

Afterword to *The Satin Slipper*

Hans Urs von Balthasar

That is the question of this drama: how is it possible to be at the same time both worldly and wholly oriented to God?

Translator's Introduction

In 1939, when he was thirty-four years old, Hans Urs von Balthasar published a German translation of Paul Claudel's *Le Soulier de Satin*, [The Satin Slipper]. The translation went through four editions between 1939 and 1949. To the German translation Balthasar appended a long "Nachwort" ("Afterword"). In what is one of Balthasar's earliest literary critical pieces, we can see his youthful philosophical reflections and the germ of many ideas which in time became part of his later works, particularly Theo-Drama. We can also see Balthasar's characteristic reaction to Claudel's great work of art, elaborated in greater detail than almost anywhere else in his voluminous writings. Because of this detail, the "Afterword" provides an early glimpse of how Balthasar's ideas were shaped and, indeed, transformed by his reception of the works of literature which he read and appropriated.

The inchoate forms of many of Balthasar's greatest insights are evident in the "Afterword": the sense of call and mission; the paradoxical

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nature of love as surrender and fulfillment; the limitless desire of the free but finite creature within the infinite freedom of God; and God's presence even in nothingness. As an example, early in the section on "Horizon," Balthasar asserts: "The cross is no isolated world-denying pillory of martyrdom. The world itself, and love for the world—developed to the end of its inner logic—both stand in the shadow of Golgotha."

For those unfamiliar with Claudel's play, it may be difficult to follow Balthasar's argument without a brief summary of the drama's central action. The play's background is late sixteenth Century Spain, Europe, and the New World. The action is framed in five days made up of several scenes and covering over a decade in time. The play opens with a Jesuit, brother of the protagonist Rodrigo, dying aboard a ship in mid-Atlantic. In the next scenes we meet Doña Prouheze, wife of Don Pelagio, preparing to depart for Mogador, an imaginary fortress city in Africa. Prouheze acknowledges her love for Rodrigo, but before leaving, she hangs a satin slipper on the hand of the Virgin's statue, pledging fidelity to her marriage vow. In frustration at being unable to possess Prouheze fully, Rodrigo sets off in search of conquest and adventure. In the meantime, Prouheze loses her first husband and marries the abusive and atheistic Don Camillo in order to prevent him from doing further evil in Africa. In a visionary exchange with her guardian angel, Prouheze sees her life's mission as becoming the "bait" which will draw Rodrigo from love of her to love of God. She also sees her suffering at the hands of Camillo as part of her destiny.

After ten years, during which he has—among other things—laid waste parts of South America and built a ship's bridge across the Isthmus of Panama, Rodrigo, now the Spanish king's viceroy, appears before Mogador in Africa. There he threatens to destroy the city unless Doña Prouheze is given to him. Prouheze visits Rodrigo on his ship but instead of leaving with him presents him with a nearly grown daughter, Doña Seven Swords. Prouheze and Rodrigo part forever.

In the mocking final days of the play Rodrigo's fortunes turn. He appears first as a dilettante artist, playing romantic games among the courtiers on King Phillip's floating palace. Then, instead of being given rule over England after the (supposed) victory of the Spanish Armada, he is accused of treason and ends up a prisoner. Counseled to patience by Doña Seven Swords, Rodrigo finally begins to see his spiritual destiny and accepts with equanimity being sold into servitude to a group of Carmelite nuns.

Some critics have remarked both the unwieldiness and the immense imaginativeness of the play, but Balthasar is in good company in praising the play so highly. Critic George Steiner has called Claudel and Brecht the two most important playwrights of the twentieth century.

Balthasar's essay is highly allusive. References to art, literature, and music abound. One of the most striking is a comparison of Rodrigo and Prouheze's love-agony to the Bernini statue of St. Teresa in ecstasy. That this early allusion is not accidental we discover later in the essay, when, in summarizing the fate of Rodrigo and Prouheze's love, Balthasar observes of all lovers: "What the good sister of Avila received at the hand of the angel, that God gives to all lovers if they really are lovers to the end, giving themselves into each other's hands." Balthasar also brings his knowledge of Claudel's other work to bear, interpreting both the role of women and the play's archetypal water imagery in light of Claudel's great odes.

Claudel's play challenges Balthasar to see the world in the fourth decade of the twentieth century with the same sweep as does the author. The work clearly enraptures Balthasar, and some of his insights are colored by the exuberance of Claudel himself. The view of human love is a case in point. The dramatic character of human life is another. Claudel's work, as Balthasar admits, is on a par with Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Its vision is comprehensive, for it encompasses tragedy as well as the highest ecstasy of joy. Balthasar develops this theme in numerous later works, but in the "Afterword," it is a developing idea, one which Balthasar is clearly learning from the French playwright. Balthasar's final comment on the play's language perhaps best expresses his insight: "Joy is the personified music which, like a healing elixir, penetrates all the pores of existence. Joy breathes not least from Claudel's noble language, which streams forth, always expansive, noble, bright, roguish, cozy, delicate, and warm, like an analogy and like an incontrovertible revelation of the highest form of joy." Balthasar's own poetic style rises to the occasion and his vision matches (and will later surpass in many ways) that of the author whose work he understands so well.

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In this afterword the attempt will be made to let the echo of Claudel's masterpiece¹ resonate in us, to give it that purity which belongs to the meaning and greatness of poetry. For there

¹A broad paraphrase finds itself in the work of Jacques Madaule: "The Drama of Paul Claudel" (1936). Madaule follows, however, only the "heroic" leitmotif and neglects wholly to follow the unavoidably comic, fairy tale and grotesque side paths. For that reason his description of the fourth act, where the heroic mixes itself indissolubly with the grotesque, is badly drawn. More penetrating is Gottlob Winkler's essay, "The Shoe of Doña Prouheze" ("Gestalten und Probleme" 1937).

is always the danger with works which resemble in form *The Divine Comedy*, *Hamlet*, or *Faust* (and Claudel's masterpiece has seized for its territory this place in world literature, eschewing all narrowness of the French academicians) that we will too hastily try to draw "hardening lines around the portentous and unsurpassable whole, behind which its living aspect will withdraw itself, as behind a thick grating. And Claudel's piece, without being in the least bit "Storm and Stress," lives precisely by that vitality that shatters again and again with resounding laughter every artificial limitation which believes itself final. Inexhaustible mockery flows over the glum, pallid, and confined hothouse poetry of the French Academy; baroque Spain and its stiff Gongorism provide at every possible opportunity the welcome disguise of this satire. We cannot hope to grasp this headstrong creature by the bridle, as it thirsts for light, air, and freedom, so as to rein it in, for it has already violently shaken off that bridle. At best we can swing up, saddleless, onto its back and—holding the wild mane—let it bear us where it pleases.

Horizon

In an entirely other sense than is the case with other masterpieces, Claudel's poetry, and particularly *The Satin Slipper*, has horizon. The "author," according to the stage directions for the first day, "has taken the liberty to condense centuries and times, just as, at a certain distance, various separate mountain ranges form a single horizon." And as the directions before the fourth day put it so laconically: "In twelve measures the orchestra unfurls once and for all the horizon." For Claudel, horizon is that reality which grows out of two fundamental experiences: that of the yearning, fleeting line and that of the complete, circling globe.

Claudel passionately desires the world, not as Christians, but only as pagans before him did. And still Claudel is passionate for the world because he is a Christian. No Christian philosopher, theologian, or mystic before him has experienced the horizon of the world so powerfully. In Christian antiquity and in the Middle Ages, the Greek astronomical world-view has a determining effect: the way of human perfection and purification follows the planetary motions to ever more immaterial and spiritual realities. God's heaven begins just on the other side of the fixed stars. Paradise becomes, if it is not removed into the third sphere (according to St. Paul's reference to the "third heaven"), an inaccessibly high mountain, where it is found in Dante.

"Spiritualization" is the ideal of the Patristic era. But in the thought, poetry, and architecture of the Middle Ages "spirit" descends to earth, so that the ideal of reconciling the Church and the world, which the apocalyptic vision of papal empire shows, is felt to be less insurmountable. Yet there remains in Scholasticism the final worldliness of the world, the last authenticity of existence, the grossness of sin and the dead end of worldly tragedy. But there also remains the sweetness and passion of earthly beauty, love, and longing, softly veiled by a delicate, radiant, and transfiguring veil. The great Scholastics loved order. Something of the spirit of the Children's Crusade blows through the theological *summae*. That St. Thomas was exalted by Fra Angelico is significant and essentially correct.

A third era dawned, however, in which the young world grew up next to Mother Church and had suddenly reached to her shoulder. For a moment it seemed as if they would recognize each other and embrace. All the spheres of heaven, for which Dante's worldly soul yearned, were broken, and all around, space itself was plunged into bottomlessness. The earth, however, grows under Columbus's keel, whose arrow-like course no longer seeks the horizon above, but before it. And soon the fearful and enrapturing discovery is made: the curving line returns on itself; the globe is forever a dungeon. Human nature is not only geographically and astronomically directed toward itself, but its arrow-like yearning up to the angels bends back on itself too. If there should be a paradise, then it can't lie anywhere but on earth; perhaps on an earth devoured in its own yearning and guilt, in a divine fire which both loves and punishes, but it is also a new-born earth, an earth transformed. That was, for just an instant, the paradoxical recognition of the world and the Church, out of which burst the great flames of Michelangelo and Rubens. But then the ways parted sharply. No Christian thinker was confined by this vision. Luther and Pascal tore asunder this new, scarcely knitted bond, and the world made its way into an Enlightenment and an ever more flaccid humanism, while the Church, often with scarcely less sense of direction, followed with its eyes this Phaeton's flight, counseling, warning, and scolding.

If one speaks generally today of an end to a great epoch which began with the Renaissance, is it not then, from the outset, chronologically amiss that Claudel should choose for the point of view of his play the Renaissance and the Baroque? That point of view would be wrong if Claudel were attempting an historical assessment and not merely using it as a kind of symbolic drapery. He is not concerned about historical accuracy, as is proven by his

deliberate anachronisms and his fantastical transformation of historical material—as for example John of Austria as son of Doña Musica, or Rodrigo's "Panama Canal" or Philip the Second's palace on the sea at Mallorca. He plays with historical motifs as the composer plays with traditional musical progressions. Behind the Renaissance stands a timeless *kairos*, the meeting of the world and the Church. The experience of irresolvable and absolutely undiminishable worldliness, a Catholic experience, consumes Claudel's spirit, and in order to embody it, he chooses the Renaissance and arranges the historical material in a way which radiates from this central concern. That fire which in the course of centuries burned out and lost itself under a pile of ashes will now, at the end of the epoch—enriched by the experiences of several centuries and stirred by the passions of the twentieth—kindle anew.

This situation, then, which could not have been grasped by any thinker or poet until our era, has now become so readily apparent that the form and the expression could not fail to find voice. Claudel, who spent decades in diplomatic service living in and experiencing a wide array of nations around the world, immersed himself lovingly and attentively in all those many nations and cultures, was destined for this experience and these images. It is more than just the Eros of Renaissance man which lives in him. The world has become better known and "overseeable" since that time of heroic, lonely discoverers and inventors; humanity has, through the agency of world travel, become closer and seems suddenly as a unity of essence and fate. Paradise is the earth and Adam is humanity. It is with the fate of this unique Adam that the poet is concerned. Claudel's drama is—unlike the individualistic theater of Shakespeare and the typical "world theater" of Calderón—inescapably both the history of the unique individual and the history of the whole human race. For now, where the unity is experienced concretely, Adam is in every individual, and every individual is always only Adam. The love and longing of Rodrigo and Prouheze is wholly individual, but likewise and as such it is in the highest sense universal, for the love and the longing of humanity for unity come together in them. The entire globe is not only outwardly the stage; that world is the stage necessarily and interiorly as well. Every time two human beings love each other, the fate of the world is at stake. Love only makes sense within this horizon, and the lovers' double movement of unending, arrow-like longing—which no limits can appease—and of endlessly revolving peace, a peace which wants

nothing other than itself, is the worldly horizon, and at the same time a questioning of the earth.

Claudel knows that this is a religious problem and that the question of horizon can only be resolved in God. He also knows further that in this resolution, achieved through death, the undiminished fullness of the earth must pass away. This double knowledge determines Claudel's Catholicism. For only Catholicism guarantees both simultaneously. No earthly value can be disdained out of arrogance or resentment. Every good is necessary to the Catholic; he cannot permit himself the smallest "no" where he stands before an earthly good. Even sin, guilt, and evil are always wrapped and embodied in such values, and even in the guise of evil, even there where the naked "no" (which is really a nothingness) stops us; even there the Catholic has to utter his loving "yes." Only there, where the degree of earthly value demands choice and preference, where even in the construction of the world there is implied a preordained "no," all the stronger there, where the "no" of evil meets us in its meanness and wretchedness, there a Christian's affirming attitude is compelled to utter its freely spoken "no" to the world. For absolute affirmation of the world is a contradiction in itself: for a being who is a mixture of yes and no, of being and nothingness, of worth and unworthiness, cannot affirm absolutely. To affirm a partial "no" means in truth to say "no." But it is precisely the Catholic, if he understands himself sufficiently, who does not exaggerate the "no" and turn his back on the world, in disillusionment with this inner limitation of being. He bears the "yes" as well as the "no" of the world before God and seeks to affirm both in expectation of final transfiguration by God. He knows that God himself has established himself in the heart of this no and nothingness, and in this way has removed every finality.

Don Camillo: And has God then sought nothingness in the womb of a woman?

Doña Prouheze: Where else had he otherwise suffered want?

Don Camillo: Do you mean, then, that since that time even nothingness belongs to us no more and is no longer our possession?

Doña Prouheze: It has been given to us in order that we might, from the confession we make of it, let Him Who is be all the more.

That is also the question of this drama: how is it possible to be at the same time both worldly and wholly oriented to God? How is the calling of the human being to the world and its unity compatible with the call of God to the cross and to the flame? Every flight from this question is excluded. As a result, no

renunciation is possible which does not stand with the most unaffrighted look into the midst of the world, and which accepts with final determination its fate. For the fate of the world and the fate of the Church are one and inseparable. Renunciation is not a self-chosen, arbitrary "no" to the "yes" of the world; rather it is that we stand completely open to the burning, dividing, trembling, and crucifying of genuine, affirming love. In this sense Claudel's play is perhaps something of a first ascetic and, in its assessments, a first mysticism from a Christian lay person for Christian lay people. The cross is no isolated world-denying pillory of martyrdom. The world itself, and love for the world—developed to the end of its inner logic—both stand in the shadow of Golgotha. The opposition of the eternal, arrow-like longing and the closed, circular or global worldliness are together the sign of the cross burned into the being of the world. The horizon of the world is itself the cross.

The Spanish Renaissance and the Spanish Baroque were the right stages on which to give this insight space and form. On the one side the brightest, the most overflowing, the most joyous, and the proudest worldliness: Rubens as the vanguard of the Gospel—the chaplain who looks incredulous is reproached as a heretic—; Don Balthazar, the Dutchman, is dead at the end of the first day, with his face sunk in that sumptuous dinner of juicy peaches, trout, pastry, and wines, which he had extolled shortly before, and which was stacked up for a supper of life as if in a still-life by Jordaens, Franz Hals, or Snyder. There are also the feisty, gigantic Velasquez-figures like the announcer, Don Gil, the old seadogs like Diego Rodriguez; proud, world-hungry monarchs like the king of the first two days; fine, inspired lovers of beauty like the viscount of Naples, daring desperadoes like Almagro, Guzmán and Ruiz Peraldo, and, deeper down, the whole circle of spicy, unpolished, vital humanity: the raging black woman, the artful Chinese, the downy-faced sergeant, the stingy servant girl, the gross fishermen of Mallorca, the intelligent Japanese: each of these individuals Claudel bathes in that comfortable, irresistible light of humor and good-naturedness, which appears like the rays of his secret, delicate affirmation. And behind and over this rises the unprecedented image of Doña Musica, the universal song of existence made tangible; the delicate, naive, singing wonder of the world, seamlessly presented and then transformed in a still more interior, more divinely managed yet mysterious way into the young woman, Maria Seven Swords. Existence as song, existence as rapturous desire, existence as a daily conquest, existence as discovery, and

as the great adventure. Finally, inclining over the whole, the figures of the saints who take part in the pageantry: Mary, who holds in her hands the satin slipper of Prouheze and therewith the key to the entire play; Santiago, protector of Rodrigo, the constellation of his love; the four saints of the Church of St. Nicholas in Prague; the guardian angel of Prouheze, partly her vacillating and upward striving conscience, partly that of her which is torn by the exquisiteness of the human being's destined suffering; and finally the mysterious and allegorical figure of the moon.

On the other side, however, this pleasant, very sentimental, jovial, passionate Baroque world appears plunged in bloody red and the deep black of suffering. Here is Don Pelagio, his majesty's pitiless judge, for whom the good and the strong are a single thing and behind whom stands the ghost of the Holy Inquisition; here, too, is the Jesuit priest who, hung on the cross, mysteriously lets his life run out, in order to swell the veins of his brother Rodrigo with the power of the relentless truth of the cross. Here, too, is the impossible love of Rodrigo and Prouheze itself, which is no less deep, holy, or less piercing than the arrow in the heart of St. Teresa. Slowly all of Spain transforms itself, through the power of the Jesuit's dying prayer, with the ever more painful piercing of this love-wound; transforms itself from the glory and the worldliness of Charles the Fifth into the severe black and—to all appearances—insubstantial Spain of Philip the Second. This transformation takes place in order to crystallize the last unity of worldly and divine love—here among the grotesque mummeries of the palace—into monstrosity, and theatricality. In this double image of worldly passion and the cross, Spain becomes a simile for the world. "The scene of this play is the world, and more especially Spain at the close of the sixteenth century, unless it be the opening of the seventeenth century." The pomp and haughtiness of the Baroque is a simile of the pomp and haughtiness of the world. The necessity and the impossibility of the love of Rodrigo and Prouheze is a simile of the same necessity and impossibility of existence. This is the horizon of the play.

Love

In the history of world literature Rodrigo and Prouheze have the same status as Dante and Beatrice, Tristan and Isolde, Hyperion and Diotima. Though all three pairs are related, Rodrigo and Prouheze surpass the others in conception. Fiery and

sinful, but tormented and, finally, blown into the air and transformed into a "burning star in the storm winds of the Holy Spirit," Prouheze is more human than Beatrice. Prouheze doesn't conclude, like Isolde, with a dissolving, wandering explanation of eternal love which appears as a nimbus about a divinized sensuality; Prouheze poses with the clarity of a French woman, which she is, the question of her eternal love and resolves it with a sharpness and relentlessness which surpasses the consequence of her life. Like Isolde, she also yearns for the nothingness of all things, but not ("most extreme, unconscious lust") in order to dissolve in them, but in order to smelt the last dross out of her love in the infernally burning torment of Mogador, until only the pure, bright flame remains. This also distinguishes Prouheze from Diotima, in that she doesn't remain in tragic, finally imaginable doubleness of sword and lust, hell and heaven. This is because Prouheze is not a goddess but a poor, guilty human being who offers herself and her beloved to God.

Just as Prouheze is the most human of the three heroines, so is Rodrigo more human than Dante, Tristan, or Hyperion. Hell, purgatory, and paradise trouble him little: his assignment as a human being is the earth and the unity of the world from America to Asia, which it is also his assignment to fashion. Nor is he the lonely hero, like Tristan. Behind him stand millions who press toward the light and who stand or fall with him. For that reason Rodrigo most resembles Hyperion, who is placed between absolute love and manly political action. But when, at the end, deeds fail and they both must retreat into art and isolation, while the dead beloved shines like a distant unreachable star over them, so is the sense of each one's fate quite different. Hyperion's "holy soul," deeply "injured" by the destructive hardness of the world, retreats into the inconsolable sorrow of aesthetic contemplation. Rodrigo, however, without resentment and in magnificent if quarrelsome humor that lasts right up to the end, sinks to the depths, becoming the hawker of more or less "kitschy" saints' pictures, then the victim of a wholly grotesque intrigue and a supposed traitor to his country, finally becoming a scullion in a Carmelite cloister. Rodrigo's realistic and consenting attitude, which by means of this consent enters into the definite and the conclusive, stands in sharp contrast to the imaginary, forever fleeing attitude immortalized in the tragedy of Hyperion. So Rodrigo and Prouheze are the first truly Christian lovers of world literature, in whom the great earthly passion is grasped immediately and for the first time as a religious problem. The opening out of the whole play into the spiritual world of Mount Carmel

and the Jesuit Prologue, which together establish a leitmotif, surround the earthly love of Rodrigo and Prouheze not as a cloister surrounds a romantic tale. Rather, the opening merely establishes a Christian dimension within which the dramatic action of this love plays itself out.

From the beginning this love appears as a dark force of nature which, like a roaring stream, breaks through every dam. Prouheze, the young bride of Pelagio, is swept along, despite all warnings, and even against her own protests, over the body of Don Balthasar. Rodrigo, for his part, is magically and without defense pulled beyond honor, even (in his conversation with the Chinese servant) past religion. Both are reproached with guilt, crime, and sin; they hear nothing, they are deaf; they spin like leaves in a storm that engulfs everything. They will never possess each other, but they are from that point on only meant for each other. Claudel never questions the natural phenomenon of love. It is enough that it is there, that it also took absolute hold of him at one time (all his works tremble with this dark experience, and most absolutely that most frightening of his dramas, *Break of Noon*). But is it a sin? *Etiam peccata!* Of course there is sin; it is one of the powers of this world, mixed into everything. The poet does not justify; he only describes what is. And he bends the knee with wonder that "God can write straight with crooked lines."

If there was guilt in this storm which irresistibly blows together Rodrigo and Prouheze, there is also nonetheless awakened in their souls a sense of the mysterious, the undetermined, and the absolute. Camillo, who loves Prouheze, has portrayed her at the beginning as the bait of this citadel in the African wasteland, where "nothing more is,"—it is the emptiness of the world. Now Prouheze knows that her own love is so absolute that by and by it will require that everything be swirled into its fiery whirlpool. This is the whirlpool which beckons at the end of that waste, and which Camillo has shown to her, and into which Pelagio indeed has dispatched her with the consent of the king. If absolute suffering and waiting in the nothingness of Africa is bestowed on the woman because of her love, on the man Rodrigo, in contrast, is bestowed an absolute impatience with all worldly work, and it is just because he struggles actively and creatively against the unlimited—the king of Spain recognizes this clearly—that his aptitude is to become master of the New World. The fire, which God has thrown upon the earth, will prevail, actively or passively, until everything is consumed. The spark in the last redoubt of creation is kindled, and it will follow the fuse until the final explosion.

Already here the insane contradiction of the play's opening reveals itself. Unquestioningly chained to a body, and inseparable from the sensual, this absolute love must shake the prison bars of the body, groaning to destroy that which is absolutely necessary to it. Indeed, so great is the agony of this finitude which stands as a wall between the two souls, that the impediment which Prouheze's marriage to Pelagio presents is only an external simile for that more fundamental separation.

Rodrigo: I want to confront her as witness of this so immensely vast separation between us, so that that other separation, caused by the man who took her before me, is only the painted semblance. A semblance of that abyss which yawns down to the roots of nature.

In Claudel's entire life's work there is no portrayal of a happy marriage. Marriage is only seen as a holy bond, or as an iron ring around a sacrament of impossibility. Marriage is not coincidentally or incidentally a cross; it is so essentially, because it chains together two finite beings who both desire the infinite; the one crucified in the nothingness of the other. In Claudel's play, *The City*, the character Lâla gives an early, enigmatic definition of the woman: "I am the promise which cannot be kept." Between Rodrigo and Prouheze this cross of marriage is not erected as the cross of their love—for the simple reason that it is already there—in her marriage to Pelagio. Prouheze is the first to realize that she is herself the "ungraspable promise," and thereafter that she is necessary for the realization of Rodrigo's eternal yearning.

Prouheze: Just as I can't give him the heavens, neither can I tear him away from the earth; I can only create a dissatisfaction commensurate with the greatness of his longing.

Prouheze understands that, even as she crucifies him, she also calls up in him an unquenchable thirst, which drives him out into and beyond the world to God. She is, as the angel will say of her, the bait of God. Rodrigo the man does not understand this. He is as blind as an animal for everything except the promise which is offered to him through woman. He understands, without comprehending, only the impossible simultaneity of paradise and infernal torment. He only knows that he has been wounded and that his entire being runs out, drop by drop, from this wound. Even when he has finally renounced the body which has been denied to him, he still feels only the ardent longing; he always demands the impossible. He cannot resign himself to the

inconceivable conversion which Prouheze finally places before him: in freely giving all to find everything. Even late in the play, when Prouheze is long dead, he understands his love only as the burning, blissful yet infernal emptiness, similar to the love of Hölderlin, Rilke, and Morgan:

Rodrigo: But I think that I shall never find her. This palpable distance, you my beloved. Even when you lived and when I possessed you, and held you in my arms in this embrace, in which hope was exhausted, who knows whether it was something else than a beginning and practice in this sense of want, without bottom and without hope, to which I have been destined, absolutely, without counterpoise.

Doña Seven Swords responds: "But you're describing hell!" And, indeed, Rodrigo is very near the fearful possibility of Camillo, who entrenches himself in his nothingness and burning loneliness and rejects the conversion which God offers him. And it is for this reason that Rodrigo, in obstinate concern for the world, even there where it is empty, does not grasp the opening of this emptiness to God. Instead, in the fourth act, this world must be destroyed in the most horrible of all destructions, and even this demolition is the grace of Prouheze. Prouheze experiences a grand immolation which transforms her into a star. Her crucifixion is at once a steep and towering flame. Rodrigo must manage in humility with a living body; his crucifixion is decay and ruin. But both forms, the way through hell and the way through the deep, are both a single way, and both meet at the same end. Both ways to death are fearful, but both are holy, and both necessary.

And so the way opens itself to the last secret of their love. According to the logic of this love, it is not enough that each of the lovers be kindled by the other into this unquenchable fire that blazes out beyond them into eternity. It is not enough that each must open in the other the final wound, the inner nothingness. Each must plunge into the soul of the other the sword of death—that death which is more fearful than bodily murder—that sword which is at the same time love and loss, the last tenderness and the last cruelty. What the good sister of Avila received at the hand of the angel, that God gives to all lovers if they really are lovers to the end, giving themselves into each other's hands. Prouheze guesses this first, in the ecstatic pain of her first separation:

Prouheze: O, I can give him what he wants! Truly, to be without him is not enough; I want to betray him. He's learned that from me, in the kiss which blended our souls.

Why should I refuse him what his heart desires? Why should his death lack in the least what I can give, since he does not expect joy from me? Has he spared me? Why should I indulge him in the least? Why should I refuse him a death blow, since I already see his eyes expecting it, since I read it in the depths of his hopeless eyes?

Rodrigo's whole fate is nothing other than the ever deeper penetrating sword of Prouheze. But Prouheze must also die through Rodrigo's agency. She has turned over to him her soul and all else besides. Now, however, she understands in a dream, in the speech of her guardian angel, that she must be free, absolutely free and absolutely destroyed. But how can she hold back her soul from Rodrigo, who holds it in his embrace?

Guardian Angel: But how can you consent to give to me what does not belong to you?

Doña Prouheze: And does not my soul belong to me?

Guardian Angel: Did you not give it to Rodrigo on that night?

Doña Prouheze: So tell him he has to bring it back to me.

Guardian Angel: You must ask permission of him yourself.

Doña Prouheze: Let me be, my beloved. Let me go! Let me become a star.

Guardian Angel: Are you ready to suffer at his hands the death which will change you into a star?

Doña Prouheze: Ah, God be thanked. Come, beloved Rodrigo. I am ready. Raise your murderer's hand above this being who belongs to you. Sacrifice what's yours. To die; to die at your hands is delight.

And despite his opposition, Rodrigo, too, must surrender her to death. But first comes the sacrament of emptiness and absence, the fundamental secret in the sacrament of love, bestowed by both on each other, binding and absolute: "*Consomme l'absence!*" For only in this way can Prouheze enter the unbounded source of all being and in that fashion come to full presence within her beloved, becoming the co-grounding of his being.

Doña Prouheze: Take my heart, Rodrigo. Take it in, and take my heart; take this God who fills me. The power with which I love you is not other than that by which you live. I am taken up forever into the secret which gives you eternal life.

But even after this secret of death is revealed there remains an unanswered question. It is the horrible possibility that Claudel unrolls before our shocked sight in the last conversation of Camillo and Prouheze. Prouheze has become, after Pelagio's

death, Camillo's wife in order to keep the wedding promise that she gave to the king of Spain. Only in this way could she bind and hold Camillo in Mogador. Camillo has tortured and whipped her. But Camillo has in that way given her the final release from all bounds. He finds the bead of the rosary which she had lost on the beach, and when he places it in her hand while she sleeps, the bead immediately turns into a globe. On its horizon her guardian angel arises, and in its fullness she sees Rodrigo and his whole earthly career. Finally the angel ascends, enraptured, into the circle of stars, to become one in the eternal glorification of God.

Camillo gave that to her. But Camillo is the God-defiling renegade. The face of the French poet Rimbaud, whom Claudel so much admired, shines tragically through Camillo. Camillo is the soul frozen in the ice of satanic loneliness. And the only thing that can free him from this ice is the soul of Prouheze, wholly free and totally possessed by God. At the end of the dialogue [in sc. viii] Camillo lets all the blasphemous scorn fall like a curtain and presents to the shocked Prouheze the naked "either-or": let Rodrigo go and belong only to God, or thrust him—Camillo—into hell. And Prouheze, like a shipwrecked sailor clinging to a plank, exclaims four times: "No, I cannot give up Rodrigo!" This is the same Prouheze who, earlier, in the dream, had given up everything which bound her to Rodrigo; the same Prouheze who will, shortly hereafter, in a decisive exchange with her beloved, softly but absolutely detach his clasping hands. Yet at this point she seems unwilling, even at the price of a damned soul, to give up the man for whom alone she lives. And yet it is here that the secret of her love fulfills itself. The renunciation which the angel had demanded is not the renunciation which Camillo demands. The angel wants her to raise her love to God, freeing it from all confines of tragic, earthly bonds. He wants her to offer up this love to the eternal and absolute, where there is no more contradiction between earthly and divine love.

Camillo's blasphemy, however, consists—as he himself knows—in the fact that for him God and world can never become one. It is for this reason that he has become a Muslim. In that religion Allah is everything and the human being nothing; both remain forever opposed to each other. It is also for this reason that he wants to deny Prouheze's love for Rodrigo, in order to save himself through her love for God. But this is Claudel's final justification of earthly, human love. Camillo's either-or is indeed a blasphemy. "Because they love no one, they believe that they love God," Péguy has said of many a Christian. And doesn't St.

John say: "How can the person who does not love his brother, whom he sees, love God, whom he does not see?"

World

Love is one pole of the play, the world is the other. And just as these two poles are closely related, so Prouheze has a task in the world just as Rodrigo has a love task, even though a woman seems ordered to love and man to the world. Having to this point spoken primarily of Prouheze's love, we must now speak of Rodrigo's world. For him, of course, the world-creating deed is nothing without love, but in his case this love comes to be a polestar of action. The endless craving, the eternally unrequited love gives him the strength for that restless creation, that blind struggle to succeed, which love has sunk in his heart, and which he pursues like an *idée fixe* to the ends of the earth, leaving behind as chaff everything that he has achieved. This is the way Rodrigo describes it in the concluding scene of the third day. There, after a ten-year separation, instead of sinking into one another's arms, the lovers, before the entire gathered court of the viscount, untie the fated strands of their love with the noble pathos of a Greek tragedy. In his solemn speech to his officers Rodrigo describes the role of the woman in the life of heroes, among whom he counts himself:

Don Rodrigo: Whence could have come to Caesar and Marc Antony and those great men whose names I have given you to recall,

Whose shoulder I feel on a level with mine,

Whence could have come to them the sudden power of those eyes, that smile, those lips, as if never before they had kissed a woman's face;

If, into their life, all busy steering the onrush of time, had not burst an unexpected bliss?

A flash of lightning gleams out for them, by which the whole world is sent down to death, is cut away from them;

A promise, which nothing in the world can satisfy, not even this woman, who for one moment makes herself its vessel to us.

Rodrigo's great deed is only the uncoiling of a spring once unbearably compressed. Out of an unearthly tenderness derive that hard, brutal injustice; that rapacious yet radiant code of heroism, such as the Almagro-scene depicts; those proud achievements, like the transport of ships over the mountains of Panama—purchased at the cost of ten thousand lives—or the

expedition to the Philippines and Japan, and that final plan, already bathed in the fog of illusion, for an English expedition.

The creation of the world, the uniting of the globe, serve to fill the infinite voids which love opens up in the heart of the hero and which translates itself immediately into a need to round the horizon of the world and make all human beings take part in it. If Prouheze grasps the Christian sense of love before he does, Rodrigo himself comes to understand from the very first the deeply Christian sense of the act of union. "As a Catholic" he undertakes, first, to make his mark on America, then, to escape his isolation, he tries to do the same with Japan; then he seeks to organize a chorus of peoples, and finally to bring before the king of Spain those politically crazy proposals which brought upon him the charges of treason against the Spanish nation.

From his early drama, *The City*, through the titanic tragedy of conquest, *The Head of Gold*, to the fourth and fifth of the *Great Odes* and the *Conversations*, Claudel has never ceased to express in ever new ways his ardent belief in unity and particularly in the growing unity of the world. How little he cares for the obliteration of unique national characteristics, however, whose loss to the noblest polyphony would be achieved by the imposition of an empty monotony of sound, is best manifest in *The Satin Slipper*, with its colorful individuation of peoples and nations. As poet and as Catholic Claudel sees in each individual people an unrepeatable quality, and for that precise reason irreplaceable, indeed necessary for the circle dance of love which is the universe.

Because Rodrigo's drive to achieve is a child of his love, it cannot do other than participate in that love's fate. A contradiction exists in this drive which is intimately bound up with the contradiction of his love. Claudel's fourth "Great Ode" described this contradiction fiercely, and with shrill dissonance. It bore the title, "The Muse which is Grace." In a dialogue between the poet and his muse both appear at the start in a conciliatory and rhythmic opposition of realistic artistic figuration and idealistic flight of fancy. The muse, as ecstatic inspiration, tempts the poet aloft, above the earth into the eternal. The poet, resolutely masculine in his relationship to this figure, drags the muse back down to earth. But the demands of the muse become more and more importunate and the threats and enticements ever more ardent. Whoever has given himself up to the muse must be ready for the utmost, for the sacrifice of everything earthly.

The poet allows the muse to speak then offers his response. A woman has no calling; only the man knows what the

stiff-necked truth of the soil and of the meager yet glorious earth is worth, which he carefully sets in order. Now, however, the muse lets the mask of the aesthetic fall, and the face which the poet sees is divine. "You call me muse; my other name is grace." The movement toward transcendence—toward the ideal and toward inspiration—does not rest until it flows into the Absolute. Art is only a preliminary to mysticism, and along the way there are no boundaries and no directions. At this point there awakens in the poet the dark, tenacious instinct of the earth. He plugs his ears and turns sorrowfully back to the earth, and yet there arises out of the mighty deep the "sister of pain"—that early sketch of Prouheze and all Claudel's female figures—the gloomy emblem of desperate earthly love.

Two long decades lie between this tragic poem and *The Satin Slipper*. In this long ripening time a wonderful thing happens: the flaming, unearthly Muse and the heavy, chthonic sister of night have become one and the same person: Prouheze, the sinner, the ardent lover, the heavenly star. But this does not mean that the fearful rift, which stretches human beings between heaven and earth has now been painlessly healed either for Rodrigo or for Claudel himself. For Rodrigo the stance of the fourth ode remains the only understandable one, for to the very end he cannot follow the transformation of the earthly into the heavenly Prouheze. As a result, it is necessary to teach him by means of force what he did not see of his own free will.

The fourth day of the play describes this route. But this act is often misunderstood, and it is only a correct reading of this act which assures a proper understanding of the whole play. At first sight this fourth day certainly appears as an insignificant satyr play after the tragic trilogy of the first three days—like something to "kill time" between the death of Prouheze and Rodrigo's end. Perhaps it also serves as a painful mirror which the aging poet, growing old and lame in his creative powers, holds up before himself. We should not forget, either, that such similar easily lyrical and intimate final acts had become a conventional feature in some modern French conversation plays. But the import of this convention, which those conversation plays for the most part hide beneath a veil of sentimental elegance, steps forth earnestly and almost frighteningly in Claudel. The fourth day is the fading and emptying of Rodrigo's world and of Rodrigo himself. This day also brings the fulfillment of his love for Prouheze. The comic, the grotesque, the burlesque, the laughable, the unreal, and the merely theatrical all burst forth—in various forms—in the world of the hero. Things don't disappear, but they lose their existential

heaviness; they lose color. Like mummies which one drags from the grave, a breath suffices to make them crumble into dust.

Claudel has given this fourth act two central symbols: one comprehends the figure of Philip the Second and the sinking of the Spanish Armada; the other is the stage setting itself, the sea.

Philip the Second represents that moment at which the most powerful political force which a people ever exercised begins suddenly to crumble; hollow ceremonial replaces vital form. Still, precisely through the dimming of the external brightness, a momentary, inner, spiritual form achieves a last ripeness. Claudel displays both, but they are set grotesquely one against the other. It is indeed scarcely believable, psychologically, that the melancholy monologue of the king before the death's head—which reveals to him in a kind of trance the defeat of the Armada—is spoken by the same man as the grotesque academic speech in the later court scene. But Claudel is not concerned about psychology here. The dream-likeness of the first and the burlesque of the second monologue are two ways of expressing the same thing: the unreality of the Spanish decadence under Philip. It is true that we scarcely have a presentiment of the Philip of the Escorial in Claudel's ripe old Philip, simultaneously tired yet with brazen finish. But this is also necessary, for that aspect of the king's completeness must bear a wholly transcendent face, a transfiguration which can only become apparent in defeat.

Still more important and far-reaching is the second figure. The stage directions for Day Four indicate: "This whole day takes place on the sea." And so it does; on ships, in little boats and skiffs, and finally with characters immersed and swimming in the sea. In order to evaluate this figure's meaning properly, one has to keep in mind the complex significance of the sea in the work of Claudel, particularly in the second Great Ode: "The Spirit and the Water." For Claudel the sea is, as it were, the matrix of the earth, as it is heralded in the tones of Felix Mendelsohn's hymn of praise for the British Isles, the overture to "Fingal's Cave." And indeed England, and all solid ground, is like a ship which bobs upon this simultaneously beautiful and terrifying abyss. For water is at once the dissolving and creative element, and as such it is even more a simile. It is the sensible mirroring of spirit. Penetrating through the finest pores of material existence, it releases from within what is opaque and combines it anew in its own crystal clarity. The transparent water drop, shining in the light of the sun, is the sense image of spirit and of that spirit's transparency in God. But in order to become this transparent drop, every human being must dissolve, in frightening agony, his own

clouded, sinful thickness. He must open up this spring of interior water from its deepest sources, so that it can well up with a powerful force to the surface of his existence. The second great ode blends four images into one another without apparent boundaries. The first is the image of the mountain torrent which, having overflowed the fields, rushes forward and becomes the life-giving source of fruitfulness for the land. The second image is the incessant flood of tears, in which the "soul of salt" wells up and at the same time breaks open. The third image is that of semen, ejaculated from out of the inmost depth of life. The last image is of baptismal rain streaming down on nature, which has crumbled in upon itself.

All these motifs resound in *The Satin Slipper*, but the wild or streaming waters are now swallowed up in the quiet of the surrounding sea. As early as Day One [scene. xiv], the Chinese servant—thoroughly engrossed in the erotic—comprehends the secret of the Milky Way, and this prepares for the simile of the moonlight on the sea at the end of the second act. Here the moon is that milky, fluid medium in which, after the day's crisis and pain, and after their spiritual betrothal, both lovers rest, swim, sleep, and finally drift. In the course of the fourth day this ecstatically flowing moonlight becomes at once both a realistic and a more symbolic form of water which bears, penetrates, and surrounds everything.

The simultaneity of both functions of water: dissolution and creation, drowning and giving birth, determine everything here. While the world is bathed in shadowy unreality, there appears in it at the same time its most physical reality. In this way the theme of love fulfills itself, where emptying and fulfillment are a single process.

At the beginning of the fourth act the Armada has sunk, and for all practical purposes Rodrigo has sunk with it. But the false announcement of victory makes possible the entire fabricated intrigue against him, which he nevertheless is able to elevate, fancifully, into a matter of high renown for himself. Woven throughout this act is the theme of Rodrigo's artistic nature. This theme presents itself in the betrayal of the actress and the burlesque creation of Don Mendez Leal. Deliberate or not, both scenes are fundamentally a bloody satire on the aesthetic world, and on the Helena-Act and the Homunculus scenes in Goethe's *Faust II*. It is also clear that, in this act, Claudel stands personally related to the artistic point of view of Rodrigo. One even hears the poet speaking to us, in an unmediated fashion, from behind the mask of his creation. But whether or not Rodrigo

is right when compared with the views of the king of Spain is not the point. What is essential is the increasing unreality of this entire alternative world which Rodrigo creates in his imagination, and the pressing "necessity" of his inspirations, that more extravagant flight into the realm of free-floating fantasy, unfettered by earthly ties. That sense of unreality comes to painfully sharp expression in Rodrigo's flirting with the actress, in the course of which all the heroic, genuine tones of love for Prouheze sound again, only now unbearably shallow and false. This scene also suggests the unreality and destruction of Rodrigo's love in its all too worldly and heroic greatness. Rodrigo, the sharp-sighted, sensitive hero has become in a most distasteful way insensitive and blind. One thinks involuntarily of Wallenstein's end or the Lemur scene in *Faust*. But we should note the fact that Claudel sees the Lemur scene beginning in the Helena-Act.

In the same unreal way, the world-unifying, fugitive plans which Rodrigo's fantasy unrolls before the king are only apparently identical with the world-uniting plans of the young Rodrigo. It is with justice that Doña Seven Swords unmasks these plans as a wrong path and that the king exposes them as treachery. Of course he doesn't intend this, since he also has deep grounds to bring against Seven Swords' arguments. But though Rodrigo is still right in his own ideal, unrealistic sphere, he is wrong with respect to reality. Here the quarrel between poet and muse heats up again: for Seven Swords, who calls for her father's obedience to a completely individual and concrete deed, assumes again the role of the unconditionally demanding "grace" which is a theme of Claudel's fourth ode. Rodrigo, however, who still sees himself as the architect of the hard temporal world and again "stops his ears and turns to the world," has finally become—because of his disobedience—unearthly, fantastical, and unreal. He sinks into that sphere of existential unreality which Claudel knew how to create magically—and so drastically—throughout the piece by means of the fantastic theatrical effects: in the sphere of the "not too subdued," which is only the fantasy of the poet himself, in the character of Don Leopold August, who is at bottom only a vain, light-weight nothing, in the figures of Ramiros and Isabel, whose whole being—outside the head—exists only on a painted canvas, in the Professors Lederer and Wieherer, only laughable shadows of an even more laughable and schematic wisdom, and in the character of Don Mendez Leal, who represents literally nothing other than an overblown phantom of a court parasite, and finally in the

actress, whose individuality is so meaningless that she steps forth in two different versions of herself.

In the tone of the dialogue between Rodrigo and Seven Swords one hears the trembling anxiety which grasps the aging poet too; who has to be at once a single, obedient human being and the bearer of universal, world-creative visions. Both aspects of Rodrigo struggle with each other: for the difficult deed to which Seven Swords calls him will make it impossible for him to respond to the attraction of infinity. But in thinking about the "unification of the world," the fantastical poet forgets about the existential deed. No doubt: from Rodrigo cries forth Claudel's deepest longing of the heart, but he takes the side of little Seven Swords and shows himself and his hero to be wrong. It is easier, as Rodrigo had already said, to paint the portraits of saints than to become a saint.

In light of this discussion, the conclusion of the play has a pressing necessity. All the while the floor is reeling in a fantastic way during the grotesquerie of the last palace scene, and finally falls away beneath Don Rodrigo, and as he then sinks from level to level until he ends up among a pile of old scrap iron as the booty of a convent of rag-picking Carmelites; at the same time Seven Swords—the daughter of love (Prouheze) and the beloved of music (literally by the son of Doña Musica)—is swimming to the ship of Don Juan of Austria. In order to make the symbolism still clearer, she is accompanied by the young butcher-girl, who finally drowns from exhaustion and fear. As covering after covering falls from Rodrigo, the holy water takes over; Seven Swords bathes in the delightful, lukewarm element of eternity, in the transfigured medium of overflowing love and the inner music of things. Maria of the Seven Swords is the human sword which Prouheze plunged into Rodrigo and which he, in turn, plunged into Prouheze; she is the symbolic water of the heart which trickled out of each wound. So this development of the "world's" reality concludes with the same secret into which the reality of "love" descended; that is, with the simultaneity of complete emptying out of the world and the full incarnation of the divine in the world: with the redemptive raising up of the world in the grace-filled, ever-flowing sea of divine life.

Love and World

There remains one step to take: love—the realm of Prouheze's creativity—and world—the realm of Rodrigo's

creativity—have not been grasped in their full interpenetration. Claudel stresses that in this work it is not two divided independent motifs which, however artfully, become intertwined. Both motifs are, in fact, one. This manifests itself primarily in the fact that not only does a tragic tension exist in the man, between his work and his love, but that the woman, too, is incorporated interiorly and necessarily in the world of action and even politics.

It is perhaps the uniqueness of Claudel's achievement that all the great scenes in which the protagonist's individual fate undergoes development, also have an ethnological, geographic, astronomical dimension, just as every great political and cosmic issue always remains linked to the individual destiny. The opening monologue of the Jesuit joins the prayer for Rodrigo undivisibly with the welfare of the whole continent. Rodrigo "belongs to those who cannot save themselves unless they save everyone, which salvation, according to them, is only achieved through the figure (*Gestalt*)." Camillo binds Prouheze to Africa, and he does so not only with the "nothingness" of the coastline fastness of Mogador but with the saving of the whole continent, which must be achieved. Rodrigo's conversation with the Chinese servant concerning Prouheze issues in an astronomical vision and an evocation of China.

Behind the pastoral Sicilian idyll of *Musica* and the viceroy of Naples stands the Italy of Renaissance humanism, and then in Prague the view widens itself further. *Musica* disappears in anonymity, becoming the heart of Germany, while the protective saints of the East—of the Tchechans, Russians, and Greeks—surround her and represent their various peoples. Dionysius (St. Denis) throws a bridge between the Byzantine mystics and the French Enlightenment. Even Santiago is both a saint and a constellation. The moon's monologue extends the moment of happiness between Rodrigo and Prouheze into one of paradise for all of humankind. In the battle of words between Rodrigo and Almagro, the fate of South America is decided. The dream conversation of Prouheze and the guardian angel begins within sight of the turning globe, but it extends out into a confirmation of the fate of Japan, India, and Oceania, finally flowing out to include the entire cosmos. Prouheze gives herself to Camillo as his wife in order to save Africa. Rodrigo's symbolic canal through Panama and his voyage to Japan are only the echoes of Prouheze's dream vision of the angel. Rodrigo's last meeting with Prouheze assumes world-historical proportions as the meeting of the struggling man with the eternal promise of the wife. The formal conversations of Rodrigo with Daibutsu have as

their background the inclusion of Japan and Japanese culture within the wider human community. The figure of Seven Swords herself is inextricably bound to the war in Turkey and is renewed in the freeing of Africa. Even the farce with the actress has to do with the fates of England and America.

There is, finally, no individual fate which is not at the same time social and world-historical. Adam is inextricably both. Every stone which falls into the water casts ripples which wash out to the ends of the earth. And so intimately are both the individual and the universal united that Prouheze cannot reach Rodrigo because she is responsible for the fate of Africa. And Rodrigo may not remain with her because behind him, as an assignment, stands the whole of America. Rodrigo himself becomes guilty only because he will not give up his idealistic and aesthetic inclinations for the political necessities of the Turkish war.

The unity of love and world stands forth in fine symbolic fashion in the great conversation of Prouheze with the angel. The globe turns slowly before the dreaming woman. It is, in fact, the bead from her rosary which Camillo has found for her. And as the globe turns, it reveals to Prouheze the cosmic face of her beloved. The last horizon of Rodrigo's fate is geographically the farthest: the Japanese archipelago, and from this horizon there rises up the figure of Prouheze's guardian angel. The way between the earthly Prouheze and her ideal heavenly image is also the way of Rodrigo's fate. It is for this reason that Rodrigo, the viceroy of Panama, dreams too of his journey to Japan:

Don Rodrigo: I have a horror of the past! I have a horror of remembrance!
The voice I thought I heard just now deep down in me, behind me,
'Tis not behind, 'tis in front, it calls me on; if 'twere behind me it
would have no such bitterness and no such sweetness!

Before him, at the end of the earth, waits Prouheze. And when Rodrigo breaks through the middle of a continent, when he builds the ship-ferry through Panama and so unites one sea with another, then the great political deed is simply one with his love: he is merely building the way to the inner sea of his beloved. And more: when he opens this gigantic gate, he has also opened the gate for Prouheze, through which he lets her go, and the sleeping woman asks reproachfully of her beloved, whose grasping hand appears in shadowy fashion over America:

Doña Prouheze: Why do you hold me fast upon this half-destroyed threshold? Why would you turn me from the door which you yourself have opened?

It so happens that as Rodrigo brings the Gospel to Japan, he offers to the expectant emptiness of the heathen peoples only his own far deeper emptiness, the emptiness of his longing love. It is an emptiness such as only a Catholic heart can hold. And in this figure he becomes the bearer of the good news:

The Guardian Angel: So the peoples appear, who moan and wait and face the rising sun.

To them is he sent as a messenger.

He understands their darkness, since he has sins enough to weigh him down.

Their despair is clear to him, since God shows him enough of joy.

The nothingness on whose shore they have encamped for so long, which, through absence of being, has grown empty, and in which the counter-image of heaven is, he must reveal to them God's image, so that they may fully grasp it.

It is not Rodrigo who reveals God to them, but he must come in order that these waiting masses may feel the lack of God. At this farthest horizon of the earth the lovers' ways diverge; the horizon of their love is the horizon of the earth.

Here, then, where love and world become one, we attain to the surpassing meaning with which a Jesuit opened the action and which a group of Carmelites will close. At the start of the action there stands, like a secret compression spring recognizable only to the spectators, the prayer of the Jesuit, a prayer which mirrors the spirit of his order. At the end of that action, like the pocket into which the ball disappears, stands the Carmelite order and its spirit of individual insignificance, which looks upon itself as "garbage," into which Rodrigo sees himself gathered up. The Jesuit lets us know that Rodrigo, his brother, was also once a novice in the Society of Jesus, but that he left the novitiate because "he imagined that it was not his duty to wait but to conquer and possess."

The Jesuit: But, Lord, it is not so easy to escape you, and if he does not walk according to his own light toward you, so shall he have to do it in his darkness.

So Rodrigo's brother requests for Rodrigo, who does not desire divine love, a tragic love, and the educative bond to the body and soul of a wife, as well as for the "other" way by means

of which the flame can still realize itself in spite of willfulness. But this is not a blind tragedy turned in upon itself. It is the tragedy of one who, behind his worldly longing, feels the thorn of the religious life goading him. Rodrigo, the former novice, is a wounded animal. His whole flight from the hunter-God drives him through the world into the inescapable trap of the hunter who finally gathers up the dead-tired and lost animal as a man plucks ripe fruit which he has tended. Prouheze, as she learns it from the angel, was for this noble animal the "bait." The Jesuit's prayer is answered, and his goal realized for Rodrigo, despite Rodrigo's opposition: the piercing of that restless yet open heart, which moved without ever pausing through the ways of the world, possessed only by love, and which now finds itself at the end of its way. And Prouheze places herself willingly under the same law in which she—from the outset—refused any final rest, having done so by means of the votive surrender of her slipper to the Virgin:

Doña Prouheze: I say to you in advance that I shall shortly see you no more and that I shall set everything in motion against you!

But if I then try to plunge into evil, so may it be with a lame foot! And I will fly over the barrier which you have erected, even though it be with crippled wings.

In the fate of each festers the thorn of every great passionate earthly love. But for all that suffering, love is not torn apart and left behind as a mere means to God. In the last moment, when everything is given up, the fullness of earthly love wells up again, as the wonderfully symbolic scene with Diego Rodriguez in the fourth day shows. That is the last word of this drama, in which so much suffering piles up; the word "joy" that flashes forth at each decisive point. It is joy that the lovers expect from each other and which they finally receive. Joy is the personified music which, like a healing elixir, penetrates all the pores of existence. Joy breathes not least from Claudel's noble language, which streams forth, always expansive, noble, bright, roguish, cozy, delicate and warm, like a simile and like an incontrovertible revelation of the highest form of joy.—*Translated by Ed Block Jr.* □