of over production. He wrote about the crisis of capitalism as the devaluation of money, not as the exploitation of the working class. There would be something fundamentally flawed in expecting Burroughs to provide his readers with a Marxist analysis of globalization in his novels. What he provides are cognitive maps of inner space. It is clear from his body of work that he viewed history as a prison. What he gives voice to in his novels is the moment when the imagination breaks with reality and takes the reader beyond the given. He leaves it up to his readers to take the next step.

Note

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Les Monuments aux Morts

Photo: Ken Balderson

Not *momuments de la guerre*, but *monuments aux morts*: I have only just learned that this is how you say 'war memorials,' in France. Monuments not to war, but to those who died because of war. Not just any dead, of course. Sometimes these monuments commemorate only soldiers killed in World War I, though usually the plaque attached to the stone has been altered to accommodate those from World War II, as well. Some monuments to that war have the names of the Deported attached, and those of Civil Victims: resistance fighters, citizens perished in bombing raids or reprisals. I discovered, in my researches, that it was only after 1918 that the names of ordinary soldiers, as opposed to those of officers,

were inscribed on war memorials: so numerous were French deaths caused by the "Great War," so dramatically did that war tear the fabric of ordinary social life and relations that countless towns and villages were driven to record in bronze or stone each man lost to them. Pattern books must have been published and distributed en masse: each commune would have chosen the particular shape and style of monument that best articulated its desires vis à vis its military dead.

I came to interest myself in the art and articulation of war memorials during a recent stay in France. I had, of course, seen such memorials during previous visits to different parts of the country, but had never paid very much attention to them, dully or flamboyantly generic as they seemed to be. It was only when I spent a month in a small village in the foothills of the Pyrenees that I responded to a *monument aux morts* as if it were, not a marker of fossilized public memory, but a work both of art and of living history. And it wasn't to the modest, rather abstract war memorial in the village of Brassempouy that I first responded, but to the dramatic, figurative memorials I encountered on day trips to the south. To, for example, the Val d'Ossau, and Bielle, a small village flanked by high cliffs and towered over by the *Pyrenées Atlantiques*. Through the village runs a river: on that cold, bright day in late spring its waters, charged with melting snow, rushed in a way that seemed theatrical, though it was 'only natural,' after all. Bielle's true theatre, I discovered, was to be found on the outskirts, near the information panel advising the visitor of various hiking trails and listing a few of the area's most common plants and animals. The church, beside which so many French war memorials are erected, was barely visible from this deserted spot, and so they had it to themselves, as if they were lovers, the man and woman on the monument.

It was the first war memorial I had seen in which a woman appeared as a woman and not some sexless angel or overblown Spirit of Glory, Liberty or Homeland. Because it was the first, and thus unexpected, it moved me in a way that that was conceptual as much as emotional. The woman sculpted here was a country woman, wearing no flimsy tunic or voluptuous veil, but sturdy shoes, a full, woven skirt, a shawl, and over her hair, a kerchief, signifying, I supposed, that she was a married woman. She was reaching up to put a laurel wreath on the head of the soldier who stood before her, a soldier kitted-up in puttees and tunic-coat and helmet. At first I thought the difference in their ages to be such that the woman must be the man's mother, but the longer I looked at the figures, the harder I found it to tell their ages, their relation to each other. Were they husband and wife? Mother and son? Or were they, perhaps, perfect strangers, brought together by the intimacy of loss: her love, his life? Walking round the statue, I could make out the flowers embroidered on the woman's shawl and, in a fold of her skirt, the sculptor's

signature: A. Jouveneault. The same sculptor who made similar *monuments aux morts* that I would discover in other Pyrennean towns, and at the casino town of Biarritz. Bronzed, life-sized figures–the valiant dead and their wives or mothers and sometimes, far more poignantly, only the grief-struck living. Bowed, elderly parents dragging their feet in clumsy sabots; bewildered children in their Sunday best, visiting the grave of a father they never knew or barely remembered; a young woman seated on the ground, her face in her hands, as she leans against the monument, in a pose of despair and sheer abjection.

I would go on to discover other kinds of sculpted war memorials during my stay in Brassempouy, in the market towns and larger villages dotting the département of Les Landes. Bravura sculptures featuring allegorical women of nightmare proportions, or scrawny cocks digging their spurs into the bellies of sprawling eagles. In the town closest to Brassempouy, I would see, each time I cycled to the market there, the statue of a soldier, striding out with flag hoisted high, the legend *Gloria Victoribus* in large gilt letters under his feet. And in another, far larger town, I saw a soldier swooning in the arms of a chaste young woman of the angelic orders; someone had taken a magic marker to the soldier's groin, supplying the equipment with which he might have engendered more young men to die for their *patrie*.. It seemed clear to me that there was a sharp line to be drawn between the kitsch of sentimentality, underscored as it was by blatantly militarist ideology, and the kind of simple, meticulous, almost gauche realism practiced by a Jouvenault in his attempt to find some adequate response to the need of those who had commissioned him to shape their grief.

And yet I didn't know quite what to make of the *monument aux morts* in Brassempouy, my adopted village. This memorial is perfectly Cartesian: a plinth surmounted by an obelisk topped by a simple cross. At first, I had registered it not so much as a disappointment as a nonentity: located next door to the church, it was usually obscured by the cars and vans parked in front of it. Even when the view was clear, the monument seemed nondescript, lacking the aesthetic interest and emotive power of so many of the war memorials I had found in the Pyrenees. I found myself wondering how to account for the restraint of Brassempouy's *monument aux morts*. Was it fiscal prudence, inherently austere aesthetics, cultural history of the most specialized and specific sort that led to this refusal to shout *Gloria Victoribus*,–Glory to the Victors!–or to hire an artist like Jouvenault to create a sculpture that would speak a more authentic, living language? And what did this signify now, some ninety years on from the War to End All Wars, in the opening years of a century dedicated by the Power-That-Is to "The War on Terror," a slogan glossed by Gore Vidal as 'perpetual war for perpetual peace'.

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Brassempouy lies at a modest elevation in a landscape of rolling hills, ivy-and-mistletoe-hung oaks, and the pollarded plane trees that seem to me as French as the *tricouleur.* Gascon is the dialect spoken in this section of Les Landes: on road signs you will find names like Hinx and Marpaps, Dax and Bax. The Romans built a camp at Brassempouy large enough to lodge a whole legion; a feudal castle rose on the ruins of the Roman camp, as well as a monastery built by an order called the Prémontrés, who ran it up until the Revolution. A cross between an octopus and a bloodsucker, the monastery is said to have worked the peasants so hard that they had no time to marry or even have a drink at the village tavern. They drudged for the greater profit of the Prémontré monks, who built them a church, and along with it, a road to the sea along which barrels of their famous *vin de claverie* made their way to thirsty Dutch merchants, among others. But the vineyards are long gone in Brassempouy, victims of a war waged by phylloxera, the galls left on the leaves and roots of grapevines by minute insects believed to originate in the eastern United States. Phylloxera nearly extinguished French winemaking in the late 1800s: would those freedom-fry patriots of two springs ago have realized, as they poured untold bottles of fine French wines into their gutters, that if it hadn't been for the grafting of French *Vitis vinifera* scions onto the pest-resistant *Vitis labruscana* rootstocks of America, they'd have been pouring out bottles of Perrier or Vichy water instead?

Brassempouy's current renown derives from a network of nearby caves in which, tens of thousands of years ago, the ancestors of today's villagers loved, fought, died, and made art. Not long after the village's vineyards were devoured by phylloxera, a miraculous find was made, quite by chance, in a cave called *la grotte du pape*; No fat lady with generic bulbhead, no Michelin-man fertility idol, but, sculpted from mammoth tusk, and all of thirty-six and a half millimetrès, the portrait of a woman–the first known representation, anywhere on earth, of a human head. She is either wearing a stylized hood or else has her long hair plaited in corn rows. There are traces of eyes, nose, a rounded chin, once painted, perhaps, on this face of a young girl not so far removed from a Piero della Francesca madonna. The original–too fragile, too precious to be exposed to the light of day–is locked away in Paris, in the museum of Saint-Germain; a replica of "La Dame a la Capuche' as she is called here, resides in the small, elegant museum at Brassempouy, alongside replicas of her fleshier sisters. In the garden behind the museum, up a flight of steps reminiscent of Mayan temples, three larger-than-lifesize replicas of the lady and two torsos from the period are mounted. By day, the village children play tag between them; at night, the statues are spectacularly spotlit, as are the tower and façade of Brassempouy's other treasure, the

twelfth-century church of Saint-Saturnin. It was rescued from the wrecker's ball at the eleventh hour by the same energetic mayor who found the funds to build the museum. The stone of the church has been returned its original honey colour; masons have repaired the damaged and replaced the ruined. And although the priest comes only once a month to say mass in Saint Saturnin, the church remains the living heart of communal memory, both cultural and historic, partly because of the role it plays vis à vis the *monument aux morts* erected beside it.

It was this mayor of Brassempouy, Monsieur Jacques Momasse, who invited us, one day in late May, to attend the ceremony at the war memorial. For Canadians, the proper weather for Remembrance Day is chill, grey, leaden with rain or sleet. So it did not feel strange for us to be remembering the dead of war on a day so cold that the leaves of the trees behind the memorial had refused to unfurl. They were carefully pollarded, those lime trees, and in their nakedness resembled nothing so much as an array of grotesquely amputated limbs. The past weeks' solid rain had made their stubs look miserably soft and swollen; in fact, the trees seemed to be drowning, for the sticky, yellow-brown soil anchoring their roots could not hold a drop more water. It was the same in the surrounding fields: birds swam on small lakes that had formed in the clayey earth where corn waited to be sown. For though much of Les Landes is pine forests planted in the eighteenth century to reclaim the region's vast malarial swamps, here in the Chalosse they grow the best corn in France, feeding it to the white, free-ranging ducks who become that dark and meaty jam which goes by the name of *confit de canard.* And on that wintry Saturday in May, not a few of the villagers assembled before the war memorial of Brassempouy may have been entertaining warm and savoury thoughts of the *confit de canard* they would enjoy at lunch, instead of meditating on the costs of war added up so strictly on a sober chunk of granite.

Standing in a crowd of villagers before the monument, I tried to really see what I had only glanced at and past in the previous weeks. I took in the martyr's palm, newly regilded, on the modest obelisk, and registered, for the first time, the names of four horrendous battles inscribed on the four corners of its base: Somme, Verdun, Marne, Champagne. I decided that certain elements of the ensemble must have been added to soften the starkness of the design: the low, rustic fence, made of concrete but moulded to look like wood, that marks off the monument; the padded pillow, with a military cross–a *croix de guerre*–at its centre, and placed before the list of names. Though made of concrete, the cushion provided the illusion that if you wished to kneel before those names, your knees would be spared the smack of bone on stony earth. From a booklet loaned to me by Monsieur Momasse, I knew that Brassempouy's monument had been inaugurated on May 28th, 1922 with a short speech

delivered by a twelve-year-old school girl to all those villagers whose sons, brothers, husbands and fathers had perished in those brutal battles of Verdun, Champagne, the Marne and the Somme. I had learned that, more than seventy years later, Jeanne Capdeville-Lannelongue was able to recite the speech she'd given, word for word:

> Fathers, mothers, wives, brothers and sisters of our dear disappeared, the children of Brassempouy respectfully salute you. All of us who have had the almost unhoped-for joy of finding once more all our dear ones after this long and terrible torment respect your pain that nothing can pacify. We promise you to honour all our lives the memory of those you mourn and whom we mourn with you but of whom we are proud.

The booklet recorded how, after the celebration of solemn vespers, at which two choirs directed by a former military chaplain, now a maker of wooden clogs performed, a cortege was formed by the assembled schoolchildren, members of the two self-help organizations in the village (St Lucie et St Antoine) the parents of the twenty-three dead, the Municipal Council, and various officials and clergy. The monument was blessed by the local Abbé, and then it was the turn of François Cerez, of the house of Pétré, a former *poilu* now a *mutilé de guerre* or war amputee, to call out the names of the dead. The mayor thanked the assembly for its generosity–the 5,320 francs raised by subscription, added to the 1000 francs voted by the Municipal Council, had served to pay the full cost of the monument. And finally, eight *pupilles de la nation* – war orphans – had laid down their sprays of flowers.

Eighty-two years later to the day and hour of that inauguration, Monsieur le Maire marched up to the war memorial, bearing a patriotic bouquet of crimson roses, white carnations, and blue irises. There was a deputy, too, wearing a képi, a black sash and carrying the *tricouleur*; it took a bare moment to lay the flowers, after which the mayor stepped up to the microphone to read out a message from the Minister of Former Combatants and Victims of the War. We were told that in all the communes of France, the same text was being read out at the same moment, a text pointing out the danger of using force instead of diplomacy to end disputes. Everyone, I thought, must be remembering the invasion of Iraq, launched little more than a year ago; everyone but the children who, as the mayor went on to read out each name engraved on the war memorial, chanted the words *mort pour la France*. From a sound system that had thundered throughout the ceremony, picking up random gusts of wind, came the Marseillaise, followed by a moment of silence, before rockets were fired to end the ceremony–rockets so loud that, even knowing they were coming, they made me jump out of my skin. And then we trooped, villagers and guests, to the community hall for a glass of wine and *pâté de chevreuil*, and talk of the weather: the fires

burning out of control in California, the rains drenching Europe, last summer's murderous heat wave. All of us dressed in our Sunday best, for this was a formal occasion, one tying past and present in a ribbon like the golden one around the martyr's palm darkening in the rain outside, on the solitary monument.

There is another place where Brassempouy remembers its war dead, I discovered, a place sheltered from rain and sun alike. Inside the Church of Saint Saturnin, in a glass case attached to the wall of the pews reserved for the men of the parish, appear the images of all but nine of those who perished in the two "great" wars of the twentieth-century: black and white photos against a blood-red ground. Twenty-six deaths, in all, from a village of some five hundred and fifty or so inhabitants; 26 men aged 19 to 43 years. There's a pamphlet giving the names of the parents of each soldier, his place and date of birth; the date, and if possible, the place of his death. Marriages, but not the names of children are recorded, as well as each soldier's rank and outfit. But for all the sparseness of the information tendered, there are stories hidden here: that of Jean Prosper Lalaude, for example, who survived the war only to die, aged twenty-nine, of wounds in Brassempouy, almost a year to the day after he married one Jeanne Duboscq. Paul Fondeviolle, aged 23, dead of wounds 5 days after the signing of the Armistice; Alfred Candessoussens, aged 25, killed 19 days after the declaration of war in 1914. Two brothers, Etienne and Fernand Thomas Ferdinand – named with what great hopes: Etienne, the elder, a married man, killed aged 35; Fernand a bachelor still at 32, *disparu*–vanished–*à Bois de Lauffée, 3 juin 1916*. Or the ones who died too young for any story at all – Gaston Polycarpe, who enlisted aged 18 and died three months before his twentieth birthday, in a hospital near Tarbes.

The pamhlet bravely offers stories that some might have preferred to forget: that of two men of Brassempouy killed, not by the Germans, but by their own countrymen–the *Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur* of Vichy France. One of the victims was a 32 year-old gendarme: born 2 years before the start of World War I and orphaned by the death of his father in that war, he was murdered a year before the end of World War II, leaving three children to be orphaned in their turn. The other victim commemorated by the booklet is one Bertil Ryberg, or to give him his full name, Bertil Pierre Ryberg de Monval, who travelled all the way from Argentina, where he'd been born to a Swedish father and a French mother, to meet his death in Damascus. Dark hair and eyes, dark, thick eyebrows, a large mouth and strong nose: at twenty, he looks as if he has still to grow into his features, to gain his full height. He doesn't look as if he believes he could ever die, this handsome boy in his officer's uniform, though his own father had died when his son was only five. Bertil, the booklet tells us, represented the hope of continuance for a branch "*sans*

posterité" of an old local family, the Lobit de Monval. He spent a pampered childhood with relations near Brassempouy, went to the local school and considered the village as his adopted home. In October 1940, with his mother and step-father, he joined De Gaulle's Free French in London, attending officer's school in Camberwell and going off as an officer cadet to fight in Syria. Awarded a "*croix de Guerre avec palmes,*".he was, of all the men of Brassempouy to be killed in two world wars, the only officer, this boy of 20. He was killed by "*les troupes du Levant restées fidèles au maréchal Pétain,*" French troops fighting the Gaullist and British forces. Bertil was one of 650 combatants of the Free French to die at the hands of his countrymen, but there is no mention, in the memorial booklet, of whether the deaths of members of the Vichy forces have been commemorated by any war memorial, or any 'roll of shame.'

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"In the end it was always a poem that ran through the mind–not a string of dates," writes Mavis Gallant in a story exploring the ruins of memory, public and historical as well as personal and private. In the pamphlet published seventy-two years after the dedication of Brassempouy's war memorial appear these lines of Charles Péguy who died, aged 41, in 1914:

> Que Dieu mette avec eux dans le juste plateau
> Ce qu'ils ont tant aimé, quelques grammes de terre,
> Un peu de cette vigne, un peu de ce coteau,
> Un peu de ce ravin sauvage et solitaire.
>
> May God grant them in their cramped plateau
> what they so dearly loved: a few grams of earth,
> a part of this vine, some of this hill,
> a bit of this wild and lonely ravine.

But on the *monument aux morts* at Brassempouy no verse, secular or sacred, is inscribed. This absence seems emphasized by the cover of the memorial booklet. It is dominated by a summery photo of the monument, a photo taken in such brilliant that the names of the dead, even the martyr's palm are scarcely visible against the stone; the rustic wooden fence, the comfortable cushion seem exactly what they only look to be. And yet, however illusionary this cover may have been, I vastly preferred it to that of a similar booklet dedicated to the 75th anniversary of the Armistice in the town of Saint-Germaine-en-Laye. A detail from a charcoal sketch shows an officer, his fist clenched round a grenade raised to the sky as he shouts encouragement to his men. One of them seems to be crouched behind him in fear and amazement, another, head bowed, appears resigned to his imminent death, and a third – a boy – has his back turned to us, but hoists his rifle high, ready to make the blind charge into those shell-tormented skies the artist has rendered as soiled clouds of poison gas or artillery fire. The booklet explained that its cover illustrates the heroism of one Jacques Pericard, on the Heights of the Meuse, at Bois-Brûlé. Having staggered back to his trench after a bout of heavy fighting, confronted by the bodies of his dead and wounded comrades-in-arms, he caught sight of the enemy advancing towards them. Brandishing a grenade, he uttered his 'sublime cry' *"DEBOUT LES MORTS!"* to lead his exhausted comrades back into battle.

In the *gloria victoribus* genre of war monuments I have seen in France, no grenade is ever brandished; to my knowledge, no one has ever caused *Get Up You Dead* ! to be inscribed on any war memorial. In Canada we have been lulled with the verse of John Mc Rae to think of the dead as safely prone, though burdened with the task of constant surveillance of their surviving comrades. Prone they may be, and asleep, but their eyes are wide open under all that earth. Only in Wilfred Owen's poem "Strange Meeting" is the trench dug between enemies at last filled up, so that all may lie down in the limitless peace which is their only possible reward for, or rescue from, the horror whose victims and instruments they have become. Perhaps the martyr's palm on the monument at Brassempouy, a few of its staggered fronds bent, its new gold so bright it smarts, is poetry enough. The martyr's palm, the terse mention in Brassempouy's booklet on the first world war of "*la tuerie déclenché le 2 août 1914*"–the killing unleashed August 2nd, 1914–and the trenchantly colloquial words which end the preface: "*Plus jamais ça, la Guerre!*" For no matter how often we have heard the promise of "No more war, or never again, war" (just as soon, that is, as this current war, whatever and wherever it may be, is over and won) it sounds infinitely better to our hearts, as well as our ears, than "Gloria Victoribus."

And if, as Anne Carson reminds us, the very origins of what we in the west know as poetry lie in the brief, haunting epitaphs inscribed on ancient Greek headstones by the poet Simonides, and if memory is, as Carson has so memorably stated, an event pulled from the dark by language, then surely the *monuments aux morts* have no need of allegorical sculpture nor patriotic verse to fulfill their function: the very names of the dead are this kind of poetry, as are the historically-specific representations of the killed and their mourners–a uniformed poilu , a head-scarved widow. They, and the contexts provided by collective memory as manifested in a booklet, a pamphlet, an array of photographs–simple headshots–that give us the lived reality of the victims of those mass killings we dignify by that little word, war.