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French Cinema, 1940-1944, and its Socio-Psychological Significance: a preliminary probe

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We have come to grasp the physical contours of divided and occupied France in the forties through the now classic works of Aron and Michel, the more contemporary works of de Launay, and the specialised studies of Paxton. And we have gained insight into the social life and day to day existence of Frenchmen in the period through works like Hervé Le Boterf's *La Vie Parisienne Sous L'Occupation*. But what of the mental contours of bifurcated France, attitudes, fears, hopes, dreams, tensions? How did the population deal psychologically with the 1940 defeat, the trauma of Occupation and the dramatic societal cleavage? What myths evolved to help Frenchmen cope with the situation; myths, if we are to follow Lévi-Strauss, being the mechanism for smoothing over irreconcilable contradictions?

Perhaps there is no better source for these mental contours than the French cinema of the period, which after the hostilities ceased, flourished more successfully than ever before both in terms of production and box office receipts [1]. Although recently much has been written particularly in France on the importance of cinema as a source of collective mentality, in relating the cinema, history and psychology, one ventures on to relatively new terrain. Christian Metz provides some theoretical underpinnings with his *Le Signifiant Imaginaire* and Marc Ferro and Pierre Sorlin have pioneered a more concrete application to historical questions [2].

It must be acknowledged that French cinema in the thirties and forties never attained the success cinema had in the United States where 75% of the population frequented the cinema on a regular basis. One historian of the cinema has estimated that 85% of all Frenchmen did *not* attend the cinema regularly [3]. Although this may have been a bit of an exaggeration, cinema in France in the nineteen forties was essentially an urban, working class phenomenon, and film analysis which attempts to extrapolate to the level of national consciousness must recognise this fact. Still, the cinema in France occupied a far more significant place in terms of spectators than all other forms and sources of entertainment [4].

There have been a number of more standard treatments of the cinema of the Vichy period beginning with Roger Régent's classic study and Marxist Georges Sadoul's analysis to the more current interpretation of Paul Légise [5]. Until quite recently, with these studies, as with more general questions of this period, it has been common to approach the cinema in terms of resistance versus collaborationism. Over and over again we hear that at least the French made no overtly collaborationist films and were not involved in pro-Vichy propaganda, with rare exceptions like the films of Jean-Paul Paulin, the Abel Gance film *Vénus Aveugle* which he dedicated to the Maréchal [Pétain], and Marcel

Pagnol's *La Fille du Puisatier* featuring one of Pétain's celebrated discourses to the nation. And French film historians have been quick to point out the various cinematic references that are indicative of the spirit of Resistance, like the often cited lines in *Pontcarral, Colonel d'Empire* (Delannoy, 1942) when the hero proclaims to the judge "Under such a regime Sir, it is an honour to be sentenced" [6] and like the celebrated last scene of Carné's *Les Visiteurs du Soir*, where the hearts of the two lovers beat together, though they have been turned into stone statues, thus supposedly symbolising the unity still existing in a divided France. But to my mind, analysis and understanding suffers from this Manichean-like approach, placing films in moralistic categories of good and evil.

There is perhaps no better example to illustrate this point than the much maligned film by Henri-Georges Clouzot *Le Corbeau* which appeared in 1943. After the Liberation, this film was vigorously attacked and derided, particularly in the leftist press as a piece of German propaganda [7]. The film had in fact been produced by the German production company operating in Paris, the Continental, and focused on a whole series of anonymous letters of denunciation (from the Corbeau) which threatened to undermine the entire social fabric of a small French village. Georges Sadoul continued to dismiss the film as enemy propaganda long after the war, when in his 1954 history he wrote, "to show Frenchmen capable of writing anonymous letters of denunciation is unworthy of the Resistance fighters" [8]. The fact that the script for the film was based on an actual incident of 1917 and had been submitted to the Société des Auteurs as early as 1937, the fact that anonymous denunciations had really been quite common under the Occupation, the fact that the film had achieved a high degree of box office popularity and that artistically it was perhaps one of the finest films of the period were of no consequence to Sadoul and others as they preferred to avoid any sort of serious analytical treatment of the film. *Le Corbeau*, in fact, became one of those 'invisible' films shown only in rare instances at the Cinémathèque Française, until about 1969 when it was once again given a public showing.

Another example of such obfuscation involved Delannoy's 1943 film *L'Eternelle Retour*, which was condemned after the war in the British press as a pure Nazi film. French film historian Roger Régent, writing in 1949, almost reaches a strident tone as he jumps to the film's defence, "Is it not possible to show a blond hero without having him symbolically and aggressively serve as a representative of the aryan race?" [9]. Those who conceived of *L'Eternelle Retour* as a fascist film could respond to Régent by pointing out that not only is the title of the film borrowed directly from Nietzsche, but also the hero of *L'Eternelle Retour*, Jean Marais, deliberately dyes his hair peroxide blonde to insure box office success, his heroine Natalie is a tall, blonde, blue-eyed Norwegian, the narrative of the film was based directly on the Tristan and Isolde saga, the idyllic tryst of the two lovers takes place in a pristine, wintry, Leni Riefenstahlesque mountain setting, the forces of evil are all dark, epitomized by the dark-haired dwarf (quite possibly an oblique reference to Jews), there is expressionistic lighting and a Wagnerian sea drama, all bringing the film dangerously close to some of the Nationalist Socialist films of the period. On the other hand, the director of the film was the same Delannoy who also directed *Pontcarral, Colonel d'Empire*, with its already-mentioned snatch of dialogue which was taken to be reflective of a spirit of Resistance. But rather than seeing *L'Eternelle Retour* as a fascist inspired French film and falling into the Manichean trap, I would rather look at the film as a way of working out the relationship of France to the occupying power and as a way of coming to grips with the 1940 defeat and the ensuing modification of political structure as well as life style. We will pursue this line of thought with subsequent thematic and visual analysis.

Although both Sadoul and Régent were writing after the war and their work is very

much coloured by the mania to prove all Frenchmen to be Resisters at heart, there continues to be a need for constant re-interpretation. Paul Légise, in his otherwise extremely well-researched and documented *Histoire de la Politique du Cinéma Français Entre Deux Républiques 1940-1946* (1977), writes, "Effectively, the French production of this period is marked by a clear distance from Petainist philosophy, at least which concerns works of quality" [10]. But surely Légise must realise that if we are to use film as a source of social history and collective mentalities, we must not selectively focus on works of quality, for quality is both temporally and culturally determined.

The most recent studies which concern themselves with Vichy cinema provide a dramatic corrective to the previous literature which exalts French cinema for basically having eschewed pro-Vichy proclivities. Both François Courtade in his thoughtful *Les Malédiction du Cinéma Français* (1978) and Jean-Pierre Bertin-Maghit in his semio-logically oriented *Le Cinéma Français Sous Vichy* (1980) [11], both undoubtedly at least partially inspired by the spirit of auto-critique generated by Ophüls' *Le Chagrin et la Pitié*, view the cinema of the period as an expression of the Vichy ethos. Accordingly, French films 1940-1944, although not involved with hard-core political propaganda, do constitute what Bertin-Maghit calls "sociological propaganda" and the "propaganda of integration" [12], or the propaganda of the ideals and values of the ruling elite, the architects of Vichy consciousness. They are, following Courtade, infused with the ethic of 'Travail, Famille et Patrie,' the very essence of the ideology of the National Revolution [13].

On the one hand, it is scarcely surprising that the films of the period did tend to reflect the Vichy ethos to a large extent, given the socio-economic and political structures which controlled French film-making, as we shall see. Indeed, it is a very telling commentary on more contemporary French society that the myth of the Resistance has been so persistent and that French film historians are only now drawing such conclusions. However, when all is said and done, although this may place the films in a 'new' perspective, it still adds little to our knowledge and insight into the Vichy period.

Moreover, it is the opinion of this historian that interpreting all of the films in terms of one or two structural models, as Bertin-Maghit has done, is dangerously reductionist. How can one lump together films of directors of such diverse political backgrounds as Carné, who had flirted with the Left in the thirties, and Jean-Paul Paulin, of obvious right wing persuasion and say that they all were a pure and simple reflection of 'Travail, Famille et Patrie'? Here again one falls into the Manichean trap. And in another vein, is it meaningful, when assessing films as indicators of collective mentalities, to group together films of the period which enjoyed relatively little success with those that were big box office draws for weeks on end?

But before we begin to respond to what we have judged to be weaknesses in the literature, let us briefly sketch what film production and cinema-going was like in France between 1940 and 1944, this time of wooden shoes, ration cards, and reduced electricity [14]. In 1940 the cinema studios were requisitioned by the Army for storage and other military purposes, but by 1941, 60 films had been produced, 44 in the Occupied Zone and 16 in the so-called Free Zone. All aspects of film production fell under the newly created Comité d'Organisation de l'Industrie Cinématographique, or the C.O.I.C., but this took its orders directly from the Germans who monitored French production very carefully. French films of the period, in fact, had the double censorship of Vichy and Propaganda Staffel.

The often cited Goebbels' diaries were very specific on keeping French films 'light, empty and if possible, stupid' [15]. And above all, it was necessary to down play French nationalism. In the Occupied Zone, the Germans immediately forbade the projection of

any British and American film (and it must be recalled that American films accounted for two-thirds of all films shown in France in the 1930s). American and British films could be projected in the Free Zone until 1942. The Germans hoped to fill the created lacuna with their own film exports. And in addition, they had their own production company, the Continental, which operated out of Paris and produced 30 of the some 220 films made under the Occupation. The Germans issued all sorts of interesting and revealing directives regarding the cinema. For example, on October 12, 1940, the communiqué went forth that there could be no applause during the projection of newsreels [16] and a subsequent communiqué required newsreels to be projected in half-lit theatres [17], thus lending credence to theoretical writers who have waxed poetic on the particular psychological and emotive impact of the 'salles obscures' or darkened theatres.

Some 110 previously circulating films were censored (i.e. put out of circulation in the Non-Occupied Zone), comprising 65 French films and 45 foreign films. Among the films censored were the cream of the so-called French poetic-realist movement, which for an ephemeral moment in French cinema history focused on the working class and contemporary social problems, albeit in a highly romanticised fashion. Among these were nearly all the films of Marcel Carné, *Hôtel du Nord*, *Quai des Brumes*, and *Le Jour se Lève*. And Carné was a director who chose to remain in France after the 1940 collapse, who continued to make films, and who was forced to adapt [18].

What sorts of films then were the French going to see in this period 1940 to 1944? What were the most popular films? [19]. First of all it must be acknowledged that information on exact box office statistics is very difficult to come by for this period. The sketchy periodic annual surveys of film popularity from the thirties are missing altogether in the forties. What I have done then to try and arrive at reasonably reliable box office statistics is consult *Le Film*, the principal organ of the French film industry in the forties and look at the advertisements which would list box office figures if a film was particularly successful [20].

First there is the question of how well the German films fared amongst the French; better, I am afraid than has been generally assumed (Sadoul, for example, maintained that the French spontaneously boycotted German performances) [21]. It is true that most of the hard-core propaganda films did not even circulate in France, although *Jude Suss*, for example, was shown and was extremely popular in Marseilles, coming second and first respectively as the most popular film for April and May 1941, according to *Le Film* [22]. What did proliferate on the French screens were the German musical comedies, Viennese operettas, historical reconstructions, and these were highly successful. The German films with the French titles, *Les Aventures Fantastiques du Baron Munchausen*, *Le Démon de la Danse*, and *La Vie Dorée*, were, in fact, among the most popular films of the entire period. Part of the attraction of some of these films was that they marked the first European usage of colour stock and provided sumptuous and lavish visual spectacles.

But what of the most popular French films of the period? What visual imagery, thematic concerns, uses of the cinematic language reoccur in the most popular films that bind them together and give us insight into this dark and complex period of French history? Here we will restrict ourselves to about a dozen of what I have judged to be among the most popular films. The analysis is designed to be a prelude to a broader ongoing study.

What strikes us first is that there are distinguishing common traits which cut across considerations of the filmmakers' social backgrounds and political preferences. Thus, two films like *Les Visiteurs du Soir* and *L'Eternelle Retour*, (the former having been seen as an oblique ode to the Resistance and the latter as a French reflection of National Socialist ideology), made respectively by two director/scriptwriter teams as diverse as Carné/Prévert and Delannoy/Cocteau [23] strike us as being remarkably similar from the visual

and thematic point of view. Both have dramatic settings of imposing medieval chateaux, both involve stories of fated love, doomed love, impossible love. Both use dwarfs as portents of evil. Both films reach epic proportions and raise fundamental questions of good versus evil. At the end of both films, the lovers are reduced to stone statues, in *Les Visiteurs du Soir* in actual fact and in *L'Eternelle Retour* through striking visual imagery evoking medieval giants.

One of the most obvious features of French films of the Vichy period, and this quite naturally the result of German control and rigid censorship coupled with a desire to escape from grim socio-political realities, was their distance and lack of overt commentary on the contemporary social scene. They are all films of fantasy and evasion, often set in the distant past like the Middle Ages. Yet although there was no overt social commentary, the latent meaning of various images, narrative structure and cinematic language was loaded with indirect commentary on the more contemporary situation, as we shall see.

On a very basic level, the cinema of fantasy and escape into the past provided psychological compensation for the bleakness and daily struggles of the Occupation years. Among some of the most popular films, both German and French, one is struck by the visual lavishness and excess as concerns food, clothing and living conditions, all marked by opulence and plenty. In *Les Aventures Fantastiques du Baron Munchausen* we are treated to a gargantuan banquet where a seemingly endless brigade of servants parades forth with plate after plate of pheasant and elaborate pastry concoctions. Carné's *Les Visiteurs du Soir* is another film where feasting is quite prominent, all this at a time of ration cards and food lines. In a parallel vein, these same two films have lengthy dance scenes, here again at a time when the public dances had been closed. But if it seems logical that the cinema should be serving as an escape valve at this historical juncture, it is important to ask on a much deeper level, escape into what and for what reason?

If the French films of the Vichy period differ markedly from the poetic realist films of the thirties by their avoidance of contemporary social setting, they also differ in that their settings were invariably rural as opposed to urban, whether it concerns the small provincial village Saint-Robin of *Le Corbeau*, in the country inn of *Goupi-Mains-Rouges* or the grand country chateau of *L'Eternelle Retour* and *Les Visiteurs du Soir*. These rural settings correspondingly evoke the life style and the ethos of the ancien regime, rigidly hierarchical societal divisions, the landed aristocracy in all their wealth and leisure, artisanal labour, peasantry, the church as a focal point. A prominent documentary filmmaker of the period, Georges Rouquier, invariably focused on artisanal labour within the context of a small village, and although sympathetic to the Left and the Resistance, his films *Le Charron* and *Le Tonnelier* seem to exude the ethic of 'Travail, Famille, et Patrie' so dear to the Maréchal [24].

The emphasis on rural setting in these films reflects a shift in power from Paris to the provinces. There has always been a marked cleavage between Paris and the countryside or provinces which has been remarked upon time and time again by analysts of the French social scene beginning with de Tocqueville. This division has been apparent previously in French cinema. The films of the thirties show a strong opposition between Paris versus medium sized towns or small towns as seen in a film like *Gueule d'Amour* (1937). Under the Occupation, this long-standing dichotomy is attenuated. No longer is Paris the heart and brain centre of France. France is divided along other lines.

The cinema of the period actively tries to come to grips with this undoubtedly highly disconcerting eclipse of Paris, Dr Germain of *Le Corbeau* has rejected his identity as a top Parisian brain surgeon and tries to lose himself in the small provincial village of Saint Robin. In *Goupi-Mains-Rouges* (1943) the acceptance of the eclipse of Paris arrives in the saga of Monsieur, a Goupi who has gone to Paris and who has ostensibly become a great

success. The alienation between province and Paris is reflected in the animosity the provincial Goupi and their friends feel for Monsieur at the beginning of the film, but this changes as it is discovered that Monsieur is only a tie salesman and that he is a fairly decent and down to earth sort after all. And Monsieur accomplishes the ultimate in obliterating the Paris/province dichotomy and sense of provincial inferiority when he proclaims '*Paris, voyez vous, c'est la province. Dans les rues, au cafe, au spectacle, vous recontrez des provencaux, ces charentais, ces normands font que Paris est Paris . . .*'

The emphasis on the rural setting gives the French film noir of the forties, if one indeed can even call it that, a particular and unique coloration. Film noir, or the detective story genre, became universally popular during World War II, but in American cinema, its setting was invariably rain slickened city streets in the dead of night, this atmosphere, as Michael Wood has so perceptively pointed out in his *America in the Movies*, being all important in defining the genre [25]. But in French film of the period, the most chilling detective stories and complex mysteries are set in broad daylight and in country settings. Such is the case for *Le Corbeau*. And such is the case for Christian Jacques' *L'Assassinat du Père Noël* (1941), which takes place in a mountain village which has been snowed in and is entirely cut off from the rest of the world for several months.

In the American film noir, we are dealing with individualistic anti-social crime, whereas in the French film noir we often see the complicity of an entire village and entire social fabric. In *Le Corbeau* everyone is accused, the clergy, post office officials, doctors, the head of the psychiatric institute, and everyone is potentially guilty as the Corbeau. The effective visual metaphor for this is the shots of villagers behind an iron fence, half hysterically calling for the head of Marie Corbin, whom they accuse of being the Corbeau or poisoned pen writer. They are the accusers but rendered cinematically just as guilty, depicted as they are from behind the bars. Reaching for a level of broader signification, it is as if the entire population is being called into question for the post 1940 situation [26].

Another element which seems to characterize some of the most popular French films is the strong assertion of moral purity in this time of moral compromise. Nowhere is this more evident than in *Les Visiteurs du Soir*, which translates like a medieval morality play with a primitive sort of black/white symbolism and the devil, magnificently played by Jules Berry, the ultimate embodiment of evil and a very blatant allusion to Hitler, against which the good and heroic lovers resist to the end. And in *Eternelle Retour*, the blond hero and heroine are portrayed as forces of goodness and virtue pitted against a host of swarthy villains like the first husband of Nathalie who is a violent, drunken wife beater [27]. The moral absolutism of these films is singular to the period. Although such moral absolutism is dominant in American cinema, it is unusual to French cinema where the moral relativism of Louis Malle's *Lacombe Lucien* and the famous line from Jean Renoir's *Rules of the Game* (1939), "Everyone has their reasons" has been much more characteristic, reflective of a deep-seated cynicism on the part of the French. But these years of crisis were extraordinary times.

The stress of the crisis years, which in fact can be seen to have extended from the Concorde riots of 6 February 1934 to 1944, gave rise to an increasing number of prominent French films being preoccupied with psychosis. Already from the mid-thirties we have films like *Les Mutinés d'Elseigneur* (1936) and *Le Puritain* (1937) which deal with psychosis. At one point in *Le Corbeau*, we are treated to a medium close-up reflection of Marie Corbin in a mirror, which has a long-standing place in cinematic codes for representing the inner psyche. The mirror is cracked and she gazes with horror upon her shattered physiognomy. Eventually, just about everyone in *Le Corbeau* seems slightly mad, all reacting a little hysterically to the extraordinary circumstances which have upset the outward tranquillity of the small, provincial village. But the ultimate statement comes

when it is discovered that it is the head of the psychiatric institute that has been penning the letters and he is a complete psychotic. Tonkin of *Goupi-Mains-Rouges* is another character who goes completely mad, his psyche having borne the weight of the French colonial experience in Southeast Asia. A wobbling, uncontrolled camera simulates his inability to readapt to French society, and his literal fall is a symbol of his fall from sanity.

Still another striking aspect about the most popular films of the Vichy period is a jarring temporal discontinuity. The flashback was quite a usual feature of the thirties already, but typically involved the cutting back and forth between different segments of a given individual's life span, an example of a particularly deft execution of this can be found in Carné's *Le Jour se Lève*. In the forties, however, the cuts are much more dislocating as we often seem to jump to and from completely different time epochs. One of the most popular films of the period, the German film *Les Aventures Fantastiques du Baron Munchausen* serves as an excellent illustration. For about the first ten minutes of the film, one is under the impression that the setting is an eighteenth century aristocratic ball, but an abrupt close-up on a light switch reveals it to be rather a twentieth century masked ball. Then the film proceeds to cut back and forth between the twentieth century and the actual eighteenth century with poignant references to Franco-German relations in both epochs. In the case of Delannoy's *L'Eternelle Retour*, although the film in fact has a contemporary setting, so overpowering is the impact of the imposing medieval chateau, so epic is the narrative, that when we actually see the characters driving cars or listening to radios, the effect is disorienting. Herein, of course, lies a tension central to the fascism of the period, the conflict between the past, agrarian, mythical and the modern new order. The very head of the 'New Order' in France was an octogenarian, belonging to a different age, that age of the Ancien Regime before the Grande Guerre.

Another way in which the cinema of the period exhibits a sense of dislocation lies in the very use of the cinematic language. Here French cinema picks up on a tradition bequeathed to it by Méliès, a tradition of camera trickery to achieve fantastic effects. This was a tradition which had largely been neglected since the Avant-garde Movement of the twenties and which was particularly antithetical to the aesthetic of the poetic realist movement of the thirties. The popular German film *Les Aventures Fantastiques de Baron Munchausen*, a sort of homage to the Méliès film by the same name, is full of truceage, accelerated motion, stop motion, freeze frames, superimposition. Carné, who was of course part of the poetic realist movement of the thirties, comes to use freeze frames and slow motion and cuts to perform 'miracles' in *Les Visiteurs du Soir*. Even Jacques Becker, who was also part of this movement and a close collaborator of Jean Renoir, as we have seen employs a subjective, wobbly camera to simulate Tonkin's state of madness in *Goupi-Mains-Rouges*. All this is a far cry from the Jean Renoir films of the thirties with their long takes, smooth camera work, in depth shooting, the very antithesis of fragmentation and trickery. Here again there is the strongly felt need for the manipulated magic of the cinema rather than its inherent realist function that cuts across social backgrounds and political preferences.

On a thematic level, one of the most revealing aspects of the popular French films of the Vichy period is the role of children. In French films of the twenties and thirties, children are quite important and are treated with a certain reverence. They are usually depicted as orphans or at the very least as having lost a father. Paul Monaco in his *Cinema and Society* has linked this with the demographic 'classe creuse', which resulted from World War I and the obsession with the ensuing low birth rate in France [28].

By contrast, in the Vichy period films, we see children relatively less and if we do so, they are often seemingly portrayed in a rather malevolent light. There is, for example, the horrible little girl Rolande of *Le Corbeau* who listens at keyholes. Indeed, it is interesting

to note that the character of Rolande does not figure in the original script of *Le Corbeau*, written in 1933 by Louis Chavance, but was rather added in 1943 at the time the film was shot [29], thus rendering it more particularly reflective of the times. Dr Germain of *Le Corbeau* announces categorically that he does not like children. His beloved wife has died in childbirth because the attending physician had tried to save the child instead of the mother. So now Germain makes it a practice of going around saving mothers. *Le Corbeau* opens with Germain washing the blood from his hands, having just saved a mother at the expense of the child. One of the Corbeau's denunciatory messages accuses Germain of being an abortionist, which is clearly the ultimate taboo in a society worried about its population growth, as France was.

A notable and significant exception to this dearth of children or unflattering portrayal of children is Louis Daquin's *Nous les Gosses* (1941). Populated by an appealing gang of some forty 'gosses', the film is a veritable celebration of children drawing inspiration directly from Chaplin and Jean Vigo's *Zéro de Conduite*. There is a striking reversal in this film of children who act like adults and adults that act like children. The children, who parody the inane, superficial banter of upper middle class French society in a wonderful opening sequence, are shown to embody reason, industriousness, inventiveness and most especially solidarity and fraternal camaraderie (and as such they are preservers of the spirit of the Popular Front), whereas the adults in the film are deceitful, reprehensible and at best benevolently inept. But left-wing Daquin's portrait of children is highly unusual for the period.

Why was there this sometimes extremely hostile attitude towards children? It is precisely in times of great crisis that man has felt the need and the urge to have children to somehow compensate for and atone for the present. But in France, the birth rate had been dramatically low for decades, especially compared to other European nations. The cinema confronts this inability to reproduce and tries to cope with the situation. It is interesting to note that *Le Corbeau* abounds with references to this low birth rate and the inability to have children. There is the old woman at the beginning of the film whose grandchild Dr Germain has been unable to save. She herself is very old, at least in her seventies, if not eighties [30], and her daughter must surely be a bit old for having children. In another instance, it is a mother who provides the razor with which her own son will slit his throat. Marie Corbin is an old maid. Laura is married to Vorzet who is too old for her and cannot satisfy her, by his own admission. Yet Laura and Germain still cannot seem to have their wished for affair. Denise, who exudes raw sensuality, fails for the longest time in her quest to win over Germain. The fact that Denise eventually falls pregnant with Germain's child seems a minor miracle, the ultimate in triumphing over impossible odds. In the same vein, in *Goupi-Mains-Rouges*, the young couple can barely manage to hold hands, yet they are the sole hope for carrying on the Goupi name.

This is indeed a curious antithesis of the popular image abroad of the super sexy French. In the face of mass socio-sexual dysfunction, French cinema manages to perform the miracle of demographic resurgence. Interestingly enough, it was in 1942 that the actual birth rate in France began to go up for the first time in years.

Instead of children, we see a number of dwarfs. There is a prominent dwarf in *L'Eternelle Retour* and three dwarfs in *Les Visiteurs du Soir*. In both instances, dwarfs are symbols or portents of evil. Both children and dwarfs represent a sort of regression and adults acting like children is another important thematic concern. In *L'Eternelle Retour* the dwarf Achille, who is actually 24 years old but is treated like a baby by his mother, behaves impulsively, uncontrollably, like a spoiled brat. In *Le Corbeau*, where the structural symmetry of the work has the film keep returning time and time again to the schoolyard, the ultimate in regression and reductionism comes when all the suspected adults are

forced to sit in a classroom like children and write the prolonged dictation. The *dictée* has always been extremely important in the French educational system and has been one of the great institutional mechanisms in French society for encouraging social conformity. How reflective of France after the defeat, a nation of children listening to the grand papa Pétain. And one has only to be reminded of Paul Claudel's Ode to the Maréchal:

France, écoute ce vieil homme qui sur toi
se penche et qui te parle comme un père.
Fille de Saint Louis, écoute-le et dis:
En as-tu assez maintenant de la politique?
Écoute cette voix raisonnable sur toi
qui propose et qui explique cette proposition
comme de l'huile et cette vérité comme de l'or. [31]

The prominence of dwarfs has even wider meaning and is indicative of the whole preoccupation with physical perfection versus physical deformity, which is so striking in these films. Not only do the three dwarfs in *Les Visiteurs du Soir* exhibit stunted growth, but when their hoods are pulled off, we are treated to a few horrible split second close-ups of grotesque facial deformities. Rénaud, the suitor of Anne in the same film has his cheek marked by a long scar and he pleads "Look at them and you will like me better". In *L'Eternelle Retour* the mother and father of Achilles argue over whose side of the family has produced the bad genes. Denise of *Le Corbeau* has a deformed leg and considers it a great triumph to have concealed this fact from everyone. The very word *corbeau* is a play on words involving *corbeau* meaning raven and *corps beau* meaning beautiful body. Marie Corbin, whose name is a sort of distortion of *corbeau*, has social and psychological problems because she is not attractive. The dwarf in *L'Eternelle Retour* is named Achilles, who, if one remembers from classical mythology, would have been infallible but for a vulnerable heel. The French too would have been infallible but for physical stature, but for the physical maiming that resulted from World War I, but for a profound fear of a repeat of that physical maiming, but for the demographic quotient which put them at a disadvantage, or so went the mythology that was spun out by the French movies of the Occupation Period to try and rationalise the 1940 defeat. The fact that tall, blond, blue-eyed Jean Marais, a Frenchman, and blonde blue-eyed Madeleine Sologne, a Frenchwoman, were on a physical par with and worthy of the nordic races was indeed a victory, the likes of which can only be achieved through the magic of the silver screen.

Thus, we have seen that the most popular films of the Occupation Period offered an escape into a largely agrarian, mythical past. As such, it is evident that they reflected more of the traditionalist, conservative ethos of Vichy than the radical, rightwing approach of Doriot, Déat, or the German Reich itself. But we have also seen that the films are more complicated than a pure expression of Vichy consciousness. Having tried to eschew cut and dried categories of Collaboration or Resistance, we have tried to interpret the films on a much broader basis of national consciousness and national mythologies. On a surface level, we have found that these films helped Frenchmen to escape from the unpleasant socio-political realities, as well as from difficult day to day living conditions. On a deeper subliminal level, we have discovered that they helped them resolve many seemingly irreconcilable contradictions and tensions, the division of France, the eclipse of Paris, the 1940 defeat itself, the question of moral compromise, the low birth rate, the feeling of physical inadequacy *vis à vis* the occupying power. And so we can perhaps begin to sketch the evasive mental contours of bifurcated France during *les Années Noires*.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

- [1] According to the statistics of film historian Roger Régent, the box office receipts from 1938 to 1943 more than doubled from 452 million francs to 915 million francs. See Roger Régent, *Cinéma de France* (Paris, 1948).
- [2] Christian Metz, *Le Signifiant Imaginaire, Psychanalyse et Cinéma* (Paris, 1977). Marc Ferro, *Cinéma et Histoire* (Paris, 1977). Pierre Sorlin, 'Clio à l'écran ou l'historien dans le noir', *Revue d'histoire Moderne et Contemporaine*, t. XXI, April-June, 1974, pp. 252-278. Pierre Sorlin and Marie-Claire Ropars, *Octobre, Ecriture et Ideologie, Analyse Filmique d'Octobre d'Eisenstein* (Paris, 1976). I would like to thank Pierre Sorlin for his reading of and commentary on this study.
- [3] Régent, *Cinéma de France*, p. 43.
- [4] This was certainly true for the thirties, as seen from the annual comparative statistics of "Recettes des Spectacles" published in *Le Tout Cinéma*, but in the forties, as other forms of popular entertainment like the popular public dances were curtailed, the cinema came to assume an even more primordial function. As Pierre Cadars has written "... the cinemas were certainly the only places where escape was permitted and even desired", Pierre Cadars, "Cinéma de Vichy", *Cinéma de Vichy* (Les Cahiers de la Cinémathèque de Toulouse, Perpignan, 1973), p. 26.
- [5] Georges Sadoul, *French Film* (1953/Arno reprint, 1972), Chapter IX, The French Film During the Occupation. Paul Légise, *Histoire de la Politique du Cinéma français entre Deux Républiques, 1940-1946*, (Paris, 1977).
- [6] Cited in Joseph Daniel, *Guerre et Cinéma* (Paris, 1972), p. 199, Hervé Le Boterf, *La Vie Parisienne Sous l'Occupation*, Vol. 1 (Paris, 1974), pp. 113-114, François Truffaut in the introduction to André Bazin, *Le Cinéma de l'Occupation et de la Résistance* (Paris, 1975), p. 31.
- [7] The history of the controversy surrounding *Le Corbeau* has first been traced by Marcel Oms in 'Le Corbeau et ses Quatre Verités', *Cinéma de Vichy* (Perpignan), pp. 58-61, excerpts of which have been reprinted in *Le Corbeau*, *L'Avant Scène*, April 15, 1977, pp. 4 and 5.
- [8] Georges Sadoul, *Le Cinéma Pendant La Guerre* (Paris, 1954), p. 58.
- [9] Régent, *Cinéma de France*, p. 207.
- [10] Légise, *Histoire de la Politique du Cinéma français entre Deux Républiques*, pp. 18-19.
- [11] Francis Courtade, *Les Malédiction du Cinéma Français, Une Histoire du Cinéma Français Parlant (1928-1978)*, Paris, 1978. Jean-Pierre Bertin-Maghit, *Le Cinéma Français Sous Vichy Les Films Français de 1940 à 1944*, Paris 1980.
- [12] Jean-Pierre Bertin-Maghit, *Le Cinéma Français Sous Vichy*, p. 91.
- [13] Francis Courtade, *Les Malédiction du Cinéma Français*, p. 205.
- [14] There is a very useful monograph on cinema-going in Perpignan from 1939 to 1944 by René Noell. See René Noell, 'Histoire du Spectacle Cinématographique à Perpignan', in *Cinéma de Vichy*, pp. 3-11.
- [15] Cited in Légise, *Histoire de la Politique du Cinéma français entre Deux Républiques 1940-1946*, p. 17.
- [16] René Prédal, *La Société Française à Travers le Cinéma 1914-1945* (Paris, 1972), p. 282.
- [17] *Ibid.*, p. 282.
- [18] A number of prominent French film-makers of the thirties, unlike Carné, chose to leave France after the 1940 defeat including René Clair, Jean Renoir and Julien Duvivier.
- [19] The importance for the historian of box office success should be emphasised. One of the major difficulties with the earliest studies which tried to probe the 'mentalities' of a given culture in historical context was that they failed to use this criterion of selection. Siegfried Kracauer, for example, in his pioneering work *From Caligari To Hitler* (Princeton, 1947), based his whole theory linking national socialism with expressionist cinema on films that were for the most part viewed by a narrow artistic and intellectual elite and which had relatively little success at the box office. Paul Monaco in his *Cinema & Society, France and Germany During the Twenties* (New York, 1976) has made a very important contribution in using top box office films as revealing of French and German society in the twenties.
- [20] See the Appendix. I would like to thank Ms. Donna Evleth for her assistance on the research of box office statistics.
- [21] Sadoul, *French Film*, p. 97.
- [22] See the Appendix. The statistics for Marseille for April 1941 come from *Le Film* of June 7, 1941, p. 91, while the statistics for Marseille for May 1941 come from *Le Film* of July 19, 1941, p. 32.

- [23] In the thirties, Carné and particularly Prévert had close left-wing ties, whereas Delannoy and Cocteau had more of an apolitical past.
- [24] This point is made in 'An Innocent Eye? the Career and Documentary Vision of Georges Rouquier up to 1945', an unpublished paper by John Weiss presented in part at the Western Society for French History, San Diego, 1978.
- [25] Michael Wood, *America in the Movies* (New York, 1976).
- [26] *Le Corbeau* was scripted long before the collapse of 1940. The fact that the script could only find a producer in the forties makes this film extremely relevant for our understanding of the Vichy period.
- [27] The case of *Le Corbeau* is a bit more complicated. Germain is unquestionably the embodiment of moral absolutism as he would even denounce Denise if she were guilty. Moral relativism is espoused by Vorzet in the famous scene where he swings a naked light bulb back and forth across a globe and talks about the fine dividing line between darkness and night, which has been interpreted as reflective of collaborationism. But then, of course, at the end of the film, we find that Vorzet is completely mad.
- [28] See Chapter 4 of Monaco, *Cinema and Society*.
- [29] *Le Corbeau*, Henri Georges Clouzot, *l'Avant-Scène Cinéma*, April 15, 1977, p. 12.
- [30] This is a purely visual clue that has no bearing on when the script was written, but is rather a choice shaped by the climate of the Occupation years.
- [31] Quoted in Jacques de Launay, *La France de Pétain* (Paris, 1972).

APPENDIX

BOX OFFICE STATISTICS FROM VARIOUS ADVERTISING PAGES OF *LE FILM*

Paris

Le Corbeau, at the Normandie. First week, 35,556 entrées, 1,363,966 fr.; Second week, 35,524 entrées, 1,355,498 fr.; Third week, 32,981 entrées, 1,122,453 fr.; Fourth week 28,397 entrées, 1,092,221 fr.

Les Aventures fantastiques du Baron Munchausen, at the Normandie. In five weeks, 163,537 entrées, 6,124,623 fr. German film.

L'Eternel Retour, three salles, Three months, 10,511,384 fr.

Les Visiteurs du Soir, at the Madeleine and the Lord Byron. For the first 5 weeks, the money receipts broke down this way:

	Madeleine	Lord Byron
1.	260,000	180,762
2.	425,000	233,148
3.	426,000	231,624
4.	446,000	245,624
5.	431,000	218,399

La Ville Dorée, at the Normandie. German film. First major European film in color. Ten weeks, 243,172 entrées, 8,709,563 fr.

Cora Terry, at the Colisée Paramount and Gaumont-Palace. Broke all records in 1941. Four weeks, 2,000,000. German film.

Picpus, at the Normandie. Five weeks, 4,396,000. Director Richard Pottier, 1942.

Au Bonheur des Dames, First week exclusivite, record 31,245 entrées, 1,193,532.50 fr. Director André Cayatte, 1943.

Domino, at the Paramount. Eight weeks, 7,082,363 fr. Director Roger Richebé, 1943.

Goupi-Mains-Rouges, almost 100,000 entrées in 9 weeks.

Voyage sans Espoir, at the Paramount. Nine weeks, 9,508,495 fr. Director Christian Jacque, 1943.

Pontcarral, at the Marivaux and the Marbeuf. For the first 7 weeks, the money receipts broke down this way:

	Marivaux	Marbeuf
1.	321,801.20	147,109
2.	463,070.60	248,979
3.	491,625.60	267,163
4.	519,325	280,846
5.	416,543.85	220,158
6.	431,247.40	221,007
7.	431,217.80	218,421

La Fille du Puisatier, 21 weeks, 4,500,000 fr. Director Marcel Pagnol, 1940.

Mariage d'Amour, two weeks, 2,064,644.60, Director Henri Decoin, 1942.

Marseille

Popularity by box office receipts for the months of April and May 1941.

For April:

La Vie privée d'Elisabeth d'Angleterre (1st wk)	272,186
Le Juif Suss (1st wk)	238,554
Miquette (and orchestra)	164,476
La Vieille Fille	160,704
Alerte au Bagne	155,540
La Vie privée d'Elisabeth d'Angleterre (2nd wk)	153,734
Nuit de decembre	149,930
Monsieur Hector (1st wk)	148,215
Monsieur Hector (2nd wk)	143,470
La Fugue de Monsieur Petterson	139,422
Zaza and Casier Judiciaire	122,910
L'Enfer des Anges	127,823
La Vielle Fille	118,119
Jeunesse Triomphante	111,543
L'Enfer des Anges	108,952
Le Maitre de Poste	97,188
Notre Dame de la Mouise	96,709

For May:

Le Juif Suss	199,329
L'Homme du Nulle Part	174,311
L'Autre and les Ecumeurs du Far West	163,720
Toute une Vie	156,829
Un Chapeau de Paille d'Italie	136,405
Cora Terry	127,682
L'Autre and Les Ecumeurs du Far West	113,612
André Hardy s'enflamme	113,612
Le Danube bleu (repeat)	112,721
Lune de Miel à Bali	110,228
Lune de Miel à Bali	100,295
Le Monde est merveilleux	100,294
L'Etrange sursis	97,912
Cora Terry	94,912
Altitude 3200 (repeat)	91,173
Brazza	80,426

The statistics for Marseille for April 1941 come from *Le Film* of June 7, 1941, p. 91.

The statistics for Marseille for May 1941 come from *Le Film* of July 19, 1941, p. 32.

The list for *Les Visiteurs du Soir* at the Madeleine and the Lord Byron in Paris comes from *Le Film* of January 23, 1943, p. 11.

The figures for *L'Eternel Retour* for Paris come from *Le Film* of February 5, 1944, p. 3.

The figures for *Les Aventures fantastiques du Baron Munchausen* for Paris come from *Le Film* of April 1, 1944, an advertisement inside the front cover of the issue.

The figures for *Le Corbeau* for Paris come from *Le Film* of November 6, 1943, p. 6 (an ad).