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Dorgelès, Roland

By [Laurence Campa](#)

Lécavelé, *Roland* (Roland Dorgelès)

French Writer

Born 15 June 1885 in Amiens, France

Died 18 March 1973 in Paris, France

Roland Dorgelès is the author of the pacifist novel *Wooden Crosses* (1919), a great classic of French war literature. Although based on his personal experience, he was convinced that fiction could be an outlet to express the truth.

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During the War

Roland Dorgelès (1885-1973) was a figure of the Montmartre bohemian scene who became known before the war as a journalist and columnist. Declared unfit for service in 1907, he enlisted in August 1914, became a [machine gunner](#) in the 39th [infantry](#) regiment in September and fought in the Laon (Aisne) and Neuville Saint-Vaast (Nord) sectors. He never stopped writing, however, and sent his articles to the daily paper *L'Intransigeant*. He joined the air force in the autumn of 1915, but suffered a flight accident in July 1916. After becoming an instructor, he delved into his personal notes and wrote *Wooden Crosses*. He began to write for the *Canard enchaîné* in 1917 and became friends with [Henri Barbusse](#) (1873-1935) and [Paul Vaillant-Couturier](#) (1892-1937).

After the War

Wooden Crosses was published in 1919 and was a strong contender for the Prix Goncourt that year. Although shortened by the [censors](#), the book was immediately acclaimed by the public, which appreciated its [pacifism](#), humanity, as well as its witty originality. The author used the cut and censored passages to write another book in a similar vein, *Le Cabaret de la belle femme* (1919). In 1929, after becoming President of the *Association des Ecrivains Combattants* (Association of Soldier-Writers), he was strongly criticized by [Jean Norton Cru \(1879-1949\)](#) for his literary inventions. Supported by [comrades](#) such as journalist [Jean Galtier-Boissière \(1891-1966\)](#) and historian [Jules Isaac \(1877-1963\)](#), Dorgelès stood his ground and maintained that [literature](#) is capable of conveying the truth about war. Film director [Raymond Bernard \(1891-1977\)](#) adapted *Wooden Crosses* for the big screen in 1931.^[1] Throughout his writing career, Dorgelès never ceased to express his solidarity with war veterans and proclaim his loyalty to the dead (*Bleu horizon*, 1949).

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Notes

1. ↑ Bernard, Raymond : Les Croix de bois [1932], 113 mn, noir et blanc, DVD zone 1, New York, The Criterion Collection, 2007.

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Citation

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