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A Queer Premiere: Jean Cocteau's *The Typewriter*

Introduction

Late in April 1941, toward the close of the first Parisian theatre season following the Defeat, Jean Cocteau's *La Machine à écrire* (*The Typewriter*) opened, then closed, then reopened at the Théâtre Hébertot. Written in the style of a detective drama, the play starred the actor generally known—at least in the entertainment world at the time—as Cocteau's sometime lover and perpetual companion, Jean Marais, as identical twin brothers. The reviews are curiously reticent about what exactly occurred at the Hébertot, and historians and critics offer sometimes contradictory pieces of a puzzle that, even when carefully put together, forms an incomplete picture.

The fragments are, however, intriguing. Merrill Rosenberg describes how, on the evening of April 29, 1941, the dress rehearsal (*répétition générale*), sponsored “as a gala” by the daily *Paris-Soir* and attended by various “dignitaries,” caused in the Hébertot's auditorium a demonstration by members of the Parti Populaire Français (PPF). This disruption prompted Vichy's ambassador to Paris, Fernand de Brinon, to order the withdrawal of the production (“Vichy's Theatrical Venture” 136). Francis Steegmuller describes the disorder that greeted the *Typewriter* premiere and the revival of *Les Parents Terribles* (at the Gymnase later that year): “stink bombs exploded in the theatres, and hoodlums filled the aisles and climbed onto the stage, shouting obscenities at Cocteau and Marais as a couple” (442).¹ Patrick Marsh too notes that these plays “were seriously disrupted by violent scenes fomented by fascist sympathizers and members of the Parti Populaire Français” (“Le Théâtre

Français . . ." 231) and adds with regard to *The Typewriter* that "violent protests succeeded in the withdrawal of the piece from the bill" (232).²

Several accounts, though, entirely omit the riot and describe instead other significant aspects. Neal Oxenhandler never mentions disturbances by the PPF and/or hoodlums (in this case, one does not exclude the other) but indicates that the play "immediately after the dress rehearsal, . . . was banned" and that this ban "was the signal for the beginning of those attacks against Cocteau and Jean Marais, which reached their climax with the revival of *Les Parents Terribles*" (216). Similarly, Serge Added, in *Le Théâtre dans les années Vichy*, tells how on April 29, 1941,

a commissioner acting on instructions from the police prefect banned the performances. The day after, the same, under instructions from the same, suspended the previous ban. In the mean time, the Propaganda Abteilung intervened to make the prefect go back on his original decision in the name of artistic freedom! Fernand de Brinon, the [Vichy] French government's ambassador to Paris, was at the origin of the ban. (43)³

Jean Marais, who was on stage in one of his two roles much of the time, recalls the affair differently. Not only does he fail to report an uproar in the auditorium, but he suggests that the April 29 ban came from the Germans. When Jacques Hébertot, owner of the theatre, approached the Nazis, he was told that once he had paid all the required fees, the play could run. Two days later, after some stage business, including an epileptic fit by one of the Marais twins in Act II, and some dialogue in Act III, were cut, the play reopened (134). Several reviewers remarked that the seizure was offensive, but Roger Sardou in *Les Nouveaux Temps* mentions that it "greatly affected certain spectators and caused, in the house, several different commotions."⁴

This much seems clear: After its dress rehearsal, *The Typewriter* was closed on April 29, probably by the Paris police, who were presumably acting on behalf of the Germans. Although Brinon may have instigated it, Ingrid Galster suggests that Suzanne Abetz, French wife of German ambassador Otto Abetz (who was apparently far more liberal than she), called for the ban (222)⁵; Brinon was in fact present at the opening, but so was Mme Abetz; thus, the impetus behind the suppression may have come from both, either separately or together.⁶ In any case, the Germans reversed the interdiction a few days later and allowed the police to save face with the excuse that certain fees had to be paid. The censors—either Vichy's or the Germans' or both—insisted that specific passages be omitted before the reopening. There was probably some protest by the PPF, though perhaps not as violent as the brawl that would bring down the curtain midway through *Les Parents Terribles* the

following autumn: Definitely there were some negative reactions to the play in the press. Nonetheless, *The Typewriter* was reinstated and ran through June 1941 (Florisoone, Cogniat, Bonnat 41).

The causes for the outcry against and for the closing and reopening of *The Typewriter* have never been adequately explored. Rosenberg asserts that the play “offered an incisive critique of the pettiness and hypocrisy of French provincial life” (“Vichy’s Theatrical Venture” 136) but goes on to agree with Roger Lannes that Cocteau himself, “who epitomized the spirit of non-conformity to the French public,” and not his work, was the actual object of the PPF’s protests (137). Patrick Marsh implies the same, indicating that *The Typewriter* was hardly a masterpiece (“Le Théâtre à Paris . . .” 230) and that the attack launched against it by the newspaper *L’Appel* was clearly against Cocteau (232). Added quotes a letter from Cocteau (to Gaston Bâty) in which the playwright declares that he himself was the cause of the ban, not the play; this declaration confirms the conclusion that the suppression was due to the author’s identity and behavior rather than to his script (43). For the most part, historians who have examined the period concur that the author was the actual object of censure, and with few exceptions, literary critics seem to share Oxenhandler’s view that the script is a failure (216–220).

To present-day readers, the hostile response to *The Typewriter* may appear typical of the repression of artistic freedom that might be expected during the German Occupation. Modern sensibilities easily envision the entire episode in a way that follows a stock scenario: The nonconformist, homosexual dramatist, whose play was promoted by a French newspaper, is ostracized and censored by collaborators and the Nazis (who we know imprisoned and murdered male German homosexuals). However, such a rendering is very far from the truth.

This chapter examines the dramatic, theatre, and audience texts of *The Typewriter* in light of those years in which the play was originally performed. Written toward the end of the drôle de guerre (or “phoney war”), as Cocteau and hundreds of thousands fled the German advance, and staged near the end of the Occupation’s first season, *The Typewriter* occupies a significant time and space—a unique moment when diverse cultural and political forces came together and clashed. This chapter explores why and how the events described above—the Hébertot “riot,” the withdrawal of the play and its reinstatement—occurred, and goes on to propose, contrary to those who have previously examined the dramatic text, that the playscript around which these events swirled was neither the meaningless potboiler that many have called it nor the “incisive critique . . . of French provincial life” that Rosenberg suggests it was; *The Typewriter* was the actual site of the dispute to which it has previously been only incidentally linked. The play was not merely theatre scripted by a homosexual but an expression of its author’s subculture; to

some degree, *The Typewriter*, in spite of its attempts to resemble a conventional piece, was (wittingly or unwittingly) perceived as a discernible expression of contemporary homosexual sensibility.

The Typewriter may be, as Jacques Guicharnaud contends, “generally considered [Cocteau’s] worst play and one that he himself repudiated” (63), but its role in its own prohibition and restoration was hardly irrelevant. Indeed, the puzzle piece that has always been missing from the broad picture has been the one containing the play itself.

Paradoxical Politics, Newspapers, Plays

Readers unfamiliar with the political climate of Occupied Paris may have little notion of its heterogeneity. Of course, only right-wing and for the most part extreme right-wing politics played out publicly, but even among this bloc, one might encounter diversity. The idea that the government at Vichy was a solid front was a myth; indeed, throughout his remarkable study, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940–1944*, Robert O. Paxton documents how, in spite of a desire to appear a monolithic corporatist entity, the Vichy regime was a hotbed of disagreement and that, even with Pétain as ongoing Head of State, the government changed a number of times. In Paris, too, various factions among the ruling Germans, including the SS, the embassy, and the army’s various departments, all vied for control, and each competed in courting various political and other groups within the former capital.

Vichy France, strictly speaking, was not genuinely fascist in itself; Roger Griffen calls it *Ersatz* fascist or parafascist. Griffen observes, “although the façade of national regeneration was maintained, the State, as the representative of the interests of the traditional ruling hierarchy, repressed rather than encouraged those aspects of fascism which it rightly saw as threatening to its interests.” Both Franco’s Spain and Vichy France managed to co-opt or marginalize fascism. Such regimes “aped some of the superficial aspects of the Fascist and Nazi apparatus and style of power” (19). The Pétain regime’s traditionalism lacked the aggressive, dynamic approach evident in Italian and German movements. Although Vichy spoke of a New France, the idea of an actual fascist revolution, the notion of which had been established by Mussolini and imitated by Hitler, was clearly perceived as “threatening to its interests.”

Caught between the Nazi occupiers and the Vichy French, both unstable vectors of power, people constantly wondered how to reconcile their ideas of France with its current dilemma. To be genuinely French—always an implicit and sometimes the explicit subject of most of the plays performed during this period—might mean being in favor of De Gaulle and the Free French in London, but, especially during the first year of the Occupation, it

more than likely meant being for Pétain, which was not necessarily the same as being pro-Vichy. One could define oneself politically as pro-Vichy and anti-German, pro-Vichy and pro-German, pro-Pétain and anti-Vichy, pro-German and anti-Vichy, even pro-Gaullist and pro-Pétain (though probably, in this case, anti-Vichy and almost certainly anti-German). And one's self-definition probably changed over the period.

The Parti Populaire Français, whose members have been accused of disrupting the first performance of *The Typewriter*, nicely illustrates how such confusions over national and political identity played out. The PPF was created by Jacques Doriot, who before the War had been Communist mayor of Saint-Denis, the working-class suburb to the north of Paris, and who eventually fought with and was then expelled from the Party. "In the elections of 1936," writes Alfred Cobban, "he managed to hold his fiefdom of Saint-Denis against his former party, in rivalry with which he founded the Parti Populaire Français" (151). Doriot was impressed with Hitler, and as the 1930s advanced, the PPF veered further right and became progressively more anti-communist. Following the Defeat, Bertram M. Gordon recalls, the PPF was "[t]he most active and probably the largest of the collaborationist parties" (10). Paxton estimates that it had "300,000 members, 4,000 of them active, in 1941" and received its funding from Germany's Ambassador to Paris, Otto Abetz (253).

Paxton further notes how the PPF, while nominally loyal to Pétain, was distrusted by the Vichy government, which Doriot (and other French fascists) criticized for its traditionalism and disinterest in the fascist revolution. Vichyites Pierre Laval and François Darlan convinced Doriot's Nazi backer, Abetz, to keep Doriot from "becoming an alternate German candidate for [French] prime minister," but the Nazis refused to shut down the PPF, and there were even "active centers of PPF activity in the Vichy Zone" (253). The PPF pursued its own program, often distinct from Vichy's and the Nazis,' and it was, as Gordon points out, "[o]nly with the attack on the Soviet Union" by Germany on June 22, 1941, that the PPF became "a vigorous partisan of collaboration" (11).⁷ Thus, on April 29, 1941, almost two months before the German assault on Russia, the PPF toughs who broke up the theatre gala sponsored by *Paris-Soir* considered themselves members of a fascist revolutionary front, positioned separately from other French fascists and the Nazis.

The collaborationist press was similarly heterogeneous: The daily that sponsored Cocteau's gala, *Paris-Soir*, though published in Paris before the war, had closed after the Defeat and was then, as Donna Evleth puts it, "relaunched by the Germans." Evleth adds that "the 'real' *Paris-Soir* . . . retreated to the south zone" along with the *Le Figaro*, *Les Temps*, and a few other Paris papers. Some of these, like *Le Figaro*, "suspended publication when the Germans occupied the south zone" in 1942 (193). The Occupiers,

Galster explains, used the press, in part, to reassure French readers that nothing had changed, and thus, rather than starting new periodicals (which they did to a limited extent), favored the reappearance of newspapers that existed before the armistice, although in such cases, and Galster mentions specifically *Paris-Soir*, the only thing preserved was the paper's name (94). As for the contents of Paris newspapers, Marsh summarizes:

Virtually all news, both foreign and domestic, was filtered through the Agence Française d'Information, which was organized and came under the control of the Propagandastaffel. Newspapers were subject to the Propagandastaffel not only for what they published, but also for such details as the lay-out of the paper, the number of columns per page and even the characters to be used. Thus newspapers were completely controlled throughout the war, both at source and distribution levels.

Reopened by the Germans on June 22, 1940 (the day the armistice was signed), the new *Paris-Soir*, Marsh observes, was one of several reborn papers that "supported Pétain's government" ("The Theatre: Collaboration or Compromise?" 155), but as noted above, loyalty to Pétain did not always mean loyalty to Vichy.

A less easily revived paper from before the war was Robert Brasillach's *Je suis partout*, which Evleth characterizes as "anti-Semitic but intellectual" and which, she notes, Robert Brasillach, who would be executed after the war for collaboration, edited until 1943 (193). This weekly had articulated its ultra-rightist views beginning in the 1930s, and it was closed down as France entered the War. Despite its blatantly fascist voice, it had not been allowed to reopen until February 1941, at which time Alain Laubreaux resumed his post as theatre critic (and, as such, came to play a leading role in the events surrounding *The Typewriter*).⁸ According to Marsh, Laubreaux, who also wrote for *Le Cri du Peuple* and *Le Petit Parisien* (both run by the PPF's Doriot), "was an arch-collaborator, and wrote reviews which were often vindictive, frequently unfair, violently anti-Semitic and wildly prejudiced—nevertheless he must be regarded as one of the most influential drama critics of the war" ("The Theatre . . ." 155).

There were, as Galster notes, other smaller political-literary weeklies founded by other factions, such as the pro-Vichy *L'Appel*, representing the Ligue Française (97), but few were as successful as *La Gerbe*, funded by Ambassador Abetz (96) and thus, Marsh indicates, "hostile to Pétain and Vichy" under the directorship of "Alphonse de Chateaubriant, a fervent Nazi, a champion of collaboration and admirer of Hitler" ("The Theatre . . ." 155). "While the majority of political articles and editorials in *La Gerbe* suggest that the review was little more than a crude propaganda sheet plugging the Nazi line,"

observes Richard J. Golsan, “Chateaubriant’s own ambitions for the journal were much more grandiose. . . . *La Gerbe* would seek an ‘armistice de l’esprit’ to match the military armistice signed by Pétain” (31). Its regular drama critic, André Castelot (brother of the actor, Jacques, who would eventually appear in *La Princesse des Ursins*), had a well-earned reputation for nastiness.

Perhaps the example of *Comœdia*, an arts weekly that had existed before the Defeat and was subsequently “relaunched,” best illustrates how all publications, no matter what their political orientation or purpose, were in some way controlled by and supportive of the occupiers and their French adherents: The paper, Herbert Lottman affirms, attracted some of the best minds in France, much as the *Nouvelle Revue Française* had done before the War, and appeared to be apolitical. To some, this weekly, which limited itself to cultural matters, seemed neutral, but others sensed in its coverage of the arts across (German-occupied) Europe a strong measure of Nazi propaganda. Yet the most effective role that *Comœdia* performed for the Germans was, as Lottman puts it, presenting the arts world “as if cultural life could be carried on as usual on streets patrolled by Hitler’s army” (163–164). Even as *Comœdia* was viewed as being “different” from publications directly funded by Abetz or by a French fascist party, the paper inevitably served a double purpose.

Like the press, the theatre was co-opted by the occupiers. Although in January 1945 a few foreign visitors, such as Philip Toynbee, might believe that “[t]he Germans appear to have interfered very little with the freedom of the Paris stage, and there has been a varied and fertile dramatic activity” (156), the theatre in occupied Paris came very much under the control of the Germans, who, as Leo Forkey points out, “not only allowed the theatres to reopen, but encouraged them as an integral part of their program to make Paris a recreation center, and France an agrarian state” (“Theatres of Paris” 299). Little by little, Hervé Le Boterf recalls, beginning slowly in July and August, and then more rapidly through the fall of 1940 and into the winter of 1941, established theatres reopened and new playhouses, such as the Monceau, Edward VII, and Avenue (formerly cinemas) and the Noctambules (formerly a cabaret) opened their doors (166). “At the end of 1940,” Marsh specifies, “thirty-four theatres, fourteen music-halls, two circuses . . . , six cabarets and about thirty cinemas were open” (“The Theatre . . .” 144).

Yet what Toynbee calls “varied and fertile dramatic activity” was hardly apparent during this first year of theatre when, as Le Boterf indicates, revivals outnumbered new plays seventy-five to thirty-five (169); Le Boterf calls the 1940–1941 season “Le Temps des ‘Réprises’ ” (174–179). Rosenberg adds that “[o]nly one theater, the Hébertot [where *The Typewriter* would eventually open], presented the work of an unpublished author as its initial production. Together with this play, Jean Anouilh’s *Léocadia* and Sacha Guitry’s *Le Bien-Aimé* were the only new plays put on in Paris during the last six months of 1940” (“Vichy’s Theatrical Venture” 131). Just a few of the new works of

the second half of the season stood out, such as Jean Anouilh's *Le Rendez-vous de Senlis* (written before the war), Stève Passeur's *Marché noir*, and Cocteau's *The Typewriter*.

Part of the control exercised by the Germans came in the form of direct censorship. Marsh describes how, for productions at private theatres in Paris, playscripts "were first read by the Vichy censor and then sent on to the German censor at the Propagandastaffel," all texts having been submitted "well in advance so that the authorities would have ample time to give their decision about the suitability of any particular work" ("The Theatre . . ." 149). Vichy retained control over state-run theatres, the Comédie-Française, Odéon, Opéra Comique, and Théâtre National Populaire although, here too, the occupiers had more than a little influence. Initially, Rosenberg tells us, "The Germans appointed Roger Capgras, husband of Alice Cocéa (manager of the Théâtre des Ambassadeurs), as liaison between themselves and the [private] theaters," but his fascist sympathies prompted his replacement by three respected stage directors, Charles Dullin, Pierre Renoir, and Gaston Bâty in January 1941 ("Vichy's Theatrical Venture" 129).

While Added observes that censorship was central to the theatrical project of the Vichy government (37), which he capably illustrates subsidized many of the private theatres and private productions (his table, "Subventions des Beaux-Arts au théâtre dramatique," specifies the extent and amounts: 82–83), he also provides instances (among them the reinstatement of *The Typewriter*) when the power of the Nazis' censors superseded that of Vichy's. Added concludes that no matter how fervently Brinon might assure Dr. Karl Epting (director of the German Institute and Abetz's cultural attaché) that Cocteau's work was contrary to their efforts toward the regeneration of the youth and art that must come with collaboration, the Germans were clearly not interested in Brinon's program (43).

In fact, the Germans seem to have been interested in achieving the direct opposite of Brinon's goals—in promoting the complete degeneration of French youth and art. The collaboration that the armistice demanded applied to the French (whose institutions—their government, presses, playhouses—had been co-opted) and not to the Germans, who followed a very different course in France than in the Fatherland.

Gay Paris Under the Germans

On June 18, 1941, educator and writer Jean Guéhenno noted in his diary:

Sociological problem: why so many pederasts among the collaborators? C . . . , F . . . , M . . . , D . . . (who, as they say, likes to go both ways). Are they waiting for the new order to legitimize their loves?⁹

This observation, made while *The Typewriter* was still playing at the Hébertot, offers a clue to one of the ways through which the Nazis pursued their program of degeneration in Paris.

Yet, in describing this phenomenon, I am obliged to differentiate it from previous discussions that have sought to conflate homosexuality and fascism. As Andrew Hewitt demonstrates in his analysis of reactions to works by Jean Genet, in postwar politics, “the linkage [between homosexuality and fascism] permeates a popular culture that has long understood decadence as effeminization and effeminization as homosexuality” (“Sleeping with the Enemy” 119). As I note later in this chapter, condemnation of the enemy as homosexual and vice versa was never limited to the Nazis and their sympathizers; in liberated France, the Left as well as the Right were capable of seeing the invert as culprit and the culprit as invert, as Jean-Paul Sartre’s famous post-war essay, “Qu’est-ce que c’est un Collaborateur?” makes clear. Yet Guéhenno’s remark, written a year into the Occupation, seems to be asking something else, not why all collaborators were homosexual but why, astonishingly, there were any homosexuals among those who collaborated. And Guéhenno’s surprise is understandable in light of the Nazi’s very public hatred of “pederasts.”¹⁰

In spite—and, ironically, because—of the Germans’ well known abhorrence of inverts within the Reich, homosexuals in what remained as France were neither legally penalized nor rounded up by the Germans. “Nazi-occupied Europe was largely to escape this homophobic persecution,” writes Antony Copley (153).¹¹ Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS and, as George L. Mosse in *Nationalism and Sexuality* explains, the most outspoken Nazi leader for the “extinction [*Auslöschung*] of abnormal life” (169), was himself responsible for this peculiar policy of acceptance:

Himmler argued that Germany’s interests lay in encouraging the degenerating consequences of homosexuality amongst the subject peoples, hence accelerating their decline. Homosexuals in [occupied] France had more to fear from homophobia within. (Copley 153)

Summing up an address to the SS leadership at Bad Tölz in November 1937, Mosse points out Himmler’s belief that “[t]he conspiracy of homosexuals must be viewed side by side with the world Jewish conspiracy” for the two were “bent on destroying the German state and race as the implacable enemies of German virtue and will” (168). Thus, Himmler’s reasoning in permitting homosexuality outside Germany, as bizarre as it may seem today, perhaps made perfect sense to his fellow Nazis: This policy would allow the “slave nations,” to the benefit of the Reich, to destroy themselves from within.¹² In the Reich, homosexuals were placed in concentration camps and eventually exterminated;

in what Nazi Germany regarded as France, they were tolerated and in some cases even recruited.

Of course, in those parts of France that were incorporated into the greater Reich, homosexuality was viewed quite differently. The awful history of Pierre Seel illustrates how in Alsace those suspected of homosexuality were imprisoned and murdered. Yet Seel's chilling description of being summoned to the Gestapo and his ensuing confinement, remind the reader that he, like all in Alsace and in other areas directly appropriated by the Germans, was regarded as German, not French; in Germany being a homosexual remained a crime.

In Paris, however, the Nazis found a subculture of homosexual men who might be of use to the Reich's master plan, for from the beginnings of modern times, homosexuality had always had a strong presence in the metropolis. Unlike Germany, Austria, and England, where homosexual acts had remained outlawed, homosexuality was legal in France: The Code Napoléon did not criminalize such acts except, writes Robert A. Nye in *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France*, for "forcible rape, child molestation, and 'outrage'" (108). Yet during the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century, despite the liberalized laws, the Paris police relentlessly sought and harassed men for practicing various forms of homosexual behavior.

Although, as Copley describes how, with the advent of the Third Republic, medical researchers in France, as in other European countries, began to regard homosexuality as a pathological problem (135ff), the Paris police persisted in their "crackdown . . . on offenses against public decency, with consequent court appearance for men of all ages and all backgrounds" (147). In other words, Nye clarifies, the police were able to use what the Code called "public outrage" in order to criminalize and punish what were ostensibly legal but immoral acts (168). Even after the First World War, with the translation of Freud into French (Copley 149) and the widespread belief that homosexuality ought to be treated psychiatrically, the culture continued to regard inversion as shameful, and the police went on with their arrests. Thus, in spite of an apparent legalized permissiveness, the prevailing atmosphere in Paris through the end of the 1930s remained, at least for males, somewhat repressive. Formally, homosexuality might not have been a crime, but homosexual behavior had become criminalized.

Nevertheless, a large part of this repression was cultural rather than legal and focused on issues related to gender and gender roles. To be thought of as being capable of performing homosexual acts meant being thought of as *a* homosexual: as Nye puts it, "*a behavior was converted to an identity*" (102). Hence, the male who discreetly engaged in sexual acts with other males, had "little need to fear direct police intervention in his private life"; however, even the most wary of men "had much more to fear . . . from the

judgments of his fellow citizens about the *quality* of his masculinity” (107). George Chauncey, in his study of gay¹³ male sexual identity in New York City, explores a similar contemporary phenomenon. He is able to discern analogous cultural attitudes toward males whose effeminacy labeled them as homosexual and males who, in spite of their sexual attraction to other males, because of their lack of effeminacy, were viewed as “normal” (65–97). “Only in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s,” asserts Chauncey, “did the now-conventional division of men into ‘homosexuals’ and ‘heterosexuals,’ based on the sex of their sexual partners, replace the division of men into ‘fairies’ and ‘normal men’ on the basis of their imaginary gender status . . .” (13). Chauncey also offers evidence that men who performed sexual acts both with women and other males were identified (and identified themselves) not as homosexual but as “normal” “so long as they played the ‘man’s part’ [the dominant role] with both” (119). Thus, in this period of transition, not just one’s partner but one’s “role” in the sexual act and one’s social behavior were key elements in determining one’s sexual identity.

Such distinctions had considerable influence on popular and private views of homosexuality in France. Indeed, the whole problematic notion of “the man’s role,” that social construct culturally assumed to incorporate maleness, lurked (and perhaps still lurks) behind every discussion of homosexuality. To speak broadly, homosexuality in France remained a threat to what had come (or what was coming) to constitute masculinity. Therefore, those who had been designated through their actions as “homosexual” were subjected to some of the culture’s more repressive measures and were in this sense criminalized.

Of course, “repressive” must be admitted as a relative term. There had always been, in spite of cultural and other prohibitions, a lavender underground or demi-monde in Paris. True, in the 1920s Berlin was regarded as the gay capital of Europe. “For a brief moment in 1929,” writes Klaus Müller, “the burgeoning gay and lesbian movement even seemed likely to abolish” the German anti-homosexual laws; “[a] parliamentary commission that was rewriting the nation’s moral code voted to drop the anti-sodomy statute” (9). During the Weimar Republic, homosexual men and women made a major assault on the legal and cultural restrictions against them, and generally, in spite of the existing legal restrictions, the atmosphere in Berlin was more tolerant than in Paris.

However, after Hitler’s ascent, Magnus Hirshfeld’s Institute for Sexual Research and his efforts to repeal the sodomy laws came to a halt. After the Nazi takeover in 1933, recounts Copley, Ernst Röhm, commander of the SA and himself a known homosexual, unleashed his “stormtroopers—ironically themselves to become victims of the same homophobic campaign— . . . on the gay community.” While any evidence of homosexual behavior was now

highly punishable in Germany (“a lewd glance would do,” notes Copley) and men labeled homosexuals were cruelly hunted down and detained (153), France, where the legal system and moral attitudes remained the same, now seemed less repressive to homosexuals, in the same way that it suddenly seemed more tolerant to Jews. After the Defeat, of course, Jews born in France and foreign Jews who had fled there would find a change of policy, but French homosexuals might discover a mixed though not always unwelcoming reception in the City of Light.

Vichy, which stood for traditionalist values, the family, and motherhood, was hostile to homosexuality. Statutes passed in 1941 restricted homosexual behavior (Nye 106). In August 1942, the regime would pass the first legislation since the Code Napoléon (which, as specified earlier, already punished the corruption of children) to deal explicitly with the punishment of such behavior. “This related,” explains Copley, “to ‘les délits d’excitation habituelle de mineurs à la débauche’” and referred to seductions (by males or females) of a minor between fifteen and twenty-one years of age; “it made no difference,” Copley adds, “if both partners were under age” (203).¹⁴ There is, nonetheless, a certain irony here, for the Vichy Minister of Education (1942–1944), Abel Bonnard, was well known to be a homosexual. Moreover, whenever they could, French (and German) fascists were eager to claim celebrity supporters, even “maverick” novelist Henry de Montherlant, whose clandestine but untiring penchant for cruising pre-adolescent boys during the Occupation would play an important role in his new career as playwright. (My analysis of his play, *Fils de Personne* [*Nobody’s Son*], follows in chapter 7.)

Yet what is significant here is not so much the Vichy government’s hypocrisy, which was pervasive and remains well documented, but the need of this weakening regime to delimit in its own way that which it perceived to be a danger and offense. On the surface, the Vichy decrees may seem rather feeble in comparison with the Nazis’ approach to controlling homosexuality in Germany through mass imprisonment and murder, but the laws’ invidiousness clearly lies in their statutory differentiation of the homosexual and lesbian from others in society and in their characterization and outlawing of specific acts and practices that were already prohibited socially. In spite of their apparent limitations, the decrees mark an attempt to legitimize cultural prejudices that had not since the French Revolution carried genuine legal weight.

The Vichy decrees seem to have come partially in response to the apparent flourishing of homosexuality in German-occupied Paris. Although there has yet to be a full-length study on gay Paris under the Occupation, some of its shadow may be glimpsed. Edmund White’s masterful *Genet: A Biography*, written from an openly gay point of view, presents a wealth of detail about the homosexual demi-monde in Paris during the War. A world of

nightclubs and clandestine pick-ups, with a select pornographic book trade among gentlemen with money and a steady traffic in male prostitution; an urban arts center of discrete cafes, bars, and clubs; a place where homosexual men held positions across society, including in the government, police force, and judicial system—occupied Paris witnessed not merely the sort of collaboration to which Guéhenno refers but in some cases (as in Genet's) to a literal coupling with the enemy.¹⁵

In White's cityscape, there lurk gay fascist sympathizers and traitors: Maurice Sachs, the half-Jewish poet who had converted to Catholicism with Cocteau and after the Defeat "sided with the Nazis and was then killed by them," (266)¹⁶ is notable. Indeed, Sachs himself has left "Suite au sabbat," an uncompleted memoir featuring glimpses of the gay underworld just after the Defeat. In addition, there were homosexual men whose association with Dr. Epting's German Institute and other cultural organizations would later be viewed as collaborationist, such as Montherlant, Marcel Jouhandeau, and Cocteau himself (176). André Gide, a longtime progressive thinker on homosexuality, was in the Free Zone when France fell and eventually left for North Africa. Daniel Guérin, who would become a gay activist, though in Paris during the Occupation, would not begin to address the topic seriously until after the War.¹⁷ White's sketches of occupied Paris, however, do not focus clearly on 1940–1941 for two crucial reasons: First, much of the first year of the Occupation Genet spent not at large in Paris but in jail; and second, although Genet's relationship with Cocteau (who opened the doors for him into the noncriminal, literary–artistic homosexual world) began during the Occupation, they did not meet until 1943, well after the curtain had come down on *The Typewriter*.

The relative freedom with which homosexual males moved through Paris seems perhaps no greater than before the War, but in many significant ways it does not appear to have been very much less. Yet the very survival in Paris of a gay subculture—as Michael Bronski defines it, a "group excluded from the dominant culture" whose "outsider status allows the development of a distinct culture based upon the very characteristics which separate the group from the mainstream" (7)—was not just an offense to Vichy, which postured moral righteousness no matter what its proponents did on the sly, but, more important, an outright affront to French collaborationists in Paris, like Doriot and some of the ultra-rightist journalists who would attack *The Typewriter*. After all, the PPF and other radical fascists had modeled themselves on the Nazis; they had already eagerly begun promoting the occupiers' hatred for the Jews (with which they had no quarrel), and they were no doubt distressed and annoyed that the Germans, who so energetically punished homosexuals within their own borders, should allow these degenerates such liberty in Paris.

Marais versus Laubreaux

Jean Marais appears frequently in the sections of *Genet: A Biography* that deal with the Occupation: Marais's lover (whom Cocteau allowed to move in with Marais and himself) around the time *The Typewriter* opened, was water-polo player Paul Morihien, who would become the publisher of the first edition of Genet's *Notre Dame des fleurs* (*Our Lady of the Flowers*) (204; the book was originally printed in a limited edition and clandestinely distributed during the Occupation). Moreover, Marais's relationship with Cocteau ensured that Jeannot (as Cocteau called him) would frequently meet and sometimes even come to the rescue of Genet.¹⁸ Although Marais's gay life in occupied Paris is perhaps more discernible in White's 1993 book than in the actor's own *Histoires de ma vie*, published in 1975, Marais chronicles in detail an incident precipitated by the closing and reopening of *The Typewriter*, which illuminates how, in the juxtaposition of Nazi Paris and Pétainist Vichy, frictions generated by various rival forces within French culture caused sparks to ignite and, if only momentarily, burst into flame.

Marais narrates the incident, which has been described by various historians and critics and (as noted in this book's epilogue) was fictionalized and transposed to François Truffaut's 1980 *The Last Métro*, as follows:

A few days before opening night [of *The Typewriter* . . .], a journalist from *Le Petit Parisien* informed me that Alain Laubreaux, critic for both that paper and *Je Suis Partout* and a veritable *Führer* of dramatic literature, was getting ready to "tear Cocteau to pieces."

"He hasn't seen or read the play," I said.

". . . [J]ust the same, his mind is made up."

"Well, you can tell Laubreaux that if he goes through with it, I'll bash his face in."

. . . . The day after the dress rehearsal—which for once had gone without incident—the production was banned. Hébertot went off to the Germans and pointed out the inconsistency of their ban. . . .

Two days later, the performances were allowed on condition that we suppress the epileptic fit at the end of the second act. The Germans were trying to save face.

Alain Laubreaux didn't show up. Nonetheless, what a vicious review! Not content with tearing the play and actors to shreds, he indulged in vile attacks both on Cocteau's writing and on his private life. I was obliged to live up to my word: whatever the price, I had to strike.

. . . We dined every night after the show at a little restaurant nearby. I was having supper with Cocteau and Michèle Alfa

when I was advised that Hébertot wanted to see me. . . . I went up. . . . At first I didn't see a thing. In the glimmer of the lightning bolts, I recognized Hébertot's bald skull. I held out my hand to him. . . . [t]hen someone else, to whom I introduced myself. He didn't give his name. Hébertot said to me "That's Alain Laubreaux." . . .

"If it is, I'll spit in his face. Sir, are you Alain Laubreaux?" . . .

He said yes. And I spit. He got up. I thought he wanted to fight.

The little restaurateur, who had followed me, separated us: "Not in my restaurant! . . ."

I went down the stairs. . . .

"Laubreaux is with the Gestapo," Jean said to me. "We'll be shot."

"This is not your affair," I answered. . . .

. . . . At last I see [Laubreaux], followed by Hébertot. . . . I follow them.

Laubreaux has a big square cane. I grab it from him. If I use the cane on him, I run the risk of killing him. I toss the cane. . . . I attack Laubreaux with my fists. He falls. His brow is cut open. He screams, "Help! Police!" I can't take any credit; he didn't defend himself. And I continue to pummel him, in time with my cries, rhythmically: "And Jean-Louis Barrault? What did he ever do to you? And Berthau? And Bourdet?"

In my crazed litany, I invoke all his victims. ("Confronting a Critic" 182–184)

I quote this at length to present the story as told by its protagonist. According to Marais, this incident was widely known within the theatre community, and indeed there have been a number of retellings of what occurred, some pre-dating Marais's version, others (including Truffaut's in *The Last Métro*) post-dating it. Marais's anecdote is particularly theatrical, its narrator cast in a role as masculine as any he would play on stage or screen; his swagger and devil-may-care heroics accompany his manly, if somewhat showy, efforts to avenge the critic who sought to ruin Cocteau and other thespians.

Nonetheless, as Marais indicates, Laubreaux's attacks and some of those by others against *The Typewriter* appeared to be more personal than theatrical. Although his first review (in *Le Petit Parisien*, 3 May 1941) was negative, it is relatively polite, even as it damned Cocteau's dramaturgy and Marais's acting ability. Another reviewer, writing in *L'Appel* (8 May 1941), was more pointedly vicious, calling the dramatist "a notorious invert; seeking his inspiration (?) in opium and other illegal drugs. Mr. Jean Cocteau is nothing less than that," and adding that Cocteau's genius derived from acclaim of the pre-war elite (Rosenberg, "The French Theatre" 168).¹⁹ If only by contrast, Laubreaux's initial notice was almost decorous.

Although Laubreaux was not only the drama critic for two dailies, *Le Petit Parisien* and *Le Cri du Peuple*, but also for *Je suis partout*, Lucien Rebatet (writing as François Vinneuil) was first to review *The Typewriter* for the weekly (12 May 1941). Again, the attack against Cocteau was made on a personal level, though Rebatet's charges are more skillfully extended to the play itself:

The Typewriter is the same type of inverted theatre. . . . It is too easy to see at its center the same watermark of physical and intellectual perversions in which its author does not cease to contort himself. (9; 21)²⁰

Laubreaux's second review of the play, which appeared in the next issue of *Je suis partout* (19 May 1941), includes the same gay bashing but adds an ample helping of anti-Semitism and accuses the play's director, Raymond Roulleau, of being "a purveyor of pornography" (9). Laubreaux even went on in a later issue to defend Rebatet's and his own reviews and to abuse Cocteau again.

Thus, the sort of ruination Laubreaux and others had in mind was to defame Cocteau by provoking, as Nye puts it, "the judgments of his fellow citizens about the *quality* of his masculinity" (107). Marais, of course, would have been guilty by association. His assault and battery of the critic dramatizes another question, one that had perhaps become every bit as urgent by the spring of 1941 as the question, What does it mean to be French? Indeed, Marais's behavior asks, in its own belligerent way, What does it mean to be a Frenchman? Although different playwrights would respond to this question in different ways, Marais, who was an actor, could only act out his answer. The melodramatic nature of the vignette takes for granted the machismo Marais felt it necessary to deploy in order to contradict the critic: In his own telling of the incident, Marais emasculates Laubreaux by first taking, then disposing of his cane, and then wounding him and exacting revenge, first physically, then psychically.

Up to now, Marais had been assured protection from such personal criticisms through that cultural system that had identified him not so much by his choice of sexual partners—Cocteau, Morigien, and others—but by his sexual role and social (as well as stage) presentation of himself. Marais's close friend, former lover, and patron, was generally perceived not just as a flaming aesthete but as an effeminate, and as Steegmuller acknowledges, "the nature of [Cocteau's] sexuality was always well known to be passive" (18). Thus far, Marais's sexuality had escaped public scrutiny. Now, with his film career poised for success, Jeannot needed to maintain the identity of a handsome young man who was attractive (and attracted) to females. While the attack may appear to have its basis in the politics of culture, economics seems

to have been a cause as well. The power of the collabo press did not harm Marais the movie star: Cocteau complains throughout his wartime journal how teenage girls relentlessly follow Marais on the street and wait for him outside their apartment in the Palais Royal.²¹

This issue of masculinity was important not just to Marais, who perhaps felt obliged to demonstrate his manhood, but to Laubreaux, who belonged to an ultra-conservative elite that had in fact, either consciously or unconsciously, displayed a penchant for the homoerotic while at the same time maintaining a fierce homophobia. Mosse detects such a trend in the writings of collaborator and homophobe Drieu La Rochelle, in which the pursuit of love and praise of war “were accompanied by consciousness of the beauty and strength of the male body.” Drieu’s work, Mosse surmises, “was the written equivalent of the nude statues that guarded Nazi buildings [such as Arno Breker’s male nudes flanking Hitler’s Chancellery] . . . ; but here [in Drieu’s writings] the male eros remained intact” (175). At the same time, Drieu “lumped homosexuals together with Jews as creatures of the city, unhealthy and rootless.” Reviewing the works of Montherlant and Robert Brasillach along with those of Drieu, Mosse concludes, “French fascism almost flaunted homoerotic, if not homosexual, attitudes that other fascisms sought to suppress. Here the consequences Himmler wanted to abort seemed to emerge into the light of day” (176). Perhaps the real difference may have been that in Germany much fascist art took a graphic and plastic form, whereas in France it was almost exclusively literary.²² Only to the extent that linguistic representation could be more explicit than painting or sculpture, then, can the homoerotic be seen as being “flaunted.”

At the same time, “Any discussion of fascism and sexuality,” notes Mosse, “must always return to the worship of masculinity and to the community of men as the ruling élite” (176). The masculinity that fascist Frenchmen had been “celebrating,” was, at least in part, an expression of what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has called “homosocial desire,” which refers to “social bonds between persons of the same sex” (1). Sedgwick, in discussing “homosocial desire,” hypothesizes about “the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual—a continuum whose visibility, for men, in our society, is radically disrupted” (1–2). For French fascists, then, whose control over Paris was mocked daily by the very presence of the Germans (who had brought the French fascists to prominence), the pervasiveness and tolerance of male homosexuality made evident a major link between two points that for them were supposed not to be connected at all—the worship of masculinity and homoeroticism. Thus, that men (or, as the ultra-rightists might have put it, males) such as Cocteau and Marais were left to do as they pleased, posed a bitter reminder that, despite all their collaborative efforts, the French fascists had been effeminized by those whom

they would have liked to think of as their German allies. Freud hypothesized what later experiments seem to have shown to be true, that extreme homophobia is manifested by men who are themselves aroused by homosexual thoughts; in such instances the denial of same-sex attraction becomes all the more vehement and violent.

Unfortunately, hatred of homosexuals was never the exclusive franchise of the fascists. While homosexuals were rounded up by the Germans, “anti-fascists attempted,” writes Mosse, “to prove that the homosexuality of Ernst Röhm had infected the whole [Nazi] movement” (186). Heger explains how “[d]uring the 1930s and 1940s, homophobia would become one of the most frequently used tools of both Nazi and Stalinist propaganda to portray the other side as morally degenerate” and that “[p]ostwar films about the Nazi regime often included these homophobic posturings without challenging them” (10). Copley looks skeptically at Jean-Paul Sartre’s “description of the sexual opportunities opened for his character, Daniel, in *Les Chemins de la Liberté*, by the presence of German troops” (203); but after the Liberation some would see, in the real or alleged willingness of some homosexuals during the war to collaborate, a reason not to repeal Vichy’s anti-gay laws. Ironically, even though Marais was maligned by Vichy and the French fascists, he was also denied entrance into an actor’s unit of the Résistance because, as one of its members, Louis Jourdan, later put it, “Cocteau talks too much” (Steegmuller 445), an idea that Marais himself had uttered to Cocteau (Cocteau, *Journal* 551).

Lottman, chronicling the intellectual life on the Left Bank in the 1930s and 1940s, adds an interesting twist to Marais’s clash with the press:

When Cocteau complained to his German friends about the attacks on him in *Je Suis Partout*, they replied, “It’s the French who are attacking you; you’re not liked by your colleagues.” Marais physically assaulted the distasteful collaborationist critic Alain Laubreaux and was saved from arrest, it is said, by a phone call from Cocteau to Breker—the German had given his private number to Cocteau for just such an emergency. (169)

Although Marais never refers to any help from Breker, Cocteau had been a friend of the sculptor since the 1920s and would continue as one throughout the Occupation and after. His recurrent mention of the gratitude he owed Breker, who performed a number of services on his behalf (some of them to benefit Marais), has led the editor of Cocteau’s wartime journals to infer that the sculptor may indeed have been responsible for quelling Laubreaux’s efforts against Marais (112n). This may help explain Cocteau’s loyalty to Breker, for whose May 1942 opening at the Orangerie Cocteau composed a highly flattering address, which was later published and which in part prompted

many to charge Cocteau with collaboration. Whether or not the phone call that Lottman mentions ever occurred, such an event is credible and could easily have taken place.

The curious cultural links and ruptures between fascist aesthetics and homoeroticism are further examined in chapter 2. The question remaining here, however, regards Cocteau as a person and an author. Exactly who was Jean Cocteau, or perhaps more significantly for this study, who was Jean Cocteau during the German Occupation of Paris? During the four years that followed the Defeat, the Cocteau who seemed to embody so much of Vichy's enmity and who would bear the burden of so many fascist French attacks, became, despite his increasing time in the public eye, ever more elusive.

Cocteau in Occupied Paris

In addition to being a poet, novelist, screenwriter and director, artist, painter, and designer, Jean Cocteau (1889–1963) was a dramatist of some repute. Of all the arts in which he worked, the theatre perhaps came most naturally to him. On the claustrophobic and often treacherous social stage of the Occupation, he managed to transform his vast social circle into a cast who supported him through the War. As a widely known homosexual trapped in a “situation limite,” Cocteau played to whatever part of the audience might best appreciate him, no matter who might be seated in that section of the house.

Although a biographical sketch that would do justice to Cocteau is beyond the range of this study, a number of aspects about him are pertinent here. For example, although brought up in a proper middle-class family, a teenage Cocteau apparently ran away from home and lived in hiding for about a year (or so he told people) in the Old Port district of Marseilles (which the Germans destroyed during the War). Steegmuller refers to a monologue written for Edith Piaf (probably during the Occupation), itself based on a short story Cocteau published in 1933, in which “a young [male] thief, having disguised himself as a female prostitute to escape the police, allows himself to be courted by an elderly gentleman—with fatal consequences” (17). During the 1920s, his affair with the young writer, Raymond Radiguet, who died in 1923, caused him to return to smoking opium, an addiction—described in detail in his memoir *Opium* (1929)—that he would never completely shake, except perhaps during the Occupation, when narcotics were impossible to buy (Steegmuller 440). Among his earlier important dramatic works are *Orphée* (1926), *La Machine Infernale* (1934), and *Les Parents Terribles* (1938), which he attempted to revive after *The Typewriter*. He had already written and directed the film *Le Sang d'un Poète* (1931) and would go on to write the screenplay for the 1943 classic, *L'Eternel Retour*.

His relationship with Marais, which lasted until Cocteau's death, began in 1937, when Marais was cast in the chorus of Cocteau's *Oedipe*. By the time *The Typewriter* had been produced, their romantic connection seems to have cooled (both having found other love interests) but not the intensity and intimacy of their friendship; they continued to live together for many years.

Cocteau's homosexuality was publicly and tacitly recognized, but his confessional novella, *Le Livre blanc*, was published anonymously, first in 1928 (by Maurice Sachs), and again in 1930 (this time with illustrations obviously by Cocteau), as was the 1953 edition (published by Paul Morihien). In an English translation, brought out in 1957, Cocteau admits to composing the drawings and writing the preface, in which he declares,

I have even, yes, in several preceding editions accompanied this text with drawings which are patent evidence of the fact that if I do not specialize in a taste for my own sex, I do nonetheless recognize therein one of the sly helping hands fond nature is wont to extend to humans. (8)

Cocteau's original explanation for his denial of having written the book, offers Margaret Crosland, was "that he did not wish to upset his mother," but Mme Cocteau died in 1943 by which time, if she had looked at any of the reviews that her son's plays had received over the past three years, she could not have helped but be aware of his sexual orientation. "His reasons for not conceding authorship, even in 1957," Crosland suggests, "seem to constitute a game he was playing both with himself and with his readers" (9).

This "game," as Crosland calls it, was played out according to cultural and legal rules: Cocteau's anonymity had probably more to do with the same impulses that had caused Marais to thrash Laubreaux. Even after the war, the Vichy decree against pederasty stayed in place and attitudes about sexuality had not greatly changed; the same cultural repression of homosexuality that had operated during the Third Republic and the Vichy regime lingered into the 1960s. Certainly, Mme Cocteau had more than enough opportunity to recognize her son's sexual preferences, but what is clear from Marais's behavior, as well as Cocteau's, is that *being* a homosexual was rather different from *being called* a homosexual. Unlike Montherlant, both Cocteau and Marais appear to have been able to accept being known for who and for what they were so long as the who and the what went unnamed. In an age when even widely known gay figures, such as Gide and Jouhandeau, remained married, Cocteau and Marais were uniquely "out," although, during the war at least, a portion of the public (including Marais's female fans) may not have understood the implications of their identities. Thus, if Marais battered Laubreaux for identifying him, and Cocteau shied away from acknowledging his