ARTICLE

Gratitude: A Different Kind of War Reparation

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SUMMARY

This essay explores the intersection of fiction and history in three novels to access and better understand how the French veteran experienced demobilization and reintegration to society from 1918 to 1920. These novels, Pierre Lemaitre's award-winning (Prix Goncourt 2013) *Au revoir là-haut*, and two works of the immediate postwar period, *Le Retour d'Ulysse* (1921) by Jean Valmy-Baysse and *Le Réveil des morts* (1923) by Roland Dorgelès, echo the soldiers' anxiety and doubts about the home front expressed during the conflict. Their negative portrayal of noncombatants in the postwar period demonstrates an inhospitable and often antagonistic treatment of the veterans, an accusation of civilian hypocrisy and greed outside the purview of conventional histories of the demobilization. These novels indict the contempt, duplicity, and thanklessness shown to the soldiers who survived. They argue for the acknowledgment of the veterans' important contribution to the *victoire* as a sacrifice different from that of the dead but one that likewise warrants the expression of gratitude.

KEYWORDS: Pierre Lemaitre, Jean Valmy-Baysse, Roland Dorgelès, World War I, France, demobilization, intertextuality, civilian attitudes, veterans, commemoration, reparation, *devoir*

Museums, monuments, journals, correspondence, and photographs are physical manifestations of memory. They link, with different degrees of success, the perceiver to a moment that simultaneously becomes a shared, public experience and one that is uniquely individual and private. This plurality of perception, at once collective and specific, is also true for works of imagination, such as historical fiction, which have by definition their foundations in one or more sites of memory. But what about a war novel whose sources are found in a previous creative work? Does the multiple layering of mediated texts, with their several authors, different audiences, and social contexts separated by (perhaps) many decades, exclude works of fiction from the category of memory sites? Certainly not. While complex, such intertextuality deepens and extends the terrain of shared memory by exposing the works' compound points of view and illuminating the many-faceted subjectivities intrinsic to any mediated representation of a lived experience.

Pierre Lemaitre's award-winning (Prix Goncourt, 2013) novel *Au revoir là-haut* is a powerful example of this sort of textual borrowing. The novel is a mixture of crime and historical fiction and focuses on two events of the immediate post–World War I period: the creation of the memorial to the *Soldat inconnu* and the scandals that characterized the repatriation of soldiers' remains during the construction of French national cemeteries. In the acknowledgments at the end of the book, Lemaitre thanks at length a wide variety of historians, authors, and librarians, and he

specifically references two war-era novels that he states were particularly *utiles* to him: *Le Retour d'Ulysse* (1921) by Jean Valmy-Baysse (1874–1962) and *Le Réveil des morts* (1923) by Roland Dorgelès (1885–1973). The benefit of Lemaitre's choice is that the two older works provide access to the ways of thinking, the psychology, and the emotions of returning soldiers in ways that conventional documents and histories cannot. In his exhaustive examination of the demobilization of French soldiers from 1918 to 1920, Bruno Cabanes observes that the paucity of historical sources largely obscures knowledge of the reintegration of the *poilu* to civilian life. In contrast, he notes that the complex and often contradictory emotions experienced by these veterans appear especially in literary works (20, 428). Both Valmy-Baysse and Dorgelès were talented writers before the war in which they served, and they both wrote fiction during the conflict: *Les Pépères, la victoire* (1917) by Valmy-Baysse and *Les Croix de bois* (1919) by Dorgelès.[1] Their respective novels of the demobilization period, *Le Retour d'Ulysse* and *Le Réveil des morts*, uncover the paradoxical conflicted nature of the relationships between veterans and civilians.

While there are many aspects that these earlier novels have in common with *Au revoir là-haut*, this essay will examine one in particular: the stark accusation of hypocrisy against civilians for their inhospitable and often antagonistic treatment of the *poilu*s who return from war. In all three novels, it is not that the civilians have failed in their duty to remember the fallen, as the numerous ceremonies and the rush to commission and erect monuments attest, but rather that civilians have disregarded the living—the soldiers who survived. It is my contention that these novels argue for acknowledging the important contribution of survivors to the *victoire* and more importantly that they demand their service be recognized as a sacrifice different from that of the dead but one that likewise warrants the expression of gratitude.

We must ask why then, despite the physical and psychological damage borne by the survivors, do civilians in these three works not value what the surviving *poilus* achieved and suffered? There are several possible explanations. As George Mosse argued in *Fallen Soldiers*, combatants were subject to a war ideology that emphasized the role of the soldier's self-sacrifice in the redemption of the nation. Since death is the irrefutable proof of obedience to that notion, no other form of sacrifice can fully corroborate the veteran's selflessness or his heroism. In a perverse sense then, a soldier's very survival is a refutation of a foundational argument for patriotic service. Moreover, as Antoine Prost indicates in *In the Wake of War*: "*Les Anciens Combattants" and French Society 1914–1939*, the soldier did only what was required of all French citizens, and thus it follows that special recognition is inconsistent with the obligation to preserve and serve the republic. However, perhaps the most important consideration in examining this question is the overall negative opinion the soldiers had of the home front—that civilians were, according to Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau in *Men at War 1914–1918*, indifferent, irresponsible, and egotistical: "The fighting troops were convinced that the behaviour of almost all the French at the rear was motivated solely by their concern for their own personal interests. This was a firmly entrenched conviction, allowing them to heap up all kinds of reproaches on civilian heads" (110).

Projecting forward, it is reasonable to recognize in the contentious postwar relationship between veterans and noncombatants in the three novels a furtherance of the soldiers' judgment that civilians failed to reward the soldiers financially or express verbally their gratitude. Shortly before the armistice, a soldier writing in the trench newspaper *La Fourragère* voiced his distrust and doubt about the future: "[The soldier in the ranks] is particularly depressed because he is well aware that he will return too late and too old, diminished and poorly regarded in tomorrow's world"

(Audoin-Rouzeau 122). Rather than describe the complications of that time, especially the competition for scarce economic resources, as a shared experience of hardship and mourning to be overcome together, Valmy-Baysse, Dorgelès, and Lemaitre represent postwar society as divided and alienated. The image in these novels thus rejects the notion of a prolonged support of the *union sacrée*, whose carryover during the immediate postwar period preoccupied the government. Instead of emphasizing the unity of purpose that would give meaning to the victory (Cabanes 438–42), the authors showcase greedy, deceitful, and disingenuous civilians who exploit the returning veterans to serve their own financial goals.

Valmy-Baysse establishes early on the basic structure of avarice and the concomitant dishonesty and deception that will encumber the attempts of his character, forty-five-year-old Ulysse Taniau, to return to middle-class civilian life in Paris in early 1919. His expectations, fueled by newspaper accounts of public praise, an ample pension, and a patiently waiting family and former job quickly evaporate. At each disappointment, his anger grows and the threat of violent retaliation increases, while Ulysse struggles to understand and come to terms with the hostility and indifference he continually encounters. He has no place to live because his wife has run off with her latest lover, a black-market truck dealer, and has taken the couple's considerable savings, all of their furniture, and even Ulysse's clothes. He cannot buy food or new clothes because the demobilization allotment has yet to be paid. His former tailor will not make him civilian clothes without an advance, and Ulysse is fleeced out of the few francs he has by resentful taxi drivers and snarky café waiters who belittle his service in the war. Bureaucratic cunning and unethical practices make it nearly impossible for him to find work commensurate with his skills and experience. A prospective employer requires the new hire to wear his uniform and medals in the front office, but Ulysse considers that inappropriate and manipulative, much like wearing a costume. Another owner will not hire Ulysse because his wounds are not severe enough, not because he wants to give the job to a *grand blessé* but rather because that man's government allotment would be higher and the employer could illicitly but safely pay him less than Ulysse.

The law requiring employers to rehire returning soldiers does not cover those like Ulysse who worked in the liberal professions, but even so Ulysse would still have lost his former position to Lepoil, the man who replaced him during the war. Valmy-Baysse lays bare the mordant irony in the decision of the former employer not to rehire Ulysse. Using the heroic language recognizable to contemporary readers as characteristic of the official speeches of 1919 (Cabanes 425–94), the proprietor asserts that France is indebted to the returning soldiers for the victory, and he includes Ulysse specifically among those *braves gens* to whom he would like to prove his admiration and gratitude. However, he quickly distorts this seemingly earnest tribute with a devious appeal to Ulysse's honor, designed to exempt his own responsibility for retaining Lepoil:

> [V]ous êtes trop juste pour admettre que nous puissions congédier du jour au lendemain ceux qui, pendant les cinquante-deux mois de cette rude guerre, ont rendu de signalés services à notre maison. (Valmy-Baysse, *Le Retour* 50)

Valmy-Baysse compounds his mockery of the employer in developing the character of Lepoil, who openly brags about his clever evasion of service and self-righteously accuses Ulysse and other veterans of exasperating everyone with their memories of the war:

> Méfie-toi, mon petit, lui dit-il. . . . Tu es en train de prendre la mauvaise habitude de raconter tes campagnes. . . . Or, on n'en veut plus de ces histoires! . . . Il faut oublier la guerre! . . . Sinon, mon vieux, vous finirez tous par vous rendre tout à fait insupportables! (*Le Retour* 88)

Lepoil, as most of Valmy-Baysse's secondary characters, is selfishly preoccupied with relating the hardships of civilian life during the war with an intensity that establishes a hierarchy of suffering with civilians in first position. The reader might expect that the author would show how the civilians, through individual encounters with Ulysse, eventually develop an empathetic understanding of the problems of a veteran's reintegration, but instead they become more antagonistic and even accuse Ulysse of exploiting his own war service to live off the government and avoid work.

The frustration and bewilderment Ulysse feels boils over in conversations with a fellow veteran, Lafilotie, who was blinded in the war. Through these discussions, Valmy-Baysse explores the complicated issues of *devoir* and its acknowledgment. In general, the term *devoir*, used as both a noun and a verb, is especially commonplace in war-related writing, regardless of author or venue. The framework of *devoir* is typically ideal, abstract, and associated with intangible attributes such as responsibility and patriotism. This normative symbolic representation applies to both soldier and civilian alike. However, in relating Ulysse's encounters with the public, situations that nearly always result in his financial disadvantage, Valmy-Baysse uncovers the insincerity of civilian adherence to this ideal by presenting the notion of *devoir* purely in its tangible and quantifiable sense. Portraying *devoir* in commercial terms is a jarring and clear break with tradition, so much so that it openly challenges the reader to recognize the hypocrisy in society's refusal to move beyond an idealization of soldiers in wartime or to share the material benefits of the victory with the veterans (*Le Retour* 98). Valmy-Baysse demonstrates the extent to which his characters are acutely aware of the materialism at the core of their relationship with civilians and employs the language of commerce, the image of marketplace haggling (*marchander*), and other explicit references to buying, selling, payments, and contracts in describing "le premier devoir" of noncombatants to the returning *poilus* (*Le Retour* 98–99, 137). And, later:

> Le bloc des Français admire le poilu, mais chacun s'en fout: la foule ne détaille ni son admiration ni sa reconnaissance, elle les donne en gros, ça lui coûte moins cher. Ils te disent tous: "Nous avons contracté envers vous une dette éternelle." C'est trop long; nous n'en verrons jamais l'échéance, mon gars. . . . Les dettes collectives sont trop élevées; elles ne se paient jamais . . . . Il faudrait pour cela de l'entraînement; mais personne ne veut commencer. (*Le Retour* 157)

Throughout the novel Valmy-Baysse traces Ulysse's growing anger, and sometimes the veteran appears close to real violence. But the author generally mitigates the seeming threat, even asserting that "[n]ulle amertume en lui pourtant" when Ulysse realizes that shirkers continue their profiteering and intentionally obstruct financial advancement for those he terms *rescapés* (*Le Retour* 110–11). The author grants the role of level-headed practicality to Lafilotie, who chides Ulysse for seeking to reestablish the equilibrium of his life through money or kind words from others. Lafilotie explicitly warns him against provoking pity in the hearts of those who took their places, for "ça serait une vraie défaite pour nous" (*Le Retour* 163). The choice of Lafilotie is significant because as a blind veteran he represents the inability to perceive completely the society

around him. Accordingly, he accepts his situation, along with the return of his wayward wife. Adopting a similar acquiescence to his new postwar reality, Ulysse seeks out his wife, forgives her, and, true to his Homeric namesake, soundly defeats his rival. Gazing at his wife, Ulysse realizes that he feels truly demobilized for the first time since returning to Paris. The message from this abrupt ending is clear: that a personal, emotional connection is the most important factor in the successful reintegration of veterans and that renewing those ties is a choice that resides within each *poilu*.

That both wives in this novel are unfaithful to their soldier husbands may seem coincidental, but marital infidelity, in fact or in fantasy, is a common thread in war-era fiction by male authors. Journalists writing in home-front and trench newspapers openly worried about what exactly the women were doing in their absence. They rarely highlighted the enormous material contribution women made to the war effort through paid and voluntary work, and they did not mention the anxiety of waiting and the pain of loss. Instead these novelists and essayists concentrated on women's sexuality and physical needs with a unanimity that suggests a widespread assumption. Traditional essentialism and sexual objectification cannot totally explain this phenomenon, as writers also expressed their anxiety about recent economic and social changes in gendered terms (Goldberg 1–35).[2] Writing one month after the armistice in *L'Horizon*, a trench newspaper, an *ancien combattant* seems to understand victory over Germany as a mandate for familial authority, and he casts women as competitors for advancement in the public sphere as he glances back at the prewar suffrage movement and anticipates the pronatalist governmental policies of the 1920s:

> Coming home victorious . . . will it be fair to return to a deserted hearth where our authority, so hard-won, will no longer be recognized? Will he be told on his return that the civil status of Man and Woman no longer exist, that instead there are two human beings with equal rights, two social units? Pushed out of his age-old role as protector at the moment when he has just qualified once more for the title, will he have to put up with sharing civil and political struggles with women? With finding women his rivals everywhere, competing for the work he seeks, and where they already have a head-start? . . . Bring the women back home, keep them out of political struggles, surely that is the plan we should follow, if we do not want to have hundreds of thousands fewer Frenchmen in twenty years' time? (qtd. in Audoin-Rouzeau 124)

In Roland Dorgelès's 1923 novel, *Le Réveil des morts*, marital infidelity is the outward proof of a betrayal, not simply of a soldier but especially of his memory. The central theme of *oubli* in this second war-era story intensifies the concern Dorgelès voiced in *Les Croix de bois*—that time would indeed heal all wounds and that the fallen soldier would disappear forever:

> C'est vrai, on oubliera. Oh! je sais bien, c'est odieux, c'est cruel, mais pourquoi s'indigner, c'est humain. . . . Oui il y aura du bonheur sans vous, car, tout pareil aux étangs transparents dont l'eau limpide dort sur un lit de bourbe, le cœur de l'homme filtre les souvenirs et ne garde que ceux des beaux jours. La douleur, les haines, les regrets éternels, tout cela est trop lourd, tout cela tombe au fond . . . [.]

> On oubliera. Les voiles de deuil, comme des feuilles mortes, tomberont. L'image du soldat disparu s'effacera lentement dans le cœur consolé de ceux qui l'aimaient tant. Et tous les morts mourront pour la deuxième fois. (380)

Awareness of this "second death" is foundational to the creation of both Dorgelès's novels. While literature, in the form of the book we are in the process of reading, provides hope in countering the effacement of memory in *Les Croix de bois*, that prospect has disappeared in *Le Réveil des morts*. The main character Jacques Le Vaudoyer is an architect and second husband of Hélène, with whom he had an affair while her husband André was at the front. Similar to Valmy-Baysse's novel, Dorgelès's story takes place between the spring of 1919 and the spring of 1920. With the novel situated in the area near the Aisne River, the text relates the efforts to reconstruct the devastated former war zone and Jacques's attempt to join his new neighbors in rebuilding their homes and lives. The government relief programs designed to compensate the *sinistrés* are intensely complex and hindered by insufficient funds and inept administrators (Clout 171–232). Dorgelès's narration describes in great detail the difficulties in navigating both the bureaucratic systems and war-scarred terrain, as well as the harsh living conditions and the overwhelming physical and emotional strain. Suspicion of the government, petty jealousies, and outright greed motivate Dorgelès's characters, leading to inequities, misunderstandings, suicide, corruption, and scandal. Entwined within these numerous stories of rivalry and racism is Jacques's growing awareness of the extent to which the fallen soldiers, whose bodies are being discovered and disinterred, have already been forgotten.

Jacques's own reintegration is hampered by the guilt surrounding his affair with Hélène. He met her while recuperating from his wounds and, importantly, while André was at the front. The fact that André was killed very near his home places all three protagonists, Jacques, Hélène, and the undiscovered body of André, in close proximity. Dorgelès employs this juxtaposition to explore the psychology of demobilization of the veteran and his family, as well as of the *sinistrés* returning to the district. Jacques is burdened by the moral ambiguity of his new life as Helen's husband, living in André's house, and he sees himself as a usurper. He comes to feel André's presence through the memories of his childhood friends, the recollections of fellow soldiers, and the tearful gaze of André's grieving mother, who is roaming the countryside, searching to bring her son's body home. Still convalescent and given to vivid dreams, Jacques becomes obsessed with the image of André, who represents for him all of the unknown dead, the 300,000 soldiers whose bodies would remain forever unidentified (Dorgelès, *Le Réveil* 36, 180).[3] Hélène is uninterested in the whereabouts of André and unmoved by the sight of disinterred corpses waiting for reburial. Like the other *sinistrés*, she is absorbed by establishing the most advantageous dossier with the government emergency agencies and competes with her neighbors to receive the most money. The turning point in the novel is Jacques's chance discovery of André's correspondence from the front, letters that Hélène had completely ignored. Jacques is so gripped by the pleading tone of the unanswered letters that he memorizes them, and, more than simply obsessed by André's image, he now identifies with the dead soldier:

> Jacques lisait avec passion, comme s'il avait ignoré le dénouement. Il souffrait, il espérait, il rageait avec le soldat. Il buvait d'un trait certaines lettres de colère, il suivait mot à mot des bavardages pleins d'espoir, et, peu à peu, une étrange substitution s'opérait. Il oubliait que c'était lui, l'amant, l'autre la victime; leurs deux cœurs si semblables ne faisaient plus qu'un. (266)

These letters are an important narrative device because they give voice to a dead soldier, and through Jacques, that soldier is able to speak for all the dead, those who cry out, unheard, not to be left behind (36). The poignant tone of the letters combines with realistic detail to create an awareness of the emotions of those at the front and, ultimately, the unevenness of their relationships with those at home. For André, what mattered most was the personal connection with his wife, who symbolized the link with his family, friends, and the land he knew as a child, and her silence fills him with overwhelming despair. The explanation Dorgelès provides for Hélène's behavior is extraordinarily damning: no longer in love with him, she treated him as nonexistent, and once widowed she simply forgot him while retaining his house and the income from his business. She had moved on with her life.

Hélène is only one of the many people in *Le Réveil des morts* who show little or no concern for the fallen soldiers. The large cast of characters is preoccupied with receiving compensation for the material damages they personally suffered from the war, a self-centered concern that has markedly negative consequences. However, the self-importance, jealousy, inexperience, distrust, and greed Dorgelès portrays is not just an outcome of war but rather a return to their true selves, for "sitôt la paix signée, leur guerre avait repris, l'envie, les jalousies de village, et déjà les lettres anonymes pleuvaient à la Commission" (131). This petty-mindedness together with a lack of sophistication makes the *sinistrés* clear targets for dishonest entrepreneurs and speculators. These *mercantis* easily persuade the acquisitive farmers to pay them to pad their dossiers or to sell them their damaged houses for a quick return. Bogus architects, surveyors, and engineers flock to the *Régions dévastées*, "ces modernes Amériques" to seek their fortune (112). They abscond with the commissions, leaving the locals with nothing and still waiting for their homes to be rebuilt. Despite government efforts, this outright exploitation of the *sinistrés* is almost impossible to stop because as soon as any new regulations were enacted the "trafiquants de dommages" would cleverly find a way to circumvent the law (184). Nonetheless, progress is eventually made and Dorgelès's portrayal of civilian shortcomings is mitigated by a somewhat oblique respect for their amazing accomplishments in the name of self-interest:

> [I]ls trimaient pour en tirer leur récompense, ils gagnaient la paix, comme autrefois la guerre, sans en attendre de gloire, et Jacques, qui voyait déjà se niveler les ruines, s'émerveillait que l'homme pût faire de si grandes choses, seulement poussé par ses petits appétits. (193)

The thousands of dead soldiers buried in the area were not exempt from this widespread corruption and trafficking, and the complex schemes to defraud the government through the redisposition of soldiers' remains feature prominently in both *Le Réveil des morts* and Pierre Lemaitre's 2013 *Au revoir là-haut*. According to the research of Béatrix Pau-Heyriès, the end of the war found the government short of the money necessary to collect, identify, and lay to rest the devastating number of casualties. Some families refused to tolerate the delay and arranged to locate and transport the bodies privately. The government largely overlooked the illegal exhumations and attempted to alleviate the situation by subcontracting various phases of the operation to private suppliers and freelancers. Abuses occurred, and dishonest vendors, the so-called *mercantis de la mort*, gravediggers, casket-makers, truck drivers, and others exploited family members. Since few of those involved had the necessary experience to correctly exhume and reinter a body, often in an advanced state of decomposition, and further, given the illicit nature of these operations, egregious and heartbreaking errors occurred. Missing and/or unreadable ID tags and grave markers,

battlefield conditions at the time of the burials, and the inferior quality coffins the families were duped into buying all contributed to the misidentification of the remains. The discovery of incomplete corpses, intermingled body parts, and sand- and dirt-filled coffins led to a full-scale scandal in 1922 (Pau-Heyriès 33–43).

This crime was a very public and thus undeniable example of the profiteering that had taken place throughout the period of hostilities. It corroborated the numerous accounts of exploitation and abuse of soldiers by civilians in works written during the war such as Henri Barbusse's best-selling and award-winning *Le Feu*. In Barbusse's novel, as well as in Dorgelès's *Les Croix de bois*, the *poilus* are deceived financially by the various individuals they encounter. These instances are episodic and deepen the atmosphere, rather than contribute to the story line. In *Au revoir là-haut*, however, the profiteering that occurs is multifaceted and goes beyond commonplace anecdotes of price-gauging and hustling. Here, war profiteering takes a murderous turn to drive the plot and the elaboration of major characters. Indeed, the word *profiter* occurs frequently, and from the novel's beginning pages it describes the temperament and strategy of the glory-seeking and brutal lieutenant d'Aulnay-Pradelle. Dismayed by the prospect of the war's fast-approaching end without achieving the recognition and honors he craves, this officer intentionally breaks the quasi-armistice of the first week of November 1918 by murdering two of his own soldiers to instigate a battle. This initial act of illegal and immoral action precipitates all the subsequent events of the novel and is the foundation of its complex structure, subplots, and character development.

It is significant that the murders committed by d'Aulnay-Pradelle in *Au revoir là-haut* go unpunished and that it is his role as embezzler in the national cemeteries scandal that leads to his imprisonment. The centerpiece of his profiteering scheme is the commission and sale of coffins to the government that are considerably too small for the exhumed bodies. The punishment of five years in prison and complete financial ruin seems light in the face of multiple murders and responsibility for the intense physical and emotional suffering of the two other main characters, Édouard and Albert. These two wounded veterans live in extreme and degrading poverty, and they create a false monuments scheme, not out of greed or ambition but out of desperation. The disclosure of their conspiracy is met with public outrage and indignation at their affront to the memory of the fallen, rather than with society's shame and remorse at the discovery of the wretched postwar conditions of veterans. The difference between the outcomes of the two separate conspiracies highlights Lemaitre's assessment of French society in the 1920s and his judgment that civilians had forgotten the survivors and concentrated instead on the dead. For him, veterans were the new poor, a class of undesirables for whom the social system no longer functioned (Salamé).

In contrast, Dorgelès reserves a violent and ghastly fate for scores of politicians, bureaucrats, and civilians in his novel. In a dream sequence similar to that in Abel Gance's film of 1919, *J'accuse*, the dead soldiers arise from the earth to question, judge, and ultimately condemn most of those who survived the war (*Le Réveil* 283-306). It is noteworthy that the far-reaching and inclusive list of criminals in Dorgelès's extended vision emphasizes the injustices committed since the armistice. Multitudes of people welcome the *revenants*, showering them with gifts, and impoverished mothers and widows see them as rescuers from their destitution. But those who are guilty of profiteering or have continued their wartime misdeeds during the demobilization period are terrified. A succession of long paragraphs reiterates many of the abuses that figure in *Le Réveil*

des morts: from the grave-robbing *trafiquants* to the *marchand de ruines*, but also the counterfeit disabled, disingenuous employers, and the abusers of widows and orphans. The most dramatic portion of the vision indicts elected officials; those obese and pompous *députés* who try to appease the *revenants* with vast increases in allocations for the families of the dead and wounded, as well as new laws to guarantee full employment for veterans. Dorgelès's description of the scene of frenzied competition resembles an auction of barking, shouting rivals, each trying to outdo the others in proving his care and consideration for the veterans:

> Sans s'arrêter, coup sur coup, on votait des lois qui attendaient depuis les élections, sans qu'on eût jamais trouvé une séance pour les discuter. On décrétait l'emploi obligatoire des mutilés, on accordait une retraite aux combattants, on relevait les taux d'invalidité, on flétrissait les Conseils de guerre.
>
> —Tous les héros au Panthéon! tempêtaient des forcenés.
>
> —Une voie sacrée! Rien que des tombes en marbre! vociférait un vieillard dans ses mains en cornet.
>
> —Plus d'impôts pour les anciens soldats!
>
> —Plus de prison . . .
>
> —Tous riches! (*Le Réveil* 303)

In the roll call of abuses and failures in judgment, word, and deed, it is curious that there is scant mention of decorating graves and no reference at all to erecting monuments. It could be argued, of course, that there would be no need of memorials because the dead are back, but that would not negate remembering the soldiers' heroism. This absence, which also occurs in Valmy-Baysse's story, is all the more unexpected because it is out of place in these two novels that are otherwise conspicuous in presenting minute details concerning costs, regulations, and other historically based facts. Indeed, it is well documented that a passion to build monuments occurred immediately after the war; Antoine Prost described this as a "response to contagious necessity, which everyone took for granted" (*In the Wake* 309). Moreover, timing does not adequately explain this *non-dit* since most of the thirty-six thousand monuments in France were erected before 1922 (Prost, "Monuments" 309; Becker 123), that is, concurrent with the publication of both novels. Jay Winter wrote that "the harsh history of life and death in wartime is frozen in public monuments . . ." (78), and the key word here is *frozen*. With each of the two novels centered so firmly on the still prevalent and unresolved problems of reintegration and restoration, the authors appear to reject the immobility, permanence, and solidity inherent in monuments. The experience of war, they seem to say, is unfinished and is still being lived by veterans and the families of the missing. Nonetheless, Lafilotie, designated as Valmy-Baysse's voice of reason, tells Ulysse that he has merely to stop living in the past in order to catch up with everyone else (*Le Retour* 161-162). For Dorgelès, this path forward is rooted in willful forgetting and self-satisfied disregard for those struggling to rebuild their lives:

> Un instant, cette France pauvre put croire que la France heureuse l'oubliait. Les journaux de Paris leur apportaient l'écho d'une fête incroyable; on dansait, on s'amusait, on gâchait l'argent. Chaque jour éclataient de nouveaux scandales, avec des gains de dix, de vingt

> millions Et eux, gîtés dans des cahutes, se disputaient les boules de pain et les déchets de frigo. (*Le Réveil* 63)

The argument here is not that moving on with life after war is wrong but that forgetting about the damages that conflict inflicted on the survivors is intolerable. Indeed, Dorgelès's description with its details of profiteering, civilian pleasures, and scandals could well have come from *Le Retour d'Ulysse* or Pierre Lemaitre's *Au revoir là-haut*. There is, however, an important difference because the racketeering, fraud, hostility, and neglect that are uncovered in the earlier novels serve a more important thematic goal in *Au revoir là-haut*. While Ulysse and Jacques complain about their experiences, they do little more than protest. Ulysse reclaims his unfaithful wife in order to "move on" and "catch up" with the rest of society. Jacques finds solace and meaning in the spirit of hope and creativity that generate the rebuilding process. These characters express their disillusionment and frustration inwardly or with a few intimates, and by the end of their respective novels, they have quietly accepted and adjusted to the reality of their postwar lives. The reverse is true in *Au revoir là-haut*, where Édouard and Albert, two *anciens combattants,* rebel against their postwar circumstances in a spectacular fashion. They appropriate the greed, insincerity, and neglect of the government and the civilians around them to design an ingenuous vehicle of revenge against nearly everyone.

Like the other two novels, *Au revoir là-haut* takes place in the immediate postwar period, and, similarly, the main characters encounter enormous obstacles to their reintegration. Many of the details echo those recounted in the earlier stories: Albert's employer refuses to rehire him, using the exact language (quoted but not attributed) contained in the letter received by Ulysse (Lemaitre 193–94). Without the still unpaid government allotment or another income, Albert lacks any financial security, and predictably his fiancée leaves him for a rich man. Prospective employers want the new hire to wear medals or a degrading uniform. Corruption is the order of the day, especially in business interests. "Le marché du siècle," Lemaitre notes mockingly. "Pour le commerce, la guerre présente beaucoup d'avantages, même après" (170). Nonetheless, Albert and Édouard attempt to live honestly, but bureaucracy and the ghastly extent of the latter's facial injuries combine to lead them, to their dismay, into drug addiction, violence, and poverty. It is out of despair, not greed, that the monuments hoax is created.

Aware of the nation's need and desire to memorialize the fallen soldiers, the two men use their skills to sketch and sell models of war memorials they know will never be built. Édouard considers the public frenzy to commemorate the dead less an act of individual mourning than as a need for a national catharsis, a chance to release any lingering feeling of responsibility or culpability. The extent of the swindle for him is the fitting punishment of an entire country that supported the war and is now obsessed with commemorating the dead. Lemaitre portrays graphically the pain and extent of Édouard's injuries, the hospital stays, and his sense of hopelessness and isolation, and he highlights the hypocrisy of a nation that turns away in disgust from the survivors, while enthusiastically honoring the dead: "Le pays tout entier était saisi d'une fureur commémorative en faveur des morts, proportionnelle à sa répulsion vis-à-vis des survivants" (332). Lemaitre underscores this point by attaching the hoax to the consecration of the tomb of the Unknown Soldier on November 11, 1920, an event that effectively subsumed all of the deceased into a single symbolic death (397). The national communion induced by the ceremony would be in a sense an official signal and authorization for everyone to put the dead and the missing behind them and to move on with their lives. Lemaitre makes it clear that this intentional amnesia

is an important objective behind both the 11 November ceremony and the creation of national cemeteries, to "permet[re] à tout un chacun de classer enfin cette guerre parmi les mauvais souvenirs" (172).[4]

The publicity brochure that Édouard creates for his monuments appeals to the vanity of officials in small villages and towns by offering them the possibility to participate vicariously in the Parisian celebration:

> Le 11 Novembre prochain, à Paris, la France érigera le tombeau d'un "soldat inconnu." Participez, vous aussi, à cette célébration et transformez ce noble geste en une immense communion nationale, par l'érection, le même jour, d'un monument dans votre propre ville! (334)

One of those caught up in the monuments hoax is the father of Édouard. In an effort to end his own anguish and remorse over the (supposed) death of the son he never really knew, he commissions anonymously a monument to inscribe his son's name. Immersed in the proposals, he convinces himself that the sense of eternity and timelessness, however artificial and deceptive, granted to his son by the monument, overrides the hyperbole and superficiality of the structure (414). Obsessed by the submission entitled *Gratitude*, the father literally begins to live in the monument, as if he were living a double life. This monument, *his* monument, had ceased to be a static drawing and had become something tangible and living, more authentic to him than many photographs of the battlefield. The seeming truth he absorbs from the monument is so powerful that it unblocks his long-dormant emotions and overrides the contradiction of a noncombatant feeling something he could not possibly know—the physicality of war. But this understanding goes beyond the expected objective of remembering a dead soldier and enshrining his name for future generations, and, moreover, it detaches the monument's imagery from established Christian and nationalist contexts. For Édouard's father, the central image of a grief-stricken Victory cradling a dead *poilu* is transformed into a self-centered modern *Pietà*. Instead of seeing his son as the dead soldier, he sees himself. The monument is not about Édouard or the life he might have lived or even the death he suffered; instead, it grants absolution for the guilt of a father who barely cared for his son.

Pierre Lemaitre re-creates in Albert and Édouard the underlying mind-set of characters found in the novels by Valmy-Baysse and Dorgelès and thus gains access to how the veterans lived and understands their distinct historical moment. While conventional documents concerning the immediate postwar period focus on laws, statistics, and official speeches, these three works of fiction come to grips with subjective concepts difficult, if not impossible, to quantify: how the veterans envisioned and processed their re-entry into society, their expectations of the reaction from friends and family, their struggle to absorb all that had changed in their absence, their resentment toward the men who did not fight, and more. Whatever their doubts and suspicions about their demobilization, it is clear that they did not anticipate the extensive level of dishonesty, disingenuousness, and hostility they found. But perhaps their deepest disappointment lies in the lack of gratitude expressed for their service to the nation, an omission made all the more glaring by the pervasive rhetoric of the eternal debt owed to the dead soldiers, concretized in stone and metal monuments but elusive for those who survived.

As veterans, Valmy-Baysse and Dorgelès understood personally and reveal in their novels the disastrous consequences of this double standard. Yet neither of their novels portray any resolution for the difficulties of the veterans' readjustment. The main characters, Ulysse and Jacques, end their respective stories reconciled and even submissive to the incomprehension and duplicity they experience in their lives. Pierre Lemaitre, however, rejects the resignation and passivity of the individuals in these earlier works; he creates a retaliation so complete that it exacts revenge on all of postwar French society. It is significant that Lemaitre is a well-established writer of crime and *noir* novels, a genre steeped in the allegorical tradition of good, evil, and vindication. In *Au revoir là-haut*, the intertwined denouement of the fictional monuments fraud and the real-life scandal of the cemeteries scam discloses more than the absolution of Albert and Édouard and the condemnation of d'Aulnay-Pradelle. Lemaitre pointedly indicts the people and institutions that preferred to venerate the dead through well-choreographed ceremonies, neatly arranged cemeteries, and monuments that assuaged guilt and promised eternal remembrance rather than accept the more arduous, grim, and long-term obligation toward the survivors.

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Notes

[1] Dorgelès's book was better known and was awarded the Prix Fémina in 1919. It was also first runner-up for the Prix Goncourt, famously won that year by Proust's *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs.*

[2] The list of works published by international scholars on all aspects of women in war is (happily) too extensive to be cited here.

[3] Estimates of the number vary.

[4] Bertrand Tavernier in his 1989 film, *La Vie et rien d'autre*, also makes this point.