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Understanding the Legacy of German Occupation: Analyzing Postwar Criticism of *Jeanne Avec Nous*

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The German Occupation of France during the Second World War is referred to by the French as *les années noires* (*the dark years*). Yet this same period has also been characterized as *un âge d'or* (*a golden age*) of French theatre. Though France had fallen to the Germans by June 1940, war continued to rage elsewhere in Europe. It was in Germany's interest to expend as few resources as possible to maintain order in France so that its military could operate at full capacity in the fight against the Allies. Thus, hoping to distract the population from its misery, the German authorities set out to promote a cultural and artistic revival in the occupied capital.¹

During the period from 1940 to 1944, French theatre thrived. The French collaborationist government at Vichy awarded production companies generous subsidies while the Germans supported theatrical ventures in an effort to restore a sense of normalcy.² As daily life grew more difficult, Parisians desperate for distraction were increasingly drawn to the theatre such that attendance at performances rose as food supplies declined.³ In the capital alone over 400 plays were performed during the Occupation, with ticket sales at Parisian box offices reaching a record high in 1943.⁴ The period witnessed the first plays of a number of iconic French playwrights including Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus and Henry de Montherlant. It also marked the first time that plays by Jean Anouilh, Jean Giraudoux and Jean Cocteau were performed on stage.⁵

In the postwar era, the question of whether or not French theatre during the occupation was ideologically committed to the Resistance has become the subject of controversy. This paper examines French theatre under the Occupation from a different perspective, however. It is not concerned with determining whether the theatre, as an institution, can be described as either *resistant* or *collaborationist*. Rather, it constitutes a comparative study of wartime and postwar criticism of a single play described as *pro-resistant* in the aftermath of the occupation – Claude Vermorel's *Jeanne Avec Nous*. An analysis of how postwar criticism retrospectively “re-wrote” the history of the play's wartime reception will be used to show how the French constructed representations of the Occupation in the period after the Liberation. Using the history of this play's reception as a lens through which to understand the impact of

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the German Occupation of France on the nation and its inhabitants, this paper will address the question: How have the French sought to understand and come to terms with the memory of occupation and collaboration in the postwar period, and how has this memory changed over time?

The Premiere of Claude Vermorel's *Jeanne Avec Nous*

In July 1941, Vichy officials brought French theatres under state control through the establishment of *le Comité d'Organisation des Entreprises de Spectacle* (*The Organizing Committee for the Performing Arts*), a government-sponsored body charged with regulation and oversight of all theatrical enterprise.⁶ This organization, in turn, authorized the creation of *la Société du Théâtre d'Essai* (*The Society of Workshop Théâtre*) at the end of the summer of 1941. *Le Théâtre d'Essai* was formed to cultivate and help finance the work of up-and-coming actors and playwrights, and operated with subsidies from the Vichy government. Signaling their support of *le Théâtre d'Essai*, the Germans granted the association use of one of the stages at the German-controlled *Théâtre des Champs-Élysées* as a venue for performances free of charge.⁷

On January 10th 1942, the organisation hosted the premiere of *Jeanne Avec Nous*, the first play written by the young and relatively unknown French playwright Claude Vermorel.⁸ Staged under the direction of Georges Douking, the play was an immediate success.⁹ Yet despite favorable audience reception, its initial run lasted only three months, with performances coming to an end in March.¹⁰ This was largely due to Vermorel's status as a new arrival to the world of French theatre.¹¹ Funding for the production of *Jeanne Avec Nous* was limited from the outset, restricting the total number of possible performances. As a testament to its popularity, however, the play was staged a second time during the Occupation at *le Théâtre Pigalle* "from 26 June to the end of August 1942, achieving its milestone hundredth performance on the weekend of 4-5 July."¹²

Jeanne Avec Nous is a dramatization of the trial and execution of *Jeanne d'Arc* (*Joan of Arc*) or *La Pucelle d'Orléans* (*the Maid of Orléans*), a French national heroine and Catholic saint who, in the 15th century, led French forces to victory against the English army during the Hundred Years' War.¹³ Joan has long been a popular French national icon. The appeal of *la Pucelle*, however, has not always been on the rise or even remained constant. Rather, it has risen and fallen at different moments in time and in different areas within France.¹⁴

When *Jeanne Avec Nous* premiered in January 1942, it was the third and last major theatrical production to feature a retelling of the Joan of Arc story during the Occupation of Paris. The play was preceded by revivals of George

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Bernard Shaw's *Sainte Jeanne* in December 1940 and Charles Péguy's *Jeanne d'Arc* in June 1941.¹⁵ The reprise of Shaw's *Sainte Jeanne* at the *Théâtre de l'Avenue* in 1940 has been described as technically and theatrically superior to either Péguy's or Vermorel's version of the story. Yet it "attracted relatively little critical attention" as evidenced by the small number of reviews written about the play at the time of its premiere. Gabriel Jacobs concludes that this indicates "the lack of serious interest, in this early period [of the Occupation], in Joan of Arc as a symbolic character."¹⁶ In 1940 – the date of the play's premiere -- the Occupation had just begun. The French Resistance did not formally exist, Charles De Gaulle was largely unknown to the French people and the national mood had not yet shifted in favor of intense patriotism in the face of ongoing German oppression. In consequence, few critics viewed Shaw's play as a *pièce de circonstance*, or a play relating to contemporary events.¹⁷

Though interest in the story of Joan of Arc was not particularly strong during the first year of the Occupation, this began to change as the war progressed. By the time Péguy's *Jeanne d'Arc* was staged at *le Théâtre Hébertot* in 1941, representations of *la Pucelle* had become increasingly prominent. In testament to the fact that ideological commitment during the Occupation was rarely unequivocal, Vichy, French collaborationists, the Resistance and the German authorities all saw in Joan a historic representation of the ideals they claimed to uphold. For Vichy, Joan, as a country maid, portrayed the virtues of a rural upbringing. Additionally, because she stood as a heroic defender of France and the French, government propaganda frequently drew comparisons between Joan and Philippe Pétain, head of the Vichy government. Right-leaning collaborationists admired Joan's strong-willed character and "her refusal to compromise or accept defeat," while the Resistance celebrated *la Pucelle* for having been a French national who fought to repel a foreign invader.¹⁸ At the same time that Vichy compared Joan to Pétain, however, *résistants* drew parallels between the maid of Orléans and Charles de Gaulle.

The German authorities also approved of the legend of Joan of Arc. It depicted the English as the enemy of France, and the Germans believed that retellings of the story encouraged anti-English sentiment.¹⁹ This supported the German position since Britain was fighting against Germany at the time. In all, the story of Joan of Arc had universal applicability within France during the Occupation. Though interest in *la Pucelle* may not have been particularly pronounced in December 1940, as seen in *Sainte Jeanne*'s critical reception, by 1941, the French had become noticeably more interested in the legend. This, in turn, affected

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Le Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. Run under the auspices of the German authorities, the theatre hosted the premier of *Jeanne Avec Nous* in 1942.

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the reception of Péguy's *Jeanne d'Arc* and Vermorel's *Jeanne Avec Nous*.

In May 1941 Petain commemorated Joan's feast day in "a burst of nationalistic enthusiasm," calling upon all of France to celebrate the life and contributions of the French martyr and national heroine.²⁰ When performances of *Jeanne d'Arc* by Charles Péguy began one month later, critics responded favorably to the play, and certain among them noted what they perceived to be the production's contemporary political significance.²¹ The following year, 1942, saw an outpouring of French cultural and artistic production dedicated to the maid of Orléans. According to Edward Boothroyd, it "was a key year for festivities, marking the publication of a (controversial) tome edited by [Sacha] Guitry, entitled *1429-1942: De Jeanne d'Arc à Philippe Pétain*."²² At the same time, "various interpretations of the Johannic legend flourished in Paris as parallels were made with the contemporary situation."²³

It was against this backdrop that Claude Vermorel's *Jeanne Avec Nous* debuted in January 1942. The play was well received by critics and commented upon favorably in the collaborationist press. Collaborationist critics congratulated Vermorel on a well-written dramatic work and expressed admiration for the play's protagonist, a response likely conditioned by the current popular fascination with *la Pucelle*. According to Gabriel Jacobs, "for the 1942 critics, Vermorel's *Jeanne* [was] the incarnation of positive glory and majesty."

Much of this criticism described the work as having a certain degree of contemporary significance. In a 1942 review of the play published in the pro-fascist daily newspaper *Le Cri du Peuple*, Lucien Rebatet calls the legend of Joan of Arc "the most beautiful [subject], without doubt, of all our history."²⁴ Rebatet continues on to say: "I do not know the political inclinations of the playwright. But it is certain that he shows us a sketch of a Joan who could become [...] the patron of French fascism."²⁵ Similarly drawing a parallel between the story of *Jeanne d'Arc* and contemporary French society, Charles Quinel, in a review of the play appearing in the conservative newspaper *Le Matin*, writes, "the heroine, by turns, sweet, resigned, brutal and rebellious, gives a strong impression of truth which brings her closer to our modern time and makes her live almost among us."²⁶

In a review published in the pro-fascist *Les Nouveaux Temps*, *Jeanne Avec Nous* is described as "proof of the comprehensive interest taken by the playwrights of this generation, after our setback, in tracing the course of our history."²⁷ Here, the critic makes a connection between the subject of the play and contemporary French society, situating Vermorel's production in the broader context of renewed artistic interest in depictions of French history

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during the Occupation. The play is also described by this reviewer as an affirmation of national dignity in the aftermath of defeat and collaboration.

Discussing the play in the collaborationist daily *Le Petit Parisien*, Morvan Lebesque, reminds the reader that “*Jeanne avec nous*” was the rallying cry for the *Front Populaire (Popular Front)*, a major coalition of leftist political parties in France, during the May Day celebrations of 1936.

We will not forget that on the first May of this year, a communist or freemason leader delivered a lengthy speech in which the Popular Front laid claim to Joan of Arc.

“*Jeanne avec nous!*” cried the liberal thinkers and atheists.²⁸

Yet in recalling this moment, – a time in which the memory of *la Pucelle* was used in service of communist ideology -- the author is quick to note that, “this strange headline in no way corresponds to this dramatic work.” The pro-fascist critic’s attempt to discredit the notion that Joan might have stood as a symbol for the left demonstrates the competing claims made on *la Pucelle* during the Occupation. Thus, through a number of published critiques of the play, the collaborationist press approved of, and frequently laid claim to, Vermorel’s *Jeanne*.

Wartime theatrical commentary on *Jeanne Avec Nous* derives mainly from German and Vichy approved collaborationist publications, and there does not appear to have been a review of Vermorel’s *Jeanne* in *Les Lettres Françaises*, the official journal of the *Comité National des Écrivains (CNE)*, a French Communist association dedicated to promoting literary Résistance, or any other clandestine publication. If such a review existed it would provide insight into the *resistant* or non-collaborationist perspective on the play. In the absence of such a review, however, descriptions of audience and critical reaction to the play as it was performed in 1942 taken from historical commentary and other secondary source material will be used here to determine how those who did not harbor collaborationist sympathies viewed *Jeanne Avec Nous*.

The collaborationist press embraced the play, but what of its reception among members of the French Resistance or those sympathetic to the cause? It would certainly have been possible for audiences to see the play as reinforcing the ideals of the Resistance to the extent that Joan was fighting to save France from a foreign occupier. Patrick Marsh, Serge Added and Edward Boothroyd all agree that this element of the plot in addition to the fact that *Jeanne d’Arc* had already been taken up as a symbol for both right-wing and left-wing ideologies makes it inevitable that at least some segment of French audiences would have come away from the performance with a pro-Resistance impression of the play. However, this reaction does not seem

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to have been widespread. In an article titled “*Peut-on parler de ‘théâtre résistant’?*” (“*Can one speak of a theatre of resistance?*”) Serge Added contends that while it would have been impossible to publish a pro-resistance interpretation of the play in the official press, if *Jeanne Avec Nous* had been seen by a majority of people as *résistant*, collaborationist critics would have had at least some sense of this and would not have praised the play with such intensity.²⁹

Despite similarities between Joan’s plight and the plight of *résistants* in France, the Resistance movement had not yet attracted extensive public support by January 1942. As evidence of this, Added points to the fact that General de Gaulle was still “far from unanimously acknowledged as France’s true leader” at that time.³⁰ This makes it unlikely that theatergoers would have interpreted the play as representative of the struggle of French resisters. In support of this claim, Gabriel Jacobs writes, “almost nothing written about *Jeanne Avec Nous* during the Occupation could lead one to conclude that it was taken by audiences to be anti-Nazi or anti-Vichy.”³¹ While some individuals may have interpreted the play in support of the French Resistance, to say that *Jeanne Avec Nous* was massively received as such during the Occupation would be inaccurate.

Analysis of Post-Liberation commentary on *Jeanne Avec Nous*

Jeanne Avec Nous remained popular in the immediate postwar period but failed to achieve the same degree of success it had enjoyed during the Occupation. The play was performed in Liberated Paris for the first time in December 1945 at *le Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier*.³² Subsequent revivals were staged in 1946 at *le Théâtre Verlaine*, in 1954 in the public square in front of *Notre Dame* and in 1956 at *le Théâtre en Rond*.³³ After this last performance, interest in *Jeanne Avec Nous* began to diminish, however. An analysis of postwar criticism of *Jeanne Avec Nous* nevertheless demonstrates how French memory of the Occupation continued to influence perceptions of artistic and cultural production in the period following the Liberation.

Postwar critical reaction to *Jeanne Avec Nous* is highly uniform in content and reflects a move towards reinterpreting the play as having been initially seen as a work of *théâtre résistant* staged in full view of the German authorities. In criticism of the play dating from 1945 onwards this argument is made most frequently through the claim that French audiences perceived a pro-resistance message in the play at the time of its premiere. Additionally, reviewers assert that Claude Vermorel intended for *Jeanne Avec Nous* to serve as a carrier of resistance ideology. In making these arguments, however, critics disregard or significantly downplay the overwhelmingly positive response to the

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play in the collaborationist press. In the rare case when this aspect of the production's initial reception is taken into account, critics maintain that this occurred only because the Germans failed to pick up on the play's "hidden meaning." Taken together, these elements of postwar criticism of *Jeanne Avec Nous* indicate that the French attempted to re-write the history of the play's reception to reflect a *resistancialist* vision of French conduct during the Occupation – a view of the Occupation wherein the majority of the French resisted German authority with only a small number having collaborated.

Beginning with the first postwar revival of *Jeanne Avec Nous* in 1945 and continuing until 1956, the play received glowing reviews in the Parisian press. Critics frequently praised the heroic qualities of the protagonist. Some reviews commented on the *mise en scène* (staging); others discussed the quality of the acting. Almost without exception, however, critics describe the play as having been politically significant for French audiences in 1942 and throughout the war. In a December 1945 review published in *Le Pays*, J. Van der Esh, writes,

Jeanne Avec Nous is not one of these works that one forgets. This which, in 1942, constituted a beautiful cry of revolt, a stupefying challenge thrown to the occupier and his heavy censorship."³⁴

By saying that *Jeanne Avec Nous* constituted "a cry of revolt" in 1942, the critic's pronouncement is definitive. Rather than saying that the play was *interpreted* as pro-resistance, he claims it *was* pro-resistance. Van der Esh makes no mention of the play's reception in the collaborationist press, instead he presents his description of the event as though it were indisputable fact. In stating that *Jeanne Avec Nous* supported the cause of *resistance*, the critic makes no attempt to present an objective representation of history.

Further interpreting the play as an allegory of France under the Occupation, the review compares the "collaborationist" behavior of the Bishop Cauchon to the conduct of French collaborators. Pierre Cauchon was a French bishop who, in aspiring to become a cardinal, sought political support and recognition from both the King of England and the Duke of Bedford.³⁵ To win favor with the English authorities, Cauchon served as the chief prosecutor of Joan of Arc at her trial. Describing the bishop, Van der Esh writes, "for five centuries, schoolchildren have hated Cauchon because he 'collaborated'."³⁶ By putting the final word in quotation marks, the reviewer calls attention to the specific language used, emphasizing the idea that, as a Frenchman who represented the English in the trial against Joan of Arc, Cauchon collaborated just as those who supported

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the German interest in France during the Occupation collaborated.

Van der Esh is unable or unwilling to view the play as distinct from the political context in which it premiered. Rather than acknowledging that some critics interpreted the play as pro-German or pro-Vichy at the time of its premiere, the critic leads the reader to believe that *Jeanne Avec Nous* was seen as unequivocally pro-Resistance in 1942. This retrospective simplification of audience reaction serves to minimize discussion of French collaboration while simultaneously misrepresenting the extent to which audiences perceived a resistance message on stage. The reviewer evidently does not wish to deal with shades of grey. He has no interest in explaining the complexity and ambiguity inherent in the play's wartime reception. His intention is, rather, to create the impression that the play constituted nothing less than a call to resist the Germans during the Occupation. This tendency to exaggerate the scope and influence of the Resistance in the post-Liberation period corresponds with and provides evidence for the existence of the *resistance* myth, or Gaullist, myth. In discussing the character of the inquisitor Lemaître, Van der Esh, directly refers to the French Resistance. He writes, "perhaps the martyrs of the resistance sometimes found before them one of these beings without measure, [who are, like Lemaître,] only capable of understanding their own sacrifice."³⁷ In using the term "martyrs", the critic portrays the resistance in a heroic light. This indicates the influence and impact of the *resistance* myth, a phenomenon that sought to describe French resisters as entirely heroic and valiant.

When *Jeanne Avec Nous* was performed the following year, critics continued to portray the play as having been uniformly interpreted as a call to resist by French audiences during the Occupation. In a 1946 review written by Jacques Mauchamps in *Spectateur*, a "leftist literary and theatrical weekly,"³⁸ *Jeanne Avec Nous* is labeled "a long cry of revolt against oppression, against foreign occupation and against all forms of submission to the enemy."³⁹ Mauchamps writes,

"The greatest merit of Claude Vermorel is without doubt having put into Joan's mouth these fervent patriotic fits of anger which rouse the spectator irresistibly from his own concerns so that he may stand up, shoulder to shoulder, with 'the national heroine' against all the injustices, all the crimes and against foreign oppression. Written before the war, this play, which appeared during the occupation, bore witness at once to the stupidity of the German censor, the courage of the playwright and the public's adherence to a good cause."⁴⁰

While claiming that French audiences saw the play as pro-Resistance during

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the Occupation, the reviewer also contends that it was the playwright's intention to provoke such a reaction. This is not necessarily surprising or without precedent given that, to mark the play's first post-war revival in 1945, Claude Vermorel submitted an article to the formerly clandestine left-leaning newspaper *Opéra* identifying "a pro-Resistance message in the play, [and] claiming it had been banned by the occupying authorities."⁴¹

Yet Vermorel's assertions about the *resistant* character of *Jeanne Avec Nous* fail to capture the complexity of both the playwright's wartime conduct and the circumstances under which the play was produced. To begin, *la Compagnie du Théâtre d'Essai*, the theatre company responsible for staging the original production of *Jeanne Avec Nous*, was funded by the Vichy regime and operated with German approval. Additionally, the right to perform the play in *la Comédie des Champs-Élysées* had been granted to Vermorel by the German authorities. This information was never kept a secret. Furthermore, Vermorel wrote a number of articles for collaborationist and pro-fascist newspapers such as *La Gerbe* and *Comœdia* during the War. This was a matter of public record and both were widely circulating publications.⁴² In repeating Vermorel's claim that *Jeanne Avec Nous* had been written to communicate a message of resistance, critics like Jacques Mauchamps necessarily overlooked information that might have called into question the playwright's, and their, version of events.

Mauchamps was not alone in his ready acceptance of Vermorel's assertion. Further imposing a retrospective, *resistance*ist, view of the Occupation on the history of the play's reception, the author of a review appearing in the daily newspaper *Minerve* in January 1946, Francois de Roux, writes,

"The Germans did not perceive that *Jeanne Avec Nous* was nothing more than a long and virulent protest against their actions, their methods and their constant barbarity. I suppose when everyone else heard "the Germans", they, according to the literal text, heard 'the English.'⁴³

Similar to Jacques Mauchamps, de Roux contends that the German censor failed to pick up on the play's subversive content because it adhered to a literal interpretation of the text. While it is true that the play won approval from the censor because it gave voice to anti-English sentiment, it does not follow that simply because of this and because some audience members may have perceived a pro-Resistance message in the performance, the play was universally interpreted as a *pièce résistante* (*resistance play*). Lucien Rebatet's statement, for example, in 1942, that Vermorel's Joan was "the patron of French fascism" demonstrates that the play was subject to other political interpretations.⁴⁴ In

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light of this, claims made by critics like Mauchamps and de Roux with respect to the play's intended message indicate either that these men did not have any knowledge of how the play was received in occupied Paris -- meaning that they were "creating" history in accordance with what they wanted to believe had transpired in the past -- or that they were aware of but chose to ignore the fact that the play had been used as pro-German and pro-Vichy propaganda during the war. In either case, postwar criticism of the play reflects an inaccurate *resistancialist* vision of French conduct during the Occupation.

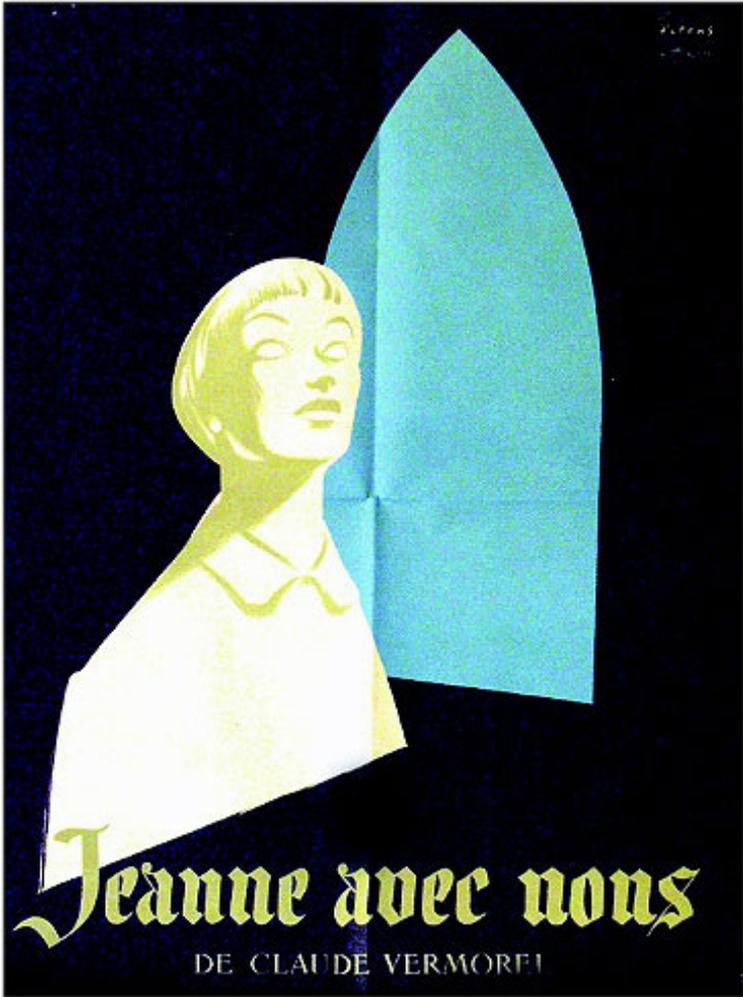
Further illustrating the strength of French belief in the resistant character of the play, Thierry Maulnier, writing in the conservative newspaper *L'Essor*⁴⁵ in January 1946, remarks,

"Claude Vermorel's *Jeanne Avec Nous* was performed in Paris under the German Occupation. As it tells the story of Joan of Arc, and consequently, the English, the censor and the press of the occupying regime made Vermorel a fairly good welcome. But the public was not fooled. They discerned without difficulty the true meaning of the play, the only true meaning of the myth of Joan of Arc in a land trampled by invading armies in the midst of insidious and menacing calls to submission and servitude: the lesson of the disarmed weakness which triumphs over force, of the candid honesty which triumphs over ruse, of courage and moving fragility, of inflexible obstinacy and of inflexible hope."⁴⁶

While upholding a view of the play's history consistent with what is described in other reviews, Maulnier also mentions the play's reception in the official German-approved press, a topic avoided by other reviewers. Yet Maulnier neither concedes the ambiguity of the circumstances under which the play made its debut nor acknowledges that *la Pucelle* was subject to a variety of interpretations during the War. In saying, "the public was not fooled," he suggests, rather, that the situation may still be seen in black and white, or absolute, terms. The implication of his statement is that Joan was, in fact, standing on the side of the Resistance during the Occupation; the German censor and the official press were simply not discerning enough to have realized this.

A chorus of voices echo the postwar vision of the play's reception in occupied Paris as described by Van der Esh, Mauchamps, de Roux and Maulnier. In a review of the play appearing in 1946 in *Les Etoiles*, a resistance journal published in the south of France,⁴⁷ Marc Beigbeder states that, in the play, the English symbolized "the Germans in 1942"

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An advertisement for *Jeanne Avec Nous*; French, year unknown.

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while “the inquisitors represented Vichy.”⁴⁸ This portrayal of *Jeanne Avec Nous* continued to be seen in theatrical criticism published as late as 1956, the year in which the play was revived in Paris for the last time. Writing in October 1956, in *Le Parisien Libéré*, a newspaper that had operated as a resistant publication in the last year of the war⁴⁹, J.C. Jaubert contends that every detail of the play has been precisely imagined so as to cause the reader to reflect upon and see before him a depiction of the German Occupation. Referring to *Jeanne Avec Nous*, he writes, “all this was made to remind us of an occupation not Anglo-Saxon, but Germanic.”⁵⁰ Thus, the French continued to retrospectively re-interpret the history of the play’s reception up to two decades after the Liberation of Paris and the end of the Occupation.

Conclusion

What emerges from an analysis of postwar criticism of *Jeanne Avec Nous* is a widespread attempt on the part of French critics to portray the work as having been seen as a call to resist during the Occupation. The fact that reviewers consistently discuss not only how the play might be seen as pro-resistant but also how theatergoers perceived the work as such during the war demonstrates the larger postwar obsession with the “dark years” as seen through a desire to continually discuss the significance of past events in relation to the overarching circumstances of the Occupation. Additionally, the fact that critics claim that wartime audiences interpreted *Jeanne Avec Nous* as an allegory for resistance while failing to mention the play’s positive reception in the collaborationist press indicates a tendency to simplify the history of wartime events to envision an inaccurate but heroic portrayal of the past.

Rather than attempting to show the situation in Paris as it existed, postwar criticism of *Jeanne Avec Nous* portrays an idealized, *resistancialist* version of French conduct during the Occupation. In writing that spectators picked up on a pro-resistance message in the play, critics retrospectively and inaccurately depict the French as having been complicit with the *resistant* intent of the play by implying that audiences were receptive of such messages. Furthermore, the idea that the play and its author communicated *resistant* ideology, suggests that the Resistance was powerful enough during the Occupation as to have influenced even the nation’s artistic and cultural output over the period from 1940 to 1944.

In his introductory essay to the seven-volume work entitled *Lieux de Memoire (Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past)*, Pierre Nora writes, “memory and history, far from being synonymous, appear now to be in fundamental opposition.”⁵¹ In opposition to Nora’s idea that history stands as a discrete, factual record of past events while memory is a convoluted

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construct, clouded by individual prejudice and forgetfulness, this paper argues that it is impossible to separate the two given that history is ultimately a representation of the past constructed *from* memory. This is clearly seen through the analysis of postwar criticism of *Jeanne Avec Nous*. Though Nora might argue that postwar criticism of the play attempted to subvert or corrupt history, such an assertion fails to account for the fact that history and memory are highly interwoven and, even, interdependent. Rather than tainting the historical record, French memory of the plays actually forms an important component of the history of the works and their reception in France, and provides insight into how the French have attempted to understand the legacy of occupation and collaboration in the postwar era.

In the present day, *Jeanne Avec Nous* has largely fallen out of favor.⁵² Claude Vermorel was not a very prolific playwright and did not succeed in establishing a name for himself in an enduring sense. Though *Jeanne Avec Nous* was immensely popular at the time of its premiere – likely because the French, at that time, were so desperate for affirmations of national heroism – it has not stood up to a myriad of other, perhaps more sophisticated adaptations of the Joan of Arc legend. Nevertheless, the play and the history of its reception serve to illuminate the way in which the French attempted to retrospectively reimagine past events to rebuild a sense of dignity and pride in their nation after one of the most devastating periods in French history.

¹ Frederic Spotts. *The Shameful Peace* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 19.

² Kenneth Krauss, *The Drama of Fallen France: Reading la Comédie sans Tickets* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), xiii.

³ Spotts, *The Shameful Peace*, 235.

⁴ Julian Jackson, *France: The Dark Years, 1940-1944*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 310. See also: Merrill A. Rosenberg, “Vichy’s Theatrical Venture,” *Theatre Survey* 11 (2009): 142.

⁵ Jackson, *The Dark Years*, 310.

⁶ Merrill A. Rosenberg, “Vichy’s Theatrical Venture,” *Theatre Survey* 11 (2009): 143.

⁷ Serge Added, “Peut-on parler de ‘théâtre résistant?’” *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine* 37 (1990): 141

⁸ Edward Boothroyd, “The Parisian Stage,” (Ph.D. thesis, University of Birmingham, 2009), 54.

⁹ Ibid., 55.

¹⁰ Boothroyd, “The Parisian Stage,” 58.

¹¹ Ibid., 75.

¹² Ibid., 58.

¹³ David Hilliam, *Joan of Arc: Heroine of France* (New York: The Rosen Publishing Group, 2005), 99.

¹⁴ Ibid., 155.

¹⁵ Jacobs, “The Role of Joan of Arc,” 68.

¹⁶ Ibid., 68.

¹⁷ Jacobs, “The Role of Joan of Arc,” 69.

¹⁸ Boothroyd, “The Parisian Stage,” 66.

¹⁹ Ibid., 65.

²⁰ Jackson, *The Dark Years*, 257.

²¹ Jacobs, “The Role of Joan of Arc,” 72.

²² Boothroyd, “The Parisian Stage,” 64.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Original text: “...cet admirable sujet, le plus beau sans doute de toute notre histoire, renferme encore des forces neuves d’émotion.” Source: Lucien Rebatet, “Théâtre d’essai de la Comédie des Champs-Élysées: Jeanne avec nous de Claude Vermorel,” review of *Jeanne Avec Nous* by Claude Vermorel, *Le Cri du Peuple*, January 1942.

²⁵ Original text: “j’ignore quelles sont, quant a lui [Vermorel], ses inclinations politiques. Mais il est certain qu’il nous montre l’esquisse d’une Jeanne qui pourrait devenir, [...] la patronne d’un fascisme français.” Source : Rebatet, “Jeanne avec nous de Claude Vermorel.”

²⁶ Original text: “l’héroïne, tour a tour, douce, résignée, brutale et révoltée, donne une forte impression de vérité, qui la rapproche de nos temps modernes et la fait vivre Presque avec nous.” Source: Charles Quinel, “Jeanne Avec Nous: Quatre Actes de Claude Vermorel,” review of *Jeanne Avec Nous* by Claude Vermorel, *Le Matin*, 1942.

²⁷ Original text: “Le Théâtre d’essai de la Comédie des Champs-Élysées nous a donné, l’autre semaine, une prévue nouvelle de l’intérêt compréhensif que les auteurs de la génération présent trouvent, le lendemain de nos revers, a remonter le cours de notre histoire.” Source: Armory, review of *Jeanne Avec Nous* by Claude Vermorel, *Les Nouveaux Temps*, January 20, 1942.

²⁸ Original text: “enfin, nous n’oublions pas que le 1er mai de cette année-la [1936 as noted earlier in the paragraph], un orateur communiste, d’ailleurs franc-maçon, prononça un long discours dans lequel Jeanne d’Arc était

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revendiquée par le Front Populaire. “Jeanne avec nous! [...] crièrent les membres de la section des Libres-Penseurs et Sans-Dieu.” “ Source: Morvan Lebesque, “Comédie des Champs-Élysées : Jeanne avec Nous, quatre actes de M. Claude Vermorel,” review of *Jeanne Avec Nous* by Claude Vermorel, *Le Petit Parisien*, January 12, 1942.

²⁹ Added, “théâtre résistant?” 137.

³⁰ Boothroyd, “The Parisian Stage,” 72-73.

³¹ Jacobs, “The Role of Joan of Arc,” 74.

³² *Ibid.*, 55.

³³ *Ibid.*, 55.

³⁴ Original text: “Il faut en reparler Jeanne Avec Nous n’est pas l’un de ces œuvres qui se laissent oublier. Ce fut, en 1942, un beau cri de révolte, un stupéfiant défi lance à l’occupant et à sa lourde censure.” Source: J. Van der Esh, “Jeanne Avec Nous: Légende de notre Temps,” review of *Jeanne Avec Nous* by Claude Vermorel, *Le Pays*, December 29, 1945.

³⁵ David Hilliam, *Joan of Arc*, 82.

³⁶ Original text: “depuis cinq siècles, les écoliers honnissent Cauchon parce qu’il a “collaboré”. Source: J. Van der Esh, “Jeanne Avec Nous,” 1945.

³⁷ Original text: “peut-être les martyrs de la résistance ont-ils parfois trouvé devant eux un de ces êtres hors mesure, seuls capables de comprendre leur sacrifice.” Source: J. Van der Esh, “Jeanne Avec Nous,” 1945.

³⁸ Otis Fellows, *The Periodical Press in Liberated Paris: A Survey and Checklist* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1946).

³⁹ Original Text: “L’œuvre est un long cri de révolte contre l’oppression, contre l’occupation étrangère, contre toutes les formes de la soumission à l’ennemi.” Source: Jacques Mauchamps, “Jeanne avec nous de Claude Vermorel au Théâtre Verlaine,” review of *Jeanne Avec Nous* by Claude Vermorel, *Spectateur*, January 2, 1946.

⁴⁰ Original text: « Le plus grand mérite de Claude Vermorel est sans doute d’avoir mis dans la bouche de Jeanne ces emportements patriotiques et fervents qui arrachent irrésistiblement le spectateur à lui-même, pour le dresser, coude à coude, avec ‘l’héroïne nationale’ contre toutes les injustices, toutes les félonies et contre l’oppression étrangère. Car, écrite avant la guerre, cette pièce, qui fut jouée pendant l’occupation, témoignait à la fois de la bêtise sans non des censures allemands, du courage de l’auteur, et de l’adhésion du public à la bonne cause. » Source : Mauchamps, « Jeanne Avec Nous. »

⁴¹ Boothroyd, “The Parisian Stage,” 55-56.

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⁴² Boothroyd, “The Parisian Stage,” 76.

⁴³ Original text: “Les Allemands ne s’aperçurent même pas que Jeanne Avec Nous n’était qu’une longue et virulent protestation contre leurs actes, leurs méthodes, leur constante barbarie. Je suppose que lorsque tout le monde comprenant “Allemands”, eux, selon le texte literait, entendaient ‘Anglais!’” Source: François de Roux, “Jeanne Avec Nous,” review of *Jeanne Avec Nous* by Claude Vermorel, *Minerve*, January 4, 1946.

⁴⁴ Rebatet, “Jeanne Avec Nous de Claude Vermorel,” 1942.

⁴⁵ D. Elveth, *The Authorized Press in Vichy and Occupied France, 1940-1944, A Bibliography* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1999), 152.

⁴⁶ Original text: “La Jeanne Avec Nous de Claude Vermorel, fut représentée à Paris sous l’occupation allemande. Comme il s’agissait de Jeanne d’Arc, et par conséquent des Anglais, la censure et la presse du régime d’occupation lui firent assez bon accueil. Mais le public ne s’y trompait pas, il discernait sans peine ce que pouvait être le sens actuel, le seul sens actuel du mythe de Jeanne d’Arc sur une terre piétinée par les armées d’invasion au milieu de tous les appels insidieux ou menaçants a la soumission et a la servitude: la leçon de la faiblesse désarmée qui triomphe de la force, de la candide honnêteté qui triomphe de la ruse, du courage dans sa fragilité la plus émouvante, de l’intraitable entêtement et de l’intraitable espérance.” Source: Thierry Maulnier, “Jeanne Avec Nous,” review of *Jeanne Avec Nous* by Claude Vermorel, *L’Essor*, January 19, 1946.

⁴⁷ Jackson, *The Dark Years*, 501.

⁴⁸ Original text: “je sais que certaines transpositions (les Anglais = les Allemands de 1942, les inquisiteurs = Vichy) pourraient l’actualiser et lui rendre au moins une émotion élémentaire, mais elles sont mises la de façon bien subtile.” Source: Marc Beigbeder, “Une auteur et une œuvre,” review of *Jeanne Avec Nous* by Claude Vermorel, *Les Etoiles*, January 1, 1946.

⁴⁹ “Le Parisien,” in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, (2010).

⁵⁰ Original text: “tout avait été fait pour nous rappeler une occupation non plus anglo-saxonne, mais germanique.” Source: J.C. Jaubert, “Au Théâtre en rond: *Jeanne Avec Nous* de Claude Vermorel,” review of *Jeanne Avec Nous* by Claude Vermorel, *Le Parisien Libéré*, October 18, 1956.

⁵¹ Pierre Nora, “Entre Memoire et Histoire,” *Les Lieux de Memoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 2984), 8.

⁵² Krauss, *The Drama of Fallen France*, 162.