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LAWRENCE A. JOSEPH Catherine Pozzi's "Agnès":  
Writing as Self-Construction

Fifty years after her death, Catherine Pozzi's place in the history of French poetry appears both eminent and secure. Her name figures prominently in Robert Sabatier's recent *Histoire de la poésie française* and both Jeanine Moulin and Michel Décaudin have included her poems in their well-known anthologies.<sup>1</sup> In so doing, they followed the lead of Thierry Maulnier and André Gide who in their selections of French verse were the first to raise the poems of Catherine Pozzi to canonical status.<sup>2</sup> But in spite of this recognition, Catherine Pozzi remains an "illustre inconnue." While critics continue to express enthusiastic admiration of her poetry, they have almost entirely neglected her other published writing. I propose to examine here her story "Agnès" and the biographical impulse from which it springs.

Catherine Pozzi herself bears much of the responsibility for the critical neglect of her writing. Although she desired passionately to communicate with the widest possible public, at the same time she obstinately refused to allow her work to be published. She wrote prolifically all her life, maintaining a vast correspondence, for example, as well as an intimate journal, still unpublished, that at the time of her death filled more than forty notebooks; yet, if one excludes some short translations and a few pieces of occasional journalism, her published work consists of only one story titled "Agnès," six poems and an essay she called *Peau d'âme* and had conceived as a kind of semi-poetic introduction to a larger philosophical treatise she never completed.<sup>3</sup> In spite of the pleas of her friends and admirers, among them influential literary figures such as the director of the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, Jean

Paulhan, she was extremely reluctant to divulge her manuscripts and on the rare occasions when she did allow her work to appear in print, she usually insisted on hiding her authorship. For example, "Agnès" appeared privately printed in an edition of only fifty copies under the mysterious initials C. K. (Catherine-Karin) as well as in the *NRF*, where it was widely admired and provoked lively speculation as to the identity of the author.<sup>4</sup> Guesses ranged from Paul Valéry to Marie Laurencin.

By contrast, her first published poem, "Ave," appeared in the *NRF* under the name "Karin Pozzi"; but this was the result of a misunderstanding between author and editor.<sup>5</sup> She consistently refused to publish selections from her philosophical work-in-progress so it was left to her son to bring out posthumously first *Peau d'âme* and subsequently her complete poems along with a few translations of verse by Stefan George.<sup>6</sup> If Catherine Pozzi has, in the end, attained the literary immortality she ardently desired, it was in spite of her best efforts to insure that her genius would remain unrecognized.

This anomaly—the refusal of a woman of literary genius to publish her work—is only one of the most salient manifestations of an existential dilemma that the life of Catherine Pozzi presents in exemplary form and that recent feminist research has identified as typically faced by women writing in a male-dominated society and literary tradition.<sup>7</sup> Limited in her activities by ill-health, she found her existence even more severely constricted by her inability to accept emotionally the autonomy which her privileged material circumstances offered her. Wealth, culture and intelligence might have given her access to a professional career but the limitations imposed on women by her family and her society—limitations she internalized—made this impossible. Genius and achievement were the prerogatives of men, she felt intuitively, and she repeatedly placed herself in a subservient role: her relations with the attractive and successful father by whom she felt rejected, with the husband whom she mothered, and with the famous lover whose thought she nurtured and whose conversations she recorded all fit into this pattern. In her writing, she held up as an ideal collaborative effort rather than individual success. Spiritually, she sought salvation in union, be it with a lover or with God. Catherine Pozzi felt herself, all her life, compelled to wrest from others control of her own destiny.

The latter conflict is, essentially, a problem of youth and, indeed, the theme of adolescence appears in Catherine Pozzi's writing with obsessive frequency and determines its tone and style as well as its sub-

stance. Like an adolescent, she felt herself an uncompleted being. Although she valorized the domestic sphere to which her culture relegated her and took on the narcissism it expected of women in the extreme fastidiousness with which she cared for her physical appearance and surroundings, she remained unsatisfied with these occupations. She felt compelled to remake herself, to create a self more closely identified with the masculine roles which she associated with perfection, achievement in the world, plenitude. Her writing is the central element in this enterprise. It enabled her to transcend the inferior role of woman to become a writer. Her literary vocation is essentially autobiographical and collapses the distinction between the public and the private. "Agnès," her first published work of the imagination, is exemplary in this respect. "Voici comment je me bâtis" ("Look how I am going to construct my self;") says the adolescent heroine of this story.<sup>8</sup> Catherine Pozzi creates a new identity by writing about her heroine's fictive attempt to create an identity.

Pozzi's fundamental experience of self was one of absence, insufficiency and discontinuity. Much of this feeling of inadequacy doubtless stems from her childhood. Despite the extraordinary privileges she enjoyed, she suffered intensely, caught in a conflict between parents she both loved and resented. Her father, doctor Samuel Pozzi, a renowned surgeon, was widely known in theatrical and artistic circles. A famous portrait by Sargent preserves the image of this exceptionally handsome man, dressed in a striking crimson robe, set against the backdrop of his salon. Although she found her father's elegance, charm and intelligence enormously seductive and deeply admired his social and professional success, she judged harshly what she regarded as his selfishness and was appalled by the violence of his temper. For his part, Samuel Pozzi, while at first enchanted by his vivacious and intelligent daughter, came eventually to reject her: as a woman, she was naturally associated in his imagination with his wife, from whom he was becoming increasingly estranged. Catherine Pozzi's feelings toward her mother, an attractive heiress from Lyon whose ancestors had amassed a fortune in the construction of the first railroads in the Bourbonnais, were similarly ambivalent. Her mother's beauty and kindness would always remain a model for her but she found her lack of intellectual curiosity irritating and felt contempt for her domestic defeat at the hands of her husband. In this unhappy household fraught with bitterness and misunderstandings, Catherine Pozzi felt abandoned and saw her very essence undermined.

Writing represented her attempt to fill this existential void: lan-

guage and the imagination enabled her to construct a self and give an identity to a fragmented consciousness. As patently autobiographical enterprises, the letter and the intimate journal were naturally her privileged mode of expression. But identity requires not only the construction, in words, of a self but also its recognition in the eyes of others. However voluminous these autobiographical writings, their value to her as self-construction was restricted by the discontinuous nature of their form as well as by their limited circulation: her letters were confidential documents and her journal was only on rare occasions communicated to intimate friends. The lack of plenitude that was Catherine Pozzi's motivation for writing was at the same time what prevented her from affirming her existence through publication. The confidential status of these writings is part of their message: one cannot easily venture to open to the public gaze that which does not fully exist.

In contrast to her confidential writing, the literary texts—one story and a lyric poem—that found their way, albeit circuitously, into print during Catherine Pozzi's lifetime present themselves as works of the imagination, artifacts distanced from their creator. As fictions, however, they use a first person narrator and themselves thematize autobiographical self-creation. In fact, both the fictional narrators or speakers and the real author attempt to construct an identity and acquire wholeness and autonomy. By projecting herself into fictional autobiographers, Catherine Pozzi, in effect, conflated the self and the other, the world of fact and the imagined world. In life, she became a writer, a constructor of fictions through which she lived and which changed her self-conception. Looked at from the opposite perspective, her imaginative creations are versions of her real self. Their imaginative truth carries along with it much of the literal truth of her existence.

"Agnès," the first of Catherine Pozzi's works of the imagination to reach publication, remains the clearest illustration of the complex relations linking the writer with her creations. An epigraph "Aux Mânes de la Comtesse de Ségur, née Rostopchine" presents the seventeen-year-old heroine of the tale as a modern day "petite fille modèle" and invites the reader of a sophisticated literary review to assume an ironic distance between author and heroine. Catherine Pozzi's literary testament, however, invites us to read the story in a different perspective. In this document, dated 1931, she requests that "Agnès," ostensibly a work of fiction, be reprinted as a preface to her intimate journal. Catherine Pozzi evidently regarded the tale as an expression of truths about herself.

In fact, the narrative voice in "Agnès" is closely related to the one heard in Catherine Pozzi's intimate journal. Both narrations employ the first person, but while the journal addresses the writer's present and future self, "Agnès" is cast in the form of a series of letters addressed to a phantom, an ideal lover to whom they give a virtual existence. Like her creator, Agnès is moved to write by the feeling that her life is incomplete and meaningless. Meaning and wholeness are, in her imagination, masculine attributes and she looks to a lover to give her the experience of plenitude whose lack is a torment to her. The appearance of such a lover depends upon chance, however, and the thought that her life might run its course without having allowed her personal fulfillment overwhelms her with anxiety. The role the world allots to women is, in her view, necessarily passive and it is despair at her impotence that impels her to give a semblance of existence to the lover whom she may never meet:

Le sort des femmes dépend excessivement du hasard [she tells him]. Elles vous rencontrent trop tôt, trop tard, et celles qui vous rejoignent quand même ne vous ont jamais à l'heure qui serait la plus délicieuse. . . .

Quand l'heure viendra, quand je serai prête, avec la robe, et le coeur, —quand je dirai: "maintenant, maintenant," et que vous ne viendrez pas (comme tant d'autres fois où vous n'êtes pas venu), je ne laisserai pas ce que j'ai de meilleur se dissiper jusqu'à l'autre bord du monde.

Je m'assieds, je vous écris, amour, je vous l'envoie.

[The fate of women depends far too much on chance. They either meet you too soon or too late and even those who succeed in getting together with you never have you at the most exquisite moment. . . .

But when the time comes, when I'm ready, with the right dress and the right heart,—and I'll say: "right now, right now," but you won't come (just as you haven't come so many other times), I won't allow what is best in me to vanish to the ends of the earth.

I'm sitting down, I'm writing to you, my love, and I'm going to send this to you.]<sup>9</sup>

Agnès finds herself in a dilemma: the same incompleteness that moved her to create an imaginary lover endowed with every perfection also makes her unworthy of his love. "En vous connaissant," she writes, "j'apercevrai une personne parfaitement composée, dont beaucoup de volontés seront accomplies, dont beaucoup de curiosités seront instruites; mais moi, je n'ai pas de forme solide encore." ["In getting to know you, I'll find a perfectly composed person whose plans

have already been in large measure realized and many of whose curiosities have been satisfied; but as for me, I don't have any solid form yet."]<sup>10</sup> She decides to take her destiny into her own hands and, while waiting for the chance meeting which would give her life meaning, she undertakes to earn the privilege by remaking herself physically, spiritually and intellectually. She begins this task, which she calls "la construction Agnès" and compares to an architectural project, in a vacant room that she obtains from her uncomprehending family. On the walls, she pins a sort of balance sheet divided into columns on which she compares her present state with the goals she sets out to accomplish in the three years she allows herself: "CORPS Golf, handicap 7. AME Possession de soi. ESPRIT Pouvoir suivre le raisonnement le plus difficile. . . . Comparer avec l'état actuel: CORPS Golf: 21. AME Se laisse emporter par ses nerfs. ESPRIT Comprend pas un mot aux mathématiques." ["BODY Golf, Handicap 7. SOUL Self possession. MIND Be able to follow the most difficult argument. . . . Compare this with my present state: BODY Golf: 21. SOUL Lets herself be carried away by her nerves. MIND Can't understand a word of mathematics."]<sup>11</sup>

This construction bears a remarkable resemblance to Catherine Pozzi's own studies as a young woman. In most intellectual matters, Catherine Pozzi was an autodidact. Around her twentieth year, guided mainly by her emotional and spiritual unease, she read widely in philosophy and in science, taking extensive notes on Hindu and Buddhist philosophy at the Bibliothèque Nationale with the intention of writing on these subjects. She also began a systematic study of contemporary philosophy and of German research in the new science of psychophysiology. At one point, she had the ambition of writing in French a study of William James, whose philosophic and scientific investigations of the relationship of mind to matter were closely allied to notions she had begun to develop on her own. As for Agnès' simultaneous concern with physical culture, Catherine Pozzi too had, as an adolescent, participated vigorously in a variety of sports, including tennis and riding to hounds. Projects for self-improvement and education were to accompany Catherine Pozzi's development throughout her life.

But can the present, incomplete self reach its goals by its own efforts? Acquisition of those qualities which would make Agnès worthy of an ideal lover would, paradoxically, require union with the very person from whom her imperfection separates her. He is constructed of those qualities which she finds lacking in herself. In addition, were

she to succeed in her effort to acquire them, she would no longer be driven to seek them in another person. Ultimately, she comes to realize that the lover of her imagination, whom she calls "grand frère," is in reality the adrogynous projection of her own idealized image.

The motif of the lover as double reflects Catherine Pozzi's relationship with Paul Valéry, whom she had met in June 1920. At this first meeting, arranged by a mutual friend, Valéry was impressed by Catherine Pozzi's elegance and astonished by the breadth of her learning. Most of all, he was profoundly touched by the congruence of her intellectual interests with his own. She too, it appeared, was the keeper of a journal, a reader of Latin and Greek, a student of physics, chemistry, mathematics, a person who speculated on the nature of consciousness and on its relationship to the material world and to God. In recognizing himself in another he found himself overtaken by a passion that shook him with a singular violence and impelled him to act out in life the drama of Narcissus which, for years, had obsessed his poetry. Having exorcised the tyranny of the passions more than twenty years before to lead a peaceful and fulfilled conjugal life, he was dismayed to find his emotional equilibrium destroyed. His sudden attachment to Catherine Pozzi, at once an emotional awakening and an intellectual stimulus, was fraught with peril, for it threatened the peace of mind on which Valéry had edified his literary achievement as well as the stability of his family.

At the time of their meeting, Catherine Pozzi had decided to dissolve her marriage with the playwright Edouard Bourdet but had not formed other firm emotional commitments. Like Valéry, she was both amazed and deeply moved to discover herself incarnated in another. The self she recognized in Valéry, however, was not the one with which she was familiar but rather a potential self, the Catherine Pozzi she had been seeking to construct during her entire life. In Valéry, she recognized herself carried to a vastly enhanced power of tenderness and intellectual acuity.

Their union was consummated soon after their first meeting at Catherine Pozzi's family estate in the Dordogne. Their liaison was to last for eight years. During this time, Valéry was a frequent visitor to the estate, La Graulet, as well as to La Collinette, the residence Catherine Pozzi acquired in Vence in 1922. In Paris, they maintained discreet but quasi-conjugal relations, meeting privately as well as in a number of literary salons. While apart, they often communicated several times a day by telephone and by post. Much of their time together was spent in conversation about literary, philosophical, and scientific



matters and Valéry was soon dismayed to take the measure of his dependence on Catherine Pozzi's mind as a reflector and stimulant of his own. The concept of resonance, a notion to which he constantly returned in his *Cahiers*, was the analogy he used to describe their relations. He had a high regard for her judgment and came to rely on her erudition in such arcane areas as Buddhist philosophy and ancient Orphic rites to supplement his own quick and intuitive views. In her journal, Catherine Pozzi transcribed many of these conversations which take the form of Socratic dialogues whose substance sometimes found its way into Valéry's writing.<sup>12</sup> Between the lovers there was a constant exchange of manuscripts. Catherine Pozzi conceived a scheme for transcribing and classifying Valéry's *Cahiers*, for example, which contain numerous annotations in her handwriting; similarly, her own journal bears traces of Valéry's comments. However intimate and fruitful, this intellectual exchange was far from equal, and Catherine Pozzi, although she sometimes ventured to do so, could not rival the depth, range and sheer virtuosity of Valéry's mind.

Paralleling Catherine Pozzi's relationship with Valéry, but on a hypothetical level, Agnès' struggle to make herself worthy of the love of the ideal other is an act of self-creation; imaginative union with this ideal is an act of self-possession:

Vous êtes, en somme, précisément ce que je veux que je sois. Tout vous va, le golf, le grec, la hardiesse, la douceur, la mathématique. Il n'y a que quelque danse à vous retirer.

L'amour, ce serait donc de rencontrer à l'état séparé *la perfection de moi-même?* Quand les femmes parlent de leur "idéal," est-ce que de celui-ci?

Quelle perplexité! Pour que vous me plaisiez, il faut que vous soyez *moi*. Un autre peut-il être *moi*? S'il n'est pas moi, tout est manqué.

[In sum, you are precisely what I want myself to be. You're a success at everything: golf, Greek, daring, tenderness, mathematics. One only has to leave out a dance or two.

Would love, then, be to find outside myself *myself perfected?* When women talk about their "ideal" is that what they mean?

How perplexing! In order for you to suit me, you have to be *me*. Can another person be *me*? If he can't, nothing will work.]<sup>13</sup>

Over the door of her work-room Agnès paints "AU MOI INCONNU" ["TO THE UNKNOWN ME"] and although she works energetically to perfect her skills in golf, tennis and horseback riding, she gives first priority to intellectual development. "La construction Agnès" requires that she surround herself with a heterogeneous collection of

books on history, literature and philosophy: “Je me suis donc levée à sept heures. Il est maintenant midi, le premier Mars. Après un rapide examen de mes deux tableaux, j’ai décidé que le plus pressé, c’était le latin, l’algèbre et la religion.” [“So I got up at seven. It is now noon, March first. After a quick inspection of my two tallies, I decided that what was most urgent was the Latin, the algebra and the religion.”]<sup>14</sup> Her inquiry into theological matters, however, leads her into crisis when she realizes that underlying her creation of an ideal lover there is a religious dilemma. Without her being aware of it, her imagined lover has usurped the place of the God in whom she had ceased to believe. She comes to understand that to address a fictive lover in the place of a taciturn God is simply a convoluted way of talking to oneself. Effective prayer brings contact with a reality outside the self, but Agnès is unable to escape self-enclosure.

This negative turn reflects in a different guise the crisis that was developing in the relations between Catherine Pozzi and Paul Valéry. With the passage of time she began to feel with increasing bitterness that her contribution to Valéry’s thinking went unrecognized by others and was insufficiently appreciated by Valéry himself. Eventually, she came to believe that he had unjustly appropriated some of her ideas. She felt lively resentment, for example, when she discovered by chance on Valéry’s table the plan for a short story she had discussed with him, and immediately set about writing her own version—“Agnès.” In the end, she felt that her lover’s eminence was a hindrance to her own literary endeavors. Valéry seemed hesitant to help her publish her work; in addition, she feared that those people aware of their liaison would attribute to him whatever excellence would be found in her writing. Their relationship which, at the outset, had appeared to favor Catherine Pozzi’s self-expression finally made her feel more frustrated and isolated than before.

Their liaison, tormented from the very beginning and several times broken off, caused intense suffering to both Catherine Pozzi and Valéry. It was not, however, literary jealousy which eventually led to their separation but rather a profound difference of outlook that had emotional, intellectual and moral aspects. Put simply, Catherine Pozzi was a believer and Valéry was not. She was convinced that the universe contains a spiritual principle linked to human life and giving it value. Believing intuitively that the human spirit and body are one, she required of herself and others a rigorous moral effort to bring conduct into accord with the exalted principles she professed. Valéry, on the other hand, like Goethe’s Mephistopheles, came to appear to her as the spirit which denies, the quintessence of scepticism and doubt. In

order to liberate the mind, he believed it necessary to distance himself from the physical and moral concerns of daily life and had set out for himself an unusual goal: "tuer le marionnette." Like his *alter ego*, M. Teste, he proposed to make a hermetic division between, on the one hand, worldly concerns such as his married life, his social ambitions and the advancement of his literary career, and on the other hand, his intellectual pursuits. In the last analysis, it was the latter that counted most for Valéry; in the other areas of his existence, which he saw as ruled by blind determinism and necessity, he felt authorized to compromise and to act according to expediency. The Valéry who refused to give up his close relationship with his wife and who spent much of his time in a round of social activities in order to advance his literary career caused intense distress to Catherine Pozzi. In her journal, she came to refer to him contemptuously as "Hell" and "Desum."

This conflict whose essence is religious is transposed onto a fictive plane in "Agnès," which begins as a tale of an adolescent emotional crisis and ends as an anxious metaphysical quest. The promise of salvation held out by Catholic orthodoxy, which presents itself as an elaborate structure of objective truth, attracts Agnès, but modern scientific and historical investigation prevents her from assenting to it. Her religious and philosophical meditations lead her to the exploration of the physical world; through the study of mathematics, physics, chemistry and biology she undertakes to investigate the operation of the spirit in the world on which she bases her hope for personal salvation. The goal of her quest is not so much to demonstrate the existence of immaterial phenomena as to discover the modalities and mechanisms of their influence on human life. In this enterprise, she reinterprets traditional religious symbols and doctrines to bring them into harmony with the modern sensibility, seeing, for example, in the coiled filament bearing the genetic message at the heart of each living cell the analogue of the biblical serpent; similarly, she conflates the ancient notion of original sin with the modern science of heredity. The material world and the past, she believes, are the keys to the immaterial world and to a future in which she hopes to transcend the limits of her individual existence.

In other words, the fictive Agnès imitates the philosophical investigations which Catherine Pozzi conducted throughout a large part of her life and which she gathered together in the unfinished treatise *Peau d'âme*. Indeed, "Agnès" anticipates concerns that were to take on increasing urgency towards the end of Catherine Pozzi's life. Whereas her adolescence had been marked by her father's questioning of traditional Catholicism, she ultimately came to assent to an idiosyncratic Catholicism rendered unorthodox and even heretical by the addition

of ideas she had formulated in the course of a lifetime of philosophical speculation. For Catherine Pozzi, the relations between mind and body, matter and spirit, free will and determinism, this world and the next, always remained vital issues.

In the story "Agnès," these concerns are thematized in the conflict between Agnès and her grandmother. They reflect, however, transformed, the intellectual and emotional crisis that was taking place in Catherine Pozzi's relationship with Valéry and reveal it, ultimately, as a conflict within herself. In projecting what remained of her own religious faith onto the figure of the grandmother, Catherine Pozzi freed the fictional Agnès to come under the influence of Valérian scepticism. Profoundly disturbed by her grandchild's unbelief, the grandmother insists that she attend mass and brings her to Lourdes in the hope of renewing her lost faith. Agnès herself shares this hope: "dans le ciel qui était vide, je replace tous les saints,—je replace DIEU, obscur au fond d'une lumière éblouissante. Je veux qu'il existe, je meurs de soif." ["to the heavens that were empty, I restore all the saints—I restore GOD, a darkness at the heart of a dazzling light. I want him to exist; I'm dying of thirst."]15 At the shrine of Bernadette she drinks water sanctified by a religion in which she has ceased to believe. In performing this rite, she asks the Virgin to grant her either love or death, a savior or annihilation, these alternatives appearing the only reasonable solutions to her agonizing feeling of meaninglessness. The water of Lourdes has no efficacy, however; her prayer receives no reply and Agnès remains enclosed within her own being.

And yet, the intensity of her despair gives her the intuition that her consciousness bears within it the trace of other consciousnesses that have formed and determined it; similarly, she feels her body linked to bodies that have preceded it. The phenomenon of perception in which quantitative phenomena are transformed into qualitative experience gives material existence a spiritual dimension and enables her to link her life to the past and project it into the future.

Here too, Agnès' search for a connection between past, present and future closely resembles Catherine Pozzi's own. But for Agnès, a resolution remains problematic and unattainable. Within her own person, in whom matter and spirit are united, she gains the hope of establishing contact with a continuity, both physical and spiritual, outside herself that would give her existence meaning and authenticity. Yet in the last analysis, Agnès' effort to build a self and thereby find wholeness and autonomy represents a religious quest: a paradoxical attempt to transcend the self it constructs.

Agnès' fervent desire to attain a perfection that is not of her own

making remains unfulfilled at the end of the story, but her efforts to seek a solution accurately chart the course of the intellectual journey that was to occupy Catherine Pozzi for the rest of her life and that she expressed in all her writing. In anxious, oneiric and sometimes drug-induced hallucinatory states Catherine Pozzi felt herself in the presence of the dead, relived her past and saw her future, creating the basis for the mystical poems upon which her literary fame rests. The magnificent love poems, "Ave" and "Vale," written shortly after her separation from Valéry and inspired by it, as well as the enigmatic pieces which followed them, "Scopolamine," "Nova," "Maya," "Nyx," are all informed by the sensual experience of the spiritual world and influenced by the philosophical and scientific views which found their clearest expression in *Peau d'âme*.

Although "Agnès" may well appear undramatic, the imagined record of an unresolved inner crisis, it is in fact complex in its biographical references and constituted a breakthrough for its author. As a fiction, it enabled Catherine Pozzi at the same time to objectify and live out her profound personal conflicts with an emotional intensity which discursive literary forms such as the essay do not permit. If "Agnès" represents the imagined record of a failure to construct the self, Catherine Pozzi's last poems are a triumphant literary realization of this task. In depicting in the story the conflicts she experienced as a woman, she began a development that enabled her to find wholeness and identity as a poet. The splendid integration of the self represented in poems such as "Maya" is precisely the metamorphosis that escaped Agnès:

Rochers, le chant, le roi, l'arbre longtemps bercé,  
Astres longtemps liés à mon premier visage,

Singulier soleil de calme couronné.

[Stones, song, the king, tree rocked long since  
Stars long since linked to my earliest face,

Singular sun crowned with calm.]

Although the frequent appearance of these poems in anthologies might suggest they can be read in isolation, it is only against the background of Catherine Pozzi's long development as a writer that they attain their full meaning and resonance.

## NOTES

1. Robert Sabatier, *La Poésie du XXe siècle* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1981), pp. 161–163; Jeanine Moulin, ed., *Huit siècles de poésie féminine* (Paris: Seghers, 1963), pp. 217–222; Michel Décaudin, ed., Claude Roy, pref., *Anthologie de la poésie française du XXe siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), pp. 355–356.
2. Thierry Maulnier, ed., *Introduction à la poésie française* (Paris: Gallimard, 1939), pp. 359–362; André Gide, ed., *Anthologie de la poésie française* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), pp. 821–823.
3. The unpublished documents are to be found in part at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris and in part in private hands. See my forthcoming book, *Une robe couleur du temps: la vie de Catherine Pozzi*. The following are the most readily available editions of Catherine Pozzi's writing: "Agnès," *Nouvelle Revue Française*, 28, No. 161 (1927), 155–179; *Poèmes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959); *Peau d'âme* (Paris: Corrêa, 1935).
4. See note 3.
5. *NRF*, 33, No. 195 (1929), 757.
6. After the publication of *Peau d'âme* (Paris: Corrêa, 1935), five of Catherine Pozzi's poems appeared in *Mesures*, No. 3, 15 July 1935, pp. 83–90. The following year, they were reprinted by *Mesures* with the addition of "Ave" as a brochure of sixteen pages. Catherine Pozzi's translations of three poems by Stefan George were published in *Mesures*, No. 2, 15 April 1936, pp. 183–187. In 1959, Gallimard brought out a new edition of her poems and translations with an unsigned introduction by her son, Claude Bourdet.
7. See, for example, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979); Elizabeth Abel, ed., *Writing and Sexual Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).
8. P. 158. This as well as the following translations are my own.
9. Pp. 156–157.
10. P. 158.
11. Pp. 160–161.
12. In the following passage from "Rhumbs," for example, Catherine Pozzi claimed that the metaphor identifying original sin with the process of mathematical integration was her own invention: "Tout sentiment est le solde d'un compte dont le détail est perdu. Impossible d'obtenir un relevé de ces débits et de ces crédits. On y trouverait des opérations qui remontent à l'an mil; d'autres au singe ou au castor. Le péché originel est une intégrale, sans doute." Paul Valéry, *Oeuvres*, Vol. II, ed. Jean Hytier (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 608. [All emotions are the balance of an account whose separate items have been lost. It's impossible to obtain a statement of these debits and credits. It would contain some calculations going back to the year 1000; others to the primates or the beaver. Original sin is doubtless an integral.]
13. P. 162.
14. P. 164.
15. P. 178.

Catherine Pozzi: une robe couleur du temps, Paris, La Différence, 1988, 340 pp.

Catherine Pozzi, Œuvre Poétique, textes recueillis, établis et présentés par Lawrence Joseph, Paris, La Différence, 1988, 176 pp.

Catherine Pozzi, Agnès, nouvelle, préface de Lawrence Joseph, Paris, La Différence, 1988, 57 pp.

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