WOUNDED BY MEMORY: ART, GLORY, AND THE FANTASY OF REVANCHE

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ABSTRACT

(Under the direction of Daniel J. Sherman)

In this thesis, I examine the imbrication of memory, masculinity, and glory in the cultural politics of revanche. I argue that revanche functioned not only as a desire to restore the annexed provinces of Alsace and Lorraine to France, but also as a cultural fantasy that reproduced and masked the antagonism between a glorious French past and the resounding defeat in 1871, variously described as a wound or mutilation. The visual, I maintain, played a constitutive role in the construction of fantasy, as it bandaged as well as effaced the wound of defeat to reassert French glory. In paintings, posters, processions, films, and monuments, representations of dying soldiers and the war dead reveal how the fantasy of revanche changed between its emergence in 1871 and its abatement in post-World War I France. Across these media, invocations of the dead transitioned from calls to remember, to act, and finally, to forget.
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INTRODUCTION: THE FANTASY OF REVANCHE

In 1913, Georges Ducrocq produced a curious kind of travel book. Motivated more by a fantasy of revenge than an ethnographic interest in the cities, sites, and peoples he recorded, Ducrocq provocatively titled the notes of his visit to Alsace-Lorraine *La blessure mal fermée*—the open wound. That wound, he reminded his readers, resulted from France’s humiliating loss to Prussia in 1871, which culminated in the annexation of France’s easternmost provinces, Alsace and Lorraine. But the injury he described was not merely one of territorial loss. In the decades after the Franco-Prussian War, the desire to restore Alsace-Lorraine to France was intimately bound up in issues of glory, masculinity, and memory, encapsulated in the idea of revanche (revenge). As Ducrocq surveys a field of wooden crosses commemorating the 1870-71 war dead, the trauma of that wound prompts him to imagine a local woman questioning the authenticity of his grief; her simple question, “what have you done to avenge them?” illuminates the deep imbrication of vengeance, vision, and trauma that was fundamental to revanche.

The verbal tableau Ducrocq presents—a man overlooking the battlefields of Metz—invariably relies on the visual to strengthen its contentions. When he asserts, for example, that “at every instant the eye is gripped and caught by [these] little wooden crosses,” the claim serves to define the power of vision more broadly for revanchard thought. The act of looking constitutes a response to the woman’s question: Ducrocq has seen the graves. Later Ducrocq

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2 Ibid.
alludes to another visual strategy that confuses vengeance with remembrance, painting.\(^3\) That the visual, in its various forms, could construct and naturalize memory suggests a nexus of strategies to construe memory as vengeance, as a fantasized means of enacting revanche. These knotted discourses of revanche, wrapped in fantasy, emerged broadly in French visual culture, manifesting themselves, for example, in painting, photography, film, prints from the illustrated press, posters, and processions.

Ducrocq’s language of wounds calls to mind both the methods used to conceal injury and the remedies to heal it. A wound, of course, heals with time, but an open wound remains visible and festers. What Ducrocq described as a wound, others called *la patrie mutilée*, with both encapsulating a sense of loss. At one level, mutilation referred to the violation of territorial sovereignty and a dismemberment of the national body. But mutilation also spoke to two disconcerting castrations: first, the emasculation of French soldiers who had failed to protect *la patrie*; and second, as a response to that failure, the severing of the 1870-71 war dead from a past intimately bound up in discourses of glory.

In searching for the strategies developed and maintained in the visual sphere, this study departs from more recent scholarship on revanche. Historians and art historians alike have treated revanche largely as a political question and nationalistic goal, portraying it merely as the desire to reunify the lost provinces of Alsace and Lorraine with the nation. In defining revanche so narrowly, art historians have grouped its visual manifestations primarily in two categories: allegorical representations of the provinces and monuments to the 1870-71 war dead. And for historians such as Karine Varley, though revanche represents a notable memory of the war, it

\(^3\)Ibid., 54.
failed to become a dominant memory, and thus contributed little to the discourse of 1870-71 war memory.4

But the politics of revanche, involving questions of how and under what circumstances Alsace-Lorraine might again become French, ought not crowd out a consideration of its cultural politics. In this domain, revanche emerges as a set of discourses and representations that, while at times political, concerned the broader cultural arenas of gender and memory. The lost provinces became placeholders for larger and more profound debates that extended beyond the stagnant political issue often posed as la question d’Alsace-Lorraine, with revanche constituting not only a means of restoring the provinces, but also a means of recuperating the nation’s glory, masculinity, and sense of history.

At its core, this thesis asks what role the visual played in the construction and deployment of the cultural politics of revanche, identified throughout as the fantasy of revanche. If the trauma of defeat and territorial loss constituted a wound in the French cultural imagination, how did artists represent that wound, and how did it relate to discourses about masculinity? How did fantasy marshal history and memory to its purposes? And, further, how did its visual strategies evolve? To answer these questions, I build on but also complicate the premises of Richard Thomson’s account in The Troubled Republic: Visual Culture and Social Debate in France, 1889-1900, which provides a compelling study of the persistence of revanche in 1880s French visual culture as a “mentalité,”5 chiefly through an examination of its supposed decline in the 1880s. By illuminating the considerable variety of subjects that could convey revanche to fin-de-


siècle audiences, Thomson places welcome emphasis on the subtle ways cultural politics play out in visual culture. But whereas Thomson hews to the traditional conception of revanche as a political formation, albeit with greater attention to its social manifestations, I relocate revanche within the discourses of gender and memory that constructed revanchard subjects in both text and image.

Concepts of gender, fantasy, and memory weave throughout my analyses as I recast their centrality for the visual emergence of revanche. As sketched out here and elaborated in the following chapters, these concepts provide a theoretical apparatus and a set of critical terms that clarify the kinds of cultural processes at work. In this study, I examine gender primarily through one side of the binary through which it operates, masculinity. Joan Scott posits in her now-classic essay that gender encapsulates two propositions: “gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power.”6 The analysis of gender, moreover, involves a complex imbrication of signs, their contestatory meanings, and the projection and performance of those signs onto and through lived bodies that, by shaping and naturalizing gendered discourses, inevitably perpetuate them through repetition. Signs gain meaning only through difference, but the boundaries between and within them are sufficiently unstable to produce differences within signs, such that one can speak, for example, of multiple masculinities.7 In late nineteenth-century France, notions of masculinity, whether social, artistic, or political, were intimately associated with glory, such that the achievement of glory could signify the highest

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7Abigail Solomon-Godeau, for example, argues persuasively for “an internal division” within French Revolutionary masculinity; Abigail Solomon-Godeau, *Male Trouble: A Crisis in Representation* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 11, 23, 62-63.
attainment of masculinity. In the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War, the collective dimension of glory formed a persistent concern, for if defeat could be equated with the loss of glory, the foundation of a deeply rooted militarized masculinity too could collapse.

As a response to anxieties about glory and masculinity, the visual culture of revanche operated through a form of fantasy construed as history and memory. In her essay “Fantasy Echo: History and the Construction of Identity,” Joan Scott posits fantasy as a historical phenomenon for the projection of identity into the past. The appropriation and mobilization of the past, namely perceptions of Revolutionary and Napoleonic victories against similarly “Prussian” armies, required not only an assimilation of a particular version of the past but also a retrospective identification with it. It thus constituted what Scott has called “an illusory sameness” that supposes the constancy of identity despite historical changes, a fantasy. “The double structure” of fantasy, Scott writes, “at once reproduces and masks conflict, antagonism, or contradiction.” The dual processes of reproducing and masking offer a revealing lens through which to consider how revanche as fantasy sought, through selective emphasis, alteration, and omission, to reconceive the position of the année terrible within the larger constellation of French history. The fantasy of revanche enfolded the generation of 1870-71 in a

Glory, of course, was often reserved to exceptional individuals, as noted in contemporaneous dictionaries’ rooting of the term in the notion of celebrity, but glory could be bestowed collectively as well; *Nouveau Dictionnaire Militaire* (1892), s.v. “gloire militaire.” French notions of glory, particularly as they relate to art, were longstanding and date at least as far back as the numerous military campaigns of Louis XIV, and arguably earlier. See, for only a few examples, Peter Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 71-83; Michael Marrinan, *Painting Politics for Louis-Phillipe* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 43-57, 77-98, 141-72, among others.


Ibid., 288.
resilient and highly mediated narrative of French glory, issuing from the French Revolution to the Napoleonic Wars and beyond in an attempt to displace defeat and assuage the anxieties it had engendered.

In forging a narrative in response to historical events, fantasy at once resembles and mobilizes memories that, even shortly after the events they purport to describe, reveal a collective dimension through their status as representations. “Memory,” Alon Confino has argued, emerges from “an outcome of the relationship between a distinct representation of the past and the full spectrum of symbolic representations available in a given culture.” Cultural memory, moreover, draws on and deviates from existing practices, images, and discourses to endow its own interpretation of events with legitimacy. For if fantasy authorizes retrospective identification, a projection of the self into the past, it does so through discourses that are at once “formative” in the knowledges they distill and groups they produce, and “normative” in their capacity to police the borders of such groups. Cast as memory, such discourses efface vital differences between past and present to assert shared cultural values.

Perhaps the most common signifier of revanche and of war in general, representations of soldiers, deceased and living, regularly served as avatars of masculinity and representations of memory. Certainly the intersection of masculinity, glory, and memory was not unique to revanche—indeed, Anne-Louis Girodet’s 1802 painting *Ossian Receiving the Ghosts of French Heroes* (fig. 1) seamlessly deploys all three in its praise of the French generals of the

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Revolutionary Wars—but their reconfiguration after 1871 suggests a break from earlier traditions.\textsuperscript{14} To borrow Scott’s language, the representation of dead soldiers reproduced and masked the contradiction between ideals of military glory and perceptions of military disgrace.

But if the Franco-Prussian War constituted a rupture with the past, both in how contemporaries perceived their historical position and in its visual manifestations, revanche too was punctuated by periods in which its discourses and representations were reassembled, reconfigured, and realigned. Three periods in particular illuminate such transformations, each of which comprises a chapter of this thesis: 1872 to 1888, the First World War (1914-1918), and the early postwar period (1918-1923). In Chapter 1, cultural artifacts of various sorts—prints in the illustrated press, paintings, poetry, and art criticism for the Salon of 1872—reveal dominant assumptions about the relationships between art, memory, and revanche as they began to take coherent shape. In particular, close readings of Salon criticism demonstrate that art could preserve memory of the année terrible for future viewers, thereby supplementing actual revenge with visual substitutes for revanche, depictions of soldiers at the moment of death. When read in conjunction with and against the artworks exhibited, critics’ interpretations offer telling strategies for circumscribing the kinds of memory, that, in their exclusions, indicate how fantasy operated through gendered forms of memory and art-making.

Chapter 2 examines the significant role armies of the war dead played in what Maurice Barrès called the “dream of revanche.”\textsuperscript{15} Édouard Detaille’s \textit{Le Rêve} both gave form to that dream through the depiction of resurrected armies and expanded the field of representations


\textsuperscript{15}Maurice Barrès, \textit{Colette Bauduche: histoire d'une jeune fille de Metz} (Paris: Librarie Plon, 1911 [orig. 1909]), 247.
available to revanche, producing fantasy in both its historical and colloquial senses. Both the sudden emergence of imagery related to *Le Rêve* in war posters and its use to spur bodily and financial forms of sacrifice suggests a transformation of revanchard memory. Through invocations of the dead, representations of memory transitioned from calls for remembrance, a projection of revanchard memory into the future, to calls for action, a realization of revanche in the present (Great) War.

Analyzing the discourse of reparation promoted by President Raymond Poincaré and the visual strategies of war posters, Chapter 3 demonstrates how the postwar *fête de la délivrance de l’Alsace-Lorraine* (November 17, 1918) functioned as a final salve for the wounds of memory. Photographs of the processions, especially those included in *Le monde illustré*, make clear the organized pageantry of revanchard signifiers, with special attention to the ways in which the *mutilés de guerre* substituted for the dead in lived time. Yet such attempts to fix the meaning of the dead proved futile, as postwar art increasingly subverted the connotations of glory typical of depictions of resurrected armies. Abel Gance’s 1919 silent film *J’Accuse*, for example, famously displays the dead rising from their graves to judge the value of their sacrifice. Even in war monuments such as Paul Landowski’s 1923 *Les Fantômes*, which often evoked the rhetoric of glory, resurrection suggests condemnation rather than glorification. As such, Landowski and Gance’s portrayals of rising corpses provide powerful counter-examples to the rhetoric of sacrifice, redemption, and unity prevalent in postwar processions and commemoration. For if, in 1871, an unexpected defeat had made the concept of glory all the more imperative, in 1918 a costly victory made it altogether unpalatable.
CHAPTER 1: BANDAGING THE WOUND

While art was always dominated by [scenes of] heroic battle, war, situated up to that time [1800] at the center of social values, was represented more and more in all its aspects and even more atrocious in its consequences.16

—Laurence Bertrand Dorléac, 2014

So writes Laurence Bertrand Dorléac in her preface to the Musée du Louvre-Lens’s ambitious 2014 exhibition *Les désastres de la guerre, 1800-2014*. In commemorating two events, the bicentennial of the end of the Napoleonic Wars and the centennial of the outbreak of World War I, the exhibition forges a narrative of resistance to the heroism of war, seeking instead to view such artworks as a response to “nightmares.” Categorically describing the artwork exhibited as a means to forget “mourning” “wounds,” and “shame,” Dorléac subsumes each into exhibition’s anti-war narrative. Gracing the cover of the exhibition’s handsome catalogue, and presumably lending credence to the exhibition’s anti-heroic vision, is a detail of Émile Betsellère’s *L’Oublié* (fig. 2), painted for the Salon of 1872, the first held after the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71). But if *L’Oublié* taps into a tragic vision of war, the tragedy it evokes arises not from a war denuded of its heroic pretensions, but from one that failed to achieve them.

Writing in the weekly *L’univers illustré*, A. de Pontmartin cloaked the Salon of 1872 in much the same language as Dorléac, though with radically different implications:

Together we have to rebuild this mass of ruins, to bandage together such agonizing wounds, to increase with haste and hospitality all that proves the immortal vitality of our dear and unfortunate France, for every revival of

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intelligence and art; [these are the] peaceful revenges that allow us to await the others. […] Today, we embrace our decimated ranks [and] salute our dead, for they are already the glory of France.17

If Pontmartin evoked what would become a cliché of revanchard discourse, the image of France rising from the ruins, he also imagined art as the vehicle for recovery. Of the discourses deployed in this passage, the conceptualization of defeat as a wound and the assumption of military glory bear special significance, as they at once suggest discontinuity and continuity the past. Although Pontmartin and other critics such as Victor Cherbuliez disagreed on how marked the differences were between the artworks exhibited at the Salon of 1870 and that of 1872, few doubted the idea of a radical break from the past.18 In describing his sense of such discontinuity as a wound, a kind of psychological trauma, Pontmartin employed a metaphor that fused the Franco-Prussian War, the injury inflicted by the annexation of Alsace and the greater part of Lorraine, and the potential for transformation.

Taken as both representation and cultural response, trauma entails what psychologist Judith Herman has identified as “two contradictory responses of intrusion and constriction,” that is, of persistent remembering and willful forgetting. Thus, memory lies at the heart of any discussion of trauma, as the events construed as traumatic impinge on the remembering subject for years, even from the slightest reminders.19 Yet, as Herman demonstrates, the power trauma wields stems more from the sense of rupture events produce than the events themselves.20 That


20 Ibid., 51.
trauma undermines, indeed, shatters, prevailing narratives of the self suggests a similar process for groups that understand their cultural memory as traumatic. If, as Herman argues, recovery occurs only through an ongoing process of storytelling that inserts memories into a larger narrative, the emergence of a revanche as a fantasy in the wake of defeat and territorial loss can be similarly understood as process that reconciles recent memory with overarching history.

The Salon of 1872 neither summarized that process of reconciliation nor stood as its origin. Rather, it provided a moment of crystallization for the attitudes, discourses, and representations already present, and offers an example of how they could converge. To reconstruct the representation of memory and its relationship to revanche requires a broad view of the moments after the Franco-Prussian War, one gained through prints, paintings, poetry, and Salon criticism. Central to my analyses throughout this chapter is the relationship between art and art criticism. Insofar as critics’ assessments, including their interpretations and the language in which they enveloped the Salon, gave voice to and helped to shape revanchard discourse, they also provided strategies for reading fantasy unambiguously into otherwise polyvalent artworks. Those strategies of depicting and reading fantasy raise important questions about how memory was conceived as trauma, the gender dynamics at play, and how art meditated that trauma through fantasy.

The Gender of Trauma

In Pontmartin’s lengthy call for unity, he cloaked the Salon of 1872 in the language of commemoration, transforming the state exhibition into a memorial to the recent war dead. The critic’s elision of these seemingly unrelated concepts, revenge and commemoration, invites some consideration of their relationship. The cultural work of commemoration involves, at multiple levels, the restoration of the systems of order—based on class, race, and gender, among others—
that dominated before the moment of discontinuity, through forms of memory that compel communities to remember in particular ways and to particular ends. Central to revanche, however, was not only the construction of a “consensus version of an event or connected series of events,” the wound of the année terrible, but the production of metaphors and strategies of mediation to resolve disruptions within an imagined continuity between past and present.\footnote{Daniel J. Sherman, \textit{The Construction of Memory in Interwar France} (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 7.} Pontmartin provides but one representation of memory, the wound, in the early formation of revanchard culture. As challenge to this metaphor yet at times woven into it, one finds throughout postwar France a different (though not incongruent) metaphor of mutilation, amputation, or disability that encapsulates irrevocable loss.

\textit{L’Executif}, a print by Georges Pilotell, connects these metaphors directly to the loss of Alsace and Lorraine (fig. 3). Employing the conventions of political cartoons, Pilotell ably conveys the political situation after the signing of the Treaty of Frankfurt, which ordered the cession of Alsace and Lorraine. A classically garbed personification of France, Marianne, grief-stricken at the turn of events, extends her arm as a sacrificial offering. But the print does not neatly deploy either the metaphor of wounds or of mutilation. It seems, rather, to decide on both. As Thiers severs the arm inscribed with the words Alsace-Lorraine, the blood pools in a Prussian helmet below, likely an indirect reference to the blood of French soldiers and certainly the beginnings of a wound. Yet in his posture the man holding the arm, perhaps a German artisan, appears more to pull than to keep steady, indicating a complete severing. Notably the allegorical language at play in the print insists on the representation of France as a woman.

The connection of this imagery with discourses of wounds and mutilation, then, amplifies the gender of France, and it gives some sense of the language available to critics and artists in
1870s France, a language that associated them with concepts of feminization already present. Even at the level of trauma, which Sigmund Freud describes as a residue of certain memories, there emerges a clearly gendered set of relationships, with those suffering from the weight of such experiences described as hysterics.\textsuperscript{22} Salon critics, whether knowingly or not, entangled the concept of the wound with unmistakably gendered connotations, invariably interpreting the events of 1870-71 as a form of castration.

The metaphors of wound, mutilation, and their gendered instantiations, castration, emerge from this complex of discourses knotted together, making any strict distinction between them difficult to sustain. What role, then, did art play in the fantasy of revanche? In Pontmartin’s view of the Salon as a memorial, the visual works “to bandage together such agonizing wounds” both by paying tribute to the dead, a standard trope of war-related and commemorative art, and by substituting “peaceful revenge [\emph{revanches}] that allow us to await the others”\textsuperscript{23} for revanche itself. As Pontmartin and others imagined it, art sublimated trauma into visual experiences that neither advocated for nor foreclosed the possibility of revanche.

\textit{“Still I Think of You”: Preserving Memory for Revanche}

The artworks Pontmartin envisioned as “peaceful revenge” were likely not depictions of revanche at all, which were largely absent from the Salon, but rather paintings such as Betsellère’s \textit{L'Oublié} that depict soldiers at the moment of death. The critic’s assumption that revanche could be embodied in paintings with few, if any, references to the lost provinces suggests a complex and unresolved entanglement of Alsace and Lorraine in invocations of


Franco-Prussian War memory. An 1897 questionnaire in the *Mercure de France*, for example, asked respondents to articulate their perception of the Franco-Prussian war; in a telling example, Joseph Reinach, a deputy for the Basse-Alpes department, declared that he would “write the history of the 1870 war under this title: *History of the Loss of Alsace-Lorraine.*”\(^{24}\) Nor was alone in that sentiment, as several others wrote of their longing for Alsace and Lorraine. Describing the process of mourning, Freud observed that it demanded emptying meaning from that which one has lost, a person or “some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one’s country, liberty, an ideal, and so on.”\(^{25}\) The nearly simultaneous loss of the provinces and the lives of French soldiers, as well as their claim to glory, explains in part why Alsace, Lorraine, and representations of the 1870-71 war dead were conflated and confounded with such frequency. In a crucial way, Alsace and Lorraine stood as the soil on and for which soldiers died, newly sanctified by their sacrifice but nonetheless a reminder of defeat. A complex displacement of mourning occurred from the 1870 war dead to Alsace, thus implicating Alsace in the national anxieties produced by defeat and its attendant sense of emasculation.

In *L’année maudite*, a book of poetry published in 1871, Charles Grandard couched his work in the familiar discourses of wounds and remedies while also exemplifying the process of displacement. In these poems, Grandard imagines Alsace as the site of mourning as well as the object that gives meaning to sacrifice. In “Les deux rêves,” for example, he contrasts the perceived glory of past empires and peoples—the Romans, Egyptians, Caliphs—with “la France meurtrie,” which awaits a moment of vengeance. Here revanche achieves two ends: first, it


transforms suffering into glory; and second, it anticipates the return of Alsace-Lorraine.26

Consider the concluding stanzas to his poem, “Souvenir”:

Je pense encore à toi [Alsace], qui poursuis sans relâche
Quelques lueurs d’espoir dans l’ombre du tombeau
Et la foi, dissipant le doute bas et lâche,
En moi rallume son flambeau

Ainsi, le souvenir de ta mâle vaillance
Est pour moi comme un baume, une forte liqueur
Que j’aime à savourer aux jours de défaillance
Pour me réconforter le cœur!27

Embedded throughout these verses is a strategy of reversal, as the narrator builds tension between seemingly opposing verbs and nouns coupled through sound. Noteworthy in that construction is the connection of “tombeau” [tombstone] and “flambeau” [torch], which visualizes revanchard memory in its privileged object—tombstones and monuments to the war dead—and its most common trope—hope emanating from and reawakened by the example of heroic death. The memory of the dead, whose valor is embodied in and confused with Alsace itself (whose tomb is it?), reignites the narrator’s passion and comforts her. Confusion and misrecognition are fundamental to the discourses Grandard employs here; the implication of revanche as the objective of Franco-Prussian War memory, as a guarantor of its meaning, works to naturalize its masculinist claims.

At the Salon, critics relied on a logic of conflation evident in the French illustrated press to link representations of Alsace with other memories of the Franco-Prussian War. A month before the Salon opening, in April, Le monde illustré celebrated Alsatians’ emigration to France


27 Grandard, “Souvenir,” in L’année maudite, 80. I have chosen not to translate this poem to preserve its linguistic complexities.
for its testament to their inherent Frenchness. Though the text related to the front-page engraving *Arrivée à Gray (Haute-Saône) d’émigrants alsaciens* (fig. 4) mentioned only the warm reception and patriotism of those receiving the emigrants, the image complicates categorical distinctions between French (represented here synecdochically by the commune of Gray) and Alsatian. As Justine Renée de Young has observed, the practice of non-Alsatians appropriating Alsatian dress often signaled their support for revanche, a practice much in vogue throughout the 1870s. The townspeople’s adoption of a similar but distinguishable dress, particularly the large bows typical of traditional Alsatian garb, renders meaningless the designation “emigrants.” Here the artist presents not so much an arrival as a homecoming.

Such categorical conflations, moreover, could emerge from a wide-set of motifs. In the *Gazette des beaux-arts*, Paul Mantz noted with interest the dominance of two new genres at the Salon of 1872: military paintings of wartime episodes and nostalgic tributes to Alsace. Those conventions converged in Frédéric-Auguste Bartholdi’s *La malediction d’Alsace*, a sculptural group of a dying soldier, an allegory of Alsace, and a small child (fig. 5). Though both the soldier and the Alsatian figure both arguably function as allegories, personifying abstractions of sacrifice and territory, the presence of the child suggests a more intimate set of relationships. In addition to their allegorical valences, critics read the group as a family. In his observations, intended more as praise than criticism, concerning Bartholdi’s sculpture, Georges Lafenestre objected that “whereas the dead soldier and his widow are logically idealized Alsatian types, the

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child clinging to his mother’s dress remains a street urchin [gamin de Paris].” Lurking beneath Lafenestre’s criticism toward the class and urbanity of the young boy is a complex imbrication of the categories of “soldier” and “widow” with the lost province. That he regarded the two as Alsatian, rather than French, rested on a blurred distinction between national and regional categories. His remarks thus perform a double move, at once transforming the various paintings of war dead and widows at the Salon into Alsatians and reimagining so-called national values of Frenchness in terms of what had previously been an unmistakably regional identity.

In the arguably common view these slippages present, Franco-Prussian War memory involved four principal elements in 1870s and 1880s France. The representation of the war’s effects as a wound, or a metaphor of trauma more broadly, acts as its first element. A presumed devotion to Alsace and of the region’s devotion to France, evident in several of the prints from *Le monde illustré*, functioned as a second element. The third element emerges from the perception of France’s break from its past, a severing that construct synchronic events as diachronic, transposing them as cause and effect. In late nineteenth-century France, the chronology that transformed glory into emasculation conceals a binary of masculinity/femininity that has always haunted assertions of manhood. The final element of memory, its invocation as a salve, typically in the form of the remembrance of soldiers’ valor, the loyalty of Alsace, or both, serves not only as of a reminder of what was lost but also consolation.

“*Art Is a Soldier*”: The Salon of Revanche?

Peace had a curious effect on critics’ conception of art: having accepted the government’s reluctance to prosecute another war, critics increasingly turned to art as a way of continuing the

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struggle. A. Delzant, in *Le courrier de France*, likened artistic production to the trappings of war: “Art is a soldier; [...] art should produce large, virile works, [ones] worthy of the task we all pursue, worthy of the terrible times we must traverse and of the future we await.”33 Such an art, he contended, would embolden French spirits through its qualities as both “virile” and “grande,” words inextricably bound up in a masculine conception of art. In this conception, the masculine object of history painting, through both form and subject, remasculinizes its ostensibly male viewers and acts as an intermediary between peace and revanche. Yet paintings at the Salon failed to imagined a reunification of France with its glorious past or its reunification in the future. Rather, artists responded to the encouragement to embrace a masculine painting chiefly in works that attempted to salvage moments of triumph from the ruins of the past year.

For art historian Bertrand Tillier, such paintings present a moral victory that, while not denying defeat, certainly diminished its potency through the recognition of exemplary courage. Such courage, he argues, was less a political statement—one that urged viewers to recognize soldiers’ deaths as reason enough to pursue revanche—than a reflection of particular artists’ war experiences.34 They represented, in effect, a visual testimony. And though that schema generalizes too neatly, the notion of testimony, as an account of cultural memory (its concerns, directions, subjects), did underlie paintings of individual action that sought to instantiate glory. Critics cited two paintings, each representing a dying soldier, as among the few “testimonies” worth seeing: John-Lewis Brown’s*Journée du 6 août 1870 Reichshoffen* (fig. 6) and Émile Betsellère’s*L’Oublié* (fig. 2).


Brown’s *Reichshoffen* qualifies as testimony only in the broadest sense of the word. Middle-aged by the start of the war, Brown was too old to have served, and it is unclear whether he, like other artists, visited the front to sketch the battles. Nor does the painting present itself as a testimony in Tillier’s sense, for it simultaneously alludes to a specific battle and denies that historical specificity. In the lithograph, a lone soldier darts into the fray while raising his trumpet, a common attribute of glory in nineteenth-century military paintings, in a gesture of defiance and victory, having already succumbed to Prussian artillery. Through a stark tonal contrast and diminution in scale, Brown distinguishes clearly between the soldier and the larger regiment to which he belongs, who manage to retreat thanks to his actions. Other than the painting’s title and the figure’s standard military attire, however, *Reichshoffen* offers few details with which to anchor it to any one historical moment.

Of greater interest, then, is the production of a visual language capable of navigating the tension between resounding loss and embodied glory. Dominating the foreground, the dying soldier embodies the association of glory with celebrity (*célébrité*), with the visual conferring glory and fame to an otherwise nondescript individual. The contrast between foreground and background illustrates the central antagonism that fantasy sought to mask, as it literally foregrounds glory over more numerous but less imposing representations of defeat, exemplified in the straining and phantom-like figures in the distance. In his criticism, Hippolyte Audeval erased even the underlying admission of defeat, with its troubling notions of emasculation, instead reading the painting as, above all, an admirable representation of sacrifice for the preservation of the army. \(^{35}\) At one level, the notion of the sacrifice of a part for the preservation of the whole serves as basis for the displacement of mourning. Yet, at another level, when

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considered alongside Lafenestre’s assertion of dead soldiers as ideal Alsatian types, *Reichshoffen* could work as metonymy. Especially when expressed through an exemplary figure, soldiers’ deaths could allude to the sacrifice of the provinces for the defense of the nation.

In refusing to yield to the prevailing metanarrative of tragedy that characterized memory of the Franco-Prussian war more generally, *Reichshoffen*, perhaps unknowingly, responds to Pontmartin’s call to “bandage” memory through art. Of the soldiers who had fought at Reichshoffen, Audeval wrote that those “brave men” had warded off further German advance and were thus “wrapped in an eternal glory.”36 For Audeval, the painting itself evokes a lengthy and selective recollection of the battle focused not on its *faits militaires*, but on soldiers’ resolve despite the monumental task set before them, and officers’ recognition of their unfaltering heroism. In contrast, Émile Betsellère, a highly regarded academician and student of Alexandre Cabanel, presented at the Salon a radically different interpretation of sacrifice. His *L’Oublié* (fig. 2) opens onto a scene of a wounded soldier gasping for his final breaths as snow steadily accumulates on and around him. Along the horizon an ambulance either approaches or recedes, leaving the scene ambiguous about the fate of the soldier. Such ambiguity, moreover, carries over to the memory work the painting performs. The snow where the soldier has just rested his chest is stained with blood, a thinly veiled reference to shedding blood for one’s country and to sacrifice. Yet the recognition of that sacrifice remains uncertain, as the marginality and decreasing visibility of the trumpet, the means of announcing victory and glory, suggests the impermanence of the figure’s glory and, by extension, the glory of all the war dead.

For inasmuch as Betsellère’s vision addresses the need to remember the war dead, it also gives voice to a fear that they would be soon forgotten. The title *L’Oublié*, translated as “the

36 Audeval, "Salon de 1872,” 278.
forgotten one,” gestures to two forms of forgetting. In an obvious sense, if the ambulance has abandoned the central figure, his comrades have forgotten him. The connotations of that perhaps unremarkable occurrence, however, took on more profound suggestions of the tendency of memory to fade without cultivation, and critics responded by recasting L’Oublié’s ambiguity and pessimism into a call for remembrance. In Le monde catholique, for example, Bathild Bouniol forcefully articulated the need to impress the painting firmly in his readers’ memories: “L’Oublié by Betellière [sic] also deserves a memory [souvenir] on our part” for its “serious execution and sincere feeling.” But if, as Bouniol wrote, the soldier’s attempt to lift himself represented “un suprême effort,” that reading denied other, more subversive interpretations. Vincent Huguet, for one, has recently interpreted that gesture as “a revelation of the infinite after chaos,” a potentially undignified cry or unwillingness to die. Bouniol, in contrast, chose to wrap the figure in a shroud of glory. Cherbuliez interpreted the work in similarly grandiose and patriotic terms, construing the figure’s final gasp as an attempt “to breathe in the motherland [patrie] one last time.”

What forms of memory emerge from and were sustained by these artworks? As I have suggested, Lafenestre’s confounding of Alsace and France performs a conceptual slippage that displaces the object of remembrance from soldiers to Alsatians. Thus, despite the narrative distance of paintings such as Reichshoffen and L’Oublié from specific Alsatian themes like those commonly found in the illustrated press, critics and viewers could nonetheless read them as statements of Alsatians’ sacrifices and as further examples of their devotion to France. Yet few

39Cherbuliez, Études de literature et d’art, 278-79.
saw the Salon as an open call for revanche. Pontmartin described such paintings somewhat ambiguously as “peaceful revenges,” intimating that they appeased the jury by avoiding explicit calls for revanche while appealing to revanchard readings.\(^4^0\)

Several critics reported that jurors either refused or later allowed the removal of openly revanchard paintings to accommodate German sensibilities, citing fears that those paintings would hamper attempts to negotiate for Alsace and Lorraine, which were underway in early May.\(^4^1\) Though they have been called into question in recent scholarship, accusations of censorship reinforce the tightly woven relationship between revanche and art.\(^4^2\) As Audeval noted, revanchard sentiments proliferated in a growing collection of books and periodicals, yet such brazen hostilities escaped government scrutiny.\(^4^3\) Audeval was suspicious of government claims that because the Salon was an official (i.e., government sponsored) exhibition, the presence of such paintings would amount to tacit support of revanche. But beyond this realm of politics, the issue of censorship casts light on the forms of memory both sanctioned and normative, for no critic decried the lack of more aggressive military paintings at the exhibit. Emerging in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War, then, was a form of revanchard memory that stressed remembrance over action.


\(^4^3\)Audeval, “Salon de 1872,” 139.
“Don’t Insist on these Painful Memories”: Glory, Masculinity, and the Future

Even in paintings of defeat, critics sought out instances of triumph in an atmosphere of despair. The trauma they described and assessed signaled a breakdown of men’s ability to mobilize the signs associated with masculinity, chiefly couched in the oft-cited notion of French “gloire.” Concerns about French masculinity were not unusual, nor were they surprising, given the dialectical and contestatory processes through which discourses construct gender. In pre-revolutionary France, for instance, anxieties about the ruinous effects of luxury on gender relations dominated social tracts, which noted luxury’s tendency to “soften” men.44 By 1871, the anxieties surrounding masculinity did not simply concern men’s position in a certain social order and the deleterious influence of women; rather, they involved men’s position within history itself.

In the foreword to 1870-1871: L’année sanglante (1872), an epic poem covering events from the Roman occupation of Gaul, the ancien régime, and the Franco-Prussian War (representing, as it does elsewhere, a decisive break from that past), Paul Jane sets the scene for national disgrace. Defeat encompassed more than a strategic loss, issuing from ill-conceived tactics, inferior resources, or bungled diplomacy, a point Jane asserted by quoting high government officials. “France died of indiscipline,” Clément Laurier, a member of the government of national defense, claimed.45 In a suggestive statement, Jules Simon attributed France’s quick loss to a deficiency in French manhood, with loss as merely one of many symptoms pointing to degeneracy.


Critics responded to that overwhelming sense of detachment by reasserting art’s relationship not only with the past, an easy enough feat for history painting, but with the concepts believed to underlie those traditions. Bouniol derided the spectacular yet forgettable quality of recent artwork, preferring an aesthetic firmly entrenched in “moral precepts.”\textsuperscript{46} Pontmartin, for his part, simultaneously ridiculed the notion that art was responsible for defeat and advised that art become more austere in response. He observed that, as a constitutive of public values, art shared in “the softening of public morals, [and] in all that readies disaster and delays revenge.”\textsuperscript{47} In both critics’ interpretations of art at the Salon and the artworks themselves, the insistence on the glory of individual soldiers reveals an attempt to convey exemplarity, imitability, and heroism both for the benefit of viewers and to assure soldiers’ ascension into ranks of France’s illustrious past. Audeval put the matter more flatly in his description of \textit{Reichshoffen}:

> Don’t insist on these painful memories. Let us quickly add that M. Brown’s painting \textit{Reichshoffen} puts before us a consoling, recuperative idea rather than an idea of crushing defeat and of incurable despair.\textsuperscript{48}

What Brown’s painting recuperated was an example from which viewers could construct a positive representation of the war, a memory that would bandage the wounds.

This theme of enduring glory manifested itself with new emphases, concerns, and forms in \Édouard Detaille’s most famous painting \textit{Le Rêve} (fig. 7), exhibited at the 1888 Salon. Of course the pictorial and interpretative strategies evident at the Salon of 1872 did not fade in the same way contemporaries feared memories of the Franco-Prussian War would, but the


\textsuperscript{48}Audeval, “Salon de 1872,” 180.
emergence of new ways of visualizing revanche signaled changing and more compelling conceptions of memory. If revanche could not be achieved quickly, if art would be ceaselessly pressed into its service, then remembrance itself would need to substitute for action. Yet in doing so, memory moved away from the generation of 1870-71, because too burdened by the stigma of defeat, and toward more distant moments of French history, the imprecise memory of which easily lent them an air of undisputed glory. The fantasy of revanche thus looked to the past in the name of the future.
CHAPTER 2: DREAMING OF REVANCHE

At the close of Maurice Barrès’s novel Colette Baudoche: Histoire d’une jeune fille de Metz (1909), the people of Metz gather at the cathedral for the annual commemoration of the local war dead. Initiating the mass, the priest proclaims that “today, we make a memory [faisons mémoire] of the fallen French soldiers.” To make memory, however, involves more than a foregrounding of and tribute to death; it confers immortality. The dead respond to the priest’s invocation, and their presence arouses recollections of the past, evokes dreams of reunion, and reassures the living. 49 Though cast in the decidedly Catholic terms of sacrifice and resurrection, the underlying politics of the event come into sharper focus as the collective vision subsides:

For the people of Metz, this night signifies a hard life under the German yoke, far from the comfort and lights of France, and for them the idea of resurrection doubles as a dream of revanche. They enrich an already full liturgy with all their patriotism. 50

Through the concept of the dream Barrès constructs a number of equivalencies. First, as the product of a spiritual imagining, the presence of the dead and the memory of the dead invariably become entangled and inseparable. Such memories emerge in part from religious inspiration, if only because, as the narrator explains, the cathedral alone provides sufficient freedom from the German occupation for patriotic thoughts to flourish. 51 By contrast, Barrès’s second equivalence

49 Barrès, Colette Baudoche, 242-44.

50 Ibid., 247.

51 Ibid., 238.
is both more direct and more profound: the resurrection of the dead becomes a substitute for and signifier of revanche.

The designation of resurrection as “idea [idée]” and revanche as “dream [rêve]” involves not a distinction between rational processes and imaginative ones, or conscious versus subconscious thoughts, as they might denote for modern readers. As early as 1872, and well into the early twentieth century, rêve denoted not merely a product of sleep, but, more specifically, a manifestation of images and ideas that arose involuntarily and often chimerically.\(^\text{52}\) Understood as such, the difference between idea and dream lay in their modes of representation. Ideas freely navigate between and through media, arguably requiring only a basic constitution in language (verbal, textual, or mental) to function. Images, even when described as verbal, take as their privileged mode the visual, from which all other forms of imagery conceptually, if not perceptually, emerge.\(^\text{53}\) Thus the dream of revanche consisted of images of revanche, most prominently embodied in resurrected armies.

Much of the force of that dream-imagery arose from its distinctiveness from images that preceded it. If, as Alon Confino has argued, memory always exists within a spectrum of representational possibilities, with distinct representations embodying different versions of the past, then that spectrum arguably derives its vitality from the twin poles of adaptation and contestation.\(^\text{54}\). Viewed from a distance, representations of revanche, and the memory they encapsulated, followed a fitful trajectory from remembrance to fulfillment. Nor were such

\(^{52}\)Dictionnaire de la Langue française (1872-1877), s.v. “rêve.” The Dictionnaire de l’Académie Française, 8th ed. (1932-35), provides a similar definition.


\(^{54}\)Confino, “Collective Memory,” 1391.
representations without precedent, as they often drew on convention to legitimate and naturalize their claims. Detaille’s Le Rêve (fig. 7), for example, employs a pictorial convention that dates at least to the First Republic, and thus conveys notions of military glory long familiar to French audiences, as, for example, in Girodet’s Ossian Receiving the Ghosts of French Heroes (fig. 1).

The deployment of such imagery for revanche contributed to an expanding field of representation that, in its novelty, presented both formal and conceptual ambiguities. Formally, Detaille achieves his partitioned registers of bodies and spirits by contrasting the impressionistic colors of the spectral revolutionary and Napoleonic armies, swathed in a sunset of desaturated pinks, oranges, and lavenders, with the ruddy earth tones of the soldiers below. Even that distinction, however, blurs in light of the painting’s temporal uncertainty. The sun simultaneously rises and sets, and soldiers either enjoy their final moments of rest before the day’s battle, with the dead leading the charge, or lay themselves to rest, with spectral armies assuring them of victory.

Writing in the Gazette des beaux-arts, the critic André Michel praised the painting for its grandeur, simplicity, and idealization, and commended Detaille for his successful foray into large-scale painting. But the appearance of resurrected armies, presumably the dream of the soldiers sleeping below, raised questions about the relationship between dream and dreamer. “To this scene [the sleeping soldiers], so stirring in its simplicity,” Michel wrote:

M. Detaille has nevertheless thought to superimpose on them a second [scene] that takes place in the clouds: it is the march of forebears, of those of Arcola, of Rivoli, of Jena, as well as those of Algiers, of Constantinople, and of Solferino, who deploy above the sleeping conscripts, their standards bullet-ridden. The memory of great wars and former glories soar in the sleep of tomorrow’s combatants. Without a doubt the idea is beautiful, if not entirely new […]. But added to the lower part of the painting, does this image add much to its meaning?55

The nature of that doubt receives scant elaboration in Michel’s criticism, which passes over his concerns quickly. Couched in compositional terms, Michel’s question nevertheless points to and leaves unanswered a conceptual issue: what significance did depictions of resurrected armies hold for the living?

In exploring this question, this chapter seeks to uncover the changing discourses and visual representations that animated the dream of revanche. Answers to Michel’s question presented far less conceptual difficulty for other critics, perhaps more attuned to the painting’s relationship to revanche or more willing to construct that relationship, and their criticism reveals some of the ideas that further shaped revanche in the late 1880s. Considered through that criticism, Le Rêve made visible the conceptualization of revanche not only, as it had been in the 1870s, as a form of remembrance, but as a proposition that remembrance itself could constitute action, or at least a substitute for action. Yet the tenor and object of such remembrance changed considerably. In emphasizing more distant historical actors and events (the armies and battles of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars), Franco-Prussian War memory ably reinserted the disastrous events of 1870-71 into a succession of moments construed as unproblematically glorious, revealing in effect the emergence of a new visual strategy: erasure. Embedded in that strategy is an implicit concession that memory-images of exemplary acts could no longer adequately mask the wound of 1870.

Le Rêve offers a productive nexus for these discursive and representational changes for several reasons. First, Michel’s question offers an invitation to examine the memory work Le Rêve performed for Salon viewers in the 1880s. Indeed, Barrès’s later equivalence of resurrection and revanche emerges, albeit indirectly, from a logic already present in Le Rêve.
Second, although *Le Rêve* was highly praised by critics and quickly circulated in reproductions, it was a something of singular success; its entry into the visual field was marked by a lack of adaptation or appropriation. Such widespread reproduction, moreover, suggests the painting became an emblem in its own right rather than a model for emulation or imitation. The painting’s simultaneous continuity and discontinuity with convention, as well as its relative singularity, make all the more striking the sudden proliferation of similar visual imagery in France during World War I, which I address in the central sections of this chapter.

*Envisioning the Dream*

In the heated atmosphere of the 1880s, which saw the rise of General Georges Boulanger, whom his followers styled “le général Revanche,” and Paul Déroulède’s nationalist League of Patriots (founded in 1882), Detaille’s *Le Rêve* and the dream it embodies could not but associate exemplary duty, patriotism, and glory with conservatives’ emboldened calls for revanche. In his *Le Salon militaire de 1888*, Jules Richard interpreted the painting through that lens:

> What can a camp dream about the evening before a battle? The camp is the army, the nation. It dreams of glory, of battle, of victory. And, in the fantasy of its dream, it sees all the flags marching that have led [its] forebears. For at Fontenoy as at Valmy, at Austerlitz as at Algiers, at Sevastopol as at Tonkin, on the battlefield that we lost to the enemy, in this golden dust of the past [cette poussière d’or] and of distant history, the French flag […] will always appear to the brave with these brilliant words: honor and country!

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The rhythmic list of battles recalls a similar trope in Michel’s criticism, but, in this case, it asserts a retrospective identification with the honor and consequently the masculinity of the armies who fought those battles. If the armies marching overhead did not trouble Richard, as they did Michel, it was likely because he thought such visions necessary given the subject, stating that “every defeat should be erased by victory; every victory calls forth others.”59 Taken with his statement that in both victory and defeat the words honor and country appear dream-like before French soldiers, Richard reads into the painting an enduring glory that transcends individual bravery.

Richard’s criticism nicely summarizes attitudes toward art and memory nearly two decades after the Franco-Prussian War, and, more broadly, offers a midway point in the trajectory of revanche. The principal elements of Franco-Prussian War memory remained intact, but, like all discourses, it shifted, changed, and rearranged to retain its viability and legibility in new contexts. In his criticism, Richard pointed to Le Rêve as an indication of such transformations: in contrast to works produced shortly after the Franco-Prussian War, such as those at the Salon of 1872 that exemplified “particularly brilliant” valor marred by defeat, Le Rêve, Richard suggested, offers a vision of the future.60

Clearly Richard regarded Le Rêve as different from 1870s images such as Brown’s Reichshoffen (fig. 6), if only because, to his mind, it neither evokes memory through defeat nor envisions the past for its own sake. Both Richard and Michel interpreted the painting in forward-looking terms. For Richard, the dream of revanche arises from a careful mobilization of the past that ignores defeat, including death, and secures glory for those to come. And despite Michel’s

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59 Richard, Le Salon militaire, 10.

60 Ibid, 9-10.
reluctance to adjoin the dead and living, he too located the narrative focus of the image in the future, describing the soldiers as “tomorrow’s combatants.” By insisting on Detaille’s deft representation of victory, unburdened by the contradictions that characterized other paintings, however, the critics place too much emphasis on the painting as an unproblematic sign of military glory. With bodies massed together, plunging into the background, and the gray, seemingly putrefied skin of two soldiers closest to the foreground, the lower register bears some resemblance to mass graves. Heightened by an inability to read the light definitively as daybreak or sunset, with the corresponding connotations of renewal and end, the soldiers linger between life and death. Considered positively, the resurrected dead thus appear not merely as images the living imagine, but also as a procession to welcome the recent or soon-to-be dead.

Such ambiguity arises in part because the pictorial conventions for sleep and death overlap. More than an unavoidable confusion, however, the slippage between sleep, death, and waking indicates a new way of conceptualizing revanche. As a metaphor, sleep at once allows for the manifestation of dreams and suggests a transitory period, a period of inactivity that nonetheless produces imagined activity. By the early twentieth century, concepts of dreaming changed subtly, still encompassing its earlier definition but with the added and now colloquial valence of something desired or hoped for. The *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* (1932-35) illustrates this definition with a revealing example: “rêve de gloire.” The proximity of those words, especially one modifying the other, exemplifies the tight interweaving of dreams and glory in French culture, even at such a rarefied level, that would become evident in the course of the First World War.

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“To Fix Memory”: Posters, Revanche, and Revolution

In a 1925 article discussing the extensive collection of artworks amassed by the Musée de la Grande Guerre, established to preserve artifacts and documentation from the recent war, Guys-Charles Cros noted that though painting “form[ed] the substantial basis” of that collection, illustrated posters were “of greater interest,” in part because of the still-vital memories and rich documentation of wartime attitudes made visible in each.62 “Six years after the conclusion of peace,” Cros wrote in a pessimistic assessment, “memory of the hardships and horrors of that awful epoch has oddly [singulièrement] already grown pale.”63 Firmly couched in postwar fears that the “lessons” of the war had been forgotten, Cros’s statement acknowledges the crucial connection of art and memory during the war. Posters of course took little part in expressing the tragedies of the war, issues that largely manifested in other modernist artworks, and favored instead the construction and amplification of differences deemed significant enough to mobilize citizenry against an enemy “other.” At the same time, however, and closer to Cros’s point, posters made clear the sacrifices asked of the public to achieve those goals.

Under the auspices of the French Press Commission, French war posters urged conservation, charity, and, above all, action, each in the name of national causes. As James Aulich and John Hewitt have observed, through the directive of the Commission and common academic training, posters roughly attained a level of visual uniformity in style and content not seen before or after the war.64 Aesthetic similarity, they write, marked the political union known


63Ibid., 116.

as the union sacrée, a temporary and largely rhetorical political truce between bitterly divided parties for the sake of national preservation. If the union sacrée fostered a predominantly conservative vision of politics and society, it fit comfortably with the revanchard mission the French government espoused shortly after the outbreak of conflict. In December 1914, in a special session, the French Chamber of Deputies considered three propositions for the French war effort, calling for the institution of a medal of valor, the recognition of the status “mort pour la patrie” for all the war dead, and the return of Alsace and Lorraine. Although it is unclear whether the first two propositions became law, the latter was frequently cited in postwar celebrations, and together they illuminate the values of glory, sacrifice, and revanche that motivated poster production.

Of course, those values appeared with varying emphases in different posters. As a summation of the poster scene near the end of the war, L’Illustration’s October 12, 1918 cover La réponse est sur les murs (fig. 8) presents four identifiable posters side by side, obscuring and frequently rendering other text-based posters illegible. At one level of interpretation, as the caption suggests, the posters reproduced, all from 1918 (Auguste Leroux’s Pour hater la victoire; Henri Royer’s L’Aurore; Abel Faivre’s Souscrivez au 4e emprunt national; and Marcel Falter’s Pour le suprême effort) make visible the refusal to consider any peace that did not include the return of Alsace and Lorraine. The cover’s insistence on the return of the lost provinces, represented here by allegories of Alsace and Lorraine either liberated or awaiting French victory, plainly sets it into the framework of revanche.


At another level, however, the posters depicted also promote militarized forms of masculinity, effectively presenting such representations as models for emulation. Nearest the bottom of the image, the reproduction of Faivre’s poster offers a vision of a poilu in a classical idiom, an allusion that, even without other historical attributes, positions the soldier in a continuum of heroic glory. Royer’s *L’Aurore*, which depicts a poilu standing beside two women, one Alsatian and one Lorrainer, depicts the most peaceful masculine figure. Yet even here the contrast between a triumphant poilu and allegorical figures of the provinces underscores the gender divisions typical of revanche, presenting the provinces as women incapable of asserting their own agency and awaiting masculine intervention. Falter’s *Pour le suprême effort*, located in the middle of the top register, presents a markedly more aggressive avatar of revanchard masculinity, as the figure strangles a black eagle, the symbol of imperial Germany.

That such depictions point up the connection between masculinity and revanche is perhaps not surprising, as revanche had always presumed certain gender relations, but posters offered new means of interaction for viewers and, as a consequence, new avenues for playing out that connection. James Aulich and John Hewitt have offered a convincing account of the difference between public notices and posters in regard to how they construct their subjects. “In this exchange,” they write, “the public notice constructs the ‘readers’ as citizens subject to the power of institutions, while the poster constructs them as consumers who have the freedom to choose from what is on offer.”

That distinction faces greater difficulty in France, where institutions made use of advertising techniques, especially those rooted in visual media, to present as a kind of product the moral duties of citizenship. Expounding on the role of posters in World War I Europe, Pearl James has observed that in France, more so than elsewhere, posters

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67 Aulich and Hewitt, *Seduction or Instruction?* 2.
were already a mature form of advertising, and thus easily appropriated.\textsuperscript{68} Blurring the distinction between advertisement and public notice most strongly was the visual emphasis of posters, which butted their textual requests against imagery deeply associated with notions of Frenchness.\textsuperscript{69} Indeed, French war posters presupposed the values of citizenship and used them to seduce viewers, for whom revanche, citizenship, and the masculinities they presupposed could not be neatly disentangled.

Like advertisements, the dominant function of posters was to persuade viewers to purchase material goods, in this case war bonds, by associating them with an appealing idea. But if commodification had discredited belle époque posters for many nineteenth-century critics, either for posters’ lack of redeeming aesthetic value or serious subjects, war posters enjoyed a different fate.\textsuperscript{70} In 1917, Clément-Janin, a regular contributor to the \textit{Gazette des Beaux-Arts}, published a series of three articles on the visual culture of the war, including prints, \textit{images d’Épinal}, and posters. For Clément-Janin, the base “material interests” of posters were diminished, if not subverted outright, by their appeal to higher causes. Clément-Janin provided a suggestive example: “Even when it’s a question of inviting citizens to deposit their wealth at the Banque de France or subscribing to war bonds, [posters] did not appear unfit for the patriotic mission entrusted to their talent.”\textsuperscript{71} How, then, did the subjects of posters overcome their obvious role as advertisements? The close proximity of the words “citoyen,” “souscrire,” and

\textsuperscript{68}Pearl James, “Introduction: Reading World War I Posters,” in her \textit{Picture This: World War I Posters and Visual Culture}, 4.

\textsuperscript{69}Aulich and Hewitt, \textit{Seduction or Instruction?} 6.

\textsuperscript{70}Ibid, 2-4, 12-13; Ruth Iskin, \textit{The Poster: Art, Advertising, Design, and Collecting, 1860s-1900s} (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2014), 176, 254-55.

“patriotique” in Clément-Janin’s statement suggests another word that could bridge the activities associated with posters and their subjects: sacrifice, redefined as both bodily and financial. Thus, following the logic of war posters, to do one’s duty could be as simple as contributing to the loan of one’s choice.

If sacrifice could be reimagined in the bloodless terms of financial contributions, how did posters evoke its underlying associations with revanche? Posters, of course, have at their disposal two languages to purvey their messages, the visual and the textual, with multiple strategies to harmonize or dissociate them. Yet Clément-Janin privileged the textual over the visual, writing that “what is important in a poster is not the image, it’s the text.” More surprisingly, he refused the visual the power to define posters’ meanings, effectively circumscribing their messages to fundraising. Visual images “should only reinforce the idea, retain attention, [and] fix [fixer] memory; it is the text, which defines and clarifies, that has the primary role.” Text directed viewers to a desired action, but the power of the visual exceeded that limited intention, a point Clément-Janin conceded in recognizing the memory work images could and did perform. The ambiguity of “fixer,” which can variously mean to attach, to strengthen, and to maintain in place, extends beyond simple reinforcement, and provides insight into the forms of memory posters conveyed. For posters invariably performed all three

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72 Ibid., 498. See also Sherman, The Construction of Memory, 105-141, especially 105-108.

73 For a good analysis of word-image relationships in nineteenth-century posters, see Iskin, The Poster, 208-243.


75 Clément-Janin, “Les estampes,” 492

tasks: they attached, strengthened, and maintained memory of the Franco-Prussian War while redirecting it in subtle ways.

Representations of resurrected armies and of François Rude’s *La Marseillaise* (fig. 9) constituted by far the most common means of evoking Franco-Prussian War memory in posters. In recent scholarship, the pervasiveness of *La Marseillaise* unquestionably indicates the mobilization of a visual tradition extending from the French Revolution to the Great War. Michael Moody, for one, has argued that the appeal to glory during the First World War affirms the profundity of revolutionary memory, for, while interest in the First Empire grew, “it was from the Revolution of 1789 […] that much of French propaganda drew its visual inspiration” largely because it “had provided the French national consciousness with a recognisable pictorial vocabulary of republicanism.”

Moody’s assertion has gained support in more recent scholarship, for example in Marie-Monique Huss’s argument that the uniformity of French war culture indicates “a collective visual memory” that unfailingly placed soldiers’ hardships into lineage issuing directly from the French Revolution. Certainly visual representations of *La Marseillaise*, the celebration of the army, and personifications of liberty point to notions of glory and similarly “glorious” moments in French history, but in denuding those references of their revanchard politics, scholars naturalize the political and symbolic conflations fundamental to revanche.

The difficulty art historians and historians face in distinguishing between memories of the French Revolution and of the Franco-Prussian War in this context arguably arises from the murky distinction between French and Alsatian, a confusion that galvanized support for revanche.

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77. Moody, “*Vive la Nation*” 36.

78. Huss, “Belonging to a ‘Grandiose’ family,” 41. For another example of this argument, see Aulich and Hewitt, *Seduction or Instruction?* 141-42.
throughout the war. Recall that as early as 1872 Lafenestre, in his description of an allegorical sculpture of Alsace, conflated Alsatian identity with a national French identity, blurring the difference, and in effect conceiving of Alsace as a metonym of France. In the decade before the Great War, that conflation took on a new character: not only were Alsatian values perceived as indispensable for French culture, Alsace became an unexpected epicenter of French history.

Indeed, the slippage from one event to the other precluded attempts to separate Alsace from memories of the Revolution. Before and during the war, artists such as L’Oncle Hansi (pseudonym of Jean-Jacques Waltz) advocated for revanche by blurring the boundaries between history and memory. In Hansi’s illustrated book *L’histoire d’Alsace : raconté aux petits enfants d’Alsace et de France* (1912), a response to histories that favored Germany’s claim to the region, the artist reimagined Alsatians as the vanguard of Revolutionary activity. “Nowhere in France,” Hansi asserted, “was the Revolution welcomed with as much enthusiasm as in Alsace,” for there “it found its most admirable expression.” In a November 1914 issue of *Le Petit Journal*, Ernest Laut articulated a similar point: “Alsace was the soil of heroism that produced the most glorious soldiers of the Republic and the Empire.” Laut noted, moreover, that the revolutionary fervor that enveloped Alsace culminated in Rouget de l’Isle’s famous lyrics, later the national anthem of the Republic, from which Rude’s figure takes its most common sobriquet.

In this collection of memories, *La Marseillaise*, as song and sculpture, became a conventional signifier of revanchard cultural politics. Performances of the song, as Regina

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Sweeney has observed, invariably took on revanchard overtones in the early twentieth century, with such notable conservatives as Barrès praising the song for the evocative memories it furnished. Hansi and Huen’s illustration of Rouget de l’Isle’s first rendition of the song, in Strasbourg (fig. 10), makes clear the connection between territory, sculpture, and song. Hansi’s depiction of the composer, framed by an open window, borrows from Isidore Pils’s interior scene of the song’s first recital, *Rouget de l’Isle chantant la Marseillaise* (1849), placing the figures of Pils’s composition within the architecture of the hôtel de ville. As though summoned by Rouget de l’Isle’s moving words, a ghostly manifestation of Rude’s *La Marseillaise* beckons and leads a motley group of revolutionaries. Yet, by providing an exterior view, such that the perspectival recession of buildings dominates the pictorial space, the illustration places greater stress on the location than on the act of creation. In this regard the imposing silhouette of Strasbourg cathedral is all the more noteworthy, as the most visible symbol of the city.

The apparition of the dead, then, affirms a different but no less persuasive form of unity: the fantasized union of the living and the dead. As Hansi suggests here, Alsace contributed greatly to the glory their union would come to represent, and, in a roundabout way, justifies French demands for the return of the lost provinces. The resurrection of the dead places the image within the logic of Barrès’s “dream of revanche,” as it merges ideas of dreaming (presented as Rouget de l’Isle’s dream of revolutionary glory), resurrection, and revolution. Just as revanche conceptualized glory as an enduring theme of French history, it also construed


German antagonism as a reoccurring event. Thus, in signaling their desire to defend against the armies of the First Coalition, which included, among other combatants, Prussians, Hansi’s band of revolutionary soldiers could assume the role of precursors to revanche.

Those Who Remember and Those Who Act

For Clément-Janin, posters in which the dead appeared to sacrifice themselves for France were of special significance. For example, though dismissive of much of Charles Léandre’s wartime output, Clément-Janin nonetheless appreciated the “beau sujet” produced in *Journée du poilu* (fig. 11). Despite directing the greater part of his comments to what he saw as its muddled treatment, Clément-Janin interpreted the poster through the now familiar operations of fantasy and dreaming. He wrote: “This old woman no longer sits ‘at the corner of a peaceful fire,’ but before a raging fireplace from which her dream escapes: the innumerable crowd of generations marching toward glory and heroic sacrifice…” From the billowing smoke, with its strong diagonal emphasis, emerges an unsettling mass of war dead whose sunken and skeletal faces register them as corpses. Yet, despite the posters textual reference to World War I soldiers, Leandre depicts 1870-71 war dead, as denoted by their uniforms. With her darkened eyes, which suggest at once blindness and a new form of vision, the elderly woman becomes a seer, and her vision registers both a sense of glorious return and its frightening results.

The woman’s dream comprises three levels of signification. First, it acknowledges the acknowledged but seldom visualized outcome of the First World War, mass casualties. The dead, as she imagines them, carry the signifiers of glory, flags and trumpets, but in the ominous scene Leandre depicts, they seem to deny rather than to embrace any positive valence. At the level from which Clément-Janin interprets the poster, however, the widow’s vision cannot but evoke

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the dream of revanche, invariably enfolding all soldiers into a vision of glory. The gendered discourse of glory here registers a third level of signification, for the poster suggests the disparity between how men and women ought to remember. In depicting a woman holding letter, perhaps of her lost husband, Léandre asserts a commonplace of women’s devotion to (masculine) memory. Men, by contrast, honored the dead primarily by way of their own sacrifice. Thus memory as mourning was understood as the domain of women; memory as action constituted masculine duty.

The inclusion of a dreaming subject recalls in many ways the division between dreamer and dream in Detaille’s Le Rêve, though with importance differences in the gendered form of memory. In a 1911 speech to the people of Metz, Barrès elaborated on the role of veterans for the preservation of memory. Women, he acknowledged, had consoled dying soldiers and continued to tend to their graves yearly. Yet he offered his greatest thanks to the men of Metz, who, though no longer able to serve in the French army, “constitute the cadre of this immense army of memory.”

Léandre’s poster at once illustrates that division and unsettles it. In tending to the memory of the dead as an act of traditional feminine duty, the woman submits herself to a higher, masculine-inflected cause. Her age suggests that she is perhaps one of the many women widowed during the Franco-Prussian War, and thus among the women Barrès commends. Yet in imagining revanche and its attendant emphasis on action, the women oversteps the boundary between passive and active remembrance, as the renewed possibility of revanche during the First World War allows her to transform her dream not only of the dead, but of resurrection.

For many, the war presented not simply the opportunity to dream of revanche, but a struggle to achieve it. The metaphors of dream and sleep that had sustained memory in the years

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between the wars, promoted especially by *Le Rêve* and later writers, gave way during World War I to a call to realize revanche. To present memory in that mode, posters represented the living and dead united in the common cause of victory. Describing Sem’s *Pour le triomphe* (fig. 12), Clément-Janin pointed to the contrived representation of Revolutionary and Napoleonic armies, whom he describes already as “victorious,” marching seamlessly into the ranks of Joffre’s army to enact just such a union.\(^{86}\) Yet he was quick to forestall any condemnation of its historical accuracy, noting that, though neither army ever filed through the Arc de Triomphe, which was completed only in 1836, it was nonetheless a fitting scene. That Clément-Janin dismissed what can arguably be described as the poster’s fantasy, focusing instead on its quality as “lively” and “curious,” itself reveals a telling omission.\(^{87}\) For fantasy itself operates as a form of concealment, one that acknowledges and exposes difference, even incongruity, while also effacing it.

In *Pour le Triomphe*, fantasy works to reassert a militarized masculinity both through the assumption of victory and through a complex play of compositional choices. Sem’s poster reproduces difference in its attention to detail, clearly demarcating the uniform of one soldier from another and distinguishing past from present, yet uniting them compositionally to privilege continuity and commonality. Compositional unity here signifies the condensation of narrative, with historically dissimilar armies presented as a unified whole, all under the banner of sacrifice and glory. The presence of the billowing cloud alerts us to the poster’s deployment of fantasy in both senses, ideological and colloquial, as it neatly obscures the lower figures of *La Marseillaise*, placing the now animated armies of the past as their willing substitutes. In the end, revanchard

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\(^{87}\) Ibid.
culture’s commitment to the memory of the Franco-Prussian War would only remain “a dream of revanche” if the dead, embodied in those who carry on their task, did not return.

“Action Consumed Memory”

In a speech before the British Academy in 1916, and in an article for the nationalistic *L’Écho de Paris* the year before, Maurice Barrès presented what he claimed was an unadulterated story of resurrection. Barrès began by observing the staggering loss of life that war had brought about, a constant reminder to soldiers of their mortality as well as an inspiration to make sacrifice matter. The central figure of Barrès’s speech is Jacques Péricard, an otherwise unremarkable lieutenant from the 90th infantry, who, in a moment of near collapse, regains his strength and is joined by the dead. In Barrès’s account, Péricard loses his awareness of himself after crying out the dead. Barrès blurs Péricard’s thoughts and words, writing: “Debout les morts! A stroke of madness? No, *for the dead responded to me* [emphasis in original].” And, similar to the resurrected Revolutionary and Napoleonic soldiers in *Pour le triomphe* who charge forward and fuse with the living, “[the dead] said to me: ‘we follow you.’” Noteworthy in Barrès’s account is the common refrain of Péricard’s loss of memory, induced by the fear that his compatriots’ sacrifice, as well as those of their forebears, would be unworthy, futile, or desecrated by another German victory.

Through the erasure of memory induced by frenetic action carried out in a trance, Barrès makes the weighty claim that the very purpose of sacrifice is to overcome memory through

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88 For his article in *L’Echo de Paris*, see Maurice Barrès, “Debout les morts!” *L’Écho de Paris*, November 18, 1915. For differing accounts of this theme during the war, see Varley, *Under the Shadow of Defeat*, 74-75, and Winter, *Sites of Memory*, 205-207.

action. To this end, Péricard summons the dead in a role that approximates the call to action signaled by *La Marseillaise* in war posters. Exhausted from shouting, Péricard’s memory slips away:

> What happened? Since I only want to tell you what I remember, leaving aside what others told me later, I must sincerely confess that I do not know. There is a gap in my memories; action consumed memory. I simply have the vague idea of a disorderly defense […].

Here Barrès contrasts individual memory [*les souvenirs*] with the faculty of memory [*la mémoire*], asserting that action overwhelmed the capacity to remember, as Péricard regains his ability to remember shortly after the events. But on a second, more abstract level, Barrès proposes not the loss of memory, a kind of mental slippage, but its active destruction. It is through this latter sense that Barrès offers a versatile metaphor for the teleology of revanche, positioning action as a means to remember as well as to forget. Sustained through memory, the fantasy of revanche pivoted from an emphasis on the injustices of the past vindicated in the future to a demand directed to the present.

This conceptual shift surfaced in the visual field through the union of the dead and living while simultaneously maintaining the differences between them. If action “consumed” memory, it did so by replacing one generation of soldiers with another. In November and December of 1918, *L’Illustration* took great pains to document, report, and circulate the celebrations and commemorative outpouring in and for the return of the “lost provinces,” filling its pages with articles on the entry of soldiers into the region, the welcoming of distinguished generals, and even the fêted arrival of President Poincaré in his native Lorraine. Henriot, *L’Illustration*’s wartime satirist, pointed to these celebrations in his first postwar *Croquis de la semaine* (fig. 13). In the sketch, Marianne honors the masses of the dead, all of whom, through victory, she

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90Barrès, “Le blason de la France,” 349.
proclaims as “vengés.” Vengeance supplied more than a common union in death, however. Both in print and in text the dead of 1870-71 recede into memory. Visually, they stand apart from the contemporary poilus, Marianne’s most recent honorees, and form an indistinct mass indicative of the imprecise differentiation of their memories from others. In addition, Henriot’s caption reinforces this process as the Battle of Reichschoffen, the only battle listed from the Franco-Prussian War, becomes the first in a line of more recent and more poignant memories. In the clearly demarcated registers of figures, the 1870-71 war dead stand in honor of their new compatriots who, through the apparent fulfillment of revanche, now take their place.

Images such as Henriot’s lay bare the fear that, against the staggering losses of World War I, action had consumed the memory of the dead along with the memory of defeat. If posters had failed to secure a definitive place for the 1870-71 war dead in the constellation of French history, their imbrication of masculinity, glory, and action suggested other avenues for mending the still open wound of 1870. Yet, at the same time that the World War I dead replaced the dead of 1870-71, they also joined them in an overarching narrative of tragedy. These soldiers suffered in differing ways and in differing proportions, but the end of the war brought little consolation to either. For if the dream of revanche associated resurrection with glory, image with idea, postwar representations of resurrection increasingly turned against revanche, militarism, and glory itself.
CHAPTER 3: DELIVRANCE AND DENOUNCEMENT

On November 18, 1918, a sprawling mass of spectators gathered along the Champs-Élysées to watch the fête de la délivrance d’Alsace-Lorraine, a commemorative spectacle that would, as one journalist claimed, “mark in all our memory among the most eloquent souvenirs of the end of the war.”91 Before an assembly of various groups, including Parisian school children, traditionally dressed Alsatian women, and foreign military delegations, President Raymond Poincaré stood beside James Pradier’s statue of Strasbourg (1836-38) (fig. 14) in Place de la Concorde to convey a long-awaited message: the end of the war and the return of Alsace and Lorraine to France. Like most ceremonies, le fête de la délivrance d’Alsace-Lorraine fused pageantry with ideology, spontaneous gestures with calculated organization to interpret an existing social order.92 But the interpretations ceremonies offer depend on the signifiers available to them, the meanings already associated with them, and the means of staging them.

As the most obvious element of France’s wartime visual culture, posters had developed a semantically dense visual language. Sem’s Pour le triomphe (fig. 12) bears several of the hallmarks of revanche, as it neatly embraces a number of key signifiers. The “triumph” it urges viewers to achieve refers at once to victory over Germany and the other Central Powers and to the site around which the poilus congregate, the Arc de Triomphe, itself deeply invested with the victories of armies past. In this regard the poster offers an assortment of signifiers that could be


carefully mobilized in lived time: the Arc de Triomphe, Rude’s *La Marseillaise*, contemporary poilu, and the dead.

Posters not only proliferated revanchard signifiers, but also, in the postwar period, offered a kind of template for activating them through performance, as *tableaux vivants*. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, *tableaux vivants* had a complex relationship with their pictorial counterparts, for in a crucial way they depended on their association with painting and sculpture for legibility. Sarah Frost, author of a how-to guide for *tableaux vivants*, pointed up their shared status as representations as the very foundation of such performances: “the first thing to be remembered is the fact that the representations [*tableaux vivants*] are *living pictures*, and, therefore, must resemble, as closely as possible, painted pictures.” More recently, Aura Satz has theorized the performance of such *tableaux*, arguing that they consist of three principles: first, a marked slowness or condensation of time; second, an allusion to something outside the performance; and finally, a reliance on the duration and ephemerality of representation that allows the body to signify in certain ways only for limited amounts of time.

To be sure, the *fête de la délivrance* was understood by those who viewed it neither as a *tableau vivant* nor a performance in the modern sense. Writers for the leading dailies understandably placed the event in the familiar rubric of military parades. But despite that categorization, and because of its status as representation, the procession nonetheless exhibited visual strategies made recognizable by war posters, a relationship like that of *tableaux vivants* to painting. Viewing the procession through this lens widens its potential significations and wrests

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it from the confining rubric of military parades, and in this sense I read the fête de la délivrance as a military parade, performance, and moving tableau, each through the visual signifiers it deployed.\textsuperscript{95}

Crucial to the visual culture of revanche since at least Detaille’s Le Rêve (fig. 7), the dead continued to function as its most prominent signifier and arguably a visual manifestation of memory itself. That the procession referred to and was dedicated to the dead is hardly surprising, for the entire event borrowed from the visual language that had long defined the fantasy of revanche. But if fantasy as such contains no formal mechanism for its own termination, the fête de la délivrance d’Alsace-Lorraine sought to mark just such an end, and to conceal growing disillusionment with the very premises of the fantasy of revanche.

\textit{From Posters to Processions}

In Pour le triomphe, the mingling armies of the dead and living dutifully march from the Arc de triomphe, a monument with obvious connections to memories of Napoleonic glory, toward the unvisualized Place de la Concorde and the Statue of Strasbourg. During the siege of Paris, Pradier’s sculpture, Hollis Clayson has observed, quickly garnered Parisians’ attention as a commemorative site, with prominent figures such as Théophile Gautier noting the religious-like devotion the statue inspired.\textsuperscript{96} Pierre Théodore Tetar van Elven’s painting “Strasbourg” in the Place de la Concorde (ca. 1871) testifies to the commemorative outpouring for the lost capital of Alsace (fig. 15). The power of fantasy to reveal and conceal antagonisms is clearly at work here:


almost hidden in a decorative accumulation of flags and wreaths that by itself demonstrates a concerted masking, the figure of Strasbourg seems to rise above them, dominating the center of the painting. Assembled around the base of the statue are soldiers of the recent war, who have come to pay their respects to this figure in mourning.

The commemorative element of the Statue of Strasbourg found expression throughout the First World War, especially as a pilgrimage site, but the inflection of the memory it embodied changed in the context of the war. In her May 1915 article “The Look of Paris,” Edith Wharton described the statue as a symbol of loss, mourning, and “the Cause.”97 In one episode, Wharton recounted a scene similar to van Elven’s imagery, noting how amidst the hustle of wartime Paris, a group of soldiers solemnly laid a garland at the feet of the veiled statue. Yet what would have provoked, in Wharton’s words, “a patriotic outburst” only a year earlier was met with little interest by passersby, as the pressures of war stressed action over remembrance.98 Such a change in attitudes corresponds to the mobilization of revanchard memory more generally. Of greater significance here, however, is the continued veiling of the figure and the soldiers’ compulsion to honor it, which indicate that the statue continued to make visible the wound of the année terrible. Thus the route chosen by the Union des Grands Associations Françaises, from the Arc de Triomphe to the Statue of Strasbourg, overtly embraced spaces already saturated with visual connotations.

The permeation of both place (the route) and performers (chiefly the soldiers) in the procession raises questions about kind of order it sought to impose. In Pour le triomphe, the union of the dead armies of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic eras and living poilus asserts a


98 Ibid.
common heritage of glory that masks the absence of Franco-Prussian War soldiers from that lineage, in effect seeking to erase them from memory. If such a union signaled erasure, how did the fête de la délivrance mobilize the dead, those who could no longer be made present except in memory? Certainly these processions did not involve the carrying of soldiers’ physical remains, nor did they approximate the kinds of commemorative burials for which the Third Republic was well known,\(^\text{99}\) but they did develop other visual strategies to suggest the presence of the dead. Those strategies, and their place within the tension between remembering and forgetting, become clearer through Poincaré’s speech, in which he offered an interpretation of the event by identifying the procession’s signifiers and fixing their meaning. Enfolding both veterans and the dead into the “dream” of revanche, Poincaré noted:

> How moving for those of us who, wounded by the memories of the other war, have waited almost fifty years for this day of glory and resurrection! […] The greatest number of heroes who died for them [Alsace and Lorraine] never knew them. […] And yet they sacrificed themselves to liberate [pour délivrer] the two imprisoned provinces and to return them to France, who did not forget them.\(^\text{100}\)

Central to this passage are a number of concepts that merit further elaboration: the placement of Franco-Prussian War veterans among the mutilated; the designation of victory as the attainment of glory as well as resurrection; and finally, Poincaré’s use of the freighted verb délivrer to describe the restoration of the provinces, as délivrer and its noun form, délivrance, can encompass several meanings: liberation; arrival, as in to deliver a message; and childbirth, such as the delivery of a newborn.

In describing those who awaited revanche as “wounded by memory,” Poincaré was clearly referring to the trauma they suffered during and after the année terrible. Yet, more subtly,

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\(^\text{100}\) *Le Temps*, “La journée.”
he constructed a symbolic correspondence between those wounded in battle, *les mutilés de guerre*, and those wounded by the memory of war, above all the veterans of 1870-71. Though veterans may well have been wounded physically as well, Poincaré understood the latter group’s trauma as greater because it achieved only a partial glory, one dependent on the sacrifices of those who followed them. As those wounded physically, the *mutilés de guerre* became worthy substitutes for the dead, in a sense (though likely unknowingly) performing the role of the dead. In a series of photographs of the procession *Le monde illustré* fabricated a condensed narrative of the event. While the first set of photographs established the setting (fig. 16), specifying its principal sites, notable spectacles, and sheer extent, the second folio provided a kind of census of its constituencies. Chief among them, as indicated both in the size and number of photographs, were the wounded, including amputees (fig. 17). The central photograph, for example, depicts bandaged soldiers, some with impaired sight, led by nurses. The orchestrated leadership by men who were probably blind underscores all the more emphatically the visual symbolism of their sacrifice: though unable to see themselves, such soldiers embody a form of glory announced mainly through visual means.

That the dead, the wounded, and Franco-Prussian War veterans could be elided so easily rested in part on the designation of *les revenants*, those who survived particularly harrowing battles and carried on despite their wounds. In his autobiographical narrative *Paroles d’un revenant*, Jacques d’Arnoux recounts in a series of loosely connected episodes his war memories and his recovery from paralysis. One episode follows his battalion’s stay in the forests of Verdun where, after intense fire, it ventured south to Nesles. Of its arrival D’Arnoux writes:

101 Satz describes a similar occurrence of the living body standing in for the dead in contemporary performance art, but “unlike the static temporality of the statue or painting, the living body is a weak carrier of such condensed narrative [as a signifier]”; Satz, “Tableaux Vivants,” 159.
The inhabitants watched with astonishment our rows of phantoms march. Some frightened boys followed the cortege of our men [and] examined their squalid tatters [and] their sunken, mud-caked faces…”Yes, children of the Meuse, look at them: these are les revenants of the Bois Nawé. Look at them before they pass into legend.”  

Throughout the novel, and in this passage, D’Arnoux idolizes the dead for both their Christian valor and their patriotic sacrifice. Featured most prominently in his memory, however, is art.  

In this regard D’Arnoux conceptualizes art as a mnemonic device that allows him to act in a dream state despite his paralysis. Particularly evocative for D’Arnoux is Detaille’s Le Rêve, which focuses his search for memory-images to decorate what he calls a “dream scenery.” The narrator’s attachment to such imagery, moreover, forms an obsession stimulated by the slightest reference to heroism, death, or glory, calling forth images that consistently take on forms similar to Le Rêve. In its first appearance, he summarizes his projection of the painting’s iconography in the night sky in wholly visual terms: “I see you,” D’Arnoux writes after listing several battles from French history. Sight, as D’Arnoux presents it here, positions armies of the past as models for emulation, conceptualizing them as “muses for our armies.” D’Arnoux thus claims the status of revenant in another manner, through his imagined relationship to the past.  

More broadly, D’Arnoux’s references to works of art embody the assumption that glory is manifested visually, an assumption he shared with those who organized the elaborate display of the fête de la délivrance. But if the equation of glory was fundamentally similar in both, the sense of history the procession constructed was radically different. From the movement of

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103 Ibid., 182, 185.
104 Ibid., 203.
105 Ibid., 14.
delegates to the speech presented, the fête purposefully invoked and yet attempted to write over the memory of 1870. What was needed, then, was a reinterpretation of the past in light of victory. Poincaré argued for such a reinterpretation, stating that “restitution pure and simple: that is what the reparation of the past demands.”

What did it mean to repair the past? If memory of the Franco-Prussian war was represented variously as wound and mutilation, it is worth asking how the fête de la délivrance could mend both. A wound can heal in unnoticeable ways; a mutilated body, in contrast, struggles to conceal disfigurement without some mediating element, such as prostheses. Although neither the metaphor of wound nor that of mutilation (see chapter 1) became a dominant form of memory—indeed, Poincaré makes use of both in his speech—the difference proves significant for an event intended to empty both of their cultural resonance.

As substitutes for the dead often understood as “resurrected” themselves, the mutilés de guerre became a sign for the restoration of the patrie mutilée. A key word in that process was délivrance, which Poincaré used to describe how, through sacrifice, soldiers had brought Alsace and Lorraine back under the French fold. If the liberation of territory constituted the purported motivation for the fête, what other kinds of cultural work did the metaphor of delivery perform? Sally Moore and Barbara Myerhoff have remarked on ceremony’s ability to mark and even instantiate change. Strongly implicated in the numerous forms of resurrection the fête enacted, délivrance took as its object memory itself. Through victory the fantasy of revanche could come to an end, a conclusion performed through a liberation from the past as well as a imagined rebirth.

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106 Le Temps, “La journée.”

of the nation. In the latter sense, the metaphor of delivery overcame the conceptual difficulty of undoing mutilation, assuming instead a renewed wholeness.

That the fête de la délivrance functioned as a salve for wounds still sensitive from the Franco-Prussian War is evident in the significance afforded to other symbols at the event. Casting the entire celebration in contrast to the defeat of 1871, Poincaré stated that although for nearly fifty years the statue of Strasbourg had symbolized humiliation and inaction, victory removed the “stain” of defeat. In a symbolic gesture, one veteran approached the statue to announce that “the day that ends our sorrow has come,” tearing off the veil as he spoke. The removal of the veil alluded to the restoration of one of the proclaimed great cities of France, embodied allegorically by the statue, and the territorial integrity of France. Yet the trauma associated with territorial violation was rarely, if ever, limited to concerns about political and cultural borders. Indeed, the wound of 1871 also separated men from a history of glory that had ensured a vital component of their masculinity, with the loss Alsace and Lorraine as poignant reminders of French soldiers’ inability to perform their duty. Délivrance thus entailed a simultaneous restoration of the nation and reinstitution of a vision of France’s masculinity.

Les Revenants Reviennent

The “resurrection” and vindication of the dead performed what posters sought to accomplish: the recuperation of masculinity through visual means. Despite the attempt to impose a cultural amnesia, that is, the dictum to forget as the final stage of healing, representations of the dead took on new valences, typically with far less positive connotations. In their studies of such representations, historians Keith Phelan Gorman and Martin Hurcombe have emphasized the

108 Le Temps, “La journée.”

place of Abel Gance’s 1919 film *J’accuse!* and its 1938 adaptation in French antiwar culture, largely through an analysis of its religious elements.\(^{110}\) Certainly Gance’s film, and what Gorman calls the “cult of the dead” more generally, employed Christological motifs, but the continued emphasis on those references over others obscures the continued force of revanchard discourses in postwar France.

Typical summaries of the film follow a basic formula, in which the narrative revolves around three characters: Jean Diaz, a poet; François Laurin, a bourgeois drunk; and Édith Laurin, François’s wife and Jean’s lover. Framed as a love triangle, the film traces the mobilization of the two men and their eventual reconciliation through combat, only to have François die and Jean suffer from intense shellshock. Missing from this summary, however, is the role of Maria Lazare, Édith’s father and a Franco-Prussian War veteran. For Maria, the advent of war presents an opportunity to regain his and his compatriots’ honor; Gance’s portrayal characterizes Maria as obsessed with glory. Consider, for example, the décor of Maria’s bedroom (fig. 18), austere and ornamented with objects from his past military exploits: his cap, rifle, pistol, sabers, and epaulettes. These masculine objects hang above Maria’s bed and, like D’Arnoux’s obsession with *Le Rêve*, focus his meditations on glory. Essential to this collection of souvenirs is a map of France with the former provinces of Alsace and Lorraine blackened, which represents them as a festering wound or a stain (fig. 19). In another scene, as Jean’s mother weeps for her son, Maria dismisses her protestations by relentlessly pointing to his map, insisting that the black mark is justification enough for Jean’s possible death.

Maria’s awareness of his honor reaches its apogee when his daughter, Édith, returns from German captivity with a child, clearly the result of rape. In a fury Maria pens a letter to his daughter: “honor is an old tradition among us [veterans]. I am leaving to try to avenge this indelible affront.” In describing her rape as “indelible” and thus a lasting mark, Maria conflates his desire for revanche, as visualized through the black stain of his map, and his daughter’s rape by German soldiers, in effect perceiving both as violations of his honor. Having written his letter, Maria disappears, presumably to join the war. As an avatar for the kinds of masculinity promoted in revanchard visual culture, Maria represents a generation at once beholden to and eager to erase the past.

Though Maria acts in some respects as a locus for revanchard discourses and representations, he is not their only manifestation in the film. Gance makes effective use of several signifiers of revanche, especially Rude’s *La Marseillaise*, which appears in three guises: as living form (a Gaul leading an advance), as statue, and as an element in a parade. In the second instance, François attempts to fight on behalf of Jean, who can no longer function. As he climbs out the trenches, François calls out to the dead and the living to join him. Yet in this moment François seems to transcend himself, evoking the image of Rude’s sculpture, which comes into focus precisely as François fades out of view. The third appearance accompanies the film’s climax, as a noticeably shell-shocked Jean urges Édith to assemble their neighbors. At the sound of François’s name, Jean finds himself unable to distinguish between nightmares, dreams, war, living, or dead.

The scene Jean depicts shares revealing parallels to another well-known war myth: Maurice Barrès’s story of Jean Péricard. In Barrès’s account, Péricard, like Jean, worries that this
comrades have died in vain and summons them to ensure the meaning of their sacrifice. Jean similarly witnesses a soldier rise up and beckon the other dead to judge whether the living have honored their deaths. Yet, in a sense, the dead serve not only to judge the worthiness of the townspeople, but also to question the concept of glory. One of Gance’s most provocative scenes juxtaposes the march of the dead with a parade at the Arc de Triomphe (fig. 20) comparable to the *fete de la délivrance*. At one level, the juxtaposition produces an image that bears some resemblance to Détaille’s *Le Rêve*, with the living on the bottom register and the death they at once glorify and aspire to placed above. But unlike *Le Rêve* and related posters, here the dead counter the celebration of glory. Even Maria—who like his namesake, Lazarus, is resurrected—reappears to testify to the depravity of the war and repudiate the idea of glorious death.

The zeal with which Maria returns to the army, and the intensity of his proclamations of honor, find a clear contrast in the soldiers’ letters Gance displays in the second third of the film, each displaying different attitudes toward impending death. The first letter passes over the mounds of the dead matter-of-factly, assuring the soldier’s wife that not even those bodies can stop the spring, for nature is indifferent to suffering. The second author directs his animosity squarely at those responsible for the war, though he leaves them unnamed. Resigned, the third author denounces thoughts of glory; war is hard enough “without thinking of other things.” The soldiers’ ambivalence and anger toward death differ from the images of glory, presented by a proclaimed “visionary,” that precede the letters, such as the apparition of an ancient Gaul in the trenches. None of these authors and, by extension, none of the soldiers at the front, embraced those visions.

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112 For another interpretation of this and similar scenes in postwar French film, see Hurcombe, “Raising the Dead,” 162, 168.
Against Glory

In a thorough study, historian Antoine Prost has documented the extent of soldiers’ resentment as well as their efforts to wrest control of their affairs from bureaucrats and others who lacked the credential of “experience.”¹¹³ Veterans’ associations, Prost argues, were vehemently antimilitarist and invariably suspicious of the countless acts made in their name or, more commonly, the name of the dead. Writing in the *Journal des mutilés*, one of the official organs for such groups, in 1919, André Linville hailed the recent victory while denouncing the use of parades to celebrate it. Such events, and the victory parade in particular, he claimed, only nourished the already rampant militarism embodied in displays of glory.¹¹⁴ Veterans’ attempts to combat militarism and glory, in the events Prost describes, point to a larger contest: a struggle to reverse the symbolic codes that revanche had so completely impregnated with meaning.

Perhaps more than anything, veterans objected to the rapidly increasing number of war monuments and their related culture industry, which had been fixtures of the French commemorative landscape since after the Franco-Prussian War and reached their apex in interwar France.¹¹⁵ Monuments largely enfolded the dead into a narrative of honorable sacrifice, for obvious reasons rarely giving voice to antimilitarist claims. Although monuments of the poilu and indications of death, such as inscriptions designating soldiers as “mort pour la France,” dominated that landscape, few represented *les revenants*, likely because such depictions were exceptionally difficult to convey in sculptural form. If such representations posed compositional


¹¹⁴ Ibid., 59.

challenges, they arguably posed ideological ones as well, for the narrative of glory from which they drew their discursive power had been too thoroughly discredited.

This notable absence makes all the more revealing the case of one such sculpture, Paul Landowski’s *Les Fantômes* (figs. 21 and 22). As a group, monuments managed to draw the ire of art critics on some of the same grounds as veterans; in their reviews of the 1923 Salon des Artistes Français, Albert Flament and Thiébault-Sisson disparaged the Salon in no uncertain terms. Flament, for example, expressed dismay that the salon was once again “cluttered” with monuments.\(^\text{116}\) As Claire Maingon has recently argued, the increasingly frequent exhibition of monuments at the Salon underlies its importance as an opportunity for public display and, more important, as a venue for attracting future commissions. Even Paul Landowski, whose plaster model received rare praise, described his work as a “gagne-pain,” a way to make a living.\(^\text{117}\) The Ministry of Public Instruction and Fine Arts commissioned Landowski to produce a monument corresponding to the simple theme of “the dead,” in 1919, with few details as to its final location or deadline.\(^\text{118}\) Though perhaps typical of the slowness of monument production—*Les Fantômes* was not completed until 1929, and not inaugurated as a memorial to the Second Battle of the Marne until 1935—the designation as *Les Fantômes* (ghosts or phantoms) as well as the sculpture’s form sets it apart from conventional portrayals of the war dead at the annual Salons.

The sculpture’s lack of polish, the awkward bulkiness of the figures, and the strained as well as vacant expressions of the soldiers contribute powerfully to its unsettling presence. In the


\(^{118}\) Ibid., 173.
plaster version, soldiers rise from the sculpted plinth, with little demarkation of where one ends and the other begins. As frequently noted in critical reviews, the combination of clothed and nude figures, moreover, accentuates the emotional and physical divide between the figures. In monuments, soldiers rarely interact with one another,\textsuperscript{119} an indication of their unity and seriousness of purpose, but in Les Fantômes that common trope connotes something closer to alienation and a denial of fraternity, usually one of the few vaunted experiences of the war, at the front or in death. In his final version, Landowski separates the figures with greater clarity, but their lack of uniform posture, attributes, and gazes, achieves a similar expression of alienation. For both Flament and Thiébault-Sisson, the masculinity of the figures encapsulated an antimilitarist memory of the war, offering veterans a vision of antiwar masculinity or expressing outrage at the war’s injustices. Flament described the soldiers’ expressions as one of “virile resignation,” implying that they served as exemplars without glory, and suggested that the work would be a fitting addition to the landscape of the “bloodiest massacres of the war.”\textsuperscript{120} By contrast, Thiébault-Sisson stressed the youthfulness and the immaturity of the figures, labeling them “young and hairless,” a comment that juxtaposed them to the literal meaning of poilu, hairy, which itself asserted the rugged masculinity of French soldiers.

Yet in the face of the sculpture’s antimilitarist stance, if not overt pacifism, other critics found traces of revanchard notions of glory. Édouard Sarradin, for example, described Landowski’s work as a “formal resurrection of heroes,” a remark he plainly saw as high

\textsuperscript{119}Sherman, \textit{The Construction of Memory}, 188.

\textsuperscript{120}Flament, “La sculpture au Salon,” 405.
praise. As in D’Arnoux’s *Les Revenants*, “resurrection” could be achieved through participation in battles or through memorial invocations. But *Les Fantômes* designates a different kind of resurrection, at once literal and metaphorical: literal in that the viewer can imagine the figures as dead; metaphorical in that *revenant* and *fantôme* possess different connotations, with the latter suggesting not a return but a haunting.

Thus, like the denunciation of visual signifiers of glory in *J’accuse!*, culminating in a final scene of judgment, *Les Fantômes* condemns the people and ideology that sent soldiers to their deaths. Closing his thoughts on the sculpture, Thiébault-Sisson extended his criticism to public monuments in general for their inability to inspire or evoke glory, with noteworthy examples of monuments that came to mind paling in comparison to their more illustrious antecedents. If *Les Fantômes* could not visualize glory, it is perhaps because the concept of glory had lost its unique purchase in the French imagination. That the location of the finished monument (fig. 22), at the butte de Chalmont, a key site in the Second Battle of the Marne, was chosen by a veterans’ group is thus perfectly fitting as a response to their discomfort with now outdated displays of sacrifice. Against the combined forces of the tragic narrative of the Great War and the weakened claims of revanche after the return of Alsace and Lorraine, fantasy could no longer sustain its hold over the dead. As the war faded into memory, the idea of resurrection now doubled as an incrimination of revanche.

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121 Édouard Sarradin, “Les Salons de 1923 (premier article),” *Gazette des beaux-arts* 65, no. 7 (Jan.-Jun. 1923): 293.

122 Thiébault-Sisson, “Le Salon de 1923.”
CONCLUSION: LAY YOUR WEARY DEAD TO REST

Strasbourg has honored its great dead for all time. By commemorative plaques or statues decorating its boulevards and spaces, [the city] has done its utmost to revive the memory of its illustrious children who have well deserved the recognition of the nation.123

—President Albert Lebrun, inauguration of war monument in Strasbourg, 1936

With a distance of eighteen years from this speech to the end of World War I, it would be tempting to reason that the inauguration signaled a final stage for revanche, its passage from fantasy to commemoration. All the requisite elements appear: the fear of memory’s impending disappearance, the invocation of the dead, the desire to cast a particular version of events as memory. One could also dismiss Lebrun’s painstaking lesson on the shared military glory of France and Alsace, from Revolutionary General Jean-Baptiste Kléber to the recent poilus, as nothing more than banal commonplaces for his Alsatian audience. Yet given the discourses that animated revanche, these references strike a different chord, demonstrating instead that revanche continued to shape memory as much as it was forged through memory.

The monument Lebrun inaugurated, the work of Léon-Ernest Drivier, presents the city in a Pietà format assuming the role of mater dolorosa (fig. 23), a mother grieving for her two dead children, one French, one German. The entwining bodies and tender hand-holding of the nude soldiers suggest their common humanity, perhaps not, as Lebrun indicated, rooted in their presumed Strasbourg heritage (to Lebrun’s mind a shared Frenchness), but emanating from the statue’s pacifism. Unlike the Madonnas it echoes, the allegory of Strasbourg finds no

consolation in her sons’ “sacrifice.” Nor do the soldiers display themselves proudly, honorably, or gloriously; their bodies seem rather to contort and writhe in pain.

A disparity thus emerges from the meaning Lebrun sought to impose and the pacifism the monument seems to encourage, a difference that illustrates at once the deployment of fantasy and its denial. Revanche as fantasy, in a sense, had always relied on the concept of pain: as early as 1872 A. de Pontmartin described the wound of the année terrible as “agonizing,” and Georges Ducrocq wrote that to visit memorials to the 1870-71 war dead was to “suffer.” But in the French imagination, that suffering had a clear purpose, above all to keep the memory of the Franco-Prussian War alive while also denying its more troubling aspects. In this schema, art bandaged wounds, strengthened memory, and urged viewers to act. As key signifiers for the fantasy of revanche, the shifting depictions of soldiers, from exemplars of glory to resurrected armies, suggested more profound changes for the configuration of memory.

Across the diverse media in which fantasy took shape, invocations of the dead signified differently in the three periods I have examined, transitioning from calls to remember, to act, and finally, to forget. But any suggestion that, with the return of the lost provinces and mounting postwar contestation, the fantasy of revanche came to a definitive end would be simplistic, for recent events at home and abroad foreclose that conclusion and demonstrate the mobility of that fantasy. Revanche constitutes one example of how history, memory, and fantasy can converge, and certainly there are others. The point is not to assert that the past lives in the present, or that revanche continues today in a direct way, but that its logic continues to inform current discourses in unacknowledged ways, with different sets of memories, histories, and dead soldiers bound up in imagined glory.

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124 Pontmartin, “Salon de 1872,” 294; Ducrocq, La blessure mal fermée, 53.
Figure 1:
Anne-Louis Girodet de Roucy-Trioson [Girodet]: Ossian Receiving the Ghosts of French Heroes, 1802. Oil on canvas, 94 cm x 187 cm. Rueil-Mal maison, Musée national du Château.
Figure 2:
Émile Betsellère, *L’Oublié!,* 1872. Oil on canvas, 123 x 200 cm. Bayonne, France, Musée Bonnat-Helleu.
Figure 3:
Figure 4:
Figure 5:
Figure 6:
Figure 7: Édouard Detaille, *Le Rêve*, 1888. Oil on canvas, 300 cm x 400 cm. Paris, Musée d’Orsay.
Figure 8:
Figure 9: François Rude, *Departure of the Volunteers of 1792 (La Marseillaise)*, 1833-36. Paris, Arc de triomphe.
Figure 10:
Figure 11:
Figure 12:
Figure 13:
Figure 14: James Pradier, *Statue of Strasbourg*, ca. 1836-38. Paris, Place de la Concorde.
Figure 15:
La manifestation en l'honneur de l'Alsace et de la Lorraine

C'est l'ennemi que toute la population participée s'est souvenue, avec une fermeté et un enthousiasme que personne n'eût eu à l'antique, aussi bien que la prochaine. Le monde illustré, 21 November 1918, 162.
Figure 17: 
Anonymous, “La manifestation en l'honneur de l’Alsace et de la Lorraine” (Folio 2) Le monde illustré, 21 November 1918, 163.
Figure 18:
Abel Gance, Film still of Maria Lazare’s bedroom with various decorations, *J’accuse!* 1919.

Figure 19:
Abel Gance, Film still of Maria Lazare’s bedroom with map of eastern France, *J’accuse!* 1919.
Figure 20:
Abel Gance, Film still of dead rising and allied victory celebration, *J'accuse!* 1919.
Figure 21:
Figure 22:
Figure 23:
Primary Sources


*Nouveau Dictionnaire Militaire* (Paris: Librairie Militaire de L. Baudoin, 1892)


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Robichon, François. “Representing the 1870-1871 War, or the Impossible Revanche.” In *Nationalism and French Visual Culture, 1870-1914*, 83-100.


