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Yehuda Jean-Bernard Moraly. L'Œuvre impossible: Claudel, Genet, Fellini. Paris: Éditions le Manuscrit, 2013. 207 pp.

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Abstract

Review of Yehuda Jean-Bernard Moraly. *L'Œuvre impossible: Claudel, Genet, Fellini*. Paris: Éditions le Manuscrit, 2013. 207 pp.

Keywords

unfinished works, creative process, Paul Claudel, Jean Genet, Federico Fellini

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The book is organized in three different chapters, and is based on three incomplete projects by Paul Claudel, Jean Genet and Federico Fellini. Moraly seeks to reconstruct the different creative stages of the unfinished works. This reconstruction sheds light on the process of writing, from inception, to development, and ultimate abandonment. The author frames his discussion by exploring what led the three authors to put an end to their works before their completion. The main argument of the book is that analyzing the abandoned projects offers a crucial key to understanding each author's complete work: "Il se pourrait bien que l'œuvre impossible d'un artiste constitue le centre de son œuvre" (17) 'It could very well be that the unachievable work of an artist constitutes the center of his overall creation.'

In Chapter 1, Moraly contends that Claudel wanted to write a work in which Christianity and Judaism engaged in a dialogue. Without success, he attempted to add a fourth part to his Coufontaine Trilogy that he considered incomplete, through a dialogue between a Jewish mother and her blind daughter. Proposed by Ida Rubinstein, the staging projects of *L'Histoire de Tobie et de Sara* ('The Story of Tobit and Sarah') and *La danse des morts* ('The Dance of the Dead') based on Ezekiel were also unachieved. Finally, *On répète Tête d'or* ('Tête d'or Rehearsed'), in which prisoners rehearsed the play in a World War II camp, was unfinished. Moraly argues that Claudel stopped writing as he began to ponder the mystery of his complex relationship with Judaism. In the chapter that follows, Moraly turns his focus to Genet. As Genet worked toward the completion of *La mort* ('Death'), he published fragments of it which related to a larger project of his that he eventually destroyed. Moraly contends that analyzing the unfinished manuscript is critical to understanding his overall theatrical work and political writings. Sartre referred to this unfinished project in *Saint Genet comédien et martyr* (*Saint Genet, Actor and Martyr*). Despite its incompleteness, it constituted, according to Moraly, a response to Sartre that would inspire Genet's subsequent writing. In the final chapter, Moraly discusses how the theme of creative failure was already present in Fellini's *Otto e Mezzo* (*Eight and a Half*). A few years later, the filmmaker prepared a scenario for a new film, *Viaggio di G. Mastorna* (*Journey of G. Mastorna*). While everything was set for shooting, he abandoned the project. Its scenario was published in 1995 after his death.

Moraly's critical reading and approach is similar for the three works and authors. Using drafts and testimonials, he identifies in each unachieved work the resumption of images and themes, in order to establish a link between the abandoned projects and the authors' work as a whole: "Dans les trois aventures créatrices, ces trois artistes, parmi les plus grands du siècle qui vient de se

terminer, échouent à penser l'Autre Monde" (194) 'In the three creative works, the three artists, among the greatest of the century which just ended, fail to conceive fully the beyond.' Yehuda Moraly shows how Claudel, Genet, and Fellini put an end to their creations as they were about to reflect and write about something essential: the questioning and abolition of borders between Judaism and Christianity, good and evil, the temporal and the eternal. In each instance, the authors stopped their work as if they became instantly immobile in their thinking and action.

The book lacks a more detailed explanation about the choice of authors analyzed and how they relate to one another through different genres. Moraly succeeds, however, in showing how the impossible work of an artist, writer, or filmmaker, half-conceived and abandoned, may in fact reveal what is at the center of his or her creative process. In this respect, the book will be of interest to students and faculty working in literary, theater, and film studies. As different as Claudel, Genet, and Fellini might be, they provide great examples that support the notion that authors often fail in their attempt to confer what is ineffable and yet central to their ambition: "L'art serait-il lui-même toujours en fin de compte une œuvre impossible?" (196) 'Might not art be in itself always in the end an impossible work to achieve?'

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