 1943 play \textit{Les mouches} is often compared to that of his immediate predecessor, Giraudoux, the two plays differ significantly. Giraudoux emphasized Electre’s role in the Atreus family history, while Sartre chose to concentrate on that of her brother. In particular, Sartre focuses on Oreste’s return and intellectual evolution. The theatrical new-comer follows in the footsteps of Giraudoux, when he builds upon his contemporary politicization of the Greek drama and further shifts the power dynamic, an innovation underlined by the title \textit{Les mouches}.

Sartre’s play begins with the young man’s return to a very different Argos than the one he left as a small child. Although born an Argan, Oreste serves as an observer, a stranger seeing his homeland for the first time through new eyes. All citizens dress in black and express fear of the unknown. For example, when Oreste and the Pédagoge ask directions, they cry out in fear, spit on the ground as if to curse them, and finally

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 604.
flee. The Argans are fraught with such xenophobia when encountering the strangers, that they break the Greek code of hospitality that characterized previous versions of the play. They no longer embrace visitors, but instead abhor them. Their curse isolates them from the outside world, both physically and psychologically. Although this segregation does not appear to have been wholly imposed by the government, they still cling to it like a security blanket. It is their misery.

Argos lies under a black cloud, a cloud of death, for Oreste arrives on the newly-invented *Fête des Morts*, which the people celebrate by bringing libations to the statue of Jupiter, repeatedly called the “god of death and flies”. In earlier versions, the dead king *Agamemnon*, not Jupiter, was paid tribute by his children or townspeople on the anniversary of his death. Sartre’s Day of the Dead indicates a greater general fixation on the deceased, an official holiday over which a god presides.67

The ritual of honoring the dead takes on particular importance during the Occupation, and continues in France to this day. The Vichy government disseminated propaganda which compared the defeated French to the dead heros of the first World War. In fact, Pétain himself was a living reminder of the sacrifice of the previous generation. If one walks about any city or small town, one sees countless plaques commemorating the dead who nobly perished in defense of the country, either during the First or Second World War. Indeed, many of these plaques (both pre and post-WWII) had permanent hangars underneath them designed to hold wreaths honoring the dead.

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67 Giraudoux was already known for satirizing contemporary political situations, such as in *La Guerre de Troie n’aura pas lieu*, when he depicted the Trojan War as a result of lust, stubbornness, and a manipulation of public relations.
The French have a long-standing custom of commemorating their dead, like a holy totem to be trotted out for comforting and reassuring the masses.\textsuperscript{68}

The evocation of past dead became a key leitmotif during the Occupation. When Hitler strategically repatriated the remains of the Duc de Reichstadt, Napoléon’s son, from Vienna in December 1940,\textsuperscript{69} it signified the recognition of France’s past glory, its dead glory, just as November 1st, All Saint’s Day, had played a significant role in the Catholic country. In a similar fashion, November 11th, Armistice Day, took on particular public importance after so many were lost in World War I. The commemoration of those dead became part of an elaborate annual ceremony, a remembrance of times and people past, that quickly worked itself into national consciousness. Pétain himself served as a living reminder of the link with that past, of the old glory that was France, and indeed the government encouraged this commemoration.

In \textit{Les mouches}, Jupiter’s role as a god has shifted: Sartre transforms him from the king of the gods in classical Greek mythology whose benevolence mixed with justice and a sprinkling of human-like folly. In \textit{Les Mouches} the populace acknowledges only Jupiter’s retributive or negative traits, a symptom of society’s illness. His statue, located in the center of the city, suggests that all movement, that all life, turns around the axis of death. Jupiter calls the tunes to which society dances. Although Egisthe exercises the function of terrestrial king, he serves as a mere relay-man. He holds power thanks to his complicity with the god of death and flies. Egisthe’s illegitimate reign is one of a titular

\textsuperscript{68} Pierre Nora discusses \textit{lieux de mémoire}, and the problems of memory and history as now appearing to be in opposition in “Between Memory and History” in \textit{Representations}, No. 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (Spring, 1989), 7-24.

king whose orders come to him from a greater authority, whose orders serve to maintain a static society that serves the end of that hidden, yet not hidden power. Jupiter acts through Egisthe, seemingly absent, as indicated by his feigned identity, and spy-like talent for overhearing useful information, but in reality holding the strings of power as a puppeteer controls a marionnette. Sartre uses his portrayal of the power dynamic between Jupiter, Egisthe, and the rituals for the dead in order to construct a critique of the Vichy government.

Sartre’s depiction of the shift in power dynamic of the play reflected the change in control during the Occupation. Where ever possible, the Germans used French authorities to do their dirty work and to run the particulars of daily life. The German hierarchy issued orders, but French administrators had to implement them, allowing for the illusion that they had control over their country. This clever tactic made it all the more difficult for the French to rebel, for seemingly, their politicians – Pétain, Laval, De Brinon – were the ones holding the reins of power. “The Lavals and de Brinons and collaborators who lent themselves to [the German] cause could argue that they were preserving French institutions and the French way of life.”70 As in the case of the defeat, the French were directly responsible to the public, and thus they garnered the criticism for governmental decisions that in reality had been imposed on them. The illusion of power helped maintain public order more so than if the Germans directly issued orders to the public, which would have caused more outright resentment and lead to further political instability.71


71 Ibid., 49.
Argos, like France, is a city of the living dead, where the mourning supplants the act of living for its occupants. Its corpse rots under the sun and draws a multitude of flies to plague the citizens. The Pédagogue points to the town idiot and remarks “There are a dozen flies on his eyes.. A greasy white paste oozes out. It looks like rotten milk.” The robust size of the flies indicates that the city provides an excellent source of food, that whatever makes them thrive exists in plenty. The putrescent meat of Argos provides ample sustenance.

The presence of the flies in Les mouches is one of the biggest differences between Sartre’s play and other versions of the House of Atreus. Who are the flies exactly? What do they symbolize? When Jupiter meets Oreste in Act One, he immediately launches into an account of Agamemnon’s return to Argos, and explains that the flies only came after his death, when the townspeople, their faces red from the setting sun, paid tribute to Clytemnestre and Egisthe. The exacting precision of the color red evokes the idea of blood, indicating that they, too, had a hand in the death of the king, as though they fed on the gruesome feast and came away with their faces drenched in Agamemnon’s blood. The collective shared in responsibility for the crime two individuals committed, for they said and did nothing to avenge the death. Thus they are guilty because of their inaction, much like the French were guilty of inaction during the phony war.

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73 Ibid., 109.
74 Ibid., 111.
Clytemnestre and Egisthe solidified their political position by reinforcing this idea and by instituting the Day of the Dead. If everyone’s hands are dirty, than no one can come forward to punish the offenders. The populace, along with the reigning couple, currently seek to publicly atone for their sins, a Christian notion of redemption akin to a public act of confession followed by public correction. In Sartre’s version, flies take the place of the supernatural Erinnyes of previous versions. It is significant that Sartre employs a common form of nuisance that can usually be dispersed by a waving of the hand, instead a more exotic, supernatural agent to plague the masses. Their every-day quality renders them subtler agents of justice, ones that punish the townspeople at the behest of the gods, but without drawing attention to their masters.

The flies are invaders, authoritatively controlled by Jupiter’s whisking hand and murmured “Abraxas, gulla, gulla, tsé, tsé.” The insects recall another set of invaders, the German army, come to occupy and feast on a dead land of plenty, France, after the defeat of 1940. The flies have transformed the Argans’ peaceful existence into a daily war, a daily struggle to survive. The insects light on the food the people eat, gain sustenance from the sweat of the citizen’s very bodies, and grow fat on their frustrations.

The parasitic aspect of the flies would have been all too familiar to an audience plagued by food shortages caused by mass exportation to the Fatherland, and who were now forced to produce rationing coupons for each legal purchase. An adult received rations for 350 grams of bread a day, 350 grams of meat per week, as well as 500 grams of sugar, 300 grams of coffee, and 140 grams of cheese. Rations decreased as the war dragged on and supplies grew more difficult to find; items such as turnips and sugar

75 Ibid., 120. The tsetse fly lives on blood and spreads deadly illness in Africa.
substitutes found their way into the daily diet. Diseases caused by poor nutrition abounded, and the average height of children growing up during this period decreased by several centimeters.\textsuperscript{76} Thanks to food scarcity, the burgeoning black market, the indemnities that France now had to pay Germany, and the exchange rates favoring the German Mark (20 francs to the Mark, roughly 40\% higher than the exchange rate before the defeat)\textsuperscript{77} approximately 71\% of the average Parisian’s income went towards food.\textsuperscript{78} People were weak for lack of sustenance, and the daily activity of eating, of finding food, became an obsession for most.

Sartre’s flies also torment the Argans by landing on their eyes, as in the scene where the Pédagogue points to the Idiot, “A dozen have landed on his eye, as though it were a piece of buttered toast!”\textsuperscript{79} The flies blind them. They even invade their very mouths, such as in the scene with the poilu-esque soldiers in the throne room. The second soldier states, “I don’t even dare to yawn any more for fear that they’ll fly in my open trap and set up a merry-go-round in the back of my gullet.”\textsuperscript{80} Thus, they threaten to choke people as they speak, rendering them fearful to open their mouth in public, a tactic which stifles free expression.

Once again, Sartre has shifted the power dynamic in order to reflect contemporary France. On a private level, French citizens exercised discretion airing their opinions in public, and indeed, even in private, for the wrong words to an unfriendly pair of ears

\textsuperscript{76} Pryce-Jones, 94.
\textsuperscript{77} Kedward, 5.
\textsuperscript{78} Pryce-Jones, 95.
\textsuperscript{79} Sartre, \textit{Les Mouches}, 90.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 186.
might end in a secret denunciation (mouche is also slang for a stool-pigeon) to the police, followed by an arrest, interrogation, interment, or deportation. A discreet letter could help its writer resolve petty, private quarrels, or assuage jealousy over social position, goods, or love affairs, a situation which added a new, fearful component to the atmosphere of uncertainly, already heightened by awareness of the censored news of the collaborationist press. Thus, the flies represent not only a punitive, but also an actively suppressive force.

Jupiter underlines the citizen’s guilt with the words, “They closed their eyes, eyes knocked out by sensual pleasure. The whole city was in like a woman in heat.” Thus, they not only refused to intervene, but the regicide unleashed a tidal wave of lust. The perversity of the action translated itself in a perversion of physical pleasure. Jupiter emphasizes this notion when he interrogates an old woman regarding what she did when the king was being slaughtered.

You cracked open your window in order to hear better, and you watched from behind your curtains, holding your breath, with a strange stirring in your loins…You must have really gotten it on in bed that night. You’ll never be able to forget that bloody red celebration.

The people’s degeneration reflects that of the adulterous Clytemnestre, joyous as she slew her helpless husband.

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82 Burrin, 214-215.
83 Sartre, Les Mouches, 112.
84 Ibid., 114.
The pre-murder, decadent Argan society displays a similar face to that of the inter-war period in France, an idea driven home by Pétain’s speech just after the capitulation. According to Pétain, French society had grown lazy and self-indulgent, filled with the desire for good times, fast money and fast women. Citizens lacked proper notions of duty to the State and Church, they had been mislead by Capitalists, Bolchevists, and Jews, instead of having children and fostering the notion of work, family, and country. As a result of the loss, this unforeseen upheaval of their very notion of their country’s existence, the overwhelming majority of French fell into a murky pit of self-chastisement and finger-pointing.\textsuperscript{85} Sacrificial atonement became necessary to show true repentance, both during the Occupation, and in \textit{Les mouches}.

Repentance lies at the heart of Argos’ curse – the flies are a physical manifestation of their guilt and inner turmoil. Instead of chafing at living under an unlawful king and crying out for justice as in earlier version of the Atreus myth, here the citizens become mired, physically and psychologically, in the guilt of another’s act. The previous fifteen years have been spent in state of ritualized remorse, a condition encouraged by the State. The more repentant one shows oneself, the better citizen one is. The same old woman “proves” her newfound piety when she declares,

Ah! I repent, my Lord, if you knew how I repent, and my daughter repents, too, my son-in-law sacrifices a cow every year, and we raised my seven year-old grandson to repent, too. He’s good as gold, blond and already feels guilty about his original sin.\textsuperscript{86}

The concept of original sin has its roots in Christian, not Hellenic culture – the ancient Greeks did not believe in the story of the garden of Eden, and thus did not see themselves

\textsuperscript{85} Paxton, \textit{Vichy France}, 21-23.

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 115.
as inherently flawed. The image of a young child, filled with remorse instead of joy, underscores the unnatural state of affairs. Society has intervened and filled him with its sickness: guilt. Moreover, one can suppose that a seven-year old does not really understand the doctrine behind his penance – he only does what he is trained to do. Thus, this habit represents form without true meaning. Religion for him, and for so many people, is form without personal significance.

Clearly, the State and family work hand in hand in the role of educating children in the importance of guilt, all the better to integrate them into a society where guilt acts as a suppressive force. Guilt and obedient atonement develop as reflexes at the youngest ages. In a similar manner, the Vichy government sought to instill the culture of *Travail, Famille, Patrie* in youth in public schools and through organizations such as the Chantiers de Jeunesse. 87

The ritualizing of guilt becomes most apparent during the ceremony where the dead are released from their bottomless chasm. The stage directions indicate that this takes place on raised platform in a mountain setting. Thus, a symbolic stage stands upon the actual theater stage. The official ceremony takes the form of a dramatic ritual, with a defined space and an established order of events. A child stands, obviously in his best clothes, next to his fussy mother. She chides him, “Look at your tie! I’ve already redone it three times. You’re clean. Be good and cry with the others when we tell you.” 88 Appearance counts. The boy must look like a well brought-up child, that is, one whose conscience of the enforced gravity of the ceremony at hand. Moreover, he must

87 Ibid., 160-63.
88 Ibid., 149.
simulate the proscribed emotion: fear. Thus, he creates a show within the larger ceremonial spectacle. Crying has become a ritual, something to produce on command and thus void of real meaning. One would normally expect a mother to tell her child to be good and play with the other children. Instead, ritual supplants the authentic joys of childhood and replaces them with manufactured tears. Purity gives way to falsehood.

Fear plays a leading role in the ritual. The ceremony takes place each year, and part of its power is the anticipation of what will occur. The townspeople’s attitudes vary, the mildest being glad to get the yearly torture over with, leaving with them alone with their lesser mental and physical torments of the heat and flies until next time. Once the tribulation finishes, they will have survived, and can now put the thought of it on a convenient shelf. Life returns to the status quo with its tormenting flies. The most fearful attitude looks backward to past manifestations of the dead and compares them with the present and future. One man asks himself, “What will the flies be like next year? Every year they get nastier.”89 The crowd whips itself into a frenzy, like small children scaring each other with ghost stories by the campfire. Before the ritual even begins, another man speculates, “What if one of them has already gotten out through a crevice and was already sniffing around us…Some of the dead show up early.”90 One cannot speak freely, due to the possible presence of the avenging dead - those who pronounce their fears risk being singled out for more punishment. The townspeople give themselves over to anticipation of the coming torment by imagining the wrath of the dead. A young woman states, “They’re over there, behind it, they’re waiting like us, but

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89 Ibid., 150.

90 Ibid., 151.
joyful at the harm they’ll do us.” The dead’s imagined, malicious power becomes their greatest weapon. They risk random punishment just as citizens risked random execution as payback for attacks against Occupation forces. Those who committed the worst offenses imagine punishment meted out in a manner similar to that of Dante’s sinners. An unfaithful wife speculates that her husband, now aware of her infidelities, will torture her with his intimacy.

Now he knows everything. They’ve wrecked it for him, he hates me, and he’s suffering. And in a little while he’ll be next to me, his smoky body will press up against my body, more tightly than any living man has ever done. Ah! I’ll take him home, wrapped around my neck like a fur wrap. […] Nothing will soften his rancor, and tonight…tonight he’ll be in my bed.

Her punishment takes the form of an enforced coupling with the dead, a sexual torture, a symbolic rape that recalls the sexual nature of the original offense. Another woman conjures up the vision of her own husband’s return, stating, “He’ll lock me in his slimy, invisible arms. He’ll be my lover all night long. All night long.” The stage directions call for her to faint. The city not only suffers from guilt, but also from an unhealthy preoccupation with sex, which takes on a particularly monstrous form at this moment. Sartre plays on this theme constantly, beginning with the rabid lovemaking of the old woman near the beginning of the play and ending with the Erinnyes’ language filled with sexual imagery when they threaten Electre. Clytemnestre’s and Egisthe’s first offence, their illicit coupling, embodies the original sin which infects the entire town. Far from

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91 Ibid., 151.
92 Pryce-Jones, 118-120.
94 Ibid, 153.
Aeschylus’ version, in which the people of Argos demand justice for the queen’s transgression, Sartre’s Argans actively share in her guilt and subsequently torture themselves for it.

The punishment evokes the Middle Ages, when good Catholics scourged themselves and wore hair shirts as penance for their offenses. One man throws himself on his knees, an action symbolic in itself, and cries out to the flies,

Bite, sting, dig in, drill, you vengeful flies. Burrow into my flesh until you reach my stinking heart. I have sinned, I’ve sinned a 100,000 times, I’m a gutter, a cesspool…

His cries constitute a public confession of guilt and a desire to atone for his transgressions, a spontaneous outcry that issues from years of ritualized guilt. “Forgive me Father, for I have sinned…” Ironically, his professions occur before the ritual has even begun. The offended dead cannot even “hear” his cries of mea culpa.

Multiple like references to the Middle Ages recalls the contemporary call for a purer, less decadent society, with clean-cut, national heroes such as Joan of Arc. As Paxton states, “An integral Catholic vision of the moral order summoned France to return to the traditional faith of her years of glory, with its acceptance of authority and social hierarchy and its solution of social conflicts by charity.”

Catholics saw the defeat as an opportunity to reverse the anticlericalism of the Third Republic that had been particularly grating, as well as to re-introduce religious instruction in public schools. Although they did not succeed in this, under Pétain the Catholics schools could receive some forms of

95 Ibid., 154.
96 Paxton, 140.
97 Ibid., 149.
government funding, and certain lands that had been taken from the Church by the State in 1905 were now restored to it.98

In Les mouches, guilt has become a public institution, presided over by the joint power of religion and heads of government, notably Egisthe and Clytemnestre. Egisthe evokes Pétain’s remonstrance of the French when he demands, “Have you forgotten your abject state? By Jupiter, I’ll refresh your memory.”99 In the words of Maréchal Pétain, “You have a short memory,”100 an accusation which decorated Vichy propaganda posters throughout the Occupation. The State reminds the populace of its flaws, those faults which have lead them to the very degradation they now suffer. They were weak and must now be forced to toe the line in public. Electre’s absence garners Egisthe’s wrath, for it is in the interest of the kingdom (or rather, his own) that the royal family present a united front of contrition. If one member resists, obstinately refusing to acknowledge the moral line as subscribed by the king, it sheds doubt on the ritual as a whole. For collective guilt to function, it must be unanimous, not individualistic.

The presence of the Grand Prêtre, representative of religion, underlines and lends credibility to the fusion of theology and state. He “sanctifies” the proceedings, giving them the official religious seal of approval, thereby assuring their “legitimate” nature. His calling up of the dead goes beyond simple celebration of those who have passed on. Instead, he seeks a legion of ready-made torturers, soldier-like, who will do his bidding.

98 Ibid., 152.
99 Ibid., 155.
100 “Vous avez la mémoire courte.” Address to the French people by Philippe Pétain on June 17, 1940 as cited in Azéma and Bédarida, 165.
The more terrifying the apparition, the more effectively they can cause suffering. Thus, he summons them:

Vampires, larvae, specters, harpies, night terrors – get up! […] Look, the living are here, fat living prey! Get up, flow over them like a whirlwind and gnaw them down to the bones!101

It must be noted that in this religious ceremony, the “happy” dead either do not exist or have no place. The priest invokes evil entities to do holy work. Instead of serving as a source of comfort or simple law, religion aligns itself with the unnatural – the end justifies the means. Religion concerns itself with worldly power to the point that it helps maintain an illegal regime; thus, its authenticity has become muddled, much as it did under Vichy. Sartre infuses his play with Pétainist authoritarianism, with its Catholic roots. These ideas were foreign to the original Greek plays.

During the course of the ritual, Egisthe, surrounded by protective guards, plays the role of tent revival prophet and whips the crowd into a frenzy of fear with his ever-intensifying comments. He “sees” the dead come back, describes how they touch, love, and hate the members of the crowd. His power of suggestion piques their sense of individual guilt to the point that they fall under a collective spell – he places the crowd under mass hypnosis. Moreover, he legitimizes himself as an oracle and the omniscient dead as executors of justice, when he states:

The dead are no longer alive, and that’s why they have made themselves the uncorruptable guards of our crimes. […] They see us, they see us, we’re naked in front of the assembly of the dead. […] Their invisible, pure gaze is more unchanging than the memory of a look.102


102 Ibid., 158-159.
Egisthe’s use of repetition, frantically insisting the dead can see the living, evokes a the notion of prayer-like mantra, as does the rote, catechism-like refrains of the crowd, “Forgive us for living when you are dead.”\textsuperscript{103} This refrain echoes the lines of the Our Father, “Forgive us our trespasses…” The Argans/French have become so guilt-obsessed that their very existence must be pardoned.

It must be noted that at the onset of the ritual, Egisthe draws particular attention to three “sinners”: Aricie, who cheated on her dead husband, Nicias, who neglected his mother, and Segeste, a pitiless money-lender.\textsuperscript{104} Why should a loose woman, an undutiful son, and a usurer garner the dubious honor of having the “judge” enumerate their crimes? The strumpet and the unloving son threaten family stability, and by extension the State, which functions thanks to universal submission to the State’s values. In a similar manner, the money-lender recalls pre and post-defeat criticism of capitalists, specifically of speculators who threaten the country’s economic stability. Moreover, one cannot help but recall the classic stereotype of a Shylockian Jewish money-lender who grows fat on the ruin of “good” people, but produces nothing concrete. He acts as a parasite on society and sows only destruction. These three violate the Vichy credo of \textit{travail, famille, patrie} in unison.

The ceremony’s spectacle within a spectacle reaches its climax when Egisthe conjures up that show-stopping king of all murdered kings, Agamemnon. Egisthe openly admits his guilt: “My torment has begun. […] The greatest of the dead will appear, he

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 159.

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 157-158.
whom I killed with my own hands, Agamemnon.” How can the crowd doubt this prestidigitator’s sincerity when he points the finger of guilt at himself for a greater crime than any of their own? They bear witness to Egisthe’s culpability, thus rendering themselves all the more guilty for their inaction.

Electre, shockingly clad in a white dress that jars with the funereal black Argans, interrupts the proceedings and threatens the illusion of a happy, concordant, first family. As such, she must be destroyed, for her opposition makes her one of the unclean, a threat to state order because she does not follow State-prescribed customs. Although Greek versions of the Oresteia underlined the Atreus family inheritance of destruction and murder, it is only here, for the sake of opportunistic exploitation and re-enforcement of his position, that Egisthe draws attention to it.

Look at her. In her whore’s robe, Atreus’s granddaughter, that Atreus who cowardly cut the throats of his nephews. What are you if not the last descendant of a cursed race! I tolerated your presence in my palace out of pity, but today I realize my mistake, because it’s still the old rotten blood of Atreus that flows through your veins, and you’d infect everything if I didn’t put everything in order. Wait a bit, bitch, and you’ll see if I know how to dole out punishment.

Egisthe singles our Electre as infected by sanguinary corruption, a threat to public health much as the Nazis (and Vichy) villanized the Jews. In reality, however, her non-conformist stance threatens public order, for that order only exists through suppression of difference. As the other, that is, who does not subscribe to the generalized Mea Culpa credo, she must be eliminated before her infection can spread to other habitants, as it does when the crowd, encouraged by Electre’s happiness, begins to question the nature of the

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105 Ibid., 160.
106 Ibid., 161-162.
dead. Religion and State work in unison against this display, using a combination of the
Grand Prêtre’s moral chastisement for her sacrilegious actions and Egisthe’s physical
threats. “I’m going to crush her under foot, and her race will disappear with her.”107
Egisthe completely loses control of the crowd until Jupiter intercedes with a sudden,
improbable act that terrorizes them into immediate submission. The crowd immediately
denies responsibility for their actions.

We didn’t do anything, it’s not our fault. She came, she seduced us with
her poisonous words! Throw the witch in the river, in the river! Burn her
at the stake.108

In other words, they disown their acts for the sake of fear, they act in bad faith. It must
be noted that Sartre once again draws attention to the Medieval aspect of the scene by
playing upon stereotypical images of witch-hunting and punishment. Furthermore, the
scene suggests a parallel between the possible fate of Electre and the execution of Jeanne
d’Arc, symbol of Medieval French purity, burned at the stake by the English. During a
period when official propaganda hearkened to the past and its heroes in order to
reestablish a sense of continuity, Sartre creates a subtle analogy between the two virgins
that lends itself to question contemporary notions of the alliance between religion and
government.

Electre’s presence and in particular her dancing, contrast with the closed-in nature
of the city. It is as though a free, live butterfly flutters among the masses of dark, dead
moths pinned in an insect collector’s specimen case. The people, like their homes and
their city, are closed off, like a turtle in its shell, submissively hunched under the extreme

107 Ibid., 164-165.
108 Ibid., 166-167.
weight of their culpability. In contrast to this huddled mass, Electre states, “I spread my arms, I spread out, and I stretch like a man who’s waking up, I take my place in the sun, all of my place.”\(^{109}\) Her freedom of movement indicates not only a rejection of the collective guilt complex, but also an embrace of herself as an individual. She displays a similar physical liberty when meeting Oreste for the first time, a reaction that quickly dies when confronted with the presence of Clytemnestra. She rebukes her daughter: “A little while ago I saw another Electra who moved freely, her eyes filled with fire.”\(^{110}\)

Mother and daughter share a mutual hatred for one another, but in Electre’s case, her mother’s corruption and much-flaunted sexual appetite cause her to take the extreme opposite direction. Her thin body appears to embarrass her, her bony countenance reflects a rejection of all things sensual. It is as though the purity of her hatred has burned away all excess flesh from within, leaving a fanatical, ascetic shell that thrives on her subversive antipathy. Although she holds an official role in Argan society, her title belies the lowly tasks assigned her, an incongruity reflected in her lack of ease in society. She does not accept her allotted role, in contrast to her mother, who embraces her official role as the sinning queen of the city, as well as the horrific crime she committed. Clytemnestra’s openness and startling sensuality are similar to those of the Greek versions of the play, but here the Queen displays an essentially weak character, slavishly submissive to her husband, but with a disturbing sadistic streak with regards to her daughter. When Egisthe expresses some regret, likely insincere, after punishing Electre, Clytemnestra responds, “Isn’t she my daughter? You liked doing it, and I think that

\(^{109}\) Ibid., 167.

\(^{110}\) Ibid., 136.
everything you do fine.”111 In fact, the notion of motherhood has here been replaced with the annihilation of her children in physical sense, as with Oreste, and emotionally, in the case of Electre. Murderous, sexual instincts supplant maternal instincts in the quest for sensual gratification. By denying her bloodline, Clytemnestra ensures the stability of Egisthe’s power while threatening future generations that should rightfully occupy the throne, therein fostering future political instability. Her collaboration with her lover against her children (as it did, against Agamemnon) constitutes an act of modern-day treason, for it imperils the State.

Bereft of parents physically (as with Agamemnon) and emotionally (as with Clytemnestre), Electre responds to other figures of pseudo-parental authority. Although we first see her in the “sacriligious” act of defaming Jupiter’s state with rotten garbage, she nonetheless show acceptance of the gods’ authority after Zeus/Jupiter illuminates the stone covering the entrance to the abyss of the dead. When Oreste vacillates, she grows terrified at the thought of disobeying a direct order from the gods and begs her brother to reconsider. 112 Oreste reasons with her, explaining his actions in relation to the situation of the Argos, stating that he will assume the weighty regrets of the townspeople. He only receives a positive response when he talks of killing the usurpers who maintain the remorse-obsessed equilibrium. Oreste’s aura of authority corresponds to that commanding father/brother protective/savior figure of her dreams. She exclaims, “Oreste, you are my brother, the head of our family, take me in your arms, protect me,

111 Ibid., 190.
112 Ibid., 178.
because we’re faced with some big woes.”

Although she and Oreste share in the same decision, that Egisthe and Clytemnestre must be eliminated, Electre comes to the conclusion emotionally and through the “persuasion” of her brother; although she desires the deaths, she would never act of her own volition, and indeed, remains either completely or partly in the background while her brother swings his sword. Oreste acts out what she longs to do, but she does not fully participate in the act. Therefore, although she craves the executions, she cannot entirely assume them as her own. Instead she vicariously enjoys the act while never completely engaging herself in the destruction, playing the role of a cheering spectator at a sporting event.

The lack of engagement symbolizes Electre’s bad faith, a willingness to allow others to act and suffer for her sake. No sooner has the act been committed than she falls prey to remorse, symbolized by the now-apparent Erinnyes. Like her mother, they display a perverse sort of sexuality, describing their new-found possession of Electre in sadistically erotic terms. The first Erinnye murmurs longingly over Electre’s sleeping body, “Our caresses will make you scream. I’ll enter you like a make enters a female, because you’re my wife, and you’ll feel the weight of my love.”

Like the townspeople, Electre’s guilt is expressed as a type of twisted sexuality, to be feared yet relished. Moreover, the Erinnyes echo the sadistic, sexual joy of Clytemnestre as she slew her husband; in fact, they replace the dead queen as a mother figure. The third Erinnye looks at the unconscious siblings and states, “My hate will be like a mother’s tenderness to

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113 Ibid., 184.
114 Ibid., 216.
him.”115 Although they specifically refer to Oreste at this point, only Electre embraces what they have to offer: a constant, unhealthy companionship filled with petty torture.

Moreover, the Erinnyes control Electre by means of psychological torment, helping to divide and separate Electre and her brother, causing the girl to turn on her “savior”. They act as a psychological mirror for the girl, throwing back her worst fears. For example, Electre asks, “And he stabbed them several times?” and the First Erinnye responds, “A good dozen. And each time the sword made a sound like “Creeeeeek” in the wound.”116 For every rapid-fire question Electre asks the Erinnyes, they answer in the affirmative and add grisly details that render the situation even more imaginable, even more vivid. They make Electre see the death of her mother in all its horrific gore, causing her to reject Oreste in attempt to divest herself of responsibility. Their offering to Electre, a masochistic mother-daughter relationship based on guilt and fear, mirrors the relationship the girl had with her own mother.

In fact, the Erinnyes, a human-like embodiment of the flies that torment the city, act as the hand-maidens of Jupiter. They, like the flies, disperse with a simple wave of his hand. They act as the first-round participants in an interrogation, softening up the victim with verbal blows until the more-powerful chief investigator enters the arena. In classic police-investigation style, the Erinnyes are the “bad cops”, the hard-hitters, to Jupiter’s “good cop” style. The first team arrests the suspect, terrorizing her until she will do anything for relief, then the second authority figure offers clemency. Although

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115 Ibid., 217.
116 Ibid., 222.
they have different techniques for playing the investigative game, both sides still work in tandem.

As such, Jupiter enters, immediately frees the desperate Electre from her tormenters, then offers sympathy couched in paternalistic terms. “My poor children,” he sighs, and continues with, “Look what you’ve come to! My heart sways between anger and pity.” He assumes the tones of a father who tells his children that punishing them hurts him more than them, and that they although they have displeased him, he still loves them. Jupiter continues, “Get up Electre. As long as I’m here, my hounds will not hurt you.” With these words, Jupiter renders Electre dependent on him for her well-being – he rids the night of the evil monsters, he saves her. Any claims to the contrary would be irrelevant, for she is able to see, physically, what Jupiter does to help. He adopts a conventional, fatherly mien with the words, “Ah! Presumptuous and crazy youth, look at the harm you’ve done to yourself!” In other words, look what you silly kids have done with your silly rebellion, you have only succeeded in torturing yourselves and ruining your health. Jupiter calms the atmosphere and brings it back to an almost pre-murder state. Like the Erinnyes, he attempts to divide in order to conquer the pair. He immediately pronounces their guilt, draws attention to Electre’s tormented state, and attempts to persuade Oreste to renounce what he has done for his sister’s sake. Jupiter uses the fact that Oreste vehemently refuses to do this as “proof” to Electre that her

117 Ibid., 225.
118 Ibid., 225-226.
119 Ibid., 226.
brother does not love her. By extension, he, Jupiter, who has already helped the girl by dispersing the Erinnyes, does love her.

As such, Jupiter counters Electre’s pleas to Oreste by providing her an escape from the guilt she is trapped in with the words “She never wanted to commit this sacrilegious act.” And to Electre he affirms, “You can trust me. Can’t I see what’s really in people’s hearts?”

When Electre expresses her astonishment, he further twists the circumstances in order to accommodate her escape and gain her confidence. “Those bloody dreams were fairly innocent: They helped you bear the burden of slavery, they soothed your wounded pride. But you never dreamed of actually carrying them out.” He reverses the situation, making Electre the victim of the dead couple, as well as the victim of Oreste’s desire for a co-conspirator.

Sartre has Jupiter use a tactic familiar to the French during war time. As the authority figure, in this case representative of the German occupying forces, he holds the power of punishment, but also the power of sudden acquittal for someone who has, up until this moment, seen themselves as utterly without hope. Jupiter offers Electre an exit at the price of obedience and betrayal of her brother, or co-conspirator, a technique used to capture a more important, more solid member of the Resistance. Moreover, the betrayal did not have to be intentional – the captive could be released and then innocently lead the police to a co-conspirator. Thus, they would have unintentionally lead their friend into a trap.

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120 Ibid., 229.
121 Ibid., 229.
Similarly, after the Occupation began, posters sprang up depicting a German soldier, tenderly gazing at one or more children, with the words, “Deserted countrymen, trust the German soldier!”¹²² in bold lettering. Clearly the message was that the Germans, a new fatherly, authority figure, could be trusted by lost French children, no matter what the age. Do not fight us, for we are your friends, we can lead you along – our presence benefits you by making you safe. Electre renders herself childlike, dependent on her perceived protector; she accepts the situation, and the rules of the other, for it makes her life easier than forging out a path on her own. She follows orders, collaborates, for the sake of comfort. And if she chooses not to, the Erinnyes still hover in the background like a brute squad, their talons sharp and waiting to rend her flesh. In fact, terror holds sway over every relationship with Jupiter – Jupiter with Electre, Jupiter with Egisthe, Jupiter with the people.

Why does Jupiter attempt to make this bargain in the first place? Order can best be maintained by continuity – sudden, radical changes disrupt daily life and cause problems for those in authority. Thus, Jupiter seeks to maintain the illusion of continuity by placing Electre and Oreste, both symbolically clothed in the vestments of the deceased, on the throne. Not only will they physically resemble the former rulers, but they also retain the semblance of legitimacy by virtue of their bloodlines. The public would perceive them as the rightful rulers, and life would continue as usual. Normalcy, though public order, would be reestablished.

¹²² Pryce-Jones, 22. “Populations abandonnées, confiez-vous au soldat allemand!”
In a like manner, Philippe Pétain ensured an “accepted normalcy”\textsuperscript{123} after the defeat, for his paternalistic manner and popularity lent themselves to the illusion that France had some control over its own affairs, that it could depend on the heroes of the past, especially a leader from a more victorious era, that is to say, World War I. Vichy’s doctrine of \textit{Travail, Famille, Patrie}, evoked Old France, stability, and better times.\textsuperscript{124} In addition, people generally construed Pétain not so much as a politician, but as a one “above politics”, a literally iconic “homme providentiel” who hearkened back to Napoleonic values.\textsuperscript{125} As Kedward indicates, “abstract values and absolutes flourish at a time of crisis and the Marshal’s promises [of always telling the truth] were received by the majority of the French people without any of the skepticism with which they would have greeted such statements before the war.” Thus, the majority of French showed a desire to accept, not to criticize or even think, just as Electre chooses to accept Jupiter’s version of the facts. One can speculate that had Pétain died during the first stages of the Occupation, the French would have found a similar figure to represent Old France, another fatherly hero of the Great War who would perpetuate the illusion of continuity.

Egisthe rules through the terror of remorse, by suffocating the populace with the guilt of their misdeeds. In order to create a sense of complicity with the populace, he must project his own sins onto them, and in fact, has to embody the “official sinner”, the founder of the “founding sin”. Thus, he is constantly obliged to maintain the illusion by words and appearance. Sartre constantly reminds the spectator of the theatrical aspect of

\begin{footnotes}
123 Kedward, 4.
124 Pryce-Jones, 16.
125 Kedward, 18-19.
\end{footnotes}
Egisthe’s character, for the ruler employs a theatrical lexicon throughout the play. He refers to the dead as “mediocre actors” (piètres comédiens) in front of their “audience” (public), and ruminates on his “extérieur” and “image.” He states, “I’ve been acting for the past fifteen years in order to hide their power from them.” and finally asks “What am I but the fear that others have of me?” Nothing lies behind the mask of the terrible (and terrified) sovereign; empty, he must define himself through others’ view of him. The myth has replaced the man as the essential being, just as the myth of Pétain - the fatherly, moral, sincere leader - masked the reality of the childless, former playboy who underwent an annulment and new church ceremony to his divorcée bride (with whom he had already been involved for twenty-one years) in order to better correspond to the public, old-fashioned moral face that Vichy needed to present.

Sartre constructs Oreste’s journey in Les mouches as both physical and psychological. He enters Argos as a stranger, and immediately feels his distance from the populace, for he shares in neither their collective memory nor the national obsession with remorse. The Pédagogue points out the potential threat to Oreste: “Your heart will be terrorized by the abject desire to repent.” However, his master’s romantic longing for a place of his own causes him to deny the usefulness of the advice. He replies “At least it will be my own.” Oreste’s search for his past, for a sense of belonging, turns into a philosophical battle between his education, which has left him “free for all engagements

126 Sartre, Les Mouches, 159, 192, 201.
127 Ibid., 200-201.
128 Paxton, 148.
129 Sartre, Les Mouches, 124.
and knowing that one should never engage oneself\textsuperscript{130} and the desire to commit an act, thus engaging himself and allowing himself to belong to some place. This freedom from bonds and preconceived beliefs, ironically endowed to him by a slave, has in fact left him too free, confronted with a vast array of choices, none of which help to compose the essential self. In other words, although he knows his lineage, he has no idea who he is, for he has few memories to draw upon. He exists as an exile, an exile from both himself and the community that should construct his identity. Symbolically, he enters Argos under an assumed identity, Philèbe, not only for purposes of security, but also because Oreste has no identity at this point.

Fragments of his own identity gradually return to Oreste – via his initial, physical exploration of the city, and his encounter with Electre and Clytemnestre – but it is the evocation of his dead father Agamemnon that leads to a spontaneous acknowledgement of his illusive identity. The decision to act, to avenge his father, prompts recognition on the part of his sister Electre. Although Oreste identifies himself to Electre at several points after the Fête des Morts, it is significant that only when he expresses a desire to realize her long-held dreams of retribution does she spontaneously cry out “Oreste!”\textsuperscript{131}

Oreste displays the telltale signs of individualism, as signified by the remark, “I tell you that there’s another path…my path. You’ve got to follow it, you understand, follow it until you’re at the bottom of a hole.”\textsuperscript{132} This journey to the end of the night involves the rejection of conventional moral principles, most notably guilt, and the

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., 122.

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., 183.

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., 180.
embracing of *all* aspects of the self, both positive and negative. Conventional morality as depicted by Argan adherence to rules created by another person, no longer applies. The label others apply a certain act becomes inconsequential, as at the moment where Oreste kills Egisthe. “It’s fine. It doesn’t matter to me how I kill them. Therefore, I’ll be an assassin.”133 During a period when conformity ruled, spanning from thought, to uniforms to strict publication standards,134 individualism posed a definite threat to a static society that sought to bury itself in remembrances of the past.

Oreste’s gift to the people, relieving them of their remorse, evokes a hero quite the opposite of the Maréchal Pétain, who offered himself up as a magnifying mirror, designed to multiply the public’s sins by a hundred-fold. Instead, Oreste sacrifices himself, giving the “gift of his person” in order to free the city. His final departure suggests a revolution, a throwing aside of the oppressive order that has held Argos/France captive under its spell, as well as an invitation to follow him. Sartre’s play suggests that the time had come for the French to throw off the yoke of unhealthy guilt promoted by the Vichy government, and to take responsibility for their own lives, by assuming their own freedom.

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133 Ibid., 204.

134 Paxton, 175.
Chapter 3

*Huis Clos*: Sartre Smacks Vichy with Its Own Satin Slipper

In spite of *Les Mouches*’ resounding lack of popular success and virulent panning by theatre critics, Sartre did not wait long before beginning his next play, *Huis clos*, originally titled *Les autres*. As in the case of *Les mouches*, Sartre wanted to create a theatrical vehicle which would display the acting talents of his close friends, in this case Olga “la Brune” Barbezat (née Keschélievitsch)¹ and Wanda Kosakiewicz.² According to Simone de Beauvoir, Olga’s husband Marc Barbezat, who edited and published the review *L’Arbalète* at his own cost (in addition to running a pharmaceutical factory in Lyon), suggested that Sartre “write a play for [Olga] and Wanda that would be easy to stage, and that could be performed on a tour throughout France: [Barbezat] would be in charge of financing the tour.”³ Beauvoir continued,

> The idea of constructing a very brief drama with a single setting and only two or three characters tempted Sartre. He immediately thought of a “Huis clos”[(locked room)] situation: people walled up in a cellar during a long air-raid; then he got the inspiration to lock up his heroes in hell for all eternity.⁴

Thus Sartre drew his daily experiences in war-time France for his play’s setting.

> It must be noted that, in addition to criticizing Sartre’s lengthy text for *Les mouches*, reviewers had expressed dissatisfaction with the multiplicity of characters, the bizarre costumes, and avant-garde set. Thus, by paring down the number of characters,

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¹ Galster, *Le théâtre de Jean-Paul Sartre devant ses premiers critiques*, 194. Note : Frequent confusion occurs regarding the two Olgas in Sartre’s circle, Keschélievitsch-Barbezat and Kosakiewicz.


⁴ Beauvoir, 639.
words, costumes, and simplifying the décor, Sartre avoided the pit-falls associated with his first attempt at Parisian theater. Furthermore, war-time shortages of materials (and electricity) also favored the staging of more straight-forward, shorter plays. Sartre had learned from experience.

According to Contat and Rybalka, Sartre wrote the text of *Les autres* in early fall of 1943 in just two weeks. Sartre added a male role to the two original female characters, and very diplomatically worked within the constraint of “three roles and three texts of equal length, in order not to favor any one actor.” Barbezat subsequently published the play in the spring 1944 issue of *L’Arbalète* – Gallimard later published an almost identical version of this text under its final name of *Huis clos* in March of 1945, several months after the August 1944 Liberation.

Sartre had immediately liked Albert Camus when he met him at the 1943 premiere of *Les mouches*, and he subsequently asked Camus to play the role of Garcin as well as to direct the new play. After a slight hesitation, Camus accepted and rehearsals, held alternatively in Beauvoir’s or Camus’ hotel rooms, began during Christmas of 1943. Shortly after, Olga Barbezat was arrested, and Sartre abandoned the idea of taking

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5 Contat and Rybalka, 100.
6 Cohen-Solal, 357.
7 Contat and Rybalka., 98.

8 By this time, Camus had already published *L’étranger* (praised in a twenty-page essay by Sartre appearing in *Les cahiers du sud* in February 1943). Olivier Todd, *Albert Camus : une vie* (Paris: Gallimard Folio, 1999), 423. Camus also had extensive experience with an amateur theatre group that he had founded in Algeria. His play *Le malentendu*, would be staged in June 1944. (Todd, 484).

9 Beauvoir, 647. Camus later directed the private staging of Picasso’s short play *Le désir attrapé par la queue*, performed in June of 1944 at Michel Leiris’s apartment. Camus, Sartre, and Beauvoir all had roles in the small production. (Cohen-Solal, 362.)
the play on tour. In the spring of 1944, Sartre’s editor, Gaston Gallimard, acted as intermediary and offered the play to Annet Badel, the new director of the théâtre du Vieux-Colombier.10

Some controversy surrounds the decision to re-cast Olga’s role and continue staging *Huis clos*. According to Beauvoir, Olga Barbezat had been arrested in a general police round-up, because of friends in the Resistance. In spite of efforts on the part of Sartre to have her released, she remained imprisoned at Fresnes until June 1944.11 According to Gilbert Joseph, Camus argued with Sartre over the decision to wait for Olga - Camus wanted to halt rehearsals and refused to perform out of solidarity for his imprisoned friend. Once again according to Joseph, Sartre used this as an opportunity to find a more professional director and replace all his amateur actors once he had found a proper theater for the production.12 Camus’ biographer Olivier Todd appears to more or less agree with this version, although it paints Camus’ departure in a more amiable fashion, and does not portray Sartre as the blindly ambitious, egotistical playwright of Joseph’s *Une si douce occupation*.13 Beauvoir wrote of Camus’ “charming letter of resignation” where, according to her, he intimated that he felt unqualified to direct professional actors in a professional production.14 Sartre’s biographer Annie Cohen-Solal’s interpretation of the change of actors falls somewhere in the middle, thus muddling the question even more. She writes,

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11 Beauvoir, 647.

12 Joseph, 320.

13 Todd, 462-463.

14 Beauvoir, 673.
The rehearsals had definitively ceased and Sartre feared that his play would never see the light of day. The director of the Vieux-Colombier, Annet Badel, was interested in it, rehearsals began again, with professional actors this time, and a confirmed director [Raymond Rouleau].

Cohen-Solal makes no mention of Camus’ resignation or any possible reasons for it.

Ingrid Galster, on the other hand, attributes Camus’ withdraw from the role of Garcin as the result of feeling somehow personally slighted because the directing job had been given to the more experienced Rouleau. According to Galster, Sartre continued to fight for Wanda Koscakiewsics’ inclusion in the play, as he had written the role of Estelle with her in mind. Both Rouleau and Badel insisted that the role be given to the professional actress Gaby Silvia, who was married to Badel. Sartre finally gave in and accepted a new, professional cast, and was ultimately highly pleased with the result. Along with Silvia as Estelle, Tania Balachova, the ex-wife of Rouleau, played the role of Inès Serrano, while Michel Vitold, already known for his portrayal of shady characters, took the role of Garcin. Only one original cast member remained – R.-J. Chauffard, a student of Charles Dullin, played the small role of the Garçon d’étage.

With the cast set, the scenery could be finally be constructed at the tiny Vieux-Colombier theatre in the Saint-Germain area. The anonymous décor posed no great problems: a Second Empire-style hotel room/salon with depressing bluish green walls, a bricked-up window, missing mirror over a simple fireplace, three straight-backed settees of varying colors, a bronze statue and paper cutter. It might have been anywhere, the

15 Cohen-Solal, 367.
17 Ibid., 202-203.
choice perhaps inspired by one of the many inexpensive hotels that Sartre and Beauvoir had inhabited during the decade since leaving the E.N.S. In any case, the setting of hell in an uninspiring, common-place hotel room - a rather familiar-looking storage facility for travelers as opposed to an elaborate, exotic pit of physical torture - flew in the face of popular Christian mythology, as did the characters portrayed.

According to Badel’s post-Liberation memoirs, the German censorship authorized the play, then forbid it, then finally allowed it to be performed. Galster points out that Gerhard Heller’s account coincides with Badel’s, but that the Vieux-Colombier’s file in the Propaganda Abteilung’s archive makes no reference to any sort of refusal or revocation of privileges. Instead, two internal reports describe the play as a ‘“great literary success’ in which one finds, as in Camus’ Le malentendu, a ‘deeply pessimistic outlook’ which showed a ‘marked contrast’ with the omnipresent vaudeville [shows].” According to Heller, he also rapidly and enthusiastically gave approval to Camus’ L’étranger, only to be criticized by the Propaganda Abteilung who had received complaints from (we can assume) more conservative critics on the French side. This French/German schism would also rear its head with regards Sartre’s new play.

The Paris press gave Huis clos a modest buildup, most notably in Comœdia. The journal’s theatre chronicle described Rouleau as a director who, “[was] not a black

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18 Heller, a friend of Otto Abetz, ran the Referat Schrifttum, the literature section, of the Progaganda Staffel in Paris. Writers submitted their manuscripts to him in order to obtain the official Nazi stamp of approval. Heller also chose the writers (among whom Robert Brasillach, Pierre Drieu LaRochelle, Ramon Fernandez) for the official “Writer’s Trips” to Weimar in 1941 and 1942. (Pryce-Jones., 249-250).

19 Galster, 205.

20 Ibid., 205. Citing Arch. Nat. AJ 10, 1001 (7)

21 Pryce-Jones, 252.
market trafficker of theatrical spectacle, but instead a disinterested servant of dramatic art.” To illustrate this, he reiterated the Vieux-Colombier’s mission to present plays stripped of the superfluous visuals, an homage to the pared-down theatrical aesthetics of Jacques Copeau, founder of the Vieux Colombier and former director of the Comédie Française. Copeau served as the national theater’s director from May 1940, just before the defeat, up until January 1941, when he resigned amongst political intrigue. According to Marie Joubert’s study of the Comédie Française, Copeau only lost his job due to the fact that the Germans disliked him. Comœdia’s article on the Vieux-Colombier implies a criticism of boulevard-style theatre with its flashy trappings, or even elaborate (and costly) productions in more “serious” venues, such as the 1943 production of Claudel’s Le Soulier de satin.

Huis clos opened on May 27, 1944 to packed a house. Its first commentator, Alain Laubreaux of Je suis partout fame, reviewed the play for his column in the pro-fascist daily Le Petit Parisien. From the very outset, Laubreaux expressed scorn for the author, “Le Malin,” and the play’s characters, “a Mexican deserter whose country’s military has shot, an unfaithful young wife of an old man guilty of infanticide. And finally ‘The Prisoner.’” He continued, describing the character of Inès. “It’s obvious that the place for a damned woman is in Hell.” Instead of directly attacking the play for its “ignoble” characters, Laubreaux focuses on its aesthetic short-comings, notably its “dark, violent” language, and “oppressive” décor and direction, but praises the actors’ performances. Overall, he finds the huis clos concept boring and obvious, but enjoyed

23 Joubert, 60, 226.
the play that followed,24 *Le souper interrompu*, by the late Jean Toulet. Toulet’s masked ball filled with Marivaudage romps and mistaken identities25 struck a more “agreeable,” “charming”26 chord with the ruffled critic.

Laubreaux continued the attack on *Huis clos* in the following week’s issue of *Je suis partout*.27 He began by stating that various sources had accused him of secretly calling for Sartre’s play to be banned, an accusation which he denied. According to him, the “boredom” that the play produced should be reason enough for it to close. Furthermore, he had no interest in becoming alarmed by the “vices” that the play portrayed, and if the play’s “author and his friends [were] attempting to succeed by causing a scandal, they should not count on [him].” According to Laubreaux, the play would only benefit from public cries to ban it, as it garnered the play free publicity. Sartre’s play, unlike the recent closing of a “zazou” version of *Andromaque*, starring Jean Marais, was not a deformation of classical French theatre - a threat to the literary heritage of France. Thus *Huis clos* was “immoral in a different fashion”. He ends by stating that people should bring their children to see it, as if to say “Look, little one, look at what has happened to French theater since we have been recruiting poets from the ranks of professors.” Thus, Laubreaux simultaneously denied responsibility for the call to ban *Huis clos*, but still underlined the fact that it was immoral and detrimental to French theater. All the while he supposedly rejected the notion of subscribing to banning a play based on morals content. He effectively played both sides of the fence.

25 Galster, 207.
26 Laubreaux, Op cit.
27 Alain Laubreaux, “ Enfer et damnation ” in *Je suis partout* (June 9, 1944).
Whether or not Laubreaux initiated the movement to ban *Huis clos* cannot be verified, but the critic certainly had a well-earned reputation for having done so in the past. In May of 1941, Laubreaux launched a virulent attack on Jean Cocteau and the staging of his play *La Machine à écrire.*

The critic attacked the playwright and the play’s star, Jean Marais, for their sexuality, their “physical perversions” which represented a menace to public morals in the year after the defeat. Laubreaux also linked Cocteau to a Jewish brand of corruption and its deleterious, decadent effect on French theater. Laubreaux continued the attack through several more articles (June 16, July 27, October 25, and November 1, and November 15, 1941), all of which reiterated accusations of homosexuality, Jewification, threat to public morals, and corruption of French youth. In a short article on November 1, 1941, Laubreaux joyfully announced that *Les parents terribles,* another Cocteau play, had been banned after “indignant young people” protested its content by disrupting performances. Although he mentions that various sources had been spreading rumors that he lead the movement to ban the play, he does not quite take credit for its closing. Instead, he stated that, “If there is some [truth to it], there would be nothing that [he] would not laud himself for doing so.”

As in the case of Sartre’s *Huis clos,* Laubreaux made no direct admission of responsibility, but the critic lets it be known that he heartily approves the censors’ actions just the same. Laubreaux’s way of operating remained the same.

Laubreaux’s former colleague Robert Brasillach took a more tolerant stance towards *Huis clos,* even though he initially criticized Sartre for being another N.R.F.

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28 Alain Laubreaux, “Marais et Marécage” in *Je suis partout* (May 12, 1941).

29 Alain Laubreaux, “Théâtre” in *Je suis partout* (November 11, 1941).
author credited with writing huge philosophical tomes and “boring, dark novels.”

Even though the characters are indeed Monsters, they are presented [...] as such, they hide nothing about themselves from us. Yes, there is something sordid, a type of terrifying sadism, and no hint of health enters this little symbolic drama [...] it is really Hell that speaks. Hell undisguised, Hell that does not attempt to pass itself off as an artificial paradise, Hell that dares to speak its name and does not ornament itself with any charm. Is it an antipathetic work? Certainly. Is it La nausée all over again? Of course. It’s also Le mur, and the heroes pound their heads against this wall for all eternity.

Thus, even though Sartre’s depiction of Hell repulses the spectator, its very repulsion emanates a sort of hypnotic horror that compels one to watch. Moreover, Brasillach warns the “professional moralizers”, who will certainly condemn Sartre’s play, that they had better look to their own lives first. Thus, although he himself is a pro-fascist reactionary who has fomented violence (and condemned cultural decadence), Brasillach takes a more cosmopolitan stance on the morals issue.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, Comœdia’s theater critic, Raymond Purnal, gave a highly positive review of the play: According to Purnal, Huis clos was a “chef d’œuvre” and even though the play challenged the spectator by giving him the impression of being “smothered”, it confirmed Sartre’s “incontestable talent.”32 The only real criticism Purnal made was in regards to Raymond Rouleau’s staging, which he finds to be “vulgar” overall. Purnal praised the characters and actors, but it is significant that in his description of Inès he refrained from stating the fact that she was a lesbian. Instead, he only referred to her as “among the three, the most perverse and whose

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30 Robert Brasillach, “Théâtre” in La Chronique de Paris (June 1944).
31 Ibid.
32 Roland Purnal, “Générales et Premières” in Comœdia (June 10, 1944).
particular morals make her evil in spite of herself”, i.e. her sexuality, the crime whose name cannot be spoken. The critics generally chose this technique, allusion, to describe Inès. This type of self-censorship was in line with the social mores of pre-war and occupied France.

Not surprisingly, the majority of the critics fault Sartre’s play for its immoral content, especially with regards to sexuality. One of the first reviews to appear, in *L’Echo de la France*, summed up the story-line in disgust:

The lesbian is in heat and rushes to the infanticide’s neck. But the infanticide is in heat, too, and launches an attack on the deserter, who can do nothing but be in heat, as his male pride is in question. Mr. Sartre gravely comments on the action, “Hell is other people.”

The theater critic for weekly *Le Réveil du peuple*, Robert Francis, includes Sartre among the ranks of “naïve philosophy teachers” who

Every time they raise their legs somewhere, in a book or on the stage of a theater, a small troupe of young, pre-pubescents and impotent old men are compelled to come and sniff around before showing their contentment in many articles, glossaries, and studies whose stupidity rivals their immodesty. Let it be known that this time, Mr. Sartre has left his tinkle on the stage of the Vieux-Colombier.

For Francis, Sartre takes his place among the ranks of “bad masters” associated with the regime of Léon Blum. Gisèle Sapiro points out that proponents of the National Revolution as well as collaborators, often blamed the “Republic of professors,” a government headed up by intellectuals, for the defeat of 1940. Thus, *Huis clos* represents the production of a decadent school-teacher promoted by underage students.

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and old, sexually inadequate toadies. It must be noted that when Francis continued to
eviscerate the actors’ performances, he attributes the role of the lesbian to Gaby Silvia,
who actually played Estelle. Apparently no one was perfect.

Other critics proceed in the same fashion, attributing a decidedly unhealthy
quality to the play, treating the one-act drama as a threat to public health. Jean Silvain,
critic for the weekly L’Appel, begins his attack by reiterating how awful he found Les
mouches, but now

Mr. Sartre has once again fallen ill at the Vieux-Colombier. […] One
cannot dream of something more boring and at the same time, more unhealthy. […] Garbage is their reason for being. At the moment when
our country is living through the greatest drama in its history, such a
spectacle appears useless to us and afflicts us. […] The lesbian desires
the infanticide while the deserter wants to make love to the lesbian. The
punishment for these three damned people is to never get what they want.
They will go around in this vicious circle. Oh! Very depraved – for all
eternity.36 (italics my own)

Silvain’s article was one of the most virulent criticisms: the corporeal metaphor and
notions of a disease that threatens the body of France return time and time again. As in
the case of anti-Semitic propaganda, in which the Jew menaces society through his subtle
corruption of “native” values, so to do characters so obviously alien to the credos of the
National Revolution, or a “New France” menace the nation. According to this concept, a
nation of school-teachers whose effete intellectualism and corrupt morals contributed the
country’s downfall should be silenced for the health of the state. The disease must be
excised, particularly when it comes from within.

The Paris press/Vichy press split had already been evident for several years, most
recently preceding Huis clos with the publicity surrounding Claudel’s opus Le Soulier de

Between the time the play was originally written (1924) and its lavish autumn 1943 opening at the Comédie Française, Louis Jouvet, best known for producing Jean Giraudoux, had attempted to mount the play at least twice (1930 and 1936), but to no avail. Although Jouvet absented himself from France by going on a four-year tour of South America during the war, Jean-Louis Barrault, the director originally set to produce Sartre’s first Paris production, Les mouches, took up the baton and eventually got the support of Jean-Louis Vaudoyer, the head of the Comédie Française. As Ingrid Galster points out, Sartre’s letter to Barrault releasing the director of any obligations towards the play contained several bitter references to Le Soulier de satin. According to Sartre, Barrault preferred to direct Le Soulier de satin instead of his play, and moreover, Sartre accuses Barrault of never wanting to produce his play in the first place and using delaying tactics to avoid doing so.

Although we cannot be completely positive as to what occurred, some suppositions can be made. First, the Comédie Française, the most famous theater in France, represented more prestige, as did a production of a playwright and poet such as Paul Claudel. The honor of producing the first real play (with a questionable text) by a lycée philosophy teacher paled in comparison. Although Sartre attempts to put a good face on his change of directors, his disappointment and bitterness at the perceived attitude of Barrault are nonetheless palpable, leading Galster to theorize Huis clos as a type of anti-Soulier de satin. This will be discussed at greater length later in this chapter.

37 Joubert, 254.


39 Ibid., “Lettre de Jean-Paul Sartre à Jean-Louis Barrault.”, 42.
According to Serge Added, Claudel dominated the theatre scene during the Occupation as a great French dramatic author.\textsuperscript{40} By the time war broke out, Claudel was already an established, respected author whose entire corpus was impregnated with his Christian beliefs, a theme of great importance during an era when the Vichy government touted the return to traditional Catholic values. Coincidentally, Claudel had also authored an “Ode au Maréchal Pétain” shortly after the defeat.\textsuperscript{41} The production of \textit{Le Soulier de satin} was enormously expensive and lavish, partly because the cast alone contained seventy-three members that needed period costumes from the Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{42} Moreover, even after significantly cutting the play, the performance lasted five hours including intermission. Excessive cost, multiplicity of characters, and length were the major criticisms made of \textit{Les mouches}, as well, but Sartre’s production did not have the éclat of the prestigious Comédie Française behind it. Due to heavy promotion, propaganda, and state support, the \textit{Soulier de satin} managed to make enough money to break even despite its enormous production costs. It ran from November 1943 though the entire winter of 1944.

\textit{Le Soulier de satin} traces the journey, both physical and symbolic, of its heroine Doña Prouhèze as she struggles between her love for the young Rodrigue and a sense of duty towards her much older husband, Don Pélage. The conflict, one of passion versus obligation, hearkens back to the religious notion of the split between body and soul, and one’s attempts to master those “baser” impulses. During the very first scene of the play,

\textsuperscript{40} Serge Added, \textit{Le Théâtre dans les années Vichy} (Paris : Ramsay, 1992), 335.

\textsuperscript{41} Michel Autrand, “Préface” to Claudel, Paul, \textit{Le Soulier de satin} (Paris : Gallimard, 1997), XXXII.

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., XIII.
l’Annucier and the Père Jésuite lay out a framework for the major themes of travel and physical hardship, themes which become symbolic during the arduous journey Doña Prouhèze’s soul must make as it gradually tears itself from the realm of the physical to become pure. As the play progresses, Prouhèze focuses more and more on her relationship with God. The play’s title comes from a moment on the first day when the amorous Prouhèze, who has fallen in love at first sight with Rodrigue, escapes from the confined space, a sort of Garden of Eden in miniature shared with her husband Pélage, in order to see Rodrigue once again. She promises herself that she will not sin physically, places one of her satin slippers between the hands of a statue of the Virgin Mary, and asks her to protect her from corruption. Throughout the course of the play, Prouhèze does cede to temptation, but eventually learns the spirit of sacrifice, refusing to marry Rodrigue even after her husband has died, much like the Princesse de Clèves. The themes of guilt and sacrifice, contained as they were in a highly Christian framework (complete with quotes from Saint Augustin), held particular appeal at a time when the official Vichy stance preached guilt and self-sacrifice as atonement for the past sins of corruption, sins that had lead to the downfall of the Republic. Mounting an elaborate production of a French author came to be seen as a sort of balm for wounded national pride, a challenge to show that their culture was alive and well, in spite of the radical changes of government and society. “The French came to see Soulier as though it were a mass in the French language.”

43 Paul Claudel, Le Soulier de satin (Paris : Gallimard, 1929, 1997), 11. (my translation)

Although often heralded as the great success of the Occupation, *Le Soulier de satin* did not escape criticism, particularly from those in Paris who found its heavily Christian thematic tiresome. Critics, notably Laubreaux, expressed indignation at the enormous sums and material required to produce the play, especially in times of scarcity. Laubreaux cites costume changes for Marie Bell, who played the lead of Doña Prouhèze, that required her to have eleven pairs of shoes when the majority of the French had to wangle for a pair of galoshes.\(^{45}\) The most valid criticism, however, was that the text’s novel-like length and verbosity simply did not make for good, coherent theater. Exotic characters from China and Africa, as well as symbolic figures such as Doña Musique, appear and disappear at random, acts of God cause sudden shifts in the action, making the plot-line incomprehensible at times. The criticisms can perhaps best be summed up by the quip of the time, “Happily it wasn’t a pair [of slippers]!”\(^{46}\)

Criticisms aside, *Le Soulier de satin* became a huge hit soon after Sartre’s *Les mouches* had been thoroughly panned. It also appeared while he was contemplating his second play for the Paris audience. Sartre also makes a reference to Doña Prouhèze in his 1943 philosophical work, *L’Être et le néant*.\(^{47}\) Although Beauvoir gives no indication that Sartre viewed *Les autres* as a reply to Claudel’s preachy, lengthy Christian drama, the play’s themes and success, especially in light of Barrault’s actions, must have rankled. Jean-François Louette gives a convincing argument that *Huis clos* may be

\(^{45}\) Joubert, 256-257.

\(^{46}\) Autrand, 1.

\(^{47}\) Sartre, *L’Être et le néant*, 438.
interpreted as a “very sharp retort to Catholic theater.” In spite of Sartre’s POW camp friendships with priests such as the Abbé Perrin, their attempts at conversion had always failed, and he remained highly critical of and hostile towards religion, particularly the Catholic Church. During this time of moral and political oppression, in which the National Revolution called for a return to traditional French values, including religion, the Church’s influence must have appeared all the more suffocating.

In her article on *Huis clos* and *Le Soulier de satin*, Galster claims that critics had not seen that [Sartre] had gone so far as to take up and rewrite [Catholic plays] by switching certain elements, such as known characters, of this type of theater whose purpose was to share a faith that, for the philosophy of contingence, could only be bad.

However, Sartre had a well-documented penchant for satire, even as a student at the ENS, where he helped write and starred in the end of year follies that mocked the schools’ administration, most notably its director Gustave Lanson. Furthermore, his novella *L’Enfance d’un chef* can be interpreted as literary jibe against the extreme right-wing, as well as a cautionary roman d’apprentissage against their recruitment techniques. Parody and satire become sharp weapons in a culture where words are often the deadliest arm against one’s enemies, particularly for a student educated at the E.N.S., and who would have been talented and familiar enough with a variety of genres (such as Christian-themed plays) in order to turn them on their head. Therefore, Sartre’s specific choice of one of the cornerstones of Christian mythology – Hell – should have been suspect from

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49 Galster, 35. (my translations)

50 Cohen-Solal, 124-126. Sartre appeared wearing a fake white beard and a Légion d’honneur, a young double for the Director.
the beginning, just as his choice of the nativity for Bariona, a play in which the Holy Family makes no appearance, indicates that the real action happens on a deeper level. Louette points out that if one were to interpret *Huis clos* as an anti-mystery, a type of remedy for the traditional Catholic drama, the moment when the “door suddenly opens at the end of the single act [of *Huis clos*] can be considered, as far as structures, as a different type of “miracle,” a miracle which, following the rules of parody, solves nothing.”

According to Louette, Estelle the sensual infanticide becomes a type of anti-Prouhèze. Their circumstances are remarkably similar on the very surface: both are young, beautiful women who have much older, wealthier husbands whom they do not love, which in itself is a theme drawn from the Middle Ages. Both fall in love at first sight with someone their own age, and pursue that love in spite of their husband and societal constraints. It is at this point that the two radically differ – Prouhèze, although she later gives in to her passion, attempts to restrain herself, to maintain her marriage vows and not bring shame upon her household. Estelle blindly pursues her lover, only taking care that her husband not find out. Obviously she has confided in her best friend, Olga Jardet, about the affair, but that she would also inform her of the infanticide indicates that she does not fully grasp the horror of the situation. Estelle epitomizes selfishness and the inability to feel empathy. Prouhèze, although she sins, is fully aware of the destructive consequences of her acts, and does not willingly harm other people – her passion simply gets the best of her until she becomes capable of controlling her

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51 Louette, 87. (my translation)

52 Ibid., 87.
Estelle never grows, period. She desires, even in Hell, not scrupling to avoid any objects in her path, like a human hurricane whose cruel beauty throws those around her into turmoil.

Estelle lives in a permanent state of bad faith, refusing to confront reality, even in Hell. For example, shortly after she enters the shared room, she criticizes the angular couches, laid out as though “for a New Year’s Day visit at her Aunt Marie’s.”\footnote{Jean-Paul Sartre, \textit{Huis clos} (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), 29. (my translations)} She immediately expects the others to accommodate her desire to look beautiful. The only empty couch, in spinach green, clashes with her light-blue dress, so they must change places with her. Although Inès offers her the Bordeaux settee, she insists that the only suitable one would be “that of Monsieur”. She obtains what she wants from men, in death as in life, an exchange representative of her preoccupation with appearance and obsession with seducing the opposite sex. Hell is simply Earth continued in another form.

Her failure to acknowledge her state continues with specifications regarding language, namely, a refusal to describe herself and the others as “dead”. When Garcin describes himself as such, she chides him,

Oh, dear sir, if only you would not use such crude words. It’s…it’s shocking. And finally, what does that mean? Perhaps we have never been so alive. If it’s absolutely necessary to name this…state of things, I suggest that they call us “absent,” that would be more correct. Have you been absent for a long time?\footnote{Ibid., 31.}

Estelle uses a type of social Newspeak that mimics the precious speech of the bourgeoisie. Her use of allusion masks unpleasant reality.
In a similar fashion, she quickly tries to find common friends among the three, as though chatting with strangers at a cocktail party. She asks Inès, “Perhaps we’ve met before? […] Or maybe we have friends in common? Do you know the Dubois-Seymour?”

When Inès states that she was a postal employee, and therefore not likely to know people with a château who “received everybody,” Estelle “withdraws” according to the stage directions. The combination of social embarrassment and disdain for the lower classes has been so well-programmed into her that it continues after death. Similar social rules regarding comportment cause her to insist that Garcin not remove his jacket, even though the room has become oppressively hot.

She maintains her socially-indoctrinated façade when she refuses to admit why she has been sent to hell. Estelle assures the others:

I don’t know, I don’t know at all! I’m asking myself if there hasn’t been some sort of error. (To Inès). Don’t smile! Think of the quantity of people here…who become absent every day. They come here by the thousands and only deal with subordinates, with uneducated employees. Why wouldn’t there be any errors? […] If they are mistaken in my case, they can be mistaken in yours. And in yours, too. Isn’t it better to believe that we are here by mistake?

Estelle, a member of the haute bourgeoisie, not only “blames” (or appears to) some clerical error for her fate, but also invites the others to subscribe to her falsehood. She seeks a collective lie that would allow them to maintain the illusion of innocence. In so doing, she not only avoids admission of guilt (a pattern that later repeats itself with regards to the death of her child and lover), but permits her to live in the relative comfort

55 Ibid., 35.
56 Ibid., 36.
57 Ibid., 39.
of oblivion. Clearly, her talent for creating and living false situations (unfaithful wife, unfaithful lover, murderous mother to a secret child) has been well-established. She was poor, had a sickly brother, and so had to marry an old man for security. She fell in love and carried on a secret affair under the nose of her husband. She became pregnant and went away to hide it, and finally she threw the child into a lake in order to hide the evidence. She asks those around her “What would you have done in my place?” in a vain attempt to get their approbation. Without their approval, she is nothing, for she needs their affirmation to reinforce the illusion.

All three characters exhibit a doubling of personality, the exterior persona for societal consumption that chafes against the interior, “real” person, made up of secret thoughts, acts, and dreams. Nowhere does this become more evident than with Estelle. Her whole purpose of existence relies on radiating a certain persona – that of the femme fatale, society wife seductress whose beauty must inspire admiration. Without that adulation she becomes nothing. Sartre’s usage of the mirror motif, particularly regarding Estelle, emphasizes this visceral need for admiration. When she reapplies her powder and lipstick, she searches in vain for a mirror, and first turns to Garcin to ask him if he might have one. Not terribly likely, as men generally do not carry pocket mirrors, but it once again reminds us of her desire to become the object of admiration, to draw attention to herself in any way possible. When the search for a mirror ends in failure, Estelle swoons (in itself an overly dramatic, staged move designed to attract attention), and cries:

When I don’t see myself, I have to touch myself, I ask myself if I really exist. Everything that takes place inside heads is so vague, it makes me fall asleep. There are six large mirrors in my bedroom. I see them. But they don’t see me. They reflect the love-seat, the carpet, the

58 Ibid., 39.
furniture...How empty it is, a mirror I’m not in. When I spoke to others, I would place myself so that there was one in which I could look at myself. I spoke, I saw myself speaking. I saw myself as people saw me, that kept me awake.  

Estelle has no image of herself – what she has constructed relies on the judgement of others, on the *eyes* of others. Without this exterior reflection, she does not exist, for she has no ability to see herself as she is, from the inside, for her inside is empty. Pierre’s image of her, a crystal vase, is particularly appropriate, for a vase in itself has no purpose but to be beautiful – it is also empty inside. It is only when it receives flowers, or *compliments* in the case of Estelle, that it appears to have a purpose. As soon as the foliage is removed, the vase returns to its essential state: *empty*. Her reliance on the approval of others represents a continuous act of bad faith, a refusal to see things as they are and accept responsibility for them.

Estelle’s preoccupation with appearance leaves her vulnerable to attack, as in the case with Inès, when she “acts as a mirror” for Estelle so that she can inspect her makeup. The fact that another woman evaluates her causes Estelle discomfort, as all women are potentially competition in the search for men, thus, she initially turns to Garcin. Other women do not count, as Estelle later states. When she finally looks at her reflection in Inès’ eyes, she states, “You intimidate me. My image in mirrors was tamed. I knew it so well...I’ll smile: My smile will go from the depths of your eyes and God knows what it will become.” The loss of her image, the ability to see her own image, represents an intolerable loss of *control* for Estelle. Inès, who attempts to grow closer to Estelle

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59 Ibid., 44-45.
60 Ibid., 75.
61 Ibid., 48.
through serving as her mirror, becomes angry when Estelle rebuffs her by refusing the familiar form of address. Inès parries by striking terror into Estelle’s heart. “What have got there, beneath your cheek? A red blotch? […] There’s no redness. […] But what if the mirror began to lie? Or if I closed my eyes, and if I refused to look at you?”

Privation of admiration equals death for Estelle, and it is significant that it is only after her last admirer on earth, Pierre, learns the terrible truth about her that she can fully face what she is, “Garbage.”

Estelle sees herself as an object, and she applies the same value towards others. As already stated, Inès does not count, as she is just a woman. Estelle does not hesitate at the idea of having sex with Garcin in front of Inès, for she was already “in the habit of getting undressed in front of her chamber maid.” Although men offer more recompense in the form of ego-stroking and sexual gratification, they are objects for consumption in turn. She refers to Pierre, a young admirer who is still alive, as a “little idiot”, yet she bristles at the thought of relinquishing him to her best friend Olga. He does not exist as a person, but as a type of bone to be argued over. Even though he has no real value to her in Hell and she never really cared for him in the first place, the thought that he might stray tears her apart. He functioned both as a repository for her self-image, and to reflect that pleasing image back to her, like human mirror/object.

In a similar fashion, her baby existed as an inconvenient side-effect of her affair, not as a separate human being. Or if it were actually seen as human, the girl baby would

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62 Ibid., 48.
63 Ibid., 70-71.
64 Ibid., 75.
only be a source of competition for her lover’s admiration. Thus, in throwing away the
child, Estelle not only removed the evidence of her guilty affair, but also anything that
might distract from Roger’s love for her. The disappearance of the baby/object does not
cause her concern, and she cannot understand her boyfriend Roger’s horror, as nobody
knew anyway. Thus, Roger’s resulting suicide was not her fault. Estelle must always be
at the center of things, both psychologically and physically, as seen with her position on
the center couch. The female child, like Inès, risks becoming competition for Estelle,
therefore they must be physically eliminated, as at the moment when Estelle attempts to
push Inès out of the room so that she can remain alone with Garcin.

Estelle cannot bear it when Garcin refuses to look at her, for all her machinations
are designed to attract his attention: her primping, looks, conversation, seductive
gestures. When he attempts to remain “neutral”, leaving Estelle for Inès as a self-
preservation technique, Estelle loses control and grabs him, forcing him to look at her.

She cries,

Look at me, don’t look away: is it that painful? I have golden hair, and
after all, someone killed himself for me. I beg you, you have to look at
something. If it’s not me, it will be the bronze statue, the table, or the
settees. After all, I’m nice to look at. Listen, I fell from their hearts like a
little bird from a nest. Pick me up, take me into your heart, you’ll see how
nice I can be.65

She presents herself as an object, another furnishing of the room to be used. Garcin
attracts her like a magnet, for now only he can fill her need for male approval. Estelle
cannot love Garcin as a person, for he, too is “garbage” and a coward as well. Instead
she desires what he represents, the male sex (indeed, we can presume that he will be the

65 Ibid., 71.
only male available to her for all of eternity) and the affirmation she will gain in seducing him. If he admires her, she still exists, she is still beautiful.

Estelle can only “love” him as an object, a simulated emotion designed to benefit her by projecting the image that he seeks of himself, which will in turn cause him to project the desired image of Estelle back to her. They will see each other through a convenient prism which will distort their true, sullied images and project a beautiful new facsimile for the consumption of the other, as well as for self-gratification. Their relationship will stand on a foundation of double falsehood.

In so doing, Estelle will gladly model her “appraisal” of Garcin according to the image he wants to see projected from her reactions towards him. Her only concept of “trust” in a relationship regards physical fidelity – any deeper concept is impossible for her to understand. Moreover, she does not display a quick enough wit in order to understand that Garcin desperately seeks affirmation as a hero, a man. When he explains his justifications for fleeing, Estelle grows impatient and responds, “What do you want me to say? You did the right thing because you didn’t want to fight.” Clearly, Garcin had hoped for a very different assessment. Estelle, still uncomprehending, adds, “Ah! My dear, I can’t guess what I should say to you.”

Estelle, ever the chameleon, will transform herself in order to tie Garcin to her. However, she can only love him for his “mouth, [his] voice, [and his] hair” – the physical, the exterior.

Within moments of entering Hell, Garcin admits his penchant for falsehood. Although not used to the Second Empire décor, he states, “I always lived with furniture I

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66 Ibid., 78.

67 Ibid., 83.
didn’t like and in false situations: I loved that.” In fact, his entire life has been lived as though he were a character in a novel, a romantic hero and seducer of women. However, beneath the exterior of a publicist and writer involved in the pacifist movement lies a man with the heart of a coward, who, when finally given the chance to prove himself, to confirm his ideas through action instead of word, chooses to flee. After being captured, he reasoned that if he at least dies “properly,” i.e. like a man, he will not be a coward after all. Unfortunately, his body betrays him at a key moment, leaving him either unconscious, with urine-stained pants, or perhaps both. In any case, his romantic image of himself, squarely facing down death, is shattered, just as he failed at the earlier moment to prove his pacifist convictions. Instead, everything “is undecided forever”. Just as death did not relieve Estelle of her desire to seduce, Garcin continues to try to convince himself and others that he is a real man, a man of principles.

Garcin asks, “Can one’s life be defined by one act?”, but instead of looking inward for confirmation, he instead casts his view upon the editorial room on earth, desperately attempting to hear his colleagues’ opinion of him. In spite of his spoken desire to “face up to the situation,” i.e. the reality that he has died and gone to Hell, he cannot even speak the name of the place until the final moments of the play. Instead, he talks around it, describing the traditional Christian version of a place of physical torture. Just as he avoids formally acknowledging his situation until late in the play, so, too does he avoid the truth about himself, the fact that he has lived his life as a coward. The last time he gazes towards his life on earth, he sees his journalist friends finally ready to

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68 Ibid., 14.
69 Ibid., 16.
speak about him - but they do not confirm Garcin’s heroism. Estelle asks him what they are saying, but Garcin replies shortly, “Nothing. He’s not saying anything. He’s a bastard, that’s all. A real bastard.” Shortly after, he acknowledges that although Gomez was right in condemning his actions, he did not tell him what he should have done instead.

Garcin, like Estelle, looks to others’ opinions of him, and wants to see what he wishes to be reflected back at him. The thought that he will be remembered as a coward, a legendary joke, hits him particularly hard. He imagines his friends, who “in six months, will say ‘Cowardly like Garcin.’” Garcin breaks down at the thought that posterity, always a writer’s concern, will not be kind to him. He turns to his two companions and remarks, “You two are lucky, nobody on earth thinks about you anymore. I’ve got the most difficult life.” Here, his bad faith allows him to fall into the trap of self-pity. He does not truly accept responsibility for his decisions, but instead sees them as thrust upon him. He is a simple victim of circumstances, dead before he had time to prove what he wished.

Ironically, Garcin barely discusses the more likely reason he is in hell: the fact that he took sadistic joy in torturing his wife. Garcin saw his wife as an objet, someone he “pulled out of the gutter,” and therefore not worthy of respect or consideration. He openly brags about the fact that he tortured his wife psychologically. He takes a sadistic

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70 Ibid., 76.
71 Ibid., 80-81.
72 Ibid., 40.
joy in her distress even after his death. While describing his wife sitting with his bullet-hole ridden jacket on her knees, he scornfully mocks her.

Are you going to cry? Will you end up crying? I would come back drunk as a pig smelling like wine and women. [...] She would never cry. Not a word of reproach, naturally. Only her eyes. Her big eyes. I regret nothing. I’ll pay for it, but I regret nothing.73

For Garcin, his wife existed in order to reflect his desired dominance back at him. For one who so desperately sought affirmation from those he admired and apparently did not receive it to his satisfaction, his wife’s cowering despair filled an important void in his ego. She, at least, would roll over in submission. Garcin barely notices when she has died, except to state in an offhand way that she is dead, two months after the fact. When Inès asks him if she has died of despair, Garcin grows outraged. “Naturally, of despair. What else would she die of?”74 His pure egoism suffers at the thought that his personal slave might have somehow died in a way unrepresentative of how she lived – for him. This petty tyrant, filled with bad faith, draws sustenance from his wife’s abjection like a bee does nectar from a flower. Making her suffer was easy, he assures Inès, which is why he did it.

In fact, Garcin sees all women as objects, not as human beings. Each of the many notches on his bedpost is a visible sign that he is in fact a man, a powerful being whose will can overcome the other’s will. At one point Garcin brags about the fact that he installed a sexy mulatto woman at his home, and that he was sure his wife could hear the noise of their love-making. In the morning, she served them breakfast in bed. How many men could do such a thing and not pay a heavy price for it? The fact that his wife

73 Ibid., 53-54.
74 Ibid., 81.
submissively accepted the presence of another woman in her husband’s bed only illustrated that both she and the other woman were so under his spell that he commit any outrageous act and not pay the consequences. Except of course, in the afterlife.

Garcín’s view of women as objects remains unchanged, particularly with regards to Estelle. He does not even feel the need to charm or seduce her (although admittedly, she makes it known from the beginning that she wants nothing more than to be seduced), but instead displays a boorish attitude and crude language. He puts his hand under her chin and states suddenly, “Well, little one, you like me? It seems that you’ve been giving me the eye? […] Soon we’ll be naked as worms.”\(^\text{75}\) Although he claims to be aware of how the higher powers are maneuvering them against each other, he still gives in to the situation, claiming that “If they had lodged him with men…men know how to be quiet.”\(^\text{76}\) Garcín, like Estelle, sees himself as a victim of circumstances, therefore he might as well take the fullest advantage of those circumstances. Estelle will not only fulfill him sexually, but will also possibly reflect back the image he desires of himself – a hero. Thus, Estelle is not so much a person, for her incredible shallowness and rotten interior neither permit her to fully understand another person, nor to really love him. However, Garcín in his own way displays a similar selfish callousness, and is also incapable of really loving anyone but himself. Therefore, Estelle serves as a means to an end of self-gratification – he hopes she will replace his wife/object as the faithful mirror.

As a lesbian, Inès is immune to Garcín’s “charm.” Although women generally found him attractive on earth (so he claims), it appears that this Don Juan has never dealt

\(^{75}\) Ibid., 51-52.

\(^{76}\) Ibid., 51.
with a disinterested woman, and thus, one who is unable to be dominated. Inès constantly pays him back in kind, effortlessly poking holes in his overblown ego. As a lesbian, she represents a type of substitute man for Garcin. Although their relationship is antagonistic to the extreme, he displays more respect towards her than for the superficial pleasure machine that is Estelle.

Inès Serrano shares a family name with another of Sartre’s homosexual characters, Daniel Serrano of the Chemins de la liberté trilogy. She is by far the most perceptive character, the most aware of their situation and the most willing to admit her guilt. She grows impatient with Estelle’s pretence at innocence and roughly demands, “Who are you acting for? It’s just us here. […] Just us assassins. We’re in hell, my dear, and there are never mistakes and they don’t damn you for nothing.” She completely accepts what she has done: torturing her cousin, his wife, and finally causing the death of all three participants of the sordid love triangle. She continues, “There are people who suffered for us to the point of dying, and that amused us a lot. Now we have to pay for it.”

Moreover, Inès quickly understands exactly why the three have been thrown together – not by chance or through common relations as Estelle suggested, but because, “They saved on personnel. That’s all. It’s the clients who carry out the task themselves, like in co-op restaurants. […] We’re each the executioner for the other two.” Although the other two, especially Garcin, resist the idea that their purpose is to torment

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77 Ibid., 40.
78 Ibid., 40.
79 Ibid., 42.
their fellow tenants, Inès almost immediately embarks on the task at hand. Her Revolution-era song breaks the agreed-upon silence, and reminds the other two that the “executioner”\textsuperscript{80} is present. Furthermore, her sly mention of the executioner serves to worry Garcin, as he grew offended at the label when Inès mistakenly label him as such. Unable to look at himself, Garcin cannot truly deny or confirm that fact that he resembles a killer, and being reminded of that fact tortures him all the more.

Although Inès exhibits great perception with regards to understanding her current situation, she cannot accept herself for who she is in spite of her many protestations to the contrary. Although she acknowledges the fact she deserves a sentence to hell as a recompense for her torture of others, she states that her deepest crime is that she was, “what they call down there a damned woman. \textit{Already} damned, right. So, there weren’t any big surprises.”\textsuperscript{81} She simply accepts society’s judgement of her as inherently flawed – her sexual orientation prohibits her from being a “real” woman, from being able to have a real woman’s life, i.e. a traditional relationship with a man followed by marriage and children. As she blindly accepts the “fact” that her sexual impulses are monstrous, her logic follows that all other monstrous impulses that might follow are permitted. Like Garcin and Estelle, she sees herself as the hopeless victim of circumstance, for someone born so inherently twisted cannot restrain herself from acting in a twisted manner.

Moreover, Inès exemplifies the classic sadist, gaining pleasure from torturing others. Each destructive act represents a triumph for her, for she momentarily gains the

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 43.

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 55.
upper hand in a society that has already rejected her. She relishes the suffering she causes:

I need other people’s suffering in order to exist. A torch. A torch in their hearts. When I’m all alone, I go out. For six months I flamed in her heart; I burned everything up.  

In and of herself, Inès does not exist. She cannot be a whole person, because she has accepted society’s judgement of her as already damned, already flawed and beyond redemption. Thus, the suffering of others becomes a destructive accomplishment, an affirmation that she does in fact exist, for the signs of her presence manifest themselves through the devastation she leaves in her wake. Like Garcin’s continual torment of his wife, Inès’ torture of others validates her power when she in fact views herself as powerless, worthless. Similar to both Estelle and Garcin, she does not believe herself to be a whole person in and of herself. Each of the three looks to the outside, to the other, in a vain attempt to feel whole.

Similar to Estelle and Garcin’s view of other people, Inès treats them as objects to be maneuvered for her own pleasure. Florence, whom Inès manipulated and twisted by gradually “sliding into her,” thus symbolically possessing her mind before possessing her body, gradually began to see her husband “through [Inès’] eyes.” Had Inès simply loved Florence, she would have been happy when she received her freedom due to her husband’s tramway accident. The obstacle – the husband’s presence - disappeared, leaving Florence without the constraint of marriage. However, Inès still accepted the fact that society damned her, and had to act accordingly. Therefore, her new victim became

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82 Ibid., 57.
83 Ibid., 56.
the one she “loved,” Florence. Florence did not exist for Inès as a separate human being, but more of a key component to challenge: seducing a wife away from her husband under the eyes of a disapproving society.

Inès’ modus operandi, like those of Garcin and Estelle, has become such a habit that she immediately begins repeating the pattern with Estelle. Clearly, the primping, seductive Estelle has no interest in other women – she is reluctant to take them into her confidence to the point of not wishing to use the informal “tu” form of address. She sees her girl-child and best friend as inconvenient objects at best, competition at worst. Yet from the moment Inès sees Estelle, she pushes Garcin out of the way in order begin her quest to conquer Estelle. Garcin, like her dead cousin, is the enemy as he represents competition for Estelle’s affection. Estelle never gives Inès the slightest encouragement, and in fact, attempts to avoid speaking with her in favor of the man present. Inès then tries to bribe Garcin into withdrawing from the competition by promising that if he leaves the two women alone, she “will not hurt him.” Estelle’s immediate cry for help goes unheeded, and Inès continues her pursuit. She refuses to acknowledge the fact that Estelle will never respond to her, and continues her attempts to impose her will on the object of her affection.

For indeed, Inès sees Estelle as an pretty blonde prize, exactly like Florence. When Garcin informs her, correctly, of the futility and destructive nature of her pursuit, and advises her to give it up, Inès grows outraged. She asks

Do I look like someone who will let it go? I know what awaits me. I’ll burn, I burn, and I know there’ll be no end to it; I know everything. Do you believe that I’ll give it up? I’ll have her, she’ll see you through my

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84 Ibid., 67.
eyes like Florence saw the other one. [...] Naturally I’m caught in a trap. And so what? So much the better if they’re happy.\textsuperscript{85}

When Garcin states that he pities her, Inès explodes – she cannot have pity for herself, and she certainly cannot accept the superior position of one who would have pity for her. To be pitied means to be somehow less powerful, and she refuses to allow a coward whom she despises to get the upper hand. She must continue, masochistically courting rejection at every turn, for she sees herself as destined to do so. Her fate, as a lesbian marginalized by society, causes her to marginalize herself in turn.

In fact, Inès becomes almost a female foil for Garcin – they are locked in a war of wills and both refuse to cede. Inès will not accept that Garcin can succeed where she has failed (i.e. seducing Estelle), and Garcin cannot stand the idea that Inès will stay behind, “triumphant with all these thoughts in [her] head; all these thoughts about [him].”\textsuperscript{86}

Because Garcin sees Inès as one of “his race,” a hard realist in spite of their personal shortfalls, if he manages to convince her that he is not a coward, he will effectively convince himself. Like Inès’ quest to seduce Estelle, Garcin’s attempts to win over Inès are doomed to failure from the outset.

The play’s cyclical form, signaled by Garcin’s last statement, “OK, let’s continue.”\textsuperscript{87} suggests that no true resolution will ever take place, for its characters mindlessly repeat the same patterns on earth. Each seeks affirmation from the other, who will necessarily reject them because they, too, refuse to change. The most famous line of the play -“Hell is other people.”- is often mistakenly interpreted as the meaning that other

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 66.

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 89.

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid. 95.
people cause us torment by their antagonistic presence. As Sartre clarified after the war, that was not his intent. He stated:

I want to say that if relationships with others are so distorted, so tainted, the other can only be hell. Why? Because the others are at the bottom of what is the most important, in ourselves for our own knowledge of ourselves. When we think about ourselves, when we try to know ourselves, deep down we use knowledge that others already have about us. We judge ourselves with the means that others have, that they give us to judge ourselves. Whatever I say about myself, the judgement of others always factors into it. Which means that if my relations are bad, I make myself totally dependant on the other. There are a large number of people in the world who are in hell because they depend on the judgement of others.88

In this sense, Garcin, Inès, and Estelle have all sacrificed their liberty – the freedom to judge themselves and take responsibility for their own actions. All three prefer to view themselves as hapless victims of circumstances rather than to assume the heavy burden of their freedom and admit that they had a choice: they could have chosen to act differently, to feel compassion, to take responsibility. Instead, they willingly make themselves prisoners of the other’s judgement, be it that of society, of men they wish to seduce or persuade of their heroism, or of those whom they wish to conquer.

The fact that they still wish to convince others of their lack of choice, even after death, represents an act of utter futility. Sartre continues:

The “dead” symbolizes something here. What I wanted to point out is precisely that many people are incrusted in a series of habits, of customs, and that they have judgements thrust upon them from which they suffer, yet do not even attempt to change. And these people are as dead. In that they cannot break the framework of their troubles, of their preoccupations,

88 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Un théâtre de situations* (Paris : Gallimard, 1973, 1993), 282. This interview took place in 1965 on the occasion of the creation of a recorded version of the play for Die Deutsche Gramaphon Gesellschaft. Sartre recorded it as a preface to the performance. (my translations)
of their customs; and that in so doing, they often stay victims of the judgements that have been placed upon them.89

Thus, what Sartre reproaches in his protagonists is not so much their repugnant crimes, but the fact they have allowed others to judge them, or attempt to dominate others in an attempt to gain self-esteem. The weighty gaze of the other oppresses, yet they depend upon it to liberate themselves from free thought and thus assume the responsibility of their liberty. The dead of Huis clos exist like bubbles in a sealed glass container, bumping against each other and against the glass, but fundamentally static, as their essential state never fluctuates - they never attempt to break free. Sartre concludes, “I wanted to show the absurd importance of liberty for us, that is to say, the importance of changing acts by other acts. Whatever circle of hell we live in, I think that we are free to break it.”90 Thus, the protagonists represent the antithesis of the existentialist ideal: existence precedes essence, i.e. after a certain point, we create what we will become, we choose our mode of existence. As Sartre wrote in L’Etre et le néant:

The pour-soi flees that anxiety that accompanies his own free choice by looking for his image in the gaze of the other. But in the eyes of the other, I do not find myself as I see myself, but as the other sees me: beneath his gaze, my transcendence is taken from me, I am conscious of being an object. I can only tear myself away from this alienation by attempting to reduce the other into an object in my turn; it follows that the two essential relationships with the other are sadism and masochism. By principle, the Other is elusive: it escapes me when I look for it or possesses me when I flee.91

Why, at this moment, did Sartre choose to write a play focusing on the gaze of the other and its destructive effect when attributed too much power? Is Huis clos simply an

89 Ibid., 283.
90 Ibid., 283.
illustration of the existentialist philosophy mapped out in *L’Etre et le néant*? Galster cites an interview with Paul-Louis Mignon, who states that Sartre had never forgotten the experience of the POW camp, “living constantly, totally under the gaze of others, and the hell which naturally established itself there because of it.”

According to Mignon, Sartre was also inspired by the Resistance members in prison, a theme which he would rework more explicitly in *Les morts sans sépulture*.

As Galster points out, the relationship between the main characters of *Huis clos* hardly displayed the same qualities of those close friendships formed in captivity. Sartre’s own *War Diaries* show an increased awareness of his connection with other people, and a growing acceptance of being with people from all walks of life. Sartre grew while a prisoner of war, while Inès, Garcin, and Estelle are engaged in an endless battle, their presence designed to torment rather than comfort their co-habitants through commiseration and mutual support.

Beauvoir states that after curfew, “except for the occupants and their protégés, the streets [of Paris] were no longer paths, but instead barriers; instead of uniting them, they isolated the buildings […] Paris was a vast Stalag.” Thus Paris after hours became an expansive network of cells, with the streets acting as the bars separating them. This recalls the image Sartre creates of Hell as a series of nondescript hotel rooms, a

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92 Galster, 198. Citing Paul-Louis Mignon in Avant-Scène 34. (my translation)

93 Ibid., 198. Citing an interview from June 15, 1981.

94 Ibid., 198.

metaphysical Anywhere, whose individual cells are separated from others by hallways (symbolic paths) and walls.

But who exactly causes this hell to exit? Are the Germans the gate-keepers, or are the Vichy morals police the watchers - never sleeping, constantly on alert, looking for infringements on moral rectitude? Whose eyes constantly watch and judge, and what ramifications will their judgments have?

We have seen that with regards to public morals, the occupied capital actually provided more liberty of movement. The Germans basically had two criteria for condemnation. Firstly, one must not be a member of one of the class of “undesirables” i.e. a Jew, Free-Mason, or Communist sympathizer. Secondly, one must not take action to infringe upon the Occupying government in any way, i.e. not be involved in the Resistance. As for morals questions, the Germans did not particularly care to enforce sanctions regarding sexual behavior, for example. In fact, Paris alone had one hundred and twenty brothels, “forty of them reserved for German soldiers, four for officers, and one for the generals,” all of whose working girls had health certificates issued directly by the German occupiers. In addition, plays that were eventually banned in Vichy, such as *Huis clos*, could be performed in Paris in spite of cries on the part of outraged moralists to have them closed down. Indeed, the French state censorship only controlled the content in *state-supported* theaters, ensuring that spectators would not see anything to break with the traditional values that Vichy sought to promote.

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96 Pryce-Jones, 254. Interview with Helmut Rademacher, Stadtkommissar for Paris and chief of staff to General von Schaumburg during the Occupation.

97 Galster, 222.
As Galster details at length, both Sartre and Beauvoir were personally attacked by moralizers inspired by the credos of the National Revolution. Beauvoir’s conduct with her students, namely an affair with Nathalie Sorokine, eventually lead to the girl’s mother to accusing Beauvoir of corrupting her minor daughter. Beauvoir received news of her dismissal at the end of the 1943 school year. Galster cites Beauvoir as stating in *La force de l’âge*, “Before the war, the affair would not have been followed up; with Abel Bonnard’s clique, it went otherwise.” Abel Bonnard, himself a homosexual but a discreet one, was the Chancellor of the Académie Française who served as Vichy’s Minister of Education from April 1942 onward. At the Liberation, Bonnard fled Paris with Pétain and other members of the Vichy government, and later escaped to Spain.

While Gilbert Joseph’s intent in writing *Une si douce occupation* appeared to be to discredit Sartre and Beauvoir, he in fact confirms that the pair, Beauvoir in particular, were pursued by Vichy ideologues. Joseph details how beginning in April 1942, the rector of the “University of Paris addressed himself to the State Secretary for National Education in order to demand the firing of Beauvoir and Sartre.” The rector cited both the personal lives and the teachings of the two teachers as justification for letting them go. For Beauvoir, the Madame Sorokine’s complaint damned her in spite of its eventual dismissal; her sexual relationship with Sartre, a to whom man she was not married to also

99 Kedward, 41-42.
100 Pryce-Jones, 201.
101 Jackson, 569.
102 Galster, 28-29, citing Joseph, 218. In a sense, Joseph uses Vichy’s own moralistic stance to condemn Beauvoir and Sartre, while using this book to condemn the couple for not having done enough to resist.
“proved” her immorality. Furthermore, she encouraged her students to read decadent Jewish authors such as Proust and took them on a trip to the psychiatric hospital, Sainte-Anne. In summation, Beauvoir’s “own conduct as well as her teaching show a superior contempt for all moral and familial discipline. She is not fit to model future educators.” According the government, Beauvoir, guilty of licentious acts and thoughts unfriendly to the ‘traditional’ values of travail, patrie, famille, represented a public threat, a threat not only to those around her, but to the French nation. If she succeeded in passing on her “twisted” values to her students, they in turn would likely transmit the same perverted ideas. Her influence tainted those around her, thus she had to be prevented from spreading that influence. In order to avoid future trouble, the contamination had to be eliminated before it infected the entire body.

Similarly, Sartre’s publications, most notably the group of short stories published with the title novella Le Mur, were deemed “pathological and erotic” by the investigator. The inspector writes,

Mr. Sartre who makes such edifying use of his literary talent, also uses a talent in his teaching which gives him a strong influence over his students. But what might be the moral nature of this action?

Furthermore, Sartre was Beauvoir’s lover and allowed her, instead of his mother (as was more seemly) to collect his pay while he was away during the drôle de guerre. From this one can surmise that she was his mistress and he supported her. The rector concludes, “at the hour when France hopes to restore its moral and familial values, the continuation of

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103 Ibid, 29.
105 Ibid., 29. Citing Joseph, 220.
Mlle de Beauvoir and M. Sartre as chairs of philosophy in secondary education would seem intolerable.” Beauvoir and Sartre’s personal lives and philosophical teachings directly clash with and jeopardize the government’s vision of the “New France.”

After Beauvoir’s dismissal from her teaching post, Sartre helped her obtain a position doing a series of radio broadcasts focusing on “the origins of the music hall” for Radio Nationale, a weekly program sponsored by Vichy, ironically enough. The government showed itself to be slightly more tolerant towards its radio announcers than its educators. Nonetheless, Beauvoir lost her only steady source of income, the only profession for which she had been trained, because of a morals issue. Society condemned Beauvoir’s behavior as a “damned woman” just as it condemned that of Inès.

Galster also draws a parallel between the character of Garcin, a Don Juan and boor, and the private life of Sartre. André Castelot, the drama critic for the collaborationist Alphonse de Chateaubriant vehicle La Gerbe, asks whether “Sartre, who in spite of his predilection for the abject, is instilling his students with the love of the Beautiful, the respect for the Noble and the Great?” Castelot counts himself among those who asked for Huis clos to be banned.

In addition, the cowardly aspect of Garcin’s character, as well as his pretensions to pacifism, recall the condemnations of the decadent society that lead to France’s downfall. The younger generation had failed spectacularly in just six weeks after eight months of refusing to fight. Not only were they deficient, they were cowards when

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108 Galster, 31.
109 André Castelot, La Gerbe (June 8, 1944). As cited by Galster, 32. (my translation)
compared with the tenacity displayed by the older generation, who managed to defend the *patrie* under deplorable conditions for five years.

Finally, the character of Estelle acts as a slap in the face to Vichy moral and natalist policies. She subscribes to the decadent *jouissance* of the prewar years, selfishly pursuing pleasure instead of sacrificing herself for the state. Her sexual morals are corrupt, as evidenced by her betrayal of her loyal husband with a younger lover. More importantly, however, she refuses motherhood, and *murders* her child at the time when the declining French birth rate is blamed as one of the factors for the defeat. In particular, the French birth rate had fallen so low that in 1914, “it was realized that the ratio of Germans to French was three to two.” Concerning able-bodied men of military age, the statistics were even more alarming: “the ratio of Germans aged twenty to their equivalent in France was twenty-two to ten.” At this time, “breeding became a sacred duty, a national obligation, and women were seen as mothers first, above all else.”

In order to encourage women to produce, quite literally, the State enacted a numbers of measures, both financially advantageous, such as child subsidies, as well as punitive, designed to keep women “*sage*” and at home where they should be, pregnant. Most notably, in February 1942 Vichy enacted the 300 Law, which “made abortion a capitol offense synonymous with treason, harmful to the French people, and brought it within the jurisdiction of the new Tribunal d’Etat.” Although most cases regarding abortion were still heard in civil courts, the Tribunal d’Etat heard those with special

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110 Kedward, 25.

circumstances. These usually included some factor that made them especially heinous, such as the death of a client or the greed and blatantly immoral lifestyle of the abortionist, such as in the case of Marie-Louise Giraud, who was guillotined in 1943. The state declared Giraud, the antithesis of the Vichy femme au foyer a ‘domestic monster’, and ‘unnatural’ woman, disconcertingly cynical, publicly flaunting her disregard for her husband, the law, social convention, and property.”

Similarly, Estelle Rigault appears as a monster, an unnatural woman who could dispose of her own child as though it were a piece of garbage. She, like Giraud, displays no real regret, no feeling, no empathy. Moreover, she threatens the future of a country by destroying the new children it must produce if it hopes to continue to exist.

Why has Sartre united these three particular characters on stage at a time when they incarnate the antithesis of the official new, sanitized, and “moral” French state? Galster labels the trio as an “Anti-France”, a group of outsiders and “non-conformists.” Although their presence shocks critics, Sartre has placed them in Hell, where they deserve to be according to Catholic dogma.

Sartre’s version of hell has absolutely nothing to do with the traditional Catholic version of it, just as his nativity play Bariona had only the barest traces of a traditional religious play. When Garcin asks the Garçon d’étage if he knows what they say about hell on earth, he mocks him. “How can you believe such stupidity? People who’ve never

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112 Ibid., 193-194.

113 Ibid., 193. Giraud’s story is the subject of the 1988 Claude Chabrol film, Une affaire de femmes.


115 Ibid., 31.
set foot here.”¹¹⁶ Garcin, still not reassured, pursues the idea. “Where are the stakes, the hooks, the craters filled with molten bronze?”, i.e. the traditional trappings of Christian hell. The Garçon openly ridicules him, “Are you joking?”¹¹⁷ Hell as such does not exist – hell is godless and devil-less for that matter. Instead, hell is run by an anonymous, bureaucratic administration.

In addition, Sartre inserts references that recall problems relevant to the era, such as the question of electricity. The Garçon states, “The management can cut the current. But I don’t recall them ever having done so on this floor. We have unlimited electricity.”¹¹⁸ These lines prompted a laugh from the audience at the premier.¹¹⁹ Most importantly, one is continually under the watchful eyes of someone, someone constantly in the process of judging the other and finding them somehow lacking or corrupt, as in the case of Sartre and Beauvoir. Hell is the continual judgement of the Other, a party antagonistic towards one’s very existence. Hell is also a series of triangles, designed to always set two against one, to marginalize one person.

Sartre’s hell resolves nothing, teaches nothing. In this manner, the play embodies the anti-mystery. It turns Christian theology and the notion of Christian progress on its head. If one takes Claudel’s Le Soulier de satin as an example of a Christian play, one sees the heroine, absorbed by the idea of perfection and of mastering her lower impulses in order to progress to a higher state. As such, the spectator witnesses a linear advancement upward, towards union with a higher, benevolent power. Sartre’s

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 15.
¹¹⁸ Ibid., 19.
¹¹⁹ Galster, Le théâtre, 207.
characters never advance, never even desire to do so. Instead they remain locked in the same patterns for eternity.

One may well ask why *Huis clos* is considered a resistance drama, and what, indeed, it resists. Certainly, just after the Liberation its star Gaby Silvia proudly posed for photographers from *Libération* in front of the Vieux-Colombier, her baby buggy filled with grenades in order to illustrate how she transported arms for the Resistance. The article states

Gaby Silvia never hesitated in face of any mission, even the most perilous: on many occasions, she transported weapons carefully disguised in the buggy of her daughter Christine, aged two. Sometimes the revolvers and rifles lay at the feet of the child, under a pretty pink satin blanket.120

The article in *Combat* also identified Vitold and Sartre as resistance members, and stated that the play’s director, Raymond Rouleau, “was a stretcher-bearer for the F.F.I.”121 The same information appeared a week later in the *Franc-Tireur*, in a story entitled “The Theaters Are Re-opening...Two “Free” Premiers at the Vieux-Colombier.”122 With at least four people involved with the play involved in the Liberation of Paris, how could the play not be about resisting Germans, when at that particular moment, Paris had just “liberated herself” from her foreign occupiers. But foreign occupiers, as we have seen,

120 *Libération* (September 8, 1944). As cited by Galster, 275. (my translation)

121 *Combat*, (August 19, 1944).

were not the subject of Sartre’s play. Instead, Sartre condemned the homegrown evil within.
Chapter 4
Giraudoux: Collabo, Résistant, or None of the Above?

Jean Giraudoux’s untimely death in January 1944 left him with no voice to account for war-time activities. Unlike the majority of writers who worked during the Occupation, he did not live through the time of purges, both official and unofficial, that shook France in the wake of the Liberation. Thus one cannot judge him by using the same criteria as for Jean-Paul Sartre, whose long career as a public intellectual offered ample opportunities for criticism, and whose World War II-era activities provided fuel for critics’ fires. However, Giraudoux has nonetheless become the center of several polemics, the most serious among them being the charge of anti-Semitism that stemmed from the content of his biblical play *Judith* (1934) and his collection of political essays *Pleins pouvoirs*, which appeared shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War.

Furthermore, Giraudoux came from a different generation than Sartre, a generation that had suffered the tragic losses of the Great War, and whose perspectives regarding the senselessness of war lead to revolutionary literary movements such as Dadaism and Surrealism as well as political convictions as divergent as pacifism or extreme patriotism. In Giraudoux’s case, his exposure to the carnage instilled in him the desire to understand the former enemy, and his best-known literary works, *Siegfried* and *La Guerre de Troie n’aura pas lieu*, left him with the indelible reputation of a man devoted to promoting Franco-German entente. One must ask how an author who, during the Occupation, maintained cordial relationships with the staff of the German Institute as well as other noteworthy German intellectuals, and who worked with various propagandistic tools of the Vichy government such as documentary films (as well as in
the Vichy government itself) became known as the author of an “official resistance” drama, *La Folle de Chaillot*?

Hippolyte Jean Giraudoux was not necessarily destined for a brilliant academic or artistic career. Far from the intellectual milieu of the Parisian Schweitzer household where Jean-Paul Sartre blossomed, Giraudoux grew up in the more remote Limousin region in central France. His father, the son of a Limousin *paysan*, was a provincial *fonctionnaire* whose career began in the department of bridges and sidewalks in Bellac. The family followed Léger Giraudoux (called Léon) through several moves throughout the same region as he slowly worked his way up the ladder of public service; his final position, granted partially due to health concerns, was that of the tax collector for the small town of Cusset.¹

Jean Giraudoux’s mother, Antoinette Lacoste, originated from a slightly more prestigious background: her father, a well-respected veterinarian, was the descendant of a family of artisans who had lived in Bellac for at least seven generations.² Thus Jean Giraudoux was of double Limousin, of double *French*, origin, a background upon which he played at length in his semi-autobiographical works.³ Antoinette’s more bourgeois family fostered an appreciation for cultural accomplishments, a mindset which she passed on to her second son Jean, as she called him, born in 1882.⁴

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³ Jacques Body, Jean Giraudoux : *La légende et le secret* (Paris : PUF, 1986), 39. Among the many works with references to the Limousin region are: *Siegfried et le Limousin*, *Suzanne et le Pacifique*, *Simon le Pathétique*, *Intermezzo*, and *Apollon de Bellac*.

As Giraudoux’s biographer Jacques Body points out, the German victory in 1870 spurred a growing interest in the German language throughout France. A strong desire to understand the country’s traditions accompanied the study of German. At this time, cross-cultural exploration became almost a “national duty” in France, at least within the more educated classes. One can compare this phenomena to that of the huge increase of German language students after the French defeat of 1940, when enrollment in German-language Berlitz courses, for example, went up by 800%. However, the effects of the 1870 German annexation of Alsace left a more significant imprint on French society, as the region remained in German hands until the treaty of Versailles in 1919, whereas the WWII Occupation of France lasted only four years. Thus interest in German language and culture was much briefer in the 1940’s, more like the sudden flash of a firework than the long, slow burn of a bonfire. This said, the phenomena of awakened interest in the conquering country’s language and culture was similar during both eras.

Jean Giraudoux was born in this midst of this Germanistic awaking in France, thus it comes as no surprise that he studied German, as some sixty percent of students (in the Paris region at least) chose that as their first foreign language. Thus, Giraudoux began a relationship with a language and culture that, along with his Limousin roots, became a signature theme throughout his works and helped define his identity as an author.

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5 Ibid., 18-19.
6 Burrin, 306.
7 Body, Giraudoux et l’Allemagne, 19.
Giraudoux proved himself to be an excellent student at the public lycée of Châteauroux, and later won a scholarship to the Lycée Lakanal de Sceaux in order to prepare for the entrance exam for the Ecole Normale Supérieure.\(^8\) Since the ENS rue d’Ulm required Greek and Latin, Giraudoux temporarily abandoned German during his two years in the \textit{khâgne} Lakanal. The young scholar acquitted himself extremely well during his second year at the preparatory school, winning first prizes in French composition and history, along with the first prize in Greek translation for his entrance exam to the ENS, which garnered him the thirteenth place out of twenty-one admitted in July 1902.\(^9\) Giraudoux’s academic success had now officially taken him out of the provinces and into one of the most exclusive institutions in France, with all its advantages, both social and academic.

After a year’s delay for military service, Giraudoux entered the ENS in the fall of 1903 and enrolled in the track of the more “literary” students, those who would eventually take the \textit{agrégation} in literature.\(^{10}\) Contrary to the popular belief that he began in the German track from the very outset, Giraudoux in fact redirected his studies towards German only \textit{after} his first year at the ENS. According to friends, the “eternal first” disliked finding himself ranked somewhere in the middle of a field of literature students, and as he would be the sole student of German at the ENS, the change of track offered him the opportunity to distinguish himself from the crowd.\(^{11}\) His years spent as an

\(\text{\textendash}^{8}\) Body, \textit{Pléiade}, vol. I, XLIV.
\(\text{\textendash}^{9}\) Ibid., XLV.
\(\text{\textendash}^{10}\) Body, \textit{Giraudoux et l’Allemagne}, 34.
\(\text{\textendash}^{11}\) Ibid., 38. Among others, Body cites Giraudoux’s friend and future diplomat Paul Morand as accrediting Giraudoux’s tender provincial ego with the change of track to German. Giraudoux also embellished his
exchange student in Germany further transformed him, as he metamorphosed from a badly dressed provincial scholarship student into a well-traveled cosmopolitan who eventually joined the diplomatic corps. Giraudoux was fast becoming a person of distinction.

A key event in Giraudoux’s life occurred in May of 1905, when he left for Munich with the support of a six-trimester ENS scholarship. The young man took advantage of his steady ENS boursier income and made a circuitous detour through Belgium, the Netherlands, and northern Germany before reaching the Bavarian capitol city of Munich. Upon the advice of a friend, he moved into the Eberlein boarding house in the artistic district of the city.\(^\text{12}\) The spinster sisters who ran this establishment were related to the German playwright Frank Wedekind.\(^\text{13}\) It was at this time that Giraudoux began to associate with an eclectic mix of artists and composers, many of whom also boarded with the Eberlein sisters, and who helped him shake the provincial dust off his feet.\(^\text{14}\)

During this period Giraudoux began a friendship with Paul Morand, the son of Eugène Morand, the Chief Administrator for France at the 1905 International Painting Exposition in Munich, Germany. At the time Paul Morand was only seventeen and had just failed his baccalauréat exam in philosophy. His father contacted the French

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\(^\text{12}\) Body, Pléiade edition of Giraudoux’s Theater, XLV.

\(^\text{13}\) Laurent LeSage, Jean Giraudoux His Life and Works (Philadelphia : Pennsylvania State University Press, 1959), 23. Wedekind’s expressionist plays exhibited an unconventional sense of sexuality by blurring the line between masculine and feminine, a bit like Giraudoux himself would later blur the line between French and German. Nancy Thuleen, “Lulu: Sexuality On the Stage and Screen”. Article published online at: http://www.nthuleen.com/papers/711FilmLulu.html
Consulate in order to find “quelque agrégé” who could tutor his son; fortunately for Giraudoux (and characteristically), he had already paid a short social visit to the Consul, made a good impression on him, and thus received the recommendation. This simple tutoring job lead to a life-long friendship that gave Giraudoux entrée into the highest levels of the diplomatic and cultural worlds.15 The Morand’s connections proved themselves invaluable to Jean Giraudoux, as they granted him personal access to a strata of society which he, a provincial scholarship student, would have found difficult to penetrate.

Giraudoux frequently repeated this pattern of making contacts, seemingly effortlessly charming chance acquaintances, which in turn lead to deeper relationships with more powerful, cosmopolitan people who in turn helped his career. These new acquaintances were not only high-ranking French citizens abroad, but were occasionally culled from the cream of German society, such as the Prince of Saxe-Meiningen, whom Giraudoux tutored in French.16 Thus, he was an adept social climber who used his personal charm to widen his social circles and thus increase his pool of opportunities.

Although Giraudoux officially enrolled at the University of Munich, and did in fact audit a few courses, he spent the great majority of his time in Germany in the pursuit of pleasure, be it intellectual, such as reading, attending the opera, and visiting the city’s many museums, or more social, in the form of jaunts around the countryside, frequenting the many cafés, or chatting up the young ladies. Paul Morand’s father also introduced

14 Body, Giraudoux et l’Allemagne, 55-56.
15 Ibid., 61.
16 LeSage, 23.
him to an artistic community at Dachau – these acquaintanceships later inspired parts of his first novel *Siegfried et le Limousin*.\textsuperscript{17} This wide exposure to cultivated, artistic society helped polish and refine Giraudoux, fashioning him into a burgeoning, cultivated, and witty diplomat that he later became. Giraudoux’s social skills gave him the inside track and made him an insider in French society, whereas Sartre’s awkwardness and unconventionality (albeit stunning intelligence) tainted him with a certain air of the *outsider*, much like Roquentin in *La nausée*.

Although Giraudoux managed to prepare a *mémoire* on the Bavarian poet August von Platen,\textsuperscript{18} and thus received the Diplôme des Etudes Supérieures in German upon his return to Paris, it became clear that he was unwilling to put in the vast amount of time and effort in order to pass the *agrégation*. Instead he worked only sporadically, preferring to spend his time at the Morand’s home and enlarge his circles of friends with more cosmopolitan additions such as Suzanne Lalique\textsuperscript{19} (of the Lalique glass-making

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\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 23-24. The artist colony at Nau Dachau was composed of painters who primarily worked in the Impressionist style. Article found online at: [http://www.adolfhoelzel.com/](http://www.adolfhoelzel.com/) and H.W.S., “Art in Germany” in *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, Vol. 11, No. 49 (Apr., 1907), 56-58. Now of course, Dachau has become synonymous with the concentration camp, as it was the first camp constructed (1933) after Hitler came to power. Johannes Neuhäusler, *What Was It Like in the Concentration Camp at Dachau? An Attempt To Come Closer To the Truth* (Munich: Manz A.G., 1960), 7.

\textsuperscript{18} The Count August von Platen was a contemporary of the German Romantic author Goethe, and much admired by Thomas Mann, who based the protagonist of his novella *Tod in Venedig (Death in Venice)* on the homosexual writer. During his lifetime, von Platen became involved in a dispute with the German Jewish poet Heinrich Heine, whose origins von Platen attacked. Heine countered by satirizing the author and his sexuality in the third installment of his collection of poems *Reisebilder*. Von Platen’s anti-Semitic attacks had done their damage, however, and Heine later went into exile in France. Heine’s work also influenced the authors Rainer Maria Rilke and Frank Wedekind, whose sisters ran the Munich boarding house in which Giraudoux later resided. Josef Komer, "Maginalien zu Heine" in *Modern Language Notes*, Vol. 54, No. 6 (Jun., 1939), pp. 399-412.

family) or emerging artists. Thus, it came as no surprise to anyone when Giraudoux failed his *agrégation* exam dismally.

Once Giraudoux had shelved his *agrégation* aspirations, he left for a year-long exchange (1907-1908) at Harvard, organized by a wealthy young American philanthropist, James Hazen-Hyde, who financed the trip and whom Giraudoux had most likely met through the well-connected Morand family. While in America, he focused on preparing for the entry exam to the Quai D’Orsay, the diplomatic corps, a career more suited to his social talents and ambitions. It was during this period that Giraudoux also formed a friendship with Pierre and Lilita Abreu, an amazingly wealthy brother/sister pair whose family literally owned half of Havana. Lilita in particular proved to be influential, as she eventually established herself as a writer and benefactress in Parisian literary circles. Giraudoux attempted, in vain, to win her favor, partially attracted by her good looks, partly by her vast fortune, but to no avail. In a letter dated October 8, 1907, Giraudoux stated, “My circle of acquaintances is now well-oiled and soon I will know everyone in town.” This is typical Giraudoux, and attests to his almost effortless ability to expand his social network.

In spite of Giraudoux’s preparation, he narrowly missed (by two points) being received at the *grand concours* for diplomatic and consular careers in the spring of 1909.

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http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0482416/. She also worked on Broadway in the 1950’s.
http://www.ibdb.com/person.asp?ID=26300

20 LeSage, 26-29.

21 Body, *Giraudoux et l’Allemagne*, 110. Body studied Giraudoux’s library loans at Harvard and came to the conclusion that although Giraudoux had officially claimed to be studying German, the books he borrowed indicated that he was in fact aiming at a diplomatic career.

His time had officially run out, as the age limit for entry into this career stream had recently been lowered to a maximum of twenty-seven years old. Although he appealed the decision (perhaps counting on the influence of the Morands),24 he had to settle for the petit concours for élèves vice-consuls, which he passed with flying colors. In June of 1910 Giraudoux received his first assignment - the foreign press section - which he would direct fourteen years later.”25

Giraudoux in no way limited himself to a simple career in the diplomatic corps, for the publisher Bernard Grasset accepted his collection of short stories, Les provinciales, in February 1909. His deliberate cultivation of writers and artists since his time in Munich had firmly taken effect. The public received Les provinciales well, and André Gide gave it a favorable review in the Nouvelle Revue Française’s June 1909 issue; there was even talk of the possibility of a prestigious Goncourt prize. In spite of the excellent review, however, sales remained sluggish until the outbreak of World War I.26 Perhaps the uncertainty of the war prompted a nostalgic desire to return to the idyllic French countryside, the “picturesque France” that Giraudoux remembered from his youth.

During his early years at Quai d’Orsay, Giraudoux also formed friendships with Louis Jouvet, who later became his “official” director, as well as the Prince Aladimir

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24 Body, Giraudoux et Allemagne, 114.
26 Body, “Chronologie” in the Pléiade edition of Giraudoux’s Theater, XLVIII.
Argoutinsky-Dolgoroukov, a secretary to the Russian embassy and supporter of the Ballets Russes and its director Diaghilev. Spurred by these contacts, Giraudoux formed a friendship with Diaghilev and later with members of the Dadaist/Surrealist circle, which eventually influenced him to pursue a career as a dramatist. His circles of influence were expanding in a literary, rather than a strictly social, direction. Thus Giraudoux, like Paul Claudel, began negotiating the path of the traditional French writer/diplomat.

As a young attaché, Giraudoux was “well-placed” in order to see the coming of World War I, thus the outbreak did not surprise him. In 1914, the army assigned him the duty of interpreter in the Alsace region; his primary responsibilities included interrogating local residents and requisitioning food for the army’s kitchens. Shortly thereafter, he was wounded by shrapnel and spent time in several different hospitals, and upon his return to active duty, Giraudoux almost immediately received a more serious wound to the head. His injuries effectively ended his time at the front, and he spent the remainder of the war in questionable health, periodically moving from hospital to hospital until the army decommissioned him in March of 1919. He continued to suffer from his wounds throughout the following year. In spite of ill health, Giraudoux managed to be assigned to Harvard in 1917 in the capacity of “Assistant professor of military science and tactics,” which consisted of drilling students as well as giving a

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28 Body, “Chronologie” in the Pléiade edition of Giraudoux’s Theater, XLIX.

29 Body, Giraudoux et l’Allemagne, 178.

30 LeSage, 42.

31 Body, Giraudoux et l’Allemagne, 182.

32 Ibid., 183.
series of lectures on campus.\textsuperscript{33} Paul Morand, an attaché to the Briand cabinet at the time, pulled some strings for his friend and “spoke to Berthelot for Giraudoux” in order to ensure the position in the United States.\textsuperscript{34} At this time, Philippe Berthelot was the cabinet director for future prime minister Aristide Briand\textsuperscript{35} - he later became secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.\textsuperscript{36} Thus, Berthelot was well-placed to give certain favors and in fact exercised a certain influence on the career of fellow writer/diplomat Paul Claudel. Thus, the Morand connection came though for Giraudoux once again.

During his days in and out of the hospital, Giraudoux had little to do officially, so he took advantage of his free time and wrote copiously: three novels written between 1917-1918, \textit{Lectures pour une ombre, Amica America} (inspired in part by his time at Harvard), and \textit{Simon le Pathétique},\textsuperscript{37} a semi-autobiographical novel that centered on life in the Limousin region. Giraudoux received the most attention after the war, however, with the publication of his novel \textit{Siegfried et le Limousin} (1922), for which he won the prix Balzac, created by his own publisher, Bernard Grasset.\textsuperscript{38} Giraudoux later adapted the novel for a stage version directed by Louis Jouvet in 1928.

The basic story of \textit{Siegfried}, both the novel and the play, is as follows: Siegfried von Kleist (a tribute to the German author of the same name), tall, blond and idealistic, has become a leader in the post-war German government. He is in fact, Jacques

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 189.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 187.
\item \textsuperscript{35} Paul Morand, \textit{Jean Giraudoux : Souvenirs de Notre Jeunesse} (Geneva : La Palantine, 1948), 85.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Body, “ Chronologie ”, LIII.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Body, \textit{Giraudoux : La légende et le secret}, 28.
\end{itemize}
Forrestier, an amnesiac French soldier who was found with no uniform, but who was
taken in by Germans and acquired a German identity. Forrestier had been a French writer
and political activist in his native land, and these same qualities have been translated,
literally, into German. Just as Jacques once embodied French ideals, Siegfried now
carries with him the hopes of modern Germany and lives in a particularly German
Romanic environment, complete with embroidered cushions and bear statuettes. At this
point, the novel and the play differ: Giraudoux showed himself much more critical of
German society in the novel, while the later adaptation is much more sympathetic and
depicts a society willing to be open to new thought, even of foreign origin. For example,
the character of Zelten, a German revolutionary, became much more manipulative in the
theatrical adaptation – he discovered Siegfried’s true identity, and schemed to bring
Siegfried/Jacques’ former fiancée to Germany in order to discredit him. In the end, he
helps plot an insurrection that threatens the German nation and eventually flees to France.
When Siegfried, now an exile from his adopted country, waits at the train station at the
border between the two countries, a geographical location that symbolizes Siegfried’s
dual nature, two German generals, Waldorf and Ledinger, attempt to persuade him to
return and in order to serve Germany. Ledinger argues:

> Abandoning your service to Germany for that of another people is as
> though, if you were a farmer, you renounced the earth where the plants
> grow because they only flower every hundred years. If you love the fruit,
> do not renounce her, especially to serve France.  

At the end of the original version of the novel, Siegfried et le Limousin, Siegfried is
assassinated, a scene which Giraudoux writes as an alternative ending (never performed)

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for the play. Instead, the generals agree to stage Siegfried’s death, so that his memory will live on and he will continue to inspire the German people.

The play ends on a much happier note than the novel, perhaps due to a desire to please the audience. Geneviève, an artist and Siegfried’s former fiancée, had masqueraded as a Canadian instructor of French and had been threatened by Zelten. She finds Siegfried at the train station, still symbolically caught between two worlds. Although she formerly rejected Jacques’ German identity as Siegfried, she now expresses a desire to live in Germany, and to learn German so that she can speak to him in his new language. After refusing to call him by his German name throughout the play, she finally accepts his Germany identity as an integral part of him, and ends with the words in German, “Siegfried, I love you.”

Now Jacques/Siegfried is free to return to France as he wishes, not “as the last prisoner set free from German prisons, but as the first beneficiary of a new science, or of a new heart.” Thus, he will use the seven years spent as an integrated member of German society in order to promote understanding between the two countries.

According to Jacques Body, the editor of the definitive Pléiade editions of Giraudoux’s works, as well as his biographer:

The French unanimously took Siegfried to be an act of understanding, serving peace. As proof of this, Jouvet, after returning from a theatrical tour in Italy, staged Siegfried at the Comédie de Genève from the 1–4 of September 1928, [in order to honor] the new session of the League of Nations.

40 Ibid., 76. “Siegfried, ich liebe dich.”

41 Ibid., 68.

42 Body, Giraudoux et Allemagne, 296. (my translations)
The French received the play much better than the Germans, whose critics chided Giraudoux for his (in their opinion) rather stereotypical view of Germany. Indeed, the play does focus quite a bit of attention on the military aspect of the country (along with a flattering depiction of “musical” Germans), but one can argue that Giraudoux deliberately exploited this stereotype while pleading for understanding between the two nations in order to prevent a repeat of the horrific losses of the Great War. Within two years, German critics’ opinions of the play had softened somewhat regarding the play’s stereotypes. However, as the economic crisis entrenched itself more firmly in Germany (and the Nazi party gained popularity), reviewers began to criticize the idea that Siegfried/Jacques, a Frenchman, should be given the task of leading the German nation. Thus, at this point, the play, frequently called *The Nameless Soldier* (*Der Namenlose Soldat*) in German, appeared to have the opposite of the desired effect, antagonistic rather than unifying, in Germany.

Giraudoux was certainly not the only French author to draw upon his war-time experiences in order to create politicized fiction. As David Carroll has noted, Drieu La Rochelle constantly reworked scenes in which the French soldier returned from war only to find his “homeland destroyed [and] that he no longer belonged to it,” a sense of alienation rather than homecoming. In *La comédie de Charleroi*, Drieu La Rochelle presented “modern war as the sign that the myth of nationalism had ceased functioning positively.” Although the future fascist took a less optimistic stance than Giraudoux,

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43 Ibid., 298.
44 Ibid., 304.
46 Ibid., 129.
who preached understanding and unification rather than utter desolation, one gets the sense that the concept of the nation had to drastically change if such destruction was to be avoided.

By the time Giraudoux wrote 1935’s *La Guerre de Troie n’aura pas lieu*, his thinking had become much more overtly pessimistic. Between *Siegfried*’s first appearance in 1922 and the mid-1930’s, Giraudoux had seen Hitler come to power in Germany, complete with growing xenophobia in that country, not to mention the growing popularity of the extreme right-wing in France, which was partially due to the worldwide economic crisis that had finally hit the Hexagon. Andromaque’s opening statement, “The Trojan War will not take place.” is immediately countered by the prophetess Cassandre, who wishes to bet *against* continued peace. According to her, the Greeks will never return Hélène to her husband Ménélas, in spite of the fact that Helen no longer cares for Paris, and he no longer cares for her. She has become a symbol of beauty for the Trojans and for their manhood. Hector, although he hopes desperately for peace and indeed, attempts to negotiate in order to maintain it, sees human nature as inherently war-like. When Hector’s pregnant wife Andromaque states that she will cut off her son’s finger in order to keep him from going to war, he responds,

> If all mothers cut off their son’s right index finger, the armies of the universe would make war without index fingers… And if they cut off his right leg, the armies would be one be one-legged… And if they ripped out his eyes, the armies would be blind, but there *would still* be armies.

47 Giraudoux, “La guerre de Troie n’aura pas lieu” in *Théâtre complet*, 483. (my translations)

48 Ibid., 483-484.

During the course of negotiations between Hector and Ulysse it becomes clear that the real motivation for waging war on the Troy is for its riches, but Ulysse later agrees to take Helen back to her husband. In a last desperate measure, Hector stabs Demokos, his fellow Trojan, for Demokos has continued to protest against Helen’s return. Demokos in turn loudly and quite deliberately blames Oiax, the soldier who had accompanied Ulysse on his diplomatic mission. Thus, the Trojan War begins due to a sort of public relations falsehood whose sole purpose is to spread conflict.

Although Giraudoux claimed in an interview in *Je suis partout* that *La Guerre de Troie n’aura pas lieu* contained no reference to the political situation at the time, the allusions to the contemporary political situation fooled no one. At this time Giraudoux worked in the Propaganda ministry, and in fact became the Minister of Propaganda during the *drôle de guerre*. *La guerre de Troie* became his signature work, performed countless times before and after the war.

In a similar manner, Giraudoux’s 1937 *Electre* was particularly significant, both for its inter-war context and for its 1943 revival. It was the immediate predecessor to Sartre’s work *Les mouches*, whose title was most likely inspired by a line from the Giraudoux play, and to which critics most often compared *Les mouches*. Although Giraudoux’s tragedy respects the unities of time and place (the action takes place within one day and always in Argos), the play’s everyday situations and colloquial speech give it a burlesque feel. This further serves to distance the action from its classical origins, which makes the plot more accessible to its contemporary audience. In addition, the play contained many anachronisms relating the material life of the ancient Greeks,

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50 The interview takes place between Giraudoux and Benjamin Crémieux in *Je suis partout* (December 7, 1935). As cited by Body in *Giraudoux et l’Allemagne*, 484.
anachronisms that had their roots in modern France, a technique that Giraudoux frequently used when he adapted ancient or biblical texts (such as Judith or Sodome et Gomorrhe) for modern audiences.

A significant shift in the prominence of characters also occurred, most notably with Egisthe (Aegisthus), who attains greater importance and whose motivations are much more closely detailed than in the earliest Greek versions. Giraudoux effectively transforms him into a political animal who embodies the consummate strategist, with a Machiavellian understanding of action and reaction. Egisthe cannot kill Electre, but must instead crush her spirit, leaving her so downtrodden that revolt does not occur to her. He actively discourages noble suitors, and chooses the castle gardener to be her husband.\(^51\) In so doing, he simultaneously attempts to crush her spirit with a humiliating misalliance, as well as to remove her contagion and family curse from within the castle walls.\(^52\)

As an *absolute* ruler, Egisthe actively eliminates anyone who invokes the gods, with the exception of Electre, who remains outside of his control. In this fashion, he attempts to lull the gods into a sort of sleepy lethargy that will prevent them from cursing the city.\(^53\)

Giraudoux’s Clytemnestre has also undergone a radical shift: she no longer takes center stage as she does in Aeschylus’s version, and she takes on the frivolous, grating tones of a fishwife when she scolds her husband for his indiscretions. She even kills her husband Agamemnon in an ignoble manner: she soaps up the stairs so that he will fall

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\(^{51}\) Giraudoux, “Electre” in Théâtre complet, 614. (my translations)

\(^{52}\) Ibid., 616.

\(^{53}\) Ibid., 610.
and become an easy victim for her and her lover. She displays a weak character and is easily manipulated by Egisthe; instead of acting independently, she becomes Egisthe’s marrionnette, a ruler in name only.

Giraudoux places Electre in the role of both seeker and judge, a young woman who is determined to discover the truth about her father’s death. In order to help guide Electre, Giraudoux added the character of the Mendiant, played by Jouvet, who displays omniscience and can channel the thoughts of those around him.

Giraudoux’s play depicts the struggle between an abusive dictatorship and one who seeks the truth during a period when Germany, Italy, and Spain all had fascist dictators, which lent contemporary meaning to an ancient myth. The Président states that society has a short memory for sins, and that femmes à histoires (troublesome women) like Electre, the embodiment of justice, generosity and duty, ruin the State, for she shines light on individual and collective crimes. For the sake of political stability, she should be eliminated. Thus, an individual acting alone can threaten the stability of the state. Egisthe’s and Clytemnestre’s reign came to be as the result of a murder, and is thus illegal. The populace accepts them because it allows them to forget their own sins. A rule founded on lies allows other lies to exist, and allows the populace to live comfortably with their own deceptiveness. Thus Electre’s search for the truth has the potential to destroy the delicate fabric of falsehood upon which society has been relied for so long.

54 Ibid., 609.

55 Colette Weil, “Notice à Electre” in Théâtre complet, 1554.

56 Ibid., 604.
Although Giraudoux’s biographer Jacques Body claimed in 1982 that Electre, like 
La Guerre de Troie n’aura pas lieu, was a pièce d’actualité that continued the tradition of 
updating Greek myth, no other critics, including Giraudoux’s contemporaries, have made 
the same claim. Instead, they saw it as a contemporary adaptation of a classical Greek 
myth. In addition, Body associated the character of Egisthe with Hitler, a tyrant 
obsessed with “public order, tribunals and their president, and a regime of deceitful 
oppression.” This interpretation becomes problematic when one takes into account that 
the play, unlike Giraudoux’s earlier drama Judith, was performed during the Occupation. 
Would a play that Body assumed depicted Hitler in an unflattering light have passed the 
multitude of censors in Occupied France, or did Body make 20/20 hindsight claims in the 
appeared to back away from this claim in his later book, Giraudoux et les Allemands, 
when he asserted that the play “[described] the interior conflict of all western 
countries.”

Although Electre was a wild success upon its original staging in 1937, the same 
cannot be said of its revival in Occupied Paris in the fall of 1943. By this time, 
Giraudoux’s health had already been suffering due to war-time privations, and by all 
accounts he had nothing to do with the actual staging of the play. In his article on the 
reprisal of Electre that appeared in the theater chronicle of Comœdia, the critic Yvon

Charles Mauron speculates that the play may have contained some references to contemporary politics, 
but notes that his two works closest to Electre, L’Impromptu de Paris (1937) and Pleins Pouvoirs (1939) 
“reveal politics that do not embrace the political credos of the left or the right, but rather seem to be 
inspired by semi-private values: health, cleanliness, agreement, well-being.” Charles Mauron, Le théâtre 


Ibid., 378.
Novy explicitly stated that “Monsieur Jean Giraudoux does not attend the rehearsals of his play,” which was staged without the talents of his usual director Louis Jouvet (who had also played the key role of the Mendiant). By this time Jouvet had left for an unauthorized tour of South America. Later the director stated that he had for left France for neither political nor religious reasons, “but because two of his main playwrights had been banned: Jules Romains and Jean Giraudoux.” Critical reviews described the performance of the new Electre as flat, a fact that most reviewers attributed to Jouvet’s absence both as an actor and director. Je suis partout’s critic Alain Laubreaux cited the acting as the reason for his dissatisfaction, but indicated that he thought that the play would still have a long run in spite of bad reviews.

Giraudoux moved into a more overtly political realm with his first collection of essays. Pleins pouvoirs received excellent reviews when it first appeared in July 1939, shortly before France’s entry into World War II. The work contained five essays that dealt with topics of particular import for the period, most notably the falling French birthrate, health, immigration, and advice on urban planning. One must remember that at this time Giraudoux was an active member of the diplomatic corps, and would later become the French Minister of Propaganda, the effective counterpart of Germany’s

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60 Yvon Novy, “Paris va revoir Electre de Jean Giraudoux” in Comœdia. (March 27, 1943).


63 Henri Ghéon of Voix françaises (May 7, 1943) described the performance as “Less disatrous than it might have been” while Comœdia’s drama critic Roland Purnal described the performance as leaving him “unsatisfied” (April 15, 1943).

64 Alain Laubreaux, “Seconds débuts” in Je suis partout (April 9, 1943).

65 Pierre d’Almeida, “Préface” in De pleins pouvoirs à Sans pouvoirs, 7. (my translations)
Joseph Goebbels, on July 30, 1939.66 In this capacity, he gave regular speeches on the radio; in fact, as late as May 7, 1940 he urged his fellow citizens to keep their spirits up, for, “under the heavy weight of industry or ponderous thoughts, neither the good life nor free thought will give way to these.”67 Although Giraudoux did not specifically address the question of propaganda in *Pleins pouvoirs*, his status as a writer/diplomat and the contemporary issues he addressed in the collection had raised his profile to the extent that he appeared the obvious choice for the position.68

The essays of *Pleins pouvoirs*, more than any of Giraudoux’s better-known theatrical works, have brought about the greatest polemics in critical circles, for they have drawn intense criticism regarding his attitude towards Jews as well as immigration in France. These attitudes, although not particularly exceptional for the time, shock the post-war reader.

Giraudoux began his first essay rather innocuously, by pointing out France’s shortsightedness with regards to its defense, which he viewed as largely reactive to exterior forces, i.e. setting up strict punishments and defense mechanisms against foreign invaders instead of concentrating on the problems within the county:

One can say that for the last thirty years, our foreign policies have given us a daily pretext for stepping back from examining our policy and our interior assessments. The war, the threat of war, their improvisations, their dilapidations, have furnished unassailable alibis for the least or most powerful of our directors of conscious or administrators.69

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67 Ibid., 419-420.
68 Ibid., 414.
69 Jean Giraudoux, *De pleins pouvoirs à Sans pouvoirs* (Paris : Julliard, 1994), 38. (All translations my own.)
According to Giraudoux, the administration had concentrated on the most obvious tasks while neglecting the most serious threats within the country, notably from immigration, both legal and illegal. France risked becoming “a second-rate nation, [nothing more than] a fomenter who shirked her national duty. Only the coercion and enslavement of its citizens appeared to be capable of making them [rise to the task].”™70 France had to “remain on equal footing with Germany and Italy in peace-time [by assuring that] the laws and rights of the individual [are not] replaced by those of strength and the masses.”™71 In other words, France was in a vital neck-in-neck competition with the Fascist states, a competition that she risked losing if its citizens continued to avoid their duties toward their country. France’s problem was not so much exterior, as interior, caused by an internal weakening due to bad policy.

In the second essay, entitled, “La France peuplée,” Giraudoux explained his position in greater detail. While France had created treaties to establish an “eternal peace”, its interior strength had been undermined by a decreased birthrate, especially when compared to Germany. France could not protect itself without enough French to populate it, an idea which Giraudoux dramatically called a “question of life or death,”™72 an image akin to a sort of Götterdämmerung, a dusk of the gods, because of the country’s low birthrate. He illustrated this idea of a disappearance of the French through sheer demographics by pointing out that soon “the French citizen will […] be forced to a military duty of one and half or two years, or even a total mobilization.”™73 In other

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™70 Ibid., 42.
™71 Ibid., 45.
™72 Ibid, 48-49.
™73 Ibid., 50.
words, due to the flagging French birth rate, *all* citizens would have to undergo universal military training in order to defend the country.

Such points of view were prevalent during and after the war, and indeed, the Vichy government later played at length on the idea that France had been defeated due to a lack of manpower (in addition to its decadence). Giraudoux, in a manner eerily similar to that of Vichy, also pointed to the practice of abortion (which he randomly estimated as cutting the birth rate in half)\textsuperscript{74} and condom usage\textsuperscript{75} as major perpetrators of the flagging French birth rate.

One can dispute Giraudoux’s statistics regarding birthrate and the contributing factors to its decline, but his arguments as such are not particularly controversial. However, Giraudoux’s attitude towards immigrants, in particular Jewish or non-European immigrants, shocks the contemporary reader. Giraudoux stated that immigration was a positive factor for France when the immigrants were properly assimilated into French society by adopting French values, and thus became a “fusion of the foreign element that has always been appreciated as a reinforcing tonic to [France’s] population.”\textsuperscript{76} In other words, when properly mixed with French natives, the new blood breathed new life into the old, creating an even stronger population from the concoction. Indeed, Giraudoux affirmed that the French race was a “moral and cultural type,” a composite race, as opposed to that of the Germans, who saw themselves as a biological race.\textsuperscript{77} Thus, French

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 55.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 57.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 61.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 72-73.
identity, unlike that of the Germans, was based more on shared social values than racially-specific ideas regarding bloodlines. However, when describing some of the “unwanted immigrants,” Giraudoux’s descriptions became tinged with xenophobia.

According to Giraudoux, all immigrants were not the same, and in fact, France had “become a land of invasion,”78 overrun by a large foreign element that did not attempt to become French, as the earlier Italian immigrants had for example. Instead, these foreigners chose to remain separate from French culture and made no attempt to assimilate into French society. According to Giraudoux, the government did not differentiate between “good” and “bad” immigrants, whom Giraudoux described with an organic metaphor: France should repopulate itself as “one reforests, by bringing in approved plants that are used to [its] climate.”79 The introduction of an overly foreign species might have potentially harmful effects on the forest, causing a blight, if not the total destruction of the environment. At this point Giraudoux called for an Office of Naturalization that would evaluate potential immigrants in order to eliminate those injurious elements who

[Chose France] because it was the only open place of easy speculation or agitation. […. Their] magic wands indicated the large amount of two treasures which often go hand in hand: gold and naiveté. 80

Giraudoux then compared the speculator/immigrants to “the fleas on a new-born dog,”81 i.e. France, who stupidly welcomed these new potential Frenchmen, became the victim of threats and exploitation. Later in the same paragraph, Giraudoux indicated:

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78 Ibid., 62.
79 Ibid., 64.
80 Ibid., 65-66.
81 Ibid., 66.
Hundreds of thousands of *Askenasis*, escaped from Polish and Romanian ghettos, whose religious rules they rejected, while at the same time not rejecting the particular sense of [Jewish] identity, were trained to work under the worst conditions for centuries. [They] eliminated our compatriots by destroying [French] professional customs and the traditions of all small workshops: making clothing, shoes, furs, handbags, and, cramped by the dozens into rooms, avoiding any inquiries of the census, the tax collector, or work.82

Giraudoux’s description brings to mind a secret sect of invaders. This foreign, particularly Jewish element, would quickly destroy native French society with its clannishness and illegal, immoral, and above all, non-French ways which would allow them to blatantly take advantage of the French system.83 Moreover, the image of immigrants crammed into a small space brings to mind German and Vichy propaganda films that “exposed” the unsanitary conditions of the Jewish environment: piled on top of each other like rodents, they would somehow bring disease, both physical and moral, to the native society.84 Although Giraudoux does not explicitly make such a statement, the emphasis he places on public hygiene, living conditions, and health, suggests this connection.

Critics, however, have not universally condemned Giraudoux’s more problematic stances on immigration. Pierre d’Almeida, editor of *De Pleins Pouvoirs à Sans Pouvoirs* which contains reprinted versions of both original Giraudoux texts, takes a very different

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82 Ibid., 66. (Italics my own)

83 One sees the idea of a Jewish conspiracy theory in right-wing and extremist reviews such as *Je suis partout* throughout the 1930’s. Political cartoons, for example, were an excellent means for transmitting this message, and often depicted characters with stereotypically Semitic features plotting together, and even going to far as to portray President Franklin Roosevelt in rabbinical garb.

84 In particular, the image recalls that shown in the film *L’Oeil de Vichy*, in which a Jewish immigrant family lives in squalid conditions in a tiny apartment filled with rats and cockroaches. It is an image propagated not only by the Nazi government, but also by *expositions* in France such as *Le Juif et la France* (September 1941), as cited by Château, 159-161.
stance on this controversy. He correctly points out that Giraudoux’s language and imagery in no way directly correspond to highly virulent, openly anti-Semitic rants such as those by Lucien Rebatet that appeared in *Je suis partout* in February and March of 1935. Rebatet did not concern himself with “public hygiene or sport, but instead abundantly expressed his phobia of biological mixing, focusing on the ‘eternal Heimatlos (wandering) of the Jewish race.’” Unlike Rebatet, Giraudoux did not oppose mixing (as evidenced when he cited the composite French race based on culture and morals), but rather a self-imposed segregation - the immigrant who remained unassimilated, separate, from French society. The foreign element that integrated itself into French society, and thus became effectively *French* through shared values, and who contributed to French society rather than exploited it for its own purposes, was welcome. However, instead of discussing the troubling nature of these particular passages in *Pleins Pouvoirs*, D’Almeida quickly glosses over it.

At the other extreme, Jeffrey Mehlman creates a blatantly anti-Semitic legacy for Giraudoux beginning with his 1931 play of biblical origin, *Judith*, and whose thread can be seen up through his last play *La Folle de Chaillot*. In the biblical version of the story, Judith was an old widow who killed the monstrous king Holopherne out of religious hatred and in order to avenge her dead husband, thus fulfilling her sense of duty towards her people and her religion. In Giraudoux’s version however, Judith became a

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87 Body links Giraudoux’s more modern version to that of the German writer Friedrich Hebbel, whose *Judith* was translated and published by the NRF in 1914. Hebbel’s version contains innovations similar to that of Giraudoux, such as a younger, more attractive Judith and Holopherne. Body, *Giraudoux et l’Allemagne*, 334-335.
young, beautiful, unmarried woman who kills Holopherne out of love. Although she comes to the enemy camp to meet Holopherne with the motive of killing him, she instead falls in love with him and “sacrifices” her virtue to the attractive, modernized king. In the end she sees her people, the Jews, as weak by comparison, and despises herself for her attraction to her enemy. She cannot stand the forbidden love that she feels for Holopherne and kills him, but is unwilling to take credit amongst the Jews for killing the enemy – she wishes to be truthful about her motivations, in spite of the Jewish elders’ many attempts to persuade her otherwise, or at least to be quiet for the sake of propriety. In the course of the play Judith’s reputation swings from that of the savior who risks all to negotiate with Holopherne, to the whore who slept with him, to the saint who killed him, to the whore who betrayed her people by her attraction to the enemy. Giraudoux used the plot of Judith to attack the hypocrisy of religion, and most significantly the “political spin” placed on the title character’s actions.

However, Mehlman constructs his interpretation of Judith around a malevolent plot. In it, he equates the character of Holopherne with Giraudoux himself. Thus, since Holopherne’s original mission was the elimination of all Jews, Mehlman implies that the case must be the same for Giraudoux:

With strange incongruity, Holopherne-Giraudoux reactivates the structure of Judith, a play lamenting [my italics] a failed genocide, as a consolation [for France] against the invasion of France by a power whose most radical program for Europe was an extermination of the Jews.  

The play, written in 1931 before the Nazis came to power and before the tragic genocide of World War II (Mehlmann specifically uses the term “genocide”) mysteriously contains

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88 Mehlman, Jeffrey, Legacies of Anti-Semitism in France (Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 39.
a premonition of what will occur several years later. In reality, Giraudoux’s relationship to Judaism and Jews is much more complicated than Mehlman’s reading implies.

The play’s genesis is as follows: Giraudoux met the striking German-Jewish actress, Elisabeth Bergner, while in Berlin. Fraülein Bergner later served as the inspiration for Giraudoux’s modernized Judith. In France, Rachel Berendt, another Jewish actress, this time of French origin, played the role of the title character when Jouvet first staged the play in 1931.89 The author, no small connoisseur of beautiful women, appeared to eroticize both the actress and the character of Judith, seeing her as “intelligent, of mythic beauty, and of a [fascinatingly] changeable nature linked to a tenacious faith.”90 Judith’s sensuality and passion compel, rather than repel as in anti-Semitic texts such as Brasillach's Bérénice, whose title character’s sensuality is indicative of corruption or danger rather than a positive attribute.91 As Body points out, Judith displays character strengths similar to other non-Jewish, strong female protagonists in Giraudoux’s plays, most notably Electre, who, like Judith, remains true to herself and unerringly seeks the truth.

In spite of Judith’s own personal merits, Giraudoux fell into the trap of using conventional anti-Semitic stereotypes in order to condemn religion. Judith’s Uncle Joachim the rabbi has conspired with other rabbis to sell Judith to Holopherne in order to save their own skins, all the while cloaking their cowardice in the notion of “sacrifice.”92

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89 Body, Ibid., 329. Giraudoux made reference to the inspiration for his play in his collection of lectures, _Visitations_, published after a 1941 trip to Switzerland. 23-24.

90 Ibid., 330.

91 Kaplan, _The Collaborator_, 41.

92 Jean Giraudoux, “Judith” in _Théâtre complet_, 201.
He stated that the average Jews “need a name to feed off of. Their admiration is only a pretext to peek into other people’s business,” i.e. they are cowardly hypocrites, nosy, and display a sort of shifty intelligence that exploits others. The religious leaders blatantly attempt to manipulate Judith and the murder of Holopherne to their advantage; thus they have no real religious integrity, but instead a more “tribal” instinct for protection. By the third act, Judith herself uses the word “Jew” as an insult when she mentions Suzanne, her prostitute/double’s treatment of her when she states, “You are betraying me and lying to me...Jews...” For Judith, the Jews have come to symbolize all that is false. She hates herself for falling in love with Holopherne and for the subsequent actions of her fellow Jews, who turns her against Holopherne. In this context, “Jew” signifies disappointment and betrayal.

While Giraudoux was never an open anti-Semite, as Jacques Body rightly claims, he had absorbed some of the “racist propaganda [of the time], virulent in France and Germany in his youth, which leaves slight, unpleasant traces in his work.” Giraudoux, a young man during the Dreyfus affair and of a different generation than Sartre, employed some of the same nasty stereotypes that Sartre included in his POW-camp era play Bariona, but used them perhaps in a similarly misguided fashion. Although Giraudoux occasionally used biblical stories as inspiration (just as he drew upon ancient Greek texts), in both cases he modernized the original versions. In addition, Giraudoux was hardly a religious man, and in fact, eventually displayed frustration with Vichy’s

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93 Ibid., 201.
94 Ibid., 264.
95 Body, Giraudoux et l’Allemagne, 329.
religious credo in his posthumously published political text Sans pouvoirs, written between 1942-1943. He reproached the Vichy government by evoking

[The] French sin that they [Vichy] ask us to confess today, this mortal sin, which has corrupted us and needs to be washed away. [...] We must scrutinize our past to discover the catechism of nations and the nomenclature of their mortal sins.96

Just as Giraudoux later transformed the story of Sodom and Gomorrah into a play about the irreconcilable differences between men and women (in 1943), and therefore devoid of real religious symbolism, can one not interpret the play Judith as a more general condemnation of the hypocrisy of all religions, and not specifically of Judaism?

Jeffrey Mehlman constructs an elaborate analysis of Judith as “a play lamenting a failed genocide.”97 As stated earlier, Holopherne’s original project, in 1931, was “the extermination of all Jews.”98 In fact, Holopherne’s army did come with the intention of eliminating the Jews, but he quickly changed his mind upon falling in love with Judith’s beauty, virtue, and wisdom. Thus, Mehlman effectively twists the plot to suit his own thesis. Moreover, the critic compares the rhetoric of the play to that of Lucien Rebatet’s rabidly anti-Semitic Les tribus du cinéma et du théâtre en France.99 His analysis does not stand up. Although at times Giraudoux’s language and imagery does unfortunately draw upon ugly stereotypes, it has nothing in common with Rebatet’s Occupation-era ranting. In addition to this, Mehlman views Giraudoux’s play as an attempt to win back the play from the Jews, for the immediate predecessor to Giraudoux’s Judith was a play

96 Giraudoux, De Pleins Pouvoirs à Sans Pouvoirs, 186.
97 Mehlman, 39.
98 Ibid., 39.
99 Ibid., 40.
of the same name written by the Jewish author Bernstein. Rebatet frequently condemned Bernstein’s work as emblematic of the *Jewified* theater in France, *Jewified* being synonymous with *corrupted/polluted*. But in fact, by 1931 sixteen different authors had already proffered their own versions of *Judith*, something which Mehlman himself acknowledges but still dismisses. In other words, Giraudoux somehow felt compelled to rewrite a Jewish author’s play in an effort to reclaim it for the Aryan French people in an era (1931) before Hitler’s rise to power. The critic gives absolutely no proof for his claim and admits that his is a “speculative reading,” but one that he nonetheless uses as justification for later, similarly wild interpretations of Giraudoux’s *Sodom et Gomorrhe* and *La Folle de Chaillot*.

In response to the question, “Was Giraudoux an anti-Semite?”, one can answer not entirely, or not intentionally in the great scheme of things. However, Giraudoux *had* in fact absorbed some of the negative stereotypes of his era: his statements regarding immigration in *Pleins pouvoirs* bear witness to this fact, as well as some of his negative stereotyping of Jews in the play *Judith*. One must be very careful with the term anti-Semitic, for there exist many models for it and degrees of severity. Should Giraudoux be labeled in the same manner as writers such as Lucien Rebatet or Céline, who openly called for the deaths of Jews at a time when they were being deported by the French government? There is no evidence that Giraudoux ever said anything of the kind. Although falling into anti-Semitic stereotypes as Giraudoux occasionally did could have ostensibly contributed to some of the widespread anti-Jewish sentiment of the era, it

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100 Body, *Giraudoux et l’Allemagne*, 333. The majority of these authors were French.

101 Mehlman, 40.
would be a disservice (as well as irresponsible overreaching) to categorize him with ilk such as Rebatet or Céline.

Another important polemic surrounding Giraudoux is his relationship with Germans during the war. When the *drôle de guerre* began, Giraudoux was not unknown in Germany. In fact his tenure as Minister of Propaganda from 1939-1940 prompted a wealth of political/literary articles about him in Germany. A large number of these were written by Karl Heinz Bremer, a former Sorbonne student, lecturer at the ENS, and future attaché of the Institut Allemand in Paris. Bremer’s articles focused on the idea of Franco-German alliance, with the first article entitled “Les idées françaises sur l’Allemagne: Jean Giraudoux et l’Allemagne,” published in the pro-Nazi review *Volkstum, Monatschrift für das deutsche Geistesleben (Notebooks for German Intellectual Life).* The following month Bremer published a more in-depth article “Jean Giraudoux und der deutsche Geist” (“Jean Giraudoux and the German Spirit”). In this article, Bremer painted an idyllic picture of the author Giraudoux as influenced by German Romantics such as “E.T.A. Hoffmann, Tieck, and Fouqué” (a bit like Giraudoux’s own character Siegfried). In December 1939 Bremer also approvingly cited Giraudoux’s just-published political text *Pleins pouvoirs*, in particular the more problematic passages regarding immigration. When Bremer was appointed to the research section of the *Institut allemand* after the French defeat, he hastened to develop a

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102 Bremer was seen as a German “heart-throb of the collaborationist homosexual milieu”, with admirers such as Robert Brasillach, with whom he developed a friendship. After Bremer’s death on the Eastern front, “Brasillach’s heartbroken obituary in *Je suis partout* [showed] that he understood their friendship as a kind of Franco-German alliance expressed in miniature.” Kaplan, 49.


104 Ibid., 426-427.
personal relationship with the author whose texts he had so recently studied for his series of articles.105

Giraudoux continued his good relations with the German Institute during the Occupation by frequently lunching with Dr. Karl Eptig, director of the establishment during the Occupation. Eptig greatly admired Giraudoux and had seen all the Louis Jouvet productions.106 Before the war, Eptig had run an “office coordinating academic exchanges,”107 and had a Swiss wife who served as hostess for the Institute’s social functions.108 French intellectuals who needed a travel pass in order to cross the line into the Unoccupied Zone (such as Giraudoux, whose family resided in the Limousin region), as well as gasoline or extra food tickets, frequently came calling at the Institute;109 thus, a relationship with its powerful director was advantageous. According to Jacques Body, “Giraudoux never took part in official receptions at the German Institute,” but he lunched with both Eptig and Bremer, or Bremer and Robert Brasillach, throughout the next few years. In June of 1942 the Nazi party briefly recalled Eptig to Germany in order to respond to accusations of spreading anti-Nazi propaganda, but Eptig returned to the Institute in 1943.110 Back in Paris, Eptig found it difficult to contact Giraudoux, a fact

105 Ibid., 436.
106 Ibid., 435.
107 Pryce-Jones, 37.
108 Ibid., 39. Alice Eptig’s post-war memoir Pariser Begegnungen (Paris Aquaintances) detailed the social interaction among her, her husband, and the Institut Allemand with French intellectuals as diverse as Jean-Louis Barrault (the future director of Camus), Cocteau, Céline, Serge Lifar, Sacha Guitry, Robert Brasillach, and the producer Gaston Baty to name only a few. 42.
110 Ibid., 436-437.
which was only explained after the Liberation. Jean Blanzat\textsuperscript{111} gave an interview to *Le Figaro* in which he cited Giraudoux as claiming (in December 1943, shortly before his death) that he (Giraudoux) never saw the Germans who wanted to see him, and moreover, that he had not visited the Institute.\textsuperscript{112} Had Giraudoux had a change of heart in the course of 1943, had he simply been performing the bare minimum of social networking in order to keep working, or were his relationships with the Germans before 1943 a sign of deeper attachment, based the author’s long-held concepts of Franco-German exchange? The timing of Blanzat’s statement (September 1944, right after the Liberation) appears slightly too fortuitous because of its timing as well as because it ignores certain problems in Giraudoux’s personal life, most notably the death of his mother which started off a depression, or his failing health, which kept him from attending any of the rehearsals for the reprisal of his play *Electre*. In any case, Giraudoux never published in the *Cahiers franco-allemands*, the mouthpiece of the German Institute, and one which would appear to have been tailor-made for a writer/diplomat with a reputation for advocating cordiality between the two countries. Thus, one can classify Giraudoux’s relationship with the German Institute as unofficial and based on personal relationships, rather than based on any official, propagandistic exchange.

As Body points out, however, Giraudoux never completely cut ties with some German intellectuals, such as the novelist Ernst Jünger. As late as July 1943, Jünger’s journal indicated that he had lunched at the home of Florence Gould, an American

\textsuperscript{111} Blanzat was a young Catholic, socialist schoolteacher who ran in the circles of François Mauriac and former *NRF* editor Jean Paulhan,. He was also a member of the resistance organization *Le Front National des Écrivains*. Sapiro, 233.

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid. Citing an interview in *Le Figaro* (September 23, 1944).
millionaire,\textsuperscript{113} where Giraudoux told a joke about a lawyer from Lyon. Later in the same diary entry, Jünger also indicated that Marcel Jouhandeau parried the joke with one about Giraudoux,\textsuperscript{114} something that would indicate a type of camaraderie between the two. Body fails to mention this last tidbit. As Gisèle Sapiro points out, Jouhandeau continued on at the NRF under Drieu La Rochelle’s aegis and displayed disdain for Vichy’s moralistic policies,\textsuperscript{115} much the same attitude as that of Giraudoux. More problematic is the fact that Jouhandeau was a declared anti-Semite who had published \textit{Le Péril juif} in 1937. This anti-Semitic text appeared in \textit{L’Action française}, which “lead […] the fight for the “defense of French culture” against Jews.”\textsuperscript{116} The Giraudoux-Jouhandeau association would at first glance look damaging for Giraudoux and appear to support certain critics’, such Melhman’s, anti-Semitic legacy for Giraudoux, a.k.a. guilt by association. However, one must consider that Giraudoux’s own step-son, Christian Pineau,\textsuperscript{117} was arrested and deported to Germany.\textsuperscript{118} Thus, one cannot judge relationships of this era in black and white terms – one must take into consideration the \textit{accommodations} of the time, as Philippe Burin indicates, as well as Giraudoux’s personal \textit{mondanité}. This also illustrates the distinctions between personal affinities and political ones in the complex Occupation world.

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 438. Florence Gould, like Lilita Abreu, was an established patroness in literary circles.

\textsuperscript{114} Ernst Jünger, \textit{Strahlungen} (Tübingen : Heliopolis-Verlag, 1949), 352.

\textsuperscript{115} Sapiro, 404.

\textsuperscript{116} Sapiro, 414.

\textsuperscript{117} Body, \textit{Giraudoux et l’ Allemagne}, 433-434.

\textsuperscript{118} Pineau was Suzanne Giraudoux’s son by her first husband. He later served in several offices in the French government. Reilly, 156.
On a professional, diplomatic level, Giraudoux refused an ambassadorship to Greece proposed to him by Laval, but then briefly served as director of historical monuments under the Vichy regime.\(^{119}\) According to André Beucler, Laval initially offered the writer a new post in the Ministry of Information, that of *Conseiller National*, which he refused.\(^{120}\) However, Body gives little weight to this statement, and reaffirms Paul Morand’s story that Giraudoux had refused the post in Greece.\(^{121}\) Giraudoux apparently held onto the hope that the Vichy government would create an office of urban development of which he would be the director, and wrote his son Jean-Pierre of this aspiration,\(^{122}\) a desire in keeping with the content of his essays on urban development in *Pleins pouvoirs* and *Sans pouvoirs*. In a similar fashion, one can observe multiple references to urban planning in his last play, *La Folle de Chaillot*.\(^{123}\) Thus, in spite of his posthumous reputation for scorn of the Vichy government, Giraudoux *did* work within its framework, thus negating the possibility of tidy political classification.

In a similar fashion, Giraudoux also contributed to a collection of essays put together by the flamboyant theatrical producer, playwright, and actor Sacha Guitry. The lavishly illustrated collection, entitled *De 1429 à 1942 ou De Jeanne d’Arc à Philippe*

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\(^{121}\) Op cit., 433-434.


\(^{123}\) Giraudoux’s references to urban planning in *La Folle de Chaillot* will be discussed at length in the following chapter.
Pétain, was begun in the winter of 1941-1942, presented to Philippe Pétain in October 1943, and contained essays on diverse subjects by twenty-two authors including Giraudoux and Guitry. The book sold for 25,000 francs a copy and benefited the Secours National. The Vichy government created the Secours National as a charitable organization which for the most benefited large families and Catholic schools, a policy in keeping with its Pétainiste pedigree. On June 23, 1944, less than two weeks after the D-Day invasion, Guitry organized a grand gala at the Opéra in honor of the book. That same year, Guitry directed a fifty-eight minute documentary version of the book, with participation by Cocteau among others.

On August 23, 1944, Guitry was arrested in his canary-yellow pajamas and later convicted of collaboration, for which he served a term of sixty days in the prison at Fresnes. Among Guitry’s most visible faux-pas was the fact that he and wife had taken part in propaganda trip to Berlin in March 1942 by special invitation of Dr. Goebbels.

This voyage was similar to the earlier propaganda trip that French writers such as Robert

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125 Lynne Taylor, Review of *La protection sociale sous le régime de Vichy* (Philippe-Jean Hesse and Jean-Pierre Le Crom, Eds.) in *H-France Review* Vol. 2 (January 2002), No. 2. Article found online at: [http://www.h-france.net/vol2reviews/taylor.html](http://www.h-france.net/vol2reviews/taylor.html)


128 Château, 215-219. Among others on the express train to Nazi Berlin were Continental film stars Danielle Darrieux, Viviane Romance, and Albert Préjean.
Brasillach, Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, and Marcel Jouhandeau made to Weimar in October 1940\footnote{Kaplan, \textit{The Collaborator}, 153, 270.} – widely publicized with well-placed photographs featuring French intellectuals (or in the case of Guitry, theater people) with members of the Nazi government. Throughout the war Guitry was highly visible, seen living the good life at receptions as well as at exclusive restaurants such as La Tour d’Argent.\footnote{Château, 245.} Guitry bitterly protested the arrest and conviction, claiming that he had paved the way for authors such as Claudel, Cocteau, and Anouilh to practice their professions,\footnote{Château, 433.} a statement which he repeated over and over in his post-war autobiographies.

Long after the Liberation, the collection reappeared in a limited edition of 4935 copies in 1951, the year of Pétain’s death. The editor, Raoul Solar, indicates that sixty-three of these were deluxe copies that included a hand-signed signed letter by Sacha Guitry, who is indicated as the author. A further 240 copies were signed by Guitry, and the remainind 4,630 copies were unsigned and unbound. As Guity had long attempted to justify his actions during the Occupation, one can view this privately-published edition as an attempt to show the world who had published in his collection honoring Pétain, as well as to pay tribute to the late Maréchal. Giraudoux’s contribution consisted of an essay on Colbert, the French Minister of Finance under Louis XIV. Giraudoux praises Colbert’s \textit{dirigiste} policies and ends with the idea that “[Colbert] never saw borders between minds, and in addition to competition and the war of competitors, he helped create a
society of imagination that would become the very principle of [the French] race and way of thinking.”

When the collection *De 1429 à 1942 ou De Jeanne d’Arc à Philippe Pétain* reappeared in 1966, all but Guitry’s essays had been edited out of the book. After all, Guitry had officially been judged guilty therefore he could take the additional black mark on his reputation. Among the missing original authors were Jean Giraudoux, Paul Morand, Colette, Aristide Maillol, and Jean Cocteau. One can but speculate as to why all the original authors were not included in the new printing. After the defeat, their contributions were likely viewed as an embarrassment, much like Paul Claudel’s “Ode au Maréchal Pétain.” It must be noted that Giraudoux’s main biographer, Jacques Body, makes no mention of the dramatist’s participation in this volume.

While Giraudoux worked within the Vichy government, his son Jean-Pierre and his signature director, Louis Jouvet, had left the country for the duration of the war. Jean-Pierre deserted the defeated French army, crossed into Spain then Portugal, where he remained for two weeks awaiting the arrival of his parents, who arrived too late to see

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133 Sacha Guitry, *De 1429 à 1942 ou De Jeanne d’Arc à Philippe Pétain* (Paris: Librarie Académique Perrin, 1966). (my translations) The preface to the new edition states that “the original book, so prodigious in its concept and by the high quality of those who collaborated on it (ceux qui y collaborèrent), drew a lot of attention.” The preface specifies that the book was republished because of a specific clause in Guitry’s will (he died in 1957). Thus, Sacha Guitry, so concerned by posterity and by justifying his actions during the war, wanted the book out there for the public. (7) This may explain why only his texts were re-published (the other authors likely wanted to forget they ever contributed to a work honoring Pétain). Gisèle Sapiro gives no indication as to the total sales of the book during the war, and makes no reference to the new edition. Sacha Guitry also published at least three other books with Raoul Solar: One was a 1946 volume called *Elles et toi*, another *Beaumarchais* (1950) and *La fin du monde* in 1954.

134 Sapiro, 348.
their son off. Giraudoux’s son had already joined De Gaulle in England. Although the younger Giraudoux begged his father to join him in England, the writer instead opted to return to Paris. After the war Jean-Pierre Giraudoux became the major guardian of his father’s legacy in the post-war years, serving as one of the original editors for *Les Cahiers Jean Giraudoux*, published by Grasset.

Louis Jouvet, for his part, obtained permission to cross the line into the Un-Occupied zone, in the company of his actors and sets, in order to tour the southern half of France as well as Switzerland. Jouvet had other ideas, however, and quickly left for South America, where he toured extensively with his theater troupe until 1945. By this time, Giraudoux’s works had been temporarily banned in France mainly due to the Jewish title character of the play *Judith*, an ironic fact considering later charges of anti-Semitism against Giraudoux. In an April 1945 address at the Théâtre de l’Athénée, Jouvet stated that he left France specifically because Giraudoux was banned by the Germans. However, this ban proved to be short-lived, as performances of Giraudoux’s works were soon permitted due to pressure from important Germans such as Dr. Eptig of the German Institute, as well as his high status as a French dramatist.


136 The *Société des amis de Jean Giraudoux* began in 1971 and publishes the *Cahiers* annually in order to “honor [Giraudoux’s] memory and facilitate the study of his work.” The Society is based in the Giraudoux family home in Bellac and has established a cultural center in that location. Since Jouvet’s death, the street on which the house sits has been renamed in his honor (Rue Louis-Jouvet). *Les Cahiers Jean-Giraudoux*. Volume I (1972), Volume III (1974).


Although most of Giraudoux’s biographers depict the author in a virtual state of depressed isolation at Cusset during the early war years, the year spent in the Limousin region proved fruitful, as he completed the new plays *Apollon de Bellac* and *Sodome et Gomorrhe*. Thus, although he spent his time in relative isolation, Giraudoux could effectively write and create.

Giraudoux wrote a total of four plays during the Occupation. The first, *Apollon de Bellac*, debuted in June of 1942 in Rio de Janeiro, performed by the troupe of Louis Jouvet. Giraudoux sent the manuscript to him from Lausanne while giving a lecture series in Switzerland that would later be published under the title of *Visitations*. The play takes a strangely comedic view of life that puts it at odds with the atmosphere in which it was written; it is as if Giraudoux, in his solitude, had attempted to sink into a world of comforting fantasy. One has to question why the play, which would not appear to provoke any censorship issues, was performed only outside of France. In a letter dated March 31, 1942, Giraudoux wrote to his son that he had completed both *Apollon de Bellac* and *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, but that he was “waiting for Jouvet” and had telephoned him in Rio from Geneva. Given that only a few months passed between that letter and the actual performance, one can assume from the timing that Giraudoux must have sent the play almost immediately, which would indicate the strength of the Giraudoux/Jouvet friendship.

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139 Aurel David called it a “period of absence and sleep.” Aurel, 220.

140 Reilly, 123.


Giraudoux’s only new work performed under Nazi Occupation, *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, began its run in October 1943 at the Théâtre Hébertot. Jacques Hébertot, a long-time promoter of Franco-German relations, directed the work which starred Edwige Feuillère, a popular actress of the era and whom Giraudoux knew from the production of his film *La Duchesse de Langeais*. The play also included music by Arthur Honegger, and set-design by Christian Bérard. *Sodome et Gomorrhe* benefited from a good build-up long before opening night, beginning with an illustrated announcement of the up-coming play in the August 21, 1943 issue of *Comœdia*. Two weeks later, on September 4, 1943, the same magazine published a follow-up (“Jean Giraudoux chez Hébertot”) to the first article, as well as an homage to Giraudoux (“Jean Giraudoux, auteur dramatique”) by Colette.

In the introduction to Colette’s article, Giraudoux is cited as “one of those rare contemporary writers whose work [was] already part of the national heritage.” Thus, Giraudoux’s status as one of the great *French* authors was of particular importance. It must be noted that along with promoting great *French* authors such as Giraudoux, *Comœdia* frequently juxtaposed more innocent articles with propagandistic texts such as articles on Nazi art, for example, which appeared in the January 30, 1943 issue. Thus,

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144 “Sodome et Gomorrhe” in *Comœdia* (October 16, 1943).


146 “Xème Anniversaire de l’art national-socialiste” in *Comœdia* (January 30, 1943). Giraudoux appeared regularly in the review, both as a writer and as a subject. For example, the issue of January 15, 1943 contained an article on the “Mystique de Giraudoux”, whereas the following issue contained the article on Nazi art. *Comœdia* published Giraudoux’s “Hommage à Marivaux” (taken from the collection *Littérature*, a collection of articles published by Grasset in 1941). Giraudoux read his “Hommage à Marivaux” to a crowd at the Comédie Française in February 1943 in the February 6, 1943 issue.
one sees a constant movement back and forth, a repeated mixture of the innocuous and the propagandistic with the effect of rendering the latter banal.

The build-up for *Sodome et Gomorrhe* continued in the October 9th issue, which included several pages of the text of the play, a photo of Edwige Feuillière, and several drawings by Christian Bérard, who furnished the costumes and set design for the play. Finally, in *Comœdia*’s review of the play itself (the issue in fact contains two commentaries) Pierre Laurier once again cited Giraudoux’s importance on the French artistic scene, and invited the reader to “rediscover the tradition of a French industry for which the world [had] no equal.”

Unlike Giraudoux’s preceding comedy, *Apollon de Bellac*, *Sodome et Gomorrhe*’s very loose adaptation of the biblical tale expressed no hope for the future. Man and woman are doomed because of their refusal of tenderness, a subject perhaps inspired by the failing Giraudoux marriage. By this time the Giraudoux couple had effectively separated, leaving Suzanne Giraudoux in possession of the Paris apartment, while Jean resided in a nearby hotel. The critics both during and after the war often examined the play in this very personal light (the *Comœdia* review in particular noted Giraudoux’s extreme pessimism regarding the couple). In general, reviewers gave it

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Giraudoux’s reputation as an “official” representative of the French literary scene was promoted by the magazine alongside publicity for Nazi art expos.

147 “ Feux de position : *Sodome et Gomorrhe* ” in *Comœdia* (October 16, 1943). Laurier begins the articles with “ A call by art, of the French Genius for French elegance, not a memory of the past but golden link in the chain of the great traditions of our theater. ” (Translation and italics my own)

glowing praise as a work representative of Giraudoux’s typical clever style, but some critics expressed dissatisfaction with the manner in which Giraudoux distorted the biblical tale. *Paris Soir* in particular called the play “completely impious” and speculated that Giraudoux might by “mocking those who applaud loudly in order to make it seem as thought they understood everything.” Maurice Rostand of *Midi Soir* made the same criticism, and chided Giraudoux for adding “Samson and Delilah in Sodom.”

It must be noted that Giraudoux actually began the play in 1939, not long after finishing *Ondine* and *La Guerre de Troie n’aura pas lieu*, which displayed a similar (if less extreme) form of pessimism regarding the lack of comprehension between men and women. Thus, one can speculate that the action of *Sodome et Gomorrhe* can be construed as a metaphor for strained Franco-German relations, although none of the critics of the era took it to be such. However, the play’s extreme negativity and cutting dialogue resound with personal bitterness, and thus do nothing to reinforce the idea of the Franco-German thematic.

Giraudoux’s final play, *Pour Lucrèce*, showed a return to the sense of despair found in *Sodome et Gomorrhe*. Furthermore, this reworking of the Roman legend of Lucrèce demonstrates a return to his classical roots, a precursor to his Germanism. Once again he links impurity with the downfall of male-female relations, this time in the

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149 Alain Laubreaux’s review in *Le Petit Parisien* did express some misgivings, however, as he wuestioned whether “the revolutionaries of yesterday would become the traditionalists of today.” Alain Laubreaux, “The Théâtre” in *Le Petit Parisien* (October 13, 1943). (my translations)

150 Jacques Berland, “*Sodome et Gomorrhe* au Théâtre Hebertot” in *Paris Soir* (October 18, 1943). (my translation)

modern setting of southern France. The theme of betrayal reflects not only the disillusionment of the characters of the play, but the general oppressiveness of the period.

Although one can argue that Giraudoux’s plays and political writings of this period reflect ambivalence towards the Vichy regime, his cinematic activity displays more problematic tendencies. This aspect of the writer’s work remains largely ignored by critics, virtually expunged from his record or at least considered insignificant. *La Duchesse de Langeais*, a 1941 adaptation of the Balzac novel, represented the author’s first foray into cinema. The selection of Balzac, for whose realism Giraudoux reportedly had no use, remains puzzling, but apparently the choice was that of the director, Jacques de Baroncelli, a mutual friend of his and the actress Edwige Feuillère, who appeared in several of productions of Giraudoux’s plays. Films Orange, the newly-formed cinematic firm, announced the company’s creation and its future production at a star-studded gala which included Doktor Diedrich, head of the Propagandastaffel. In his speech Diedrich contrasted pre-war French films with those slated for production by Films Orange: the most notable difference being that the former were, according to Diedrich, created by:

Jewish producers who did not take responsibility and who, in effect, were only vile speculators. French people expect[ed] to see films in which they [saw] their true character, healthy films, worthy of the artistic heritage of the nation and which [bore] the imprint of the new order.

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152 Reilly, 120.

153 Baroncelli served on the Documentary Film award committee sponsored by Films Orange, the same committee on which Giraudoux and Sartre were slated to serve. Château, 318.


155 Château, 318.
Given Diedrich’s words, one cannot be shocked by the condemnation of Films Orange made by the writers of the clandestine version of *L’Écran Français*: they denounced the firm as a camouflaged company working with German money, under German orders.\(^{156}\)

One cannot establish whether Giraudoux was present at the actual gala, although given his *mondainité* one might suppose that he was. However, German racial policies were well-established, and Diedrich’s speech appeared in *L’Ecran français*, one of the most popular film magazines of the era. While the Nazi agenda regarding the arts appeared most transparently in pro-fascist reviews such as *Je suis partout* or *Le Petit Parisien*, it also made its way in a subtler fashion in ostensibly “neutral” magazines such *Comœdia*. This example falls into the same category.

Little is known about Giraudoux’s exact relationship with Films Orange, although they did have an exclusive contract with Edwige Feuillère, which might account for his being included on the committee.\(^{157}\) One can speculate that he may have branched out into film at this time for financial reasons, much like Sartre did. Indeed, both men first wrote for movies specifically during the Occupation. The studios were booming, with even better business than usual, thus the demand for scripts would have been even greater. Perhaps writers viewed films as somehow less serious, with fewer

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\(^{156}\) Château, 413. Citing the article by Dréville, Jean. “‘Les Sous-fifres’ ” in *L’écran français* (clandestin). (June 1944). The clandestine version *L’Écran français* was the mouthpiece of Comité de Libération du Cinéma, the cinematic counterpart of the Comité National des Écrivains. *Les lettres françaises* (clandestines) later absorbed the cinematic magazine. During the purges, the Comité de Libération du Cinéma was responsible for the exclusion of eight directors (including Henri-Georges Clouzot, the director of *Le Corbeau*) who had worked for Continental Films. Pierre Billard, “L’affaire du Corbeau: Histoire d’un chef d’œuvre mal-aimé français”. The article can be found online at: [http://www2.bifi.fr/cineregards/article.asp?sp_ref=35&ref_sp_type=1&revue_ref=3](http://www2.bifi.fr/cineregards/article.asp?sp_ref=35&ref_sp_type=1&revue_ref=3)

\(^{157}\) Château, 117.
accompanying political ramifications. French studios functioned like well-oiled machines before the war, especially when one considers the close relationship between German and French productions sites, most notably the back and forth between Boulogne-Billancourt and Berlin. In spite of initial problems and shortages, studios on both sides of the Maginot line continued to function during the Occupation. Since the public (and members of the industry) could dismiss cinematic offerings as a “less serious” genre, participation in film production implied less commitment than involvement in theater, where playwrights were expected to attend and comment upon daily rehearsals. A screenwriter could write his script, send it off, receive payment, and wash his hands of the affair. Authorship is much more alienated in screenwriting.

In any case promotional efforts for Giraudoux’s cinematic offerings followed a similar recipe to those of his plays. As early as August 1941, Comœdia began publicizing La Duchesse de Langeais under the auspice that

> It [was] a great opportunity that our cinema [could] call on authors of exceptional talent such as Jean Giraudoux…Jean Giraudoux’s entrée into cinema constitute[d] a first truly valuable sign of the rebirth of French cinema.¹⁵⁸ (italics my own)

Thus, the magazine linked Giraudoux’s participation with the resurgence of French artistry; he in effect became a symbol of French endurance and success. In a Comœdia article the following spring, Giraudoux cited his friendship with Baroncelli and Feuillère as pushing him towards film, as well as his desire to elevate the language in French films.¹⁵⁹ As in the case of the play Sodome et Gomorrhe, Comœdia published long

¹⁵⁸ “Pour la première fois Jean Giraudoux écrit le dialogue d’un film” in Comœdia (August 16, 1941).

¹⁵⁹ “Théâtre et film” in Comœdia (April 11, 1942).
excepts of Giraudoux’s scenario for *La Duchesse de Langeais*, along with favorable reviews complete with promotional stills.

*Les Anges du Péché,* the 1943 film for which Giraudoux supplied the dialogue, was conceived by a R.L. Bruckberger, a Dominican priest. Bruckberger’s right-wing convictions lead him to join the Légion des Anciens Combattants at the beginning of the war, but then left in 1941 after refusing to swear an oath to the Vichy government. He later became a money-raiser for the Maquis. Bruckberger contributed to the resistance review *Etoiles,* founded in the Southern Zone by Louis Aragon, Georges Sadoul, and Georges Ternet. Albert Camus introduced Bruckberger to the Comité National des Ecrivains in 1943. Thus Bruckberger had a solidly *resistant* pedigree despite his initial adherence to Pétain’s organization for ex-soldiers.

*Comœdia* published excerpts of *Les anges du péché* in their June 12, 1943 issue under the title of “La Correction Fraternelle.” The moralistic plot focused on the good works of a nun who convinces a murderess to accept God, a scenario that falls in line with the Pétainiste values of *Travail, Famille, Patrie.* The pious content represented a departure from the Giraudoux’s earlier work, in which the author modernized biblical stories in order to present them in a tongue in cheek manner that suggested *criticism,* rather than approval of, religion, as in the case of *Judith.* Here, Giraudoux appeared to take the religious aspect more seriously. *Les Anges du Péché* was eventually shown in as

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160 “La Duchesse de Langeais” in *Comœdia* (June 13, 1942).


162 Sapiro, 519, 521, 524, 547. Contributors to *Etoiles* included Julien Benda, Paul Eluard, and René Tavernier, among others.
part of an official ceremony front of the Archbishop of Lille, other members of the clergy, and the Office of Cinema, who “saluted the film as a great hope for the moral progress of contemporary tendencies in the cinematic profession.”

One can only speculate as to why Giraudoux got involved in such a project – perhaps the adaptation by a “classic French” author (Giraudoux) of yet another “classic French author” (Balzac) was a safe choice. Perhaps Bruckberger viewed Les anges du pêché in a similar fashion, with the added ideological bonus of throwing more money in the Maquis’ collection pot. While attempting to evaluate the film’s significance, one must sift the contents through several filters: the intentions of the authors and later those of the director, those of the critics, those of the audience, as well as our post-war hindsight. Such layering makes it almost impossible to pinpoint the political message, if any, intended by the authors.

In any case, the Catholic Church had a strange bedfellow in Je suis partout critic Lucien Rebatet, who praised the film lavishly and as a notable exception to the trend of moralistic religious films. Indeed Giraudoux appeared to have had cordial relationships with at least three of Je suis partout’s main contributors, especially the fellow Germanophile and Normalien Robert Brasillach. The staff of Je suis partout as a  


164 François Vinneuil (a.k.a. Lucien Rebatet), “Giraudoux au Couvent” in Je suis partout (July 9, 1943).
whole greatly admired the dramatist, and in fact, Giraudoux is the author most frequently quoted in the review.\textsuperscript{165}

In addition to writing for the cinema, Giraudoux served as a jury member for first congress on documentary film in April 1943. Among his co-jurists were Louis-Emile Galey, General Director of Cinema, the director Jacques de Baroncelli \textit{(La Duchesse de Langeais)}, Serge Lifar and Alfred Cortot (who were both barred from professional activity for a year after the purge),\textsuperscript{166} and finally Lucien Rebatet, known for his virulent racism in the pro-fascist weekly \textit{Je suis partout}.\textsuperscript{167} Due to new restrictions under the Vichy regime that limited the length of cinematic programs, the production of documentaries, shorter than the average feature film, had skyrocketed.\textsuperscript{168} The Vichy government viewed these shorts as an important propaganda tool for the credo of \textit{Travail, Famille, Patrie}, most particularly the promotion of natalist policies and that of the return to the land. Above all they served as the reflection of “la pensée du Maréchal.”\textsuperscript{169} Little is known about how Giraudoux’s participation in this committee came about; he had long-nurtured the desire had to work in the Vichy Ministry of Education, the Minister of which, Abel Bonnard, helped organize as well as introduce this Congress. Bertin-Maghit, whose study of film during the Occupation has become a touchstone for researchers of World War II-era cinema, devotes little time to the production of documentaries, which is

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{165} Pierre Dioudonnant, \textit{Les 700 rédacteurs de “ Je suis partout ”} (Paris : Sedopols, 1993), 46. It must be noted that Giraudoux only contributed one article to \textit{Je suis partout}, “ Théâtre français et théâtre allemand ”, which appeared on March 7, 1931. He did not contribute to the review after that.
\item \textsuperscript{166} Château, 453.
\item \textsuperscript{167} “ Notre Concours de Scénarios : Le Jury est désigné ” in \textit{Comœdia} (November 14, 1942).
\item \textsuperscript{168} Jean-Pierre Bertin-Maghit, \textit{Le cinéma français sous l’Occupation} (Paris : Perrin, 1989), 111.
\item \textsuperscript{169} Château, 318.
\end{itemize}
unfortunate, given the fact that this genre flourished during the Occupation due to propagandist policies.

In a similar manner, Giraudoux (along with Jean-Paul Sartre and Lucien Rebatet among others) agreed to serve on the jury of a film scenario contest sponsored by Comœdia and Gaumont. Comœdia heavily promoted the contest in its magazine and devoted at least eight articles to it between November 1942 and October 1943. Shortly after the announcement of the contest, the magazine ostentatiously advertised the fact that French prisoners in German Stalags and Oflags were allowed to participate in the contest; furthermore, Comœdia underlined the fact that “the agreement was easily reached,” which implies a good working relationship between the magazine and the German authorities both within France, and back in Germany. By the time the 1700 scenarios had been judged, in September 1943, both Giraudoux’s and Sartre’s names had disappeared from the list of judges, but Giraudoux did not feel the need to withdraw from the jury on documentary films. Comœdia gave no explanation for this aside from the note “excused” next to their names. Sartre makes no mention of the contest in his published letters, nor does Giraudoux. One can only speculate as to whether they had fully committed to the contest, or if they asked to have their names removed. Perhaps it sounded like a good idea when they signed on, but then upon second thought they both backed out when they

170 “Remise des récompense aux lauréats du Concours de Scénarios” in Comœdia (October 30, 1943).

171 “Les prisonniers participeront à notre Concours de Scénarios doté de 100.000 francs de prix” in Comœdia (November 11, 1942).

172 “Comment furent décernés les prix” in Comœdia (September 25, 1943).
realized that the task entailed wading through numerous film scenarios by amateur writers. Both men had their own work to do.

Just months before the D-Day invasions, Jean Giraudoux’s sudden death from uremia on January 31, 1944 shocked the French theater world. His demise triggered a slew of articles which attempted to analyze Giraudoux both as an author and as a man. Most significantly, Comœdia published its “Hommages à Jean Giraudoux,” which included photos, a death-bed sketch by Cocteau, and laudatory memoirs by diverse members of the French artistic world ranging from Paul Valéry and Colette to Jean-Paul Sartre. The main article, entitled “Un grand écrivain, un grand Français,” reiterated the point of view that Giraudoux the writer symbolized the quality of French letters overall. It also underlined Giraudoux’s status as a visionary and diplomat with an evocation of his book Pleins pouvoirs, and continued, “No one could have defended the French cause with more authority, persuasion, and effect.” Marcel Arland’s tribute to Giraudoux struck a similar note, for he cited Giraudoux as being “without a doubt, the most French figure in contemporary letters: French to the point of being a symbol, to being a paradox, almost to the point of defiance. […] [He was] the very conscience and the image of a civilization.” Pro-fascist journals such as Le Petit Parisien and Je suis partout

173 “La carrière de Jean Giraudoux” in Comœdia (February 5, 1944).
174 “Un grand écrivain, un grand français” in Comœdia (February 5, 1944).
175 Marcel Arland, “Hommage à Giraudoux” in Comœdia (February 5, 1944).
176 “Jean Giraudoux est mort” in Le Petit Parisien (February 1, 1944).
177 François-Charles Bauer, “Jean Giraudoux” in Je suis partout (February 4th, 1944). Bauer wrote of the “eternal mourning” that France must suffer in the wake of Giraudoux’s passing. He also paid tribute to Giraudoux’s play on Franco-German alliance, La Guerre de Troie n’aura pas lieu, with the line, “La mort de Jean Giraudoux n’aure pas lieu.”
continued in much the same fashion, as did the German-language newspaper *Pariser Zeitung*, which evoked Giraudoux’s reputation as among those who worked for Franco-German understanding.\(^1^{178}\) Thus, the obituaries and tributes immediately following Giraudoux’s death confirmed the esteemed place he held in French diplomatic and artistic society. Clandestine publications remained silent on the matter until after the war, when they no longer had to hide.

Immediately after the Liberation, several articles questioned the circumstances surrounding Giraudoux’s death. The first published speculations, appearing in the communist weekly *Ce soir*, were given the attention-grabbing title “Jean Giraudoux a été empoisonné par la Gestapo, nous révèle Louis Aragon” (“Louis Aragon reveals that Jean Giraudoux was poisoned by the Gestapo”).\(^1^{179}\) It must be noted that Aragon had long been affiliated with the Communist party as well as resistant publications (such as the aforementioned *Etoiles*) in the Unoccupied Zone. The following day *Front National* (yet another paper associated with the Communist party and the Resistance movement lead by Pierre Villon)\(^1^{180}\) took up the cause and stated that Aragon, “having met [Giraudoux] at the home of M. Léon Moussinac five days before his death, Jean Giraudoux appeared, without a doubt, to be a very secret but very active resistant.” The article concludes:

\(^{178}\) Albert Buesche, “Wanderer zwischen zwei Kreigen: Zum Tod von Jean Giraudoux” (A Wanderer Between Two Wars: On the Death of Jean Giraudoux” in *Pariser Zeitung*. (February 1, 1944). Beusche evoked Giraudoux as a model Frenchman whose openness had lead him to explore Germany, and whose experiences had taken form in the novel and play *Siegfried*.

\(^{179}\) “Jean Giraudoux a été tué par la Gestapo, nous révèle Louis Aragon” in *Ce soir* (September 20, 1940).

\(^{180}\) Sapiro, 88-89, 472-473.
We must say something that has been kept secret up until now: Jean Giraudoux, who officially died from uremia, was, according to the formal testimony of his doctor, poisoned by the Gestapo.\textsuperscript{181}

As Jacques Body points out, Giraudoux’s doctor, M. Albeaux-Fernet, never called for the body to be exhumed, which would have been the case had he actually believed there was cause for suspicion, although Giraudoux’s son, repatriated after serving with De Gaulle, expressed interest in an inquiry. Body hypothesizes that the uremia stemmed from food poisoning suffered after eating in one of the many questionable restaurants of the era. In addition, Giraudoux’s mother had died the preceding autumn, which by the account of many, had left Giraudoux depressed and susceptible to a stubborn flu.\textsuperscript{182}

Thus, although Giraudoux’s death had been a natural one, a pendulum had been firmly set into motion: the playwright’s reputation had begun to swing from one of a Germanophile preaching Franco-German cooperation to one of secret Resistance member. Three short days after the first article in \textit{Ce Soir}, the conservative newspaper \textit{Le Figaro} rallied to the cause with the article “Giraudoux et la Résistance” by Jean Blanzat, in which the author described a meeting with Giraudoux in early December 1943. Blanzat was a young Catholic Socialist schoolteacher who ran in the circles of François Mauriac and former NRF editor Jean Paulhan. He was also a member of the resistance organization Le Front National des Ecrivains.\textsuperscript{183} According to him, Giraudoux offered to show him the working copy of what would later become \textit{Sans pouvoirs}, and told him how he “was helping ten people stay alive, most of them in prison.” According to Blanzat,

\textsuperscript{181} “La Gestapo aurait assassiné Jean Giraudoux : Les révélations de M. Louis Aragon” in \textit{Front National} (September 20, 1944).

\textsuperscript{182} Body, \textit{Giraudoux et l’ Allemagne}, 449.

\textsuperscript{183} Sapiro, 233.
Giraudoux also showed interest in such clandestine publications as *Les Lettres françaises (clandestines)* and *Editions de Minuit*. He then reported that Giraudoux told him that the Germans were circulating rumors that he had been visiting the German Institute, or even more extreme, that they had conjured up a sort of doppelgänger who attended in his place. Blanzat continued, recounting a return visit a week later, in which Giraudoux referred to a secret group of six men with whom he had “created an agency” to collect documentation regarding a “precise list of those shot or deported.” The citation concluded:

> When the moment comes, we will open our dossiers to the French press and to big English or American newspapers who sympathize with us and often do not know how to defend us.

The article ended with a dramatic statement to the effect that, the *very day* Blanzat was supposed to see Giraudoux again, he learned that the author was dead. Although Blanzat stated that it was really the task of the other members of Giraudoux’s supposed resistance organization to reveal their activities,\(^\text{184}\) no one came forward to claim this honor, at a moment when the establishment of Resistant credentials could be a matter of life or death…or at least a matter of being on the right side.

The rehabilitation of Jean Giraudoux’s reputation for the side of the Resistance had already begun. Enter Louis Jouvet and *La Folle de Chaillot*…

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\(^{184}\) Jean Blanzat, “Giraudoux et la Résistance” in *Le Figaro* (September 23, 1944).
Chapter 5

La Folle de Chaillot: Crazy like a fox

Few plays were more anticipated than Louis Jouvet’s December 1945 production of Jean Giraudoux’s posthumous swan song *La Folle de Chaillot*. Official and unofficial purges had been in the spotlight since the Liberation in September of 1944, and members of the theatrical community had certainly not been exempt from this process. Big-name producers such as Sacha Guitry had already been sentenced to serve time in the prison in Fresnes along with the actress Arletty, notorious for her affair with a German officer and her defiant declaration, “My heart is French, but my rear-end is international.”¹ Dancer/choreographers like Serge Lifar also found themselves blacklisted due to now-indiscreet friendships with German officials,² while those with equally imprudent links to the Occupiers, such as Jean Cocteau (who authored the obsequious “Hommage à Breker” published in *Comœdia* in 1942) emerged from the Comité National des Ecrivains’ questioning sessions with no official black marks against him.³ Robert Brasillach, best-known for his anti-Semitic columns in *Je suis partout*, but also as the author of several sentimental novels, was shot by a firing squad in February 1945 after having been convicted of *intelligence avec l’ennemi*.⁴

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¹ Château, 433, 439. “ Mon cœur est français, mais mon cul est international.”
³ It must be noted Cocteau and his lover Jean Marais were persecuted by Alain Laubreux in the pages of *Je suis partout*. Jean Marais was part of the Resistance. It also appears that his fellow writers did not take Cocteau, *le prince frivole*, very seriously in a political sense.
In spite of continued shortages in France, life was getting better. The war in Europe ended that May after Hitler’s suicide and Germany’s official capitulation, and Japan surrendered just a few months later – unfortunately only after the United States’ decision to drop two atomic bombs had taken a horrific toll on the civilian population. In the meantime, De Gaulle had returned to Paris to assure them that the city liberated itself (with no explicit mention of the American divisions and Normandy). More importantly, he helped the French to save face by attributing Vichy and the collaborationist government to a few greedy, unethical profiteers, a notion which endured for several decades, effectively assuaging guilty consciences.

It was into this schizophrenic atmosphere of joy and hatred, peace and politically-charged turmoil that Louis Jouvet, one of the country’s most esteemed directors, returned to France after four long years of touring in South America. As we saw above, Jouvet’s main motivation for leaving France was Vichy and German censorship of the author to whom he had been most closely linked – Jean Giraudoux. Thus, Jouvet had the spotless reputation of someone who preferred exile under difficult conditions to remaining in a country where one had to compromise at best, collaborate at worst, in order to practice his profession.

Upon his return in February 1945, friends and colleagues alike constantly asked Jouvet to describe his experiences abroad. After telling and re-telling the trials and tribulations of his journey, Jouvet finally presented them to the public at large in an address given at the Théâtre de l’Athénée on April 17, 1945. In his opening remarks,

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Jouvet asked the audience to allow the spirits of Jean Giraudoux and Edouard Bourdet (the former director of the Comédie Française) to sit among them and receive honors from their South American audiences, laurels that had been bestowed upon Jouvet’s touring troupe in the author’s (rightful) place. Thus, Jouvet immediately linked Giraudoux with the idea of heroic exile for political ideals.

Jouvet’s account, published a scant month and a half later by Grévin et Fils, gripped the audience. He told of fires tragically burning all their scenery, the defection of actors through marriages or their desire to find an easier living, as well as the pride that the locals felt at being able to support French theater. At the beginning of his tour, while still in France’s Unoccupied Zone, Jouvet mentioned that he had received a brief message from a French school teacher, a certain Mademoiselle Gippet who stated, “Serving France as you are doing gives us comfort and hope, God bless you Monsieur Jouvet, please travel to many cities.” Thus, Jouvet’s success, much like that of Giraudoux’s, became inherently linked to that of France, of French theater, and symbolized an artistic triumph over the enemy.

Jouvet expanded upon this idea in his concluding remarks:

When Victoria Ocampo was in Buenos Aires talking about the gratitude that the Argentine people have for France, she said: “The richness of

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7 Ibid., 61.

8 Ibid., 18. “Servir la France comme vous le faites, nous donne maintenant ce réconfort et cette preuve, Dieu vous bénisse, Monsieur Jouvet, allez dans beaucoup de villes.”

9 Victoria Ocampo was an Argentinian writer who wrote her first novels in French, and was a dedicated Francophile, often traveling to France and meeting with authors such as Cocteau and André Malraux. She also ran a publishing house in Buenos Ares. In her youth, Ocampo met and took acting lessons from Marguerite Moreno, who later played the title role in *La Folle de Chaillot*. This article is found online at the site of the Victoria Ocampo Project: [http://www.villaocampo.org/ing/historico/victoria_4.htm](http://www.villaocampo.org/ing/historico/victoria_4.htm)
France is to have been able to give us her poets; ours has been to know how to receive them. The words of Baudelaire, Hugo, Rimbaud, Péguy, Claudel, and Giraudoux are like our heartbeats.” Thus, our loyalty is important to those who are loyal to our country and consider it to be a shared heritage.”

Since his death, Giraudoux had been virtually canonized by the public at large. Even before his death, the author was known as one of France’s greatest playwrights. In fact, Giraudoux was similar to Paul Claudel in that they came from the same Grandes écoles milieu that fostered the career of the traditional French writer/diplomat.

During his address, Jouvet invoked Giraudoux at length: he explained that the author had called him from Lausanne, described the telegrams the author had sent to him, and described how Giraudoux had trusted him with his new play, Apollon de Bellac, which Jouvet was able to perform in Rio, much to the audience’s glowing appreciation. Giraudoux wrote the following on the manuscript of Apollon de Bellac:

Dear Jouvet, dear Louis. […] I’m working hard for you – Sodome et Gomorrhe is finished, La Folle de Chaillot will be ready when you return. All of us are thinking about you, [thinking] about all of you with great affection. We are waiting for you.

Thus, Giraudoux was not prepared to use just any director for La folle, although he had allowed another to direct his version of Sodome et Gomorrhe in 1943. Perhaps he had despaired that Jouvet would never return, perhaps he had simply wanted to remain in the spotlight with something new. Giraudoux appeared to be uneasy when he was out of the spotlight, and sought to remain in the public eye. For example, Giraudoux never had

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10 Jouvet, Perspectives, 60.
11 Ibid., 26.
12 Ibid., 26. Jouvet received Apollon on May 13, 1942 and quickly put it into production for a June 16th premier. He stated that he had the play printed in a special luxury edition while in Brazil.
qualms about promoting his works in the pages of Comœdia. *La folle* was special, however, for he owed its very conception to Jouvet.

*La Folle de Chaillot* was based on a 1935 English play, *The Old Ladies*, written by Rodney Ackland; this play itself was based upon a 1924 novel by Hugh Walpole,\(^\text{13}\) thus one has the beginnings of a literary mis-en-abime. A London-based friend introduced Jouvet to the text, and the director immediately wanted to produce the play in France. Jouvet contacted Ackland’s agent, but two years of negotiations garnered him only frustration and a bad French translation. Jouvet became disgusted and broke off negotiations for the rights to produce a French translation of the play. In the meantime, however, Jouvet had spoken to Giraudoux about the play at great length, and they had already distributed the roles to an imaginary cast, among them Marguerite Moreno who later \textit{did} incarnate the title character of Aurélie in Giraudoux’s *La folle*. Moreno effectively set the standard for all future performances of the madwoman.\(^\text{14}\) Throughout the late 1930’s, Madame Moreno had steadily pestered Jouvet for a new role, and this is probably what lead to her eventually being cast as Aurélie.\(^\text{15}\)

The actual date on which Giraudoux began *La Folle de Chaillot* is often disputed. In his memoirs André Beucler described an April 1939 outing with the author to a Paris café, where they witnessed the apparition of an extravagantly dressed woman who, according to Beucler, Giraudoux described as “the famous madwoman. […] It’s the madwoman of Chaillot. She’s amazingly rich and silent. She is royal. She’s a kind of

\(^{13}\) Besson-Herlin, “Notice à *La Folle de Chaillot*” in Jean Giraudoux: Théâtre complet, 1718-1720.


living regret, a Baudelairian protest… She is the idleness that saves the world.”

Giraudoux, intrigued, began to imagine the woman’s personality, her likes and dislikes, her whims and strengths of character. Beucler wrote:

She does not believe that they’re organizing, she knows that they’re exploiting. […] She only sees those creatures who live, who walk, who still love. […] She knows nothing better than Paris. It belongs to her like a drawer, it’s also her living room. She hates that they dig through her drawers and that they use her living room as an office. She does not think beyond her instinct and mistrusts the dead people who have no reflection in mirrors or rivers, unlike the reflection of a tree, a coach, a grape, a carriage, or a bootie.17

One must ask why so much time elapsed between the April 1939 café outing and the first written traces of La Folle de Chaillot: an outline of Act One dating from April 1941 that is currently housed at the Pattee Library at Penn State University.18 As Beucler pointed out, shortly after their encounter with Aurélie’s inspiration, Giraudoux became the head of Propaganda for the French government,19 and one can fill in the timeline with the outbreak of the war, the publication of Pleins pouvoirs, and the French defeat. Thus it is not surprising that two years elapsed between the fateful meeting and the first rough outline of the play.

In any case, Giraudoux’s version bore little if any resemblance to the Ackland play. In contrast to Giraudoux’s great wealth of characters (which later caused problems for Jouvet in the form of funding and materials during the immediate post-war period of


17 Ibid., 38-39.

18 Besson-Herlin, 1719.

19 Beucler, 37.
shortages), the British version had only four characters, three of whom who are old
women living in genteel poverty in a boarding house. Each looks longingly to the past
and hopes to hold onto or recover what she has lost. One woman clings to the hope that
her son will return after many months of no news; another holds dear a piece of carved
amber that reminds her of the deceased friend who presented it to her (as well as the
memory of her dog and happier times). The third woman, Agatha, covets the possessions
of the other two: she seethes at the thought of the first receiving an inheritance, and acts
in an especially ruthless manner in her pursuit of the timid May’s beautiful amber
carving. She relentlessly tortures May into a heart attack\(^{20}\) with a casual, systematic
cruelty more evocative of Genet’s play *Les bonnes* than anything Giraudoux ever wrote,
including his *Folle de Chaillot*.

In spite of Jouvet’s big build up and the Parisian theater audiences’ desire to make
their symbolic hero, Giraudoux, come back to life, the director had a difficult time
finding both a theater and funding for the new production. France still suffered from
severe shortages, and *La Folle de Chaillot* required considerable resources. After all, the
play required costumes and salaries for thirty-nine characters, as well as materials for two
elaborate sets. In fact, *La Folle* was a veritable post-war *Soulier de satin*, a behemoth
requiring an inordinate amount of time, money, and energy to produce. According to
Besson-Herlin, it took Jouvet eight months of finagling in order to make the play a
possibility. First, a director who was subletting the Athénée had to be persuaded to leave.
Second, Suzanne Giraudoux did not want to allow Jouvet to produce the play. Her
reticence seems more indicative of her bad marriage and lingering resentment towards

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her late husband rather than any real reservations towards Jouvet’s directorial abilities. He, after all, had already directed thirteen of Giraudoux’s plays while the author was alive.\textsuperscript{21} Even Jouvet’s own administrators, who felt that the task was much too daunting, deserted him. Jouvet overcame the final, and biggest, problem – funding – by petitioning the French government to subsidize the play. Even so, the cash-strapped State required Jouvet to pay back their loan.\textsuperscript{22} Apparently, even the late Giraudoux was expected to stand on his own two feet.

By all accounts, Jouvet was a driven man, for one could say that he had fate on his side. According to Pierre Lestringuez,\textsuperscript{23} Giraudoux already fantasized about a Jouvet production of \textit{La Folle de Chaillot} back in 1943, and Lestringuez claimed that Giraudoux showed him a hand-written note on the finished manuscript of \textit{La Folle de Chaillot}: The inscription read: “This play was first produced by the Louis Jouvet company, at the Théâtre de l’Athénée, on October 17, 1945.” Lestringuez published this statement in \textit{XXe Siècle}, on December 13, 1945,\textsuperscript{24} just before the premiere of \textit{La Folle} on December 18\textsuperscript{th}.

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\textsuperscript{21} Jacques Body, “Introduction générale” to \textit{Oeuvres théâtrales complètes}, XXV-XXVI. The only two that Jouvet missed were \textit{Sodome et Gomorrhe} (when Jouvet was in South America) and \textit{Pour Lucrèce}, which Jean-Louis Barrault directed much later, in 1953.

\textsuperscript{22} Besson-Herlin, 1727.

\textsuperscript{23} Lestringuez worked as a playwright, scenarist, actor, and producer in the years before, during, and after the war. \url{http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0504562/}; Bergstrom, Janet, “Jean Renoir’s Return to France” in \textit{Poetics Today}, Vol. 17, No. 3, Creativity and Exile: European/American Perspectives I (Autumn, 1996), 453-489.

\textsuperscript{24} Agnes Raymond, \textit{Jean Giraudoux: The Theater of Victory and Defeat} (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1966), 124.
Lestringuez later explained that he remembered the exact date because it was his birthday.25

The newspaper *Combat*, with its impeccable reputation for resistance, repeated the story on December 20th, 1945, just after the premiere of the play. *Combat’s* Roger Grenier wrote:

In order to present Giraudoux’s most paradoxical play, Louis Jouvet had to confront his own paradox. After finishing his play, the late author wrote, “*La Folle de Chaillot* was performed for the first time on October 17, 1945”. As though this date were just around the corner.

Thus, the newspaper confirmed the story and made it more believable, in spite of the fact that by the time Giraudoux finished *La Folle de Chaillot*, the author and the director had lost all contact, for the last communication from Giraudoux that Jouvet received was the aforementioned text of *Apollon de Bellac* in February 1942.26

Although several people made reference to Giraudoux’s prophetic date, none specifically state what became of this key text. Most importantly, Jouvet stated in a letter to Madame Giraudoux (in which he basically begs her to allow him to stage the play) that he had never seen the note with his own eyes. He wrote:

I learned from newspapers and from friends who had the privilege of seeing the manuscript of *de La Folle de Chaillot* that Jean wrote upon it in his own hand “This play was staged on October 1st, 1945 at the Théâtre de l’Athénée Louis Jouvet.” This happened in 1943 and it appears that he said, “This morning, I’ve made a prediction.”27

25 Ibid., 125. Raymond cites this interview as appearing in *Nouvelle du Matin* on December 18, 1945. Raymond also credits Lestringuez’ play, *Tricolore*, a depiction of the Revolutionary figure Théroigne de Méricourt, as partly inspiring Giraudoux’s madwoman Aurélie. 125-126. However, no other critic backs this theory, and Raymond states that she received this information from Lestringuez himself, which leaves some room for doubt as to its veracity.

26 Letter from Jean Giraudoux to Louis Jouvet written in Geneva and published in the *Cahiers Jean Giraudoux* no. 9 (1980), 110. (my translation)

One must note that in this version of the legend, the date had changed from October 17th to the first. Jouvet himself was relying on questionable third-hand information. Brett Dawson, who presented and annotated the Jouvet-Giraudoux correspondence in the Cahiers Jean Giraudoux, and who later co-edited the Pléiade Edition of Giraudoux’s plays (along with noted Giraudoux biographer Jacques Body), could find no trace of the prediction. In a note to the letter, he reiterated Lestringuez’s statements but admitted that they were unverifiable. Dawson suggests that the text on which Giraudoux wrote his prophesy might have been a proof that was later discarded, but notes that the definitive version established by Jouvet only mentioned the actual date that the play was first performed: December 19, 1945. The Pléiade version further muddles the question, as it gives the date of the first performance as December 22, 1945.

On the other hand, a 1943 page proof of the text (in the collection of Louis Jouvet’s papers at the Arsenal Library in Paris) contained a page that was blank except for the words “The first performance of La Folle de Chaillot took place at the Theater…” with no mention of the specifics. Dawson hypothesizes that Giraudoux may have filled in the blanks in front of Lestringuez during lunch one day. However, this does not correspond to what Lestringuez stated. Could this just be due to faulty memory, or is it possible that the “prediction” never took place at all? Considering Giraudoux’s status, the rumors surrounding his death, and the post-war atmosphere, it is highly likely that this

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28 Giraudoux, Jean, La Folle de Chaillot (Paris: Grasset, 1946). (All translations are my own.)

29 Giraudoux, Théâtre complet, 950.

30 Dawson, Note no. 4 on Jouvet’s letter to Suzanne Giraudoux. 115-116. “La première représentation de La Folle de Chaillot a été donnée au théâtre…”
detail was fabricated. In a sense, the Parisian audiences were told that this was tantamount to a final performance from beyond the grave, and that Jouvet had received Giraudoux’s blessing to carry out his last wishes. In fact, it rings similar to the legend that Giraudoux was murdered by the Gestapo – a fabrication that added to the myth of the man.

Rumors flew during this emotionally-charged period just after the Liberation. As we have seen with regards to Giraudoux, among the most sensational was that begun by Louis Aragon, who stated that the Gestapo had secretly assassinated Jean Giraudoux (an utterly unsubstantiated story). Thus, Lestringuez effectively threw another log on the fire of the Giraudoux legend: the author, secretly involved with the Resistance, secretly murdered, had privately predicted the end of the war and the production of his play.

Curiously, Jacques Body abstains from the question, both in his early biographies of Giraudoux as well as his most recent work published in 2004. In fact, he barely mentions La Folle de Chaillot and does not even refer to the famous prediction. Marthe Besson-Herlin who wrote the “Notice” to La Folle de Chaillot in the Pléiade edition, also makes no reference to the rumor.

Whether or not the prediction actually occurred, it fanned the flames of the French imagination, which matters for literary history. Louis Jouvet certainly seemed to have believed it, as evidenced by his letter to Suzanne Giraudoux, and if not, he used the rumor in order to help overcome the widow’s resistance to allowing him to produce the play. Jouvet also refers to the prophecy in an interview that he gave to Opéra on

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31 Body, Jean Giraudoux, 813. In this latest biography, Body integrates material from his earlier texts such as Giraudoux et l’Allemagne with collections of the author’s letters that he had edited at an earlier date, but adds very little new information. This is rather surprising given certain polemics (anti-Semitism for instance) that have sprung up in the past two decades.
December 12, 1945, in which he told the story of how when he was leaving Casablanca to return to France after four years of exile, a friend gave him a newspaper cutting containing the prediction. The prediction had “a strangely imperative quality” and Jouvet stated, “I had only one goal: to respect the last wishes of Giraudoux.”

Strangely enough, in an interview given to Alexandre Astruc that appeared in the February 20, 1945 issue of *Combat*, Jouvet claimed to have “No projects” in the works and ended the interview with an ironic request: “Do you have any manuscripts? Bring them to me!”

Perhaps Jouvet preferred to play the Giraudoux card closer to the vest – after all, at this time he had neither the funding nor permission from Suzanne Giraudoux to produce *La folle*. He also would have needed time to reacclimatize himself after such a long absence. One cannot doubt his long-term commitment to Giraudoux, but this interview does not give the impression of a man driven to achieve a single goal, that of fulfilling his late friend’s final wish by producing his last play. A true showman, Jouvet knew when to pull out all the stops and drum up publicity, and what better way to re-establish himself in post-war Paris than to produce the last work of one of the country’s greatest playwrights?

Publicity also came in negative forms, such as the Emile Buré editorial entitled, “Salvaging his memory with *La folle de Chaillot*: Was Jean Giraudoux a collaborator?” which reiterated rumors (that had their origins mainly in the United States) that Giraudoux had been a collaborator. Although Buré refrains from directly condemning

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32 *Opéra* (December 12, 1945) as cited by Dawson in his note on the letter from Jouvet to Suzanne Giraudoux, 116. (my translation)

33 Alexandre Astruc, “Louis Jouvet est rentré” in *Combat* (February 20, 1945). (my translation)

34 Emile Buré, ”Mémoire sauve à propos de *La Folle de Chaillot*: Jean Giraudoux fut-il collaborationniste?” in *L’Ordre* (December 19, 1945). According to Sapiro, *L’Ordre*, founded in 1929, was “nationalist-leaning paper that had adopted a position against the Munich Accords,” 647.
Giraudoux in his reprinted article (it originally appeared in the US in *France-Amérique* on February 13, 1944, shortly after the author’s death), he *does* reproach him for entering the political arena. Buré then takes pot-shots at Jean Giraudoux’s son for defending his father in what he deems a “pious and prideful filial defense.” Although Buré does not reprint Giraudoux’s son’s entire letter, what does appear shows Jean-Pierre Giraudoux, an active member of the Resistance, portraying his father as a national treasure. He attributed his father’s decision to stay in France to the desire to

> Help maintain the national flame and keep it alive, to stay in France, to suffer with her, to bandage her wounds, while others who were younger, including his son, continued with the military fight for the Liberation with De Gaulle.

According to his son, the dramatist offered himself up to his country, an idea evocative of the words of Pétain who, “Christ-like” gave the gift of himself to France in order to alleviate her suffering,\(^{35}\) as well as that of De Gaulle who in June 1940 urged others to “unite with [him] in action, sacrifice, and hope.”\(^{36}\) Moreover, according to Jean-Pierre Giraudoux his father stayed with a certain purpose in mind, which the son implies was resistance:

> He knew, for he knew our enemies well, and knew how to read better than you, sir, and that the Germans would not want to bother him, if only for propaganda purposes. His name was of such value that it allowed him to act with relative freedom. [...] He continued to write under the protection of his great name. [...] The film, *La Duchesse de Langeais* was one of the rare *victories* of French cinema during the German invasion of the cinema. (my italics)

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\(^{35}\) Discours de Philippe Pétain, broadcast June 17, 1940 cited in Azéma and Bédarida, 165.

\(^{36}\) [http://www.charles-de-gaulle.org/article.php3?id_article=285](http://www.charles-de-gaulle.org/article.php3?id_article=285)
Giraudoux’s son, like critics during and after his father’s lifetime, equates the playwright’s success with the victory of French thought. Buré does not accept this estimation, however, and closes his article by sarcastically recalling Aragon’s statements regarding Giraudoux’s murder by the Gestapo, and the fact that the dramatist “was not only resistant, but super-resistant” and that that because of this, he had to bow before the decidedly “resistant new play La Folle de Chaillot.” He also calls Jouvet a “known Pétainiste,” which was absurd. Thus, not quite everyone mythologized Giraudoux.

In spite of the nasty tone of Buré’s editorial, he did have a point, for the non-communist left in particular had adopted this play as symbolic of the Liberation, and nowhere was that more evident than in the pages of Combat. Roger Grenier described the triumphant opening night of La folle attended by “All of Paris (le Tout-Paris), really All of Paris.” He continued by stating that only General De Gaulle was missing, but that was because he would be attending a few days later. Even Léon Triech, the critic from Buré’s L’Ordre appeared impressed as he listed some of the guests: André Malraux (the much decorated resistant and new Minister for Information), François Mauriac, Jacques Debrû-Bridel, Louis Aragon, and Elsa Triolet, certified Resistants among the less politically engaged such as Jean Cocteau. Grenier wrote:

37 Emile Buré was a nationalist and anti-communist, but ‘overcame’ (with great reluctance) his attitude towards the Communists and worked with the Communist resistance group Le Front National because they were already well-organized. (Sapiro, 471) It remained an uneasy alliance, and after the war Buré went on to edit L’ordre which hosted attacks against Jean Paulhan among others. One key issue for Buré’s departure from the CNE appears to be a conflict between his friend Jacques Debû-Bridel and Louis Aragon, which resulted in Debû-Bridel being excluded from the CNE after the war. (Sapiro, 646-647) Thus, he harbored some ill-feelings towards Aragon, and the manner in which he referenced him is no mere chance.

38 Roger Grenier, “Jouvet a fait sa rentrée à l’Athénée dans La Folle de Chaillot” in Combat (December 20, 1945).

39 Léon Triech, “Sur un banc de Chaillot: La Folle de Chaillot à l’Athénée” in L’Ordre (December 21, 1945). Other reviews prominently mention the names of resistants attending the performance, among them
Louis Jouvet acted as though October 17th, 1945 were the next day. As though nothing happened in between. As though there had never been a Waffen SS in the rue Auber, in the Square de l’Opéra, in front of the Athénée, and as though [Paris] had never been occupied by committees and organizations, and as though in 1939, the rehearsals for Ondine were never interrupted.\(^{40}\)

Thus, the premiere took place as though the war had never existed, yet Grenier evoked the memory of all that the theater (and France) had suffered during the Occupation.

For Grenier and other critics, the premiere of *La Folle de Chaillot* signified a symbolic triumph over the enemy. French theatergoers were no longer subjected to blackouts and curfews that curtailed performances (indeed, *La Folle de Chaillot*, was so long that it would have had to been started very early in order for audience-members to catch the last metro). The theater seats were no longer filled with German soldiers or had large gaps where blocks of seats had been reserved for the occupying forces. *La Folle de Chaillot* was a joyous celebration, a French play by a great French author and produced by an honored French director who preferred exile to compromise.

*Combat*’s follow-up article linked the play with victory in an even stronger fashion. Jacques Lemarchand’s article noted that “There was a great feeling of freedom in the air – more precisely a feeling of liberation – that was very pleasing to behold.”\(^{41}\) The performance that Lemarchand attended was a gala event entitled “Résistants de 1940” which was attended by none other than General de Gaulle\(^{42}\) and “bonafide”

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\(^{40}\) Grenier, “Jouvet a fait sa rentrée...”


\(^{42}\) Besson-Herlin, 1727.
resisters of the first hour. With such prestigious company at a time when France was still in emotional turmoil over the traitorous collaborators, who could resist the implications? *La Folle de Chaillot* simply had to be a resistance play, as it was “officially” endorsed by the head of the Free French.

Former resistance members also embraced the new Giraudoux play in the press. In his column in *Lettres françaises*, Louis Martin-Chauffier, who founded the Comité National des Écrivains before being arrested by the Germans in April 1944 and subsequently deported to Bergen-Belsen, saw *La folle* as defying the “invasion and a country divested of freedom and smiles.” He dismissed the idea of some critics (notably those of *L’Ordre*) that the play was mere fluff and amusement. He stated, “Just entertainment? More like a [resistance] tract, written in the blackest ink, even when its writing swirls with arabesques.” In other words, the spectator should not be fooled by Giraudoux’s wordy, urbane style, for

The artifices are so bold – and deliberately so – that they act as an ingenious smokescreen: they emphasize, they lay things bare, they obfuscate. They transform a last desolate irony into scorn.

Thus, Giraudoux masked his real critique of the invasion (and who could miss the contemporary reference) not of mere speculators, but of the German Occupiers. He hid his critique under a secret code of witty style in order to mask his true critique and protect himself from the invaders - at least as Martin-Chauffier understood him.

Other journalists quickly rallied to Chauffier’s hypothesis and in fact, linked the Giraudoux play to an act of resistance in an even more explicit fashion. *L’Aurore’s*

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43 Martin-Chauffier wrote for *Le Figaro* before the war. Sapiro, 216-219, 672-674.

Gustave Joly\textsuperscript{45} associated the play with its author’s distaste for Vichy and its politics (when in fact Giraudoux’s unpublished writing, published only posthumously, shows a complex mix of feelings towards Pétain). Joly wrote

Jean Giraudoux’s flame went out just when Hope was beginning to burgeon. But he felt the hypocrisy (\textit{tartufferie}) all too keenly. He saw the spinelessness and the self-satisfied ferociousness of the society, a society which Vichy and the National Revolution filled with their secret plans. [Giraudoux felt this too deeply] not to want to give a final jolt to the collective lie.

Thus, Joly equates Giraudoux’s critique of a bunch of greedy speculators who want to destroy Paris, symbolic of France as a whole, with the Vichy government, speculated in defeated France for their own cynical gain. Joly continued:

Now is the time of the “mecs”, a symbolic quartet of whom settle in on the terrace of \textit{Chez Francis}. Will they kill off hope for the poor, for the lovers of \textit{Liberty}, for whom life isn’t solely composed of commissions, sordid bribes, schemes and unnatural takeovers? \textit{La Comtesse} is there.\textsuperscript{46}

For Joly, \textit{La Comtesse} (la Folle de Chaillot) eradicates those who have made life so miserable during the previous four years.

Another former resistant, Joseph Kessel, described French theater as a “weapon” in his article for France-Soir, patriotically entitled “Not just a Parisian event: The performance of \textit{La Folle de Chaillot} was a French highlight.” Kessel had perhaps been most famous for co-writing writing the words (along with Maurice Druon) to Anna Marley’s song “Le chant des partisans;” the song later became an unofficial anthem for the Free French Forces after the Marseillaise was banned. Kessel left France by illegally

\textsuperscript{45}\textit{L’Aurore} was a resistance publication founded in Verviers and originally associated with the Belgian Communist Party. Tania Hallender, “La victoire sur le fascisme, c'est un milliard de choses qui se sont produites partout en Europe : Entretien avec le professeur Cyrille Sironval, ancien résistant et déporté ” (August 24, 2005). After the Liberation it moved to Paris, eventually became a reactionary daily, and in 1985 was absorbed by the conservative \textit{Le Figaro}.

\textsuperscript{46}Gustave Joly, “ \textit{La Folle de Chaillot à l’Athénée }” in \textit{L’Aurore} (December 21, 1945)
crossing the Pyrenees, joined De Gaulle in London, and during the war flew resistance contact missions over France,47 one of the most dangerous tasks for a pilot. Thus, it was highly appropriate that he built up the performance of La Folle de Chaillot dedicated to the “Résistants de 1940” for the following night. He described the implications of La Folle de Chaillot:

Theater is one of France’s most glorious weapons. It has courageously served her for centuries. La Folle de Chaillot revives an illustrious and necessary tradition. In today’s impoverished France, in our sad and uneasy France, the combined gifts of Jean Giraudoux, Louis Jouvet, and Christian Bérard have beaten poverty, sadness, and uncertainty. They have shown that the country, that some believed should despair, will cede nothing to others in this essential area.48

Thus, Giraudoux’s play continued a proud, centuries-old tradition of the real France: the theater. His theater was a shining star whose trajectory one can trace throughout the centuries, a constant, an emblem of “Eternal France.” La Folle de Chaillot represented a triumph, like that of De Gaulle’s, over the forces that sought to mire the country in hopelessness.

One can compare Kessel’s idea of the long history of French theater, of which La folle was emblematic inspiration, to the claim of a “real, eternal France” used by General de Gaulle during his address in front of the Hôtel de Ville on August 25, 1944. Joly implied that Giraudoux’s play symbolically carried on the fight for all of France. Especially as Aurélie, La Folle de Chaillot, also called the Countess, prevents mercenaries from destroying Paris.


48 Joseph Kessel, “Mieux qu’un événement parisien : La representation générale de La Folle de Chaillot fut un haut instant français ” in France-Soir (December 21, 1945). (my translation)
Giraudoux clearly had important advocates on the right, as well as the left, as evidenced by the attendance (excitedly pointed out by Kessel) of De Gaulle and André Malraux. This was similar to the way in which both sides of the political spectrum rallied to claim the author as a resistant just after the Liberation, when unsubstantiated rumors ran rampant regarding his supposed martyrdom at the hands of the Gestapo.

Critics by and large embraced the play and forgave some of its shortcomings in the way of pacing and action. The Combat article in particular noted that had Giraudoux lived, he would have made the necessary cuts and re-writes during rehearsals, as he had done in the past.49 Very few reviewers, with the noted exceptions of those of La Marseillaise and the aforementioned L’Ordre openly revolted against the idea that the play was a resistance drama. These two openly ridiculed the idea that the play was a resistance drama. In particular, the reviewer for La Marseillaise, a communist daily in Provence, stated:

Some have claimed – and one must pay tribute to their marvelous imaginations – that La Folle de Chaillot was the work of a resistant. Resistant? How, pray tell? What mysterious formulas are needed in order to find the slightest allusion to the German Occupation in this play, which was written in 1942? Such hermetic and well-hidden irony - what wonderful protection from the wrath of those in power. The Germans would have laughed and wouldn’t have recognized themselves as the capitalists in the play.50

In spite of these few dissenting voices, the majority of the reviewers gave La Folle de Chaillot a resistance stamp. After all, it had the official seal of the Resistance from all around, and in that time of crisis, France needed one of its most famous playwrights to


50 La Folle de Chaillot de Jean Giraudoux” in La Marseillaise (January 3-9, 1946).
have secretly been resisting against the enemy. Moreover, the play carried with it the patina of Louis Jouvet, someone who preferred self-imposed exile to working under German censorship.

On the surface, the play does have some elements that evoke the idea of Resistance, most notably the invasion of France by people who wish to exploit it. This can be viewed much like the actions of the Germans during the Occupation, when they used French labor and materials to feed the war machine of the Vaterland. They certainly descended like carrion birds upon the fallen country, taking the best with them and gradually denuding the Hexagon of its resources. Moreover, they threaten to destroy, both physically and symbolically, the city that lies at the center of all French activity – Paris. For example, when the Président hears that Paris’s subsoil is full of oil, he exclaims, “Paris’s subsoil is worth billions.”51 Their thirst for the oil that they believe lies beneath the capitol is of primordial importance - the city’s rich history, architecture, and unique people become expendable. The Prospector expresses his frustration with the city planner who, “for the last twenty years, has refused any permits for prospecting in Paris and its suburbs.” Instead of using legal channels, he intends to use a more direct method. He states, “our enemy’s house will blow up in five minutes. A young man, who cannot refuse to help me, is setting up a charge of dynamite.”52 Once the city planner has been eliminated, they can proceed to blow up the city in search of oil. Thus, one can view the conspirators as the representatives of brute force who will subjugate Paris, not unlike the Germans.

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51 Giraudoux, La Folle de Chaillot, 29.
52 Ibid., 38-39.
To continue with this interpretation, Aurélie, the folle, can be viewed as a representative of the “real” France, the eternal France of which De Gaulle spoke. Her title, Comtesse, indicates a long affiliation with the country, the noble backbone in a world gone awry. Moreover, her title evokes the good old days, when France was a stable, sovereign empire. She now lives as one of the dispossessed. Her helpers, the modest, hard-working French citoyens such as the Chiffonnier (played by Jouvet), or Irma (la plongeuse) display the best qualities of society: honest and helpful, the city (and by extension, the country) needs their daily contributions in order to function. They, along with Aurélie, band together in a secret pact of Resistance and thus rid their world of threat.

However, when one looks more closely at the play’s text, Giraudoux’s political writings, as well as the historical context of the period just before the outbreak of World War II, one comes to a very different conclusion. La Folle de Chaillot condemns actions by the French within France, not those of foreign forces who invade the country. The exploiters who attempt to ravage and destroy Paris for financial gain are all of French origin.53

The first act of La Folle de Chaillot takes place on the terrace of Chez Francis at the place de l’Alma, which, as the Président points out, is the “official symbol of Franco-Belgian friendship”54 memorializing a victory over the Russians. In fact, the Battle of

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54 Giraudoux, La Folle de Chaillot, 37.
Alma actually consisted of a French, British, and Turkish coalition against the Russians.\textsuperscript{55}

The Président and the Baron are celebrating their new financial undertaking with cigars and port, and the Baron remarks that “I feel like it’s one of those mornings in Bagdad where thieves meet each other and, before trying out their new luck, tell each other about their lives.”\textsuperscript{56} Thus, we see from the very outset that these men are up to no good and are forming a pact of thieves. This idea is underscored by presence of a passing singer, who comments by singing, “Do you hear the bells of the musicians of hell?” the beginning of the song “La Belle Polonaise.”\textsuperscript{57}

Next the Baron presents his credentials,

My name is Jean-Hippolyte, the Baron Tommard. For the first fifty years, my life was simple. My primary activity was limited to selling off the properties that I had inherited for each of my girlfriends. I traded names of properties for names of girls: les Essarts for Mémène, la Maladrerie for Linda, Durandière for Daisy. The more French the name of the property, the more exotic the girl’s name. My last farm was called Frotteau, and my last girlfriend’s name was Anouchka.\textsuperscript{58}

Not only is the Baron a skirt-chasing do-nothing, but he has literally sold off his inheritance, his identity as a French nobleman, to support his conquest of foreign women. Symbolically, he has sold his roots, as represented by each property, to a foreign “power.” When one looks more closely at the names of the women, one sees a gradual shift from the homegrown Mémène, obviously the name of a dancer or a woman of a similarly dubious profession, to Linda and Daisy, English names, and finally Anouchka, a

\textsuperscript{55} Winifred Baumgart, \textit{The Crimean War: 1853-1856} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), The Battle of Alma was the first major battle of the Crimean War.

\textsuperscript{56} Giraudoux, \textit{La Folle de Chaillot}, 11.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 12. “Entends-tu le signal de l’orchestre infernal?”

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 12.
Russian name. Through his frivolous and decadent behavior, the Baron has allowed the “enemy” to gain a toe-hold on what was historically French land. He epitomizes a member of the effete ruling class.

Not only has the Baron effectively sold his inheritance to pay for his dalliances with foreign women, he also has prostituted one of his former mistresses (Anouchka) to the Président’s son, who had noticed the similarity between the two men’s handwriting. The Baron barters the woman’s favors to the young man (thus playing the role of pimp) in return for an introduction to the Président and a seat on the board of his new company. The Baron is a coveted silent partner, for his old family name will lend legitimacy to the new enterprise, even though he has no idea what the business will be. We learn another detail of the Baron’s corrupt character when he admits to blackmailing a woman who later attempted suicide (in front of her younger brother) and went blind.⁵⁹

The Président’s character is even more shocking. First, although his mother martyred herself to pay for his studies, he states that he cannot even remember her face, because he only saw her constantly bent over, scrubbing and washing for her son’s benefit. Next, he relates that he was expelled from school (that his mother had slaved in order to pay for) because of his first business: a pornographic library that he rented out to his classmates. He then established himself in Paris, where he was fired from a series of small jobs for his thievery, until he finally had his first success passing counterfeit 100 Franc pieces with the help of some accomplices:

All my brushes with greatness left me famished, humiliated, and ragged. So I turned to those expressionless, nameless faces that I had noticed lingering in the middle of crowds, just senselessly watching them. I met the first hairless face in the middle of a crowded metro – he made me my

⁵⁹ Ibid., 33.
first *real* thousand francs. I met another face, no less hairless but stained with wine, at the Place de l’Opéra; he helped my talent bloom by entrusting me with a team of men who sold used-up batteries. I understood. And since then I’ve simply looked for one of these lifeless masks, full of tics or even ravaged by pockmarks. When I had the good luck to spot them, I became what I am today: president of eleven companies, member of fifty-two boards, holder of an equal number of bank accounts, and the designated director of the Worldwide Company from whom you’ve agreed to accept a seat.60

Thus, the Président is a virtual lexicon of sins: lack of filial duty, depravity, theft, general dishonesty, as well as manipulating others for his own purpose. He corrupts the young and dispirited, leading them into a devil’s pact of greed and gain. Furthermore, he sees neither his accomplices nor his victims as human beings. Instead, they are “masks,” a substitute for the whole of the person, a notion which dehumanizes them. After the Président has used his pawns, he dispenses with them, for there is always another waiting in the wings. Just as the Baron exchanges his women, the Président exchanges his accomplices.

It must be noted that the Vichy government “[denounced] liberal capitalism as a foreign import that had been degraded” by 1939 into ‘enslavement to the powers of money.”61 Immediately preceding the war, there had been efforts by Catholic traditionalists to “abolish limited liability,” and in September 1940 the Vichy government voted in a law that “[increased] the personal responsibility of the president of a corporation in case of bankruptcy and [limited] to two the number of companies of which one person could be a director.”62 Thus the shifty Président of *La Folle de Chaillot* bears

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60 Ibid., 14.

61 Paxton, 213-214.

62 Ibid., 214.
a striking, although exaggerated, resemblance to the greedy insiders who were deemed responsible (as well as decadent) for some of the economic abuses that helped destabilize France’s economy.

The Président sheds further light on his dealings when the Baron inquires about the nature of their business. The Président responds, surprised, “You’re the first member of the board who has ever shown such curiosity…In fact, I still don’t know its nature.”63

He continues

Dear Baron, you should know that in the beginning a company doesn’t need a purpose, it needs a name. We businessmen have never troubled our share-holders with the need to think. When they invest, they want to make a financial transaction, not give themselves fodder for their imagination. We don’t want to pique their imagination, and we do not commit the error of novelists, who, when they already have their name of their book, want to write the novel, too.64

Thus, the Président constructs the edifice of his financial affairs on a foundation of nothingness. The businesses make and sell nothing tangible except for the dreams of riches that their investors have when they invest. As these are only pipe-dreams, the investors destined to reap only disappointment.

At this point, the Président sees one of these faces: “a signpost of humane trickery, greed, and obstinacy”65 whom the Président states that they can trust implicitly.

He tells the Baron that

The way I operate is to tell everything to the strangers that I meet by chance, but only after they have offered me their lifeless brain as collateral. Not one of them has ever betrayed me. Their grim mouths, their shifty eyes – in our profession they guarantee loyalty, our kind of

63 Ibid., 15.
64 Ibid., 16.
65 Ibid., 16.
loyalty. For their part, they also know what I am. They won’t flinch at showing me all the goods.66

The Président implies the notion of a race of thieves, who band together like a pack of wolves in order to fleece the innocent sheep of the world. Here, Giraudoux begins to create the idea of “them” the immoral, versus “us” the moral. They are not like us. Their very physiognomy sets them apart and renders them suspect.

The appearance of a deaf-mute asking for charity underlines this idea. The Président refuses to touch his envelopes, for he states that the deaf-mute is a police spy who collects fingerprints; he then condescendingly admits that the tactic is useless, as only those willing to do a charitable act would touch the envelopes anyway. The deaf-mute begins to sign some essential truths, translated by Irma the dishwasher. He signs that “Life is beautiful.” To which the Président replies “He’s not someone who’s entitled to have an opinion about life.” In response, the deaf-mute signs, “And your soul is ugly.”

The deaf-mute, an agent for charity, displays a certain omniscience regarding the Président’s past, as though his condition has given him special powers. In like fashion, Irma demonstrates a similar omniscience when she states that the Président has two wives. Another “little person,” a shoe-lace seller, appears and is also cursed and denied help by the Président:

An intolerable camaraderie allows this scum to make a living without us. The lace-sellers have the shoe-less for clients, the tie-seller’s customers are tramps wearing collarless shirts, the busker with his mechanical ducks has the strongmen from les Halles. That’s where they get that mocking tone in their voice, that insolence in their eyes. That’s where they get their reprehensible independence from.67

66 Ibid., 17.
67 Ibid., 20.
In this scene, Giraudoux creates a type of solidarity among the poor but morally upright. The “little people” resist the powerful, money-hungry speculators, who will not be satisfied until they are crushed, dispirited, underfoot.

Giraudoux adds another member to the unsavory group with the appearance of the Coulissier, who explains his tactics for manipulating the market, among which are starting rumors of war that cause people to panic and sell at a loss, whereupon he and his cohorts buy their stocks at reduced prices. When the rumors dissipate (also with the Coulissier’s help), the stock prices rise again, so he sells them back again, then bandies about more unfavorable rumors regarding the stock, which cause the price to sink again. After which, rumors of peace cause the stocks’ value to rise. During the roller coaster ride of the market, only the Coulissier regularly makes money, while his clients go bankrupt and commit suicide.68

While he manipulates the market via rumors, the Coulissier bribes government agents in order to assure their complicity. As the inspector of finances of the Provisionary Textile Committee, he knows all the legal loopholes that will assure that his company will turn a profit. As a result of his scheming, he manages to eliminate his competitors and corner the market, thus enabling him to further fix prices.69 Giraudoux underlines the slight of hand action with the appearance of a juggler, who juggles pins, then flaming pins, and finally diamond rings.70

68 Ibid., 20.
69 Ibid., 21-22.
70 Ibid., 20-22.
The final member of the group, the Prospecteur Roger Van Hutten, the “face” that the Président has seen earlier, introduces himself at this point. He relates his illegitimate pedigree, which has caused him to distance himself from everything in life “where one needs an identity card.” We cannot even know if that his real name. An outsider, he makes a living by exploiting others, and dabbles in everything from the illegal trafficking of rhinoceros horn (for which his helpers were executed), to betraying his wife and her tribe by selling out their religion in order to excavate their sacred sites for oil. His wife, like his other cohorts, ended up being impaled by her tribe for her supposed treachery. Thus the Prospecteur represents all those who are ruthlessly intent on gain; he destroys everything in his path like a carrier of a deadly virus.

In short, the Prospecteur has discovered that an important source of petrol lies beneath Paris, and that they only have to destroy the city (after bribing the right people) in order to access it. He and his new conspirators represent the very worst of modern society, that segment which has no reverence for history, beauty, peace, or religion, but only seeks cold profits. He states, “In this century, faith and martyrs have given way to fossil fuels.” Nothing is sacred to them, not their mothers, not the city in which they live:

How can I tell you exactly where [the oil deposit is], especially in this city, which they’ve turned into a historical junk-yard! They let everything pile up, in all the key places, in order to throw us off the scent: at intersections, at bends in the road, on café terraces and in gardens, alongside cemeteries. Those spiritual deposits of the past created by illustrious souls in the pursuit of love and war. […] Mankind gets its jollies out thwarting my ventures.

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71 Ibid., 27-28.
72 Ibid., 30.
73 Ibid., 30-31.
Here, Giraudoux creates an opposition between modernity, as represented by the act of prospecting, and the very bricks and mortar which contain the literary and cultural history of the Parisien people. The first threatens the second by sheer disregard and avarice.

In fact, the members of the *Union bancaire du sous-sol parisien* would pick through the city/mother’s entrails like carrion birds. The Prospector states, “Water is the one substance from which the earth can conceal nothing, the most fantastic spring betrays her innards (*entrailles*).”

The word *entrailles* here takes on a special significance, for it brings to mind the image of a mother’s womb, a place for fostering new life. What the Prospecteur proposes is to pillage that womb, a symbolic forced abortion, for financial gain.

Moreover, Giraudoux elaborates on a critique of modern society that he made in his pre-war essays, *Pleins Pouvoirs*. Throughout these essays (and indeed, in his letters and the unfinished text of *Sans Pouvoirs*), Giraudoux examines the idea of urban planning. As we have seen, he actually hoped that the government would create the post of Minister of Urban Planning so that he could put his theories into practice. As this never occurred, Giraudoux used majors themes of *La Folle de Chaillot* to reiterate his ideas. One cannot help but notice certain parallels between the ideas contained in *Pleins pouvoirs* and *Sans pouvoirs* and the themes of *La Folle de Chaillot*; most notable of these are livable space, urban blight, profiteering, and land speculation. These themes, which are in constant with Giraudoux’s political essays, have gone long-ignored by

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74 Ibid., 31.
critics as they sought to establish *La Folle de Chaillot* as politically charged resistance drama.

In his 1939 essay “La France de toujours: notre conscience” Giraudoux critiqued the lassitude and corruption of an indifferent French state. He wrote, “It smells like gas here. If it smells like a demon and like an open valve, that is the reason we want to shoot straight – we are trying to find the source of corruption.” He uses the metaphor of the threat of a gas leak to symbolize the menace to the French State. But the idea of corruptive force of noxious fumes does not function as a simple metaphor, for Giraudoux indicates one of the real threats to public health, that of air pollution:

With regards to its hygiene, Paris is the only city that has officially declared open season on living space and green areas, on those cubic meters of fresh air which, everywhere else, are considered to be as valuable as the most precious historical monuments. Companies invade parks each and every day; these companies eat away at the areas reserved for trees and walkers. [...] Modern Paris, with its gas and fume-filled air, has to be happy with only a quarter of the oxygen that existed back in the time of the Second Empire. The most significant actions of city sanitation planners have consisted of replacing the dying linden and chestnut trees with more resistant varieties. We have replaced neither the air nor the young children.

According to Giraudoux, greedy developers threaten the very lives of Parisians by whittling away the very substance that is most essential to human life: oxygen. Thus, the battle for green, life-renewing space has become a battle of life and death. Although the government has done some window-dressing in the form of planting a small quantity of

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75 Body cites a letter dating September 17, 1941 from Giraudoux to his son, “I am once again trying my chances as an urban developer and am trying to bring my science to those who are claiming to recreate the country.” as cited by Body, 433-434. (my translation)


77 Ibid., 89.
trees (presumably along the most fashionable boulevards), they have allowed the poorest areas to be invaded by concrete, the ultimate representative of modern building.

In a similar fashion, Giraudoux raises the question of preserving architecture:

The oldest monuments or sites are never destroyed because of public works, but instead, because of personal convenience. They are never torn down for modern buildings that are worth-while or long-lasting, but only for cheap and transitional constructions.\(^78\)

In a similar fashion, the plans of the Président’s company represent the same type of threat to the face of Paris; they do not attempt to renew or create, but only to destroy for self-serving ends.

If the members of the Union Bancaire du Sous-sol Parisien embody the gamut of sin (murder, theft, destruction, betrayal, falsehood, lasciviousness) that threatens Paris, then Aurélie, the title character of the Folle de Chaillot, personifies the exact opposite: honesty, protection, and above all, continuity. Even her fanciful appearance implies a connection with the past, for she appears as a great lady, wears a dress with a train, a hat like that of Marie-Antoinette and slippers from the time of Louis XIII.\(^79\) Aurélie, as well as the other three folles of the play, all display a deliberately anachronistic form of dress that underlines their connection with a different era, as well as the idea that they spend all day on the streets of Paris. Each woman represents one neighborhood of the city.\(^80\) One

\(^78\) Ibid., 82.

\(^79\) Giraudoux, La Folle de Chaillot, 34.

\(^80\) Tom Rosenthal, “Picture Imperfect” in The New Statesman (March 12, 2001). Some attribute the inspiration of the character of Aurélïe in La Folle de Chaillot to André Brassai’s 1932 photograph of “La môme Bijou, bar de la place Pigalle.” La Môme Pigalle was a former prostitute who haunted the Montmartre area. However, Body makes no mention of this idea, and there is no indication that Aurélïe had at any point been prostitute. I rather think of her as a dispossessed noble, given some of her statements regarding her childhood and having lost her wealth due to stock speculation. Giraudoux, La Folle de Chaillot, 56, 65.
might argue that Aurélie is both poor and mad, therefore it would be likely that she wear
out-dated clothing, but one must note that her accoutrements are not of her own era (we
may surmise her to be born circa 1880, thus the fashionable clothing of her youth would
have been the lacy Victorian-inspired frocks of the fin de siècle), but of a distinctly
different time, a nobler era. Furthermore, Giraudoux’s stage directions indicate that
Aurélie wears a “giant iris,” a detail which several characters underline. The purple
color of the iris is one that has traditionally been associated with royalty, and moreover,
in the second half of the first act, the Chasseur presents Aurélie with a collar made of
ermine, a fur used to adorn the garments of kings and queens.

Indeed, the name “La Folle de Chaillot” functions more as a title than a
description of her state of mind. When the Garçon explains to the the Président, “That’s
la Folle de Chaillot, Monsieur.” the Président asks, “A madwoman?” The Garçon then
corrects him, stating, “Why a madwoman? Why should she be crazy? I’m telling you
what they call her. Who said anything about crazy? I won’t permit you to insult her.
That’s La Folle de Chaillot.” The Président quickly becomes outraged that she, a poor,
ill-dressed, seemingly deranged woman, should receive preferential treatment while he, a
man of money and power, should not. The conflict between La Folle de Chaillot and the
Président represents the conflict between tradition, nobility, and stability, and the
aggressive sense of entitlement that accompanies new money.

In spite of her eccentric, ragged appearance, Aurélie has a keen eye for reality,
especially when it menaces her city. When the nefarious group begins talking about their

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81 Ibid., 48.
82 Ibid., 35.
plan to blow up the house of the civil servant who had refused their permit to excavate Paris, he feels the Folle’s eye upon them and states, “Speak softly. She’s watching us.”

In a similar fashion, she protects Pierre, the unfortunate man whom the Prospector blackmailed, when the Prospector seeks to speak with Pierre after his suicide attempt. The stage directions indicate, “The Prospecteur tries to approach him [Pierre] again. La Folle’s eagle eye makes him flee.” In addition, she physically holds onto Pierre when the Prospecteur attempts to forcibly pull him away from her circle of protection. The stage directions indicate that “[Le Prospecteur] tries to take La Folle’s hand. She hits him over the head with a hot-water bottle.” The fight to save Pierre quickly becomes a group effort as the other “little people” of Paris join in.

She [Aurélie] hits the man with her bell. He insists on continuing. Irma appears, and grabs Pierre’s other hand. The Prospecteur tries all the harder. La Folle whistles. The hunter intervenes. And the policeman. And the rag-man. And the deaf-mute.

The crowd gives Aurélie both vocal and physical support. They claim that Pierre may be her long-lost son, and Irma points out that Aurélie predicted (by reading Pierre’s palm) that he would be strangled if he left the Place d’Alma between noon and two o’clock.

In fact, Aurélie constantly displays a certain omniscience regarding the direness of Pierre’s situation. She accurately guesses that Pierre will try to kill himself again if she lets him go, just as she guesses that the Prospecteur is blackmailing him in order to force him to cooperate. She explains:

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83 Ibid., 38.
84 Ibid., 47.
85 Ibid., 62.
86 Ibid., 63.
I have every reason to hang onto him [Pierre]. I’m hanging onto him because I don’t want this man to take him away. I’m holding onto him because he’s nice to hold onto. He’s that first man I’ve ever held, and I’m taking advantage of it. I’m holding onto him because it’s the first time in several days that he feels free.87

Even though she physically prevents Pierre from leaving, he is still free, for she protects him from Prospecteur’s threats, both physical (strangulation) and moral (the corruption of forcing Pierre to murder the government employee in charge of permits).

Aurélie’s sense of responsibility includes not only individual cases, such as Pierre’s, but the city at large. She describes her typical day to Pierre:

I take my walk, Fabrice. I go on the look-out where the bad people of Chaillot gather. Those who purse their lips, those who secretly kick people at home, the enemies of trees, the enemies of animals. I see those who duck into a building to change – the bathhouse, the orthopedist’s, the hairdresser’s. But they come out dirty, limping, and with fake beards. In reality, they’re torn between thinking of the ways they want to kill the plane tree at the Galliera Museum or the idea of throwing a poisoned meatball to the butcher’s dog in the Rue Bizet. I’m naming these two who are under my protection. I’ve known them since they were little. I pass by the bandits in order to make them lose their power. It’s hard – crime travels fast, but I can move quickly.88

Thus, she symbolically protects Chaillot from the forces that threaten its inhabitants, not so much on a grand scale, but those would sow despair and harm the tranquility of the area. Aurélie acts as a combination of mother protector and unconventional guardian angel. She, the grande dame of the quartier, assumes the position of an all-powerful noble, if only in her mind. She states:

[The Prospecteur] stole my boa and he’s asked you to kill me. […] He’s not the first, but I’m not easy to kill. For two reasons. For starters, because it’s they who enter my house who are killed. If they come in

87 Ibid., 64.
88 Ibid., 60.
human form, a catapult smashes them. If they enter disguised as a mouse, I have a sure-fire trap that I bait with lard.\textsuperscript{89}

Here the \textit{trébuchet}, the catapult, hearkens back to the old fortified castle of the Middle Ages. Aurélie paints a picture of herself as the castle doyenne, charged with the responsibility of protecting herself and her people, in this case, the hard-working, modest people of Paris, from harm. The Chaillot district represents her domain, and she is the undisputed ruler who commands respect and in return is entrusted with the duty of protecting her subjects.

Aurélie, as the symbol of a past era, is threatened by the crass modernity that invades her domain. It is significant that this threat comes not from \textit{outside} of France, but \textit{within} France, a homegrown threat. Pierre explains the group’s scheme: “They’ve got a plan for prospecting that will leave nothing left of the city. They want to probe and dig through everything. Their drilling machines are ready. […] They’re looking for oil.”\textsuperscript{90} When Aurélie, uncomprehending, asks what they plan to do with it, Pierre responds, “What they usually do with oil – misery, war, ugliness. They make the world miserable.”\textsuperscript{91} At this point, the Chiffonnier (the Ragman), played by Jouvet, adds, “Exactly. The opposite of what one does with the sweat of one’s brow.”\textsuperscript{92} Here we see two worlds in conflict: that of Aurélie’s industrious cohorts, who work hard to earn a living, and that of the Président, who seeks only to pillage and sow misery while producing nothing.

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., 55.
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., 66.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 66.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 66.
The Chiffonnier looks nostalgically to the past:

Men used to smell good back then. [...] An invasion has taken place, Comtesse. Because of the invasion, the world is no longer beautiful, it’s no longer happy. For the last ten years we’ve seen them getting uglier and uglier, and meaner and meaner. [...] Back in the day, when you walked around Paris, the people you met were like you – they were you. [...] That was it – everyone was equal. But one day ten years ago when I was out and about, a funny feeling made me turn around. In the middle of the passers-by, I saw a man who was nothing like the usual people. He was a short, stocky man whose right eye seemed to be looking for something, and whose left eye looked uneasy – he was another race of man altogether. He swung his arms when he walked, but was strangely menacing and ill at ease, as though had killed one of the usual people in order to take his place. In fact, he had killed him. That was the first one. The invasion had begun. [...] You could say that they have a different set of mortal sins than ours. They’ve got our women, but they’re richer and more common. They’ve bought mannequins, complete with their furs, out of shop windows. Then they brought them to life, but with an added bonus. Those are their wives.93

It must be noted that the invasion to which the Chiffonnier refers is not one of a literal foreign invader, but of alien values, as Giraudoux describes in his essays Pleins pouvoirs. These invaders differ from Aurélie’s people, the workers of Paris, not by their language or physical appearance, but by their work ethic and personal values.

The Chiffonnier continues:

They don’t have a profession. When they meet each other, they whisper and pass each other 5000 Franc bills. You find them near the Stock Marker, but they aren’t selling. You find them near patches of houses that are going to be demolished. You see them next to piles of cabbages in Les Halles, but they don’t touch them. In front of cinemas, just watching the crowd, but they never go in. [...] Nowadays, everything that can be eaten or seen – wine or shows – has its own mec, who stand out on the sidewalk and just watch, without doing anything.94

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93 Ibid., 69.
94 Ibid., 70.
In stark contrast to Aurèlie’s band of friends, who are all identified by their professions (Chiffonnier, Chanteur, Plongeuse, etc.), these men have no real profession, for they produce nothing, an idea that Giraudoux decries in *Pleins Pouvoirs*.

In the immediate post-war context where the rationing and speculation were still rife, one might at first take these men to be black-market speculators or profiteers, abusing the public by inflating prices to increase their profits, but when one looks at Giraudoux’s *pre-war* writings, one finds a description of these same “mecs” coupled with a critique of modern Paris. In the 1939 essay “La France de toujours: notre conscience” Giraudoux states:

> Paris has capitulated. [my italics] I can make no better comparison that to that of a general, who for the last ten years, has had the duty of protecting the health, morals, and modern ways of 5,000,000 Parisians from the definitive invasion of brick, habit, and ugliness.\(^95\)

Here Giraudoux dates the beginning of the problem as ten years previously, just as the Chiffonnier indicates that the invasion began at the same time. Giraudoux then describes the problem in further detail:

> In 1930 the city of Paris was supposed to have started construction on 1200 hectares of clearings, easements, and indispensable gardens on the outskirts of the city. This didn’t include the parks which would have acted as a second line of defense for the suburbs. The plans were accepted and made public. Today, in 1939, most of these open spaces have disappeared. The zone that was recently detached from the suburbs and reattached to Paris has become a paradise for speculators and blackmailers.\(^96\)

One must not forget that one of the main themes of *Pleins pouvoirs* is one of urban planning, as outlined in the previous chapter. Giraudoux envisioned himself as the

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95 Giraudoux, *Pleins pouvoirs*, 141.

96 Ibid., 142.
Minister of Urban Planning, and according to his biographer Jacques Body, he had hoped that the Vichy government would create this position for him. The essential menace to Paris in *La Folle de Chaillot*, that of destruction in the pursuit of oil and easy money, reiterates Giraudoux’s pre-war concerns with livable space and preservation.

Moreover, Giraudoux describes the manner in which the conspirators gain control,

They come together under the aegis of a union, whose expenses are covered by a few millionaire industrialists who own factories in Aubervilliers. They escape any form of justice, because they have bought themselves a group of Deputies whose job was to protect this zone. They have made it impossible for the public to protest, for they have bought the silence or have the cooperation of the main newspapers. The rights of the 9000 little landowners are sacrificed, for their claims are sometimes shaky and able to be contested, because many of the people who live in the Zone have no property deed. The rights of 5,000,000 Parisians also fall by the way-side. The big land-owners are engaged in speculation.97

Speculators not only gain control of vast areas of land through bribery and coercion, but they in turn manipulate the price of land in order to inflate their profits, just as the Coulissier manipulates the stock market in order to ensure himself the maximum profits.

In a similar fashion, Irma la Plongeuse describes the Président’s conspirators and like-minded cohorts:

Presidents of the boards of directors, delegate directors, prospectors, brokers, general secretaries of the unions, Deputies from Les Alpes-Maritimes who are paid by Morocco; licensed former owners, M. Duplat Vergorat, who is unemployed…M. X. in publicity, etc… etc… etc…98

The Président’s co-conspirators exist in all levels of society, from the faceless masses up through all levels of government.

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97 Ibid., 143.

Giraudoux continues in this vein in *Pleins Pouvoirs* when he describes the group of speculators, this blight upon modern society:

Even in the middle of the strictest administrations, in the middle of the most honest bodies of government, in the midst of the most self-less undertaking, one can find a secret society of greed, selfishness, and commotion. They make up a *secret society* who take advantage of the weaknesses, absences, and distractions. They are always on the alert, working. They have created a *mafia*.99

Here the reader notices a striking similarity between the action of *La Folle de Chaillot* and the author’s pre-war writings. The members of the Président’s group, the Union Bancaire du Sous-sol Parisien, share a basic bond of greed, mutual financial interest, and callous disregard for the populace. They form a sort of *mafia*, a criminal organization that uses routine ruses (such as stock manipulation, coercion, false publicity, and theft to name a few) in order to formulaically fleece the innocent.

Giraudoux continues his description of this mafia:

The adversaries of this mafia cannot even find it. They cannot fight it, because it is faceless, like evil itself. It’s not a social class. They are neither the bourgeois, nor the clergy, nor the worker. They force France to cede to their evil desires. It’s not a political party. […] It’s a type of contraband, an understanding between those who find fraud to be more profitable than honesty. It’s a loss of conscience, which causes one to lose any sense of the collective good, and which tells the citizen that he has no duty towards the State.100

Thus, it is almost impossible to identify the conspirators, as they belong to no particular class and have no identity. They feel no responsibility towards the state, and exist merely to exploit others. In other words, they lack those particularly “French” values that Giraudoux describes in his political writings.

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100 Ibid., 146.
In *Pleins pouvoirs* Giraudoux describes this mafia’s manner of recruitment, and it is here that one observes the most striking similarity between his pre-war writings and the content of *La Folle de Chaillot*:

The members of this mafia are not recruited in any particular place, or according to any particular ritual. They are instead recruited by chance – in train cars, in the halls of government buildings, at newspapers, and at banks. They have no real sign by which to recognize each other, except that their appearance indicates that they are not citizens (*citoyens*).\(^{101}\)

It must be noted that when Giraudoux refers to these conspirators not being “citizens” he does *not* mean this in the sense of a French passport, but in the sense that they do not share in the collective values of Frenchmen, most notably, duty towards the state (complete with paying taxes and obeying the laws). Nor do they have a sense of obligation towards their fellow citizens. These people exist outside of *French* law, for they do not accept its authority.

Giraudoux continues his description of this mafia:

You can see it from far away and by a thousand signs: they way they light their cigar, by the self-satisfied yet worried look in their eyes. They start to chat, whether it be in Paris, in Béziers, in Roubaix, and soon the theater that was planned suddenly changes location, and bus companies, motors, and the price of coffee goes up or drops. A new mineral water company is pumping from contaminated wells. The abortion doctor’s case gets thrown out of court, the immigrant accused of fraud becomes a law-abiding paragon of society. The plane-trees in the church-yard can now be chopped down, and the trees come under the axe at dawn, bid for the school’s furniture is withdrawn and the contract is given to a friendly party: The paperwork for a case against someone who stole the city development plans goes astray and only turns up after the statute of limitations has run out. And all this happens among people of different religions, of opposing political beliefs. But their guiding principal is always the same: profits.\(^{102}\)

\(^{101}\) Ibid., 146.

\(^{102}\) Ibid., 147.
In like fashion, the opening scene of *La Folle de Chaillot*, in which the Président, the Baron, the Coulissier, and the Prospecteur meet, exchange confidences, and begin their scheme to plunder and destroy the city exemplifies the methods and effects of Giraudoux’s conspirators in *Pleins pouvoirs*. They recognize each other by a certain look in their eyes, and unite for mutual benefit. The author continues in *Pleins pouvoirs*, “The money-changers, who make the most well-known profiteer seem like he’s stealing out of condescension, do not commit the same misdeed with regards to loyal and healthy currency. Their motto is: “The money made me do it.””

According to Giraudoux’s essays, this attitude produces an echo effect, one that can be seen most clearly in the attitude of the Président towards the common folk. The author continues, “This mafia is not just characterized by selfishness and greed. It views the French with scorn. It holds them in contempt both as a whole and individually.”

We can compare this statement to the Président’s attitude towards the “little people” of Paris, the Chanteur, the Chiffonnier, the Garçon, Irma la Plongeuse, and so forth. He exclaims,

> Those are our real enemies, Baron! We must empty Paris of them, and straightaway! Looks at all these puppets – none of them look alike, not in color or size! The sole safety measure of a truly modern society is a single type of worker: each worker has the same face, the same clothes, the same gestures and words.[...] Our power ends when people can find joy in poverty, domesticity, and when insanity is respected and adulated. Look at that crazy woman! The waiter bows and scrapes when he seats her at the best table on the terrace. She doesn’t even have to buy anything. And the florist gives her a giant iris for free, and she sticks it though the holes in her bodice!”

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103 Ibid., 147.
104 Ibid., 147.
The Président detests Aurélie and her compatriots because they cannot be controlled, for they do not share the same lust for gold that he and his compatriots do. In the Président’s hierarchy, those at the top have visible, material wealth and share a core system of values based on that concept of the world. Aurélie, who is poor and possibly insane, commands the respect that the Président considers to be by right his own. In other words, she defeats his system.

If the Président represents the worst forms of corruption in modern society, Aurélie personifies all that is good. She marshals the forces of good government: watchfulness, morality, and public interest against those who prey upon the public at large. However, her greatest attributes – her goodness and generosity of spirit – are also her greatest weaknesses. As the Chiffonnier points out, “You (Aurélie), you’re living in a dream. When you’ve decided in the morning that the men you see will be handsome, even your concierge’s backside turns into two little cheeks to be kissed.”106 It is this generosity of spirit that has allowed her to overlook the serious threat against the city. She symbolizes the system that by virtue of its very generosity, has been exploited, much as Giraudoux describes the manipulation of the French system in Pleins pouvoirs.

However, when Aurélie finally discovers the extent of the menace, she immediately formulates a plan:

Why are you all whining instead of acting? How can you stand a world where you can’t be happy from sunup to sundown! Of which you’re not the master! Are you a bunch of cowards! Since the hangmen are the guilty ones, you have only to get rid of them.107

106 Ibid., 68.
107 Ibid., 72.
With these words Aurélie transforms into an avenging angel, armed with a sword to rid the world of the moral pestilence that threatens it.

One finds a direct parallel to this in Giraudoux’s essay “Armistice à Bordeaux.”

This is the café terrace. Why don’t we take a rest. I’ll take some fresh water. Who is that in front of us! All of those who made up a chorus of happy, healthy, sensible and mad people in Paris are now part of the defeat.108

At the moment of the defeat, Giraudoux evokes the image of an idyllic Paris, similar to Aurélie’s group of common folk. He then goes on to blame the defeat on bad leadership:

Today we are paying for nothing more than France’s refusal to recreate herself every day. Instead of leading France like a living being who hungers, thirsts, sleeps, watches, makes mistakes and is always serene, her masters are allowed to substitute the symbol of France for the real thing.[…] We saluted Selfishness. We saluted Oil… We committed the crime of idleness instead of paying attention to reality. […] France was won by merit. She was lost though human worthlessness.109

Here, Giraudoux exhibits the mea culpa complex so widespread during the defeat and so played upon at length by the Vichy government.

In his post-defeat group of essays, Sans pouvoirs, Giraudoux cites the two major crimes as the “exodus” and “the apathy in which the French allow themselves to wallow since the armistice, as well as the disinterest they show towards the very fate of their country.”110 Aurélie constitutes a remedy to that apathy: pure action and decisiveness. Although Giraudoux goes on to criticize the Vichy government, most notably for its religious display and their police-state tactics,111 the people he condemns in La Folle de

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108 Giraudoux, “Armistice à Bordeaux” in De pleins pouvoirs à sans pouvoirs, 159. (my translation)

109 Ibid., 162-163.


111 Giraudoux, Sans pouvoirs, 192, 194.
*Chaillot* bear a curious similarity to those denounced by the Vichy government: the decadent, the selfish, the lazy and soft people who lead France astray.

La Folle symbolizes positive action over stasis, a purifying force in a corrupt world, but a force that renders judgment through the proper channels. When she decides to enact her plan, Aurélie immediately calls open the three other *Folles* of the play: Constance, la Folle de Passy, Gabrielle, la Folle de Saint-Sulpice, and Joséphine, la Folle de la Concorde. All wear a mixture of clothing from earlier centuries, but it is Joséphine, when she finally arrives, whose designated location is most striking, for she represents *la Concorde*, where the guillotine resided during the Revolution. It is she who gives the final go-ahead for the execution of the *auteurs du mal*, that segment of the population who parasitically feeds off the rest of society and threatens its very existence. Together, the four women compose the panel of judges who will meet out the punishment for those who “worship the golden calf.” Aurélie specifically evokes the biblical tale when she states, “We’re being ruled by those who worship the Golden Calf.” One can also interpret their number as representative of the four Evangelists, the messengers of God.

When Aurélie asks the question, “Imagine that you have all the world’s criminals here in this room. You have the means of getting rid of them forever. Do you have the right to do it?” Joséphine immediately responds, “Of course! […] That’s what makes it such an profitable adventure. When you destroy, you need to destroy en masse. Look at

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113 Ibid.,104.

114 Ibid., 100.
Thus Aurélie, guardian angel of the honest workers, transforms into an avenging angel of righteous destruction.

Joséphine, a member of a family of lawyers, asks whether those on trial would have a lawyer, and states that “You cannot give a verdict until their lawyer has had a chance to speak.” Aurélie replies, “I swear to you that they’re guilty!” Joséphine remains firm when she states, “Aurélie, every accused person has the right to defend himself. Even animals.” Due process must be followed.

It is at this moment when the Chiffonnier, played by the play’s director Louis Jouvet, appears on stage, followed by the other “little people” seen in earlier scenes. It has been decided that he will act as the attorney for the various presidents and exploiters, as “He who defends the thief the best is he who is the most honest.” In order to ensure the best defense possible, the Chiffonnier decides to answer as though he himself were the one of the profiteers on trial. One must note that Jouvet, freshly returned from several years of exile, lends all the more power to the role, for he carries the patina of a bona-fide resistant who has the moral authority to pass judgment on the accused.

Aurélie begins the trial with the principal charge, worshipping money, which has lead to the further crimes of theft, stock market manipulation, speculation, lying, cheating, and general debauchery of the worst sort. The Exploiteur/Chiffonnier twists and turns the truth in order to justify the unjustifiable. For example, when Aurélie

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115 Ibid., 111.
116 Ibid., 112.
117 Ibid., 115.
accuses him of supporting a dozen dancer/mistresses and expresses the hope that they all betray him, he replies:

When is anyone cheating on anyone? When they leave him for someone who isn’t him. I possess the entire Opéra. My twelve dancing girls can betray me with twelve male dancers, with the general manager, with the machinists, with the English horn-players. I possess them, too. [my italics] It’s as though they’re cheating on me with me.  

The accused shows his true colors: he is morally bankrupt and his only desire is to continue the cycle of greed and consumption. People do not exist as free individuals, but objects for his personal consumption. When Aurélie asks what he will do with the money he will make if he destroys Chaillot, he replies:

I’ll buy the château at Chambord. It’s much more spacious. I’ll support the dancers from the Opéra-Comique, too. That will make things livelier. Right now I’ve only got race-horses. I’ll buy jumpers. I only have paintings on canvas. I’ll buy some on wood, and on marble – they’re sturdier. I’ll buy Irma!  

Thus, the group of profiteers exhibits a sort of frenetic cycle of consumption, in which each acquired article (or person) compels them to swallow another, and another, and another, until they possess everything.

The threat assumes a more direct form when the Président/Chiffonnier threatens the four Folles. The stage directions indicate that at that moment, the he grabs Irma as the others approach him. He states:

If you touch one hair on my head, you’ll become intimately familiar with official summons, a ship’s galleys, and iron marks. The two hundred families are not mean. When they’re attacked, they defend themselves. That’s their motto.  

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118 Ibid., 125.

119 Ibid., 127-128.

120 Ibid., 130.
It must be noted that the expression the “two hundred families” (les deux cents familles) refers to the two hundred biggest stock-holders of the Banque de France (out of 40,000) during the period between the Great War and World War II. Edouard Daladier coined this expression in a well-known speech in 1934:

Two hundred families are the masters of the French economy and, as a result, the French state. They are powers that a democratic State should not tolerate, which Richelieu would not have tolerated in France. The influence of these two hundred families weighs heavy on the tax system, on transportation, and on the banking system. The two hundred families put their own delegates in power. They interfere with public opinion, because they control the press.

The idea of these extraordinarily powerful families was used by political groups ranging from the extreme right-wing to the Front Populaire in order to describe the idea of collusion between these key families and their control of the government. According to diverse political groups, these families flourished at the expense of the average Frenchman, as they wielded an inordinate amount of power which they used to protect their financial interests.  

Aurélie, however, embodies the cure for this abuse of power, notably when she asks, “So, my friends, you give me absolute authority (les pleins pouvoirs) over all the exploiters?”(my italics) and is answered by shouts of approval. She continues, “I can bankrupt them? I can wipe them off the face of the earth?” and receives the same enthusiastic response. She concludes, “I will show myself worthy of your trust.”

On July 10th, 1940, just after the French defeat, Philippe Pétain received the vote of les

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122 Giraudoux, La Folle de Chaillot, 131.
pleins pouvoirs (absolute authority) from the overwhelming majority of the members of the National Assembly. As discussed earlier, although Giraudoux later condemned some aspects of the Pétain administration, his attribution of pleins pouvoirs with regards to Aurélie evokes the idea of the Vichy leader. Since the Résistance struggled against the collaborationist French government with Pétain at its head, this would muddle the idea of La Folle de Chaillot as a Resistance drama. Aurélie evokes Old France, much like the hero of Verdun, the Maréchal Pétain, and it is she who saves Paris/France from destruction. In April 1941, when Giraudoux wrote the first drafts of the play, it would be reasonable to assume that he, like the majority of the French population, held some belief in the providential powers of Pétain to protect France. In a similar fashion, Aurélie is a providential woman who is successful at ridding the city of the threat of self-interested, decadent speculators, those on whom the defeat of 1940 was blamed.

In the following scene, Pierre kneels next to a sleeping Aurélie and takes her hands, a gesture that conveys the attentiveness of a lover and the adoration of a saint. Indeed, Aurélie appear to think that he is Adolphe Bertaut, a former love who abandoned her for another woman. Pierre hears her description of the manner in which she has suffered throughout the years, but she quickly awakens. The reader cannot fully discern whether or not the scene is the product of a clouded mind, or simply the fancy of a woman who has her eyes wide open and decides to soften reality with conscious flights of fancy. In an earlier scene, in which the other Folles arrive with Dicky, an imaginary dog, Aurélie humors Constance, la Folle de Passy, but shows herself able to distinguish between what is real and imaginary (as indeed, do the other Folles). They have simply
sought refuge from the inhospitable world by choosing to inhabit a more gracious world of their own creation.

At the end of the scene Pierre hands Aurélie her boa - she is now ready to battle the profiteers. She states, “I’m thrilled. This gives me all the freedom I need. Thanks for the boa. Pierre! Pass it to me. They have to see it wrapped around my neck. They’ll think it’s a real boa!” The boa, which had been missing for many years and “stolen” by the profiteers, represents her power and is the last symbolic vestment of her authority, like the robe of a judge or the orb of a queen. Aurélie is now free to carry out the death sentences by ensnaring the profiteers with their own greed.

As each group of speculators enters Aurélie’s basement, they receive a flower from the Fleuriste, a ritualistic send-off for the dead, or, in this case, those descending to the underworld dungeon beneath Aurélie’s home/fortress. As in the case of the formal trial and its accompanying due process, Aurélie respects the conventions by offering flowers to the dead. It must be noted that each group – les Présidents des conseils d’administration, les Prospecteurs des Syndicats d’Exploitation, les Représentants du Peuple Affectés aux Intérêts Pétrolifères de la Nation, Les Syndics de la Presse Publicitaire, their girlfriends, and finally, the sale monsieur from Act One who likes to kill cats - all enter of their own free will and have the choice to continue to their doom (spurred on by their greed) or not, but they all allow their greed to overcome them. Aurélie states, “Pride, greed, and selfishness make them boil over to such a degree that, if

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123 Ibid., 140.
they pass the point where they can no longer see the earth’s goodness and pity, they will evaporate into thin air.”124

Once these undesirable elements have been eliminated, Aurélie falls into a reverie in which three groups cross the stage: those that protect animals and the environment, as well as a group of men that greatly resemble Adolphe Bertaut. Each in his turn thanks Aurélie for saving them. Aurélie concludes, “Just one sensible woman is needed to thwart the world’s craziness.”125

One must re-examine the idea: Who is condemned in La Folle de Chaillot? In the immediate aftermath of the Liberation, the unofficial and official purges condemned collaborators and profiteers of all kinds. During 1945, members of the government such as Pétain and Laval went on trial, as were certain members of the collaborationist press such as Robert Brasillach. Under these circumstances the political atmosphere in Paris was ripe for a theatrical trial. However, when one looks more closely at those punished by Aurélie in La Folle de Chaillot, they evoke the idea of those condemned for the defeat by the Vichy government – the speculators, the decadent, the people who weakened French society during the inter-war period for their personal gain - rather than the Occupation-era collaborators.

When Jouvet returned to post-Liberation Paris, French society was still in the process of sorting out who were the villains and who were the heroes of the war. Jouvet had suffered years of privations and difficulties during his years in exile, an exile with which he directly linked the writings of Jean Giraudoux. Jouvet was one of the good

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124 Ibid., 153.

125 Ibid., 156.
guys, and some of that aura necessarily rubbed off onto Giraudoux, one of the most well-respected French writers of the first half of the twentieth century.

Giraudoux was gone, and wild speculation in the post-Liberation press blamed the Gestapo for his murder, which made the public at large want to see him as a hero. It did not matter that during the war he continued to publish and promote his plays in the censored press, and that he had a reputation for promoting Franco-German understanding, which included trips to and socializing at the German Institute. He could not establish his own Resistance credentials, so the public established them for him with their interpretation of La Folle de Chaillot, Giraudoux’s farewell. In the midst of the upheaval that was post-war France: the trials, the accusations at one end of the spectrum, the glory of the Resistance, De Gaulle, and the Liberation at the other, and the all too difficult reality of shortages, rationing, and daily hardships affecting virtually everyone, the public needed a Resistance allegory more than they needed shades of gray. They needed Giraudoux to continue to be great, both as a writer, a diplomat, and as a Frenchman.
Conclusions

Writers, like the public at large, responded to the Occupation by becoming extreme collaborators, opportunists, simply earning their daily bread, or fierce resisters, with an infinite number of various roles in between. Although critics have historically attempted to evaluate Jean-Paul Sartre’s and Jean Giraudoux’s actions in order to classify them as “resistant” or “collabo,” this is a reductive act. Both men, like so many Frenchmen of this period, made an infinite number of small and large decisions that refracted their post-war image according to which critic held the prism. The historiography with regards to this era has dramatically changed. Must the manner in which we “categorize” these two authors not change accordingly?

With this question in mind, I have carefully studied the authors’ primary texts (plays, essays, critiques, memoirs, and letters). Next, I examined biographies of Sartre and Giraudoux (as well as other major figures from the era) in order to gain as much background information as possible, and moreover, to identify both tendencies and discrepancies with regards to the authors. After this I sifted through the contemporary press related to these two authors, including theatrical reviews of their plays, and their own publications in order re-evaluate the Occupation-era theatrical offerings of Sartre and Giraudoux. I have chosen to focus mainly on their plays from the era, as these are their best-known works, and the texts which had the most influence in the creation of their political legacy and reputation during the Occupation. Finally, I applied the theories from contemporary historians – Robert Paxton,¹ Henry Rousso,² Philippe Burrin,³ and

¹ Paxton, Vichy France. Paxton looked at both the German and French archives and came to the conclusion that Vichy collaborated voluntarily.
Gisèle Sapiro⁴ among others – in order to develop my own analysis of the theater of Sartre and Giraudoux and their post-war legacy.

The major criticisms of Sartre included the following: that the author used the Occupation and his supposed resistance (“invented” by him with Beauvoir’s help) in order to opportunistically push himself to the forefront of post-war literary scene. Moreover, the idea of political engagement that Sartre set forth post-war texts such as *Qu’est-ce que la littérature?* and in the pages of *Les temps modernes* was a belated attempt to make up for lost time. In short, critics claimed that his post-war political engagement and writings were the actions of a man who had missed the Resistance train, and who was attempting to make up for lost time. Had Sartre re-manufactured himself as a “witness for the prosecution?”⁵

It is a fact that Sartre never took part in armed resistance movements such as the Maquis, with their accompanying aura of danger, when men and women risked their lives at every turn, although Beauvoir’s description of Sartre’s “escape” from a POW camp is painted with these dashing images. As Jean-François Sirinelli points out, Sartre actually obtained a medical release; thus he did not romantically steal out of the camp under the cover of the night and flee to freedom. Therefore the picture Beauvoir creates in *La force de l’âge* some twenty years later is exaggerated to say the least, and can be construed as a

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² Rousso, *Le Syndrome de Vichy: de 1944 à nos jours*. Rousso coined the phrase “Le passé qui ne passe pas” (“The past that doesn’t pass.”) and detailed the symptoms of four periods in particular with regards to France’s view of the Vichy. These include “mourning,” “resistantialism,” the “broken mirror,” and obsession.

³ Burrin, *La France à l’heure allemande*. Burrin speaks of degrees of accomotation rather than in black and white terms of collaboration or resistance.

⁴ Sapiro, *La Guerre des écrivains: 1940-1944*. Sapiro examines collaboration and resistance from a sociological standpoint, for example, social class and education, as well as political leanings.
self-aggrandizing exaggeration in order to preserve a certain idea after the fact. Was Sartre in bad faith, a bad existentialist, seeking approval from the outside?

In reality, Sartre would have been physically incapable of taking part in the armed resistance, but then again, only a very small number of people actually did. However, one can trace an evolution with regards to his commitment towards his countrymen, starting with his War Diaries, those records of his daily thoughts, during the phony war. As we have seen, resistance took on more forms than just armed resistance: it also included ideas and written resistance.

As Cohen-Solal establishes, Sartre did come to the idea of political engagement very late, not until his mid-30’s, several years after he had spent the year of 1933-34 in Berlin, during the start of the era of Hitler’s absolute power in Germany. This “sleeping beauty” syndrome continued up until the very outbreak of the war, as can be seen in a letter dated late August 1939, in which he stated that he did not really believe that the war would happen, when in fact it broke out the next day. The rude awakening proved fruitful for Sartre, however, as during the course of the phony war, his journals attest to a growing awareness of his connection with the people around him, as well as the budding seeds of political engagement.

Contrary to the charge that Sartre manufactured the concept of “engaged literature” after WWII, the title character of his play Bariona ou le fils du tonnerre, displays the same courage in revolt that the character Oreste displayed in Les mouches.

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5 Watts, Allegories of the Purge, 59-61. Watts presents Sartre as being constantly surrounded by trials, from the Liberation onward, and assigning himself alternatively the “the roles of judge, jury, and attorney.”


Sartre’s first play, written and performed in a German prison was ostensibly a nativity piece, although Jesus, Mary, and Joseph make no appearance in the play. Instead, Bariona leads a revolt of the Jews against the oppressive Roman tax collectors in the era just before Christ’s birth. Just as one saw in the play Les mouches, Bariona uses the word liberté over and over, and it seems that these evocations were better understood in the prison camp than in Occupied Paris. The play’s shortcomings, however, revolve around the stereotypical depiction of the Jews as lazy, superstitious, and uncivilized.8 Although Sartre later claimed that this was smoke and mirrors for the benefit of the German officers present and that everyone understood that, Gilbert Joseph, who, although he presents a biased view in his book Une si douce occupation, interviewed several people who were present and had no idea of what Sartre was attempting.

In a similar manner, although Oreste uses the work liberté over thirty times in Les mouches, it appeared that the audience members did not understand, or that the message was obscured by Sartre’s wordy diatribes and uneven pacing. Thus, although Sartre’s intentions were good in presenting a case for resistance, the significance of his argument was lost due to the fact that he was inexperienced in writing for the stage. More importantly, the character of Egisthe, the pretender to the throne, conspires with Jupiter in order to create a false ritual of penance in order to punish the living. In retrospect, one cannot miss the criticism of Pétain and the National Revolution’s official policy of self-flagellation.

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8 Suleiman, “The Jew in Jean-Paul Sartre’s Réflexions sur la question juive: An Exercise in Historical Reading” in The Jew in the Text. Suleiman also critiques Sartre’s analysis of the “authentic” as opposed to the “unauthentic” Jew, as well as the all-inclusive terms “on” and “nous” to describe the French as opposed to “il” to describe the Jew in Réflexions sur la question juive.
In a similar fashion, Sartre also condemns the Vichy government’s stance on morality in *Huis clos*. His three characters, a lesbian, a coward, and an infanticide, all fly in the face of the *travail, famille, patrie* credo. Moreover, as Ingrid Galster points out, Beauvoir lost her teaching post in 1943 as a result of a lesbian affair with a student. Thus, instead of the *Huis clos* embodying the German occupiers, it stands for the stultifying morals policies of the Vichy government, that homegrown enemy.

It must be noted that in addition to his theatrical engagement, upon Sartre’s return from Germany, he started the group *Socialisme et Liberté*, a short-lived resistance think tank composed of members mainly drawn from Sartre and Beauvoir’s *famille*. Although no tracts or texts remain, its very existence proves an evolving attitude from the pre-war isolationist Sartre, as does his later adherence to the writer’s resistance group the CNE.

Thus, instead of offering us a neat and tidy classification of Sartre’s Occupation-era politics, his actions lay somewhere in between. He was a political late bloomer, but then again, he displayed an earlier awakening than many of the French who, crushed by the defeat, succumbed to the numbing effects of mea culpa politics. The defeat gave birth to a Sartre determined in some way to take responsibility for his place, for his fate, and awakened a sense of his connection with others. Although his efforts were sometimes of mixed success, he nonetheless *did* build upon this initial awaking in a gradually increasing manner, and decried the passiveness acceptance of Vichy policies. Moreover, once can trace the evolution of Sartre’s intellectual resistance in his writings.

At first glance, Jean Giraudoux seems to be the polar opposite of Sartre. He took the traditional route of the esteemed writer diplomat, much as Paul Claudel did, and he was able to parley his talent for cultivating relationships into a fruitful career. He came...
from an older generation than Sartre, one who had witnessed the devastation of the first
World War firsthand. By the time of the defeat in June 1940, Giraudoux had already
been publishing since 1906, with a total of sixteen published novels and eleven plays.
Giraudoux displayed a charming urbaneness and enjoyed the status of insider, already of
one the greats of French literature. His work was already well-known outside of France,
as the many articles written about him in Germany attest to. Sartre, on the other hand,
was a definite outsider, much like Roquentin of La nausée. Moreover, if one were to
compare their language, one could say that Giraudoux was an elegant, sophisticated Cole
Porter to Sartre’s callow Lenny Bruce.

These differences aside, one must question Giraudoux’s legacy which at times has
swung from resistant to collaborator, back to resistant again. Unlike Sartre, Giraudoux
had no post-war work by which to judge him – he died just a few months before the D-
Day invasions of Normandy.

The tributes to Giraudoux attest to his place in the French literary canon: obituaries published just after his death repeatedly equated the author with the greatness
of French literature. Giraudoux was French literature, a writer who ably juggled a career
in the diplomatic corps with producing plays, novels, and essays of the highest quality.
His output had been copious and consistent.

After the liberation, rumors immediately emerged to the extent that Giraudoux,
that great French writer, had been poisoned by the Gestapo. Jacques Body establishes
that Giraudoux actually died from uremia. Moreover, Giraudoux’s own doctor attested to
this natural cause of death. However, in the emotionally-charged post-Liberation
atmosphere, the idea of such a great writer becoming a sacrifice to the Germans was much too tempting to resist, and the rumor persisted.

In the midst of this, Louis Jouvet, Giraudoux’s longtime director, returned from his exile in South America. Jouvet took on producing *La Folle de Chaillot*, as a personal mission, and went through many difficulties including funding, theatrical space, and the sheer size of the production. In a public lecture at the Théâtre de l’Athénée (which almost immediately appeared in publication), Jouvet stated that one of the major reasons he left was because the censors had banned Giraudoux. Thus Giraudoux immediately became associated with one who had been the victim of Nazi oppression (even though the ban was soon lifted) as well as the moral cachet of Jouvet, who preferred a difficult exile to suffering under the censors.

Next, when *La Folle de Chaillot* was first produced, one of the first performances honored the former resisters. It played to a packed house with a star-studded audience including none other than General De Gaulle. The play represented a glittering moral and literary triumph after many years of darkness. The plot, in which a Frenchwoman defends Paris from invaders, leant itself to the interpretation that Giraudoux’s last work was, in fact, a statement about resistance, made all the more poignant by his untimely death.

However, when one looks more closely at the play’s contents, Giraudoux condemns the French betrayal of the French, those who attempted to exploit Paris for sheer financial gain. The threat does not come from the outside, from a foreign power, but from the greed of French speculators.
Lest one think that the play reproached those who speculated on a small scale with food-stuffs, or on a larger scale by selling out their country to the Germans, one must look at Giraudoux’s pre-war political essays, *Pleins pouvoirs*, in order to find exactly the same condemnation. In this 1939 collection, Giraudoux decried the corruption and devastation wrought by land speculators. Their manipulations threatened the very health of the country, in the same manner as the French speculators in *La Folle de Chaillot* threaten the welfare of Parisians. In both works, Giraudoux condemned the flashy, new-money lifestyle and decadence, an idea similar to those of Vichy. He called for a return to the core values of France – hard work, sacrifice for one’s country, and a restoration of the old order, embodied by Aurélie, also known as *La Comtesse*. *La Folle de Chaillot* becomes a title of nobility, just as her boa evokes the formal robes worn by judges performing their official duties. And like Pétain, she receives “pleins pouvoirs” from the other three judges to implement her plan. She will rid Paris/France of those untrue Frenchmen who would betray her.

This is not to say that Giraudoux was a Pétainist, but like so many during this era, he fell prey to the mea culpa complex. Giraudoux already had mixed feelings before the war even began. He had been injured and suffered greatly during the World War I, leading to the understandable desire to avoid another war with Germany. Next, as a Germanist trained at the Ecole Normale, he had spent time in Germany, during which he formed friendships with key political figures such as Paul Morand, whose father took him under his wing and introduced him to a niche of German artists. Two of Giraudoux’s best-known works, *Siegfried* and *La Guerre de Troie n’aura pas lieu*, directly addressed his ideas towards Germany; the first, the question of dual identity embodied by the
struggles of the amnesiac French soldier Siegried/Jacques Forrestier, the second, the reluctance toward and sense of inevitability of another conflict with Germany. In addition, Giraudoux had close ties with many German writers and artists, and frequented the German Institute all during the Occupation. Unlike Sartre, he did not hesitate to publish in collaborationist publications such as *Comœdia* in order to promote his plays. This said, Giraudoux was not a collaborator, nor was he a resistant. He, like so many people during this tumultuous era, was somewhere in the middle.

As one can see in François Truffaut’s 1980 film *Le Dernier métro*, those in the theater were confronted with a myriad of choices: does one denounce the Jews, and rub shoulders with the collaborationist government, as portrayed by the vile character of Dax/Alain Laubreux? Should one quit the theater and instead enter the armed resistance like Bertrand? Does one try to carefully negotiate, pick and choose one’s battles in order to protect the Jewish man she loves, as Marion did? Or does one try to ignore, as much as possible, the hardships and extreme ugliness of daily life and instead take refuge in the dream-world of the theater, as Lucas Steiner does, trapped in the cellar, determined to continue to create?

If Truffaut were making the film today, he might add the perspective of the playwright, someone who depended both on himself and others in order to see his vision come to life. Would the writer have obsequiously bowed to the censors, curried favor with Dax, and included a few stereotypical Jewish characters for the sake of “comic effect” and the passing the censor? Would he sell his soul for a glittery career? Or would the playwright carefully craft a play with a Resistance metaphor that might inspire his audience? Perhaps the playwright would attempt to disengage himself from politics
altogether and instead concentrate on the beauty of the language and re-creating a familiar theme of classical theater. Like the majority of French writers and citizens, his choices lay somewhere in between the extremes of black and white, of *collabo* or *résistant*. 
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Translation note: I decided to do my own translations for the most part, as the primary research was in French (and many of the works, especially newspaper articles, have no translation). I also wished to avoid going through the filter of a translator when interpreting the author’s words. I feel that this allowed me to remain more authentic in my analysis.
Biography

Mary Ann LaMarca was born in 1970 in Harvey, Illinois. She completed a B.A. in German and English at Indiana University in 1993. She spent time working in Germany, and studying at the University of Vienna (1996), and eventually decided to return for a bachelor’s in French (December 1997). She received her Master’s from New York University in France (2000) and taught in the Paris public schools. She returned to the United States in August 2000 in order to begin her doctorate at Duke University. While at Duke, she received the Named Instructorship Fellowship (2004-2005) for her course, “Tough and Dangerous Choices: Plays and Playwrights in Occupied France.” She currently teaches at Bryant University in Smithfield, RI.