

Twentieth-Century
Literary Criticism

TCLC 268

Volume 268

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

**Criticism of the
Works of Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,
Short Story Writers, and Other Creative Writers
Who Lived between 1900 and 1999,
from the First Published Critical
Appraisals to Current Evaluations**



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**Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism, Vol.
268**

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Preface

Since its inception *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC) has been purchased and used by some 10,000 school, public, and college or university libraries. TCLC has covered more than 1000 authors, representing over 60 nationalities and nearly 50,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical response to twentieth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as TCLC. In the words of one reviewer, “there is nothing comparable available.” TCLC “is a gold mine of information—dates, pseudonyms, biographical information, and criticism from books and periodicals—which many librarians would have difficulty assembling on their own.”

Scope of the Series

TCLC is designed to serve as an introduction to authors who died between 1900 and 1999 and to the most significant interpretations of these author's works. Volumes published from 1978 through 1999 included authors who died between 1900 and 1960. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of the period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. In organizing and reprinting the vast amount of critical material written on these authors, TCLC helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in TCLC presents a comprehensive survey on an author's career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of TCLC is devoted to literary topics. These topics widen the focus of the series from the individual authors to such broader subjects as literary movements, prominent themes in twentieth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

TCLC is designed as a companion series to Gale's *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, (CLC) which reprints commentary on authors who died after 1999. Because of the different time periods under consideration, there is no duplication of material between CLC and TCLC.

Organization of the Book

A TCLC entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym is listed in the author heading and the author's actual name is given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the name of its author.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose

works have been translated into English, the English-language version of the title follows in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication. Lists of **Representative Works** by different authors appear with topic entries.

- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it originally appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included. Criticism in topic entries is arranged chronologically under a variety of subheadings to facilitate the study of different aspects of the topic.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

Indexes

A **Cumulative Author Index** lists all of the authors that appear in a wide variety of reference sources published by Gale, including *TCLC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

A **Cumulative Topic Index** lists the literary themes and topics treated in *TCLC* as well as other Literature Criticism series.

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An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *TCLC*. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, dramas, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Gale also produces a paperbound edition of the *TCLC* cumulative title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

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Kuester, Martin. "Myth and Postmodernist Turn in Canadian Short Fiction: Sheila Watson, 'Antigone' (1959)." In *The Canadian Short Story: Interpretations*, edited by Reginald M. Nischik, pp. 163-74. Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2007. Reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. Vol. 206, edited by Thomas J. Schoenberg and Lawrence J. Trudeau, 227-32. Detroit: Gale, 2008. The examples below follow recommendations for preparing a works cited list set forth in the Modern Language Association of America's *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7th ed. (New York: MLA, 2009. Print); the first example pertains to material drawn from periodicals, the second to material reprinted from books:

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Paul Claudel

1868-1955

(Full name Paul Louis Charles Marie Claudel) French playwright, poet, and essayist.

The following entry presents criticism of Claudel's literary work from 1985 to 2009. For further information on Claudel's life and career, see *TCLC*, Volumes 2 and 10.

INTRODUCTION

Regarded as the prominent Catholic dramatist of the twentieth century, Claudel was a controversial literary figure often censured for his right-wing political views and strident, orthodox religious beliefs. In his plays, he explores a variety of thorny yet universal religious questions and dilemmas and was distinctive for his masterful lyrical and innovative style. Complex and difficult to stage, his work has often been compared to Bertolt Brecht, Eugene Ionesco, and Samuel Beckett, although his focus on Catholic themes and his ultra-conservative worldview have led to his relative obscurity outside of his native France. Recent revivals of his work in English-speaking countries have sparked some reappraisals of his work and a renewed appreciation of his poetic and dramatic achievements.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Claudel was born in August 6, 1868, in the village of Villeneuve-sur-Fère in northern France. His father, Louis-Prosper, was a government bureaucrat, and Claudel was educated in the cities and villages where his father was posted. As a disaffected teenager, he expressed a strong agnosticism toward organized religion, especially the Roman Catholicism that pervaded nineteenth-century France, and also rejected the dominant philosophies of determinism and positivism. He was profoundly influenced by Arthur Rimbaud's *Les Illuminations* and the work of the Symbolists, who abhorred the materialism of modern life. At the age of eighteen, however, he had a profound spiritual experience that would change his life. On Christmas Eve in 1886 he went to vespers at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris and had a religious epiphany that led to his conversion to Catholicism in 1890. He later wrote, "In an instant, my heart was touched, and I believed." This profound religious experience spurred a spiritual crisis during which Claudel sought to reconcile his intuitive religious beliefs and his intellectual doubts about religion, aspects of which

would manifest itself in his later work. This personal struggle is evident in his first play, *Tête d'Or* (1890), which explores the spiritual journey of an adventurer. From 1893 to 1935 Claudel served in the French diplomatic corps, including a posting as the French ambassador to the United States. In 1900 Claudel believed that he had been called to a religious vocation and endeavored to give up his life of privilege and his burgeoning literary career to enter a Benedictine monastery. He was rejected, however, and returned to his diplomatic and literary career, writing several major works during this time. A passionate but failed love affair with a married woman, Rosalie Vetch, provides the inspiration for several of his key works, including *Partage de midi* (1906; *Break of Noon*), *Cinq grandes odes* (1913; *Five Great Odes*), and *Le Soulier de satins* (1929; *The Satin Slipper*). In 1936 he retired from his diplomatic career, and decided to focus his literary career on writing texts to accompany the works of a number of composers and meditations on scriptural texts. His right-wing views, however, garnered much controversy and vitriol in many certain circles. For example, in 1940 his poem "Paroles au Marechal" ("Words to the Marshal") was addressed to Marshal Philippe Pétain, the French general who served as the head of state during the Nazi occupation. Claudel's poem led to charges of collaboration with the Nazis and approval of authoritarianism. He was also accused of anti-Semitism, although the evidence shows that he had been a vocal critic of anti-Semitic laws in Vichy France and had only contempt for the Nazi occupation and policies. He died on February 23, 1955.

MAJOR WORKS

Claudel was a prolific author who wrote plays, poetry, essays, and religious commentary. He is best-known for his plays, many of which have historical settings and reject French poetic convention by utilizing long, unrhymed lines of verse known as the *verset claudelien*. Thematically, his work explores God's infinite love of humanity, the integral role of faith in life, the individual's struggle to understand and accept God's plan, the clash between the spirit and flesh, and the human desire for salvation. *L'annonce faite à Marie* (1892; *The Tidings Brought to Mary*) follows the story of two sisters, Violaine and Mara. The elder, more spiritual Violaine willingly becomes infected with leprosy out of pity for Pierre de Craon, an architect who tries to rape her in the prologue to the play. Violaine's actions doom her marriage to the family's strapping young neighbor,

Jacques, who then marries Violaine's younger and more practical sister, Mara. Critics praise the play's insightful exploration of themes of sacrifice, love, and sanctification. In one of his best-known plays, *Break of Noon*, a charming and mysterious woman traveling with her husband on an ocean liner heading east meets not only her former lover, but also the man who will become her life-long love. Based on Claudel's relationship with the married Rosalie Vetch, the playwright refused to stage the play until 1948, decades after it was written. Set during the Renaissance in Spain, *The Satin Slipper* chronicles the love between a virtuous widow and a devoted adventurer torn between his romantic and physical longing for her and his religious zeal, which leads him on a proselytizing mission to the New World. *Le livre de Christophe Colomb* (1933; *The Book of Christopher Columbus*) traces the explorer's journey to the New World, portraying Columbus as a Catholic missionary who zealously hopes to convert the people of the Americas to Catholicism and unite them in the Church.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

During his lifetime, critics recognized Claudel's poetic brilliance and sharp intellect while bristling at his provocative themes, subject matter, and political and religious views. Influential American literary critic George Steiner ranked him as one of the best dramatists of the twentieth century. Jacques Lacan maintained that the tragic vision expressed in his work surpassed that of the ancient Greeks. Other critics acknowledged his lyrical mastery and compelling exploration of the mysteries of faith and the human condition. Despite the strong praise for his dramatic and poetic works, Claudel's often controversial right-wing political and conservative religious views strongly influenced his legacy and literary reputation. Critics accused him of being a fascist, an authoritarian, an imperialist, a misogynist, and an Islamaphobe. His support for leaders of Vichy France spurred accusations of anti-Semitism and collaboration with the Nazi regime. Although many of the charges were proven false, his reputation still suffers today. Claudel's works were also derided by some critics as didactic, anachronistic, and too difficult to stage effectively. After his death in 1955, Claudel's critical reputation continued to fluctuate in France; in the English-speaking world, his work has fallen into relative obscurity and he is rarely mentioned in pantheon of major twentieth-century literary figures.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Tete-d'Or (play) 1890
La jeune fille Violaine [*The Tidings Brought to Mary*] (play) 1892; revised and published as *L'annonce faite à Marie*, 1912

La ville [*The City*] (play) 1893
L'échange (play) 1901
Le repos du septieme jour (play) 1901
Partage de midi [*Break of Noon*] (play) 1906
L'otage [*The Hostage*] (play) 1911
Art poetique [*Poetic Art*] (essays) 1913
Cinq grandes odes [*Five Great Odes*] (poetry) 1913
Connaissance de l'Est [*The East I Know*] (poetry) 1913
Protee (play) 1914
Trois poemes de guerre [*Three Poems of the War*] (poetry) 1915
La pere humilie [*The Humiliation of the Father*] (play) 1920
Poemes de guerre, 1914-1916 (poetry) 1922
La parabole du festin (play) 1926
Le Soulier de satin, ou le pire n'est pas toujours sur [*The Satin Slipper; or, The Worst Is Not the Surest*] (play) 1929
Le livre de Christoph Colomb [*The Book of Christopher Columbus*] (play) 1933
Cent phrases pour éventails [*A Hundred Movements for a Fan*] (poetry) 1942
L'oeil ecoute [*The Eye Listens*] (essays) 1946
Conversations sur Jean Racine (essays) 1956
Oeuvre poetique (poetry) 1957
Mes idees sur le theatre [*Claudel on the Theatre*] (essays) 1966
Reflexions sur la poesie (essays) 1963
Oeuvres en prose (prose) 1965
Theatre (plays) 1965
Conversations ecologiques (essays) 2000

CRITICISM

Harold Watson (essay date May 1985)

SOURCE: Watson, Harold. "Cosmic Continuity in *L'Annonce faite à Marie*." *Nottingham French Studies* 24, no. 1 (May 1985): 37-45.

[In the following essay, Watson examines the value and function of the nature imagery in *L'Annonce faite à Marie*.]

Unlike Sartre who grew up preferring books to birds or beasts and came to know the universe only in the library,¹ or Baudelaire who developed a dogmatic hostility to nature in his later years and kept it at the periphery of his man-centred world,² Claudel experienced an early fascination for nature and never ceased to explore its meaning in order to deepen his understanding of the universe. Awed by its power and beauty and convinced of the bonds of solidarity between man and nature, he

found in it his primary vehicle for elucidating the human condition, whether in simple literal references or by images ranging from the prosaic to the sublime. Thanks to the lessons learned from nature, his characters come to realize that their loneliness is neither unique nor absolute, that good outweighs evil, joy sorrow, and life death.

Obviously, many aspects of nature frequently carry important symbolic values for Claudel, ranging from intended religious ones³ to perhaps less conscious sexual ones,⁴ and so an awareness of the several levels of symbols will enrich one's understanding of his work. But valuing nature only for its symbolic import risks obscuring not only the breadth of his lifelong love for, and interrogations of, the world around us, or nature *qua* nature.⁵ Such reductionism may also distort one's perception of his dramatic and stylistic techniques. In any case, nature precedes symbol, and a survey of its scope and function in one of Claudel's most popular dramas should provide important stylistic and thematic background, as well as a frame for symbol assessment.

Despite its medieval rural setting and many country scenes, *L'Annonce faite à Marie* (1911) is somewhat less rich in nature images and evocations than such earlier Claudel dramas as *Tête d'or*, *La Ville* and *L'Echange*. The reduction in non-nature imagery is even greater, however, thus conferring a higher relative importance on nature here than in many of his previous plays.⁶ Furthermore, sixty-five of the 113 nature images consist of metaphors, whereas only eighteen of the seventy-eight non-nature images do.

Evoked sixty-four times, mostly by Anne Vercors (32) and Pierre de Craon (11), the earth is easily the dominant element in *L'Annonce*, occurring almost as frequently as in *Tête d'or*. Here, however, there is no longer any attitude of defiance or attempted conquest of a reluctant Mother Earth goddess. Instead, "cette terre alors païenne" has become a "terre bénite", "terre de Dieu" (II, 38, 16, 20), widely appreciated and eulogized. Pierre, who often works underground on foundations, thinks that some churches are like chasms and personifies the mountain cloister in medical terms: "La montagne vierge est morte et la cicatrice à son flanc ne se rouvrira plus" (II, 104). Anne compares people who heed and reflect to land that grows any crop. His daughter Violaine knows that if cultivated "la vieille terre" will yield abundantly, and even Mara admits in the end that "l'avare terre . . . ne manque jamais" (II, 25, 28, 94, 103) and makes it a metaphor for her sorrow-sourced love.

The patriarch and pilgrim Anne sees farming as a kind of midwifery ("délivre la terre de ce pain," he tells Jaques, II, 39) and hails the earth's fecundity and beauty with more admiration and affection (II, 96-98) than he

shows his wife or children.⁷ His single negative reference ("est-ce que les pieds des enfants de Dieu seront attachés à cette terre misérable?" II, 105) comes at the moment of shock just after the death of Violaine, but he quickly recovers his Jammes-like equanimity as he surveys the countryside and "Monsanvierge qui ressucite" under the spring sun (II, 110, 112, 114). In his swan song he encapsulates the feeling of cosmic continuity so dear to Claudel:

Et partout, à tout moment,
Verte et rose au printemps, bleue et blonde l'été, brune
l'hiver ou toute blanche sous la neige,
Devant moi, à mon côté, autour de moi,
Je ne cesse point de voir la Terre, comme un ciel fixe
tout peint de couleurs changeantes.
Celle-ci ayant une forme aussi particulière que
quelqu'un, est toujours là avec moi présente.

(II, 112)

No romantic exaltation here, but a constancy and devotion to earth that is perhaps closer to respect than to rapture, born of confidence in, and familiarity with, the space-time continuum that stretches vertically skywards and horizontally right through the seasons.⁸

Although spring is mentioned only in Anne's swan song, perhaps no other Claudel play has so many seasonal references (27), mostly to summer (9) and to harvest (10), plus four each to rain ("notre banquier"; "comme de l'or pour la terre" II, 39, 41) and snow. Otherwise, water is evoked only a dozen times, with but one image. Instead, more substantial minerals like stone, gold and iron are used thirty-one times by Pierre (14) and Anne (8), in 20 images, mostly in reference to churches and as metaphors for the elect ("ces pierres baptisées", II, 33) who comprise the Church, although Mara is hard as iron (II, 29, 35) and stone (II, 101) and Violaine, who had aspired to be "cette pierre active qui moud le grain" (II, 20), becomes by her saintliness softer than alabaster for Pierre the church builder (II, 108).

These telluric elements, then, are not so much larger-than-life (as in the earlier plays) but more part and parcel of daily living, sometimes symbols and usually companions of human growth. They are also more intimately linked with the celestial elements, dominated as usual by the sun, whose light is treasured as gold and decanted like wine in Pierre's churches (II, 25). Except for one reference to its fireless, diamond-like brilliance on a wintry morn (II, 98), Anne prefers to think of the sun as a co-worker and guide (II, 109-112) and even as a glistening ox (II, 39). Mara sarcastically calls her sister "ce petit soleil" (II, 61), but in fact Violaine is acutely sensitive to the heat and brightness of the summer sun (II, 52, 55, 91) and even to the tender breath of dawn (II, 83). Although she associates its brilliance with the divinity, her hypersensitivity to the July sun

need not signify "only an epiphany of a jealous God" or reduce the sun to a castration image, "gardien éblouissant de l'aimée" in Freudian terms.⁹ As we have just seen, it is viewed quite differently—and four times oftener—by the men, who speak of harnessing its wonders in friendly companionship, and never in fear or even in much awe: "le soleil clair et gaillard", "le sein du soleil", "le soleil et moi, côte à côte" (II, 66, 106, 110). Indeed, if there is one element of nature that rules and protects the rest of creation, it is the sun: "le soleil ramène les hommes et les animaux comme avec une main" (II, 112).

Just as the elderly patriarch is twice as fascinated with the sun as anyone else, so too is he the keenest admirer of the stars, evoking the morning star as a herald, then as a beautiful maiden on the bosom of the sun (II, 97, 106), as well as the evening star Al-Zohar (Venus), Libra and Ursa Major (II, 105, 98, 110). Strangely, Violaine never mentions the stars, while the plodding Jacques Hury notices "le Scorpion oblique et le Sagittaire rétrograde" (II, 98). But it is Anne's extended rural image of the Plough (Ursa Major), Boötes and the North Star that best emphasizes the unity of earth and sky, leading to his declaration of cosmic continuity, already cited:

Le ciel de la nuit où tout est travail et qui est comme
un grand labour, et une pièce d'un seul tenant,
Et le Colon éternel y pousse les Sept Bœufs l'œil fixe
sur une étoile immuable,
Comme nous autres sur la branche verte qui marque
le bout du sillon.
Le soleil et moi, côte à côte,
Nous avons travaillé, et ce qui sort de notre travail ne
nous regarde pas.¹⁰

(II, 110)

Compared with these dozen starry evocations, the eighteen references to the sky are, inevitably, flat and prosaic, serving mainly as context or to remind us that "la terre tient au ciel, le corps tient à l'esprit" (II, 39). Clouds, lightning and a rainbow, each mentioned once, help to reinforce this vertical relationship, but surprisingly the moon is entirely absent in the silent second scene of Act Three.

The vaunted fertility of the good earth is illustrated by an equally large number of vegetation references (104), especially to foliage and flowers (39). These are made mostly by Jacques (13) and Pierre (10), least by Mara and Violaine, and include nine species. Their scent (roses, mint) and colour (pomegranate flower) are evoked by Pierre, but their primary use is to single out Violaine ("ce doux narcisse", "mon beau lys", "ma fleur-de-soleil", "la fleur suprême", II, 27, 50, 51, 54), to laud the delicate odour of sanctity, and to suggest both mortality and immortality. Of the twelve flower metaphors, Jacques uses half in the betrothal scene.

Both he and Violaine call the spot of leprosy a flower as he sarcastically rejects "ce lys que j'avais élu" (II, 56). After her death, Pierre sees Violaine as the flower of his latest church, "mon lys suprême", and compares the vocation of death to a solemn lily (II, 107, 110). But Jacques' evocation of death and transfiguration is the most lyrical and enigmatic: "Ecartez les feuilles et l'on trouvera la dernière violette! / Et la fleur Immortelle est encore en boutons, et seuls nous restent le dahlia et la tête de pavot" (II, 100).

The twenty-three tree references, fewer and less significant than in earlier plays, include only oak, poplar, olive and walnut by name and reveal Pierre and Anne to be the most sensitive to them. Early on, the master-builder, who has a house amid trees and once heard two oaks talking and praising God, calls Violaine a young tree of knowledge of good and evil (II, 24, 20, 16). Years later he compares the dying Violaine to "un arbre coupé qui penche" and grace to "cet arbre fructifiant" (II, 106, 109). In a convoluted image he likens his spiritual maturity to dominating a fruit tree from a ladder yet obliged to speak from beneath it like a well-modulated flute, aspiring to grow in intimacy with God like a vine on an olive tree (II, 113).

Anne, on the other hand, is less personal in his arboreal remarks, which consist largely of admiring descriptions and aphorisms that serve as seasonal rhapsodies or even as explanations of his behaviour. As with flowers, it is again Jacques who provides the most significant metaphor (and only image of rebirth), calling Violaine "le surgeon secret de l'Arbre saint, issu de quelque racine souterraine" (II, 91).

Fruit, mentioned a dozen times, is favoured by Mara for denigrating her sister ("comme une cerise qu'on suce"; "le beau fruit mûr, le bon fruit doré" II, 35, 101), while the men evoke fruit-laden branches and bunches of grapes. Pierre compares the shattered skull of the martyr Justitia to a nut. Grain, wheat and sowing occur eighteen times, linking several rich thematic levels: the cyclical aspect of nature, the biblical promise that if the grain of wheat dies it will bear much fruit, the labour and sacrifice involved in sowing and reaping, both here and hereafter, and above all the victory of life over death. Pierre, whom Violaine calls a sower of steeples, speaks of the martyr's teeth as seed under the church's foundation and promises to use Violaine's ring to make "une semence d'or" or church "où le froment éternel est déposé" (II, 20, 18, 25, 107) and to represent her thereon with her hands crossed on her bosom "comme l'épi encore à demi-prisonnier de ses téguments" (II, 108). Anne's seven seed references again put him on a more impersonal level, a sort of peasant philosopher, far less colourful than Pierre.

Other vegetation includes hedge, elder shrubbery, reeds, juniper, black ivy and vines, but Mara is the only one

linked with weeds (couch-grass, hunger-grass, senna and Aaron's rod: II, 35), suggesting her meanness and need of cultivation. Some rare glimmers of humour are provided by three plant images when Anne likens Jacques' beard to ears of barley and an old peasant's ears, full of white hair, to an artichoke heart, while a worker compares the stumps in a field to a beard and to teeth (II, 28, 41, 64).

Animate life is the least conspicuous aspect of nature in this drama full of vertical and religious relationships. The twenty-five animal references, involving eleven species and all the characters, tend to be very domestic and to exclude the exotic and even mythical beasts of his previous plays. Vercors, whose wife calls him a watchdog (a rare non-pejorative canine reference) and Violaine a sacrificed lamb (II, 27, 63), likes to plough with oxen, boasts that his animals are never ill and that "les pis, les puits ne sèchent jamais" (II, 38). Returning from Jerusalem, he likens himself to "la bête qui flaire de tous côtés et qui reconnaît son gîte et son nid" (II, 96). Jacques pounces on a poacher "comme on se jette sur un lièvre au gîte" (II, 36), scorns Pierre as "ton porc ladre" (II, 57), but only aspires to live on like the horse or ox (II, 99). Mara threatens to hang herself like the cat that she had once strung up and claims that her family loves Violaine merely as they would a gentle animal (II, 34, 102). A workman describes the English as fleeing like mice, while Pierre's lone animal evocation is a startling comparison of a booming church bell to a bull bellowing in the marshland (II, 65, 108)."

Pierre the steeple-sower is clearly more attuned to birds than to beasts, referring to the nuns of Monsanviège as doves and to God as *l'Oiseau éternel* (II, 14, 17). He compares his knowledge of wood to that of a woodpecker, calls the young Violaine the skylark of France, and likens the suppleness of the dead leper to a still-warm partridge (II, 21, 22, 100). Indeed, actually hearing partridges in the underbrush and seeing a buzzard hover overhead bring him consolation and hope at the end (II, 104). The other two men also speak of the nuns as plaintive doves or birds, while Jacques calls Violaine *doux oiseau* (II, 38, 53, 54). Ever the philosopher, Anne interprets the oriole's singing as praise of rain, work, God and his own imminent departure (II, 41-42). Violaine herself compares the light new spur of a young knight to a bird bone, calls the convent an eyrie of half-unfurled angels, and a singing skylark a vehement little cross (II, 14, 20, 21). Mara, with her usual sarcasm, disparages her sister as "little dove" (II, 72) and herself (in mock humility) as a chattering magpie, *l'agache* (II, 35). Bees, hives, wax, flies and spiders are evoked seven times by Pierre, Violaine and an apprentice without negative connotation, suggesting thereby the fundamental goodness of nature and its harmony with man.

Apart from Mara's typical sarcasm and Anne's moment of pessimism at the death of Violaine, nature appears as

a generally bountiful provider and welcome companion for these appreciative peasants, who find its many facets to be not only a harmonious whole but frequently also a mirror of a higher reality. Although Jacques proclaims, "Aux célestes le ciel, et la terre aux terrestres" (II, 53), the fact that this dullard mentions the sky as often as the earth, and the earth less than even Violaine or Mara, suggests that the most earthbound of Claudel's characters are stargazers, attuned to the whole cosmos. In this way the resolution of the conflicts is facilitated by a mutual, overarching view of nature as a fraternal guide and support, linking the characters to a friendly cosmos and a loving Creator. The inevitable human tensions and growing pains are mirrored, but never mocked, by nature. Rather, the harmony apparent in sister nature provides example and inspiration to these *campagnards* to surmount conflict and live in concord with others as well as with the Creator and his creation, secure in the knowledge that through the latter they could espy the hand and will of God. The telluric elements, for instance, are companions of human growth, associated with daily life and work. They are also more closely linked with the celestial elements than in earlier plays, thanks in part to "ce grand trou dans la terre" at Jerusalem, "le centre et ombilic de la terre" (II, 32). And the link continues even after the holy mountain, Monsanviège, dies out (II, 91, 104), for the interlaced bell peals of three different chapels echo the cosmic continuity (II, 114).

Although Vercors and Pierre each evoke nature far more often than all of the rest combined, their loquacity is no proof of a superior sensitivity. What is more notable is the fact that all of the characters mention most of the categories, showing the broad scope of their nature awareness and of their participation in the universal linking. Nevertheless, each one has a unique sensitivity that distinguishes them from one another. Anne Vercors, the most garrulous with 105 references to eleven categories, prefers theorizing and abstractions about nature. Pierre (81) tends to be more personal in his evocation of twelve topics and, unlike Vercors, is more attuned to bees and birds than to animals, to minerals like stone and gold than to soil, and to the sun rather than to the stars. Although Jacques (30), Violaine (27) and Mara (17) each evoke seven subjects, they differ from each other. Jacques never mentions the sun, neither sister speaks of animals, only Mara evokes weeds, only Violaine evokes minerals and bees but not trees. It is hardly fortuitous that the philosophizing patriarch should make by far the most of both the earth and celestial evocations, since he best expounds the idea of cosmic continuity that permeates the play: "La terre tient au ciel, le corps tient à l'esprit, toutes les choses qu'il a créées ensemble communiquent, toutes à la fois sont nécessaires l'une à l'autre" (II, 39).

Long implicit in Claudel's previous work, this cosmology was succinctly summarized in a 1910 entry in his journal ("Toute la nature est une série d'exploitations superposées . . ." *J*, I, 125) and has clearly become the cornerstone of his poetic art. Indeed, in *Art poétique* (1905) he had already constructed a theory of knowledge and art based on the premise of a close fundamental unity between the animal, vegetable and human realms: "Chaque note de la gamme appelle et suppose les autres."¹² He defined the vegetable domain as *la matière combustible*, the animal as *la matière allumée* but limited to a certain milieu, and man as a being meant to go elsewhere: "l'animal connaît le particulier, et l'homme connaît le général" (*OP [Oeuvre poétique]*, pp. 162, 174). Discussion of God is limited to the fifth and final article, "De la Connaissance de l'homme après sa mort", where he asserts: "Dieu est par lui-même et l'âme par Dieu. L'un est la substance et l'autre l'image. . . . Le reste de la création n'est pas, à proprement parler, une image, mais un symbole . . ." (*OP*, p. 198).

But in *La Légende de Prâkriti* (1932) the correspondence between the visible and invisible worlds, so clear already in *L'Annonce*, becomes the explicit central theme, as Claudel tries by a parable to discredit the theory of mechanistic transformism, of a universe with no divine connections and no responsibility:

D'autre part, quand il s'agit des animaux et des plantes, il y a une obligation en quelque sorte latérale, celle de fournir aux autres êtres sous forme d'aide, de nourriture, de résection, d'agencement dramatique ou esthétique, le complément qui leur est indispensable. L'être ne naît pas seulement, il co-naît.¹³

The idea that every living creature has some significance that surpasses its appearance will flower more fully in *Bestiaire spirituel* but is already announced here: "Les reptiles et les oiseaux répondent aux démons et aux anges."¹⁴

However, it is in a biblical commentary that his personal affection and admiration for animals is most apparent, as he laments their disappearance:

Dans ma jeunesse les rues étaient pleines de chevaux et d'oiseaux. Ils ont disparu. L'habitant des grandes villes ne voit plus les animaux que sous l'aspect de la chair morte qu'on lui vend chez le boucher. La mécanique a tout remplacé. Et bientôt ce sera la même chose à la campagne. Les animaux faisaient l'alliance entre la terre et l'homme.¹⁵

He deplores battery hens and the mechanisation of pork and poultry production: "Chaque espèce est élevée à part et en série. Sont-ce encore des animaux, des créatures de Dieu, des frères et sœurs de l'homme, des significations de la Sagesse divine que l'on doit traiter avec respect?" This abolition of the links between *eux*

et nous he calls the Fifth Plague, as it brings on boredom by destroying the most comical and fraternal aspect of nature.¹⁶

This fascination with the homogeneity and meaning of the universe permeates his journal as well as much of his creativity and critical work. One of his best formulations occurs in a 1923 entry: "Tout est parabole, tout signifie l'infinie complexité des rapports des créatures avec leur Créateur. C'est cette idée qui pénètre toute mon œuvre" (*J [Journal]*, I, 587). He loved to repeat his formula that nature is not illusion but allusion and G. K. Chesterton's that nature is not our mother but our sister. This sense of a cosmic continuum—along with his personal fondness for all of creation, evidenced by his habit of long walks, frequent nature excursions, and hundreds of journal entries—no doubt accounts for the wealth of wide-ranging, interwoven nature imagery in *L'Annonce* and earlier plays. Both the principle and the personal attraction inevitably underlie and sustain all the symbolism, conscious and subconscious.

Notes

1. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Les Mots* (Paris: Gallimard-Folio, 1972), pp. 44-45.
2. F.W. Leakey, *Baudelaire and Nature* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1969), pp. 311-320. See also Léon Bopp, *Psychologie des Fleurs du mal* (Geneva: Droz, 1964), II, p. 173.
3. Cf., among many others, Eugene Roberto, *Visions de Claudel* (Marseille: Leconte, 1958), André Vachon, *Le Temps et l'espace dans l'œuvre de Paul Claudel* (Paris: Seuil, 1965), Léo Brodeur, *Le Corps-sphère, clef de la symbolique claudélienne* (Sherbrooke: Cosmos, 1972), Aimé Becker, *Claudel et l'Interlocuteur invisible* (Paris: Nizet, 1974).
4. The most thorough Freudian study is by Michel Malicet, *Lecture psychanalytique de l'œuvre de Claudel*, 3 vol. (Paris: Belles-Lettres, 1978-79). Besides finding behind the apparent drama of each Claudel play the repressed anguish of a hero-son with a mother fixation (II, 217), he discovers phallic or feminine symbols in nearly all aspects of nature. While a bit overwhelmed by his comprehensive study, I am grateful for his encouragement to pursue the analysis of nature as such in Claudel. For some cautionary wisdom on Freudian interpretations, see Valentine Brady-Papadopoulou, "Claudel, the feminine, and psychoanalysis," *Claudel Studies*, IX, 2 (1982), p. 18-23.
5. Although his first nine journal entries on nature have a biblical context and orientation, by Christmas of 1905 he is exalting nature on its own, in a highly personal fashion, beginning with frost in the forest of Fontainebleau, *Journal*, I, ed. F. Varillon et J. Petit (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), p. 31. Henceforth cited as *J*.

6. References within this article are to Paul Claudel, *Théâtre*, II, ed. J. Madaule et J. Petit (Paris: Gallimard, 1965). Parenthetical figures of three digits or less indicate the number of times an idea appears in the play or is used by a character. This study is concerned only with the original version (1911), where the 356 nature references average 3.3 per page, compared to 4.8 in *La Ville* I and II and 5.8 in *L'Echange* I, all in the Pléiade edition. I have not included the detailed descriptions of sky and landscape appearing in the stage directions of certain scenes, such as II, 1, 3; III, 1, 2; and especially IV, 5, with its twelve references to trees, fruit, animals, haystacks, etc.

One of Claudel's concerns in writing *L'Annonce* was to create a Catholic contrast to André Gide's dour Protestant perspective in his 1909 novel, *La Porte étroite*. (See Claudel-Gide, *Correspondance: 1899-1926*, ed. Robert Mallet (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), p. 102.) Nothing could better point up the fundamental difference of temperament and aesthetics between these two titans than Gide's use of only sixty images in his novel (see Stephen Ullmann, *The Image in the Modern French Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), p. 30) compared to the 190 images in Claudel's shorter play.

7. But is that sufficient reason to claim that "le labourage n'est autre chose qu'une transposition de l'union sexuelle dans toutes ses phases, de la défloration à la fécondation et à la naissance" or that the earth is the object of an Oedipus rivalry between Father and offspring in this play? See Malicet, II, p. 142-144. Using tillage of the soil as a sexual or marital metaphor is hardly original with Claudel, although like Shakespeare he often chooses to intensify an image with a suggestive ambiguity or a stimulating allusion. This stylistic tendency seems to be rooted far less in Oedipal or castration complexes than in a fundamental conviction of a strong, close linkage between nature and mankind.
8. His journal abounds with his personal feeling of cosmic continuity, such as: "Par la neige le ciel prend comme un moulage de la terre" (*J*, I, 182), an entry from the same year as this play, 1911. Cf. Vercors: "Et le matin le soleil blanc / . . . s'associe à la blanche vêtue de la terre" (II, 98).
9. See Malicet, *op. cit.* II, pp. 28, 55.
10. This is an imaginative transposition of an agricultural image he jotted down about this time: "La grande pièce rouge de terre labourée avec deux attelages hersant allant en sens opposé, l'un de trois chevaux noirs, l'autre de quatre bœufs, et un semeur semant de la main, plantant une branche

verte pour reconnaître son alignement." *J*, I, 175. A 1904 entry indicates one symbol of Ursa Major for Claudel: "L'Eglise comparée à Arcturus (la G. Ourse)" (*ibid.*, p. 16).

11. Several years earlier he had noted, "comme un taureau la basse église de S. Thomas de Fond d'Ardenne", *J*, I, 136. The same church is mentioned in *L'Annonce*, but the simile shifts from size/shape to sound.
12. *Oeuvre poétique*, ed. S. Fumet (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), p. 154. Henceforth cited as *OP*.
13. *La Légende de Prâkriti*, ed. Andrée Hirschi (Paris: Belles-Lettres, 1972), p. 85.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
15. *Au milieu des vitraux de l'apocalypse*, ed. Pierre Claudel et Jacques Petit (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), p. 168.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 169.

George Poe (essay date 1989)

SOURCE: Poe, George. "The Post-Revolutionary France of Claudel's Trilogy: A Grand Tapestry Spun Forth upon Voices of Confidence and Determination." *Claudel Studies* 16, nos. 1-2 (1989): 18-29.

[In the following essay, Poe finds that Claudel's Trilogy, *L'Otage*, *Le Pain dur*, and *Le Pere humilie*, manages to provide insight into the tensions of post-Revolutionary France.]

As a student and teacher of eighteenth-century French literature and culture, I found myself initially drawn to Claudel's Trilogy by a long-standing curiosity regarding the rendering therein of *après le déluge* France. For during this year when much ink is being fruitfully employed in analyses of how and why Louis XV's predicted *déluge* came to pass, attention to the aftermath seems equally appropriate. And the economy with which Claudel dramaturgically presents his post-Revolutionary cultural panorama is appealing in its reductiveness: some sixty years of nineteenth-century French social history are spanned within the ten dramatic acts of the Trilogy. Yet one does not have to turn many pages of *L'Otage*, the first dramatic installment of the Trilogy, to realize that historical precision and completeness are not the playwright's major missions. Rather, as almost all commentators on the Trilogy have pointed out in one manner or another, the chief attitude informing the plays is certainly not that of the rigorous historian but rather that of the lesser-constrained and freer-interpreting poet (even if the lines themselves—at least in the first two dramas—do reflect Claudel's earnest ef-

fort “à tenir en bride le lyrisme qui est mon grand ennemi”). Drawing some finer distinctions, Harold Watson paraphrases Henri Gouhier: “Caudel’s trilogy . . . is neither erudite history nor romanced history, like that of Dumas *père* and Sardou, but history poetically reflected upon, as in Shakespeare, and this explains Claudel’s liberty in the creation of adventures and characters.”² The result is a theatrical creation that captivates (Claudel sensed the compositional success of *L’Otage* himself, calling it “plus dramatique et scénique” than previous undertakings³) and a historical re-creation that illuminates. This captivated and illuminated *dix-huitième* therefore proposes to share a few layman’s observations concerning the historical and, above all, the dramaturgical flow of the Trilogy.

* * *

Acknowledging the above-argued poetic inspiration which indeed colors the Trilogy (equally true, moreover, of all Claudelian drama), André Blanc reconciles such a prime ingredient with the clearly historical substance of the plays by calling upon Claudel’s own particular usage of the word *sens*: “La Trilogie est un théâtre historique (le seul théâtre historique, peut-être) qui cherche à exprimer le sens d’une époque.”⁴ Claudel himself best explains the need in historical theater for realistic portrayal to be creatively fleshed out by artistic “completion,” infusing thereby *un sens* into the dramatic interpretation:

Je n’essayerai pas de justifier les infractions que l’auteur de *L’Otage* s’est permis d’apporter à la réalité historique. Le drame a les mêmes licences que la légende et il fait en raccourci le même travail. La réalité n’est qu’une ébauche que l’artiste a le droit de compléter. Aux directions éparses et incomplètes, il a substitué un *sens*.⁵

In spite of the historical “infractions” to which Claudel quite willfully admits (the most frequently cited case being the kidnapping of Pope Pius VII, making the latter Georges de Coûfontaine’s *otage*), realistic detail *does* serve as convincing backdrop for the Trilogy plays and is not presented without care. To cite but a few examples from the first drama of the Trilogy, the names of Dalberg, Talleyrand, and the duc de Raguse (maréchal Marmont) are fittingly peppered into the fictive Tous-saint Turelure’s orders in the closing scenes of *L’Otage* and Turelure’s references to “le fils de Marie-Louise” (the “roi de Rome”) and to “le papa d’Oscar” (Jean-Baptiste Bernadotte, eventual Charles XIV of Sweden) as possible successors to an “Empereur déchu” ring with verisimilitude as well (*O. [L’Otage]*, III. i, 192). Indeed, such realism does at times move to the dramaturgical forefront in the form of a period-piece vignette; a good example, from the opening scene of *L’Otage*, is found in Sygne de Coûfontaine’s vivid flashback shared with her cousin Georges of their parents’ guillotining

some twenty years before (also serving, from a historical perspective, to root their First Empire predicament quite firmly in earlier days of Terror).

Jadis j’ai vu mon père et ma mère, votre père aussi et votre mère, Coûfontaine, paraître sur l’échafaud ensemble.

Ces quatre figures saintes à la fois qui nous regardaient, liées comme des victimes, mes quatre pères et mères que l’on a abbatus l’un après l’autre sous la hache!

Et quand ce fut le tour de ma mère, le bourreau, roulant autour de son poing la queue de cheveux gris, lui tirait la tête sous le couteau.

Nous étions au premier rang, et vous me teniez la main, et leur sang a rejailli jusque sur nous.

J’ai tout vu et ne me suis pas évanouie, et nous sommes revenus ensuite à pied à la maison.

(*O.*, I.i, 139-40)

The trenchant details of French Revolutionary history are graphically operative in Sygne’s bitter recollection. But such a realistic report is accessible to us through the same dramatic dialogue that also establishes and supports the theatrical—though historically fictive—existence of the Turelure-Coûfontaine family line. The dialogue labors, then, under a double burden. It must function as the thread by which a verisimilar tapestry of post-Revolutionary society is spun forth before the reader/playgoer while concurrently serving to advance a nonhistorical family tapestry through three successive generations. In practice, of course, these two “tapestries” support each other mutually and are, in fact, one, as *story* is artfully interwoven with *history* through the voices of Claudel’s richly developed characters. This “tapestry” image proposed, it is hoped that such a motif will prove interpretively useful in our subsequent focus upon the Trilogy plays themselves.

Another word first, however, about the principal historical strands supporting the tapestry. The major societal dilemma with which post-Revolutionary France struggled for some eighty years before settling into the still-uncertain Third Republic was, of course, the question of political direction. The Irish reactionary Edmund Burke had predicted as much as early as 1790 in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* addressed to a “Gentleman in Paris”: “before its final settlement [your country] may be obliged to pass, as one of our great poets says, ‘through great varieties of untried being’ [Joseph Addison].”⁶ Did France want to take on the democratic responsibility required of a Republic? After all, she had sent her monarch to the guillotine in order to have that very opportunity. Or had the ugly guillotine itself convinced her that the self-governing ideal was but a chimera and that some authoritarian solution had to be reenvisioned? The latter, of course, offers the more appropriate interpretation for the greater part of the French nineteenth century. And the various authori-