

## A banquet for Alphonse Lemerre, the poets' publisher

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### Article abstract

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# A BANQUET FOR ALPHONSE LEMERRE, THE POETS' PUBLISHER

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ABSTRACT

The *Banquet offert à M. Alphonse Lemerre* is a document associated with an event which took place at the Palais d'Orsay on the 24 January 1902 in order to celebrate the promotion of the publisher Lemerre to the rank of Officier in the Légion d'honneur. The document is printed with great care in order to display the taste and the art of the publishing house of Lemerre, known for its editions of contemporary poets (above all, the Parnassians), as well as the poets of the Pléiade. In addition, it reproduces the speeches and toasts given by Lemerre and his guests José-Maria de Heredia, André Theuriot and other poets. The analysis of the discourse proffered by Lemerre in his speech, as well as that of his guests, will help us to understand his role as publisher, which, under pressure by the opposition of symbolic and material values, became more and more contradictory as the century wore on. Above all, the article will show how the *Banquet* highlights the ambivalence at the heart of Lemerre's posture as an artistic, honest and paternal publisher of poets.

RÉSUMÉ

Le 24 janvier 1902, des dizaines de poètes assistent à un banquet donné au Palais d'Orsay en l'honneur de l'éditeur Alphonse Lemerre, officier de la Légion d'honneur. Quelque temps plus tard, paraît le *Banquet offert à M. Alphonse Lemerre*, qui salue l'événement. La plaquette est imprimée avec un grand soin, dans l'esprit de la maison Lemerre, reconnue pour ses éditions des poètes parnassiens et des auteurs de la Pléiade. On y retrouve les discours et les toasts prononcés par Lemerre lui-même, par José-Maria de Heredia et d'autres. Cet article propose une analyse de ces discours et explore les diverses facettes de la posture éditoriale de Lemerre, toujours en équilibre entre la valeur symbolique et la valeur matérielle. Il met ainsi à l'épreuve l'image artistique et paternelle du plus grand éditeur de poésie du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle.

Alphonse Lemerre, the successful publisher and friend to the Parnassians, was banqueted at least twice during his career, first in 1884 upon being inducted as Chevalier in the Légion d'honneur<sup>1</sup>. On January 24 1902, when he rose to the rank of Officier in that same institution, one hundred and forty two of Lemerre's friends and colleagues celebrated his achievement with a banquet at the Palais d'Orsay. This event was commemorated in a document, *Le Banquet offert à M. Alphonse Lemerre*, which was printed with all the taste and art for which his enterprise was famous, and reproduces the speeches, toasts and poems pronounced on that date in honour of the "publisher of poets". A remarkable source for literary and book historians, *Le Banquet offert à M. Alphonse Lemerre* contributes to our understanding of the role of the publisher in the field of literature in the *fin-de-siècle* period. Indeed, as Marie-Pier Luneau points out in the conclusion to a study of the "fabrication of the author", the relation between authors and publishers "*est infiniment plus complexe qu'il n'y paraît*" and "*l'histoire des représentations d'éditeurs reste à écrire*"<sup>2</sup>. As a contribution to such a history, this article will analyze the discourse of the speeches given by Alphonse Lemerre and his guests at the January 1902 banquet in order to evaluate his role in the literary field and his posture as publisher. Presented by his peers and himself as a lover of books, an honest man, the patron of poets and the devotee of Art, Lemerre will be shown to be nevertheless pressured by the opposing tensions of symbolic values of art and poetry and the material values of the book trade.

## Literary banquets of the *Belle Époque*

The *fin-de-siècle* period in literary Paris was marked by a series of banquets. Whether the extravagant luncheon organized by Charpentier and Fasquelle to fête Zola's completion of his monumental series of novels *Les Rougon-Macquart*, the famous dinners of the literary review *La Plume*, which produced Mallarmé's oft-quoted toast<sup>3</sup>, or the 1895 dinner held at the Café Vachette in honour of the Belgian poet Émile Verhaeren, the banquet was so pervasive as a form of literary celebration and auto-glorification<sup>4</sup> that one history of the period is titled *The Banquet Years*<sup>5</sup>. Schuh, in examining the example of the "*dîners du Plume*", proposes that "*les banquets littéraires peuvent [...] être étudiés comme des cristallisations provisoires de l'espace littéraire, cristallisations qui fonctionnent aussi bien sur un plan social que sur un plan imaginaire*"<sup>6</sup>. Manifestations that echoed in their form and substance the make-up of the Parisian literary field, these banquets also produced a variety of texts and

discourse delivered both at the scene of the event in the form of speeches, toasts and occasional verse, and afterwards in articles, reviews, letters and memoirs. Destined to be published, literary banquets thus formed “*des vitrines de l'état de la littérature contemporaine*”<sup>7</sup>.

Most literary banquets of the *Belle Époque* were aimed at celebrating an author or a literary movement. Martin-Fugier points out that though at these fêtes, the “princely” writer was still sacred, the forces of the publishing world hovered in the sidelines: “[...] à peine couronné, le prince vacille déjà. Il y avait là du symbole et du publicitaire. Le ‘cycle éditorial’ n’est pas loin<sup>8</sup>.” This was due to the fact that it was most often the publisher (or an editor or editorial board of a literary review) who was the driving organizational and financial force behind literary banquets. By organizing a banquet in honour of his authors, the publisher also celebrated and consecrated his own work. For example, the banquet of the *Rougon-Macquart*, this “*célébration réciproque du couple Charpentier-Zola*”, was also aimed at the exaltation of “*des pratiques éditoriales modernes, fondées sur la reconnaissance juridique des droits propres à chaque partie*”<sup>9</sup>. At what point then did the publisher become the focal point of his own banquet? Some publishers of the era did enjoy banquets in their honour; for example, Ernest Flammarion and Eugène Fasquelle were both given separate banquets when accepted into the Légion d’honneur in 1896<sup>10</sup>. An examination of one of these celebrations, rarer and less commented upon than banquets for authors, will help us to understand the position of the publisher in the literary field of *fin-de-siècle* Paris, as well as the position of Alphonse Lemerre himself.

### **Alphonse Lemerre, “l’éditeur des poètes”**

Before attempting to pin down the significance of the 1902 banquet in terms of his professional career, it is useful to situate the publisher Alphonse Lemerre in his time. The son of a Norman farmer, Lemerre was born in Camisy en Manche in 1838. He became a booksellers’ clerk at the age of sixteen and worked at the religious bookshop run by Percepied in the Passage Choiseul near the beginning of the 1860s. On 20 June 1862, Lemerre received his certificate of professional aptitude and four days later, he took over Percepied’s business<sup>11</sup>. By the end of the nineteenth century, the humble bookshop bearing his name became an expanded and prosperous business. Above all, Lemerre was known as a publisher of fine

books and the patron of the Parnassian poets. He died a wealthy man on 15 October 1912, leaving behind his bookstore, several residential buildings as well as two warehouses, a printing enterprise, and some additional buildings under the name of his wife, who originally operated a dress shop across from his bookstore<sup>12</sup>. Lemerre's real estate holdings extended outside Paris: he famously kept a luxurious villa that formerly belonged to the artist Corot in the town of Ville-d'Avray, where he also served as mayor<sup>13</sup>. Lemerre's financial success is notable, especially for a publisher who specialized in the genre of poetry that, after the heyday of Romanticism, became less and less lucrative as the century wore on.

Larousse's *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* offers a portrait of the publisher at his height, explaining:

*M. Lemerre n'a point hésité, en un temps où la plupart des éditeurs se sont attachés à résoudre le difficile problème de la librairie à bon marché, à réagir contre le courant et à ne donner que des éditions remarquables par la netteté de la typographie, la beauté des caractères et du papier. Sa tentative [...] a eu un plein succès. Ses livres ont pris place dans la bibliothèque des amateurs de beaux livres, des gens du goût, et plusieurs de ses éditions sont déjà épuisées<sup>14</sup>.*

According to Larousse, Lemerre, in addition to reacting against the rise of “*la littérature industrielle*”, rendered “*de véritables services aux lettres contemporaines en mettant en pleine lumière les jeunes poètes du temps [...] et en publiant leurs poésies dans des livres d'une remarquable beauté typographique faits pour la séduction des yeux<sup>15</sup>*”. By the close of the Second Empire, his boutique in the Passage Choiseul became a favoured haunt of the young Parnassian poets. Catulle Mendès, in his memoir *La légende du Parnasse contemporain*, recalls how Lemerre was the only publisher of the day who encouraged young contemporary poets:

*Car nous y venions tous les jours, avec fierté. Songez donc! À vingt ans, nous, pauvres diables de rimeurs, qu'aucun éditeur alors n'eût accueillis, nous qui n'osions pas passer devant la boutique de Michel Lévy [...] nous à qui la maison Hachette apparaissait dans un rêve comme un paradis chimérique [...], nous, Parnassiens, nous avions un libraire à nous, tout à fait à nous! Notre joie se traduisait en joyeuses causeries dans la chère échoppe hospitalière, et je ne sais pas de lieu au monde où il ait été échangé de plus ardentes espérances et récité plus de vers<sup>16</sup>.*

Lemerre first had a hand in the publication of the short lived journal *L'Art*, and then, after devoting himself to the production of fine editions of the French poets of the Pléiade, he also published the collection of contemporary poetry, *Le Parnasse contemporain*, which appeared in three volumes (1866, 1871, and 1876). As Mortelette explains in his history of the Parnassian movement, Lemerre “[a pris] rapidement conscience que le refus systématique des autres éditeurs pouvait rendre le marché de la poésie lucratif. L’amitié de poètes qui avaient son âge, celle des maîtres reconnus comme Gautier et Banville, [...] [renforçaient] son ambition de devenir l’éditeur attiré des poètes inédits<sup>17</sup>”. After the relative success of the *Parnasse contemporain*, many of the poets who contributed their verse to the collection saw their books of poetry published by Lemerre<sup>18</sup>. However, though he was known foremost as the publisher of poets, Lemerre also published a variety of contemporary novelists, including the Goncourt brothers, Marcel Prévost and Paul Bourget.

Though the nostalgic memoirs of such Parnassians as Mendès and Coppée<sup>19</sup> contribute to the image of Lemerre as a proud and honest patron of the arts, other contemporary figures questioned whether he was truly the patriarchal father of poets or rather a greedy businessman who became rich by profiting on the dreams of young, idealistic (and often moneyed) poets. For example, as early as 1877, one of his friends, Heredia, described him in a letter to a third party as “*avare*<sup>20</sup>”. At the end of the century, these reservations regarding the financial side of Lemerre’s publishing business broke out in a series of legal woes. The crux of the issue was that though Lemerre published his editions of the Pléiade poets and other French classics using his own funds, his personal rule was to only publish contemporary poets *à compte d’auteur*<sup>21</sup>. Thus, poets paid Lemerre to see their verse printed in fine Elzevirian typeface and bound in yellow covers. Many literary historians continue to support the idea that Lemerre became rich on the backs of poets desperate to be published:

*la fortune de Lemerre [...] était fondée sur l’édition à compte d’auteur [...]. L’entreprise réussit d’autant mieux que certains Parnassiens étaient des jeunes gens de bonne famille, relativement fortunés, disposés à payer pour se donner le plaisir de se voir imprimés et peu soucieux des conditions financières de l’opération<sup>22</sup>.*

It is notable that Lemerre’s tendency to publish books of poetry *à compte d’auteur* rather than using his own funds is highlighted in this manner, for he was neither the first nor the last literary publisher to do so in nineteenth

century France. Further research must be carried out in order to determine whether Lemerre's fortune was indeed based on such strategies, or rather whether Lemerre was simply a keen businessman who knew how to invest his money well (as his real estate purchases, mentioned by Mollier, make evident).

Another complicating matter was the fact of Lemerre's amicable and indeed patron-like relations with his authors. Since he considered himself their friend or father rather than their publisher, and since they were, in the end, servants of the muse rather than of the marketplace, Lemerre often did not provide his authors with the usual documentation listing sales and profits. This lack of accountability was one of the contributing factors to the series of trials launched by the successful author Paul Bourget against Lemerre beginning in the mid 1890s. Emile Zola notably addressed the scandal and the issue of the relations between authors and publishers in his article "*Auteurs et éditeurs*", which appeared in the 13 June 1896 issue of *Le Figaro*. Zola sums up the key issue at the heart of the trial:

*En somme, c'est toujours au fond l'éternelle question du contrôle, la preuve qu'un éditeur devrait faire à l'auteur du nombre exact d'exemplaires qu'il tire et met en vente. Il n'y a pas d'autre querelle. M. Bourget, après tant d'autres, soupçonnant son éditeur de l'avoir trompé sur les chiffres des tirages, a exigé de connaître ces chiffres avec les preuves décisives à l'appui. Et, s'il a traduit M. Lemerre devant le tribunal de commerce, c'est parce que celui-ci a refusé de lui donner ces preuves, et c'est pour que le tribunal le condamne à les lui donner<sup>23</sup>.*

In the end, according to Zola, the core problem in the relation between authors and publishers of the time period, and specifically between Bourget and Lemerre, was this very idea "*de l'éditeur bienfaiteur, de l'éditeur mécène, à qui l'auteur doit tout*<sup>24</sup>".

Even at the time of his death, Lemerre's obituaries never failed to mention his series of legal troubles in the 1890s alongside his triumphs as a publisher and his proud devotion to the Parnassians<sup>25</sup>. According to *Le Figaro*:

*sous des dehors un peu brusques, sous des emportements qui ne duraient que quelques instants, Alphonse Lemerre cachait une excellente nature. Il eut des procès. Quel éditeur n'a pas eu le sien? En ces circonstances, le Normand reprenait le dessus. Il ne*

*transigeait jamais, il plaidait jusqu'au bout, dut-il perdre son procès*<sup>26</sup>.

We will see that these marks that tarnished the legendary portrait of Lemerre, the benign publisher of poets, and which demonstrate the essentially double nature of the publisher<sup>27</sup>, continued to haunt him even during the speeches pronounced in his honour at the Banquet of January 1902.

### ***Le Banquet Lemerre***

For our purposes, the most fascinating aspect of the document printed in tandem with the banquet is above all the speeches given by the publisher and by his guests. The literary banquet, a place of collegiality and celebration, nevertheless signifies, “*dans les discours ou dans les silences, les discordes virtuelles qu'il se donne pour mission de dénier*<sup>28</sup>”. Though such speeches often follow fixed rhetorical rules and repeat common motifs, they reveal much in terms of how the individual speakers situated themselves and their peers in the literary field. The banquet opens with a speech given by Lemerre and follows with a fable-like tale spun by the poet José-Maria Heredia<sup>29</sup>, a nostalgic remembrance offered by the novelist André Theuriet<sup>30</sup>, two toasts by the dramatist Paul Hervieu<sup>31</sup> and the poet and novelist André Lemoyne<sup>32</sup>, a poem by Pierre Bouchard<sup>33</sup>, and finally a lengthy invocation to the muses by the poet Frédéric Bataille<sup>34</sup>. Through their discourse, Lemerre and his guests participate in the construction and reification of his image: the bibliophile devoted to printing books of material beauty, the honest Norman, the beneficent father of a community of poets, and the patron of Art who triumphs over the Bourgeois values of commerce and prose.

### **The Bibliophile**

Alphonse Lemerre made his début as a publisher by undertaking the ambitious project of the re-release of the poets of the Pléiade, to be printed according to the style and typography of hand press books. His devotion to the printing arts was well known and commented upon in articles and obituaries, and also expounded upon at length in his monograph, *Le livre du bibliophile*<sup>35</sup>, in which he explains the aesthetic and technical rules guiding the



printing, illustration, typography, and ornamentation of books. The main objective of the manual, published near the beginning of Lemerre's career, was to reveal, as he states in the preface: “[...] *les points principaux de l'art auquel nous nous sommes adonné tout entier, et de déterminer les conditions que doit, à notre avis, nécessairement remplir une édition pour être digne d'être appréciée et estimée des véritables connaisseurs*”<sup>36</sup>.” The document associated with the January 1902 banquet also adopts the characteristic typography and printing style of Lemerre, including his preferred “elzévirien” typeface<sup>37</sup> and laid paper. In his speech, Lemerre mirrors this material attention to detail by indicating his love of books and of the techniques of fine printing.

In the second section of his own opening speech to the banquet, Lemerre expounds on his nostalgia for his early years as a young publisher who desired to produce a new, authentic edition of the poets of the Pléiade. He dates this desire to “*remettre en odeur de sainteté les grands lyriques du xvi<sup>e</sup> siècle*” to 1865<sup>38</sup>. Lemerre notes that this project helped attract young poets and men of letters to his boutique in the Passage Choiseul: “*Cette idée, simple en soi, amena chez moi nombre de bibliophiles et quelques poètes admirateurs de Ronsard. De Ricard et Boutier (un ami de Verlaine) furent les premiers*”<sup>39</sup>.” Lemerre explains that his initial project and the gathering of poets and writers it inspired gave birth to the short lived journal *L'Art*. Thus, Lemerre frames his earliest acts as a publisher as originating in an instinct to produce fine editions of quality classical works, for the love of the art of printing rather than in search of material gain.

A publisher emerging at the heart of the nineteenth century, an era of massive technological changes in the printing industry, Lemerre adopted certain practices that harkened back to the golden age of the hand press, including the use of a mark, in his case, the famous “*Bêcheur*” or “*l'homme à la bêche*” that could be found on the cover and title page of virtually every work he published<sup>40</sup>. In his fairy-tale like speech that followed that of Lemerre's, the poet Heredia, a bibliophile himself, weaves a fable around this Man with the Spade, associating Lemerre with the figure, and describing how Lemerre's publishing efforts helped to reseed and fertilize the exhausted literary field. This fable will figure below in our discussion of Lemerre as the defender of Art, but interestingly, Heredia also compares Lemerre's mark to famous printers' marks of the Renaissance. According to Heredia, in libraries of the future, books bearing Lemerre's “*Bêcheur*” will be shelved

*“auprès de l’ancre aldine, du lys rouge des Juntas, du griffon de Gryphius, / De la galère d’or de Galiot du Pré, / Ou du satyre ailé de Simon de Colines<sup>41</sup>”*. Heredia continues this series of associations by mentioning *“l’olivier des illustres Estienne”*, *“l’ange de Langelier”* and the *“Saint Claude de Nicolas Buon”* while naming Joachim du Bellay and Pierre de Ronsard, the famous poets published by these illustrious printers. Thus, Heredia sets Lemerre in the constellation of great printers, while at the same time inscribing the poets published by Lemerre (himself included), beside two of the brightest stars of the Pléiade.

Lemerre’s devotion to the printing arts, as evinced in both his own speech and that of Heredia, could be seen as a strategy to set his productions apart from the masses of shoddily printed books that characterized his day. However, by highlighting his devotion to canonical authors and to traditional printing practices, rather than his dealings with living writers and the modern publishing market, both Heredia and Lemerre distance the publisher from the more mundane and commercial aspects of the book market.

## **An Honest Man**

While Heredia couches his speech in the nebulous language of the fable and makes no mention of the specific context of the banquet, the guest André Theuriet, a novelist, opens his speech by indicating that the honour placed on Lemerre is due to *“la décision ministérielle qui vous confère la croix d’Officier”* and that *“[c]’est une croix vaillamment gagnée! Pendant de nombreuses années, vous vous êtes montré un libraire avisé, laborieux, actif, un éditeur d’une impeccable correction; mais surtout vous avez aimé la littérature<sup>42</sup>”*. If Lemerre should be honoured for his assiduousness, his work, and his devotion to literature that is at once crowned by public interest as well as official marks of distinction (Theuriet mentions the fact that Lemerre has published many of the current Academicians), the novelist also highlights his publisher’s value as an honest man, by underlining the *“cœur chaud”*, the *“commerce si sûr”*, and the *“loyauté à toute épreuve”*, of this *“libraire dont presque tous les auteurs sont devenus des amis<sup>43</sup>”*. Theuriet mentions Lemerre’s roots in Normandy, focusing, in a paean that leans towards stereotype, on the positive character traits of the Norman people: *“la finesse de l’intelligence et l’entêtement pour tout ce qui est juste et bon.”* He concludes his speech in a rousing testimony to Lemerre’s personal qualities: *“[...] j’ai toujours trouvé en vous un esprit fier, un caractère solidement trempé, un*

*compagnon prompt à partir en guerre pour défendre son droit, mais prompt également à rendre service à tous ; un homme enfin dont la parole vaut de l'or, et dont le cœur aussi est d'or*<sup>44</sup>.”

These same attempts to validate Lemerre's business practices may be seen in both the speech of Paul Hervieu and the sonnet of Bouchaud. Hervieu describes the official distinction bestowed by the Legion of Honour as a compensation for “*une vaillante carrière de travail, de probité, de constance envers vos amitiés, de fidèle amour du livre*<sup>45</sup>”. In his sonnet, Bouchaud describes Lemerre being crowned by the Muse with a “*suprême fleuron de la Gloire impolluée*”<sup>46</sup>. This fleuron, which recalls the typographical ornamentation so valued by Lemerre, is that of Glory, which will soar “*triomphante au-dessus de l'affront*<sup>47</sup>”. Lemerre's official award will erase any questions regarding his past for, as Bouchaud addresses the publisher, “*ton noble Présent proclame ton Passé*<sup>48</sup>”. Such references to affronts to Lemerre's honour, erased by the Muse and by Glory, as well as the repetition of qualities linked to good business practices and cordial relations with authors, become particularly significant when considering Lemerre's recent legal battles with Bourget. Theuriet and Hervieu's speeches and Bouchaud's poem read more like defense testimonials than celebrations of Lemerre's character.

## The “Mayor” of poets

The new era of modern publishing was supposed to erase the former patronage system on which writers and poets depended in the Ancien Régime<sup>49</sup>. However, throughout the speeches and toasts given in his honour, Lemerre is presented as a patron-like figure, both paternal and benevolent, to a community of poets. Lemerre himself spends much of his speech fondly reminiscing the glory days when the young Parnassian poets gathered at his shop in the Passage Choiseul, and he ends with the wish that his boutique “*soit toujours la maison des Poètes*<sup>50</sup>”.

This tone of nostalgia also permeates the speech given by the aged novelist André Theuriet, who begins his speech by recalling his first meeting with Lemerre at the publisher's boutique in January 1867. Theuriet's reminiscence of his entry into the Temple of the Muses closely recalls literary narratives that helped form the myth of the writer at the beginning of the century, such as Lucien de Rubempré's arrival in Paris in Balzac's *Les*

*Illusions Perdues*. But whereas Balzac's protagonist is first rejected and then swindled by his publisher, Lemerre, in Theuriet's story, is the epitome of warmth and generosity. According to Theuriet, the day when he first met his future publisher was dreary, "*il pleuvait à verse; il faisait un temps à ne pas mettre un poète à la porte*<sup>51</sup>". The young poet, accompanied by a friend, makes his way through the streets of Paris and has just been "*durement éconduit par trois ou quatre successifs éditeurs*<sup>52</sup>". As Theuriet explains: "*À cette époque lointaine, les éditeurs n'étaient pas tendres pour les rimeurs*". The desperate young poet is heartened by the "*bon sourire*" of welcome offered by "*ce jeune libraire doux aux poètes*<sup>53</sup>", Lemerre. Just as Theuriet the young poet is welcomed through the threshold of the publisher's shop, so does his first book of poetry receive "*une hospitalité princière: un beau papier, caractères elzéviriens, en-têtes, fleurons et culs-de-lampes, enfin tout le luxe que peut rêver un auteur pour ses débuts*<sup>54</sup>". By means of typographical consecration, Lemerre elevates the verse of young poets while warmly welcoming them into his establishment, and the wider realm of the literary field.

The shop in the passage Choiseul is not the only seat of this paternal publisher of poets. The ode of Frédéric Bataille opens with a classic invocation to the Muse, depicted as flying to Lemerre's villa in Ville-d'Avray, "*pour mieux honorer le citoyen, son maître*<sup>55</sup>". In the poem, it is the poetic Muse who celebrates the publisher, for "*[l]es poètes, ce soir ont régélé*" Lemerre. Bataille extends the honours to "*les prosateurs*" as well as "*les bons porte-lyre*", who have offered this dinner of victory to Lemerre, who is not only the finest publisher of poets, but also the "*roi des éditeurs / Qui les lance au succès et les mène à la gloire*<sup>56</sup>". In Bataille's hyperbolic verse, Lemerre even becomes a Christ-like figure, as the poets and novelists, crowned by the Muse and banqueting Lemerre, are also in communion "*autour de leur Mécène*<sup>57</sup>". The ode concludes with another invocation to the Muse that highlights this image of Lemerre as the benevolent leader of a literary community:

*Muse, porte la croix d'officier à Lemerre!  
A toi ta part d'honneur, bonne Ville-d'Avray!  
Ceci n'est point un conte et le fait est très vrai :  
Les poètes, ce soir, ont décoré ton maire*<sup>58</sup>!

Bataille's poem presents a dichotomy between rich novelists and poor poets that is perpetuated in this literary community, but also balanced out by the

benevolence of the publisher by pointing out that in fact, “*les romanciers cossus ont mis la fête en train / Et prêté maint louis aux rimeurs dans la dèche*”. However, the poor poets, unable to contribute to the banquet, will be able to render their dues to the novelists for “*l’homme à la bêche [Lemerre]<sup>59</sup> / Leur gagnera des prix au palais Mazarin<sup>60</sup>!*” The success of these poets is due to the influence of their publisher, Lemerre. This publisher’s guarantee of the livelihood of the poor poets plays out on another level. Bataille presents a long list of glorious authors from France’s past whose spirits will congregate to salute the achievement of Lemerre. Such authors were literally present at the banquet, for their spirit infuses the cakes whose scent perfumes “*la salle du cénacle*”. In fact, according to a footnote, “*les gâteaux jaunes du banquet avaient la forme de livres édités par Alphonse Lemerre et en portaient les titres<sup>61</sup>*”. Just as living poets subsist on the graces of their publisher, at his banquet they feed on simulacra of the books that echo the real products that assured the fortune of Lemerre. As mayor of the poet’s city, Lemerre guarantees their physical, symbolic and literary livelihood.

## Money and the “Temple of Art”

Throughout their speeches, both Lemerre and his guests of honour continually elaborate a dichotomy that pits the representatives of Art, Poetry and Artists against the powers of Money, Prose and the Bourgeoisie (“*Les Philistins*”). This desire to hold up poetry as superior to prose is repeated by novelists present at the banquet. Despite having recently been nominated to one of the chairs of the Forty Immortals of the French Academy, Paul Hervieu opens his toast by identifying himself as a “simple prosateur” who raises his glass “*en l’honneur de l’éditeur des poètes*”. Hervieu, in toasting Lemerre, states that “*la famille de lettres*” rejoices in the award proffered to Lemerre. It should be noted that throughout the banquet, and even if guests like Hervieu make brief reference to Lemerre’s activities as publisher, he is saluted by the field of letters for his devotion to literature. Even though several individuals drawn from the field of publishing were present at the banquet, including Charles Beyle, Édouard Champion, and Charles Delagrave, their toasts and speeches (if they spoke at all) are not reproduced in the accompanying document, and no reference is made to them or the activity of publishing itself, except in the highly nostalgic speech by Heredia<sup>62</sup>. Though Heredia compares Lemerre’s mark to that of the printers of yore, the fairy-tale like tone of Heredia’s speech also serves to distance

Lemerre from the material and business-like aspects of his profession. At the heart of Heredia's speech lies the image of the Bêcheur, or man with the spade, that forms Lemerre's printer's mark. In Heredia's speech, Lemerre, as befits his Norman agricultural roots, becomes a "*bon Bêcheur*", whose spadework serves to revive the field of poetry, "*pour lors en jachère, presque en friche, et paraissait à jamais épuisé*"<sup>63</sup>. With "*les bras solides [et la] volonté tenace*", the Bêcheur "*planta sa bêche dans le champ, l'enfonça profondément et, déracinant les mauvaises herbes, retourna, féconda la terre et la fit toute refleurir*"<sup>64</sup>. Thus, the work of the publisher becomes an earthy affair, but one far removed from the realities of the field of publishing.

The guests invited to speak at Lemerre's banquet all contribute to this rhetoric that opposes art and money and that seeks to distance the publisher from his actual role as a businessman. However, the most polemical statements are provided by the publisher himself. In the introductory portion of his speech, Lemerre thanks the government for the honour he has received and inverses this official consecration by symbolically sharing it with the authors he has published. While saluting his "*chers amis*", Lemerre also names the Minister of Commerce, M. Millerand, who, in awarding him with the Cross of the Officer, "*a donc voulu donner aux lettres une marque de sympathie*". He states that he owes his good fortune to those writers and authors assembled in his honour: "*Ce témoignage d'estime, c'est à vous tous que je le dois.*" And it is not Commerce that is thereby distinguished, but, according to Lemerre, "*la Poésie qui vient d'être glorifiée dans ma personne, et quand je dis la Poésie, je dis aussi la Prose, mais la prose comme on la parle dans ma maison, comme la parlent les Flaubert et les Daudet, les Paul Hervieu et les Marcel Prévost*"<sup>65</sup>. Lemerre is honoured by a representative of commerce for having been an exemplary publisher, but rather than highlighting his own business activities and the resulting wealth and good fortune, Lemerre underlines his involvement in the field of literature and above all, in the most lofty realm of poetry. By distinguishing the works of fiction that he has published, namely that his authors produce prose as it is written by Flaubert and company, Lemerre also seeks to elevate his novelists above the more mundane producers in the field of literature of the day.

Lemerre concludes his speech by describing his shop as the threshold of the new Parnassus and counts himself as an exponent of the literary movement by again recalling the opposition of Art against the values of the

bourgeoisie. He notes that the goal of the Parnassians “*était ridicule pour les Philistins, pour les Bourgeois, mais nullement ridicule pour nous, qui avions le culte de l’Art, le culte de la Poésie, le culte du Beau, et qui savions rester impassibles devant les attaques des envieux et des méchants*”<sup>66</sup>. Lemerre continues to count himself amongst the Parnassians by describing their attitude of exclusivity and idealism: “*Et cette adoration du Beau, ce respect absolu de la forme, cette horreur dans l’expression, d’une part; cet orgueil, si vous voulez, de l’autre, ont fait notre force*”<sup>67</sup>. His publishing house, that was once “*la petite maison dont on se moquait*”, is now the house that furnishes “*l’Académie en lui donnant ses meilleurs prosateurs et ses meilleurs poètes*”. He exhorts his guests: “[...] *vivons donc dans l’Art, et pour l’Art*”, and ends with an anecdote of Gambetta, who<sup>68</sup> at a dinner at Ville-d’Avray, had celebrated the authors Coppée et Sully as the inhabitants of “*un Temple, le Temple de l’Art*”. Lemerre states that he enjoyed this great happiness, “*le bonheur d’être le Portier du Temple de l’Art*”. Thus, Lemerre subsumes himself into the Parnassian movement and identifies with the purest goals of the movement. Each section of his speech repeats the opposition between art and money, artist and bourgeois, poetry and prose. However, though he strips his career as publisher of any taint of mercantile values, he sets himself up as the gatekeeper of a temple that leads not only to the realm of art and poetry, but also to the most coveted and institutionalized form of literary recognition: the French Academy. After examining the unpublished correspondence of Lemerre, as well as the obituaries written after his death, it becomes evident that this plea for Art above all was not a rhetorical expression. In fact, by 1902, his son Désiré had already assumed direction of the family business. Lemerre’s speech pronounced at his banquet becomes thus a testament and a defense of artistic and literary values.

## Conclusion

Many questions surrounding the banquet itself, as well as Lemerre’s career in general, remain unanswered. However, I hope to have presented some preliminary conclusions on how “*les institutions aussi anodines que ces banquets participent donc activement à la configuration de l’espace littéraire*” and to the formation and reification of the posture of the publisher<sup>69</sup>. By examining the speeches pronounced by Lemerre and his guests, we see that they achieve the three objectives common to literary banquets as identified by Schuh: representation, cohesion and auto-glorification. The speeches also establish

a distinct representation of a publisher, protector of a constellation of poets, mayor of Ville-d'Avray as well as of a community of poets. Lemerre, as well as the “*simple prosateurs*” Theuriet and Hervieu and the “*poètes inspirés*” led by Heredia, all participate in the celebration of a publisher who, through his books with yellow covers, helped consecrate a generation of poets and writers and therein became the modern “patron” of Poets.

The poet, as a literary figure, is often perceived as been isolated in his own ivory tower; it seems that during his banquet, Lemerre, publisher of poets, is similarly isolated, removed far from his contemporary context and lost in nostalgia for times long past. This separation is paralleled by the tension between money and literature that arise in the speeches pronounced at his banquet, a tension that, to this day, continues to plague relations between authors and publishers<sup>70</sup>. Honoured by the Minister of Commerce, known for his keen “Norman” sense of business and his financial successes, Lemerre and his guests, choose to highlight his literary role as the publisher of poets rather than his pecuniary success. The shadow of recent legal trials and public feuds with authors colours the festivities, in the same manner in which they marked the public’s perception of Lemerre. Even the description of his banquet echoes this disconnect and tension — there are no descriptions of the décor, no menu is given, and many of the names pronounced by the guests were those of writers long past or not present at the event. The single material detail remains that of the golden cakes in form of books published by Lemerre: the publisher celebrates his achievement by serving his literary product as dessert at his own banquet; he feeds on literature that calls itself pure and immaterial. His guests, including the poor poets (both real and metaphorical), dine on their own creation. At the close of his career, the publisher thus casts himself as a paternal patron and provider, rather than a man of business.



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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Lemerre's friends and colleagues also organized a banquet for him in 1884, when he was first admitted as Chevalier in the Legion of Honour. Although it appears that on that occasion, Lemerre's publishing house did not issue a document like the one produced in 1902, the 1884 banquet was covered in the press, notably in *Le Gil Blas*, in a review titled "Le Banquet des Poètes" (Monday 17 November 1884), which is also excerpted in Lescure's biography of Coppée: M. de Lescure, *François Coppée. L'homme, la vie et l'œuvre* (Paris: Alphonse Lemerre, 1889).

<sup>2</sup> "is infinitely more complex than it appears to be"; "the history of the representations of publishers remains to be written" [my translation]. Marie-Pier Luneau, "Se dire écrivain. Conclusion," *La fabrication de l'auteur* (Québec: Éditions Nota bene, 2010), 516.

<sup>3</sup> See Pascal Durand, *Mallarmé. Du sens des formes au sens des formalités* (Paris: Seuil, 2008), 229.

<sup>4</sup> Jean-Louis Cabanès, "Les banquets littéraires: pompes et circonstances," *Romantisme: revue du dix-neuvième siècle* 137 (2007): 61-79.

<sup>5</sup> Roger Shattuck, *The Banquet Years: the arts in France, 1885-1918: Alfred Jarry, Henri Rousseau, Erik Satie, Guillaume Apollinaire* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1958).

<sup>6</sup> "literary banquets may [...] be studied as provisory crystallizations of the literary space that function on a social as well as on an imaginary level" [my translation]. Julien Schuh, "Les dîners de la Plume," *Romantisme: revue du dix-neuvième siècle* 137 (2007): 83.

<sup>7</sup> "window displays of the state of contemporary literature" [my translation]. Schuh, "Les dîners de la Plume," 84.

<sup>8</sup> "... only recently crowned, the prince already wavered. The realms of the symbol and of publicity were ever present. The 'publishing cycle' is never far off" [my translation].

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Christophe Prochasson, *Les années électriques (1880-1910)* (Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 1991), 173.

<sup>9</sup> This “reciprocal celebration of the Charpentier-Zola couple” was also aimed at the exaltation of “modern publishing practices, founded on the legal recognition of the rights of each party” [my translation]. Cabanès, “Les banquets littéraires,” 65.

<sup>10</sup> Ernest Flammarion and Eugène Fasquelle were both fêted with a banquet on the occasion of their admission to the Legion of Honour on June 10 1896. A banquet took place on 22 June at the Eiffel Tower in honour of Flammarion. Fasquelle’s banquet was held on 19 June at the restaurant Cubat (25 avenue des Champs-Élysées), and appears to have been organized by a semi-official committee. The journalist Daniel Riche was secretary of the committee, and the banquet itself was the subject of an article in *Le Figaro*, which noted: “Émile Zola a bu à Georges Charpentier, si présent malgré son absence.” (“Émile Zola drank to the health of Georges Charpentier, so present despite his absence” [my translation]). Further details regarding these two banquets are contained in the well-documented correspondence of Émile Zola, notably in the following letters: 335\* À Ernest Flammarion [Médan, 21 juin 1896] and 336\* À Daniel Riche, Médan, 21 juin 1896. Émile Zola, *Correspondance*. Éditée sous la direction de B. H. Bakker (Montréal/Paris: Presses de l’Université de Montréal/Éditions du CNRS, 1978-1995).

<sup>11</sup> Louis-Xavier de Ricard, *Petits mémoires d’un Parnassien*, in Adolphe Racot, *Les Parnassiens*. Introductions et commentaires de M. Pakenham (Paris: Minard, 1967), 50.

<sup>12</sup> Jean-Yves Mollier, *L’Argent et les lettres: Histoire du capitalisme d’édition 1880-1920* (Paris: Fayard, 1988), 453-4.

<sup>13</sup> Mollier, *L’Argent et les lettres*, 453.

<sup>14</sup> “Mr. Lemerre has never hesitated, in a time where the majority of publishers are concerned with solving the difficult problem of the market for cheap books, to go against the grain and to only print volumes that are remarkable for the neatness of the typography, the beauty of the type and of the paper. His attempt [...] has met with great success. His books have earned their place in the libraries of enthusiasts of fine volumes, men of taste, and many of his editions have already sold out” [my translation]. Pierre Larousse, “Alphonse Lemerre,” *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, Administration du grand Dictionnaire universel, 1866-1877), <http://gallica.bnf.fr/>.

<sup>15</sup> According to Larousse, Lemerre, in addition to reacting against the rise of “industrial literature,” rendered “veritable services to contemporary letters by shining a light on the young poets of the day [...] and by publishing their poems in visually seductive books of remarkable typographical beauty” [my translation]. Larousse, *op. cit.*

<sup>16</sup> “[...] For we proudly went there every day. Imagine! At twenty years of age, we, poor devils of rhymers, yet to be welcomed by any publisher, we who did not dare pass by the shop of Michel Lévy [...] we, for whom the house of Hachette appeared in dreams like a chimerical paradise [...], we Parnassians, we had a publisher all to ourselves, who belonged to us! Our joy was transformed into joyous discussions in the cherished, hospitable shop, and I know of no other place on earth where more ardent hopes were

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shared and more poems recited” [my translation]. Catulle Mendès, *La légende du Parnasse contemporain* (Bruxelles: Auguste Brancart, éditeur, 1884), 241-2.

<sup>17</sup> Lemerre “rapidly took stock of the fact that the systematic refusal by other publishers could possibly make the market for poetry lucrative. His friendships with poets of the same age as him, with recognized masters like Gautier and Banville, [...] re-enforced his ambition to become the official publisher of yet unpublished poets” [my translation]. Yann Mortelette, *Histoire du Parnasse* (Paris: Fayard, 2005), 189.

<sup>18</sup> Mortelette, *Histoire du Parnasse*, 197.

<sup>19</sup> Coppée’s memories of Lemerre’s shop in the Passage Choiseul are similar in tone and in detail to those of Mendès. See François Coppée, *Causeries – faites en 1879, dans la Salle des Conférences du boulevard des Capucines, Souvenirs d’un Parisien* (Paris : L’Harmattan, 1993), 150-152.

<sup>20</sup> José-Maria de Heredia, [*Lettre à Sainte-Hilaire*], Paris, le 27 novembre 1877, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 15070, f. 158.

<sup>21</sup> In a letter written to a young Émile Zola seeking a publisher, Lemerre explains: “J’accepterais volontiers la proposition que vous me faites si mon parti-pris n’était de ne faire aucune publication d’auteurs contemporains à mes frais.” (“I would voluntarily accept the proposal you make if it were not for the fact that my rule is to never publish any contemporary author using my own funds” [my translation]). Alphonse Lemerre, [*Lettre à Émile Zola*], Paris, le 21 juin 1868, Collection Dr. F. Émile-Zola, Archives Zola, University of Toronto (copie).

<sup>22</sup> “Lemerre’s fortune [...] was founded on publishing paid for by authors. [...] His business was made even more successful by the fact that certain Parnassians were young men of good families, relatively well-off, and inclined to pay to have the pleasure of seeing their work printed, and who were rarely bothered with the financial details of the operation” [my translation]. Edgard Pich, “*Lettres de Leconte de Lisle à Alphonse Lemerre (Commentaire et notes)*,” *Bulletin des études parnassiens* III (1983): 43.

<sup>23</sup> “In sum, it is at bottom the eternal question of control, the proof that a publisher must provide to his author of the exact number of copies that he prints and sells. There is no other issue at stake. Mr. Bourget, like so many before him, suspected his publisher of having misled him on the number of volumes printed, and thus asked to receive the exact number as well as material proof. And, if he brought Mr. Lemerre before the Tribunal of Commerce, it is because the latter refused to give him any proof, and it is for this same reason that the publisher was forced to give it to him” [my translation]. Émile Zola, “*Auteurs et Éditeurs*,” in *Œuvres complètes, Tome 17, Paris fin de siècle: Les Trois Villes* (2). (Paris: Nouveau Monde, 1897), 443-448.

<sup>24</sup> The idea of “the publisher as benefactor, the patron publisher, to whom the author owes everything” [my translation]. *Auteurs et Éditeurs*,” 448.

<sup>25</sup> As one obituary states: “Alphonse Lemerre devint aussi un grand éditeur de romans. Il eut Anatole France, il eut Paul Bourget: — et, avec ces deux écrivains, il eut en outre des démêlés qui ont fait quelque bruit dans la république des lettres.” (“Alphonse Lemerre

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also became a successful publisher of novels. He had Anatole France, he had Bourget: — and, with these two writers, he also had difficulties that caused some echoes in the republic of letters” [my translation]). Louis Chevreuse, “Alphonse Lemerre,” *Le Figaro* (16 October 1912): 3.

<sup>26</sup> “Under a slightly brusque exterior, under blustering that only lasted a few instants, Alphonse Lemerre concealed an excellent nature. He had his trials. What publisher has not? In these circumstances, the Norman gained the upper hand. He never backed down; he fought until the end, even if he had to lose his case” [my translation]. Tout-Paris, “*Bloc-Notes Parisien. L’éditeur des Poètes. Mort de M. Alphonse Lemerre,*” *Le Gaulois* (16 October 1912): 1.

<sup>27</sup> See Pierre Bourdieu, “*Une révolution conservatrice dans l’édition,*” *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 126-7 (1999): 3-28 as well as Pascal Durand and Anthony Glinoe, *Naissance de l’éditeur: l’édition à l’âge romantique*. Préface d’Hubert Nyssen (Liège: Les Impressions nouvelles, 2008).

<sup>28</sup> “in speeches or in silences, the virtual discords that is charged with denying” [my translation]. Cabanès, “Les banquets littéraires,” 64.

<sup>29</sup> During this period, Heredia, whose literary production circulated more often in manuscript form within Parisian literary circles than in print, was known for his single collection of poems, *Les Trophées*, published in a luxurious edition by Lemerre in 1893. Heredia occupied the administrative post of librarian of the Arsenal, and his wit and “*verve,*” made him a recurrent figure in the salons, dinners and banquets of the day. Anne Martin-Fugier, *Les salons de la III<sup>e</sup> République. Art, littérature, politique* (Paris: Perrin, 2003), 115.

<sup>30</sup> A prolific poet, novelist and dramatist, Theuriet (1833-1907) was of a similar age, financial and social standing to Lemerre. He was mayor of the town, Bourg-la-Reine, where he had purchased a large house in 1893. As well as being Officer of the Legion of Honour, he ascended to the seat of Alexandre Dumas fils in the Académie française in 1896.

<sup>31</sup> Hervieu (1857-1912) was a dramatist and the author of psychological novels in the vein of Paul Bourget, which afforded him some success. He frequented many of the notable literary salons of the Belle Époque, and was known as one of the closest friends of the novelist and critic Octave Mirbeau, with whom he supported the cause of Dreyfus. In 1900, he succeeded Édouard Pailleron to the 12<sup>th</sup> seat of the French Academy. *Larousse du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, publié sous la direction de Paul Augé (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1928), 3: 1019. According to the *Grand Larousse encyclopédique en dix volumes* (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1964), “toutes [s]es pièces ont bien vite vieilli.”

<sup>32</sup> Lemoyne (1847-1907) began as a typographer and then worked as the head of publicity for the firm of Didot until 1877, after which he became the librarian of the École des arts décoratifs. He was one of the poets derided in Rimbaud’s “*Lettre du voyant*”. *Larousse du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, publié sous la direction de Paul Augé (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1928) 4: 399.

<sup>33</sup> Bouchaud (Pierre-Marie-Antoine-Raphaël de), was a poet and art critic (1865-1925). *Larousse du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, publié sous la direction de Paul Augé (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1928), 1: 793.

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<sup>34</sup> Born in Besançon, Bataille (1850-1946) was admitted to the Société des gens de lettres in 1881 and named professor at the Lycée Michelet in Vanves in 1884. A mycologist, Bataille was the vice-president of the Société mycologique de France and also was awarded a prize by the Academy of Sciences as well as the orders of Officier de l'Instruction publique and Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur. *Dictionnaire de biographie française*, sous la direction de M. Prevost et Roman d'Amat (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1951), 5: 798.

<sup>35</sup>[*Alphonse Lemerre et Anatole France*], *Le livre du Bibliophile* (Paris: Alphonse Lemerre, 1874). The cited text was originally printed in italics.

<sup>36</sup> “[...] the principle points of the art to which we have devoted ourselves entirely, and to determine the conditions that must, in our opinion, be necessarily fulfilled by an edition in order to be worthy of being appreciated and esteemed by true connoisseurs” [my translation]. *Ibid.*, n. p.

<sup>37</sup> For a history of the typeface, see René Ponot, *Louis Perrin & l'énigme des Augustaux*, préface de Fernand Baudin (Paris: Éditions des Cendres, 1998).

<sup>38</sup>To “re-consecrate the great lyrical poets of the sixteenth century” [my translation]. *Banquet offert à M. Alphonse Lemerre à l'occasion de sa promotion au grade d'Officier dans l'Ordre de la Légion d'Honneur, le 24 janvier, 1902* (Paris: Alphonse Lemerre, 1902), n. p.

<sup>39</sup> “This idea, simple in itself, drew a number of bibliophiles to me, as well as poets who admired Ronsard. De Ricard and Boutier (a friend of Verlaine) were the first” [my translation]. *Banquet offert à M. Alphonse Lemerre*, n. p.

<sup>40</sup> The two versions of Lemerre's mark are compared and their possible origins examined in the article by Franck Stückemann, “*Die grabende Hoffnung: Verlagseblem und Verlagsprogramm des Hauses Alphonse Lemerre*,” *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift* 48 (1998): 305-316. Stückemann indicates that one version of the mark was designed by Félix Bracquemond (1833-1914), and the other by the artist and art critic Louis Browne (1829-1890).

<sup>41</sup> “next to the Aldine anchor, the red lily of the Juntas, the griffon of Gryphius, the golden ship of Galiot du Pré, or the winged satyr of Simon de Colines” [my translation]. Heredia makes reference to a verse fragment of one of his own unfinished sonnets. See Jean-Paul Goujon, “*José Maria de Heredia et Pierre Louÿs, d'après leur Correspondance inédite*,” *Le Champ littéraire 1860-1890: études offertes à Michael Pakenham* (Amsterdam, Atlanta: Rodopi, 1996), 239-248.

<sup>42</sup> “the ministerial decision that granted you the Officer's cross”; “it is a valiantly won cross! For many years, you have shown yourself to be an astute, hard working and active bookseller, a publisher of impeccable correctness; but above all, you have loved literature” [my translation]. *Banquet offert à M. Alphonse Lemerre*, n. p.

<sup>43</sup> The “warm heart”, the “assured commerce”, and the “loyalty at any cost”, of this “bookseller, whose authors have, with few exceptions, become his friends” [my translation]. *Banquet offert à M. Alphonse Lemerre*, n. p.

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<sup>44</sup> “the finesse of his intelligence and his stubbornness in [defending] all that is just and good”; “[...] I have always found in you a proud spirit, a solidly formed character, a comrade who is eager to march to battle to defend his rights but equally eager to help others; finally, a man whose word is gold, and whose heart is also of gold” [my translation]. *Banquet offert à M. Alphonse Lemerre*, n. p.

<sup>45</sup> “a valiant career of work, probity and constancy in your friendships, of loyal love of the book” [my translation]. *Banquet offert à M. Alphonse Lemerre*, n. p.

<sup>46</sup> “the supreme fleuron of unpolluted Glory” [my translation]. *Banquet offert à M. Alphonse Lemerre*, n. p.

<sup>47</sup> “... will soar triumphantly above any affront” [my translation]. *Banquet offert à M. Alphonse Lemerre*, n. p.

<sup>48</sup> “[y]our noble present proclaims your past” [my translation]. *Banquet offert à M. Alphonse Lemerre*, n. p.

<sup>49</sup> See Alain Viala, *Naissance de l'écrivain. Sociologie de la littérature à l'âge classique* (Paris: Minuit, 1985).

<sup>50</sup> “will always be the house of poets” [my translation]. *Banquet offert à M. Alphonse Lemerre*, n. p.

<sup>51</sup> “it was pouring rain, it was not the kind of weather to show a poet out one's door” [my translation]. *Banquet offert à M. Alphonse Lemerre*, n. p.

<sup>52</sup> “rudely sent on his way by three or four successive publishers” [my translation]. *Banquet offert à M. Alphonse Lemerre*, n. p.

<sup>53</sup> “in those days, publishers were unkind towards rhymers”; “warm smile”; “this young bookseller [who was] always gentle to poets” [my translation]. *Banquet offert à M. Alphonse Lemerre*, n. p.

<sup>54</sup> “a princely welcome: fine paper, Elzevirian typefaces, headings, vignettes and cul-de-lampes, in all, as much luxury that any author could dream of for his début” [my translation]. *Banquet offert à M. Alphonse Lemerre*, n. p.

<sup>55</sup> “in order to better honour the citizen, its mayor” [my translation]. *Banquet offert à M. Alphonse Lemerre*, n. p.

<sup>56</sup> “the poets, this evening have regaled”; “prose writers”; “good bearers of the lyre”; “king of publishers/ Who launches them into success and leads them to glory” [my translation]. *Banquet offert à M. Alphonse Lemerre*, n. p.

<sup>57</sup> “around their Patron” [my translation]. *Banquet offert à M. Alphonse Lemerre*, n. p.

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<sup>58</sup> “Muse, carry the officer’s cross to Lemerre! / to you your piece of glory, good Ville-d’Avray! / This is no tale and the fact is quite true: / The poets, this eve, have awarded your mayor” [my translation]. *Banquet offert à M. Alphonse Lemerre*, n. p.

<sup>59</sup>The name “*L’homme qui bêche*” or “*l’homme à la bêche*” would continue to be applied to Lemerre even up until 1965, see P. Dresse, “*La fin de l’homme qui bêche ou le Parnasse au pylon*,” *Le Thyrs* (1965): 349-352.

<sup>60</sup> “well off novelists have funded the party / And lent many gold coins to the poor rhymers”; “the man with the spade / will win prizes for them at the Mazarin palace” [my translation]. *Banquet offert à M. Alphonse Lemerre*, n. p.

<sup>61</sup> “the yellow cakes [served] at the banquet were formed in the shape of the books published by Lemerre, and bore their titles” [my translation]. *Banquet offert à M. Alphonse Lemerre*, n. p.

<sup>62</sup> The analysis of the list of guests of the banquet (which is included in the original document), is in some aspects unusual. The banquet was attended by a mixture of artistic, literary and political notabilities (artists, poets, authors, critics and some politicians), but also surprisingly by a number of Orientalist scholars and medical doctors. The majority of attendees were authors or poets who had been published by Lemerre.

<sup>63</sup> “until then lying fallow, almost left to waste, and seemingly exhausted for all time” [my translation]. *Banquet offert à M. Alphonse Lemerre*, n. p.

<sup>64</sup> “solid arms and tenacious will”; “planted his spade in the field, dug in deeply and uprooted the bad weeds, turned over the soil, fertilized the earth and made it flower again” [my translation]. *Banquet offert à M. Alphonse Lemerre*, n. p.

<sup>65</sup> “wished to give a sign of sympathy to letters”; “this mark of esteem, it is to you that I owe it”; “Poetry has been glorified in my person, and when I say Poetry, I also mean Prose, but prose as it is spoken in my house, as spoken by [authors like] Flaubert and the Daudet, Paul Hervieu and Marcel Prévost” [my translation]. *Banquet offert à M. Alphonse Lemerre*, n. p.

<sup>66</sup> “was ridiculous to Philistines, to the Bourgeois, but in no way ridiculous for us, for we had the cult of Art, the cult of Poetry, the cult of Beauty, and we knew how to remain impassible in the face of the attacks of the envious and the evil” [my translation]. *Banquet offert à M. Alphonse Lemerre*, n. p.

<sup>67</sup> “And this adoration of Beauty, this absolute respect for form, this awe in expression, on one hand; this pride, if you will, on the other, made us strong” [my translation]. *Banquet offert à M. Alphonse Lemerre*, n. p.

<sup>68</sup> By mentioning Gambetta, Lemerre makes reference to his own fervent Republicanism. According to Mollier, “Ami personnel de Gambetta, [Lemerre avait] droit à tous les honneurs et la République [l’a nommé] Officier d’Académie en 1878, Chevalier de la Légion d’honneur en 1884 et, pour couronner le tout, il [a reçu] le mérite agricole en 1902, sans doute pour récompenser la vignette de ses couvertures – un homme portant une bêche! – et sa devise – *Fac et spera...*” (“A personal friend of Gambetta, Lemerre was open to all honours and the Republic named him Officer of the Academy in 1878, Knight of the Legion of Honour in 1884, and to top it off, he received the award of agricultural

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merit in 1902, no doubt to honour the vignette on the covers of his books – a man with a spade – and his device – *Fac et spera...*” [my translation]. Mollier, , *L’Argent et les lettres*, 454.

<sup>69</sup> “institutions as [seemingly] banal as these banquets thus actively participate in the configuration of the literary space” [my translation]. Schuh, “Les dîners de *la Plume*,” 97.

<sup>70</sup> In her analysis of the discourse of the contemporary Quebecois author and publisher Jacques Godbout, Luneau examines how to this day, “D’un côté, il y a l’écriture et la pureté, de l’autre, la publication et la logique marchande” (“On one hand, there is writing and purity, on the other, publication and the logic of the market” [my translation]). Marie-Pier Luneau, “*De la culpabilité d’être marchand : duplicité de l’auteur-éditeur. L’exemple de Jacques Godbout*,” *Figures de l’éditeur*, sous la direction de Bertrand Legendre et Christian Robin (Paris: Nouveau Monde, 2005), 65.

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