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Abstract

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Keywords

Sigmaringen, Ghost, Germany, German, Vichy government, 1944

The Ghosts of Sigmaringen

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There seem to be two ways to write about Sigmaringen, the German town where an incapacitated Vichy government landed in September 1944. The first is to cast the town as the site of an operetta, a fantasy world in which the Vichy government is seen as nothing more than a spectacle, a parodic version of its former self. The second option consists in describing Sigmaringen as a ghost town, a phantasmal city with its haunted castle frequented, for a period of 8 months, by the shadows of the men who had ruled France for four years. Historians today, as well as eye-witnesses of the time, Vichy journalists in exile, and novelists, all turn to a language of operetta and ghosts to describe Sigmaringen. While these metaphoric systems tell of the demise of a regime, they also ask us to reflect on the forms the past takes when it revisits the present.

Sigmaringen has a particular status among the sites of memory of the Second World War. As with Oradour-sur-Glanes or the Glières Plateau, though perhaps to a lesser extent, the German town remains one of the memorable sites of France's war, remembered in historical studies and tour guides alike. It is invested with the will to remember that makes it a "presence of the past" in France's present, to retain Pierre Nora's phrase (20). At the same time, however, perhaps precisely because it is outside of France's borders and because it represents France's treasonous past, Sigmaringen remains today on the margins of the nation's collective memory; it has never become the site of an official, or even officious, commemoration. Sigmaringen remains between two worlds. It is both present and strangely absent, a transitional realm between France and Germany, between Pétain's reign and his demise, between the Occupation and the post-war period, between Vichy and the Vichy syndrome. Always men-

tioned in studies of the Occupation, Sigmaringen remains a reference in the appendices, a footnote in the last chapter of the war.

From Pétain's arrival on September 8, 1944 to April of the following year, Sigmaringen was the site of exile for some 2,000 French collaborators. Pétain was there, harbored in the castle of the Hohenzollern dynasty, as was Laval, though both considered themselves prisoners of the German authorities and both had desisted from their official government functions. Indeed, Pétain cut all ties with the German authorities and communicated only through his physician, Bertrand Ménétrél. Fernand de Brinon was in Sigmaringen, and, alleging Pétain's support, he became head of the French governmental commission whose putative role was to look after the approximately two million French men and women in Germany at the end of the war. Joseph Darnand, head of the Milice, held the position of Secretary of the Interior at Sigmaringen; Marcel Déat, editor of the collaborationist journal *L'Oeuvre* and founder of the *Rassemblement national populaire* party 'the National Popular Mobilization Party,' became Minister of Labor. The journalist Jean Luchaire was named Commissioner for Propaganda and Information, and under his direction, the French refugees published a daily paper, *La France*, from October 26 to April 7, and established a radio station that alternated programs on the Milice with musical recordings. Lucien Rebatet from *Je suis partout* was there, as were the pianist Lucienne Delforge, the actor Robert le Vigan, the Academician and ex-Minister of Education Abel Bonnard, and Louis-Ferdinand Céline, whose novel *Castle to Castle* is one of the richest chronicles of this "little bit of French history" (Céline, *Romans* 936).¹ In Sigmaringen, the French put together the last collaborationist government of the war. The town, however, was also an antechamber to the purge courts; with only a few exceptions, all of the major figures in exile were tried and convicted for treason upon their return to France.

Seeking to render the atmosphere of despair and artifice in this community, historians have used the metaphor of the operetta to represent Vichy's last days. One of the most spirited accounts of this period was written by Henry Rousso, several years before he published *The Vichy Syndrome*. In *Pétain et la fin de la collaboration*, Rousso outlines the intentions of the Germans in forcing Pétain and Laval to go into exile recalling the intrigues of the French politicians and highlighting their futile gesticulations and false hopes. The constant image through these descriptions is the stage: Pétain's

residence in the Hohenzollern castle is “sumptuous and unreal.” The Germans, he writes, “never neglect the decor. They know it conditions the actors.” More than anything, the new arrangement between French collaborators and their German hosts resembles what Rousso calls a “Viennese operetta,” whose director is Otto Abetz (Rousso, *Pétain* 20). Even the back cover of his study is meant to tip the reader about the historian’s metaphor of choice: following Rousso’s lead, a reviewer, Eric Roussel of *Le Monde*, situates Sigmaringen “half-way between operetta and tragedy.” Rousso, however, is not alone. In his recent study, *La France à l’heure allemande*, Philippe Burrin returns to this terminology of the simulacrum when he describes Sigmaringen as a “pasteboard world” (460). One of Laval’s biographers, Jean-Paul Cointet, calls Sigmaringen a “real stage setting for German Romantic directors” (503). Even the historian André Brissaud, whose work borders on an apology of Pétain and the Vichy government, calls the politicians “actors” and labels the politics at Sigmaringen a “burlesque comedy” (209).

The operetta, and more generally the theater metaphors, condense and transfer several meanings to the reader returning to the events fifty years later. Accounts of the period invariably tell of the lasting bitterness between Pétain and Laval, and of Fernand de Brinon’s Machiavelian quest for power. In one instance, Brinon, whom Pétain never recognized as head of the French governmental commission, consolidated his political power at Sigmaringen by printing a portrait of Pétain dedicated to him in the first issue of *La France*. Opening the paper’s first edition on October 26, 1944, the exiled collaborators saw the portrait bearing the inscription: “A Monsieur de Brinon mon fidèle interprète auprès des autorités allemandes” ‘To Monsieur de Brinon, my faithful interpreter to the German authorities.’ The portrait and the dedication, however, dated from November 1, 1941, and this homage was nothing more than Brinon’s attempt at political subterfuge. The operetta metaphor efficiently describes Sigmaringen as a site where politics has turned into theater and where the drama of political exile has become a tawdry melodrama. Comparing a political regime to an overblown stage production has been a rhetorical technique at least since Marx’s *18th Brumaire of Louis-Napoléon*. In the case of representations of Sigmaringen, whether they are cast as an operetta or a “burlesque comedy,” the politicians who had governed France are no more than the impotent actors in a diminutive and slightly devalued genre.

It is always problematic to attempt to ascribe an origin to a metaphor, especially one which, like the operetta metaphor used to describe Sigmaringen, has attained the status of well-worn cliché. Still, it seems likely that the source for the historians' operetta terminology is Louis-Ferdinand Céline's 1957 novel *Castle to Castle*, a text cited by both Roussso and Brissaud, and which transforms the town and its nineteenth-century castle into a stage spectacle: "[Sigmaringen] . . . you'd think you were at an operetta . . . a perfect setting...you're waiting for the sopranos, the lyric tenors . . . your stage is the city, so pretty-pretty, and pink and green, semi-pistachio, assorted pastry, cabarets, hotels, shops, all lopsided for the effect . . . all in the 'Baroque boche' and the 'White Horse Inn' style" (Céline, *Castle* 124). Céline's vision of the Vichy government in exile is parodic and the references to the operetta are meant, at least in part, to mock a regime from which the author, for various reasons, needed to distance himself.

It is difficult not to read Céline's postwar novels as the author's self-defense plea against accusations of treason, collaboration, and anti-Semitism, especially considering that during the purge trials, including Céline's, the tribunals of the *épuration* added flight to Sigmaringen to the list of treasonous acts.² Exile in Germany in the closing months of the war could serve as definitive proof that the collaborator had betrayed his nation. This was certainly the case for the journalist Jean Luchaire. But when Luchaire was accused of having found refuge on enemy territory, his attorney, Maître Jacques Floriot, downplayed the political import of his client's flight to the German town: "Sigmaringen, you consider this operetta important? . . . Doesn't Sigmaringen make you smile? That there were some Frenchmen in Germany who created a puppet government? . . . Didn't you have the feeling it was an opera troupe?" (Garçon 627). Representing Sigmaringen as an operetta not only meant devaluing the importance of the French collaborators' flight to Germany; in the immediate postwar years it meant doing so with the specific intent of partially or wholly exonerating the collaborators who had found temporary refuge in Germany at the end of the war.³ To call Sigmaringen an operetta was, for Céline as for Floriot, a way of deflecting responsibility away from themselves; it meant turning a political act into a triviality.

The trail of operetta metaphors leads us from contemporary historians back through the purge trials to Sigmaringen itself. For not

only was the atmosphere there like an operetta, but the French radio station established at Sigmaringen in 1944 broadcast operettas almost continually, alternating nightly news bulletins and a program called “La Milice vous parle” with selections from Franz Léhar’s *The Land of Smiles*, Emmanuel Chabrier’s *L’Étoile*, and Karl Millöcker’s *La Dubarry*.⁴ To be sure, these operettas are escapist fantasies. This lighthearted genre seems somehow appropriate for a population of refugees who refused to acknowledge that historical realities, not to mention allied troops, were catching up with them. What is more, since 1933 official Nazi culture had not only tolerated but practically consecrated this form of popular entertainment. While prosecuting Jews in the world of the theater, Nazi authorities had encouraged composers such as Franz Lehár to continue working under Hitler’s regime. Ralph Benatzky’s “White Horse Inn,” the operetta mentioned by Céline, was a huge success in Germany in the early 1930s, in part because it was set during the reign of Kaiser Franz-Josef and was filled with a nostalgia for the halcyon days before World War I. The transmission of these works by the French radio in Sigmaringen, then, participated in the reaffirmation of a culture that the Nazi regime had always condoned and supported. Finally, in the radio station’s juxtaposition of operettas and political propaganda, there is perhaps already the inception of the argument toward exculpation that we find in Céline’s text and Floriot’s plea for Luchaire. The operetta is a lighthearted, naive, and indeed innocent genre. It is the very opposite of “important” music. By broadcasting operettas on the Sigmaringen radio, the collaborationist exiles may have been attempting, already, to declare their political innocence. At Pétain’s trial, the Marshal’s defense team claimed that Pétain had played a double game, or *double jeu*, in which under the guises of collaboration he had favored de Gaulle and the Resistance all along. What we find at Sigmaringen is a double game of another sort: by placing their exile under the sign of the operetta, the collaborators were attempting to turn this final act of the collaboration into a malleable sign system, open, if nothing else, to a constant scrambling of interpretations. Even before contemporary historians revisited the site, the collaborators at Sigmaringen had defined themselves as the participants in a *jeu*—a term in French that refers both to a game and to an actor’s interpretation of a role. The operetta became an emblematic genre through which they could recast themselves, both as politically committed exiles when necessary and as the disengaged actors in a spectacle directed by the Nazis.

An archaeology of the operetta metaphor in representations of Sigmaringen reveals a curious itinerary. Historians of the period almost invariably use the term to describe both the overblown castle and the factitious atmosphere that reigned among the remnants of the Vichy government. The operetta metaphor is more than a mere formula, however. Along with its castle walls, Sigmaringen carries with it a lexicon of tropes in which one finds encoded in the most lighthearted metaphor a partial history of the end of the war. Describing Sigmaringen as an operetta was part of the collaborators' postwar attempt to deny the seriousness of the accusations they faced. When historians use this term, when they compare Sigmaringen to a stage setting, they are unknowingly revealing a series of ideological struggles centered around issues of guilt and responsibility. And while present day historians such as Rousso and Burrin have no intention of clearing the Vichy regime, their use of a colorful cliché to describe Sigmaringen reveals precisely the opposite of what they seem to be saying. To describe Sigmaringen as an operetta is both to discredit its importance in the face of other wartime events, and to reveal how important it was for certain men accused of collaboration to discredit, and indeed to forget the entire Sigmaringen episode.

The second metaphor circulating throughout representations of Sigmaringen is taken from the lexicon of ghosts and specters, and this metaphor, like the ghost itself, remains a guide to the sites, the memory, and the presence of the past, even if the meanings we encounter are sometimes contradictory. Again, I take as a starting point historians of the period. When describing the Vichy regime at Sigmaringen, Henry Rousso speaks of a "government of ghosts" (Rousso, *Pétain* 65). Robert Paxton refers to Pétain's "shadow court in the old Hohenzollern castle" (329). In his voluminous *Histoire de Vichy*, Robert Aron claims that the French exiles are "haunted" by their vain political projects, and he describes in these terms their false hopes: "it's the mobilization of the crabs, or often of their ghosts. But in the artificial atmosphere of Sigmaringen, this type of shadow theater [*de tels jeux d'ombres*] is often meant solely to impress" (726-27). Marcel Ophuls' 1971 documentary *The Sorrow and the Pity* also returns to the Hohenzollern castle at Sigmaringen in its meditation upon memory of the war. There, André Harris interviews Christian de la Mazière, a "young man of the extreme right-wing in 1940," who recalls that he is one of the few survivors of the 7,000 French troops in the Charlemagne division. *The Sorrow and the*

Pity, a film about the return of the past, stages a return to one of the sites of the past through a witness who, himself, seems to be a specter revisiting the war. Céline's 1957 novel *Castle to Castle* also places Sigmaringen under the sign of the specter. The narration begins with a vision of ghosts from the author's past: walking along the Seine, he sees a tourist boat, a *bateau-mouche* piloted by Charon, the ferryman of the dead, and whose passengers include the author's companions during his German exile. Finally, if we return to the trial of Jean Luchaire, we find that the prosecution, leveling charges against the defendant, mentions his flight to Sigmaringen with what they call the "phantom government" of the Vichy regime (Garçon 357).

Like the operetta metaphor, the metaphor of the ghost town describes the impotence of the Vichy government. No longer alive, not yet completely dead, the French regime at Sigmaringen is between two worlds. To call it a "phantom government" or a "government of ghosts" is to point to its powerlessness in the closing months of the war. Historians, filmmakers, novelists, and prosecutors all want to characterize Vichy as a shadow of its former self; collaborationist politicians were present in the debates and conflicts of the Liberation and yet strangely absent, cloistered until April 1945 in a remote German village. Still, as was the case with the operetta, the ghosts haunting our vision of Sigmaringen reveal more than is evident at first glance. For while they speak of the regime's death, the metaphors of ghosts also speak to a deathly memory and announce the return of the past to the present.

It seems that the metaphor of ghosts is the privileged trope of historians for representing not only Sigmaringen, but sites of memory in general. At the beginning of this essay I mentioned how Sigmaringen could be considered a site of memory in the sense determined by Pierre Nora. If we look at Nora's descriptions and definitions of the sites of memory, we realize that they, too, evoke realms that are somehow spectral; sites of memory are entities that are present and yet strangely absent. They often have a physical reality: they are, in Nora's words, "remains," "the ultimate embodiments of memorial consciousness." Whatever their form, be they archives, the tricolor or the Hohenzollern castle, these sites are somehow present in an age when memory is in a state of constant erosion. Yet for all their presence, the *lieux de mémoire* are "illusions of eternity." Invested with a symbolic "aura" (Nora 19), Nora's *lieux* serve, like phantoms, as intermediary figures, as transitions between the

present and the past, between memory and history. This is precisely what leads Nora to describe them as being between two worlds: they are, he writes, “moments of history torn away from the movement of history, then returned; no longer quite life, not yet death,” (12). Though Nora never uses the term “ghost,” he nonetheless describes the *lieux de mémoire* as if they fulfilled a ghostly function. They play the role of intermediary, of transition. Like the specter, they are “mixed, hybrid, mutant, bound intimately with life and death, with time and eternity” (19). Their “most fundamental purpose,” Nora tells us, is “to immortalize death” (19). Nora’s project of theorizing the sites of memory thus takes the form of a dialogue with the dead.

We would be mistaken, however, to believe that the ghosts of Sigmaringen are entirely a product of our own “will to remember.” Though they may be apt figures for describing an aspect of memory, the metaphors of ghosts also participate in a series of strategic discourses. Alongside the historians’ ghosts, there are other specters that emerge from the voices of the war. At Sigmaringen, in particular, the French collaborators also produced a discourse about ghosts, and like the metaphor of the operetta, the metaphor of ghosts goes both ways. Through a dialogue with specters, the collaborators attempted both to perpetuate and to deny the reality of their situation and of the crimes for which they were accused.

Among the traces left by the French in exile, one document stands out: the daily paper *La France*, edited by Jean Luchaire and published, as the editors themselves claimed, “thanks to the delicate generosity of the Germans” (October 26, 1944).⁵ As the opening editorial tells us, *La France* was dedicated both to furnishing the French refugees with news about the war and to initiating a commemoration of the Vichy regime. The newspaper produced the standard fare of collaboration: praise for the *Milice*, anti-Semitism, anti-communism, denunciation of the Liberation and the purge, and a seemingly unshakable faith in the final victory of the German army. As late as March 12, 1945, *La France* published a declaration by Goebbels that the German army would never surrender, though one finds it incredible that either the paper’s editors or its readers believed such statements. *La France* was also as devoted to covering cultural events as it was to chronicling politics. Pages in every issue were dedicated to reviewing expositions, profiling artists, commemorating writers, and detailing the declarations of collaborationist intellectuals at Sigmaringen. The paper even published a novel in se-

rial form whose very first lines read: “Je ne rentrerai pas . . . Je ne rentrerai pas . . . je ne peux pas rentrer” ‘I won’t go home . . . I won’t go home . . . I can’t go home,’ an ominous beginning to a novel published for French exiles.⁶ These arts and leisure pages served several purposes, the first of which may have been to prove that, in spite of everything, life in Sigmaringen was continuing as planned. Pétain may have desisted from his role as *chef d’Etat*, Leclerc’s army may have been knocking at the gates of the city, but a serial novel almost seems to normalize, and indeed to render banal, daily life at Sigmaringen.

At the same time, the articles in *La France* presented a commemorative project, which took the form of a disembodied voice, what Alice Kaplan has called the “emblem . . . of fascist mythology” (Kaplan 139). *La France* reproduced voices from the past through the trope of prosopopeia, the trope through which we ask the dead to speak, the trope of the voice from beyond the grave. Thus, an article about the sculptor Maillol’s death in October 1944 celebrates the “langue lapidaire” ‘lapidary language’ of his work—as if his specter continued to speak for the collaboration even after his death (November 5, 1944). An article on Marinetti, who also died in the last months of the war, not only mourned the Italian futurist, but praised him for remaining faithful to Mussolini until the end December 7, 1944). Commemorating the 250th anniversary of Voltaire’s birth, a journalist at *La France* condemned Voltaire for having “dragged *la Pucelle d’Orléans* through the mud,” but praised him as one of the “highest intelligences produced by Western civilization” (November 27, 1944). The philosopher was called to serve under the banner of Vichy’s national revolution, but he too is drafted as a ghost represented in the form of a “hideous smile,” hovering over the author’s bones. The disembodied voice of prosopopeia becomes, in this case, a disembodied rictus. One final example of this dialogue with the dead occurs on the occasion of Romain Rolland’s death in January 1945. Rolland, the author of the *Jean-Christophe* saga and a communist party faithful as of 1927, played a paradoxical role in the literary battles between collaborators and resisters at the end of the war. He was, as it turns out, recuperated by both sides. While the partisans at the clandestine paper *Les Lettres françaises* claimed Rolland as a figurehead for the communist resistance, the journalists at Sigmaringen praised him as an inspiration for the politics of collaboration. Not only did Rolland epitomize Vichy’s bucolic ideal by retiring to the monastery at Vézelay, a “sacred” site, but accord-

ing to the author at *La France*, he was a sort of arch-collaborator. The Germans understood him, he understood the Germans, and the author even quotes Rolland, in 1941, reacting to an explanation of Nazism: “Si c’est cela que les Allemands veulent, alors je suis avec eux” ‘If that’s what the Germans want, then I’m with them’ (January 26, 1945).⁷ In an apocryphal quote, Romain Rolland was made to speak from beyond the grave in favor of the collaboration.

The process of commemoration culminates in an anonymous sonnet published in *La France* on February 15 and titled “Le Tombeau de Robert Brasillach.” This *tombeau* recalls Mallarmé’s sonnets, including the use of the *rime embrassée*, but in its attempts to immortalize Brasillach, it turned into a rather kitschy affair. Comparing Brasillach’s legacy to a tree, the author of the sonnet envisioned Brasillach’s name “overcoming time” and “dominating his tribulations [Il surmonte le temps, il domine l’épreuve]. Drawing upon a romantic mythology, the poetaster represented Brasillach as an unjustly condemned man whose ghost would avenge his fate. Like Voltaire’s smile in the earlier article, Brasillach’s remains were seen hovering over Paris, his name engraved on the heart of the capital. If Brasillach was not called to speak in the sonnet, the poem nonetheless summoned a future presence of the fascist writer, his name remaining as a sign of his presence.

Throughout the pages of *La France*, then, we find a series of ghost stories, which differ radically from the ghosts evoked by post-war historians. The “government of ghosts” of which Rouso speaks turns out to be not only the haggard representatives of the Vichy regime, but also the specters and voices the collaborators themselves called upon to speak in 1944. There is little doubt that through these voices the refugees at Sigmaringen addressed themselves to the purge tribunals that were beginning to operate in France. Prosopopeia, as Fontanier reminds us, is the trope of authority, used most often to sway public opinion. In their conjuration of figures from the past the collaborators were rehearsing their own defense pleas and offering support to the writers already on trial in Paris—Charles Maurras and Robert Brasillach in particular. In all cases, the collaborationist journalists, exiled in Sigmaringen, used the pages of their newspaper to stage a trial in which voices from beyond the grave were called forth to testify for writers who, themselves, were facing death. Ghosts, specters, and death were, of course, at the core of fascist ideology. Militaristic rites and fascist holism often went hand in hand with a passion for the occult. Brasillach’s enthu-

siasm for the Nuremberg rallies exemplifies this attitude: the French writer liked to claim that his adventure with fascism began as a supernatural experience, in which fascist martyrs were conjured up by Hitler, the “archangel of death” (Brasillach 353). From the start, fascism granted itself authority through the resurrection of an army of specters. But it is also clear that for the collaborators at Sigmaringen, the trials are a spectacle. The trope of prosopopeia, through which they respond to accusations of treason, is also the trope through which they create specters. Prosopopeia not only makes the dead speak, it stages a performance, most notably the spectacle of specters.

The collaborators’ desire to stage history as a spectacle of ghosts takes one final troubling turn in an article published on November 5, 1944. On this day, *La France* ran a short piece entitled “Auschwitz, camp modèle” ‘Auschwitz, an Exemplary Camp,’ a putative report on French workers at the camps of Auschwitz, presumably sent to Germany through the forced labor program, the STO, and whose work should stand as a model to others:

First, the work is organized in the most admirable discipline and order. Then, the inside of the camp is organized. . . . The relations with the Germans, governed by the French delegates, remain excellent and transpire under the sign of confidence and cordiality. The spirit of resourcefulness manifested itself during a recent fair [*kermesse*] where we admired many ingenious stands, especially, the highlight of the day, an extremely successful haunted house [*une maison hantée extrêmement réussie*].

The misprision of this passage is such that one hardly knows where to begin. The article is anonymous and may be the reproduction of a German press release, a tactic the shorthanded staff at *La France* regularly used. Still, it is also quite clearly the French at Sigmaringen who are speaking, and they have reconverted the death camp into a work camp, where, the author tells us, among the prisoners “c’est dans la joie que se fait le travail” ‘work is joyfully performed.’ The most chilling aspect of all, however, is the reference to the “haunted house.” The French inhabiting the “ghost town” of Sigmaringen have transformed the death camp into an “extremely successful” distraction. By evoking this “haunted house,” the article is both denying and conjuring the victims of the Holocaust; it is laying bare precisely what it was attempting to repress. The article thus pre-

sents the kind of ghostly apparition Freud spoke of in his study of the uncanny in an article dating from 1919, the year after the end of another war. In the language of psychoanalysis, the ghost reveals an anxiety that "can be shown to be from something repressed which recurs" (Freud 241). When the collaborators speak of the "haunted house" at Auschwitz, they are bringing to light the very ghosts of the victims they seemed so intent upon concealing. With its reference to the "haunted house," the article both denies and evokes the memory of the victims of the Shoah.

Theories of ghosts usually cast them in the role of what the French language calls *revenants*. They are, in psychoanalytic terms, the past that is always returning, or always about to return. The ghost is that which comes back, or as Derrida says, speaking of another kind of ghost, "the specter is the future, it is always to come [*à venir*]" (Derrida 39). To be sure, when historians of the Second World War speak of the "ghosts of Sigmaringen," they have in mind less the return than the decadence and degradation of these forces. Still, the terminology of ghosts and specters leads us beyond this single meaning. Indeed, the historian who described the "government of ghosts" at Sigmaringen, Henry Rousso, returned to this same vocabulary in his later study *The Vichy Syndrome*. When concluding his discussion of Holocaust negationism in France, Rousso evokes the reaction of the French public to the October 1980 terrorist attack on a synagogue, located on the Rue Copernic in Paris. Linking this attack to the attacks against the memory of the Shoah, Rousso concludes that "to the French minds in the 1980s it seemed perfectly logical to assume that the assassins were fascists, "heirs of Nazism, ghosts of the past [*des revenants*]" (Rousso, *Vichy* 167). Rousso, a historian of *revenants* and of the return of France's past, has now recast the "government of ghosts" at Sigmaringen as the reincarnation of a fascist ideology intent upon hunting down and haunting its victims. Rousso's own terminology suggests that the metaphor of ghosts, of specters, and of shadows is perhaps as effective for talking about our memory of France's collaborationist past as a vocabulary of "repression," "trauma," "neurosis," and "syndrome."

At the same time, however, the ideology Rousso is naming and denouncing also relies upon a vocabulary of ghosts and specters. The article evoking "Auschwitz" in the pages of *La France* cannot be seen as solely a manifestation of the return of the repressed. The

scious desire to transform the reality of the death camps into a *kermesse*, that is, a festival, a spectacle, a simulacrum. The article is an early manifestation of Holocaust denial, which first began to take shape in the texts of authors who were both sympathetic to the fascists and vehemently opposed to the purge in France and the Nuremberg trials in Germany.⁸ Denying the Holocaust was, and remains, part of an attempt to deny accountability for crimes committed during the war. Its primary strategy, as Pierre Vidal-Naquet has shown, is to deny the facts of history and to counter these facts with a simulation. Negationists chillingly attempt to replace testimony and histories with fictitious accounts. They produce “a discourse replacing reality by fiction” (Vidal-Naquet 50). According to Vidal-Naquet, it is not a coincidence that Holocaust denial has surfaced at the same time as theories that call into question the reality of historical representation, when, in his words, certain philosophers “decree . . . that social reality is composed only of imaginary relations” (6). This is not to say, of course, that all interrogations of representation or theories of the simulacrum invariably lead to a falsification of history. Rather, it stands as a warning that the transformation of history into spectacle can also serve the strategic purposes of individuals and groups, like certain French exiles in Sigmaringen, who felt compelled to deny the reality of a massacre. If Sigmaringen has been called a ghost story, it is because the language of specters, which in the words of contemporary historians tells the tale of the end of a regime, also announces the attempt to transform this history into a spectacle.

Notes

1. Unless otherwise indicated, translations are my own.
2. See Céline, “Reply to Charges of Treason Made by the French Department of Justice.”
3. I have looked at this problem in relation to Céline’s style and politics as they appear in his last three novels. See Watts, “Postmodern Céline.”
4. My source for this information is the newspaper *La France*, which published the radio program every day. The collaborators at Sigmaringen called their radio station “Ici, la France,” a not so subtle reference to the radio station of *other* French refugees, de Gaulle’s “Ici, Londres.”

5. All references to the date of publication of articles from *La France* are given in parentheses in the text.

6. The novel is *Catherine Bonnières* by Renée Clary.

7. A few years later, Rolland reappeared at the heart of the polemics surrounding the purge, this time in Jean Paulhan's 1948 reprimand of the Comité national des écrivains, *De la paille et du grain*. Exasperated by the blacklists of collaborationist writers issued by the CNE, Paulhan claimed that these sanctions were at best arbitrary, and that it was only by chance that writers such as Brasillach and Rebatet were on trial after the war and not communist intellectuals such as Aragon and Claude Morgan. Paulhan argued that Communist writers who were so intent upon judging crimes of collaboration were themselves collaborators of the Soviets, and his example is precisely Romain Rolland, a model for the CNE, but a writer who, in Paulhan's assessment, would have been blacklisted had the same criteria about patriotism and treason been applied to him as to Brasillach.

8. The opposition to the purge trials and the trials of Nazis for crimes against humanity is evident in the work of both Maurice Bardèche and Paul Rassinier. See Bardèche.

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