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| Char, René (1907–1988) |
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| The French poet René Char exemplified key aspects of modernism. He was associated with Surrealism from its early beginnings due to his collaborations with poets such as André Breton and Paul Eluard, and painters such as Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, and Nicolas de Stael. Later, during World War II, Char led a Resistance unit in the Maquis, winning renown as ‘Capitaine Alexandre’. During this period he continued to write, though he refused to publish until the war was won. In 1946, Char’s wartime journal*, Leaves of Hypnos,* appeared, soon followed by his major collection, *Fury and Mystery*. Acclaimed for both, he went on to complete some of his best-known work in the 1950s and 1960s while engaging with numerous artists and the musician Pierre Boulez. He wrote widely, from poetry of striking concreteness and metaphysical reach, to political tracts against the introduction of atomic weapons in Provence. There he lived until his death in 1988, meeting with friends such as Albert Camus, Maurice Blanchot, Martin Heidegger, and Paul Veyne. |
| The French poet René Char exemplified key aspects of modernism. He was associated with Surrealism from its early beginnings due to his collaborations with poets such as André Breton and Paul Eluard, and painters such as Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, and Nicolas de Stael. Later, during World War II, Char led a Resistance unit in the Maquis, winning renown as ‘Capitaine Alexandre’. During this period he continued to write, though he refused to publish until the war was won. In 1946, Char’s wartime journal*, Leaves of Hypnos,* appeared, soon followed by his major collection, *Fury and Mystery*. Acclaimed for both, he went on to complete some of his best-known work in the 1950s and 1960s while engaging with numerous artists and the musician Pierre Boulez. He wrote widely, from poetry of striking concreteness and metaphysical reach, to political tracts against the introduction of atomic weapons in Provence. There he lived until his death in 1988, meeting with friends such as Albert Camus, Maurice Blanchot, Martin Heidegger, and Paul Veyne.  Char was born in the town of L’Isle sur la Sorgue, near Avignon, in southern France. His early poetry developed a compressed, irreverent style that explored contrasting themes, often of agony and love. When Char sent a copy of his youthful collection, *Arsenal*,to Paul Eluard, the older poet responded by welcoming him into the surrealist group in Paris. Between 1929 and 1934, Char wrote collaboratively while also composing his longer collection, the *Hammer without a Master* (1934), and voicing opposition to Franco in Spain, the Colonial Exposition, colonization of Indochina, and the rise of Nazism.  When France declared war on Germany in 1939, Char was mobilized and fought until the armistice, when he escaped to the town of Cereste (his surrealist activities made him suspect) and established a network of resistance fighters. He rose to become an inspiring, clear-sighted commander, eventually assisting in the Allied landing in Provence. His defiant silence during the war, followed by the post-war appearance of *Leaves of Hypnos* (1946) and *Fury and Mystery* (1948), immediately made him one of France’s most celebrated poets. Influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche and Heraclitus as well as a number of literary and artistic figures, Char’s poetry of the period depicts nature, love, and lived history with trenchant lucidity and existential insight. Contrasting images of darkness and light, the ‘monstrous’ presence of Hitlerian night and the renewal conveyed by love, hope, and beauty, he writes near the end of his journal, ‘Within our darkness, there is not one space alone for Beauty. The whole space is for Beauty’ (Char 2010). His later work, published in collections such as *The Dawn Breakers* (1947–1949), *The Word as Archipelago* (1952–1960), *Innocence Lost* (1964–1970), and *In Praise of one Suspected* (1988), moves through images of his native landscape to revelatory encounters with love, to the tragic fragility of human existence, and poetry’s power to illuminate it. List of Works *Oeuvres completes*, Paris. Gallimard. (1983)  *Hypnos Waking*, Selected and Translated by Jackson Mathews, New York. Random House. (1956)  *This Smoke that Carried Us*, Translated by Susanne Dubroff, introduced by Christopher Merrill, Buffalo. White Plains Press. (2004)  *Furor and Mystery*,Translated by Mary Ann Caws and Nancy Kline, introduced by Sandra Bermann and prefaced by Marie-Claude Char, Boston. Black Widow Press. (2010)  *The Word as Archipelago*, Translated by Robert Baker, Richmond, California. Omnidawn Publishing. (2012) |
| Further reading:  (Caws)  (Greilsamer)  (Lawler)  (Marty)  (Veyne) |