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**Catherine Mayaux, Ed.**, *Lettres de Paul Claudel à Jean Paulhan (1925-1954)*. Berne: Peter Lang, 2004. v + 300 pp. Notes and indices. \$49.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 3 03910 452 7.

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This volume adds to the ever growing corpus of Paulhan correspondence. As editor of the *Nouvelle Revue Française (NRF)* and various other reviews, and as a member of the *comité de lecture* of the Gallimard publishing house, Jean Paulhan occupied an unrivalled position in twentieth-century French literary culture. He left tens of thousands of letters, many of which have now been published, including three substantial volumes of selected letters from the years 1917 to 1968. The lengthening list of bilateral correspondence includes the following names (in no particular order): Francis Ponge, André Suarès, Saint-John Perse, Jean Giono, Jean Grenier, Guillaume de Tarde, Guiseppe Ungaretti, Roger Caillois, Jacques Audiberti, Monique Saint-Hélier, André Gide, Marcel Arland, Jean Guéhenno, Yvon Belaval, Michel Leiris, Paul Eluard, François Mauriac, Pierre-Jean Jouve, Jacques Chardonne, Louis Aragon, and Elsa Triolet. Many more volumes are projected. Among the unpublished body of letters, those exchanged with Jacques Rivière, Marcel Jouhandeau and Jean Schlumberger, for instance, are fundamental to understanding how the *NRF* worked. Given the changes in technology and social practice which have occurred since Paulhan's death in 1968, one may postulate that all this epistolary activity signals the end of a tradition which stretches back at least to the high point of the Enlightenment: Paulhan's correspondence is the last to be comparable with that of Grimm, Voltaire, or Diderot.

By 1925, when this correspondence begins, the poet, dramatist, and diplomat Paul Claudel, then aged fifty-seven, had produced his most important work. He was a celebrated author revered at home and abroad. As an international figure, his status as a representative of French cultural *rayonnement* was enhanced by his official position as an ambassador. Jean Paulhan, however, aged forty-one in 1925, was then a relative unknown. He had just taken over as editor of the monthly *Nouvelle Revue française* from Jacques Rivière, who died prematurely in April that year. Thus as Catherine Mayaux, the editor of this volume, notes, the nature and motivation of their exchange of correspondence was quite different from that between Claudel and Rivière. Whereas Claudel's exchanges with Rivière centred at least as much on the turmoil of the latter's struggle with the Catholic faith and Claudel's attempts to convert him, as on his dealings with the *NRF* group, the letters exchanged with Paulhan are much more narrowly focused upon the month-to-month relationship of Claudel with the review. The principal interest of this collection of letters resides in the tension which existed between Claudel and the *NRF*.

By 1925, the *NRF* was recognised throughout much of the Western world as a model and arbiter of modern literary taste. Claudel had benefited from his pre-1914 association with the review and its attendant networks, specifically the Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier, and Gaston Gallimard's publishing house. Claudel's plays, *L'Annonce faite à Marie* and *L'Otage*, had been serialised in the early review, and *L'Otage* was one of the earliest texts to appear under the Editions de la Nouvelle Revue Française imprint. However, a major tension dominated and determined the relationship between Claudel and the *NRF*. This derived from the fact that the *NRF* was considered to be André Gide's review. Not only were Gide and his milieu distinctly Protestant in background, after the First World War, Gide's homosexuality increasingly became public knowledge, in the revelations of *Si le grain ne meurt*. This, and other related factors, underlay the occasional strong sense of repugnance Claudel felt towards the review where he published his work.

As editor, Paulhan's task was challenging, and often involved risk-taking. On the one hand, he had to attract the best possible copy to a review whose reputation and prestige, slowly but surely, were on the way to making it into one of the major cultural institutions of the post-war French Third Republic. For the balance of the review, the presence of Claudel was essential to maintaining a Catholic readership, and, indeed, bolstered the view that the *NRF* constituted a broad church and not a limited (and Protestant-biased) *chapelle*. On the other hand, Paulhan had to try to reconcile the interests of a wide range of writers whose work appeared in the leading "contents" pages of the review, the section where the serialised novels appeared. Given that Claudel maintained deeply conservative views on sexuality, and proselytized intensely on behalf of Catholic religious identity, when Paulhan happened to juxtapose a text by Claudel with those of writers whose work might transgress Claudelian norms, then inevitably explosions followed.

Paulhan's problems with Claudel began in the *NRF* for December 1927, when unfortunately a text printed *en tête* of that issue appeared with several misprints. Claudel was fastidious about the presentation of his work. He detested misprints, and throughout his association with the review was never restrained in his criticism when these occurred. This pained Claudel all the more since the text, "Sous le rempart d'Athènes", had been written in honour of his friend, the diplomat Philippe Berthelot: "je suis surtout fâché de toutes ces fautes dégoûtantes à cause de mon ami Berthelot" (p. 55). Errata were finally inserted in the issue for February 1928 (p. 57), yet, as it turned out, despite Paulhan's solicitations, this would be the last Claudel text to appear in the review until 1933.

The primary reason for Claudel's rupture with the *NRF* was the publication, in the issue for December 1928, of a text by Paul Léautaud (editorial secretary of the *Mercure de France*) entitled "Dialogue", and Henry de Montherlant's "Épilogue aux *Fontaines du désir*". In his diary, Claudel fulminated: "A la suite d'articles dégoûtants de la *NRF* (Léautaud et Montherlant), j'écris à Paulhan pour lui signifier ma rupture définitive".[1] On 18 December Claudel indeed wrote to Paulhan to this effect, breaking "permanently", he said, with the *NRF*; he insisted too on being removed from the subscription list. And as though to rub salt in this wound, Gide published a letter in the *NRF* for January 1929 concerning a critique of *Corydon* entitled "L'amour qui n'ose pas dire son nom".

By March 1929 the affair had still not abated, for Gide's friend, Maria van Rysselberghe, "La Petite Dame", reported on her companion's excited state in the face of a possible "levée en masse des catholiques".[2] Claudel's anger remained so intense that he told the composer Darius Milhaud that "je suis tellement dégoûté de la *NRF* qui est devenue une maison carrément pornographique que je me demande si je ne vais pas réaliser dorénavant mes œuvres, pour échapper au contrat, sous forme allemande ou anglaise".[3] Unfortunately for Claudel, a contract tied him for life to the Gallimard house. He wrote to Gaston Gallimard to express his frustration in vehement terms: "Quand l'histoire de ma vie sera écrite, comme elle le sera un jour, on trouvera peu d'exemples d'un grand écrivain ainsi constamment trahi, étouffé, saboté par son propre éditeur" (p. 69).

How did Paulhan, for his part, view this contretemps? If one digs a little, the editor of the *NRF*, caught between his obligations to both Léautaud and Claudel, clearly found much amusement in it. Thanks to Léautaud's gossipy diary, we know that Paulhan confided to him that Claudel wanted to break with Gallimard's, and that he even jokingly asked Léautaud for material with which he might cause offence again.[4] Paulhan said that he would try to place the offending item in *Commerce*, a luxury review for which Claudel would still submit material, and for which Paulhan also played an editorial role. Over the ensuing days and weeks, Léautaud gleefully noted the details of these protracted deliberations, only to learn, to his irritation, that the text in question, "Choix de lettres", had been refused by *Commerce*, where the influence of Claudel and his friend, Saint-John Perse, was considerable.[5] Léautaud noted that Gaston Gallimard, fearing a lasting conflict of interest with the powerful Claudel, eventually stepped in to calm the troubled waters.[6]

Whether it was because of his renowned penchant for mischief-making (Emmanuel Berl called him a “farceur”), or whether his risk-taking sometimes backfired, Paulhan found much amusement in these exchanges. After all, Claudel and Léautaud were at opposite ends of the social scale; their temperaments and egos were at odds; they would certainly never rub shoulders socially; yet here they were, rubbing shoulders in the *NRF*. This form of “reconciliation”, as Paulhan called it, was undoubtedly one of the secrets of his success. Later, he would muse on this feature of the *NRF* to Marcel Jouhandeau: “tu comprends, je pouvais faire, avant 40, une réconciliation continue (hors de quoi, je ne vois pas de raison d’être à une revue): Sartre près de toi, et Gide sur les (gros) genoux de Claudel.”[7]

As for Claudel, the dispute was of such gravity that it led him to support a new publishing venture. This was a sort of Catholic *NRF*, in the shape of *Vigile*, published by Gallimard’s rival, Bernard Grasset. Unhappily for Claudel and the other founder-members, the initiative only survived for fourteen issues. Gide, who had been worried by the possibility of a diaspora of Catholic writers towards this new review (Charles du Bos and François Mauriac, in addition to Claudel), was reassured when he read it, finding it “deadly boring” [“mortellement ennuyeux”]. [8] So, despite its humorous aspect, had there been a market for a review such as *Vigile*, the dispute with Claudel and its fallout could have damaged the *NRF*.

Almost before it was over, Paulhan worked behind the scenes to attract Claudel back to the *NRF* using all his skills as an editor and as a persuasive if discreet impresario. His efforts remained fruitless until April 1932, when Claudel showed some reluctant signs of renewed interest. In an episode not included here, “La Petite Dame” records how Paulhan had informed Gide that Claudel would recommence his contributions to the *NRF*, “à la condition que tous les articles soient soumis à l’abbé Altermann quinze jours avant la date où ils doivent paraître ! et que la *NRF* annonce son changement d’orientation... ‘Ne croyez-vous que Claudel exagère ?’ ajoute flegmatiquement Paulhan ! Gide me dit que la réponse de Paulhan à Claudel est une merveille de douceur ironique...”[9] Unfortunately, Paulhan’s masterpiece of irony has not come down to us.

In order to exert more leverage, Paulhan then wrote to some of Claudel’s friends and admirers. He asked Adrienne Monnier: “ne voudriez-vous pas écrire à Paul Claudel que vous seriez contente de le voir rentrer à la NRF?”[10] He also solicited the Swiss author, Charles-Ferdinand Ramuz, to tell Claudel that their mutual friends at the *NRF* “s’inquiètent de votre silence, et [...] souhaiteraient unanimement vous voir reprendre votre collaboration régulière à la revue.”[11] At last Paulhan’s persistence paid off, for Claudel relented, writing in December 1932 that “je cède donc à vos instances” (p. 79). Paulhan was delighted, and placed “Le point de vue de Ponce Pilate” as the leading item in the *NRF* for April 1933. It just remained to thank Ramuz: “Merci d’avoir écrit à Claudel. Il me semble (et ce n’est pas du tout le rédacteur de revue qui parle) que son absence de la *NRF* est injuste—et plus injuste encore pour *cela* qu’il représente, que pour nous. Il ne semble qu’il doit le reconnaître, et que ses sentiments à l’égard de Gide l’égarent...”[12] Thus Paulhan restored Claudel to his prestigious platform, where he enjoyed a much wider readership than he could expect elsewhere.

Thereafter, Claudel contributed two or three texts every year. His submissions increased during 1939 until October of that year, when, once again, the inclusion in the *NRF* of a text by Paul Léautaud (“Portrait de mon père”) exasperated Claudel so much that on 11 October he wrote to Paulhan: “Je reçois le dernier numéro de la *NRF* où je trouve, à côté des confidences de M. François Mauriac, quelques autres de M. Paul Léautaud. En conséquence je vous prie de me renvoyer le poème [sic] que vous m’avez demandé. Vous pouvez considérer ma collaboration à la *NRF* comme terminée” (p. 237). Claudel felt that under the circumstances, the publication of such a text (on Léautaud’s incestuous relationship with his mother) was entirely inappropriate, as he told Paulhan: “Vous vous consolerez en faisant déguster à vos lecteurs quelque nouvel échantillon du délicieux talent de M. Paul Léautaud. Pas de lecture plus appropriée, comme vous l’avez discerné avec un tact infaillible, à ces jours d’angoisse du pays” (p. 239). Claudel’s reaction was swift and effective: he withdrew his poem, which was already typeset and about to be published in the November 1939 issue. He immediately submitted it to *Le*

*Figaro*, where it appeared in two parts.[13] Clearly, this was no laughing matter.

In a footnote, Catherine Mayaux quotes from letters to Michel Leiris and Marcel Arland to contextualize this gaffe (p. 241). In an unpublished letter to Jouhandeau (not referred to here) Paulhan explained further what had happened to his November issue:

“Je donnais dans ce numéro-ci, en tête, un poème de Claudel (où Saint Michel fendait en deux un Béhémoth qui ressemblait à Hitler comme deux gouttes d’eau). Déjà composé, visé, tout. Là-dessus, P. C[laudel]. lit le numéro d’octobre, est horrifié par le Mauriac [‘Cinquante ans’], plus horrifié encore par le Léautaud, publie le poème dans le *Figaro* et m’écrit : ‘C’est une bonne surprise, n’est-ce pas, eh bien, vous m’en aviez fait une autre en donnant [Léautaud]...’ etc. C’est un rude salaud. Mais te semble-t-il que le P. L[éautaud]. méritât cette fureur ?”[14].

Paulhan’s publication of the text by Léautaud in the first wartime issue of the *NRF*, through force of circumstance, may well appear to us now to have been misjudged. Yet Claudel’s furious reaction was to neglect the fact that Paulhan, as director of the *NRF*, had all sorts of obligations to other authors. Claudel’s ego was apparently such that he could not countenance the presence of other Catholic authors in the *NRF*. Indeed, Paulhan tried to make light of this in a letter to Jean Grenier: “Mauriac [m’apporte] un grand poème (légèrement panthéiste) de 800 vers qu’il réservait pour après sa mort. Jamais P. Claudel ne nous le pardonnera.”[15] The poem, “Sang d’Atys”, was published as a leading item in the *NRF* for January 1940. Unfortunately, however, there is nothing in the correspondence with Paulhan to tell us what Claudel thought.

As Catherine Mayaux points out in the introduction to this collection, the vast majority of the 129 letters published here are Claudel’s. Thus, as a correspondence, it is disappointingly one-sided; we do not gain much of a sense of dialogue between the two correspondents. Yet as she also points out, in any case their relationship was much more business-like than that between Claudel and Rivière. There is enough contextualization provided to ensure that valuable insights may be gained into the role played by writers in the cultural and institutional history of the inter-war Third Republic. Substantial and interesting footnotes gloss some of the more fleeting references. Thus, for instance, we learn something about Claudel’s friendship with fellow-diplomats Philippe Berthelot (p. 55) and Alexis Léger (the poet Saint-John Perse, p. 261), as well as his views on writers such as Goethe (p. 79). We may also trace a shift in Claudel’s output, during the late 1920s and into the 1930s, toward an interest in theological exegesis. The volume will repay study by the Claudel scholar, for there is a useful list provided of texts referred to in the letters and footnotes. Finally, as we have tried to show above, if one takes the trouble to read the collection in conjunction with other published materials involving these two correspondents, then our knowledge will be further enriched.

## NOTES

[1] Paul Claudel, *Journal*, I (Paris: Gallimard 1968), p. 842, December 1928.

[2] Maria van Rysselberghe, “Les Cahiers de la Petite Dame”, vol. 1, 1918-1929, *Cahiers André Gide* 4 (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), p. 410, dated 9 March 1929.

[3] “Correspondance Paul Claudel-Darius Milhaud”, in *Cahiers Paul Claudel*, 3 (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), p. 112, 27 March 1929.

[4] Paul Léautaud, *Journal* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1959), vol. VII, p. 234, dated 27 March 1929, and pp. 250-1, dated 10 April 1929.

[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 264-285.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 285.

[7] Jean Paulhan to Marcel Jouhandeau, unpublished letter dated 28 June 1950, Fonds Jouhandeau, Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet, Paris.

[8] Van Rysselberghe, "Les Cahiers de la Petite Dame", vol. 2, 1929-1937, *Cahiers André Gide 5* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), pp. 83 and 196. See also André Gide, *Journal*, I (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), p. 934, entry dated 27 September 1929.

[9] *Ibid.*, pp. 238-9, entry dated 26 April 1932. The letter to which "La Petite Dame" refers appears in Paulhan-Gide, *Correspondance 1918-1951. Cahiers de la NRF*. (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), pp. 121-2; in fact, here Paulhan refers to Claudel's secretary Paul Petit instead of the abbé Altermann to act as this kind of unofficial censor.

[10] Jean Paulhan to Adrienne Monnier, unpublished letter dating from November or December 1932, Fonds Monnier, Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet, Paris.

[11] Charles-Ferdinand Ramuz to Paul Claudel, letter dated 10 December 1932, in Ramuz, *Lettres, II (1919-1947)* (Paris: Grasset, 1959), p. 256.

[12] Jean Paulhan to Charles-Ferdinand Ramuz, "Lettres", *NRF* (July 1967), pp. 183-4 [nd].

[13] The poem "Ainsi donc encore une fois" appeared in *Le Figaro* on 14 and 21 April 1939.

[14] Jean Paulhan to Marcel Jouhandeau, unpublished letter dated 20 October 1939, Fonds Jouhandeau, Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet, Paris.

[15] Jean Paulhan-Jean Grenier, *Correspondance 1925-1968* (Quimper: Calligrammes, 1984), p. 124, letter dated 5 December 1939.

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