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Michel Biard and Claire Maingon, *La souffrance et la gloire: Le culte du martyr de la Révolution à Verdun*. Paris: Vendémiaire, 2018. 209 pp. €21.00 (pb). ISBN 978-2-36358-311-6.

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The figure of François Lavigne looms large over this book. On August 31, 1792, the seventeen-year-old infantryman lost both his arms and an eye to enemy fire at Maulde. Given the severity of his injuries, Lavigne's survival is probably the most remarkable thing about this incident; but survive he did, and on March 20, 1793, he found himself standing before the National Convention in Paris (p. 76). Introduced by none other than the Minister of War, Lavigne spoke briefly, but movingly, to offer his heart to the *patrie*—"it is all I have left"—and his example to his fellow citizens. The deputies were overwhelmed: one acclaimed Lavigne as "a living statue which we must carefully maintain as a glorious monument to our reconquered liberty"; and after the applause had died down, the Convention awarded the young hero a civic crown and an enhanced pension as a mark of the nation's esteem.[1] With the war already almost a year old, such scenes were already commonplace in the Convention, but that was not the end of Lavigne's fame. His mutilation in the cause of the *patrie* would later be portrayed, in extraordinarily explicit terms, in the *Fastes du peuple français*, an illustrated anthology of Republican heroism published in 1796 and destined, as its preface insisted, for readers of "all ages" (p. 113).

Michel Biard and Claire Maingon's new book takes dismembered bodies like Lavigne's and explores the many uses that were made of them, not just in the 1790s as Lavigne's example suggests, but in the early twentieth century, too, as another French Republic embarked upon another war of unprecedented intensity. Adopting an ambitiously interdisciplinary approach—the authors are colleagues at the Université de Rouen but come from different research backgrounds, the former being a historian of Revolutionary France and the latter a specialist in twentieth-century art history—this book draws on an array of printed and visual sources to examine these soldiers' sufferings and their representation across a range of themes. In successive chapters, the authors survey "the fabrication of the hero," the propagandist portrayal of these damaged bodies as exemplars of patriotic virtue across a variety of media: in print, on the stage, in festivals, fiction, art, and film (p. 23). These opening chapters focus chiefly on the war-wounded's place in Republican political culture and recount the celebration—and sometimes the cynical exploitation—of these soldiers' sacrifice in patriotic publications like the *Recueil des actions héroïques et civiques des Républicains français* of the year II and the abbé Blain des Cormiers's *Sur le champ de bataille, recueil de traits d'héroïsme* of 1914 (pp. 23, 36).

The book's second half turns from these idealized representations of heroic self-sacrifice to a sobering reckoning of the wounded soldier's lived experience. In chapters exploring the medical treatment these men received (the sheer imprecision of Dominique-Jean Larrey's recollection of performing "about two hundred" amputations in one twenty-four-hour period seems especially telling), the pensions they were awarded, and the prosthetics they received, the authors scrutinize the First and Third Republics' efforts to remunerate and rehabilitate those who had shed blood and lost limbs in the nation's defense (pp. 158, 139). In both Republics, a deep sense of the nation's indebtedness resulted in reams of ambitious pension legislation, laws imbued with "an egalitarian vision"; but these were also accompanied by "tortuous" application processes, administrative inertia, and "derisory" payments until the Charte des Pensions of March 31, 1919 introduced "a paradigm shift" in military pension provision, finally transforming the invalided veteran into a genuine "creditor of the State" (pp. 134-135).

The time it took to repay the nation's "debt" to its war-wounded is also a measure of the often-ambiguous welcome this "armée morte" received on its return home, and some of the most revealing chapters here discuss the wounded's attempts to reintegrate into civil society at war's end (pp. 158, 139). That welcome alternated between official expressions of solidarity and the alienation many of these men—at once "heroes and pariahs"—endured when they came home to find employers, families, and lovers less than sympathetic to the sight of a broken body or a shattered face. The authors cite striking testimony of the estrangement some of these men experienced on their return home, especially after World War I; but elsewhere, across much of this book, the wounded rarely speak for themselves. More often, they are spoken of—celebrated or sympathized with—by others. They appear as props in the patriotic pageants that Jacques-Louis David staged in the 1790s, or they see their suffering sanitized in the pictures of "jaunty, smiling heroes" that appeared in papers like *L'Illustration* during World War I (pp. 93, 116). However, in the authors' analysis of the mass-membership associations of wounded veterans that emerged during and after World War I, the 900,000-strong *Union fédérale des mutilés* and the smaller *Union des blessés de la face et de la tête*, the *Gueules Cassées*, which was established after the war, we see something of these men's agency in the campaigns they waged to ensure that a "grateful republic" honored the debts it had incurred and in the camaraderie the associations afforded them (p. 82).

There is much to admire in this volume. Its interdisciplinary approach is a real virtue, and there is an important dialogue here between writing the cultural history of conflict and understanding its social consequences. So, too, the authors' willingness to cut across conventional chronological boundaries makes a strong case for the continuities that connect the culture of Republican warfare at either end of the long nineteenth century. With some notable exceptions, the Revolutionary wars and World War I are normally studied in isolation; but as the volumes that Roger Chickering and Stig Förster have edited around the theme of total war have already shown, historians of the 1790s and 1910s have much to learn from one another.^[2] This book is evidence of the benefits that accrue from studying conflict in a comparative context, but the comparative approach adopted here can also seem rather narrowly defined at times. The authors do not so much trace the development of this cult of martyred bodies from Valmy to Verdun as dissect it in detail at two very particular points: its inception during the Revolution's most radical phase and its "apogee" during the Great War (p. 12). This approach undoubtedly has its own logic, but at times this reader also wondered how the men who were wounded during the wars France fought in the intervening century were represented; we learn little of how the wounded imperial *grogard*, let alone the colonial soldier,

was either treated or represented. The former appears occasionally here, as in Larrey's account of performing amputations on an industrial scale or in a brief discussion of Balzac's *Le Colonel Chabert*, a Napoleonic veteran with his "skull horribly disfigured by a scar beginning at the back of his head and ending over the right eye" (p. 145). Yet the casualties of colonial wars are entirely absent from this study. If, as the authors suggest, the soldier who returned home maimed or mutilated from Algeria or Indochina was never celebrated as an "*exemplum patriotique*" (p. 12), that certainly begs the question as to why those damaged and disfigured by France's savage wars of conquest and decolonization abroad never inspired the same reverence or respect at home.

That question gives rise to two other reservations. It goes without saying that the wars of the 1790s and 1910s were global conflicts, and both have inspired an extensive, innovative, and very international body of scholarship. Somewhat surprisingly, however, very little of that international scholarship is reflected in this volume. Of the book's almost four hundred endnotes, barely a handful reference works published in English, while a few more cite English-language works that have been translated into French. I don't note this absence out of pique (I am one of the few fortunate Anglophones whose work is actually cited here), but it is still surprising to see so much relevant English-language scholarship so comprehensively overlooked in a recent publication. This absence seems all the more perplexing because many of the themes, and sometimes even the same texts that are discussed here, have been explored, often in detail and often quite recently, in English-language scholarship, little of which is referenced here.[3]

This reluctance to engage with a wider international scholarship seems something of a missed opportunity, not least because so much of this study poses the question of French exceptionalism. The cultural history of modern warfare is increasingly being written from a comparative and even transnational perspective; but in reading this work, the reader is left with the impression, almost by default, that the images these wounded soldiers inspired, the associations they formed, and the assistance they received reflect a particularly French and specifically Republican experience. Indeed, the absence of any discussion of the wounded veteran's fate under the July Monarchy or Second Empire rather reinforces the idea that there was something intrinsically Republican about this cult of martyred male bodies. And yet this was obviously not the case. Thanks to Karen Hagemann and Mark Hewitson, for example, we know that German writers and artists were quite as willing to celebrate the virtues of heroic self-sacrifice as their French contemporaries throughout the Revolutionary wars, while Lucy Riall has shown how very similar martyr cults were mobilized by both nationalists and their Catholic opponents—including the French papal Zouaves—throughout the wars of the Risorgimento.[4] So, too, Joanna Bourke, Martina Salvante, and Heather Perry have explored similar discourses and practices to those discussed here concerning the mutilation of the male body, the rehabilitation of the maimed, and the camaraderie wounded veterans maintained through associational life in post-war Britain, Italy, and Germany.[5] Inevitably, during periods of total, or totalizing, warfare, many of the cultural practices that followed mass mobilization were nationally nonspecific, so a more sustained comparison with the experience of other combatant countries might help to identify what was unique to France and what was peculiar to French Republicanism in this particular cult of martyrdom.

Even the images of wounded soldiers this book discusses appear again, sometimes uncannily, in the art of other belligerent countries, and that brings me back to François Lavigne. For all the

gracefully expiring boy martyrs and plucky *poilus* tended to by beatific nurses that French artists depicted during both of these wars, they do not seem to have been able to portray pain. As Biard and Maingon admit of the art of the First World War, “the *mutilés*’ image is almost absent from this iconography” (p. 117). On the rare occasions when those crippled by war were portrayed in art, as in Emilien Barthélémy’s mawkish *Les Mutilés sous l’Arc* of 1920, their suffering appears transfigured by the sense that it was a sacrifice willingly endured for the *patrie*. French artists produced no images of broken bodies to compare with Francisco de Goya’s *Desastres de la Guerra*, John Singer Sargent’s *Gassed*, or Otto Dix’s *Die Skatspieler* (one of the very few foreign artists mentioned here). The reasons for this reluctance to portray suffering in anything other than idealized terms must be more substantial than the rationale the authors claim drove artists like Dix to paint the mutilated with such harrowing clarity: “in contrast to France [Germany] was defeated” (p. 121). This seems rather too easy an explanation, and this is where François Lavigne comes in again.

As I noted at the beginning of this review, Lavigne was eventually portrayed in all his disfigured glory in a print in the *Fastes du peuple français* in 1796. Like all of L.-F. Labrousse’s 165 illustrations for this collection, the design is crude, almost cartoonishly simple, but it is undeniably striking in effect. With the smoke and tumult of the battlefield behind him, Lavigne occupies centerstage in a foreground littered with corpses. He stands heroically erect before the fray—somewhat implausibly so given the great gobs of blood that gush from what had once been his arms—and urges his comrades on with the manly resolve that was the essence of Republican virtue. Biard and Maingon briefly discuss this image as evidence of the *Fastes*’ “very realistic” depiction of even the most horrible mutilations (p. 113). The reader will have to take that rather odd assessment of the image’s realism on trust because, inexplicably, this book includes no reproductions of any of the many paintings, photographs, and prints it discusses.[6] Nevertheless, this is, in its own way, an extraordinary image. And yet, it is not unique; over a century later, Claggett Wilson, a lieutenant in the U.S. Marines, sketched an almost identical scene set in another smoke-filled field in northern France. A solitary soldier—he is clearly just a boy—stands before the shattered trees of the Bois de Belleau; his left arm has been torn off, a river of blood flows freely down his now empty tunic sleeve; his shell-shocked eyes stare insanely out at the viewer.[7] Unlike Dix’s *Die Skatspieler*, the expressive intensity of Claggett Wilson’s depiction of mutilation cannot be reduced to an anger born of defeat; but like Dix, it does reflect the experience of a soldier-artist who had shared the suffering of the men he portrayed. It is probably unfair to compare a drawing by a hack illustrator in the 1790s with a watercolor by one of the pioneers of American modernism. However, the striking similarity in subject matter between Labrousse’s *François Lavigne* and Wilson’s *Runner Through the Barrage*, along with the marked contrast in their rendering, suggests, to this reader at least, the need to write the cultural history of these global conflicts from a perspective that spans not merely centuries, but also countries and even continents.

NOTES

[1] *Archives Parlementaires de 1787 à 1860, Recueil complet des débats législatifs et politiques des chambres françaises* (Paris, 1879-2012), vol. 60, pp. 349-50.

[2] Alan Forrest, *The Legacy of the French Revolutionary Wars: The Nation-in-Arms in French Republican Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Roger Chickering and Stig

Förster, eds., *Shadows of Total War: Europe, East Asia, and the United States, 1919-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Roger Chickering, Manfred Boemeke, and Stig Förster, eds. *Anticipating Total War: The German and American Experiences, 1871-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Roger Chickering and Stig Förster, eds. *War in an Age of Revolution, 1775-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[3] For example, the authors' discussion of martial heroism's depiction in Revolutionary art, theatre, and propaganda has been prefigured by, among others, David A. Bell, Ian Germani, Susan Siegfried, and this review's author, but none of these works are engaged with, or even referenced, here. See, for example, Bell, "Canon Wars in Eighteenth-Century France: The Monarchy, the Revolution, and the Grands Hommes de la Patrie," *Modern Language Notes* 141 (2001): 705-738; Bell, *The First Total War: Napoleon's Europe and the Birth of War as We Know It* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007); Germani, "Staging Battles: Representations of War in the Theatre and Festivals of the French Revolution," *European Review of History* 13 (2006): 203-227; Siegfried, "Naked History: The Rhetoric of Military Painting in Postrevolutionary France," *The Art Bulletin* 75 (1993): 235-258; Clarke, "'Valour Knows Neither Age nor Sex': The *Recueil des Actions Héroïques et Civiques* and the Representation of Courage in Revolutionary France," *War in History* 20 (2013): 50-75.

[4] Mark Hewitson, *Absolute War: Violence and Mass Warfare in the German Lands, 1792-1820* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Karen Hagemann, "German Heroes: The Cult of Death for the Fatherland in Nineteenth-Century Germany," in S. Dudink et al., eds., *Masculinities in Politics and War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 116-34; and Lucy Riall, "Martyr Cults in Nineteenth-Century Italy," *Journal of Modern History* 82 (2010): 255-287. Notably, the religious dimension of this cult of Republican martyrdom, its iconographic and linguistic debt to customary religious culture, is largely unexplored in this book.

[5] On the post-World War I medicalization of war veterans' experience, see, for example, Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain, and the Great War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Martina Salvante, "Italian Disabled Veterans between Experience and Representation," in Stephen McVeigh and Nicola Cooper, eds., *Men after War* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 111-130; and Heather R. Perry, *Recycling the Disabled: Army, Medicine, and Modernity in WWI Germany* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014)

[6] Readers can view the *Fastes* online at <https://archive.org/details/lesfastesdupeupl00gras/>.

[7] Claggett Wilson, *Runner Through the Barrage, Bois de Belleau, Château-Thierry Sector; His Arm Shot Away, His Mind Gone* (1919), Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C. For a discussion of Wilson's wartime work, see David Lubin, *Grand Illusions: American Art and the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

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