

Conference:
Gender, War and Culture: From the Age of the World Wars to the Cold War, Anti-colonial Struggle to the Wars of Globalization (1910s-present)

UNC-Chapel Hill, September 11-13, 2014

Part III: Chapter 19

**MOBILIZATION FOR ‘TOTAL’ WARFARE: GENDER, CULTURE,
AND PROPAGANDA**

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In 1946, the American composer Marc Blitzstein published “A Musician’s War Diary,” recalling his wartime work for the Army Eighth Air Force and then the Office of War Information, the propaganda agency of the United States. He finished his reminiscences showcasing the powers of propaganda through the example of a French film version (1944) of Bizet’s opera *Carmen* (1875), produced by Jean Cocteau and starring Viviane Romance and Jean Marais. In Blitzstein’s telling, the film’s music reveals the insidious emasculation of French culture through the powers of German indoctrination:

The film is neither good nor bad. [Viviane] Romance, a really top-form slut type, now plays *Carmen*, the real slut, as though she were a milliner. It is the music track that interests me; all out of Bizet’s *Carmen*, so abjectly obedient that the arranger has accompanied certain sequences with simple oom-pahs from the “Toreador” song, four bars repeated again and again. I am impressed. At least this musician knows he’s no Bizet and doesn’t tamper with or imitate the original. That is up until the climax; suddenly, out of nowhere, the music breaks into the big love-death motif from Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*—then back to Bizet again for the finish! [...] Obviously, the thing is a sickening



demonstration of a sop to the Nazi Ministry of Propaganda which they expected to be their public. The Allies just got in too soon.¹

The accompanying sketch by the illustrator Jack Levine (figure 1) captured some of the themes in Blitzstein's tale: the opera's arch-French heroine is turned into a well-nourished Walkyrie; the poster's script

uses German lettering; and Jean Cocteau's emaciated figure not only plays on tropes of John the Baptist pointing on who comes after him, but also carries a lapel flower that evokes the Star of David (though he himself was not Jewish).

At first glance, Blitzstein's story about inserting a few measures of Wagner's music into a French film score might seem like a trifle in the context of so destructive a global conflict as World War II. Yet from their somewhat selfrighteous American perspective, Blitzstein and Levine put their finger smartly on the perils and power of propaganda in waging cultural war. The point of this cautionary tale is, in effect, its seeming triviality because it made visible the potential long-term effects of propaganda on the health of a nation's pride. For Blitzstein and many other propaganda warriors, culture presented the soul of a nation. By substituting German pomp for French clarity (Bizet's *Carmen* is famous for its economy of means), the film's

¹ Marc Blitzstein, "A Musician's War Diary," *New Masses* LX (1946), 13 August 1946, 3–6, and 20 August 1946, 6–9 (quotation at p. 9). Though a French movie production, the film was produced in Italy; Blitzstein identifies Jean Cocteau as the producer, though he is not mentioned as such in the Internet Movie Database; see http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0034581/?ref_=nm_filmg_act_28 (accessed 1 August 2014).

creators had sacrificed cultural virility, thus submitting to the enemy's expressive and artistic dominion. Unless such assimilation of enemy culture was addressed and rejected, France would remain a culturally occupied and dependent nation. The gendered aspect of this transaction is implied rather than explicit in Blitzstein's story; however, it evokes a number of well-used stereotypes—from characterizing a French operatic heroine as a "slut" to emphasizing French musical subservience—that were heavily imbued with gendered meaning in the context of mid-century cultural discourse. Levine's contrast between a masculinized Wagnerian heroine and a clearly emasculated Cocteau is more obvious even to today's eyes.

I have started my contribution with an example from World War II, the endpoint of a transnational development that tested and pushed concerted propaganda efforts for twentieth-century warfare, one that would quickly be adapted to the shifting demands of the Cold War and its aftermath. This modern form of propaganda had its roots in nineteenth-century mass culture; yet—given the raise of new media technologies after 1900—it became an increasingly totalizing tool of cultural warfare in the first half of the twentieth century. Here I focus on propaganda that used art in an intentionally structural and targeted manner. Such deployments were guided by government institutions, whether in democratic countries such as the United States and England, or Fascist ones like Germany and Italy, but they also involved synergistic efforts by individual artists and cultural institutions, from Hollywood studios to the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra.

Propaganda, as David Welch points out, is a slippery term; yet it carries generally an emphasis on the deliberate management of information for the purpose of persuasion.² Propaganda also is predicated on simplifying the complexities of international entanglements to focus the message, often through the sharpening of dichotomies and the evocation of stereotypes. Finally, propaganda is never value-neutral: good and bad are moral taxonomies whose legacy is

² David Welch, *Propaganda: Power and Persuasion* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 2.

rooted in the older forms of propaganda that emerged from Counter-Reformation Rome and that cast a long shadow over the concept's secular history.³ In wartime propaganda, such dichotomies tend to focus on a good Self and a different, usually bad, Other. In this constellation of signifiers, it is no surprise then, that on the one hand wartime propaganda in particular instrumentalized gender binaries for its purposes of persuasion, and on the other, that gender politics became a target of homefront propaganda efforts. The cultural work of wartime propaganda drew thus on existing gender constructions in attacking the enemy while, at the same time, using the conflict to focus on reconfiguring gender at home for the purposes of both conflict and any ensuing peace. Where art and culture are concerned in this mix, the Blitzstein example with which I started my contribution reveals another layer to the work of propaganda: on the one hand, art is

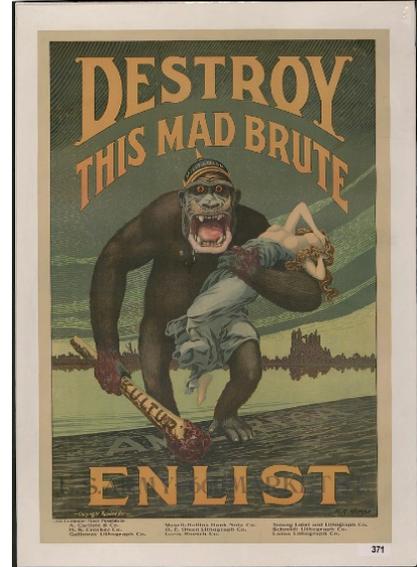


used as the medium to carry the message; on the other, however, art itself becomes a target for propaganda not least, though not only, in terms of gender. Masculinized art—especially a nation's own art—is posed as one that can contribute to a healthy and strong nation in both war and peace; feminized art—by contrast—will weaken it, though an art that embraces traditional femininity can be cast as fulfilling clearly contained functions, ranging from the medical through the domestic to the gendering of entire nations.⁴

³ In recent years, the concept of propaganda has become a renewed focus in Counter-Reformation research. See, for example, Alexander J. Fisher, *Music, Piety, and Propaganda: the Soundscapes of Counter-Reformation Bavaria* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). On the link between Counter-Reformation and secular propaganda after the French Revolution, see Jonathan Auerbach and Russ Castronovo, "Introduction: Thirteen Propositions about Propaganda," in *The Oxford Handbook of Propaganda Studies*, edited by eidem (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1–16, 1.

⁴ Not surprisingly, masculinizing rhetoric often dominates cultural discourse after defeat. This was particularly prevalent in the Weimar Republic, but—as I have shown previously—can be found in the nineteenth century as well. See Annegret Fauser, "Gendering the Nations: The Ideologies of French Discourse on Music (1870–1914)," in

In World War I, recruitment posters drew on these gendered stereotypes on both sides of the Atlantic, as these two well-known examples show. The British recruitment poster by E. V. Kealy titled "Women of Britain Say – 'Go!'" from 1915 (figure 2) emphasizes the ideal of female sacrifice, feminine beauty, and idyllic domesticity, as the uniformed men march off to war in the background. An American recruitment poster for the Army from 1916 (figure 3), by contrast, turns to mythology, but replacing Zeus in the rape of Europa with a



King Kong-type gorilla also about to step on American shores.⁵ The brutish monster reveals the underbelly of an out-of-control militaristic masculinity that turns even “culture” into a bloodstained club; the damsel in distress—by contrast—plays on every trope of helpless feminine beauty. Numerous other posters played on similar tropes of masculine militarism versus feminized fragility and domesticity. Even those images that recruited women to munitions factories emphasized traditional feminine virtues, a particularly important form of gender stereotyping in societies that were leery of women’s professional activities and the so-called “new woman.” Yet—as Pearl James points out—despite these pervasive strategies of gender containment, the posters also “reflect more radical possibilities for female subjectivity” by emphasizing a wider range of professional and physical activities for women.⁶ Masculinities, too,

Musical Constructions of Nationalism: Essays on the History and Ideology of European Musical Culture, 1800–1945, edited by Michael Murphy and Harry White (Cork: Cork University Press, 2001), 72–103.

⁵ The iconic King Kong image—created in 1933—was obviously influenced by this well-known poster.

⁶ For a rich collection of essays that present a range of interpretations of World War I posters, see *Picture This: World War I Posters and Visual Culture*, edited by Pearl James (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2009). For gender representation, see especially the contributions by Pearl James, “Images of Femininity in American World War I Posters” (273–311), and Meg Albrink, “Humanitarians and He-Men: Recruitment Posters and the Masculine Ideal” (312–39); quotation on p. 274. For a discussion of brutish masculinity assigned to the

were stereotyped in those years: whether drawing on noble, agrarian, or proletarian images of masculinity, action-oriented manliness became the ideal promoted across the belligerent nations.

Not only the visual arts—especially in form of propaganda posters—but also music were involved in fighting the “good war” of 1914–18. In music, gender comes into play on a number of levels, from the structure and sound of a musical work to its function. A military march can serve as an introductory example for the construction of gender in and through music: both the musical material—from its brass, wind, and percussion timbres to the regular marching meter and the foursquare, clear-cut harmonic language—and its functional connection with the public masculinity of the military parade and the war theater. Thus both the sonic markers of the march and the genre itself are gendered masculine in Western music.⁷ Such markers can then be deployed in other musical contexts, carrying with them their gendered connotations, whether masculine or feminine. One could easily contrast, for example, the march-like character of “It’s a Long Way to Tipperary” with Ivor Novello’s very popular 1914 “Keep the Home Fires Burning” whose slower, more ballad-like manner and stepwise melody fit well with the text’s celebration of women’s domestic function back home. But musical signifiers could also evoke the nations at war—most prominently through their national anthems—or cultural values, not least by a compositional play on genre: if invoking a waltz might hark back to happy and joyful memories, symphonic structures could evoke culture at its highest in Western musical thought of the time. Finally, music is also particularly suited for commemoration, given that the shared act of

German military, see the chapter by Nicoletta F. Gullace, “Barbaric Anti-Modernism: Representations of the “Hun” in Britain, North America, Australia, and Beyond” (61–78).

⁷ How music and gender were constructed in Western culture has been the subject of rich scholarship since the 1970s. Among the best known texts in U.S. scholarship are Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), and Marcia J. Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

listening in concert transcended the problem visual arts presented through their reliance on individualized contemplation

Wartime composers of that period knew how to draw on these sonic tropes to great effect. Arnold Schoenberg, for example, wrote a march for string quartet and piano in 1916 with the title *Die Eiserne Brigade* (The Iron Brigade), intended for a "Kameradschaftsabend" with fellow officers. Yet—as is the convention in a march—the trio section needs to bring musical contrast for which the composer chose the joyous nostalgia of a Viennese waltz. It is an easy piece to read as a rousing homage to his Austrian comrades at arms, written for an evening of fun among military men. Such military-march tropes made it even into Tin Pan Alley, across the Atlantic, perhaps most famously in George M. Cohan's legendary war song from 1917, "Over There," whose chorus imitates military fanfares in the melody to a text that promises that "the Yanks are coming" and "the drums rumtutting ev'rywhere."⁸ Both Schoenberg and Cohan wrote pieces that served the traditional wartime function where music is used to project a forceful and militaristic masculinity of camaraderie and adventure. Theirs are works in a long tradition of belligerent music drawing on both martial and popular idioms, with roots that include such sixteenth-century potboilers as Clément Janequin's *La Guerre* (celebrating the French victory at the battle of Marignano in 1515).

Where music in the twentieth century starts to effect a qualitative shift in the context of war, however, is in its transnational use both for propaganda and for commemoration. This form of music, too, has its roots in earlier times, especially the commemorative cults of the French Revolution where such a work as François-Joseph Gossec's *Marche lugubre*, written in 1790 to commemorate the dead of the Nancy Affair, fixed a musical idiom that had its echoes across

⁸ For an easily accessible reproduction of the score, see http://imslp.org/wiki/Over_There_%28Cohan,_George_Michael%29

European soundscape, not least in the famous funeral march of Ludwig van Beethoven's Symphony no. 3 in E flat major ("Eroica").⁹ In World War I, however, commemorative tropes were instrumentalized for works that glorified sacrifice for the sake of the nation and ennobled nationalist ideologies in a transnational horizon. Here the gendered binaries embodied within nineteenth-century musical rhetorics lay at the heart both of a problem and of its solution. Commemoration involves both honoring the fallen (a masculine task) as well as mourning them (by long cross-cultural tradition, a feminine one) on behalf of a nation that must assert its masculinity. In 1916–17, the British composer Edward Elgar wrestled with the apparent contradictions (though they are not) in his setting of three poems by Laurence Binyon as a symphonic cantata for soprano (or tenor), chorus and orchestra under the title, *The Spirit of England*. Dedicated "to the memory of our glorious men," the work culminated with a setting of Binyon's perhaps most famous poem, "For the Fallen."¹⁰ The work is about England, her heroism, and her sacrifice, as well as the construction of community in a commemorative piece of art.¹¹ The composition ensounded community through its musical means: the combination of a single solo voice with chorus and orchestra that Elgar deployed in *The Spirit of England* is well established as a symbolic representation of the individualized voice of a mourning community, in turn stepping out of, and blending in with, the communal musical expression. Elgar's work—like

⁹ On Gossec's role in the development of musical topoi for soldiers' funerals, see Raymond Monelle, *The Musical Topic: Hunt, Military and Pastoral* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 128–29. For the development of these tropes in the nineteenth century, see Alexander Rehding, *Music and Monumentality: Commemoration and Wonderment in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). See also Hermann Danuser, *Weltanschauungsmusik* (Schliengen: Edition Argus, 2009), esp. the section "Heldentum" (254–323).

¹⁰ Edward Elgar, *The Spirit of England: Three Poems by Laurence Binyon, Set to Music for Tenor or Soprano, Chorus, and Orchestra* (London: Novello, 1917), n.p. The complete dedication reads: "My portion of this work, I dedicate to the memory of our glorious men, with a special thought for the WORCESTERS."

¹¹ As Stefan Goebel has pointed out, commemoration in the face of the "accumulated presence of death" of World War I challenged traditional artistic responses in terms of sculpture and other monumental arts. See *The Great War and Medieval Memory: War, Remembrance and Medievalism in Britain and Germany, 1914–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 3. For a discussion of music and commemoration in the context of World War II, see Annegret Fauser, *Sounds of War: Music in the United States during World War II* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 227–34.

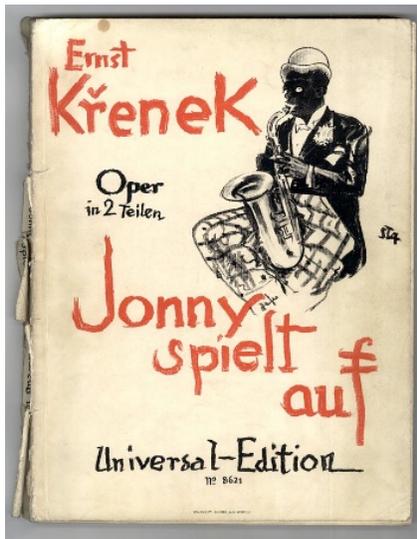
numerous others on both sides of the conflict—drew in its musical texture, genre, and form on a gendered hierarchy of musical signifiers when the composer used contrapuntal textures and symphonic developments. These complex musical techniques and their mastery were considered masculine in the world of Western music, just as simple melodies could be understood as feminized. If, then, Elgar brings together “For the Fallen” (the final movement of the work) a vocal fugue reminiscent of George Frederick Handel with a soaring melody, carried by the soprano soloist, and a symphonic orchestral texture, the music presents a masculinized and ennobled quality of commemoration, appropriately carried by a lamenting female voice who must inevitably give way to a stronger (read, patriarchal) national chorus.¹² The fact that many of these “masculine” gestures are drawn from a European musical tradition that belonged firmly to the “enemy” (Germany) did not—nay could not—worry Elgar given this tradition’s presumed universality within the pantheon of “great” music.

Elgar’s compositions also served the purpose of commemoration after the war ended—broadcast annually by the BBC for Armistice Day—as did numerous other works across the globe.¹³ Not all these pieces emerged from particular wartime or immediate postwar circumstances; nor were they necessarily commemorative in their original intent—Elgar’s “Nimrod” from his *Variations on an Original Theme for Orchestra* (“*Enigma*”) is an intriguing case in point—with its tempo slowed down significantly as a result—as, for a later period, is Samuel Barber’s *Adagio for Strings*. Rather, appropriate works were chosen from the across canon of Western music, including the “universal” Beethoven.

¹² The music of World War I is, of course, complex, multifaceted, and nationally enculturated. For an excellent overview, see Glenn Watkins, *Proof through the Night: Music and the Great War* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003).

¹³ On the emergence of *The Spirit of England* as the emblematic piece for national commemoration by the BBC, see Rachel Cowgill, “Canonizing remembrance: music for Armistice Day at the BBC, 1922–7,” *First World War Studies* 2 (2011): 75–107.

In the immediate postwar period, culture was mobilized not only for commemoration, however, but also for reconciliation through artistic enterprises that tried to translate into the cultural realm such political initiatives as the League of Nations. The PEN club, an international association of "Poets, Essayists and Novelists," was established in 1921 in London; in music, the International Society for Contemporary Music became a major force, whose life began in 1923, in Salzburg were conceived as neutral and deliberately apolitical spaces of postwar encounters.¹⁴ These and other attempts to fashion an internationalist artistic field (where Paris, for example, emerges as a feminized space of cultural production) offer a creative opening where gender



constructions become much more fluid. The wartime feminine/masculine binary started to be weakened in fashion, film, and stage. Instead, richer and more varied representations of gender found their way into the arts, one which celebrated androgyny and imagined gender-bending. Yet these modernist re-imaginings retained and reconfigured binaries when building on racialized representations that feminized the Other to an extent not seen in the immediate pre-war period, thus

displacing cultural warfare to the periphery, whether in colonial contexts or—in the United States—in segregated internal structures. In the expanded version of this text, I will add here a number of case studies, including Ernst Krenek's 1927 *Jonny spielt auf* (figure 4), the performances of Josephine Baker in Paris, and the 1927 film, *The Jazz Singer*.

Notwithstanding the continuation of challenges to heteronormativity and traditional gender roles, the 1930s started one again to instrumentalize and radicalize gender for cultural

¹⁴ On the ISCM, see Anton Haefeli, *Die Internationale Gesellschaft für Neue Musik (IGNM): Ihre Geschichte von 1922 bis zur Gegenwart* (Zurich: Atlantis Musikbuch Verlag, 1982).

warfare, both in actual combat (Spain, Italy) and internally, not only in totalitarian regimes but also in democracies. These trends that had begun in the 1930s crystallized into increasingly sharpened concepts of gender during World War II. Governments and their allies walked a tightrope between reinforcing heteronormative concepts of masculinity and femininity, and celebrating more fluid notions especially of femininity that would allow for women temporarily being seconded into the industries.

A fascinating early example that blends these issues into sleek propaganda is Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*, one of the best-known propaganda products of the Third Reich (which had garnered very strong responses from Allied film makers who—while rejecting its propagandistic overtones—admired its filmic quality). As a music historian, I am of course, also interested in the soundscape provided by Herbert Windt, a student of the Austrian Composer Franz Schreker. His play on march tropes—both the belligerent and the funeral march—together with motives from Wagner's *Meistersinger von Nürnberg* and popular Nazi songs were blended into a score that gave a grounded quality to the images and message of the film. The masculinity of the Nazi leadership—especially Hitler—is constructed as both traditional and modern, especially in the opening sequence of the film when the airplane in which the Führer arrives is set against old Nuremberg. How influential Riefenstahl's vision of modern masculinity as defined through flight and landscape had become can be seen a decade later, in the U.S. documentary *Memphis Belle* where similar tropes are woven together with a rather different music, the modernist score by Gail Kubik.

In this short version of my text, I have focused on World War I, shortchanging World War II almost entirely. This was a deliberate strategy because I found it more useful to develop one strand of cultural analysis in more depth than presenting a potted version of the whole. In the

25-page version, I will be developing a couple of trends: the futurists will make an appearance in the 1920s; for the 1930s, I am particularly interested in architecture and the so-called "great appropriation" of world culture in the Soviet Union. The lion share of the additional 15 pages will go, however, to World War II and the way in which propaganda—especially in such media as records, radio, and film—was employed by both Allies and Axis powers. In terms of culture and gender, propagandists had to forge a very careful path: a culture too feminized was perceived as weak; a culture too androgynous was seen as sterile; a culture too masculine, however, was in danger of appearing as brutish as the monster in the 1917 propaganda poster. Yet for propaganda to work, it needed to rely on stereotypes and legible signifiers which—in terms of gender—meant a deployment of traditional tropes. What is fascinating about the uses of gender in propaganda is not whether or not gender is stereotyped—it is—but how each of the belligerent nations instrumentalizes gender in presenting their culture and uses the needs of war and peace to promote these binaries, usually to the detriment of actual women. This, however, is another story moving far beyond the book chapter.