

Performing War: Vichyite Ideology from Across the Sea in Camille Morel's Poetic Radio Dramatic Work *France!..Présent!.. Poème épique Radiophonique et Théâtral en un acte et deux tableaux*

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This paper examines the concept of "Performing War" in the poetic radio dramatic work of Camille Morel entitled France!..Présent!.. Poème épique Radiophonique et Théâtral en un acte et deux tableaux. Through the examination of the form and the function of Morel's radio dramatic composition, this paper argues that Morel's work presents a reenactment of the atrocities of World War II from the perspective of Mother France in an effort to sway the French people living under the Vichy régime to believe that a restoration of France would, indeed, be possible under Henri-Philippe Pétain.

During World War II, the use of radio drama as an instrument of propaganda and war was common throughout the world. In the United States, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the predecessor of the Central Intelligence Agency, used audio drama techniques to simulate the sound of a non-existent Army and Air Force in order to overthrow a left-wing government in Guatemala. American playwright Norman Corwin contributed extensively to the development of American war radio drama. Corwin's war-time radio dramas included *An American in England* (1942), the six-part story of Corwin's visit to England which reported war-time conditions there from the perspective of the English, and *This is War! A Collection of Plays about America on the March* (1942), a strong anti-German and anti-Japanese piece of propaganda. The Nazis are the most infamous group to have created a body of radio dramas designed to promulgate National Socialist ideologies during the 1940s. In 1944, Otto Koischwitz created radio

plays in Germany for the D-Day invasion forces and their families at home which was broadcast via shortwave to the United States and which outlined the doom that was about to unfold. Further, the actress Mildred Gillars hosted a propaganda program called “Home Sweet Home,” in which during one episode she played the part of a GI’s mother who mourned her war-time losses into the microphone. Broadcast from outside of the Hexagon, the French also took part in the construction of war-time radio dramas that presented powerful propagandistic perspectives on the war. Each of these radio dramatic presentations was, in itself, a performance of the war. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to argue how Camille Morel’s radio drama *France!..Présent!.. Poème épique Radiophonique et Théâtral en un acte et deux tableaux* (1942) “performs war.”

In the beginning, it is important that we address several very basic questions: What does it mean, then, to “perform war”? How does radio drama construct the concept of war? What are the ideological implications? Why is this particular performance of war important? We are all familiar with the expression “theater of war.” This phrase originated in German General Carl von Clausewitz’s book entitled *Vom Kriege*, which expresses the notion that the theater of war refers to the space over which war prevails and has its boundaries protected, and therefore exerts its own type of independence. We contrast this military notion with the notion of a theatrical genre that is, in fact, enacting or reenacting the war as it is broadcast over the radio. To perform war within this context means to create a theatrical representation that either simulates war (as in the OSS example above) or offers a powerful, propagandistic portrayal of the effects of war (as seen in the program “Home Sweet Home” or in Morel’s radio dramatic composition that we are considering here). To construct the concept of war, radio drama production requires the use of authentic sound effects to simulate aircraft and weaponry. It requires the listener to imagine that the war is unfolding before his very ears, in much the same way that many Americans living in New York and New Jersey truly believed that *War of the Worlds* was a live report of an alien invasion. For war of the radio to be credible, it must incite the listener to feel the same emotions that he would feel if he were to see the scene happening before him on a battlefield. To “perform war” necessitates the development of specific ideologies. Pro-Nazi radio plays reflect a pro-Nazi *Weltanschauung*, just as pro-Vichy radio plays, such as the one by Camille Morel which I will discuss here, reflect a pro-Vichy point of view. By “performing war” through a recreation of a battlefield in which a mother watches and mourns the loss of her two fallen sons, Morel’s work underscores the French family as metaphor for Mother France.

Broadcast on Radio-Alger (Radiodiffusion nationale de Vichy) and within range of the French mainland, Camille Morel’s *France!..Présent!.. Poème épique Radiophonique et Théâtral en un acte et deux tableaux* (1942), echoed Vichy ideology from across the sea through a theatrical performance of the war in which the author used prototypical war characters to reenact the losses that the French had endured at the hands of the Nazis. Through its portrayal of the scourge that was World War II, Morel’s radio drama sought to fashion and to forge a new view of the French, which aligned well with the *Weltanschauung* of the Vichy régime.¹ Under Vichy, Henri-Philippe Pétain, World War I hero and leader of the Vichy régime, cultivated images of French society that emphasized a Vichy point of view: anti-Semitism, the importance of the role of mothers, the noble veteran, an envied rural life, a strong religious center, and a cult of national

¹ See Eric Conan’s *Vichy: An Ever-Present Past*. Hanover: UP of New England, 1998.

heroes such as Joan of Arc, liberator of France. Persecution of Jews in the Northern zone began upon the arrival of the Nazis, which transformed into a policy of extermination beginning in 1942. France had its own longstanding anti-Semitic traditions that fueled the Vichy régime, many of which were found in the entertainment industry.² As Charles Rearick notes, “Vichy deemed such measures necessary for France’s regeneration” (252).³ Further, attacks on Jews permeated theater, the written press, the silver screen, and radio. Vichy propaganda sought to return France to a supposedly authentic French culture by exalting rural life, pushing for a development of the “*culte de la petite patrie*” (Rearick 253). Pétain, himself from peasant stock, maintained that the peasant, whose good nature had remained uncorrupted by Nazi ambitions, would replenish the population of France, and ultimately save France. As a result, the Vichy government sponsored the production of films about peasants and artisans, encouraged the development of regional theater, and endorsed the performance of local songs, dances and traditions.

Camille Morel’s work embodied the Vichyite experience. Morel created what a first glance appears to be a traditional radio drama with a simple cast of six characters: La France, La Pessimie, L’Ambassadeur de pessimie, Le premier combattant, Le deuxième combattant, and L’introducteur. Morel used his archetypal characters to personify as well as to reenact the French experience during WWII. At the beginning of the *premier tableau*, just before the rise of the “curtain,” the sound of gun fire faded in. The curtain went up, and two French soldiers, armed with rifles, entered hastily onto the scene. The voice of the first soldier described the state of affairs in France. The sound of rifle fire and fighter planes zooming overhead blended with the voice of the second French soldier. Exchanges of gun fire rang out in the background once again, and the second scene melted into the third scene. The radio drama moved from a criticism of World War II presented by the two French soldiers to a plea from Mother France to end the military conflict. Like a mother balancing the complaints and demands of her two children, La France entered the radio drama with her own heartfelt words. The sound of gun shots cut in “back stage.” Both soldiers began to fire their weapons, each preferring to die in the name of freedom rather than to yield before the Nazis’ tyrannical face. During the exchange of gun fire, both soldiers received mortal wounds. As the “curtain” fell to signal the end of the first *tableau*, Mother France cried out as Chopin’s piece *Tristesse*, played on piano and violoncello, blended with her voice until the beginning of the *deuxième tableau*.

When the *deuxième tableau* began, the audience found itself on a park terrace in front of a palace. The curtain rose to show France mourning over the death of her two sons as she moved slowly toward the forefront of the soundscape.⁴ In the face of the loss

² See Richard Overy article entitled “The judgment of Paris: Vichy France didn’t need lessons in anti-Semitism from the Nazis.” *Sunday Telegraph*. June 16, 2008. <<http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe/>>.

³ See also “Loi portant statut des juifs,” *Journal officiel* (October 18, 1940): 5323, “Loi sur les ressortissants étrangers de race juive,” *Journal officiel* (October 18, 1940): 5324, and “Loi du 2 juin 1941 remplaçant la loi du 3 octobre 1940 portant statut des juifs,” *Journal officiel* (June 14, 1941): 2475.

⁴ Soundscape refers to the audio/aural structure created by the radio dramatist in an effort to add richness to his radio dramatic composition. The radio dramatist employs established radio production techniques and terminology in manipulating sound and music. The smooth movement from one sound to the next is called the *segue*. This technique is particularly useful between musical elements during which one musical component fades out while the other fades in (Hilliard 29). In a radio dramatic performance, it is more appropriately referred to as a *cross-fade*. The *cross-fade* is the dissolving of one sound into another. When

of her two sons, Mother France did not despair, for she held on to the hope that one day soon the war would end and that France would, once again, be free to chart her own course into the future. La Pessimie, one of Morel's two allegorical characters, entered into the drama, expressing her surprise that France did not yield, even during a period of trial and tribulation. La France believed in the resolve of the French people, her power to meet the most challenging of obstacles, and to triumph over them as she had done in the past. The history of France was largely about overcoming adversity, so as long as hope remained, the French people would rise up again and regain freedom. It is within her poetic words that the Vichy program emerged:

LA FRANCE. My history is for me the richest check book!
I retain Corneille and Racine and Molière,
Nothing can take Pascal and La Bruyère away from me
And slide into oblivion Napoléon I!...
The atoms of the air recall Lavoisier.
On the ocean, in the evening, in the jealous breeze,
Passes the memory of the valiant La Pérouse.
It is again a Frenchman: de Lesseps Ferdinand
Who was the first to dare to divide a continent (17).

With only the name of Pasteur, the world discovers itself
And in my Golden Book that I only open a little,
One name already shines with a sovereign brilliance,
You all know it, it is that of PÉTAIN!...
(approval)
When we have...my friends...such stock,
From an endless fall, history protects you (18).⁵

two of more sounds combine and are broadcast at the same time, this is called *blending*. This may involve dialogue and music, dialogue and sound effects, sound effects and music, or a combination of all three. *Cutting* or *switching* is the abrupt ending of one sound and the immediate appearance of another. The last radio production technique that is important in radio dramatic creation is the *fade in* and *fade out*. A relatively simple operation of increasing or decreasing the volume, this technique is frequently employed to fade the music under dialogue, as well as to begin or to end the program. By applying these techniques to manipulate the soundscape, the radio drama producer gives texture to the radio drama.

⁵ LA FRANCE. Mon histoire est pour moi le plus riche chéquier !
Je conserve Corneille et Racine et Molière,
Rien ne peut m'enlever Pascal et La Bruyère
Et glisser dans l'oubli Napoléon Premier !...
Les atomes de l'air rappellent Lavoisier.
Sur l'océan, le soir, dans la brise jalouse,
Passe le souvenir du vaillant La Pérouse.
C'est encor un Français : de Lesseps Ferdinand
Qui osa le premier couper un continent (17).

Au seul nom de Pasteur le monde se découvre
Et dans mon Livre d'or que simplement j'entrouvre,
Un nom brille déjà d'un éclat souverain,
Vous le connaissez tous, c'est celui de PÉTAIN !...
(approbation)

France acknowledged the difficulty associated with reconstruction, but she remained confident that the two sides of her nation would join one another again. The key to the restoration of the nation was found in her unique history and in the person of Pétain who would ultimately restore the fatherland to its prior glory.

Camille Morel's *France!..Présent!.. Poème épique Radiophonique et Théâtral en un acte et deux tableaux* became a prime example of nascent radiophonic art produced in the international section of the "zone libre." Morel's radio drama was, all at once, drama and poetry, *rapportage* and dream, as well as a performance of the battle field, which expressed the *Zeitgeist* of Vichy during the Occupation: the fear that France would not be able to rid herself of the aggressor and that, if the Nazis, in fact, were someday gone, that she would struggle to rebuild herself, as well as a focus on the importance of the family – a theme that continued from the Interwar period.⁶ When we hear the sounds on rifle fire, when we hear the sound of aircraft passing overhead, when we hear Mother France lamenting the loss of her sons, we feel as if we are there on the field of battle, witnessing with our own eyes the horrors of war. For, in reality, for a long while, France had been engaged in a war on two fronts: against the Nazis and against her own notions of the future. The *premier tableau* presented a ceaseless battle, an interminable war; "nous nous battons toujours," wrote Morel, "et ripostons sans cesse" (9).⁷ Moreover, during the radio broadcast, Morel had created a battle in which the audience became and remained completely involved and nearly implicated in the affair. In the *deuxième tableau*, Morel's "inner voices" spoke in the form of his allegorical characters La Pessimie and L'Ambassadeur. Both characters advocated an escape into "French culture," a return to French folk traditions, as well as a desire to regain the *francité* lost during the Occupation.⁸ La France had witnessed Occupation before, and she had endured:

LA FRANCE. Many times in the course of my very long history,
I saw a stranger trample on my turf,
But always swept away by a powerful blow
He has to leave confused and pale,
Leaving behind him some new flame,
Which made known everywhere that I am immortal (15).⁹

Quand on a...mes amis...une telle réserve,
D'une chute sans fin, l'histoire vous préserve

⁶ The fears evoked in Morel's radio dramatic work foreshadow one of the most interesting and thought-provoking radio dramas to emerge during World War II: a radio drama series entitled *Nazi Eyes on Canada*, a full-cast production featuring renowned radio personalities Helen Hayes, House Jameson, Quentin Reynolds, Vincent Price, and Orson Welles, which aired originally in 1942 on CBC Radio. *Nazi Eyes on Canada* is said to be based upon field reports written by Colin Ross, a Nazi spy traveling throughout the United States and Canada in the 1930s. The program was preceded a few weeks in advance by an address given by W. L. Mackenzie King, then Prime Minister of Canada, who implored his fellow countrymen to back the war effort against the Nazis for fear that a Nazi victory might eventually jeopardize the freedoms that Canadians enjoyed. *Nazi Eyes on Canada* remains Canada's radio dramatic "crown jewel." The five parts of the radio program were broadcast on CBC Radio on September 20, 1942, and October 4, 11, 18 and 25, 1942. Alan King, dir. *Nazi Eyes on Canada* Toronto: Scenario Productions, 2000.

⁷ "We are still fighting" / "and we are returning fire without end" (9).

⁸ According to the *Robert* dictionary, the French Ministry of Culture created the word "francité" in 1965 to refer to "characteristics unique to French culture."

⁹ LA FRANCE. Maintes fois dans le cours de ma bien longue histoire,

The most remarkable aspect of Morel's radio drama, considering the relatively simple sound editing techniques of his day, is his experiment in the manipulation of the soundscape with a contemporary theme; France's struggle to regain her right to sovereignty. Morel employed simple sound effects and music to paint the picture of a nation in transition. The gun shots, produced by the knocking of a piece of wood on a hollow metal container, which the audience experienced even before the rise of the opening "curtain," underscored the poignant tone of the drama and formed the heartbeat of the work that would ultimately continue throughout the work. Despite their inherent simplicity, the realism of the sound effects serves to draw in the audience. Morel's audience would soon witness France's two sons, Le Premier combattant and Le Deuxième combattant, pay the ultimate price in the service of their country. The musical accompaniment, Chopin's *Tristesse* (Étude, Opus 10, No. 3), becomes even more gripping and complex when combined with Morel's powerful story and becomes itself an aural performance of the war, for if "a picture says a thousand words," Morel's use of Chopin's piece might very well write the story of the melancholy of all of France's World War II experiences.¹⁰

During the World War II period, music was a component that the radio dramatist used with considerable caution. The radio dramatist often employed a lone piano playing in the background or a full orchestra. He chose a musical accompaniment or framework for several purposes: as a transition between scenes or between acts, as an integral component of the story (such as in Samuel Beckett's *Words and Music*), to fade in or fade out (as in television or film), or as an emotive addition to the dialogue. Evocative music produced an emotional effect within the audience and complements the dialogue. Music was an essential component of television and film production. Radio drama production borrowed from these two media, which had enjoyed much success since their geneses. Blending music with coherent dialogue, narration, and the use of live or recorded sound effects allowed the dramatist to create a unique experience for the radio drama audience.¹¹

In the construction of *France!..Présent!..*, Morel builds his narration against this backdrop as he cultivates pro-Vichy ideology from across the sea, maintaining full awareness of the nuances that would emerge from using Chopin's music, as he lead his listener toward one central idea: this is war, with all its sights, sounds, and emotions. As a collection, Chopin's *Études* represent a workshop in his own piano technique, a reflection into his own soul in B major. Étude, Opus 10, No. 3, commonly referred to as *Tristesse*,

Je vis un étranger fouler mon territoire,
 Mais toujours balayé par un soufflet puissant
 Il dut se retirer confus et pâissant,
 Laissant derrière lui quelque flamme nouvelle
 Qui fait dire partout que je suis immortelle (15).

¹⁰ Let us consider the following: "...In the middle section of op.10 no.3, the music splinters into symmetrically mirrored figurations which threaten (but only threaten) to lose touch with an underlying harmonic foundation (ex.3). In such passages we sense harmony dissolving into 'colour', to use a common metaphor." It is this "color" that serves to fill in the visual element for Morel's radio audience. Kornel Michałowski/Jim Samson. Grove Music Online.

¹¹ It is important to note that prior to the 1940s, nearly all sound effects were produced live. Prior to World War II, no sufficient inexpensive recording medium existed. This also implies that there were very few radio programs recorded before the war. Live radio broadcasts were the norm in the Interwar period.

is a study in the control of legato melody. Chopin cautioned that “the goal is not to play everything with an equal sound, [but rather] it seems to me, a well-formed technique that can control and vary a beautiful sound quality.” [“Chopin,” Grove Music Online]. The power of Chopin’s music, which, to a large extent, constituted the driving force of Morel’s radio drama and a secondary framework, was to recall French culture in its days of power. The musical accompaniment consisted only of a piano and a violoncello, it served as a cross-fade or segue from the first tableau to the second tableau, as well as to create a distinctive contrast between the melancholy music and the roar of gun fire in the *premier* and *deuxième tableaux*. Morel’s simple technique recalls that of Molière, who, in his dozen or so comedies written to entertain Louis XIV, used ballet as a segue between scenes or acts.

Chopin’s Étude, Opus 10, No. 3 can also be considered a “Tone Poem for piano.” The work is a representation of the composer’s love for Romantic Opera and his native Poland. It is said that Chopin considered this piece as the most intimate piece he has ever composed, claiming that “In all my life I have never again been able to find such a beautiful melody” (Palmer 2). It was a piece about the fatherland, recounting the death of *wanderlust*. To this powerful Chopin piece, Morel juxtaposed *La Marseillaise*. Morel’s use of the *Marseillaise* introduced an interesting paradox into his radio drama. The *Marseillaise* was banned during the Vichy régime, which had replaced it with *Maréchal nous voilà* (*Marshal, here we are*), in reverence to Pétain, and considered singing the song an act of resistance (such as Français Libre’s *Chant des Partisans*). How could Morel reconcile his use of this song of resistance, banned by the Vichy régime, when he had written the radio drama for a Vichy-sympathetic audience as evidenced by his prefatory letter to Pétain? Did he intend his radio dramatic work for the resistance movement as well? Morel’s use of the *Marseillaise* suggests a desire to re-appropriate the song and reinvent it within a pro-Vichy context. Without question, Morel knew the power of the *Marseillaise*, just as he knew the effect that employing Chopin’s piece in his work would create on his audience. By using the *Marseillaise* in conjunction with a stated approval of Pétain as messiah or the Joan of Arc who would lead the French people to liberation, Morel refashioned France under a Vichy optic, which would serve as a point of departure to a prosperous future.

Vichy propaganda sought to return France to a supposedly authentic French culture by exalting rural life, pushing for a development of the “*culte de la petite patrie*” (Rearick 253). Pétain, himself from peasant stock, maintained that the peasant, whose good nature had remained uncorrupted by Nazi ambitions, would replenish the population of France, and ultimately save France. As a result, the Vichy government sponsored the production of films about peasants and artisans, encouraged the development of regional theater, and endorsed the performance of local songs, dances and traditions.

Sound architecture consists of constructing meaning through aural imagery. The sound architect understands the uniqueness of radio and endeavors to use its language to express ideas and feelings. He understands that audio is a process that moves from aural source to the listener and then back to the aural source. The listener distinguishes between the various aural input, the brain decodes the aural input, from which the listener produces meaning. Aural input includes speech, sound effects, music, and silence. The sound architect knows the limitations of aural imagery and works to facilitate the listener’s capacity to interpret the aural input. Each listener negotiates meaning from the

aural input that he receives individually and forms mental images of objects and events that he may not have experienced himself. As a result of the power of the imagination, the listener is able to see, smell, hear, taste and touch objects that are not physically present. The smell of a sugar maple, the taste of a warm strawberry, the crackling of a fire, a red sky at sunset, the feel of the grip on a baseball bat, the sounds of rifle shots or aircraft flying overhead, are but a few of the possible experiences that may stimulate the mind.¹² Sound defines space. Aural architecture increases human experience through the brain's capacity to create visual representations based on a composite of images produced by an individual's senses.

In his article entitled "Cognitive Mapping and Radio Drama," Alan Beck underscores his particular radio theory that specifies that listening to radio drama demands a competence in navigating or orienteering through the imaginary "scenery" via the model of cognitive mapping (1). The mapping to which Beck refers is a two-fold process. Cognitive mapping depends on the ability of the radio dramatist to construct links that will be perceived by the listener. The radio dramatist creates "scenery" and "movements" that form "a sort of abstract geometry of outlines and a flattening of perspective, and that time-space-motion is compressed" (1). The listener perceived these elements through a cognitive process and constructs a visual image of the drama as it unfolds. Don Druker argues that "what we hear when we listen to the radio or to sounds depends a great deal upon how these sounds are coded - and coding in this sense involves social, intellectual, geographic, and even physiological factors" ("Listening to the Radio," 334). The sounds of aircraft flying overhead were sounds that were very real to people living under the Vichy régime. These sounds were part of the social world.

Since the 1950s, when television reached the masses and dethroned radio as the main form of home entertainment, society has depended upon images created by others to define our world. During World War II, radio listeners were active; they participated in the performance as they constructed the drama within their own minds. The listener of radio drama encounters a text that he must interpret aurally, and this differs from television and film, where images explode on the screen (silent film is the perfect antithesis to radio drama). The radio dramatist became a sound architect who structures sound and cultivates its unique properties in order to evoke emotion in the listener that permits visualization. Through manipulation of the soundscape, Morel succeeds in visualizing the evils of war endured by the French under the Nazi Occupation.

Radio itself had become a place of political and cultural opposition. This new means of communication served foreign policy, propaganda, cultural and religious objectives that no one could have ever predicted. Radio drama began as part of the new radio medium whose parameters were unknown. Morel understood this very well. He knew how to appropriate, as well as to combine, the attributes of music and drama to achieve a powerful, radio dramatic experience, which would serve him as he reenacted the war. By tugging at the nostalgic "heart strings" of his listening audience through the use of sound effects and music, Morel repackaged a vision of France first created during the Interwar period, the reemergence of which Morel and his pro-Vichy contemporaries deemed necessary for the reconstruction of France in the World War II and Postwar periods. On the invisible stage, Morel had "performed the war" in an effort to convince

¹² We recall the *madeleine* scene from Marcel's Proust's *Du côté de chez Swann* from his collection, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, where the power of the senses incites the memory of things past.

the French who were living under the Vichy government of the importance of a return to France's glorious past. An important performance indeed, Morel's work fashioned a new self-perception of the French in the Post-World War II period.

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