Studies in Surrealism

Surrealism and the Gothic

Castles of the Interior

Neil Matheson

An **Ashgate** Book

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Surrealism and the Gothic

Surrealism and the Gothic is the first book-length analysis of the role played by the gothic in both the initial emergence of surrealism and at key moments in its subsequent development as an art and literary movement. The book argues the strong and sustained influence, not only of the classic gothic novel itself – Ann Radcliffe, Charles Maturin, Matthew Lewis, etc. – but also the determinative impact of closely related phenomena, as with the influence of mediumism, alchemy and magic. The book also traces the later development of the gothic novel, as with Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, and its mutation into such works of popular fiction as the *Fantômas* series of Marcel Allain and Pierre Souvestre, enthusiastically taken up by writers such as Apollinaire and subsequently feeding into the development of surrealism. More broadly, the book considers a range of motifs strongly associated with gothic writing, as with insanity, incarceration and the 'accursed outsider', explored in relation to the personal experience and electroshock treatment of Antonin Artaud. A recurring motif of the analysis is that of the gothic castle, developed in the writings of André Breton, Artaud, Sade, Julien Gracq and other writers, as well as in the work of visual artists such as Magritte.

Neil Matheson is Senior Lecturer in Theory and Criticism of Photography at the University of Westminster, publishing widely on surrealism, photography and contemporary art. Publications include *The Sources of Surrealism* (2006), joint-editorship of *The Machine and the Ghost* (2013) and recent essays on Magritte, Ithell Colquhoun and on spirit photography.

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Surrealism and the Gothic

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Neil Matheson

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used for the *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Ed. Gallimard) of André Breton:

Breton, *OCI* – *Œuvres complètes*, Vol. I (1988)
Breton, *OCII* – *Œuvres complètes*, Vol. II (1992)
Breton, *OCIII* – *Œuvres complètes*, Vol. III (1999)
Breton, *OCIV* – *Œuvres complètes*, Vol. IV (2008)
Breton, *CV* – Breton, *Communicating Vessels* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1990).

The *Œuvres complètes* of Antonin Artaud, in 26 volumes, are abbreviated as:

Artaud, *OCI* – *Œuvres complètes*, Vol. I (Paris: Ed. Gallimard, 1976 and 1984), etc.
The Gallimard series of *Œuvres*, in the work of Artaud, Desnos, etc. is abbreviated as: Artaud, *Œuvres* – Antonin Artaud, *Œuvres*, Evelyne Grossman ed. (Paris: Ed. Gallimard, 2004).
Desnos, *Œuvres* – Robert Desnos, *Œuvres*, Marie-Claire Dumas ed. (Paris: Ed. Gallimard, 1999).

Translations

English translations have been used where available and are referenced to those sources. Where not available, the translation is my own.

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Introduction

'The start of a venture'

> Nothing could be more stimulating than this ultra-romanesque, hypersophisticated literature. All those castles of Otranto, of Udolpho, of the Pyrenees, of Lovel, of Athlin, and of Dunbayne . . .
>
> André Breton, *Communicating Vessels* (1932)

Surrealism and the appeal of the gothic

As a movement deeply rooted in the romanticism of writers such as Novalis, Nerval and Baudelaire, surrealism is immersed in the world of dreams and with all that is associated with the nocturnal, continually testing the boundaries between dream and reality. It would therefore be unsurprising to discover there, a strong affinity between surrealism and the gothic, where the gothic novel – the *roman noir* – is itself bathed in moonlight, pervaded by mystery, and permeated by the aura of nightlife and dream. Defined by André Breton in the first 'Manifesto of Surrealism' of 1924 in terms of 'psychic automatism in its pure state', as the expression verbally, in writing, or by other means, of 'the actual functioning of thought', surrealism turns essentially on the exploration of the unconscious, the rejection of the 'reality principle' and a corresponding elevation of the *imagination*.[1] Central to this is a reworking of the concept of the 'marvellous', a term frequently encountered in the gothic novel where it is often deployed to evoke mystery or to suggest supernatural intervention. At a time when surrealism was still essentially a literary movement, Breton turns naturally in that Manifesto to literature, rejecting realism and arguing that 'only the marvelous is capable of fecundating works that belong to an inferior category such as the novel'. Matthew Lewis's *The Monk*, asserts Breton, is an admirable proof of this', adding that the book is 'infused throughout with the presence of the marvelous'.[2] The characters, Breton enthuses, are stirred by a 'passion for eternity', that he says, 'lends an unforgettable intensity to their torments', and in a footnote adds that 'what is admirable about the fantastic is that there is no longer anything fantastic: there is only the real'.[3] What also becomes clear here is that a certain perverse eroticism is integral to Breton's attraction to the gothic, apparent in his assertion that:

> Mathilda in particular is the most moving creation that one can credit to this *figurative* fashion in literature. She is less a character than a continual temptation. . . . An extreme temptation, she.[4]

In the gothic, then, the fantastic assumes this living, breathing intensity – the quality of reality that Breton sought in writing, while Breton's insistence upon the 'figurative'

aspect of such writing points us to the gothic's rootedness in the body, in what is an essentially *theatrical*, dialogical genre.

Melodramatic, often exaggerated – at times, even ridiculous – the gothic novel first erupted in 1764 in the rickety *faux* medievalism of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, flourished during the pre- and revolutionary eras in the work of writers such as Ann Radcliffe and Clara Reeve, culminating in Lewis's *Monk* (1796) and Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), and thereafter mutated into detective fiction, horror stories and science fiction in the work of writers such as Edgar Allan Poe, Robert Louis Stevenson and Bram Stoker.[5] The twentieth century saw the gothic genre adapted to film, where it again provided a powerful stimulus to the surrealist imaginary through such works as Louis Feuillade's *Les Vampires* or F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu*, which we consider later. At its best the gothic novel embodies the triumph of the creative imagination in an all-consuming, obsessive pursuit of desire, providing in place of surrealism's rejection of the realist novel, an alternative literary format rooted in the 'romance' and the fantastic.

As a highly formulaic genre, the gothic novel revolves both around certain narrative tropes – including thwarted lovers, the chase, incarceration, heredity, and dispossessed inheritance – and a set of recurring motifs, of which the most prominent are perhaps the castle, the convent, the forest and the underground passage.[6] Taking a broad overview, surrealism's deployment of those forms and motifs ranges from works that directly pastiche or update the form of the gothic novel, as with Julien Gracq's *Au Chateau d'Argol* (1938) or Ithell Colquhoun's *Goose of Hermogenes* (1961), through to rather more indirect references, as with the gloomy 'gothic' atmosphere of the 1938 International Surrealist Exhibition, or the more explicitly 'occult' orientation of that of 1947. It includes the deployment of occult and alchemical themes in writings and artworks, as with Max Ernst's collage novels or the painting of Leonora Carrington, Victor Brauner and Roberto Matta, or the introduction of specific gothic motifs in artworks, as in Man Ray's portrayal of the Marquis de Sade in the form of a medieval fortress. It embraces the call for a return to a 'medieval' attitude, as in the writing of Antonin Artaud, or the intense concern with occult and hermetical themes often found in Breton's writings. And conceived more broadly, this book looks to the wider resonance of gothic themes in relation to surrealism's engagement with popular culture, as with Grand Guignol, or with fields such as psychology and insanity.

A final core motif of the gothic – and one holding a particular resonance for an avant-garde movement assuming a critical and increasingly politicised stance towards social reality – is that of the 'outsider' or 'accursed stranger', as epitomised in Maturin's protagonist Melmoth. Rooted in the figure of the 'Wandering Jew' and assuming at times the form of Satan, the ultimate rebel, this insurrectionary outsider ranks high in the surrealist pantheon, as with Rimbaud, Lautréamont, the criminal genius Fantômas, or again, the growing cult of Sade, incarcerated in prisons and bastilles for some twenty-seven years. No-one associated with surrealism better embodied that figure in his own person than Artaud, articulating that alienation as early as 1924 when he wrote 'I can truly say that I am not in the world', later suffering internment for nine years following a mental breakdown while on a trip to Ireland in 1937, and the subject of Chapter 5.[7] Our concern is not simply with gauging the extent of the gothic's undoubted grip upon surrealism, but with understanding what precisely in the gothic exercised such a fascination for the movement, how it found expression and the extent to which that influence served to shape and inform what we now understand as 'surrealism'.

Killen, Summers and the re-evaluation of the gothic novel

Whereas my concern here is very much with surrealism, this also entails some consideration of what precisely in the gothic itself seemed to the surrealists to anticipate some of their own principal concerns (as with the dream, the quest, the relationship with reality, the question of 'evil', etc.). The gothic novel begins, then, with Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, just as Breton situates a castle at the origins of surrealism:

> For today I think of a *castle*, half of which is not necessarily in ruins; this castle belongs to me, I picture it in a rustic setting, not far from Paris.[8]

And a book that, like so much of surrealism, finds its origins in a dream, explored in more depth in the first chapter. David Punter typically roots the gothic novel in the works of Walpole, Radcliffe, Mary Shelley, etc. written between the 1760s and the 1820s, the characteristics of which include:

> an emphasis on portraying the terrifying, a common insistence on archaic settings, a prominent use of the supernatural, the presence of highly stereotyped characters and the attempt to deploy and perfect techniques of literary suspense . . .[9]

Emerging in a conception of the medieval as a barbaric and superstitious past, Punter notes how the term has subsequently expanded, ranging from ghost stories and historical romances, to a 'literature of psychic grotesquerie', of psychological obsessions and fears of degeneracy.[10] In terms of style, the gothic is often opposed to classical order and balance, characterised by the convoluted and chaotic, as an aesthetic of exaggeration and excess – qualities that we in fact find echoed in Breton's own aesthetic preferences (as with Outsider and mediumistic art). The villain, as Punter observes, is always 'the most complex and interesting character in Gothic fiction' – 'awe-inspiring' and 'endlessly resourceful' in his pursuit of often evil ends, the villain is yet an immensely attractive character.[11] For a generation that lived through two world wars – wars that seemed only the prelude to nuclear Armageddon – the surrealists discovered much on violence and evil within the gothic that chimed with their own concerns, as with their complex relationship with the work of Sade.

The modern revival of interest in the gothic as a literary genre can be traced back to the period prior to the First World War in the research of critics such as Alice Killen, Edith Birkhead and Montague Summers.[12] Killen's *Le Roman 'terrifiant' ou Roman 'noir'* was first published in 1915, and while a second edition appeared in 1923, coinciding with the birth of surrealism, she is curiously ignored in gothic criticism.[13] Summers' *The Gothic Quest* was published only in 1938 but he began research a quarter century earlier, again pointing to a revival of interest in the genre that coincides with the emergence of the modernist avant-gardes, suggesting that surrealism's interest in the gothic must be considered as part of a broader cultural shift and further reinforcing the claims – confirmed by much recent scholarship – for occultism, magic and hermetic thought as integral to modernity.[14] Summers' book culminates in a critical chapter on surrealism and the gothic novel, pointing to the early appreciation of the importance of their inter-relationship. At that time, Summers observes, the gothic had fallen into neglect, with works such as Lewis's *Monk* published as a work of 'semi-pornography' under the title *Rosario, or, the Female Monk*, and undergoing a revival

of interest during the 1920s.[15] Summers characterises the gothic novel as the 'Novel of Escape' – as an escape from the world depicted in 'the novel of real life' – and for him the crucial cultural divide is not that between classicism and romanticism, but rather between realism and romanticism, 'between materialism and the Supernatural'.[16] The gothic, for Summers, is 'an aristocrat of literature' and very much bound up with the supernatural, with mystery and with poetry.[17] While surrealism might concur with much of that analysis, Summers balks at surrealism's association of the gothic with revolutionary politics, instead insisting upon its intensely *conservative* character, observing that subversive ideas pervaded the genre for only a brief period during the 1790s, before being suppressed by the efforts of *The Anti-Jacobin Review*.[18] Summers includes a useful satire of the formulaic nature of the gothic novel that demonstrates how a romance might be transformed into a novel and vice versa:

From any romance to make a novel. Where you find:

A castle . . .	put An house
A cavern . . .	A bower
A groan . . .	A sigh
A giant . . .	A father
A blood-stained dagger	A fan . . .[19]

Evidencing what was immediately perceived as a highly *formulaic* genre – something quite artificial and modern – this formula provides a striking precedent for the various devices used by dada and surrealism to produce poetry and other writings, or for the many surrealist games used to radically transform an existing text or image. And of particular interest, as we shall see, in relation to one of Breton's abiding concerns – the '*castle problem*' – with translating the castle into a modern context, as a vehicle of thought, but precisely without falling into the trap of realism.

Chris Baldick and Robert Mighall offer a pointed critique of some of the inflated claims made in writing on the gothic since the 1920s, in 'mistakenly presenting Gothic literature as a kind of "revolt" against bourgeois rationality, modernity or Enlightenment'.[20] In this they see Breton as sharing with Summers, despite their clear political differences, 'certain romantic assumptions that "dream" or fantasy is in itself the deadly enemy of bourgeois materialistic rationalism'.[21] Breton's position on the dream and its relationship with reality and with the gothic is in fact, as we shall see, rather more complex than this statement would suggest, particularly as developed in his 1932 book *Communicating Vessels*. Baldick and Mighall approvingly cite Breton's insight that, when set against the backdrop of the French Revolution:

> the ruins [of Gothic fiction] appear suddenly so full of significance, in that they express the collapse of the feudal period; the inevitable ghost which haunts them indicates a peculiarly intense fear of the return of the powers of the past.[22]

But they also then claim that Breton rather spoils his argument by psychologising and generalising it, abandoning the specificity of history for the 'psychodrama' of the individual. For Baldick and Mighall, the cardinal error of most gothic criticism is the 'assimilation of Gothic fiction into romantic and pre-romantic nostalgia for the Middle Ages', whereas the evidence for such assimilation rests on little more than Walpole's preface to his *Otranto*, with most gothic writers showing a manifest distrust

of the Middle Ages 'as ages of superstition and tyranny'.[23] While questionable as a generalisation, this is a nice point in relation to surrealism's repeated rejection of the tyranny of reason and suggests that we need to also consider the limits of that rejection.

Maggie Kilgour poses the gothic in psychic terms as a 'return of the repressed', as a 'resurrection of the need for the sacred and transcendent' in a modern secular world, while in historic terms, it is a response to the rise of the middle classes and a reaction against a neo-classical ideal of order and unity.[24] The difficulty in defining the gothic, for Kilgour, resides in its interconnection both with earlier forms, such as folklore and romance, as well as its anticipation of later genres, such as the horror story, detective fiction and sci-fi.[25] Gothic creation exists therefore, 'not as an originating faculty that creates *ex nihilo*, but as a power of combination', as a 'Frankensteinian process' that brings together stock parts – a castle, a heroine, the Alps, persecution, etc.[26] Excessively descriptive and overly reliant on frenzied action, the gothic has often been criticised for its psychological slightness, or as Elizabeth Napier observes, for its 'shallow and superficial form' with a 'focus on surfaces'.[27] Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*, subtitled *A Gothic Story*, embodies many of those shortcomings. Essentially a fantasy of youth overcoming authority, as E.J. Clery observes, the novel is posed by psychoanalytical readings as riven by 'incestuous and parricidal desires'.[28] The book opens with the sudden death of a son, Conrad, at the moment of his marriage and the subsequent attempt by his father, the tyrannical patriarch Manfred, to seize the intended bride for himself in order to establish a new family line, raising implications of incest. Thereafter, the narrative traces the revolt of dispossessed youth, assisted by the supernatural in the form of the return of the dead, where the ultimate aim is the restoration of continuity with an idealised, lost past, by re-establishing a legitimate line of descent. Walpole's preface claims the book to be built upon the moral 'that *the sins of the fathers are visited on their children to the third and fourth generation*', a phrase that would have held a particular resonance for a generation sacrificed by their fathers in the carnage of the First World War – 'flung', as Breton later recalled, 'into a cesspool of blood, mud and idiocy'.[29]

Faking and dissimulation marked the gothic novel from the outset, with Walpole initially concealing his identity and presenting his work in the form of a rediscovered medieval text purportedly written at the time of the Crusades. And this fakery could be said to pervade the genre, whether as embodied in Walpole's fabrication of Strawberry Hill as a *faux*-gothic fancy or with William Beckford's pastiche Fonthill Abbey, with the 'rediscovered' writings of Ossian or the mouldering documents recounted in *Melmoth*. The gothic thus figures as an assumed, and often ill-fitting mask, such that role-play and disguise militate against any pretence that it should be taken too literally.

Gothic and romantic influences on core surrealist concepts

It is significant that Breton should turn to the gothic in developing his ideas on theoretical concerns central to surrealism, not only at the outset, but also regularly at key moments throughout the history of the movement, as this book will demonstrate.[30] The gothic will be seen to constitute a core aspect of what we understand as 'surrealism', not only as a primary ingredient present at the origins of the movement and integral to its definition in the first Manifesto, but also figuring as a recurring theme in

the writings of surrealists such as Breton, Artaud and Aragon, along with that of associated figures such as Gracq, Valentine Penrose and Maurice Fourré. If we add to this the collage novels of Ernst, the alchemical and magical themes of the work of artists such as Victor Brauner, Kurt Seligmann, Maurice Baskine, Carrington, Colquhoun and Toyen, or the macabre and erotic themes drawn from the works of Sade and Poe in the films of Jan Švankmajer, Walerian Borowczyk and Luis Buñuel, the impact of the gothic on surrealism is clearly vast. The present work is therefore confined to the period extending from the pre-surrealist experiments of the immediate post-First World War era until around 1970, analysing the relationship between surrealism and the gothic in terms of a set of quite specific issues. Those issues include the relation of dream and reality, Breton's dispute with French psychiatry, magic and occultism in postwar surrealism, and surrealism's wide engagement with the motif of the castle, shifting – as I shall demonstrate – to a far darker reading during the postwar era, particularly in work that engages with the writings and heritage of Sade.

The gothic could be said to function for surrealism on three broad levels: in the formation of key aesthetic concerns and theoretical *concepts* (the 'marvellous', the role of dream, the questioning of reality, the intervention of the occult); in terms of the advocacy by both Breton and Artaud of a particular pre-rational, 'medieval' *mentality*; and as a source of specific gothic *motifs* such as the castle, the convent, the accursed outsider, or the supernatural. It is a commonplace of writing on the gothic novel that the genre is deployed as a device through which its authors explored the cultural 'anxieties' and desires of the time, used in dealing with conflictual situations, as with Oedipal conflicts and the relation with the past – frequently posed in terms of a 'return of the repressed' – and an approach rightly challenged by Baldick and Mighall as at times 'simplistic' and 'tautological'.[31] Nonetheless, there clearly is a sense in which the surrealists deployed the gothic as a vehicle through which to explore specific issues central to their conception of surrealism and to socio-cultural debates of the period, including: the nature of social relations, the social role of violence, insanity and the state's power of incarceration, as well as the relationship of dream to reality. We could also add surrealism's deployment of the gothic's anti-Catholicism in the movement's anti-clerical campaigns of the thirties, which we discuss later. The gothic novel's obsession with legitimacy and the authentic line of descent, finds parallels in Breton's own intense concern with authenticity, with surrealist precursors and literary influences. Finally, particular authors such as Lewis and Sade, and iconic works such as *Melmoth* and *The Monk*, are cited throughout surrealism's history, serving to inspire as sources of creativity, providing both ideas and vivid imagery, with such works adapted, illustrated and brandished as emblems of what best embodies the movement's aspirations.[32]

In the wake of the experience of the trenches, rejecting the Enlightenment tradition's reliance upon rationality, positivism and the dominance of the reality principle, surrealism instead advocated a pre-modern mentality – though conceived, as we shall see, in very different terms by Breton, as against Artaud's more intensely spiritual orientation. Gothic thought systems, as Neil Cornwell has enumerated, would embrace Jena Romanticism and Neoplatonism, hermetic and esoteric thought, as well as the Jewish and Eastern traditions, though I want to first focus more narrowly here on surrealism's relationship with German Romanticism, before expanding the discussion to occult thought systems.[33] Breton developed an early taste for German literature, visiting Germany as a youth and regularly cited figures such as E.T.A. Hoffmann and

Achim von Arnim, along with precursors such as Jean Paul, famous for his dream sequences, and the mystic Jacob Böhme.[34] Like the gothic novel, Romanticism with its revived medievalism, came to the fore in Germany during the 1790s and was similarly in part a reaction against the rationalism of the age, and just as the gothic turned back to the romance, Romanticism sought inspiration in the early German *Märchen* (fairytales). Privileging the inner world of the self and of the spirit over that of external reality, Romanticism attains its highest pitch in the thought of Novalis, where the inner, transcendent self provides the path to self-liberation.[35] As with the gothic we find the celebration of night and the world of dreams over that of daytime and light, albeit posed in more intensely subjective, and at times overtly mystical terms, attaining supreme expression in Novalis's *Hymns to Night* (1799), posed by Roger Cardinal as 'a yearning for re-absorption in the maternal womb of Night'.[36] And hence for Breton the poetry of Novalis, the most mystical and idealist of the German Romantics, came to constitute one of the touchstones of surrealism.

Carol Appleby observes Novalis's fascination with the 'invisible', listing his wide-ranging interest in 'the occult, in magic and hermeticism, in Neoplatonism, alchemy, theosophy, the Qabbalah' as well as other belief systems – areas that would become increasingly central to Breton's thought in the wake of the 'Second Manifesto' with its call for '*the profound, the veritable occultation of surrealism*'.[37] According to John Neubauer, with his concept of 'magical idealism' Novalis sought to liberate the individual from the restrictions imposed by external reality through a period of intense training of the psychic senses, whereby those senses would ultimately shift from being passive receptors, to instead become 'active organs directed by psychic energies' that are able to express mental states in the form of hallucinations and visions, such that 'the body becomes a shaping and creating tool'.[38] There are certain parallels here with the way in which Breton analyses his own dream life in *Communicating Vessels*, where he begins by citing the book of Hervey de Saint-Denys, *Les Rêves et les moyens de les diriger* (1867), as a means by which to gradually exercise control over the direction of one's dream life, again marking a shift from passivity to the assumption of a more active, creative control over one's psychic life – an idea that we consider in more depth in Chapter 1.[39]

Against the claims of reality, the gothic – as with Romanticism – marks what Breton posed as 'the revenge of the pleasure principle', where the imagination regains its rights as the key locus of creativity.[40] The question of the means by which the imagination was to be stimulated was one considered by writers such as Radcliffe and Edmund Burke, posed particularly in terms of Burke's conception of the 'sublime', where the relative impact of 'terror' upon the mind was contrasted with that of 'horror', and where the former was conceived as a stimulus to thought and action, whereas horror was considered to merely 'freeze' or contract the mind – an issue to which we will return in relation to the *Fantômas* series in Chapter 2.[41] By contrast with the realist novel – derided by Breton for its mundane descriptions of geraniums and yellow wallpaper – the gothic novel was rooted in the earlier 'romance' tradition and thus far closer to the world of imagination and fantasy, and hence connected with childhood, storytelling and dreams. The introduction of the gothic novel into the first 'Manifesto' is immediately preceded by a discussion of Freud's focus on the neglected role of dreams in psychic life and Breton's suggestion that 'the imagination is perhaps on the point of reasserting itself', culminating in his affirmation that: 'I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, into a kind of absolute reality,

a *surreality*'.[42] The gothic thus appears at this crucial point in Breton's exposition in formulating the concept of the 'marvellous', posing Lewis's *Monk* as 'exercising an exalting effect only upon that part of the mind that aspires to leave the earth'.[43] Breton thus taps into these far deeper roots of the traditions of dream, romance and fantasy, in which the gothic novel figures on the side of the imagination – 'imagination which knows no bounds' – as against the constrictions of the reality principle.[44]

The idea of a 'medieval mentality' also embraces a more receptive attitude toward occultism, magic and hermetic thought systems – systems that reject the dominance of rationality and the constraints of realism. Not a return to blind 'superstition', but rather an intellectual curiosity that seeks to explore occult thought (alchemy, divination, the Tarot, etc.) as a stimulus to the imagination and a source of creativity. Recent research has demonstrated that, rather than some aberrant throwback to an earlier age, such thought systems were in fact inherent to the modern project, as for example in Alex Owen's claim that 'occultism was integral to new ways of perceiving and experiencing the world' and was 'constitutive of modern culture at the fin-de-siècle'.[45] For Owen 'mysticism' figured as 'representative of a crisis of the disenchanted Weberian subject', such that occultism entailed a rethinking of the relationship between imagination and reason on the assumption that 'this reason exercised in the service of the imagination constitutes the key to a supreme self-realization'.[46] This is clearly territory close to that on which Breton was working, and which he would come in the 'Second Manifesto' to pose in terms of the attaining of a 'certain point in the mind' where all contradictions are resolved, later asserting that this is 'not only a view inherited from occultists', but that it 'translates an aspiration so profound that it doubtless is essentially from it that surrealism will be considered as having taken its substance'.[47]

Spiritism and mediumistic activity in general underwent a massive revival with the sudden disappearance of millions of men during the First World War, such that the early mediumistic experiments involving René Crevel and Robert Desnos in particular, served not only to repudiate the bankrupt pre-War order and the ratio-scientific system that underpinned it, but also to transform that critique into new forms of creative activity (automatic writing and drawing, clairvoyance, etc.). Out of that same conflict emerged Breton's interest in the shell-shock phenomena of patients encountered during his medical training at Saint-Dizier in 1916, his interest in psychiatry and early encounters with the work of Freud.[48] 'There remains madness', Breton observes in the 'First Manifesto', an issue again bound up for him with the freedom of the mind and the question of the state's powers to incarcerate – issues that we pursue through Chapters 3–5.[49] Persecuted characters driven to hysteria or beyond the limits of sanity constitute a regular trope of the gothic novel – as in Lewis, Maturin, Stoker, etc. – while surrealism too both celebrates hysteria and maintains a close concern with insanity and the linked threat of incarceration (as in Breton's *Nadja*), or again, as with what we now know as Outsider art. When Ernst moved to Paris in 1922, he brought with him, as a present to Paul Eluard, a copy of Hans Prinzhorn's recently published *Bildnerei der Geisteskranken* (*Artistry of the Mentally Ill*), such that insanity was again there at the outset with surrealism.[50]

Noir: 'cette soudaine nécessité de la nuit'[51]

The 'gothic' is also deployed here in the somewhat broader sense often encountered in literary criticism of the gothic novel, referring to certain qualities and ideas strongly associated with the gothic and the term 'noir' – including non-conformity, the

irrational, 'otherness', madness and melodrama – in order to analyse specific topics within medicine, psychology, psychiatry and popular culture, as 'gothic'. One such example would be the posing of Artaud's electroshock treatment as 'gothic medicine', justified, I would argue, because at the time a barbaric and little understood treatment, strongly associated with insanity and enforced incarceration, and because it exemplified a particular attitude toward the suffering body more associated with a pre-modern mentality. In a similar vein, I analyse the role of the medical periodical *Æsculape* within surrealism, again considered very much within a gothic light due to its concentration upon themes such as insanity, mediumism, the tattooed body, the occult, and many other such areas suggestive of the idea of the gothic. I also take from the gothic its strongly theatrical – and more specifically *melodramatic* tenor – in order to explore certain areas of theatre and performance within surrealism that have been little researched in recent years. But in extending the scope of the term, I nonetheless want to retain a clear understanding of what precisely constitutes gothic writing historically, as well as the cultural influence and the critical deployment of the term. The discussion is therefore very much rooted in the analysis of specific gothic texts – *Melmoth*, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, etc., as well as lesser known works – and in their subsequent impact on Lautréamont, Sade and surrealist writers.

For Annie Le Brun, surrealism's own return to the gothic is built directly on 'the rubble of the First World War' and the betrayal of that generation in the war.[52] Breton, she observes, lists examples of the 'marvellous' in the first Manifesto, ranging from 'romantic ruins' to the 'modern mannequin', before settling on the above-mentioned castle – hence the famous 'question of the castle', which would pursue Breton through his entire life, and the return to gothic literature.[53] The nub of this question, Le Brun argues, lay in Breton's search for some particular 'angle of view', for some 'indeterminate, indeterminable point of encounter', a view of some space which is neither subjective nor objective, but rather 'un *espace inobjectif*'.[54] And Le Brun poses this concern with the gothic as a kind of poetic, imaginary foil – in effect, she makes the gothic the poetic itself – that Breton sets against the hard actuality of Marxist ideology and the world of material reality, arguing that 'all the tensions of surrealism turn around this hidden castle'.[55] The theme of the castle will therefore figure prominently from the outset and the final chapter sees a 'return to the castle' – though a castle now transformed by experience and by history. Le Brun also cites the view of Benjamin Péret from his 1952 essay 'Actualité du roman noir', in which he argues that: 'At the origin of the "roman noir" one must place revolt against the external world', a revolt, he adds, against the human condition itself.[56] For Le Brun this revolt finds expression in the surrealist attitude of *démoralisation* and the post-First World War mood of despair that she links to the imaginary. As we shall see, in the wake of the Second World War, we find a metamorphosis in the surrealist treatment of the castle and related themes – particularly that of violence – in the light of a reconsideration of the lessons of Sade.

Werner Spies suggests an alternate interpretation, in which surrealism's celebration of the gothic was – at least initially – more of a tactical ploy, deploying the genre as a kind of stick with which to beat mainstream literature and the *attitude réaliste*: 'Books such as *Melmoth* and *The Monk* interested the Surrealists because they could be quoted against Huysmans, against the Flaubert of *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*, the Mallarmé of *Hérodiade* – all the literature that Breton felt initially compelled to repress'.[57] While somewhat simplifying Breton's often conflicted relationship

with literary forebears such as Valéry and Gide, there is a sense in which Breton used the gothic as a mark of difference, both signalling his modernity and delineating his own literary territory, and as this book will argue, Spies very much underestimates the significance that the gothic held for surrealism, providing – in tandem with romanticism – not only a model for an alternative thought system to that dominated by reason and the realistic attitude, but also serving as a major stimulus to the imagination and hence to Breton's goal of creative activity.

Finally, this book borrows its subtitle from the sixteenth-century mystic Saint Teresa of Avila, whose *The Interior Castle, or the Mansions* is considered in the concluding chapter. The subtitle is intended not only to point to the element of spiritual quest contained in this association with the gothic, together with its attendant ethical dimension – as with the work of Gracq, or indeed with Breton – but also to point up the element of interiority implicit in the metaphor of the castle. A quest perhaps best encapsulated in Breton's epitaph, drawn from his 'Introduction to the Discourse on the Paucity of Reality', written in 1924 directly after the Manifesto: 'Je cherche l'or du temps'.[58]

This book therefore analyses the complex inter-relationship between the gothic and surrealist art and writing, structured in terms of seven thematic chapters. The discussion begins with Breton and friends, in a medieval church at the start of what would prove to be a very long journey, and goes on to consider the reception of gothic writing in France and its subsequent impact upon the French avant-garde. This initial chapter is focused upon a number of core texts that exercised a decisive influence upon surrealism – particularly Lewis's *Monk* and Maturin's *Melmoth* – including consideration of the role of Artaud in shaping the movement and an analysis of his own version of *The Monk*. The second chapter, focused on the epic *Fantômas* series of Marcel Allain and Pierre Souvestre, is concerned with the ways in which gothic themes mutate in the popular novel and their translation to the cinema screen by Louis Feuillade, along with spin-offs such as his crime series *Les Vampires*. Pursuing the gothic theme of 'revolt', the analysis embraces the role of anarchism within surrealist thought, exploring the role of the mass media in reporting such news events and the inter-relationship of reality and fiction. The deployment by Allain and Souvestre of almost automatist techniques in their writing is considered in relation to automatism as a central surrealist device for the production of writing and artwork.

The third chapter analyses what I pose here as 'gothic psychology', considered in particular in relation to early surrealist experiments with mediumism and séances, and the various ways in which this phase reappeared in subsequent surrealist writings and memoirs, including work by Artaud, René Crevel and Raymond Queneau. The idea of a 'gothic psychology' is one attributed by Breton to William James in relation to the work of the English psychic researcher F.W.H. Myers, and is explored in a detailed reading of Breton's 1933 essay 'The Automatic Message'. The enduring influence of his medical training upon Breton's thought is also considered here in relation to his references to the medical journal *Æsculape* and the extraordinary range of imagery that he would have discovered there – not least in relation to themes such as occultism, spiritism, etc., strongly associated with the gothic. In 'The Theatre of Blood' I turn to surrealism's somewhat ambivalent relationship with theatre, focusing in particular on *Grand Guignol* and its origins in a Pigalle theatre located close to Breton's rue Fontaine apartment.[59] Breton's enthusiasm in *Nadja* for the *guignolesque* play *Les Détraquées* is analysed and developed into a discussion of the issue of fetishism.

Through its strong connections via figures such as Alfred Binet and Joseph Babinski, with the world of French psychiatry and psychology, *Grand Guignol* leads us into a consideration of the role of madness within surrealism and in particular to Breton's confrontation with French psychiatry in the imposing figure of Gaëtan Gatian de Clérambault.

Artaud was active within the surrealist movement during its earliest phase and despite his subsequent expulsion for his involvement in the theatre, remained a crucial reference for Breton. Chapter 5 considers Artaud's own gothic trajectory as surrealism's 'dark angel', culminating in his long incarceration and subjection to electroshock treatment during the primitive phase of that therapy. The extraordinary drawings produced by Artaud during his convalescence – intensely corporeal images gouged into the paper – are analysed in relation to their visual translation of that bodily experience and Artaud's own occult and religious obsessions. During the course of the Second World War Breton became increasingly immersed in the Tarot and the related field of magic and the occult, and in Chapter 6 we consider the role of magic in his writings of the wartime and postwar eras. The chapter considers the influence of fellow exile Kurt Seligmann and his book *The Mirror of Magic*, as well as their collaboration with the Swiss writer Denis de Rougemont, particularly in relation to the topical theme of 'evil' and the figure of the Devil. The discussion is focused on Breton's *Arcane 17* (1947), a work based on the Tarot, and on his *L'art magique* (1957), Breton's final book and a major historical study of magic and the occult in the arts.

The final chapter returns to the motif of the castle, but this time in a far darker register, read through the influence of the work of the Marquis de Sade upon surrealism, and on the work of writers such as Julien Gracq, André Pieyre de Mandiargues and Valentine Penrose. Sade's work assumes a new relevance during the postwar era, particularly in relation to the experience of the war, the Holocaust and the launching of the nuclear age with the bombing of Hiroshima. Focusing on Sade's most controversial work, *Les 120 journées de Sodome*, the chapter explores some of the implications of his thought in relation to the question of violence and human nature, read through the motif of the castle. The discussion is framed in relation to the theoretical orientation of surrealism in those debates during its final phase, including the contribution of thinkers such as Georges Bataille and Pierre Klossowski. I end with a short conclusion in which I draw together some of the threads of the book, pointing to the broader scope of the gothic in relation to surrealism and further evidencing the decisive influence that the gothic has exercised upon the surrealist movement throughout its history.

Notes

1 André Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism' (1924), in Breton (ed.), *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), p. 26.
2 Ibid., pp. 14–15.
3 Ibid., p. 15.
4 Ibid., p. 15.
5 For an overview of the gothic novel see: David Punter (ed.), *A Companion to the Gothic* (Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000); Jerrold E. Hogle (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction* (Cambridge and New York: CUP, 2002); David Punter, *The Literature of Terror* (London and New York: Longman, 1996); Robert Miles, *Gothic Writing, 1750–1820: A Genealogy* (Manchester: MUP, 2002); Victor Sage (ed.), *The Gothick*

Novel (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1990); Andrew Smith, *Gothic Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007); Fred Botting, *Gothic* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 1996); Angela Wright, *Gothic Fiction* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Avril Horner (ed.), *European Gothic: A Spirited Exchange, 1760–1960* (Manchester and New York: MUP, 2002).

6 For a summary of the genre and its critics see Elizabeth Wright's 'Introduction' to her *Gothic Fiction*, op. cit.

7 Antonin Artaud, letter of 25 May 1925 to Jacques Rivière, *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, ed. Susan Sontag (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 44.

8 Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism', p. 16.

9 Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, p. 1.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid., pp. 9–10.

12 Birkhead's *The Tale of Terror: A Study of the Gothic Romance* was published in London in 1921.

13 Alice Killen, *Le Roman 'terrifiant' ou Roman 'noir' de Walpole à Ann Radcliffe et son influence sur la littérature française* (1915) (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 2000).

14 See Celia Rabinovitch, *Surrealism and the Sacred: Power, Eros and the Occult in Modern Art* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2002); Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Corinna Treitel, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); Alison Butler, *Victorian Occultism and the Making of Modern Magic* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Urszula Szulakowska, *Alchemy in Contemporary Art* (Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011); Tessel M. Bauduin, *Surrealism and the Occult* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014).

15 Montague Summers, *The Gothic Quest: A History of the Gothic Novel* (London: The Fortune Press, 1938), p. 11.

16 Ibid., pp. 12 and 22.

17 Ibid., p. 397.

18 Ibid., pp. 398–401.

19 Ibid., p. 35.

20 Chris Baldick and Robert Mighall, 'Gothic Criticism', in Punter, *A Companion to the Gothic*, pp. 209–10.

21 Ibid., p. 211.

22 Breton, 'Limits not Frontiers of Surrealism', cited in Baldick and Mighall, ibid., p. 218.

23 Baldick and Mighall, 'Gothic Criticism', p. 213.

24 Maggie Kilgour, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 3.

25 Ibid., p. 3.

26 Ibid., p. 4.

27 Napier cited in Kilgour, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel*, p. 5.

28 E.J. Clery, Introduction to Horace Walpole, in *The Castle of Otranto* (Oxford and New York: OUP, 1996), p. viii.

29 Horace Walpole, Preface to first edition, *The Castle of Otranto*, p. 7; André Breton, *Conversations: The Autobiography of Surrealism* (New York: Marlowe and Co., 1993), p. 13.

30 Such references can be found not only in both surrealist manifestoes, as well as the 'Prolegomena' to the third manifesto, but also figure prominently in such core works as Breton's *Communicating Vessels* and *Arcane 17*, as well as in many key essays.

31 Baldick and Mighall, 'Gothic Criticism', p. 221.

32 Examples of visual artworks directly inspired by gothic and Sadean themes would include: René Magritte's illustrations for *Les Chants de Maldoror* (Brussels: La Boétie, 1948), Max Ernst's collage novels, André Masson's illustrations for *Justine* (1928), Hans Bellmer's illustrations of Sade, etc.; films would include Jan Švankmajer's *The Castle of Otranto* (1977), Ado Kyrou's *Le Moine* (1972) and Walerian Borowczyk's *Immoral Tales* (1974).

33 Neil Cornwell, 'European Gothic', in Punter, *A Companion to the Gothic*, p. 28.

34 See Mark Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of André Breton* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995), p. 11.

35 See Alan Menhennet, *The Romantic Movement* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1981), pp. 18–28.
36 Roger Cardinal, *German Romantics in Context* (London: Studio Vista, 1975), p. 31.
37 Carol Appleby, *German Romantic Poetry: Goethe, Novalis, Heine, Hölderlin* (Maidstone: Crescent Moon Publishing, 2011), p. 67; Breton, 'Second Manifesto of Surrealism' (1930), *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, p. 178.
38 John Neubauer, *Novalis* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980), p. 60.
39 André Breton, *Communicating Vessels* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), p. 3.
40 André Breton, *Anthology of Black Humor* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1997), p. 212.
41 Radcliffe explores this issue in her essay 'On the Supernatural in Poetry', *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*, vol. 16 no. 1 (1826); Burke considers the question in relation to his model of the sublime in his *A Philosophical Enquiry Into the Sublime and Beautiful* (London and New York: Simon & Brown, 2008).
42 Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism', pp. 10 and 14.
43 Ibid., p. 15.
44 Ibid., p. 4.
45 Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, pp. 9 and 16.; Also see John Warne Monroe, *Laboratories of Faith: Mesmerism, Spiritism and Occultism in Modern France* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2008).
46 Owen, ibid., p. 256.
47 Breton, 'Second Manifesto', pp. 123–24; Breton, 'Situation of Surrealism Between the Two Wars', in Franklin Rosemont (ed.), *André Breton: What Is Surrealism? Selected Writings* (New York: Pathfinder, 1978), p. 245.
48 See Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind*, pp. 50–53.
49 Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, p. 5.
50 M.E. Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy: A Magician in Search of Myth* (Austin, TX: University of Texas, 2001), p. 36.
51 Annie Le Brun, *Les châteaux de la subversion* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982), p. 11.
52 Ibid., p. 41.
53 Ibid., p. 46.
54 Ibid., p. 49.
55 Ibid., p. 50.
56 Benjamin Péret, 'Actualité du roman noir', *Arts*, no. 361 (29 May–4 June, 1952), cited in Le Brun, ibid., p. 54.
57 Werner Spies, *Max Ernst: Collages* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), p. 232.
58 Contained in Breton's 'Introduction au discours sur le peu de réalité', Breton, *OCII*, p. 265, and engraved on his tomb in Batignolles Cemetery.
59 Andrew Smith refers to *grand guignol* as 'gothic theatre' in his *Gothic Literature* – see Introduction.

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1 Crossing the bridge

Surrealism between dream and reality

> In the first place, trembling reader, I would advise you to construct an *old* castle, *formerly* of great magnitude and extent, built in the Gothic manner . . . One half, at least, of it must be in ruins . . .
>
> Letter to the *Monthly Magazine* (1797)[1]

Constellation *noir*: the gothic roots of surrealism

On 14 April 1921 the group of young writers gathered around André Breton, including Louis Aragon, Tristan Tzara, Benjamin Péret and Jacques Rigaut, together with friends and lovers, made a short excursion in Paris to the decayed medieval church of Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre. Posing in photos sheltering under umbrellas from the spring showers, the fashionably dressed visitors were there to stage a dada event, attracted to the church as Mark Polizzotti describes, 'less for its obvious religious affiliations than for its atmosphere of medieval desolation'.[2] But the church also holds particular significance for a nascent surrealist movement on the verge of a long journey. Contemporaneous with nearby Notre Dame, Saint-Julien is geographically located on the old Roman road that forms the pilgrims' route (*El Camino de Santiago* – the 'Milky Way'), guided by stars to the shrine of Saint James at Santiago de Compostela, such that the event's retrospective symbolic resonance – at which Breton 'read a manifesto' – extends far beyond the low-key demonstration staged that day.[3]

In the immediate wake of the First World War Breton's group had launched the journal *Littérature*, where we can trace their literary tastes and ideas on the eve of the launch of the surrealist movement.[4] The double issue of October 1923, devoted to poetry, included a layout under the 'mirrored' heading 'ERUTARETTIL' (Figure 1.1), suggestive of an inversion of literary values, and set out the group's literary firmament in font sizes that reflect the relative luminance of those celestial bodies against an imaginary night-sky.[5]

Some names figure there as isolated stars, among the most prominent of which are those of Lautréamont and Jacques Vaché, Breton's wartime friend from his time at Nantes. Others appear loosely organised according to various themes or constellations, as with a group of English writers that includes the 'graveyard' poet Edward Young, alongside a cluster of gothic novelists, including Matthew Lewis, Ann Radcliffe and Charles Maturin. The inclusion of Young, best known for *Night Thoughts* (1742–46), his great anguished hymn to the night, a meditation on mortality – 'surrealist from cover to cover' according to Breton – roots surrealism's reading of the gothic in that earlier, more elegiac moment.[6] Lewis attained notoriety for his gothic novel *The*

Figure 1.1 'Erutarettil', *Littérature*, New series, nos. 11–12, October 1923, pp. 24–25

Monk (1796), followed soon after by his sensational play *The Castle Spectre* (1798). Maturin, an Irish clergyman is best known for his *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), while Radcliffe was celebrated for a series of expansive gothic novels notable for their descriptions of sublime landscapes and mysterious castles.[7] Other names included here, though not specifically 'gothic', share the same ambiance, as with 'La religieuse portugaise' – most probably a reference to *Les Lettres Portugaises* (1669).[8] We can also identify a constellation of magicians and occultists at the very top of the chart, including the German occultist Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, the Catalan philosopher and mystic Ramon Llull, the French alchemist Nicolas Flamel, as well the mythical Graeco-Egyptian figure Hermes Trismegistus, representing the hermetic tradition and pointing us to another trajectory that surrealism would eventually pursue, and which we analyse in a later chapter.[9] Pétrus Borel, the self-styled 'lycanthrope' and a great favourite with Breton, has been considered as 'gothic' for tales such as 'Andreas Vasalius the Anatomist' (1833) and for his novel *Madame Putiphor* (1839).[10] The hermetic tradition also inspired the writings of Gérard de Nerval, a friend of Borel and a translator of *Faust*, and whose early play 'The Alchemist' (1839) was based on the life of Flamel – a strand that we pursue in Chapter 6.[11] The interweaving of dream and reality in his *Aurélia, ou Le Rêve et la Vie*, left incomplete on his suicide in 1855, posing dream as a 'second life', further situates Nerval within the gothic tradition, anticipating concerns central to Breton's own work.[12] This all therefore heralds an inversion by surrealism of early criticisms of gothic writing for the genre's invoking of

the irrational and the supernatural, instead celebrating precisely those qualities. The inclusion here of the name of Fantômas, the master criminal villain of Souvestre and Allain's epic serial also points to the direction in which the gothic would mutate during the course of the nineteenth century, particularly in the detective mystery as pioneered by Poe.[13] And the name of Charcot signals the significance of the melodramatic theatre of hysteria developed at the Salpêtrière hospital where Freud carried out some of his early training. Finally, we should note here the inclusion already of Sade, a crucial figure in relation to the theorisation of gothic literature, whose importance to surrealism would only continue to expand and whose ideas dominate the final chapter.

Both Breton and Antonin Artaud – himself a key member of the surrealist group between 1924 and 1926 – deployed the gothic during the interwar phase of surrealism, not simply as a badge of literary taste or inspiration, but more importantly as a vehicle through which to develop crucial areas of their thought. Alienated not least by the war, for both men the gothic novel provided the paradigm of the individual in radical conflict with societal norms on the model of the 'accursed outcast', whether in Lewis's *Monk* or Maturin's *Melmoth*, or the yet more hyperbolic writing of Lautréamont. For Breton, the model of the gothic novel enabled him to refract contemporary concerns – the pursuit of desire, the *femme fatale*, alternative forms of socialisation, and specific loaded motifs such as the castle, night, or the forest – through the optic of romanticism's darker cognate. Crucially, the gothic provided for Breton a paradigm of the blurring and eventual erasure of the boundaries between dream and reality – a particular focus of this chapter – and between reason and madness, the rational and the irrational. For Artaud, too, the gothic provided the vehicle through which to realise themes such as violence, melodrama, incest and theatricality, ideas central to his development of the Theatre of Cruelty during the early 1930s.[14] For both men, too, their rejection of reliance upon reason and their turn instead to the irrational, the occult and magic found an echo in the gothic: Artaud turned to magic and the production of 'spells' during the thirties, while magic and its relationship with art and architecture were to become a major preoccupation with Breton, particularly after the Second World War. For Breton and surrealism, the gothic also provided a means through which to attack Catholicism, a central plank of surrealist strategy during the 1930s, while for Artaud, more conflicted in his relationship with religion, it provided the framework for a more divided and nuanced critique. And finally we could say that the gothic provided for all surrealist writers, as well as for visual artists such as Max Ernst and Man Ray, a model of *transgression* – as with their deployment of the figure of Sade – situating their work on the fringes of society and reaffirming their avant-garde credentials.

The gothic has been posed by critics such as David Punter, Maggie Kilgour and others as a kind of 'return of the repressed' – as what Kilgour characterises as a 'resurrection of the need for the sacred and transcendental' in a modern, secular world, and as a reaction against a neo-classical ideal of order and unity.[15] Engaging with such territory clearly entailed certain dangers for a movement rigidly opposed to all forms of religion, contributing to tensions that would come to a head in 1951 with the so-called 'Carrouges Affair'. The gothic novel is posed by Kilgour as a transitional form that first raises themes later developed in a more sophisticated manner by romanticism, and like romanticism, 'a revolt against a mechanistic or atomistic view of the world and relations, in favour of recovering an earlier organic model'.[16] For romanticism, Kilgour observes, 'art is able to recover the paradise lost of childhood', noting that childhood is a central motif of the gothic and claiming support in Breton's observation

that: 'A work of art worthy of its name is one which gives us back the freshness and the emotions of childhood' – though as we will see, surrealism's relationship with childhood is also marked by deep ambivalence.[17]

Martin-Christoph Just maintains that the gothic novel essentially engages with the fears and anxieties of its readers, usually through the intrusion of evil. For Just, gothic writers weren't intending to create 'realistic' scenarios, but rather were using the gothic format as a vehicle through which to deal with contemporary issues in a disguised manner, and we see Breton continuing that tradition, as with his own abiding concern with the updating of the culturally resonant motif of the castle.[18] I therefore want to begin by tracing its deployment in Breton's early writings.

'Sublime object': the gothic castle from *Otranto* to *Udolpho*

A translation of Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* appeared in France in 1767, three years after its initial publication, while the writings of Young, Gray and Harvey also began to attract attention there. But it was with the appearance of Radcliffe in French translation that the genre really began to attract wider interest in France – both *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian* became available to a French audience in 1797, the same year as the first translation of Lewis's *The Monk*. All of these works met with an enthusiastic reception among French readers, with Radcliffe's 'explained supernatural' attracting a more positive response than in England.[19] For French readers of Breton's generation, Alice Killen's *Le Roman 'terrifiant' ou Roman 'noir' de Walpole à Anne Radcliffe* (1915) constituted a principal source of critique of the gothic novel and of its impact upon French writing.[20] There Breton would have discovered the somewhat derivative Clara Reeve alongside Walpole as the 'pioneers' of the genre, followed by Radcliffe and Lewis as it achieved its mature form. Killen relates how the idea for Walpole's novel came to him in a dream – a key factor for Breton – and describes his transformation of Strawberry Hill into a pastiche of the gothic castle. Walpole's characters, with their stilted archaisms, are somewhat lifeless and, as Killen observes, 'he made the castle itself the true hero of the book, the pivot around which all gravitates' – a focus on *place* that we find echoed in Breton's own celebration of the castle as privileged locus of reverie.[21] As Le Brun argues, what distinguishes Walpole's 'castle' from gothic structures built by others is that Strawberry Hill is more a product of fantasy and the expression of Walpole's own desires, and we could perhaps see in that rather makeshift fabrication, the same attraction for such self-styed structures as that exercised upon the surrealists by the 'Palais Idéal' of the Facteur Cheval.[22]

In the 'First Manifesto' of 1924 Breton directly invokes the gothic when he fantasises that 'today I think of a *castle*, half of which is not necessarily in ruins', specifying that 'this castle belongs to me' and that, while 'in a rustic setting', it is conveniently located 'not far from Paris'.[23] And Breton goes on to list his friends – Aragon, Eluard, Soupault and others – living and working together nearby, suggesting a somewhat playful nostalgia for lost forms of sociality, perhaps an organic community rooted in medieval social structures, as opposed to the anomic individualism of modernity. This castle, moreover, is pervaded by a particular atmosphere – of '*démoralisation*' – a key attitude cultivated by surrealism during the postwar era, and which Breton affirms has 'elected domicile' there, thus updating and parodying the medieval 'aura' cultivated by gothic novelists.[24]

As with many aspects of the gothic, though, the castle is also a highly contradictory motif: on the one hand signifying defence and security, while on the other a symbol of

patriarchal authority, arbitrary power and oppression.[25] Devendra P. Varma poses the castle as 'traditionally associated with childhood stories of magic', but also as 'inseparably associated' with the element of terror – 'an image of power, dark, isolated and impenetrable'.[26] Varma also links the castle to the nascent Romantic movement, observing that 'the castle stands as a central image of the lonely personality' – to which we might add Polizzotti's observation that 'Breton recalled his childhood . . . as sad, lonely and bleak'.[27] Ellen Brinks observes that 'castles figure as material emblems of an enduring patriarchal line', noting that, 'as "embodied fate" such estates assume great symbolic weight in the transmission of cultural ideologies' – the central conceit of *Otranto* at the very origins of the genre.[28] Breton thus effects a kind of Deleuzian *reterritorialisation* of the castle for an age in which the bastion had been superseded by advances in long-range artillery – as evidenced in the slighting of the fortifications of Paris and other cities – divesting the fortress of its negative connotations and recasting it in the gothic tradition of the 'fantastic'. Endowing that concept with a revelatory power, Breton observes that the 'fantastic' is 'the key that permits the exploration of the latent content of an epoch, the means of examining the secret historical background that disappears behind the drama of events'.[29] Similarly, Jeffrey N. Cox, discussing the proliferation of ruined castles and convents on the London stage of the 1790s, traces in this 'the liberation of enclosed spaces' in the wake of the Revolution, and we can similarly see in surrealism's own appropriation of the castle in the wake of the War, the opening up and transformation of that motif into a metaphoric and revelatory space of reflection.[30]

In his key essay 'Introduction to the Discourse on the Paucity of Reality', written in September 1924 in the immediate wake of the first Manifesto, Breton writes of himself as standing 'in the vestibule of a chateau, lantern in hand, illuminating one after another the gleaming suits of armour': 'If only I could buckle it on', bemoans Breton, 'and thus recapture a little of the feeling of a man of the fourteenth century'.[31] The essay, an intensely lyrical, fragmentary mixture of theoretical speculation and poetic imagery, would eventually open Breton's *Point du jour* (1934) – *Daybreak* – a highly symbolic moment for Breton, and clearly signals 'the illusion of embarking on the great adventure, of being somewhat like a prospector', seeking out the unknown – the 'gold of time'. Opening on the topical subject of 'wireless' and the themes of invention, imagination and invisible communication, the focus rapidly shifts to the metaphor of the castle, a temporal leap to an age more associated with superstition, but where the unifying thread remains the power of *imagination*. More specifically, Breton's concern is with the apparent *limits* of the imagination, as with the difficulty in 'identifying us . . . with a character other than ourselves', and, musing again on the suits of armour, speculates that perhaps in the future, 'in this same vestibule, someone will put on my own without thinking about it'.[32] The subsequent 'Colloquy of the Suits of Armour', in which disembodied voices muse on lovers and 'beauty without veils', is abruptly curtailed by the author's complaint that all of this 'gets us nowhere' and the sudden return to the reality of everyday Paris: 'I am in the world, really in the world'.[33] Much of the subsequent discussion turns on the question of 'the value which should be accorded reality' and the poverty of language in conveying that reality, and Breton's rhetorical question: 'Must poetic creations assume that tangible character of extending, strangely, the limits of so-called reality?'[34] What's striking here is that the gothic should again figure as representative of the imagination in an analysis of the status that surrealism should accord to material reality in relation to products of the imagination and the unconscious, a pattern that Breton would repeat in his

later *Communicating Vessels*, where, as we shall see, the key to the resolution of that dichotomy would be provided (provisionally) by Hegelian dialectics.

Breton would return to the theme of the gothic, and in particular to Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*, in his important essay 'Limits not frontiers of Surrealism', published soon after the 1936 International Exhibition of Surrealism, where the London setting provided the natural opportunity for him to consider in more depth the significance of English gothic writing for surrealism.[35] The essay contains a statement of the precise meaning of the term 'surrealism' at what would prove to be a high-point in the movement's expansion and is again strongly marked by both the influence of the Hegelian dialectic upon Breton's thought, as well as by the inheritance of the gothic. There is also a return here to *automatism* as the key to resolving the contradictions of human existence: between dream and reality, reason and madness, past and future, life and death. Assuming the language of psychoanalysis, Breton rejects the possibility of any form of creation that considers only the '*manifest content* of an age', insisting that surrealism is concerned only to express the '*latent content*' and that the fantastic is 'the supreme key to this latent content'.[36] It is only on the approach of the fantastic, claims Breton, that 'human reason loses its control' and that emotion is able to find its fullest expression, as exemplified in the 'extraordinary efflorescence of English novels at the end of the eighteenth century known in France as the "romans noirs"'.[37] While acknowledging the decisive influence of Radcliffe and Lewis, Breton points to Young's *Night Thoughts* and Maturin's *Melmoth*, as 'the most vital source for the all-powerful inspiration of Lautréamont'.[38] And Breton reinforces the radical claims made for this literature in citing the observation of Sade that the phenomenon 'illustrates "the indispensable fruit of the revolutionary upheaval to which the whole of Europe was sensitive"'.[39] The task, then, for surrealism is one of creating some equivalent 'collective myth' for its own time, just as the 'roman noir' was 'pathogenic of the great social troubles' of the late eighteenth century.[40]

Breton pits the *gothic*, as expression of the fantastic, against *realism*, claiming that humanity is stirred not by 'scrupulously exact description . . . but rather the expression of the confused feelings awakened by nostalgia and terror', which he poses in explicitly Freudian terms as the revenge of the pleasure principle upon reality.[41] Freud is again present in Breton's analysis of the symbolism of some of the core gothic motifs, particularly the *castle ruins*, posed as the backdrop to the struggle between Eros and Thanatos:

> The ruins appear so full of significance in that they express the collapse of the feudal period; the inevitable ghost which haunts them indicates a peculiarly intense fear of the return of the powers of the past, the subterranean passages represent the difficulty and perils of the dark path followed by each individual toward the light; in the stormy night can be heard the incessant roar of cannon.[42]

For Paul Eluard, in his preface to the 1943 edition of *Le Château d'Otrante*, it was the 'book of the invisible': 'Opposing to the Golden Age the age of death, the fog of mystery to the light of the sun, the icy sigh to the song of the prism'.[43] Eluard poses the castle itself as deserted by the living and now haunted by the dead, and observes of the bizarre opening scene in which Manfred's son is discovered crushed by the giant helm, that: 'it's already *the fortuitous meeting on a dissection table of a sewing machine and an umbrella*'.[44] Just, too, observes how Walpole's novel is marked by curious discrepancies, 'between thought and action, between explicit and implicit meaning'.[45]

And he notes, too, the incongruous mixture of more 'successful' with overtly 'ludicrous' scenes – rather like the frequently jarring oscillation between chapters found in *Fantômas*, which would account in part for the book's attraction for surrealism.[46] It therefore comes as little surprise that Walpole's writing technique in *Otranto* should be posed by Breton as 'nothing less than the *surrealist method*', citing Walpole's own account of its genesis in waking from a dream:

> all that I could recover was, that I had thought myself in an ancient castle . . . and that on the uppermost bannister of a great staircase I saw a gigantic hand in armour. In the evening I sat down, and began to write, without knowing in the least what I intended to say or relate. . . . I was so engrossed with my tale, which I completed in less than two months, that one evening, I wrote from the time I had drunk my tea, about six o'clock, till half an hour after one in the morning, when my hand and fingers were so weary, that I could not hold the pen to finish the sentence . . .[47]

Breton would also refer to the book as being written 'as though under dictation, in a "second state"', claiming that, right from the introduction of the gigantic plumed helmet, the book would 'revolutionise the mind', would 'magnetize' it.[48] For Le Brun, who refers to the gothic castle as the 'phantom-vessel of the imaginary', this marks a shift from the order of *perception* to that of *mental* representation, transforming both the imaginary landscape as well as the relationship with the object, and which she poses as the 'departure point of modernity'.[49] This combination of the dream and automatic writing essentially establishes Walpole as a precursor of surrealism and suggests for Breton that certain places might be particularly suited to the manifestation of this sensibility – something that, as we saw in the Introduction, he poses in terms of the 'castle problem'.[50] Varma makes somewhat similar claims in relation to the impact of the medieval atmosphere of Strawberry Hill and that of Trinity College, Cambridge, in inflaming the imagination of Walpole.[51] Breton also suggests though, that the gothic element should not be considered as essential to this privileged place and that some modern equivalent might be found, as for example in his essay 'Il y aura une fois', the introduction to his 1932 collection *Le Revolver à cheveux blancs*. There, in a further updating of the castle motif, already mutated during the nineteenth century with Poe and Le Fanu into the rotting gothic pile, Breton proposes renting a kind of large hotel or 'relais' set in woods near Paris, to which friends might come and go at any time of day or night.[52] It would have long, dark corridors and an underground tunnel, and he would invite young women noted for their beauty and the strangeness of their minds, as well as for their mediumistic abilities – though it would be forbidden, under pain of expulsion, to make love within its walls. Le Brun notes the vagueness of the actual form of Walpole's gothic castle – an 'interminable labyrinth of shadows' – and that the gothic emerges in the invasion of the colour black, the world of shadow and obscurity, such that the gothic could be said to consist essentially in this crepuscular poetic atmosphere.[53] This evocation of the dark and obscure points us directly to Edmund Burke's concept of the 'sublime', a term that designates a powerful emotional response aroused by any threat posed to the self-preservation of the subject, as with a mountainous terrain, deep crevasses, etc., but experienced as aesthetic 'delight' when that threat is only virtual in the form of an artwork or text.[54] Burke links this experience of the sublime to notions such as 'terror', 'power', 'vastness', 'obscurity' and 'infinity', which for Le Brun signifies the experience of the 'void',

such that the castle becomes 'the instrument appropriated in order to interrogate the terrifying novelty of an infinite liberty'.[55]

The gothic castle again constitutes the core of Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, the tale of an endlessly deferred relationship between two lovers, Emily and Valancourt, continually frustrated by the machinations of the evil Montoni, by far the most complex and intriguing character in the novel – albeit in many ways also the classic pantomime villain.[56] Montoni marries Emily's guardian, Mme. Cheron – though not for sentimental reasons – and in order to evade his many enemies suddenly transfers his entire household, by night, from Venice to the decaying fortress of Udolpho. With *Udolpho*, as with *Otranto*, it is the castle itself that becomes the main protagonist, though here we are struck more by the extreme isolation and impregnability of the fortress, factors pushed to the point of absurdity with Sade's Silling. After a long journey through the Apennines Montoni suddenly points to the castle, and 'though it was now lighted by the setting sun, the gothic greatness of its features, and its mouldering walls of dark grey stone, rendered it a gloomy and sublime object': 'Silent, lonely and sublime', writes Radcliffe, 'it seemed to stand the sovereign of the scene, and to frown defiance on all who dared to invade its solitary gloom'.[57] The 'uncanny' effect of this return of the gaze and the characterisation of the castle as a 'sublime object' has been analysed, for example, by Slavoj Žižek in relation to Hitchcock's *The Birds*, in an analogous approach of some sublime object.[58] In each case the disturbing impact of this return gaze serves to signal to the reader that things are awry. One of the central mysteries of Udolpho concerns a painting veiled by a black cloth, an image that instils fear in Emily's servant Annette, and which inflames Emily's imagination in her attempt to resolve the enigma of the castle as she investigates its corridors at night.[59] Readers would recognise in this one of the stock motifs of the genre, traceable to Walpole's novel in which the figure in a family portrait comes to life and steps down from the frame. But the mysterious veiled image that grips Emily's mind is subsequently revealed to contain 'no picture', and upon which discovery she faints. In fact, as we later learn, what Emily sees is a wax effigy of a beautiful woman – the dispossessed former owner of the castle. It is this same uncertainty between the animate and inanimate, often analysed again in terms of the Freudian uncanny, that surrealism so often deploys in the form of the 'modern mannequin' – posed by Breton in the first Manifesto as an exemplar of the 'marvellous' and most spectacularly staged in the gothic atmosphere of the 1938 International Surrealist Exhibition, with its night-time street of eroticised mannequins intended to be explored in darkness with torches.[60]

Looking back from 1938, Breton observed that, 'in a quite intuitive manner', surrealism in 1924 had discovered in the '*roman noir*' some 'very great affinities of climate', and that, intending in the 'First Manifesto' to strike the 'inanity' of the entire *romanesque* literature of the previous century, had brandished a single work – *The Monk* of Lewis – as emblematic of the *marvellous*.[61] Breton therefore first raises the concept of the 'marvellous' there, situating that core surrealist concept within the storytelling tradition and observing that 'most of the examples which these literatures could have furnished me with are tainted by puerility, for the simple reason that they are addressed to children', and that from an early age 'children are weaned on the marvellous'.[62] Since the adult in fact never loses that love of 'the unusual, chance, the taste for things extravagant', adds Breton, then 'the fabric of adorable improbabilities must be made a trifle more subtle the older we grow'.[63] The terms 'mystery' and the 'marvellous' both pervade the gothic, and at its source we could cite Walpole's assertion that *Otranto* was 'an attempt to blend the marvellous of old story with the natural of

modern novels'.[64] The atmosphere of the castle of Udolpho is similarly permeated by enigmas, where we're told that Emily's servant Annette 'dearly loved the marvellous', whereas Emily herself is far more sceptical, always seeking rational explanations for apparently supernatural events – hence the frequent characterisation of the book in terms of the 'explained supernatural'.[65] Radcliffe's elision of the boundary between dream and reality serves to further expand the domain of the marvellous, where it is observed for example of Emily that: 'Her present life appeared like the dream of a distempered imagination'.[66] The castle thus figures for surrealism as locus of the 'marvellous' – a 'sublime object' associated with enigma, mystery and the supernatural – and itself the realisation of a dream. Such places are, for Breton, 'observatories of the inner sky', where surrealism's task – its 'castle problem' – is that of identifying their equivalents 'in the outer world'.[67] And as Le Brun argues, such a place, 'neither subjective nor objective', entails a particular 'angle of view' – a 'wild' and 'unknown' point of view – that of what Le Brun designates an '*espace inobjectif*'.[68]

Communicating Vessels: the dialectic of life and dream

In his 1932 book *Communicating Vessels*, Breton relates that while out walking in the Quartier Saint-Augustin and finding himself unable to afford a rare copy of Raymond Lulle's *Ars Magna*, he went instead in search of 'some rare terrifying novel like those of Matthew Lewis or of Charles Maturin which I might not yet have read'.[69] Breton was looking in particular for Clara Reeve's *The Old English Baron; or, The Ghosts Revenged* (1778), but fear of 'seeming odd' induced him to ask instead for books on '9 Thermidor', the date in the French Revolutionary Calendar on which Robespierre came under violent attack and was arrested, thus ending the Reign of Terror. Breton did in fact track down a copy of Reeve's 'Gothic Story', translated into French in 1787, though he may have been a little let down to discover a rather vapid, high-minded tale modelled on *The Castle of Otranto*, dismissed by Walpole himself as 'stripped of the marvellous' and 'the most insipid dull thing you ever saw', adding for good measure that 'any trial for murder at the Old Bailey would make a more interesting story'.[70] Since Sade the gothic has been posed – both in the novel and in theatre – as an expression of the turbulence experienced in Europe in the wake of the French Revolution and it is significant that Breton, too, should link the two phenomena in this way, particularly given surrealism's aspiration to become a revolutionary movement and to directly engage in radical politics during the 1930s.

As with *Otranto*, Reeve's convoluted plot is one of misappropriated inheritance, where the dead return to accuse the usurper and where resolution is achieved by the eventual restoration, after a series of tests, of the rightful heir. Reeve's tale, ostensibly set in the early fifteenth century, suffers some of the absurdities and anachronisms that would attract surrealism to such popular writing, as for example in J.M.S. Tompkins' observation that 'nowhere else' in the gothic 'do we find knights regaling on eggs and bacon and suffering from the toothache'.[71] The novel relates the tale of Sir Philip Harclay, returned to England after extensive travels, only to discover the death of his old friend Lord Lovel and the Castle of Lovel passed into the hands of the Lord Baron Fitz-Owen. Sir Philip's dead friend appears to him in a dream, leading him through the many rooms of the castle until they arrive at 'a dark and frightful cave' containing 'a complete suit of armour stained with blood', from which issued 'dismal groans'.[72] Given the central focus of *Communicating Vessels* upon the question of

the relationship between the world of the dream and that of waking reality, Breton's interest would doubtless have been aroused by the statement that: 'The images that impressed his sleeping fancy remained strongly on his mind waking; but his reason strove to disperse them'.[73] Reeve also deploys the device of introducing apparent elisions and illegible passages in the 'manuscript' of the text, a ploy adopted extensively by Maturin, who thereby creates the dreamlike sensation of drifting in and out of sleep. Breton's interest was also drawn to the deployment of *clairvoyance* in the novel – the second major focus of *Communicating Vessels* – where young Edmund, a peasant's son adopted by the Baron's family, is told that: 'I see . . . something that persuades me you are designed for great things; and I perceive that things are working about to some great ends'.[74] Breton was struck to find this echoed in his own, dreamlike experience, where, on leaving the bookshop on the boulevard Malesherbes, he writes of encountering 'an elegant man of about fifty who looks like a professor' and who taps him for money – Breton gives the man ten francs and is told by him that: 'I do not know who you are, sir, but I hope that you can do what you must and what you can do: something great'.[75] Soon after, Breton encounters a policeman who informs him that the man was in fact a fraudster who had hoodwinked others using the same ploy, and he is later struck by the coincidence of a report of similar frauds on the front page of *Le Journal*. We should add to this an early scene in Murnau's 1922 film *Nosferatu* (also discussed in *Communicating Vessels*), where the young Thomas Hutter (Bram Stoker's Jonathan Harker) is stopped by an old man that he encounters in the street and who tells him that he 'can't escape destiny by running away', such that Breton finds a core surrealist concept – 'objective chance' (*hasard objectif*) – anticipated in the gothic.[76] Marguerite Bonnet observes that this return in Breton's thought to the concept of 'objective chance' is now read through Engels, such that what appears as a chance event is in fact shown to be driven by some inner necessity, combining 'natural necessity' with 'interior preoccupation'.[77] Breton's concern with the gothic and with related themes such as chance, premonition and dream, must therefore be read not as any kind of 'evasion' of reality, but rather as an attempt to dialectically engage such phenomena with objective reality, where the ultimate aim is the transformation of the world – evident in the somewhat utopian third and final chapter, with its lyrical metaphor of Paris awakening, through which Breton resolves the dilemma of his isolation and returns to active engagement in the world.

Pursuing his journey in the book, turning now to the Quartier Saint-Denis, whose wall and gates recall for him the 'lost look' of the medieval Tour Saint-Jacques, Breton recounts 'wandering along about six o'clock in the Rue du Paradis', while musing on 'a little glass-fronted book case, which I preferred to imagine in the Gothic style' and which 'would have been large enough to contain all the Gothic novels that I possess of the pre-Romantic epoch . . .'[78] These are books, Breton observes, that evoke 'some fragrance or other of dark forests and high vaults', adding that:

> Nothing could be more stimulating than this ultraromanesque, hypersophisticated literature. All those castles of Otranto, of Udolpho, of the Pyrenees, of Lovel, of Athlin, and of Dunbayne, crevassed with great cracks and eaten by subterranean passages, persisted in the shadiest corner of my mind in living their factitious life . . .[79]

In this reverie on the gothic, Breton's text is simultaneously enacting his argument about the interconnectedness of the different levels of consciousness, as daydream,

reverie, fantasy and dream, are all interwoven in the text, while also demonstrating the power of the gothic as stimulus to the *imagination*. But whereas the literary references here are to the gothic writings of Walpole, Radcliffe and Reeve, what this recalls for him, says Breton, is his own 'distant childhood' and the 'far more terrifying tales' related by his Auvergnat schoolmaster, such that the fantasied gothic bookcase becomes a 'little temple to Fear'. Breton's gothic bookcase is thus a psychically charged object that falls somewhere between the mnemonic theatres and mansions stocked with striking objects, as analysed by Frances Yates, and a metaphor for the contents of the unconscious: childhood anxieties, dreams and the products of the imagination, as they pass back and forth between the different levels of consciousness.[80] Breton writes in the first Manifesto that it is 'perhaps childhood that comes closest to one's "real life" . . .', though as Polizzotti observes, he nursed a 'deep resentment' of a 'cold and domineering mother', and that 'one rarely finds an author so reluctant to discuss his early years'.[81] We could add, too, the enormous anger felt by that generation at the abrupt curtailment of their youth and the loss of friends by the war, forever scarring their relationship with a lost past, such that Walpole's *Otranto* would have a particular resonance for them here, opening with the indifference of the patriarch Manfred at the mangled corpse of his son, 'dashed to pieces and almost buried under an enormous helmet', and his overriding obsession with perpetuating his own genetic line – echoed in the postwar pro-natality campaign.[82]

Breton's central concern in *Communicating Vessels* is with the *dream* – the very origin of the gothic novel and a recurring theme right down its history, whether as visionary or as nightmare, premonitory or protective, or in the merging of dream and reality. As Bonnet notes, Breton had Freud's *Traumdeutung* with him at Castellane while he wrote *Communicating Vessels*, paying particular attention to the first chapter where Freud considers the relation between dreams and waking life.[83] Reproaching Freud for having failed to expose intimate details of his own dreams, Breton takes up that challenge in seeking to analyse two personal dreams in the book, dreams coinciding with a particularly troubled phase of Breton's own private life in his relations with women.[84] Breton adopts a somewhat testy tone toward Freud, upbraiding him for his claimed failure to acknowledge in his work on dreams, a book by the Marquis d'Hervey de Saint-Denys, *Les Rêves et les moyens de les diriger* (1867), a work that Breton likens to Rimbaud's 'disordering of the senses' and poses as providing the means of reconciling the worlds of dream and reality.[85] Hervey possessed the faculty of being aware during a dream that he was actually dreaming, training himself over decades to exercise a certain control over the direction of the dream, and his work comprises an investigation of the dream state from within, eroding the distinction between passive dreaming and directed mental activity.[86] Dismissing the idea of any clear threshold between the two states of wakefulness and dream, Breton instead argues that 'psychic activity would be constantly active in the dream'.[87] And rejecting Freud's claim 'that "psychic reality" is just a form of particular existence *that must not be confused with* "material reality"', Breton is scathing of what he views as 'the almost complete lack in Freud . . . of any dialectical conception'.[88] As Bonnet observes, strongly influenced by the thought of Hegel, for Breton the dream is not simply a question of evasion or of healing but rather a means of *movement* – of eliminating the negative, breaking out of the inertia in which he finds himself mired, and thus enabling him to again *advance*.[89]

The central metaphor of *Communicating Vessels* suggests that in going beyond the 'surface ebullition' of the mind there exists what Breton calls a 'capillary tissue', the

role of which is 'to guarantee the constant exchange in thought that must exist between the exterior and interior worlds, an exchange that requires the continuous interpenetration of the activity of waking and that of sleeping'.[90] In his pursuit of the interior core of subjectivity and of 'feeling', the overriding aim of Breton's speculations is thus to uncover the subject's 'relationship with his own essence', an essence, Breton insists, that is 'totally different from exterior objective knowledge'.[91] It is here that Breton seeks the origins of dreams, of poetry and of all creative activity, concluding that it is the *poet* who will take on this advance role in eradicating the 'divorce between action and dream'.[92] In this Breton is directly in the German romantic tradition in its interrogation of subjectivity, its insistence that only via the inner world can the outer be understood and in its acceptance of topics such as the dream, animal magnetism and somnambulism as valid lines of scientific enquiry.[93] The writings of Novalis in particular privilege the role of night and dream, encapsulated in such statements as: 'Das Leben ist kein Traum, aber es soll und wird vielleicht einer werden' (Life is no dream, but should and perhaps will become one).[94] We discover the same claim in Breton's statement that 'the world of dream and the real world are only one', echoing Nerval's opening assertion in *Aurélia*, that 'Le Rêve est une seconde vie'.[95] By contrast though, the strongly Hegelian tenor of Breton's thought at this time, as Bonnet makes clear, demonstrates how his concern with subjectivity is tied to his concern with the way in which the interpretation and transformation of the world are closely linked, such that an analysis of subjectivity can serve to give revolutionary action a more profound necessity, bringing together as it does, objective knowledge of reality and subjective desire.[96] Breton's writing technique in *Communicating Vessels*, where he relates events drawn from his journals 'as though in a dream', thus serves to merge the realms of reality and dream, where events unfold in a series of chance encounters, repetitions and coincidences, recalling that of many gothic novels. This effect is very pronounced in Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho*, where characters advance as though powerless through a transfigured and often 'sublime' landscape, while undergoing strange adventures, or again as in Emily's continual 'faints' as she passes in and out of consciousness. Likewise with Maturin's *Melmoth*, where a similar effect is achieved via the device of the numerous elisions and illegible passages encountered in the tattered manuscript discovered by John Melmoth in a book, interrupting the flow of the narrative and introducing sudden leaps, as though the reader were drifting in and out of sleep, and in the ambivalent states of consciousness manifested by characters as they are driven to the brink of insanity.[97] But beyond any superficial blurring of the boundaries between dream and reality, Breton's concern is more that the inner world thus finding expression should conform to some internal *necessity* seeking some outlet and that reality should as a consequence be radically transformed.

The immediate context of *Communicating Vessels* was, as Bonnet observes, the malaise within the surrealist group during the early 1930s and Breton's concern that the decision, at Aragon's instigation, to make antireligious activity the focus of the group's communal action, was in itself insufficient. Whereas he insists in the book on surrealism as 'a specifically antireligious action', Breton's anticlericalism is surely all rather half-hearted, and immediately after that group decision he observes how his mind turns instead to the 'roman noir', to dreams, coincidences and astrology, regretting the lack of determination of both the group and himself to follow through on their decisions.[98] Breton's anxiety on this point – that action should be driven by some 'inner necessity' – echoes objections voiced against the gothic upon its initial emergence, of escapism and a detachment from the realities of everyday life, a criticism most pointedly posed by

Coleridge in his assertion that 'it excites mere feelings, without at the same time ministering to an impulse to action', and a claim echoed in Elizabeth Napier's assertion that 'the gothic represents a flight from meaning into a quest for sensations'.[99] Against this, Kilgour notes David Punter's assertion (made in relation to Radcliffe's *The Italian*) where the gothic is revealed as 'not an escape from the real but a deconstruction and dismemberment of it', a claim strikingly exemplified in Max Ernst's savage dissection and reconstitution of the nineteenth-century illustrated novel in works such as *La femme 100 têtes* (1929) or *Une Semaine de bonté* (1934) (Figure 1.2).[100] Through his melodramatic deconstruction of bourgeois morality, religion and the family, expressed in a visual rhetoric derived from the gothic novel, Ernst simultaneously engages his own fantasy life (eroticism, perversion, occultism) in a dialectic of interior and exterior realities. Ernst's collages, with their moustached patriarchs, swooning, hysterical women and repressed eroticism, directly recall such scenes in Radcliffe's *Udolpho*, as when Montoni reminds Emily that she is dealing with a man who has unlimited power over her, banishing her to the haunted east turret and resulting in the spectacle of Emily begging at his feet, falling and banging her head, while her guardian, now married to the monster, goes into 'convulsions'.[101] This image of woman as eroticised hysteric again finds a strong resonance in surrealism, most evidently in Aragon and Breton's celebration in 1928 of 'Le Cinquantenaire de l'hystérie', accompanied by melodramatic photographs of the several stages of Charcot's hysteric cycle – the '*attitudes passionnelles*'.[102]

Werner Spies, the leading authority on Ernst's work, has claimed surrealism's anticlericalism to be superficial, dismissing it as 'a picturesque set piece' and observing

Figure 1.2 Max Ernst, from *Une Semaine de bonté*, 1934

that: 'Not a trace remained of the Satanism against whose background writers from Cazotte to Baudelaire, Byron to Lautréamont, had projected their literary inventions'.[103] While true of Satanism, we do in fact see an extensive engagement by Artaud and other surrealists with the figure of Satan, with Baphomet, and more particularly in the case of Breton, with Lucifer, as we see in Chapter 6. For Spies, it is the gothic novel that inspires surrealism's anticlerical stance, the result of 'literary archaeology, a digging for artifacts untainted by the realistic attitude and embedded in deep strata of fantasy and drama' – and amongst which he includes the *Fantômas* series as an 'offshoot' of the gothic novel.[104] Against this, though, we see a clear development in Breton's strategy, from the somewhat theatrical provocations of *Surrealism and Painting* (1928) – 'God . . . is a swine' etc. – to the dialectical analysis of *Communicating Vessels*, where one of the clear attractions of novels such as *The Monk* or *Melmoth* was their combination of virulent anti-Catholicism with an often perverse eroticism, such that the gothic might serve as a cultural vehicle for the group's anticlerical militancy.[105]

Surrealist anticlericalism also pervades the Czech surrealist Vitězslav Nezval's novel *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders* (1945), in a clear echo of Ernst's *Une Semaine de bonté*. The work describes itself as 'A Gothic Novel', written, says Nezval, 'out of a love of the mystique in those ancient tales, superstitions and romances', and which he links to his affinity for the 'mysterious'.[106] Both gothic pastiche and an homage to Ernst, the book assumes the form of a long series of action scenarios in which the eponymous heroine, Valerie, is variously menaced by the sinister figure of the Polecat, a malevolent, shape-shifting force who has concluded some form of diabolic pact to preserve his youth and who feeds on blood. Nezval uses a range of gothic tropes – thwarted love, underground tunnels, incestuous desires, supernatural intervention, etc. – but read now through a surrealist sensibility that deploys discontinuity, absurdity and an all-pervasive oneiric atmosphere to create a new form of gothic surrealism. In one such surreal scene that strikingly recalls Ernst's collage novels, Valerie, 'acting like a madwoman', revives her dying father (a purported bishop) by biting through the gullet of a chicken and pressing her 'bloodstained mouth' to his, upon which he is again transformed into a 'beast' who attempts 'to defile his own child'.[107] And throughout, the gothic novel provides the vehicle for anti-clerical sentiments, as when the Polecat in the guise of a missionary gives a wild sermon on virginity, or in his earlier seduction of Valerie's grandmother. The novel ends in classic gothic style – as in Walpole's *Otranto*, Poe's *House of Usher*, etc. – with the dissolution of the house.

Breton, by contrast, in seeking to link surrealist 'anti-religious activity' more overtly to his own subjective concerns, seeks to tie it to inner necessity, and it is this that will give it motivation, driving it forward in the fusing of external reality with inner subjectivity and desire. The gothic thus figures in Breton's thought as a prime exemplar of the power of the imagination and the functioning of the marvellous, in a dialectical movement that will transform reality through its engagement with the deepest layers of the subject's psychic life.

Melodrama and perverse masculinity: Matthew Lewis's *The Monk*

In his *Anthology of Black Humor* (1940) Breton introduces the work of Lautréamont by way of a rousing reference to the gothic, proclaiming that:

> We must rediscover the colors that Lewis used in *The Monk* in order to paint the apparition of the infernal spirit behind the features of an admirable nude youth

> with crimson wings . . ., star on his forehead and gaze marked by a fierce melancholy; the colors with which Swinburne captured the true appearance of the Marquis de Sade.[108]

Lewis sites his novel in the Madrid of the Inquisition, relating the downfall of a firebrand preacher who is seduced by a novice of his order, Rosario, who it transpires is in fact a woman, Matilda, a devious and seductive figure characterised by Breton as 'less a character than a continual temptation'.[109] It becomes apparent that Matilda is being deployed by Satan to corrupt Ambrosio, a pride-swollen figure of righteousness, and after satisfying his lust with her turns his attention to another sexual object, Agnes. Blindly propelled by his desires, and after first murdering her mother, Elvira, when she attempts to prevent her daughter's seduction, Ambrosio proceeds to the abduction, rape and murder of Agnes at the behest of Matilda, thus ensuring his damnation. Beyond Breton's boundless enthusiasm for *The Monk*, the perverse eroticism and macabre violence of Lewis's novel proved a powerful attraction for other surrealists, most notably Ernst and Artaud, as well as with Ado Kyrou's later film adaptation, *Le Moine* (1970).

The same overheated atmosphere of religious bigotry and sexual hypocrisy permeates Ernst's collage novel *Rêve d'une petite fille qui voulut entrer au Carmel* (1930), an early manifestation of surrealism's anti-religious stance of the 1930s. But the book also clearly deploys the gothic as a vehicle for many of Ernst's own personal concerns in his art, including the role of childhood, eroticism, fetishism and the eruption of repressed sexuality within the bourgeois interior. Spies, in his standard work on Ernst's collages, observes how the illustrated gothic novel provided Ernst with a repertory of every imaginable horror scenario, which he characterises as 'encyclopedic compilations of human cruelty': 'dungeons, executions, coronary inquests, morgues, sinister murders, . . . inquisitions, torture chambers, escape attempts, people buried alive . . . and stories of child abuse'.[110] Spies traces the outline of a 'seemingly endless list' of horror that extends 'from Pétrus Borel, the *lycanthrope* (wolf-man or werewolf) through Eugène Sue and Dumas all the way to Fantômas'.[111] Ernst, in his introductory essay, 'Academy of Science', opposes the world of science to that of *dream*, presenting his imagery as the dream of a young girl about to take the veil, 'under the banner of Saint Theresa of the Holy Child'.[112] Spies reveals that the novel had personal associations for Ernst, in that the model for his protagonist Marceline-Marie had been provided by his then wife, Marie-Berthe, who, while 'sitting on the terrace of the Café Dôme one day, asked the waiter for a piece of paper, on which (under the café's letterhead) she applied for admission to the Carmelite convent at Lisieux'.[113] We are told of Marceline-Marie, that:

> at age seven and through the savagery of an ignoble individual she lost her virginity. It happened on the very day that first communion was refused her . . . The individual, not content with having forced her, broke all her teeth with an incredible ferocity and by means of a large stone.[114]

But this violence is posed perversely in terms of a mystical experience through which the child is enabled to take communion and which determines her for a religious vocation, a wish realised 'at the age of eleven during the benediction for a statue in bronze of the "Little Saint of Lisieux"'.[115] The reference is to Saint Thérèse of Lisieux who had entered a Carmelite monastery, the order of Saint Teresa of Avila, when only

fifteen years old, seeking the personal dispensation of the Pope to enter the order early, and who died of tuberculosis in 1897 when only twenty-four.[116] During her short life there was a revival of interest in France in the life of Joan of Arc, declared 'venerable' by Pope Leo XIII in 1893 and Thérèse produced two short plays about her, performed in the monastery. Thérèse was herself beatified far more quickly, in 1923, and was canonised in 1925, hence the topicality of Ernst's reference to her mission. Ernst's work parodies accounts of Thérèse's life, as when describing an incident depicted in one of the collages contained in the book: 'She had remained motionless during the procession of the martyr's relics and during the sermon, that is, for two hours, her arms held out, a knife in her hand "to cut open the earth"'.[117]

Among Ernst's blasphemous collages we discover a prelate being embraced by a naked woman (Figure 1.3), a father and daughter engaged in a passionate embrace, violent brawls, scenes of religious ecstasy and their desecration – all accompanied by absurdly pietistic texts, as with: 'Here now is the hour of wordless prayer. Prayer: "Dear Lord, fondle me as you knew so well how to do, during the unforgettable night when . . ."'.[118] Ernst's collages therefore echo many of the stylistic features of the gothic novel, tracing a series of action-filled, often violent scenes, involving flight and

Figure 1.3 Max Ernst, from *A Little Girl Dreams of Taking the Veil*, 1930

pursuit, as Marceline-Marie's dream is played out through a series of eroticised and frequently sacrilegious tableaux, ultimately finding a kind of resolution in the theme of the 'Celestial Bridegroom'.

Lewis's *Monk*, with its extreme scenes of horror and black magic proved less controversial in France than in Britain, with the tale of the 'bloody nun' – a surrealist favourite – exercising a particular fascination upon a French readership and passing into French writing.[119] This 'Bleeding Nun' derives from one of the long narrative diversions so typical of the gothic and is a tale related by Agnes to her lover, Raymond, a young Spanish noble, describing a ghostly, blood-stained figure in a habit carrying a lamp and dagger, who appears at night in the Castle of Lindenberg, 'accompanied with shrieking, howling, groaning . . .'.[120] The bleeding nun is explicitly presented by Agnes as a manifestation of the 'marvellous', appearing every fifth year to avenge her betrayal and murder, until her unburied remains are finally laid to rest. Raymond is haunted by this bloody apparition and is assisted by a mysterious stranger, suggested as being Doctor Faustus, who performs an occult ritual within a magic circle, during which he exposes a fiery cross emblazoned on his forehead – the mark of God which the spectre is compelled to obey. The nun is ultimately revealed as a debauched mistress who had eloped with the Baron Lindenberg, marrying him and leading a dissipated life that culminated in her lover's murder, and hence her erotic appeal for surrealism as *femme fatale*.

Just reads *The Monk* as 'a complete *psycho-genesis* of pathological attitudes' that anticipates the scientific investigation of fetishism, sadism and necrophilia.[121] Noting Ambrosio's 'sexual fantasizing' over his painting of the Virgin, of which he makes a fetish, Just observes his 'inherent sadism', evident in his rigid exercise of authority as well as in his brutal treatment of women: the rape of Antonia, his murder of her mother and his ruthless condemnation of Agnes. In this Just judges that Ambrosio's stance is 'entirely Sadean', insofar as he 'needs to be in control of both the situation and the intended victim . . .'.[122] Anticipating our later discussion of surrealism's celebration of Sade, we should also add Just's claim that this 'perverts the ideal of personal freedom', insofar as the freedom of the sadist is attained only at the cost of the subjugation of the other.[123]

Kilgour sees in *The Monk* a world of theatre and spectacle, established from the outset via the ostentatious display of fashionable society in the crowded Madrid cathedral and Ambrosio's oratorical performance there. This is a world of role play, concealing the characters' 'real, less socially acceptable identities' which 'lurk beneath surface appearances' and where characters often figure in disguise, most notably in the case of the cross-dressed Rosario.[124] In a similar vein, Killen poses the gothic as a break with the Classical tradition, a genre seeking to discover 'beneath the real world, another, invisible world, less material and more mysterious'.[125] We might also add, as Cox observes, the rise of melodrama during the 1790s, reflecting the political drama of the Revolution in France, and used as a means of evading the censorship imposed on the English stage by the Lord Chamberlain.[126] Lewis quickly followed up on the success of *The Monk* in translating the gothic to the stage as *The Castle Spectre* (1798), with its dungeons, sliding panels and its celebrated spectre, merging both high and popular culture, and signalling the rise of melodrama. For Cox, this is marked by three distinctive features – sensationalism, violent plots, and 'an overriding sense of morality' – and while melodrama proper is focused on the everyday and the ordinary, the gothic is rather concerned with the extreme and the extraordinary.[127] Lewis's later play *The Captive* (1803) is a monodrama about a wife incarcerated in a 'Private Mad-House' by a cruel husband – the nightmare of the sane

surrounded by insanity – and a recurring theme of the gothic. This issue is bound up with the more general debate of the time about 'arbitrary' incarceration of the insane, and the problem of abuses of the system in order to get rid of unwanted wives or troublesome relatives – a recurring theme of the gothic that we will see re-emerge in the case of the *Fantômas* series as well as with *grand guignol*, and a central issue in Breton's conflict with French psychiatry.

Gothic drama is characterised by Cox in terms of 'a new aesthetic of sensationalism', with a fresh focus upon the villain as central character, an often sadistic figure driven by 'erotic energy', and as most strikingly exemplified in Shelley's Count Cenci.[128] 'Shadowing the ideology of liberation', observes Cox, 'is the ideology of the isolated rebel . . .', where a tension between individual and society is played out, posing questions about the limits of personal liberty – with Sade, for example, insisting that there be no limits at all.[129] Against Foucault's claim (in *Discipline and Punish*) that the gothic represents a 'tactic of containment', insofar as in shifting to the aristocratic gothic villain it represents a method of rendering crime 'aesthetic and acceptable', Cox insists on the *radical* credentials of gothic drama during the 1790s as 'both individual and collective revolt', in tracing a path from constraint to liberation.[130] Melodrama, as Elza Adamowicz observes, 'allows Ernst to explore the limit forms of a literary code which is already based on a rhetoric of excess'.[131] And she adds that 'these codes are characteristic of a child's fantasies or an adult's dreams, posing the melodramatic stage as 'analogous to a dream-space where fantasies and anxieties are enacted'.[132] Gothic melodrama thus becomes a radical device through which surrealism is able to explore issues such as sexuality, violence and identity, at the very limits of a set of representational codes (particularly narrative, rhetoric and gesture).

In 1931 Artaud published his own version of *The Monk*, a work that he characterises in his brief Foreword as neither a translation nor an adaptation, 'but a sort of "copy" in French of the English original'.[133] In a letter written that same year Artaud clarifies his motivation, praising Lewis's indifference to the boundaries of reality and asserting that: 'The Monk is a laying on of magic, an absorption of fictional reality by the hallucinatory and real poetry of the higher spheres, the profound circles of the invisible'.[134] The mystical tendency in his writing is already becoming apparent here, as Artaud notes the 'sadistic movement' of the novel, 'pushing Lewis to oppose in imagination . . . all barriers, whether moral or physical, to the natural movement of love, to better rush and conquer them, to arrive at a kind of psychic phosphorescence'.[135] In short, we could say that Artaud's retelling of Lewis's tale serves to strip out of it most of the digressions, songs and humourous asides, focusing the narrative more intensely upon the principal characters, while heightening the violence and the hallucinatory effect of horror. Artaud likens the impact of the book upon the reader to that of a magic ritual, arguing that 'really and *materially*' it belongs to 'a kind of verbal sorcery', while at the same time he attacks the reality principle as 'that excrement of the mind that one calls *reality*'.[136] Artaud admitted to Anaïs Nin that 'I read English very badly, almost not at all', and almost certainly relied on Léon de Wailly's 1840 translation, particularly in a couple of chapters where at times he follows de Wailly almost word for word.[137] Nonetheless, Artaud equally translates rather loosely, incorporating his own alterations and making more clear to us how he deploys the gothic in his assault on the reality principle. Artaud also adds his own somewhat sensationalist chapter titles to the novel – 'The Bloody Nun', 'The Premature Burial', 'The Temptation', 'The Rape' – titles that draw the novel closer to popular fiction.

Lewis's original version of *The Monk* opens, as we have seen, with a city transfixed by the fiery rhetoric of the monk Ambrosio, its citizens packing the cathedral to hear him speak. There, Lorenzo, a young 'cavalier' attracted by the charms of the attractive Antonia falls into a dream following the service. In Lewis's account, Lorenzo's dream of marrying is interrupted by the irruption of a gigantic, nightmarish figure breathing fire, with the words 'Pride! Lust! Inhumanity!' emblazoned on his forehead, and who comes between the two lovers, seizing Antonia and dragging her down into an abyss.[138] But Artaud transforms this dream into a kind of hallucination in which Lorenzo is 'bewitched by some obscure presence', in which the boundaries between 'reality' and 'dream' become far more fluid. In Artaud's version, Lorenzo seemingly 'awakes' from this reverie, asking himself if he had been dreaming and prepares to leave – but the nightmare then resumes 'in reality', as he thinks he sees Antonia suffering the 'obscene caresses' of some stranger, which she returns with rapture, after which there is an 'appalling crack' of thunder, as the cathedral collapses in ruins around them.[139] Awakening again, Lorenzo finds himself still in the cathedral, now brightly illuminated as the monks celebrate vespers, and again questions himself as to whether or not he is dreaming, making quite clear Artaud's 'surrealist' strategy of reworking Lewis's text in enhancing the role of the imagination and increasing the uncertainty as to where the dream ends and reality begins. Artaud insists in a draft letter that, for him, *The Monk* is of value only for the way that it 'introduces the natural through supernatural operations' and because 'the Marvellous becomes a manageable object there, a state that one enters as one enters another room, on opening the door or pushing aside the curtain'.[140] And in another draft letter he argues that: '*The Monk* is an imposition of magic, an absorption of the real romanticized by hallucinatory poetry . . .', such that, for Artaud, the gothic marvellous becomes a means by which to enter into some other psychic state.[141]

Artaud's amendments – as we saw with Ernst – therefore bend the novel to reflect his own obsessions and his re-conception of reality. In the core episode of the Bloody Nun, Artaud's account underscores the more sensationalist aspects of the narrative, adding the nun's incest with the Baron's son to her tally of crimes, referring to her as 'cette fille de Satan' and expanding on the drama of the exorcism scene by adding a priest who celebrates black masses for her.[142] Whereas Lewis has the Baron's brother Otto seduce the nun and persuade her to murder the Baron, Artaud invents a bizarre tale of the couple having a son who dies, following which the corrupt priest replaces him with a 'false' son who is discovered only after scouring all the convents of Europe for a novice who resembles the lost child. This substitute son excites the corrupt nun's desire and she then conspires with him to murder the Baron, rather than, as in Lewis, simply having the Baron's brother murder him.[143] By this device, Artaud is able to introduce into Lewis's narrative the theme of incest, one of the central obsessions of his Theatre of Cruelty, as for example in his enthusiasm for the painting *Lot and his Daughters* and in his staging of Shelley's *Les Cenci*, with its incestuous patriarch.

Artaud had planned to make a film of *The Monk* and arranged for a series of tableaux to be photographed, based on scenes from the book, intending to use them to approach potential producers.[144] In his Foreword Artaud writes that he cannot recall any other reading that opened up in him such images, 'images with these kind of plunges into the whole of the intellectual underside of being', images he adds, that, 'haul after them an authentic current of promissory life, as in dreams'.[145] Artaud's tableaux focus on the more macabre aspects of the narrative, as in a scene where

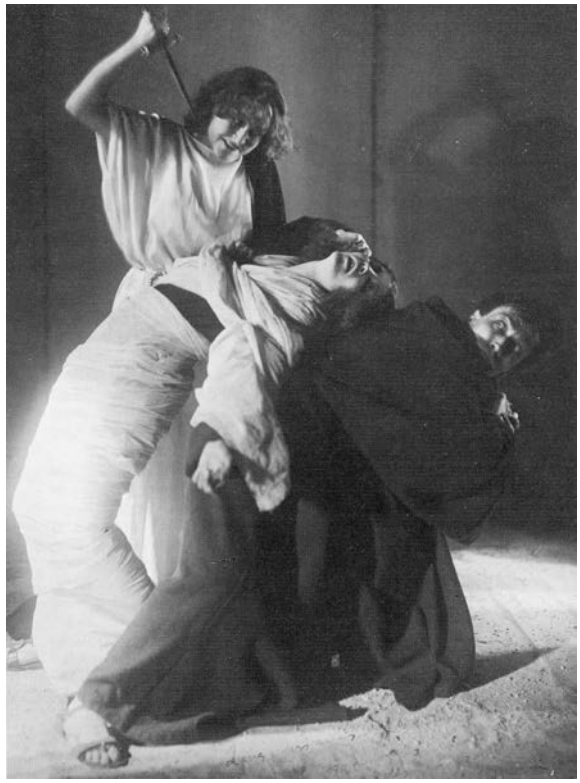

Figure 1.4 Cover image of Antonin Artaud, *Le Moine*, 1931

Agnes in nun's habit is shown begging at the feet of the sadistic prioress, while in another she is forced to take poison whilst a dagger is held to her breast. Another equally melodramatic tableau (Figure 1.4) depicts Matilda about to plunge a dagger into the body of Antonia, who in turn is collapsing across Ambrosio as he attempts to flee before the arrival of Antonia's brother. Artaud also stages the passage in which Antonia has been given a sleeping potion by Ambrosio and is deposited in a coffin in the crypt where he will rape her – or as Lewis describes the scene: 'By the side of three putrid half-corrupted Bodies, lay the sleeping Beauty'.[146] Artaud's gothicism is thus physically expressed directly through this melodrama of the human body.

Of significance here for the future direction of surrealism, as well as for Artaud's own concern with spells and the occult, is the intervention in *The Monk* of the use of magic, used specifically by Matilda to invoke the power of Satan and leading ultimately to Ambrosio's damnation as he finally succumbs to the use of infernal powers in order to satisfy his lust. Satan first appears as the Fallen Angel, in the guise of a beautiful, naked youth with crimson wings and a bright star on his forehead, but manifests himself later in the novel in his full horror as the 'Daemon'. By contrast with Breton's later revaluation of Satan as Lucifer, the rebel angel, Artaud follows Lewis in his depiction of the Faustian pact that will ultimately conclude in Ambrosio's eternal damnation, as he is

dashed down upon jagged rocks and left to expire in agony. Artaud would subsequently return to the theme of Satan in mystical texts such as his *Life and Death of Satan Fire*, where he writes of an 'evil fire which rises, a perfect projection and symbol of the irate and rebellious will, *sole* image of rebellion . . .'.[147] Artaud's text is a meditation on the nature of Being, posed in terms of 'negation more than affirmation', and expressed via the metaphor of fire, where fire 'separates and splits . . . disunites and burns itself'.[148] We can see in this the beginning of a shift in Artaud's thought that would culminate in texts such as the apocalyptic *The New Revelations of Being* (1937), in which he predicts destruction by fire: 'an infernal destruction . . . since hell represents fire'.[149] As we shall see in the later discussion of magic, Satan assumes increasing importance in Breton's thought and in that of his wartime circle in New York, where he comes to be reconceived in Breton's *Arcane 17* as the origin of poetry, liberty and love.

Satanic rebels: *Melmoth* and *Maldoror*

The Faustian pact with Satan recurs again with the Reverend Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer*, first published in 1820 and appearing in French translation by the following year. In his 1954 preface to a new French edition of the book, 'Situation de *Melmoth*', Breton poses the gothic as having provided the impetus for the development of the 'fantastic' and compares the impact of *The Castle of Otranto* to the shocking eye-slitting opening scene in *Un Chien andalou*.[150] *Melmoth* is likened by Breton to a great 'comet' flashing through the gothic window, leaving an 'endless trail of ashes' in its wake – though at the same time he poses Maturin's book as 'the swan song of the *roman noir*'.[151] Le Brun judges *Melmoth* as having exercised a considerable impact upon nineteenth-century French writing, noting that Baudelaire cites Maturin as a decisive influence, while Balzac admired his book enormously, as evidenced in his own sequel, *Melmoth réconcilié* (1835).[152] Maturin's novel is an oneiric, labyrinthine tale that relates the endless wanderings of an accursed figure who has apparently traded his soul in order to cheat death, perpetually searching for some other prepared to take on that burden and assume his blighted role. For Catherine Lanone the narrative is structured as a Deleuzian *rhizome*, a 'deterritorialized, wandering text' composed of tales within tales, with Melmoth's 'doomed quest' inconclusive and appearing to go nowhere.[153] As Lanone observes, *Melmoth* 'darkly conveys the disturbing forces plaguing society' and the 'violence in humanity' – hence the book's appeal to the romantics and to surrealism, as well as its particular relevance in the wake of the First World War.[154]

Not the least of the attractions of the gothic for surrealism, as Robert Miles observes, is its viewing of European Catholic culture through the eyes of the 'other', perceived from an English perspective – more specifically in the case of *Melmoth*, from Maturin's Anglo-Irish, high-Calvinist viewpoint – as superstitious and dominated by a depraved Catholic Church (though for Miles, Irish nationalism is ultimately the more decisive influence in the case of Maturin).[155] Surrealism's anticlericalism created various tensions within the group, as when Breton, on noticing that Georgette Magritte was wearing a crucifix, imperiously demanded that she remove 'that object', prompting the couple's return to Brussels and occasioning a long stand-off between the Paris and Brussels groups.[156] The anti-Catholicism of the gothic novel thus reinforced surrealism's atheistic, outsider stance in opposition to mainstream French culture.

Melmoth is a book full of holes, as it pursues a narrative discovered in a 'discoloured, obliterated and mutilated' manuscript – a plot continually interrupted by recurrent ellipses

and sudden leaps, and where consummation is endlessly deferred by diversions down gloomy side-tracks and along ominous corridors.[157] The narrative is told through John Melmoth, a young student called back from Dublin to attend the death of his miserly uncle and to claim his inheritance, amongst which is a decaying manuscript and the enigmatic portrait of one of his forebears. The document recounts the tale of an Englishman, Stanton, and his pursuit of another man named as John Melmoth the Traveller, a menacing, impossibly old figure, who appears when his chosen victim is in great peril or near the point of death. We first encounter him in Spain, in an inhospitable landscape littered with Roman and Moorish ruins, lit up by flashes of lightning during a violent thunderstorm, where he comes across a group carrying 'the body of a young and apparently very lovely girl', along with 'the blasted and blackened figure of what had once been a man' – a pair of lovers struck dead by the lightning.[158] Stanton is horrified by a sudden outburst of manic laughter from a stranger, and soon after we encounter the same man at a wedding feast, where the officiating priest, a man of exceptional piety who is close to the Inquisition, is unable to utter a prayer while in his presence, and after a desperate struggle to do so, suddenly falls over dead while pointing an accusing finger at the stranger.[159] But Maturin further compounds the disarray with 'cries of horror and agony from the bridal chamber' where the guests discover 'the bride a corpse in the arms of her husband', a premature widower who 'never recovered his reason'.[160] Stanton finally encounters the Englishman again four years later, at a London theatre, but when he attempts to arrange a meeting with him is told: 'The hour shall be mid-day . . . and the place shall be the bare walls of a madhouse, where you shall rise rattling in your chains . . . to greet me, – yet you shall have *the curse of sanity*, and of memory'.[161] Derangement in the face of insufferable trials, the lapse into insanity and forcible incarceration, are all recurring motifs of the gothic, constituting one of its central attractions for surrealism. Stanton is thus lured out of London by a grasping relative, to a private madhouse, where he finds himself whipped and shackled by the brutal keeper, then locked away amid religious fanatics and raging lunatics, until finally, at his lowest ebb, Melmoth in his role as the 'tempter' appears in his cell with the promise of freedom – but at an unspeakable price.

But the real core of *Melmoth* consists in the motif of the 'accursed outsider', as in the figure of the Wandering Jew, rooted in biblical texts as a figure fallen foul of God, and traceable through Coleridge, Shelley and Byron, as well as in Goethe and Schiller. This is the stranger doomed to wander the earth, standing both outside and against society as its implacable enemy, a figure that feeds into many surrealist attitudes in the wake of the First World War, as with surrealism's advocacy of the spirit of 'demoralisation', in its opposition to bourgeois conformity and the return to 'normality'. And the most obvious offspring of *Melmoth* is surely the rapacious protagonist of Lautréamont's *Maldoror* (1868), a malign presence – 'an extreme and instinctive cruelty' – who flits through the novel like a bird of prey, an 'evil phantom' whose nickname (flirting here with melodrama) was '*The vampire*'!'.[162] Like Satan, Maldoror is tortured by an 'immeasurable pride' and driven by his desire 'to be God's equal', describing himself as 'with angel's wings' – like Lucifer, a fallen angel.[163] We also discover direct echoes of *Melmoth*, as in the scene in the Second Canto in which a ship founders near the shore, as Maldoror stands nearby on a rock, his hair and cloak lashed by the hurricane, 'enjoying the spectacle, with his musket ready to finish off any survivors' – a direct echo of the scene in *Melmoth* when the Spaniard is washed ashore in a terrific storm as a watching stranger suddenly calls out 'Let them perish'.[164] Gothic motifs bound to attract the attention of surrealism are scattered across Lautréamont's text, as

in the Fourth Canto, where a victim is strung up on a gibbet and whipped by his wife and mother, or where a man is locked up in a dungeon by his twin brother for fifteen years, suffering 'unheard-of tortures', or as in the frequent, eroticised blood-letting and vampirism that recur in Maldoror's narrative.[165]

While less than fifty years separate *Maldoror* from *Melmoth*, Lautréamont's text is far more knowing, playful and ironic, translating gothic themes into a recognisably 'modern' literary idiom, and one which surrealism instinctively recognises as embodying the 'modern spirit' that the group sought in writing. For Breton, Lautréamont's work is 'the expression of a total revelation that seems to exceed human possibility' and was elevated as a guiding beacon illuminating the entire history of the movement.[166] Julien Gracq observes in his 1947 introduction to the *Œuvres complètes* of Lautréamont, the continuity since the medieval era of non-rational writing within French literature, persisting as a repressed, 'camouflaged' undercurrent that undergoes a sudden resurgence at times of doubt within the rationalist project.[167] Rather than some 'lightning flash' that suddenly erupts in a clear sky, Lautréamont's work is rather 'the torrent of corrosive confessions fed by three centuries of literary bad conscience'.[168] The revolutionary era, Gracq argues, is one that shook the collective mind to its roots, as after a long period of mental hibernation, with the 'roman noir' emerging as a kind of immediate 'symptom' heralding the eruption of all that was swarming in the collective depths – and there is scarcely any doubt that Lautréamont had read a good number of 'romans noir' in his father's library at Montevideo.[169] Gracq poses this more generally, not as a continual flow between the two psychic realms, but rather a 'timid osmosis' between the everyday world and that other world – a realm of 'phantoms', 'spectres' and '*infernal* elements' – of which the gothic provides a fleeting image.[170] But with Lautréamont it's quite the reverse – an 'extraordinarily aggressive', animal upsurge of vitality and of monsters, populating the pages of *Les Chants de Maldoror*.[171]

We might therefore conclude that Lautréamont embodies the continuation of the gothic project into modern writing and that his implantation at the heart of the surrealist pantheon ensures that the transformed gothic is embedded there too, continuing to evolve in Colquhoun, Gracq, Pieyre de Mandiargues and others. But beyond this, Lautréamont also anticipates the later mutation of the gothic format into pulp fiction (*Fantômas*, *Les Vampires*, etc.), as when we're told of Maldoror that 'a veritable army of police, and their spies, were continually at his heels', but that he continually baffles them, and that he is a 'genius' of disguise with 'a special faculty for assuming forms unrecognisable to expert eyes'.[172] Again, anticipating the ubiquity of Fantômas, Maldoror is a 'poetic Rocambole', '(m)esmerising the prosperous capitals with a pernicious fluid' and leading them 'into a lethargic state': 'Today he is in Madrid; tomorrow he will be in St. Petersburg; yesterday he was in Peking'.[173] And the uniting feature that surrealism discovers in all of these literary forms, from Lewis's *Monk* to *Fantômas*, is that, as Breton asserts of *The Monk*, they are 'infused throughout with the presence of the marvelous', breaching the boundaries set by reality and permeating the everyday with the aura of the fantastic.[174]

Notes

1 'The Terrorist System of Novel Writing', *Monthly Magazine* (1797), cited in Angela Wright, *Gothic Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 22.
2 Mark Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of André Breton* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995), p. 152.

3 *André Breton: La Beauté convulsive* (exh. cat.), Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1991, p. 106.
4 *Littérature*, Paris (March 1919–June 1924).
5 Anon., 'Erutarettil', *Littérature*, Paris, New series nos. 11–12, 15 October 1923, pp. 24–25.
6 André Breton, 'What Is Surrealism?' (1934), in Franklin Rosemont (ed.), *André Breton: What Is Surrealism? Selected Writings* (New York and London: Pathfinder, 1978), p. 122.
7 Radcliffe's best known works include *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* (1789), *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian, or the Confessional of the Black Penitents* (1797).
8 A series of passionate letters purportedly written by a Portuguese nun, though in fact attributed by most critics to Gabriel-Joseph de Lavergne, comte de Guilleragues, a minor French diplomat of the period.
9 All are discussed in Kurt Seligmann's *The Mirror of Magic* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1948).
10 See also Breton's *Anthology of Black Humour* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1997), pp. 75–82.
11 See Jean Richer, *Gérard de Nerval et les doctrines ésotériques* (Paris: Editions du Griffon d'or, 1947).
12 Gérard de Nerval, *Aurélia* (Paris: Flammarion, 1990), p. 251.
13 Pierre Souvestre and Marcel Allain, *Fantômas* – 32 volumes published by Arthème Fayard between February 1911 and September 1913.
14 See Guillaume Fau, 'L'atelier de la cruauté', in *Antonin Artaud* (exh. cat.), Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, 2006.
15 Maggie Kilgour, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 3; David Punter (ed.), *A Companion to the Gothic* (Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), p. ix.
16 Kilgour, *Rise of the Gothic Novel*, p. 11.
17 Breton, cited in Kilgour, ibid., p. 36.
18 Martin-Christoph Just, *Visions of Evil: Origins of Violence in the English Gothic Novel* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1997), p. 26.
19 Alice M. Killen, *Le Roman 'terrifiant' ou Roman 'noir' de Walpole à Anne Radcliffe et son influence sur la littérature française* (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 2000), p. 82.
20 Breton's library contained a copy of the 1924 edition and he still drew heavily on Killen 30 years later for his essay 'Situation de *Melmoth*', which formed the introduction to the re-publication in 1954 of *Melmoth* by Pauvert – see Breton *OCIV*, pp. 1408–9.
21 Killen, *Le Roman 'terrifiant'*, p. 5.
22 Annie Le Brun, *Les Châteaux de la subversion* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982), p. 160.
23 André Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism', in Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972), p. 16.
24 Ibid., p. 17.
25 Kilgour, *Rise of the Gothic Novel*, p. 119.
26 Devendra P. Varma, *The Gothic Flame* (1957) (Metuchen, NJ and London: Scarecrow Press, 1987), p. 17.
27 Varma, ibid., p. 19; Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind*, p. 8.
28 Ellen Brinks, *Gothic Masculinity: Effeminacy and the Supernatural in English and German Romanticism* (Lewisburg and London: Bucknell University Press, 2003), p. 13.
29 Breton, 'Sur le roman noir', in Breton, *OCIII*, p. 1340.
30 Jeffrey N. Cox, *Seven Gothic Dramas, 1789–1825* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1992), p. 22.
31 Breton, 'Introduction to the Discourse on the Paucity of Reality', in Rosemont (ed.), *What Is Surrealism?*, p. 17.
32 Ibid., pp. 17–18.
33 Ibid., pp. 18–19.
34 Ibid., p. 22 and p. 26.
35 Breton was also concerned here to clarify the boundaries of surrealism for an English-speaking audience, where certain critics and artists had created some ambiguity as to what surrealism actually constituted.

36 André Breton, 'Limits not Frontiers of Surrealism', in Herbert Read (ed.), *Surrealism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1936), p. 106.
37 Ibid., p. 106.
38 Ibid., p. 107. Whereas *Melmoth* received a very critical reception in England, it was immediately welcomed in France, influencing writers such as Baudelaire and finding a response in Balzac's *Melmoth reconcilié* (1835).
39 Ibid., p. 107.
40 Ibid., p. 109.
41 Ibid., p. 107.
42 Ibid., p. 108.
43 Paul Eluard, Preface to Horace Walpole, *Le Château d'Otrante* (Paris, 1943), reprinted in Francis Lacassin (ed.), *Romans terrifiants* (Paris: R. Laffont, 1991), p. 3.
44 Eluard, ibid., p. 3.
45 Just, *Visions of Evil*, p. 34.
46 Ibid., p. 35.
47 Horace Walpole cited in Breton, 'Limits Not Frontiers of Surrealism', p. 111. Breton is supported in this by Varma, who observes, 'Now, if this was not "automatic writing" what else could it be?', in Varma, *The Gothic Flame*, p. 69.
48 Breton, 'Situation de "Melmoth"', in Breton, *OCIV*, p. 908.
49 Le Brun, *Les chateaux de la subversion*, pp. 47 and 160.
50 Breton, 'Limits not Frontiers of Surrealism', p. 111.
51 Varma, *The Gothic Flame*, pp. 66–67.
52 André Breton, 'Il y aura une fois', *Le Revolver à cheveux blancs*, in Breton, *OCII*, pp. 50–51.
53 Le Brun, *Les chateaux de la subversion*, pp. 162–64.
54 Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry Into the Sublime and Beautiful* (1756) (London and New York: Routledge, 1958 and 2008), p. 51.
55 Burke, ibid., pp. 57–87; Le Brun, *Les chateaux de la subversion*, p. 168.
56 Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (London and New York: OUP, 1966).
57 Ibid., p. 227.
58 Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1991), pp. 117–18.
59 The concept of 'mystery' is central to the work of many surrealist artists, particularly with Magritte, where the motif of the curtain is regularly deployed, both in concealing a part of the image and in posing the scene in the form of theatre.
60 See Lewis Kachur, *Displaying the Marvellous* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2001), pp. 37–67. Kachur identifies a group of those mannequins as 'the "Gothick" section of the street', including Kurt Seligmann's alchemical themed mannequin with a 'philosopher's egg' pierced by a dagger on its head, Wolfgang Paalen's mannequin topped by a bat and which 'seems to have wandered out of the forests of *Nosferatu*', and Augustín Espinoza's animal-skull topped mannequin (p. 55).
61 Breton, 'Sur le roman noir', a previously unpublished text cited in a 1938 essay by Heine, reproduced in Breton, *OCIII*, p. 1340.
62 Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism', pp. 14–15.
63 Ibid., p. 16.
64 Walpole cited in Summers, *The Gothic Quest*, p. 24.
65 Radcliffe, *Udolpho*, p. 235.
66 Ibid., p. 296.
67 Breton, 'Limits Not Frontiers of Surrealism', p. 111.
68 Le Brun, *Les Châteaux de la subversion*, p. 48.
69 André Breton, *Communicating Vessels* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), p. 88.
70 Walpole cited in James Watt, Introduction to Clara Reeve, *The Old English Baron; A Gothic Story* (Oxford: OUP, 2003), pp. vii and x.
71 Cited in Watt, ibid., p. xiv.
72 Reeve, *The Old English Baron*, p. 11.
73 Ibid., p. 11.
74 Ibid., p. 37.

75 Breton, *CV*, p. 89.
76 The concept of *hasard objectif* (*objective chance*) was first developed in terms of the chance encounters related in Breton's early essay 'L'Esprit nouveau' and subsequently weaves its way through *Nadja*, *Communicating Vessels* and *L'Amour fou*, and which Breton subsequently defines as 'the form of the manifestation of external necessity as it makes a way into the human unconscious' – Breton, 'Situation of Surrealism Between the Two Wars', in Rosemont (ed.), *What Is Surrealism?*, p. 245.
77 Marguerite Bonnet, in Breton, *OCII*, p. 1364.
78 Breton, *CV*, pp. 98–99.
79 Ibid., p. 99.
80 See Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Pimlico, 1992).
81 Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism', p. 40.
82 Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) (Oxford: OUP, 1996), p. 19.
83 Bonnet, 'Notes' in Breton, *OCII*, p. 1358.
84 The role played by dreams in surrealism, along with Breton's complex relationship with Freud and with psychoanalysis is analysed in depth by Sarane Alexandrian in his *Le Surréalisme et le rêve* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1974).
85 Breton, *CV*, p. 5.
86 Hervey de Saint-Denys, *Les Rêves et les moyens de les diriger* (1867), trans. as *Dreams – How to Guide Them*, ed. Morton Schatzman (London: Duckworth, 1982).
87 Breton, *CV*, p. 17.
88 Ibid., p. 13.
89 Bonnet, 'Notes' in Breton, *OCII*, p. 1361.
90 Breton, *CV*, p. 139.
91 Ibid., p. 139.
92 Ibid., p. 146.
93 See Alan Menhennet, *The Romantic Movement* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1981), p. 28.
94 Ibid., p. 68.
95 Breton, *CV*, p. 55; Gérard de Nerval, *Aurélia, ou le rêve et la vie* (Paris: Flammarion, 1990), p. 251.
96 Bonnet, 'Notes' in Breton, *OCII*, p. 1356.
97 Alison Millbank also argues that we see in the Victorian gothic 'a Swedenborgian transposition of the qualities of the material and the spiritual', as the reality is rendered 'phantasmal' (as in Wilkie Collins or Le Fanu), while the supernatural is made real (as with the vampire tales). Millbank, 'The Victorian Gothic in English Novels and Stories, 1830–80', in Jerrold E. Hogle, *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction* (Cambridge and New York: CUP, 2002), pp. 160–61.
98 Breton, *CV*, pp. 85 and 126; Bonnet, in *OCII*, p. 1351.
99 Kilgour, *Rise of the Gothic Novel*, pp. 7 and 10.
100 Punter, cited in Kilgour, ibid., p. 9.
101 Radcliffe, *Udolpho*, p. 305.
102 Louis Aragon and André Breton, 'Le Cinquantenaire de l'hystérie (1878–1928)', *La Révolution surréaliste*, Paris (March, 1928).
103 Werner Spies, *Max Ernst: Collages* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), p. 232. Jacques Cazotte, a writer sent to the guillotine in 1792, was a follower of the Illuminati who claimed the gift of prophesy, and whose *Le Diable amoureux* (1772) – much admired by Nerval – combined eroticism and demonology.
104 Spies, ibid., p. 232.
105 Breton, *Surrealism and Painting* (Boston, MA: MFA Publications, 2002), p. 10.
106 Vitězslav Nezval, *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders* (Prague: Twisted Spoon Press, 2005), p. 11.
107 Ibid., p. 123.
108 André Breton, *Anthology of Black Humor*, p. 132.
109 Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism', p. 15.
110 Spies, *Max Ernst: Collages*, pp. 216–17.
111 Spies, ibid., p. 216.

112 Max Ernst, *A Little Girl Dreams of Taking the Veil* (*Rêve d'une petite fille qui voulut entrer au Carmel*) (New York: George Braziller, 1982), p. 8.
113 Spies, *Max Ernst. Collages*, p. 231.
114 Ernst, A Little Girl Dreams, p. 9. If such sexual violence should sound extreme, we need only consider the early experience of Lee Miller – see Carolyn Burke, *Lee Miller* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2005).
115 Ernst, ibid., p. 10.
116 Kathryn Harrison, *Saint Thérèse of Lisieux* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2003).
117 Ernst, *A Little Girl Dreams*, p. 10.
118 Ibid., p. 101.
119 Lewis acknowledges in a preface to his novel that the 'Bleeding Nun' is one of his 'plagiarisms' and is 'a tradition still credited in many parts of Germany' – Matthew Lewis, *The Monk* (1796) (Oxford and New York: OUP, 1998), p. 6. This edition follows the manuscript of the first edition of 1796.
120 Ibid., p. 139.
121 Just, *Visions of Evil*, p. 196.
122 Ibid., p. 229.
123 Ibid., p. 231.
124 Kilgour, *Rise of the Gothic Novel*, p. 145.
125 Killen, *Le Roman 'terrifiant'*, p. xvi.
126 Cox, *Seven Gothic Dramas*, pp. 12 and 15.
127 Ibid., pp. 40 and 42.
128 Ibid., pp. 12 and 29.
129 Ibid., p. 30.
130 Ibid., pp. 31–32.
131 Elza Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), p. 115.
132 Ibid., p. 118.
133 Antonin Artaud, *Le Moine de Lewis raconté par Antonin Artaud*, in Artaud, *OCVI*, p. 11.
134 Artaud, incomplete draft of a letter, 1931, in Sontag (ed.), *Artaud: Selected Writings*, p. 199.
135 Artaud, *OCVI*, p. 12.
136 Ibid., p. 13.
137 Anaïs Nin, *The Diary of Anais Nin*, Vol. I, 1931–34 (San Diego and New York: Swallow Press, 1994), p. 189.
138 Lewis, *The Monk*, p. 28.
139 Artaud, *Le Moine*, pp. 32–33.
140 Artaud, draft letter, January 1931, in Artaud, *OCVI*, p. 320.
141 Artaud, draft letter, April/May 1931, *OCVI*, p. 324.
142 Artaud, *Le Moine*, p. 131.
143 Ibid., p. 132.
144 *Antonin Artaud* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2006), p. 117.
145 Artaud, Foreword, *OCVI*, p. 13.
146 Lewis, *The Monk*, p. 379.
147 Antonin Artaud, *The Death of Satan and Other Mystical Writings* (London: Calder and Boyars, 1974), p. 9.
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153 Catherine Lanone, 'Verging on the Gothic: Melmoth's Journey to France', in Avril Horner (ed.), *European Gothic: A Spirited Exchange, 1760–1960* (Manchester and New York: MUP, 2002).
154 Ibid., p. 72.
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159 Ibid., pp. 34–35.
160 Ibid., pp. 35–36.
161 Ibid., p. 44.
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167 Julien Gracq, 'Lautréamont et les Chants de Maldoror', in Lautréamont (ed.), *Les Chants de Maldoror et Œuvres complètes* (Paris: La Jeune Parque, 1947), pp. 7–9.
168 Ibid., p. 16.
169 Ibid., p. 17–18.
170 Ibid., p. 18.
171 Ibid., p. 19.
172 Lautréamont, *Maldoror*, p. 191.
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174 Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism', pp. 14–15.

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2 From the castle to the street

Fantômas and the re-enchantment of modern urban life

> Open, graves, you, the dead of the picture galleries, corpses behind screens, in palaces, castles and monasteries, here stands the fabulous keeper of the keys to all times, who . . . invites you to step into the midst of the world of today . . .
>
> Apollinaire[1]

Fantômas, the gothic body and modern urban space

The *Fantômas* series of Pierre Souvestre and Marcel Allain, some thirty-two volumes published monthly between 1911 and 1913, rapidly established itself as part of the everyday culture of its time, first within the field of the popular crime novel and soon after as a phenomenon of the silent screen.[2] But alongside this popular acclamation, the series also attained cult status amongst the literary avant-garde, numbering poets and writers such as Apollinaire, Max Jacob and Robert Desnos amongst its followers. For the future surrealists the series not only constituted a shared rite of passage associated – somewhat nostalgically – with the period of their youth and with a nation on the cusp of the First World War, but also came to form a key component of their literary heritage. The popular novel, 'pulp fiction' and the detective story formed the terrain onto which the gothic novel had migrated by the turn of the century, while *Fantômas*, with its seductive, unseizable villain, its Manichean opposition of Good and Evil, endless pursuits, melodramatic violence and interminable side-plots, retained many of the core features of the classic gothic novel. But the city street also provided the new urban terrain on which the gothic novel came to be sited, as with Stevenson's novella *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* or Edgar Allan Poe's short story 'The Man of the Crowd', and we find that much of the *Fantômas* series is located in actual Parisian locations with which its authors and readership would have been familiar. Focusing initially on the *Fantômas* series, then on Feuillade's cinematic adaptation of the book and the related serial *Les Vampires*, this chapter analyses their transformation of the urban 'everyday' and their re-enchantment of Paris as an expression of the surrealist 'marvellous'. The analysis unfolds along two axes: firstly, that of modern urban space, where Paris itself figures as what Benjamin posits for surrealism as 'the most dreamed-of of their objects'.[3] And secondly that of the 'gothic body' – a body both eroticised and subjected to spectacular violence – and posed by Steven Bruhm as 'that which is put on excessive display', the 'violent, vulnerable immediacy' of which provides gothic fiction with its 'troublesome power'.[4] The essential issue in all of this concerns surrealism's engagement with the everyday and the movement's aspiration to integrate art with life, and

we conclude with a discussion of Henri Lefebvre's critical dismissal of the surrealist transformation of everyday life.

First and foremost, *Fantômas* was a sensation of popular fiction, an epic melodrama and the bestseller of its time. Launched in February 1911 in Fayard's sixty-five-cent 'livre populaire' series, the first volume was priced at only thirty-five centimes, and according to Allain, sold up to two-and-a-half million copies. With its iconic image of the arch-criminal Fantômas looming over Paris, dagger in hand, the work came to constitute, at least for a Francophone audience, that rare thing, a 'modern myth' – a myth, as Jean-Luc Angot observes, 'solidly anchored in the collective unconscious.'[5] Souvestre and Allain, former lawyers who had drifted into journalism, were modern, sporty types, as evidenced in their discovery of the name 'Fantômas', spotted by Allain on a metro poster while travelling to meet their publisher. This modernity is also manifested in their production-line writing technique, where the two men would meet for a few days to agree the storyline and then allocate alternate chapters, drawing lots for who took the even or the odd chapters. They would then separately spend about three days dictating their allocation into one of Edison's recently marketed phonograph machines, after which a team of typists would produce a draft for the printer; in this way they could produce a four-hundred-page volume in around three weeks.[6] The result is a kind of unhindered verbal flow that has been likened to 'automatic writing', but while there are perhaps some superficial similarities, the actual outcome is far more controlled and largely pre-determined. As a literary form, *Fantômas* is clearly in the tradition of the 'roman populaire' or the nineteenth-century feuilleton and owes a lot to Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris*, where the city itself assumes a central role. Paris has been characterised by Jean-Louis Bory as 'the capital of the mythological geography of the popular novel' and in *Fantômas* the modern city becomes a mysterious entity where the unexpected could occur at any moment.[7]

Considered in terms of *space*, the specific narrative spaces of Paris in which the novel unfolds include: the streets and boulevards, hotels and offices, the 'Zone' – a liminal military buffer-zone encircling the city – and the railway. *Fantômas* was advertised as available 'in all bookshops and stations' and the railway figures prominently in the narrative: in the opening volume a complex murder is committed through careful scrutiny of a railway timetable, allowing the murderer to switch to the express while pretending to be on the slow train. In his *Le 'Detective Novel' et l'influence de la pensée scientifique* (1929), Régis Messac observes of the great railway stations – Victoria, Waterloo, or New York – with their racks of illustrated periodicals and detective novels, that 'one feels more intensely than elsewhere, a quite particular sensation', feeling oneself 'at the heart of modern life', adding that: 'Here the present and the future dominate, crushing the past'.[8] Wolfgang Schivelbusch cites the boredom of the railway journey as the stimulus for this new market, supplied by publishers like Fayard and churned out by now forgotten writers, and with *Fantômas* the logic of dynamism and constant motion becomes incorporated into the narrative form itself.[9] Part of this new literature of movement and adventure, *Fantômas* was decidedly not considered 'literature' and Allain resented the way it overshadowed what he considered his more literary works. He recounts spotting the writer Francis de Croisset on the metro, reading – despite his having torn off the distinctive cover – what was clearly a *Fantômas* novel. But when Allain approached him he received the crushing response, 'just tell me how it ends so that I don't have to read it all'.[10]

This, then, was a literature of *distraction* and for Allain too, the popular novel was read simply 'pour s'amuser'.[11] Lacking all psychological depth, the characters exist only insofar as they act. The essence of the *Fantômas* saga is therefore *action* – an unending series of action sequences: of thefts, murders and improbable chases. Allain claims an underlying *social* thesis – of crime as unpunished, police impotence and the relativity of justice – though all surely somewhat secondary to the primary intention to amuse and divert the reader.[12] Structurally, as Vicki Callahan observes, *Fantômas* lacks any unifying narrative event, unfolding according to a kind of 'sinusoidal' structure that Umberto Eco identified in *Les Mystères de Paris*: 'tension, resolution, renewed tension, further resolution, and so on'.[13] This also indicates the *gratuitousness* of the narrative, its uneasy lack of direction in resolving a mystery, while its 'reality effect' derives from siting the action in real-world locations, such as les Invalides or the Palais de Justice, inducing in the reader, Allain claimed, the sense that the *unexpected* could occur right in their midst. Allain argues, too, that there is no clear distinction to be made between life, dream and the novel that is created from them, a claim close to the surrealist position.[14] Allain has also revealed that he kept a cupboard of newspaper cuttings of 'faits divers' that he drew upon for ideas, such that the action is often based on real-life events. The pseudo-documentary method underpins *Fantômas's* reality effect and its embracing all of modern life – as Apollinaire observes: 'The descriptions are almost always exact, and later, for contemporary slang, it will be an invaluable mine of documents'.[15]

For Robin Walz the crime serial was 'a mass-culture compendium of a surreal, modern mythology in the process of formation' and he argues that *Fantômas* was itself 'surreal' *avant la lettre*.[16] Annabel Audureau, too, working with ideas derived from Gilbert Durand and Didier Blonde, reads the novel in terms of myth, suggesting Fantômas as Proteus, a shape-shifter, and as a kind of Minotaur lurking in his subterranean, labyrinthine lair – but also as Satan, a modern Lucifer, which would again site him within the gothic tradition.[17] For Audureau, Fantômas 'incarnates the temptation of a lapse into chaos', whereas Juve is the embodiment of social order – in some ways updating the gothic novel's similar staging of the attractions of the abandoned world of superstition and the pre-rational.[18]

But while contributing to this 'modern mythology' envisaged by Apollinaire, Desnos, Aragon, and others, *Fantômas* also constituted an updating of the gothic tradition for the early twentieth century. *Fantômas* is 'gothic' in its concern with the morbid, with violence and death: of some 237 characters in the series, eighty-four are killed, almost half of whom are murdered by Fantômas himself.[19] The narrative frequently invokes stock gothic themes, including incarceration, torture, insanity, wrongful imprisonment and an underlying concern with heredity and origins, while in its writing style it revolves around action, movement and description, with little concern for the psychology of its characters. *Fantômas* also contains all the stock motifs of the gothic – underground tunnels, secret passages, mysterious paintings, secret messages, disguises and masks – while in the volume *Le Mort qui tue* in particular, beneath the modern world of shopping streets and electric lights we discover a dark, criminal underworld of secret cellars, tunnels and sewers running beneath Paris. And with paintings and statues that apparently come to life, another stock motif of the gothic, we find a modern variant in *Le Bouquet tragique*, where a

maquette for the statue of a young aviator suddenly comes alive as part of the plot of a robbery. Kilgour observes that the gothic villain 'is frequently an example of the modern materialistic individual taken to an extreme, at which he becomes an egotistical and wilful threat to social unity and order' – as with Dracula – though with Fantômas this mutates into pure criminality.[20] Radcliffe's Montoni in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, as Kilgour notes, is suspected by Emily of being the leader of a gang of *banditti* and presents us with 'an example of the modern possessive individual, motivated only by his own avaricious will', again anticipating the character of Fantômas.[21]

The appeal of *Fantômas* for Breton's group, then, as they emerged enraged from the war, consisted in part in the fantasy of vengeance enacted by the series upon bourgeois society through the exactions of an anarchic criminality. For Jonathan Eburne, an interest in crime was fundamental to surrealism's response to political and cultural events of the period, where crime served to expose the 'crises' and 'contradictions' within the socio-political fabric, thus enabling the group to formulate its own ethical and political positions.[22] Following in the path first indicated by Benjamin, Eburne identifies a form of 'gothic Marxism' able to 'account for the unconscious forces of individual and socioeconomic determination alike', and which 'stresses the importance of surrealism's links to historical forms that articulate similarly irrational forces', whether in the photographs of Atget or in gothic fiction.[23] Franco Moretti, citing Marx's celebrated metaphor of capital as a vampire, draws an analogy between the gothic and the predations of capitalism, suggesting that the vampire of Stoker's novel 'must be the capital of 1897', adding that such 'modern monsters . . . threaten to live for ever, and to conquer the world'.[24] But while certain of Fantômas's personas – the suave banker, industrialist, financier – would fit such a reading, pure criminality is surely his defining attribute. Like criminality, then, the gothic provided surrealism with a vehicle through which to tap into those unconscious currents in its response to a range of socio-cultural phenomena, central to which we might include such issues as violence, religion, insanity and social identity.

Fantômas, the avant-garde and the modern 'marvellous'

> I have a sinister mark on the inward side of my arm, a blue M which threatens me.
> André Breton and Philippe Soupault, *Les Champs magnétiques* (1920)

The infatuation of the avant-garde with *Fantômas* first emerged in Apollinaire's review *Soirées de Paris*, in July 1914, and was taken up by visual artists such as Juan Gris in his still life *Pipe et Journal* (1915). Gris includes a *Fantômas* novel with a menacing black domino in the form of a scowling skull on its cover – a modern *memento mori* – set alongside a copy of *Le Journal*, already making clear the close affiliation between the crime serial and the everyday reality on which it fed. Apollinaire praised *Fantômas* as 'this extraordinary novel, full of life and imagination' and with Max Jacob founded the 'Société des Amis de Fantômas'.[25] Jacob observed of *Fantômas* that 'the style is deplorable', but he admired its rootedness in modern life, claiming to speak for those living in the *present* and for 'those reading more the daily newspaper than history'.[26] Their fascination with the criminal underworld

spilled over into Apollinaire's own life through his involvement with the young hustler Géry Pieret, who was stealing statuettes from the Louvre, and according to John Richardson, the two men would fantasise about 'dressing up like Fantômas or Raffles in masks of steel or of black satin' and of 'going off on "artistic" burgling expeditions'.[27] Pieret was implicated in the theft of the Mona Lisa in August of 1911, resulting in a media sensation and the arrest of Apollinaire – a theft investigated by the *Sûreté's* most celebrated detective, Inspector Robert – 'extravagantly moustachioed', like the detective Juve in *Fantômas*. And 'Fantômas' would later figure alongside Apollinaire among the *Littérature* group's chart of literary preferences (Figure 1.1) – a lone character amid a constellation of authors, as though somehow self-invented.

Blaise Cendrars referred to *Fantômas* as 'the *Aeneid* of Modern Times', a kind of modern epic appealing to all sectors of society and attracting writers like Queneau and Cocteau, as well as the future surrealists, and as Adrian Rifkin observes, one of the functions of popular culture consists in its bringing together of disparate world-views.[28] Jacques Rancière has argued that the great concern of nineteenth-century writers was the recreation for their time of a literary equivalent of Homer's epic for the Greeks; they sought, he argues, a resurgence of 'that poetry immanent to life' of which they thought the secret lost, as with Zola's *Au Bonheur des dames*, which, says Rancière, 'can be read as the *épopée noire* of modern democracy identified as the phantasmagoria of merchandise'.[29] *Fantômas* is perhaps the last gasp of that quest and in fact one episode, *Le Fiacre de nuit*, is also set in a department store, the *Paris-Galeries*, which becomes the site of fantastic events: gloves with concealed razor blades cut the customers' hands, perfume testers spray them with vitriol, while the flowers poison them.[30] The attacks follow the kidnapping of Fantômas' accomplice, Raymonde, eventually recovered amongst a heap of corpses and rotting bodies – all very much in the tradition of the gothic macabre of Lewis and Maturin. Similarly, Aragon's aim in *Le Paysan de Paris* was the creation of a 'modern mythology', referring in his preface to 'this sense of the marvellous suffusing everyday existence'.[31] As Didier Ottinger observes, Aragon's programme was 'the re-enchantment of the world', the creation of a new mythology devoted to modernity, an aim that constituted a key thread in the search by the *Littérature* group gathered around Breton for what was then termed the 'New Spirit'.[32] Breton's essay of the same title, 'L'Esprit nouveau' (1922), concerns chance encounters – particularly erotic encounters on the streets of Paris – and is another aspect, as with the experiments with séances, of belief in the spectral, now posed in terms of behaviour that is either 'automatic' or as though dictated by some unknown force.[33] It becomes clear then that surrealism discovers in *Fantômas* – in this magical transformation of the everyday, in the discovery of the marvellous within mundane reality – something akin to what it discovered in mediumistic activity: the idea of another reality, the spectral, or what Radcliffe in the gothic novel refers to as 'the wonderful'.[34]

Because originally dictated as a semi-unconscious flow rather than written, the *Fantômas* novels could be claimed to tap into the collective unconscious of the era, in part explaining their immediate success as a publishing sensation. *Fantômas* famously opens with an overheard conversation suggestive of the way in which urban myths proliferate:

> Fantômas.
> What did you say?

I said Fantômas.
And what does that mean?
Nothing . . . Everything!
But what is it?
Nobody . . . And yet, yes, it is somebody!
And what does that somebody do?
Spreads terror![35]

Souvestre and Allain based many of the novel's main characters on actual people that they knew, as well as incorporating current events from their supply of news cuttings into the plot, including robberies and murders, explosions on trains, a threat to bombard the casino at Monte Carlo and the sinking of the *Titanic*. They also deployed figures such as Alphonse Bertillon, inventor of the anthropometric system adopted by the French police for identifying criminals, a system that figures prominently in the plot of *Le Mort qui tue*. As journalists Souvestre and Allain drew naturally upon the mass media in their writing, a practice rooted in the emergence of mass newspapers in France after 1863 with the launch of the *Petit Journal*. The launch of *Excelsior* in 1910 marked the start of an important new trend in the heavy use of photography and photo stories, and I therefore want to consider these developments in relation to surrealism's ambition to transform reality, focusing on the reporting of anarchist violence.

Gothic violence and modernity: *Fantômas* and the Bonnot gang

The appeal of *Fantômas* to young men embittered – and in some cases physically or psychically damaged – by the War, lay not only in the violent, subversive threat that its criminal protagonist posed to society in a fantastically transformed Paris, but also in its populist writing style and opposition to traditional literary forms. As Jean-Jacques Tourteau has observed, the lack of cultural references, minimal psychology and absence of moralising, meant that Allain and Souvestre were best placed to 'evade the mental culture of their age', and this, for Breton, was similarly part of the appeal of automatism – the idea of stepping outside oneself and one's culture, evading cliché and the formulas of the past.[36] Tourteau also remarks that 'Fantômas is anarchist as much as criminal', suggesting a more explicitly political reading of the series.[37] For Audureau, though, Fantômas should not be labelled an anarchist since 'he acts through venality and not through ideology'.[38] Nonetheless, Fantômas's anarchistic opposition to authority and the savagery of his violence perfectly expressed the mood of Breton's group, an attitude that we find echoed in his aim at this time, of 'demoralisation', and in his affirmation that political anarchism had been 'one of the seeds of surrealism'.[39] As Richard Sonn observes: 'Anarchism not only connoted rebellion and bravado, but also stood for originality and individuality.'[40] Anarchist terrorism had erupted in France during the early 1890s, with figures like Ravachol and Emile Henry, flaring up again in the immediate pre-war years with criminal groups like that led by Jules Bonnot.[41] It is also bound up with the personal experience of Desnos, a great *Fantômas* enthusiast, who in 1910 witnessed the arrest of Liabeuf, a criminal who had killed a policeman and wounded several others, and who went to the guillotine crying out 'Vive l'anarchie!'.[42] Breton too, asked in a 1919 questionnaire to state his ambition, responded: 'To become the perfect anarchist'.[43] When in 1921 *Littérature*

included a chart of the group's preferred writers, Breton headed the list, while Bonnot figured at no.19.[44] René Crevel would write, in a 1926 letter to Marcel Jouhandeau: 'I read a book on the Bonnot gang by Meric. Unbelievable people'.[45] And in his novel *Babylone* of the following year Crevel recalls that period, writing of a bookcase in which there were:

> mouldered illustrated papers fifteen years old that told the story of a terrible gang of young men, young men who sold autos, then sneaked across the country at insane speeds, without pity for any who barred their way. The provincial calm of small towns was suddenly shaken by a great uproar, banks were ransacked, cobblestones bloodied, rifle shots turning to tragedy a hypocritical springtime in the Ile-de-France.[46]

For many surrealists then, Bonnot's gang enacted the fantasy of revenge upon what Breton dubs 'a petty system of cretinization and debasement', a fantasy given its most extreme expression in his assertion that: 'The simplest Surrealist act consists of dashing into the street, pistol in hand, and firing blindly, as fast as you can pull the trigger, into the crowd'.[47]

The revival of anarchism in France during the immediate pre-War period had come to a head between 1911–12 with the exploits of Bonnot's gang, which carried out a series of break-ins and murders using getaway cars, then an innovation that, together with the latest weaponry, put the bandits ahead of the police – Souvestre had been writing since at least 1905 on the 'reign of the Apache gangs' and on the vanity and exploits of such criminals, urging the need to 'purge the capital of all the brigands that infest it'.[48] And Souvestre reflects the wider cultural concern of the period with the issue: Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907) was based on an actual botched terrorist bombing at the Greenwich Observatory in 1894, while G.K. Chesterton's *The Man Who was Thursday: A Nightmare* (1908) concerns a secret society of anarchists who are all gradually revealed to be police agents.[49] Chesterton's allegory is framed in terms of the opposition of free will (anarchism) to the constraints of law and concerned essentially with the issue of the source of *creation* – a central concern with Breton. Jean Baudrillard observes of terrorism that 'we might almost say that reality is jealous of fiction, that the real is jealous of the image . . . It is a kind of duel between them, a contest to see which can be the most unimaginable'. And he adds that 'Reality and fiction are inextricable.'[50] The anarchist attacks in France created a sensation in the media, arousing enormous public concern, and were immediately incorporated into the *Fantômas* series. Fantômas was himself a kind of anarchist master criminal, many of whose apparently random acts of violence and spectacular assaults upon society – train derailments, attacks upon the security forces and criminal justice system – went far beyond straightforward acts of criminality, echoing those of terrorist or anarchist groups, and the threat that this posed to the foundations of society explains much of the appeal of Fantômas for surrealism. However, as Angot observes, Fantômas's anarchism is more implied through his actions and his intent to 'destabilise society', rather than through any expressed political position.[51] Philippe Azoury and J.-M. Lalanne judge the book's 'anarchism' to be more akin to Nietzschean nihilism, though Max Jacob had dismissed any such philosophical pretensions as 'Nietzsche written for skivvies'.[52]

The Bonnot gang's exploits created a sensation followed closely in the media, and which we can trace through the pages of the Paris-based daily *Excelsior*. In December 1911 a bank deliveryman was shot and robbed of 300,000 francs in the centre of Paris.[53] The following March, hold-ups in Montgeron and Chantilly left three dead and another three wounded, with Bonnot's group implicated in both attacks. *Excelsior* christened them the 'phantom bandits', offering a 100,000 franc reward for their arrest and they were subsequently spotted all over France, even abroad, where wild rumours circulated of shoot-outs in Brussels.[54] To counter public hysteria, a new branch of the Sûreté was created – the 'criminal brigade' – equipped with telephones and fast cars. In late March one of the band, André Soudy, was arrested at the home of a known anarchist by Inspector Jouin, splendidly moustached subprefect of the Sûreté. Jouin too has his equivalent in the *Fantômas* series, in Inspector Juve, a committed though somewhat conventional functionary, and mortal enemy of Fantômas.[55] What's also intriguing is that Soudy was carrying potassium cyanide in order to commit suicide if caught, and that when Carrouy, another of the band was captured in April, he too attempted suicide after complaining of being bound too tightly – a fanaticism that elevated the band beyond everyday criminality.[56] By early April of 1912 Bonnot had become, echoing Fantômas, the 'Unseizable', and Montmartre was described as 'under a state of police siege'.[57] The media reported an eclipse, the Titanic sank, and then in late April another sensation, when Inspectors Jouin and Colmar visited the flat of an anarchist forger, Gozzi, who they arrested. Advancing upstairs in darkness, they were suddenly confronted by an unknown figure that proved to be Bonnot and in the ensuing struggle both detectives were shot; when a third detective rushed upstairs, he discovered Jouin dead and Colmar gravely wounded, alongside a third body.[58] The detective helped Colmar downstairs, but when he returned, the 'fake corpse' was gone. This considerably raised the stakes of the investigation and by 28 April the police had tracked down Bonnot to an automobile garage. This time taking no chances, the authorities first surrounded the hideout with four hundred troops who first riddled the garage with bullets, before eventually using dynamite to blow it up (Figure 2.1). *Excelsior*'s special issue included photos of the bloody corpses of Bonnot and Dubois – the presses ran throughout the night and it sold nearly half a million copies.[59] The remainder of the gang were soon similarly cornered. The hideout of Garnier and Valet was surrounded by an entire battalion of Zouave troops, supported by infantry and several brigades of gendarmes; they attacked all night with machine guns and after four attempts succeeded in blowing up the building.[60] The last two survivors committed suicide and their bullet-riddled corpses were again photographed for the press in a further display of gothic violence.[61]

The explosion at the criminals' hideout was quickly incorporated into the *Fantômas* series and subsequently figured in Louis Feuillade's film version – but in the film it is Fantômas himself who blows up the building – and escapes. If such excessive violence and the public display of the mutilated body marks a return to a pre-modern era, it also anticipates the irrational violence of the imminent war, while the interweaving of reality and fiction in *Fantômas* suggests a model for surrealism's own broaching of the boundaries of the real. And we can also see in this fabulous irruption of the extraordinary within the everyday, an echo of the gothic novel and a model for surrealism's own re-conception of the modern 'marvellous'.

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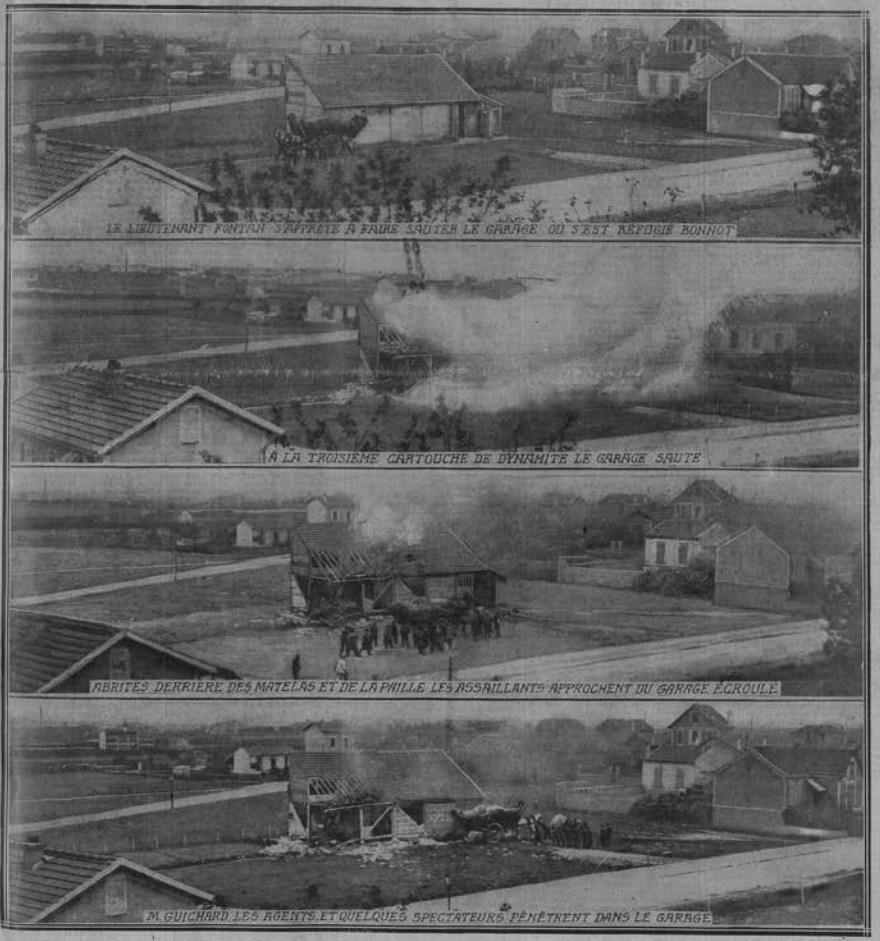
L'attaque à la dynamite du repaire de Bonnot



LE LIEUTENANT FONTAN S'APPRETE A FAIRE SAUTER LE GARAGE OU S'EST REFUGIE BONNOT

A LA TROISIEME CARTOUCHE DE DYNAMITE LE GARAGE SAUTE

ABRITES DERRIERE DES MATELAS ET DE LA PAILLE LES ASSAILLANTS APPROCHENT DU GARAGE ECROULE

M. GUICHARD LES AGENTS ET QUELQUES SPECTATEURS PENETRENT DANS LE GARAGE

LES QUATRE ACTES DU DRAME DE CHOISY-LE-ROI

Bonnot, cerné dans son repaire à Choisy-le-Roi, a été enfin capturé hier, mais il est mort quelques instants après le siège en règle qu'il fallut organiser pour arriver jusqu'à lui. Dubois, son compagnon, a été également tué. Voici, sommairement, comment les choses se passèrent : Les bandits étaient réfugiés dans un garage d'automobiles, rue Jules-Vallès. M. Guichard le fit cerner, après que deux de ses agents eurent été blessés par surprise. Des forces de police et de nombreuses troupes furent massées autour de la maison. Puis le siège commença. La fusillade n'en marqua que le début. Il fallut bientôt recourir à des moyens définitifs. Le lieutenant Fontan, faisant preuve d'un grand courage, se chargea de placer une cartouche de dynamite. S'abritant derrière une voiture de paille conduite avec un sang-froid magnifique par M. Puche, camionneur, il dut, à trois reprises, mettre le feu au cordeau. Enfin, l'un des murs du garage tomba, et ce fut Faissant à l'intérieur. Quelques détonations encore, puis M. Guichard et le lieutenant Fontan sortent, portant Bonnot mourant.

M. G. [illegible]

Figure 2.1 Excelsior, 29 April 1912

Fantômas and surrealist automatism

> We're working on a task that's enigmatic even for us, in front of a volume of *Fantômas* fixed to the wall by forks.
>
> Louis Aragon, 'A Wave of Dreams' (1924)[62]

Breton and Philippe Soupault first met through Apollinaire, whose enthusiasm for the *Fantômas* series they shared – they came together in May 1919 and over a dozen or so days produced what would become *Les Champs magnétiques*, using their new technique of automatic writing. The two men wrote together, occasionally reading out what they had written in order to produce a kind of 'echo' from the other.[63] What they intended was to set down the uninterrupted flow of the unconscious, without afterwards altering whatever emerged, and they experimented, like machines, with different speeds of writing in order to vary the degree of conscious control over their output. Already we can see in this doubling of psyches, in an alternating flow of disjunctive raw material dredged from the flux of the everyday, a kind of pastiche of the technique of Souvestre and Allain. In fact the connection with the writing of *Fantômas*, as Walz observes, was made by Soupault himself, writing in *La Révolution surréaliste* in 1925, where he claims that Allain admitted to spending as much as fourteen hours per day dictating their 'epic', and he challenges any writer to write or dictate under such conditions, over several days, 'without obeying an absolute automatism'.[64]

Les Champs magnétiques opens in looking back nostalgically to an enchanted Paris prior to the carnage of war: 'We run about the noiseless towns and the enchanted posters no longer touch us. [. . .]. The marvellous railway stations never afford us shelter any more . . .'.[65] In a later passage we again return to the extraordinary events of 1911–12, when we read: 'The anarchists have mounted on board the Mercedes' and 'We shall be caught with our hands in the safe.'[66] In the chapter titled 'Barriers' there are disconnected references to robbers, convicts and a man with a gun, 'police officers on the lookout at every corner', and the memorable line: 'Look at your hands: they are covered with blood'.[67] We therefore discover in this automatic text a combination of evocative references to contemporary life, childhood and pre-War Paris, with fantasies of crimes and violence drawn from popular culture, particularly from crime serials and cinema. There was a return to automatic writing in 1924 with Breton's *Poisson soluble*, where again we find similar nods to the world of *Fantômas*: an 'adorably polished woman's torso' is discovered in the Seine, there are crimes of passion, and the line: 'we have dug mines, underground galleries through which we sneak beneath the cities that we want to blow up'.[68] We also discover a 'little red stream' of blood, which flows through 'veins of stone', recalling the famous bleeding wall in Feuillade's *Fantômas versus Fantômas*, after Fantômas disposes of a corpse by plastering it into a wall – an echo of the bleeding statue of Alfonso the Good in *Otranto*, as revelatory of guilt.[69] It is also surely no coincidence that *Poisson soluble* is organised in thirty-two sections, echoing the thirty-two volumes of *Fantômas*, and that it ends with the line: 'The walls of Paris, what is more, had been covered with posters showing a man masked with a black domino, holding in his left hand the key of the fields: this man was myself'.[70] We can see in this explicit reference to the cinema posters advertising Feuillade's *Fantômas* series, a clear identification with the figure of the masked outsider as a source of liberty, anticipating Breton's opening question from *Nadja*, of 'who am I', or whom do I 'haunt'?

Louis Aragon, too, in his 1924 collection *Le Libertinage*, evokes the exploits of Bonnot in the piece titled 'When the game's up', referring to 'B.', the group's leader, as a 'Titan', 'a foredoomed angel' who 'flashed across the universe like a blazing light' when he launched his fatal 'car adventure'.[71] The gang set out in their yellow car, writes Aragon, 'like a sun looming over the world', and echoing Bonnot, they murder a messenger and sack the Chantilly post office, then read of their exploits in the *Petit Parisien*. Aragon's narrator, Clement Grindor, is a nihilist and informer who betrays his own gang to become a total outcast, somewhat like Maturin's Melmoth, destroying the lives of total strangers in urging them to some 'supreme betrayal'.[72] Like Breton, Aragon served during the war as an 'auxiliary doctor' and it is striking that his protagonist concludes in recalling the recent war, claiming to be 'the secret perpetrator of everything great that happened those last years' – 'I ruined countries'.[73] Adolescent memories of anarchist violence are thus permeated by the atmosphere of the *Fantômas* saga in a fantasy of revenge against the society responsible for the war.

Masks, multiple identity and insanity in *Fantômas*

> Pickpockets dans les trains! Drames dans le Métro!
> Cadavres maquillés au creux des hôpitaux!
>
> Max Jacob, 'Ecrit pour la S.A.F.' (1914)

Another striking feature of the case of the Bonnot gang was the extensive use made of disguises, a factor reported in *Excelsior* with images of the anarchists in false beards and restyled hair, enabling them to pass unnoticed in the crowd.[74] And this too becomes a key trait of Fantômas, the 'modern Proteus', where the fear surrounding him is aroused by his ability to disguise and insinuate himself anywhere, pervading the whole of the social body – a fantasy of ubiquity. If we return to the question of the body, considered in terms of subjectivity and of the instability of identity, Breton's group would also have been attracted by the constant shifts of identity that permeate the entire *Fantômas* series, encapsulated in the sinister sequence at the beginning of each of Feuillade's *Fantômas* films, where the disguised master criminal seamlessly metamorphoses from one identity to another, at one moment a bearded bourgeois at another a murderous 'Apache'. With Fantômas the stable subject dissolves, replaced by a spectral, insubstantial figure who is no more than the sum of his many guises – an instability equally shared by his opponent Juve, also a master of disguise, who at times assumes the identity of Fantômas himself.

This is a central theme of the writings of Jacques Vaché, who Breton first met in 1916 while Vaché was recuperating at the hospital at Nantes, and Breton describes the short time they shared, talking together and cinema-hopping, as 'almost enchanted'.[75] Very much the dandy, Vaché adopted a range of military uniforms on the streets of Nantes and in his drawings we also find images of pimps and crooks, celebrating a rather louche criminality.[76] In his war letters Vaché writes: 'I've been successively a crowned man of letters, a well-known pornographic artist, and a scandalous cubist painter . . .', while in one of his last letters he fantasises that: 'I shall be a trapper, thief, explorer, hunter, miner or oil-driller.'[77] Serving at the time as a translator with the British forces, Vaché's fantasies were also fuelled by drugs: 'Certainly I smoke a little "dope". This officer "in the service of His Majesty", is going to transform himself into a winged androgyne and dance the waltz of the vampires . . .'.[78] There is in fact such

a dance of the vampire in Feuillade's cinema series *Les Vampires*, performed by Stacia Napierkowska and first screened a year earlier. This play with identity is shared by many of Vaché's contemporaries, as with poet and boxer Arthur Cravan, who in his review *Maintenant* in 1913 exclaims 'My fatal plurality!', claiming for himself a variety of personas: 'socialite, chemist, whore, drunk, musician, painter, acrobat, actor .'[79] And we could add the case of Géry Pieret, described by Richardson as a deserter from the Belgian cavalry, whose various identities included that of a 'hustler . . . boxer, cardsharper, drug pusher, jockey, pimp, blackmailer and convicted felon'.[80] What this all shares with the gothic is the sheer theatricality of this performance of identity, with the added complication of a more-or-less repressed homosexuality, as with Vaché. As Robert Miles notes with regard to Walpole, Beckford and Lewis: 'the work of all three displays a recurrent interest in theatricality, with 'camp', pastiche, role-playing, excess and androgyny – in other words, with a self-dramatizing self-fashioning'.[81]

Themes of disguise and transformation similarly pervade Lautréamont's *Les Chants de Maldoror*, providing not the least of the book's attractions for surrealism. Lautréamont's Satanic protagonist, modelled in part on Maturin's Melmoth, already anticipates many of the quintessentially modern qualities of Fantômas. In the Sixth Canto, for example, it is observed that the police 'had been looking doggedly for him for a good many years', but that he continually baffles them: 'He had a special faculty for assuming forms unrecognizable to expert eyes. Superior disguises . . . On that score, he came close to genius'.[82] Maldoror again anticipates Fantômas in his ubiquity: 'Today he is in Madrid; tomorrow he will be in St. Petersburg; yesterday he was in Peking'. And he has special powers enabling him to pull off the most incredible feats: 'Mesmerising the prosperous capitals with a pernicious fluid, he leads them into a lethargic state . . .' – a ploy echoed in Fantômas's use of gas to carry out robberies at the parties of the rich.[83]

As with the gothic novel, the question of identity in *Fantômas* is also closely linked to that of genealogy and the establishment of the authentic family line – particularly in relation to Fantômas's own origins and that of his supposed daughter Hélène and son Vladimir. This problematic of heredity pervades the gothic novel (*Otranto*, *Udolpho*, *The Monk*, *The Devil's Elixirs*, etc.), both in terms of the mystery of the lineage of particular characters and in relation to the linked issues of legitimacy and rightful inheritance. The political dimension of this dispute is made explicit in Burke's re-affirmation of the constitution and inheritance system in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), as opposed by figures such as Mary Wollstonecraft. Rooted in anxieties about property rights and exacerbated by the development of capitalism, the crux of the issue lies in what Stephen Dedalus, in Joyce's *Ulysses*, suggests 'may be a legal fiction' – the question of *paternity*.[84] Or as Breton observes: 'Be horrified, if you like, this is the point we have reached: it is now the parents' turn not to be "recognised" by their children'.[85] Surrealism, part-product of the post-conflict repudiation of the generation of 'fathers', is itself pervaded by a parallel concern with literary roots and precursors, and in some instances, as with Aragon, literally, by the enigma of his parentage. Self-defined and consumed by the means of creation, for surrealism the gothic provided a vehicle by which it was able to question issues of identity, legitimacy and socio-cultural inheritance, on both a personal and a social plane.

Incarceration and the consequent lapse into insanity are also frequently linked to attempts to protect or conceal lineage, both in the gothic as well as in the *Fantômas* series and are themes of immediate concern for Breton, traceable right back to his

Figure 2.2 Fantômas, La Série rouge, Fayard, 1913

initial wartime contact with shell-shock victims and his training at the neuro-psychiatric centre of Saint-Dizier during 1916. Fantômas himself, in the original poster adapted for the cover of the first volume, figures in the classic pose of the melancholic traceable back to Dürer, but on the book cover has a dagger concealed behind his back. Insanity provided a stock theme for the illustrated popular press such as *Le Petit Journal*, to which both Souvestre and Allain contributed, as for example in an illustration from 1910, 'Un fou dans un wagon-poste', in which a deranged man in a railway sorting wagon menaces his colleagues with a dagger.[86] In the first volume of *Fantômas*, Etienne Rambert has his wife interned as a case of acute persecution, while in *La Série rouge* inspector Juve is interned in the asylum of Sainte-Anne in Paris, where the warders are told that he suffers from the delusion that he's the celebrated detective, captured in Starace's cover image (Figure 2.2), where a wild-looking man in a straitjacket is being restrained by warders.[87] Again this deployment of *faits divers* and actual Parisian locations with which readers would have been familiar served to root such narratives within everyday reality, while the theme of forced incarceration and the powers of psychiatrists – closely linked to the question of socially agreed 'reality' and its policing – would haunt Breton from the time of his affair with Nadja and her sudden commitment to the Vaucluse sanatorium. *Fantômas* is itself essentially a schizophrenic text, drafted separately by two different authors, where it's often clear that the left hand doesn't really know what the right hand is doing. This is expressed in a general sense of disjuncture and a failure to coherently develop story-lines, leaving out even crucial events: the elaborate plot involving railway timetables in the first novel remains unresolved and in the end we never actually learn whether Rambert *did* take the express train and murder the Marquise de Langrune.

We should also recall that Breton's affection for *Nosferatu* is perhaps also attributable to its immersion, like its source in Stoker's novel, in the theme of insanity. The most intriguing character in the book is surely Renfield, described by his keeper, Dr. Seward, as 'a zoophagous (life-eating) maniac', who feeds flies to spiders, spiders to birds, and then devours the birds.[88] Renfield's derangement expands the visual spectacle of *Nosferatu*, while his capacity to oscillate between apparent hyper-lucidity and madness highlights the problematic of the diagnosis of insanity and its dissimulation.

Fantômas, eroticised death and the surrealist visual imaginary

> A rain of blood falls from my vast body.
>
> Lautréamont, *Maldoror*

With the launch of surrealism proper in 1924, anarchism and insanity met in the first issue of *La Révolution surréaliste*, where the anarchist Germaine Berton – assassin of Marius Plateau and trigger of the suicide of Philippe Daudet – was celebrated as a surrealist icon.[89] Berton's photo had been produced using the anthropometric procedures of Alphonse Bertillon, founder of modern scientific police methods, whose introduction of more rigorous, scientific techniques transformed the identification and classification of criminals.[90] Bertillon's processes figure prominently in *Fantômas*, particularly in *Le Mort qui tue*, where Fantômas commits murders wearing gloves made from the skin of a dead man, such that his role in the policing of the body would have

been familiar to Breton's group.[91] The short-lived Bureau de Recherches surréalistes, launched in October 1924, was intended to provide a public face for the movement, and according to André Masson, in its offices, Freud's *Introduction to Psychoanalysis* sat alongside a volume of *Fantômas*, suggesting we might consider the series as revelatory of the collective unconscious of an era on the verge of a cataclysm.[92] In a letter of 1926 Masson, a man psychically scarred by his wartime experience, writes: 'I spend all my evenings reading, good old habit – I'll get through all of Fantômas – I found 'le Bouquet tragique' and 'la Fille de Fantômas' quite remarkable'.[93] That appeal perhaps relates above all to the intrusion of the fantastic in the everyday – often in the irruption of death – as when a gory rain of blood and diamonds falls down in a church when Fantômas abandons an unfortunate gang-member in a bell-tower. Breton deploys such an image in *Nadja* where, having set out the 'real world' context of his present circumstances and friendships while writing the book at the Manoir d'Arago in 1927, he suddenly shifts register: 'now, the tower of the Manoir d'Arago explodes and a snowfall of feathers from its doves dissolves on contact with the earth of the great courtyard . . . now covered with real blood!'.[94] The primarily *imagistic* nature of the *Fantômas* series had an obvious appeal for visual artists, not least for the frequently bizarre front covers created by the designer Gino Starace, as with *Le Policier apache*, where a gang of 'Apaches' is gathered around a disinterred cadaver from inside which their booty has just been recovered.[95] One of the most memorable, *La Main coupée*, depicts a severed hand grasping a roulette wheel and concerns a fraud at the Monaco casino, which Fantômas threatens to bombard – a plot based on a news report of an actual incident involving an English officer.[96] The influence of such ideas is suggested in various surrealist artworks, as with Duchamp's 1924 *Monte Carlo Bond*, which relates to a trip that he made there to try to beat the bank using a mathematical formula. The actual work, in the form of a five hundred franc bond, includes a photograph of Duchamp in the guise of a faun stuck on a roulette wheel, likened by Peter Read to a severed head on a plate.[97]

Magritte, another devotee of *Fantômas*, painted a series of melancholy images between 1926–28 that refer to the suicide of his mother by drowning in 1912, such that the series becomes a vehicle through which we can trace the working through of personal trauma. The black-clad figure of Fantômas features in a number of those images, as in *La Voleuse* (1927) as a harbinger of death, recalling Fantômas's melodramatic claim in *Le Train perdu* that 'I am Death'.[98] In *L'Homme du large* (1927), another figure in black stands upon a bleak beach against an overcast sky, amid fragments of a domestic living room, opening up a window upon another, psychic space. There are also references to Fantômas in images such as *Le musée d'une nuit* (1927), where the objects – including a severed hand – are carefully arranged like the clues to some murder mystery. In his 'Notes sur Fantômas' (1928), Magritte describes Juve prowling in darkness, pursuing his enemy down a gloomy corridor and attempting to bind him in his sleep, only for him to again escape.[99] Magritte also appears in a photograph in the pose of the melancholic, mimicking that of Fantômas in domino and black top hat in his *Le barbare* (1927) on the wall beside him – an image destroyed by wartime bombing – again highlighting the association of Fantômas with destruction and death.[100]

Sexual relationships in *Fantômas* equally share that strand of violence and fatality, retaining something of the cruelty of Radcliffe and – far more extreme – of Sade, or of the macabre and perverse as found in Lewis. In the first volume Fantômas murders

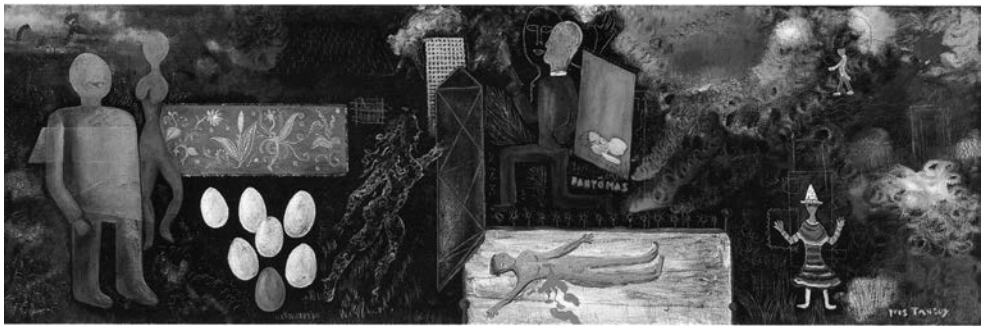


Figure 2.3 Yves Tanguy, *Fantômas*, 1925

Lord Beltham but takes his wife as his lover, in a sadistic and compulsive relationship, while other female victims, such as Sonia Davidoff, fall to his seductive charm. In *Le Bouquet tragique* Fantômas callously cuts the throat of the vicomtesse de Pleurmatin, the spouse of his son Vladimir, because she betrays him, leaving her with a gaping wound that points us to Yves Tanguy and Magritte.[101] In his 1925 canvas *Fantômas* (Figure 2.3), Tanguy presents a panoramic view of an apocalyptic, smoke-filled world on which Fantômas visits devastation. The image combines a sinister atmosphere with a colourful montage of crude fairground figures, pointing to the immersion of the series within popular culture. At the centre of the painting the doubled figure of the master criminal fires a blast from his revolver as smoke pours from burning skyscrapers, while below him, splayed across a bed, lies the bleeding corpse of his naked victim. Fantômas is dynamic, initiating the action, in contrast with the stolid figure of Juve on the left, who simply responds; justice here is both blind and impotent. Flying up toward Fantômas is what is probably Hélène, energetic like her father, and echoing her pose amid the flames on the cover of *La Fille de Fantômas*.[102] This eroticisation of the murder victim is echoed in Magritte's *L'Assassin menacé*, where the naked woman is splayed across a couch, blood trickling down her cheek, while the murderer stands nonchalantly nearby, listening to a phonograph. Magritte's composition is loosely derived from Feuillade's film adaptation of the novel, where two masked assassins lurk on either side of a doorway, waiting to strangle their victim, replaced in the painting by two bowler-hatted detectives. Here action is replaced by an uncanny calm at odds with the drama of the scene, as time stands still.

Victor Brauner had worked in Paris during the 1920s, experimenting with automatism in his native Rumania during 1929–30, but on his return to Paris in 1930 shifts to a far more oneiric style, as with his *Fantômas* of 1932 (Figure 2.4). The image depicts a carriage drawn by an ox, but transformed into a highly complex machine, with a mass of wheels, cogs and cables, and as with Tanguy, set in a dark, forbidding landscape. Yet again we discover a mutilated female corpse amid the mass of machinery, pointing to a recurring sexual fantasy that surrealism discovers in *Fantômas*. With its somewhat sinister cabman in top hat, the image recalls the *Fantômas* volume *Le Fiacre de nuit*, in which a cab is driven by a corpse – in fact the corpse of the unfortunate manager of the *Paris-Galeries* department store.[103] The *fiacre de nuit* is presented

Figure 2.4 Victor Brauner, *Fantômas*, 1932

in *Fantômas* as a Paris legend and points to a complex of connotations surrounding this disappearing mode of transport. The rapid displacement of horse-drawn carriages and buses by automobiles during this period already made them objects both of nostalgia and historic interest, documented for example by Atget, himself working with an obsolete technology. Benjamin claims that Breton 'was the first to perceive the revolutionary energies that appear in the "outmoded"', in objects, fashions and technologies left behind by the advance of 'progress', and we can detect in *Fantômas* a condensation of the psychic charge borne by these disappearing phenomena.[104] And we could add that Benjamin poses the surrealists precisely as 'visionaries and augurs', able to perceive how *destitution*, 'not only social but architectonic . . . can be suddenly transformed into revolutionary nihilism'.[105] Just as Aragon discerns such a charge in the faded arcades that are in turn haunted by Benjamin, surrealism discovers in *Fantômas* – in its recycling of the old gothic narrative tropes, in its overblown melodrama and its gallery of bearded and corseted characters drawn from a pre-war age – an outmoded world already being swept away by war, revolution and technological change. Above all surrealism discovers in *Fantômas* a world of *possibility*, of transformation, where anything becomes possible.

In a 1929 article, 'Imagerie moderne' (Figure 2.5), Desnos celebrates the striking covers of *Nick Carter*, *Buffalo Bill*, and particularly *Fantômas*, praising them as 'one of the most tremendous monuments of spontaneous poetry'.[106] *Fantômas*,

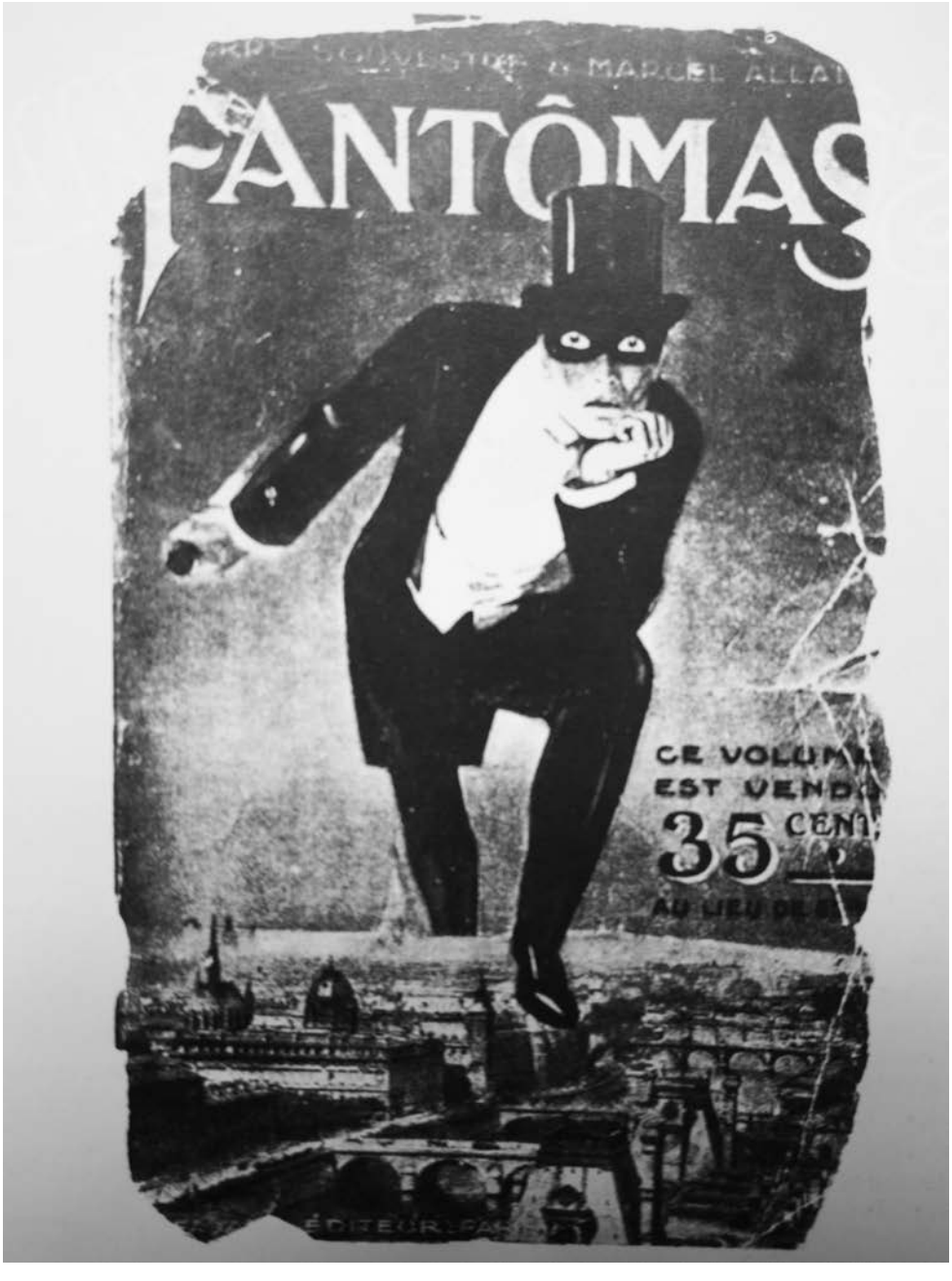
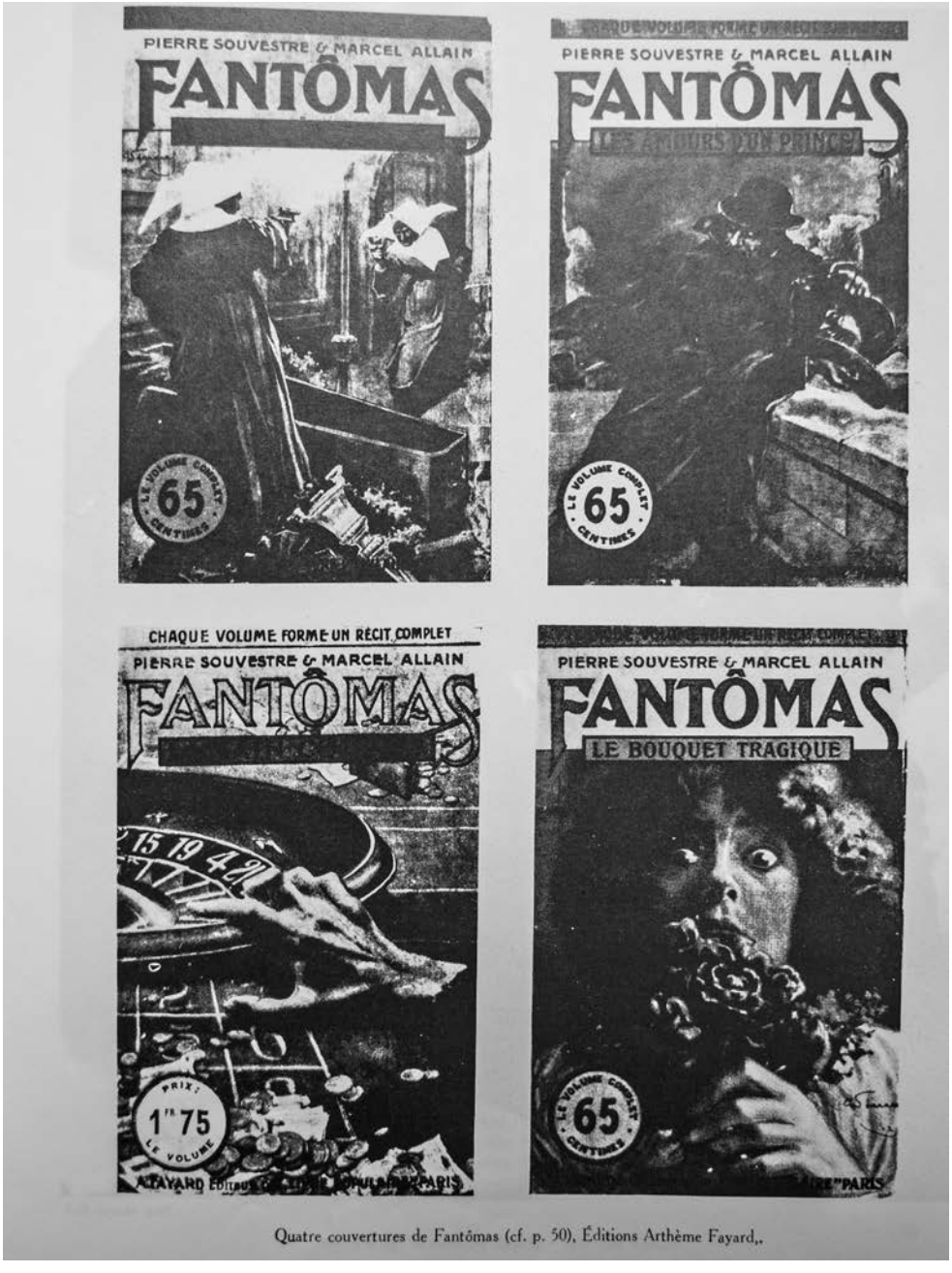


Figure 2.5 Robert Desnos, 'Imagerie moderne', *Documents* (no. 7, 1929 and no. 1, 1930)



Quatre couvertures de Fantômas (cf. p. 50), Éditions Arthème Fayard,,

Figure 2.5b (Continued)

Desnos claims, precisely conveys the social climate of the pre-war era – 'international intrigues, the lives of ordinary people, the appearance of capital cities, particularly Paris, social habits . . .' – and for the first time produces a 'marvellous specific to the twentieth century'.[107] Apart from the first cover, all are by Starace, based on ideas suggested by Allain, and of which Desnos observed that, the strange thing was that it was 'not always the most striking scene that was depicted, but always the most curious'.[108] The Czech artist and writer Jindřich Štyrský also produced a set of surrealist influenced *Fantômas* covers in 1929 for a Czech edition of the work, using photos and montaged elements. Moreover, the Romanian writer Ghérasim Luca, in his book *The Passive Vampire* (1945), includes a reproduction of the tattered cover of *Le Bouquet tragique*, depicting the terrified features of Valentine as she inhales the poisoned odour of a bouquet of black roses.[109]

Desnos returned again to this theme in his *Complainte de Fantômas*, an operetta commissioned by Radio-Paris and set to music by Kurt Weill, featuring Artaud as the voice of Fantômas and broadcast on 3 November 1933.[110] The operetta was intended to promote a new episode of *Fantômas* written by Allain and serialised in the *Petit Journal*. Clovis Trouille's painting *La Complainte* of the same year refers directly to Desnos' operetta, featuring a bloody red guillotine as depicted in the first scene, where Fantômas cheats the executioner by substituting the unfortunate actor Valgrand in his place. The Eiffel Tower in the background echoes the original *Fantômas* cover, while the rose and dagger at the base of the guillotine, alongside the eroticised figure of a woman, anticipate Magritte's *Le Retour de flamme* (1943), where Fantômas stands menacingly against a blood-red sky, holding a rose in place of his dagger. What characterises much of the surrealist response to *Fantômas*, then, is a focus on sexual violence – and more broadly – a threat to the eroticised female body, in a contemporary reworking of the classic gothic trope of the persecuted woman. Maria Tatar has argued in *Lustmord*, her study of the depiction of sex crimes in Weimar Germany in the work of artists such as Otto Dix and George Grosz, that 'the representation of murdered women must function as an aesthetic strategy for managing certain kinds of sexual, social, and political anxieties and for constituting an artistic and social identity'.[111] Tatar explains this phenomenon in terms of anxieties about women's reproductive powers, 'the psychic fall-out of the war years' and advances in women's rights – to which she adds a more general 'voyeuristic fascination' with such crimes – and while less acute outside Germany, similar factors and anxieties are common to some of the work considered above.[112] While criticised by some – and not without some basis – as misogynist, such an interpretation can be reductive, obscuring the way in which surrealism again systematically reinterprets gothic tropes and motifs in giving expression to the artists' own fears and desires – both conscious and unconscious – as well as to the pulsing of broader social tensions.[113]

Feuillade, *Fantômas* and Gothic Cinema

Cinema and the gothic, as Heidi Kaye has observed, seem to have a natural affinity, with some of the earliest motion pictures based directly on gothic themes, while Max Fincher characterises the gothic itself as 'cinematic'.[114] More broadly, Misha Kavka has claimed that there is 'something peculiarly visual about the Gothic', an aspect surely rooted in the genre's overriding concern with action, description and spectacle, as well as perhaps in the imagistic nature of the unconscious.[115] Cinema has tended

to focus on the gothic of the nineteenth century – *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, *Jekyll and Hyde* – while earlier examples of the genre have been little adapted to the screen. Lewis's *Monk* had to wait until Ado Kyrou's 1972 adaptation with a screenplay by Luis Buñuel, returning more recently with Dominik Moll's *Le Moine* (2011) starring Vincent Cassel. What, for Kavka, distinguishes the gothic from the horror film, is its central concern with *fear*, suggesting a process of 'paranoia defined as a projection of the self onto the outside world, which is in turn read as hostile', while for Punter the gothic is almost always found where there's a deployment of terror in the writing.[116] It was Radcliffe who first distinguished between the effect of *terror*, which she argued 'expands the soul', as against *horror*, which 'contracts' and freezes it, while observing the role of 'obscurity' as a stimulus to the imagination.[117] Burke similarly argues that a 'mode of terror, or of pain, is always the cause of the sublime', and which he again links to obscurity and the inability to see things clearly.[118] *Fantômas*, self-defined in terms of 'terror', both extends and updates that gothic tradition, now played out in the darkness of the cinema, and hence its appeal to surrealism in its expansion of the imagination.

The surrealists were of that first generation whose childhoods were immersed in regular cinema-going and for Breton such shared cinematic experiences with friends like Vaché at Nantes figure strongly in his reminiscences of that period.[119] Breton later wrote that 'I have never known anything more *magnetising*' and that 'the important thing is that we came out "charged" for a few days'.[120] Soupault too was a 'true fanatic of cinema' who would view movies every day, characterising it as 'the poetry of our age'.[121] Desnos, who had a regular cinema column with *Le Soir*, wrote in a 1927 article on '*Fantômas*, *Les Vampires*, *Les Mystères de New York*', that: 'For us, for us alone, the Lumière brothers would invent cinema. There we were at home . . . The screen could perhaps equal our dreams'.[122]

Feuillade quickly adapted *Fantômas* to the cinema, producing five *Fantômas* films with Gaumont between May 1913 and May 1914 (Figure 2.6). Translating the literary

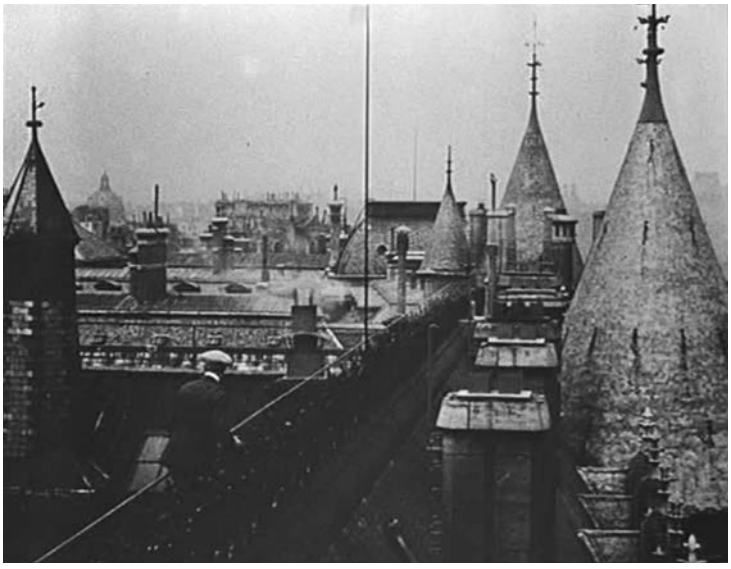


Figure 2.6 Fantômas: Le Mort qui tue (dir. Louis Feuillade), 1913

form of the feuilleton to the screen, Feuillade followed this success with series such as *Les Vampires* (1915–16), *Judex* (1917–18), *Tih-Minh* (1919) and *Barrabas* (1920) – adopting the formula of fast action, the use of repetition and a continual return to the beginning as the criminal escapes at the end of each episode. Central to the authenticity effect of Feuillade's cinema was the incorporation into the film of documentary footage of Paris – street scenes, a railway accident, the 'Zone' – such that, for Azoury and Lalanne, there is a 'contamination' of the document in grafting it onto fiction.[123] Feuillade himself referred to his technique in terms of 'Réalisme merveilleux', a term suggesting parallels with surrealism.[124] For the Parisian filmgoer, leaving the cinema was to walk out onto the real-world set of the film, such that everyday reality might potentially be suddenly transformed by any unexpected event, or as Desnos observed:

> At every street corner we rediscovered an episode of this terrific work and, against the backdrop of our dreams, we would see again that nook of the Seine where, beneath a red sky, a barge explodes beside a newspaper recounting in its headline the latest exploits of the Bonnot gang.[125]

Feuillade's first episode, *Fantômas: In the Shadow of the Guillotine*, radically simplified the plot of the initial *Fantômas* novel: Fantômas (René Navarre) murders Lord Beltham, is hunted and captured by Inspector Juve, but while awaiting execution is rescued by his lover, Lady Beltham, who arranges for an actor who has been performing the execution of Fantômas on stage to be substituted for the prisoner. In its frenzied action, melodramatic style, sudden outbursts of violence, and the theme of incarceration and escape, the film is firmly situated within classic gothic territory. The macabre also pervades both novel and film, as in the disturbing execution in the novel of an innocent man – a dénouement toned down in the film to evade censorship.

Feuillade updates the gothic's deployment of hidden doorways, tunnels and secret passages, as in the culmination of the third episode, *Le Mort qui tue*, where, as Fantômas is arrested by Juve, a secret door suddenly opens up in the wall behind him and he immediately vanishes. This device is again deployed in *Les Vampires*, as in the episode *The Severed Head*, where Fandor is lodged in a room with a secret passage concealed behind a sliding painting. All of this finds an echo in Breton's *Nadja*, where he writes of 'the mind's greatest adventure as a journey of this sort': 'Secret staircases, frames from which the paintings quickly slip aside and vanish . . . buttons which must be indirectly pressed to make an entire room move sideways or vertically, or immediately change all its furnishings . . .'.[126] The gothic device thus becomes a spatial metaphor for surrealism's conception of the operations of the mind, opening onto the unknown territory of the unconscious and forming hidden connections with that other world. Nadja, says Breton, 'is 'certain that an underground tunnel passes under our feet, starting at the Palais de Justice' – which is precisely what happens in Feuillade's *Fantômas* serial, in *Le Mort qui tue*, where Fandor searches at night for the corpse of Jacques Dollon in tunnels beneath the gothic Palais (Figure 2.6).[127] Again these secret tunnels function metaphorically, both as the undermining of justice, and in suggesting a concealed, parallel order of reality abutting that of the everyday world.

In 1937 a 'surrealist' film version of *Fantômas* titled *M. Fantômas, 280 000ème chapitre*, was produced by the Belgian writer Ernst Moerman, a friend of Magritte.[128] The film opens in the gothic location of a convent, where 'Elvire' (Lady Beltham) in a nun's habit, has sought refuge from Fantômas, and where we see a door open briefly

upon a cross-dressed cleric in female undergarments, recalling the figure of Rosario in Lewis's *Monk*. A similar deployment of *Fantômas* in the cause of surrealist anti-clericalism of the 1930s can be found in Breton and Eluard's *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme* (1938) where, under the heading 'Sainteté', we discover a quote from Nietzsche alongside a Starace cover for *Le Cercueil vide*, featuring Juve and Fantômas disguised as nuns in a shoot-out. Much of the subsequent action of Moerman's film is located on the seashore, as Fantômas doggedly pursues his elusive object of desire, while in turn being pursued by Juve and a group of bowler-hatted detectives, occasioning much amateur theatrics rather like the short scenarios recorded in Magritte's home movies.[129] Gothic formulas are thus again updated in Moerman's film – the Manichean opposition of good and evil, criminality and the Law – concluding with Fantômas's trial and execution by cannon, another core Magrittean motif.

Surrealism and the eroticised undead: Musidora, *Les Vampires* and *Dracula*

> He comes, pale vampire, through storm his eyes, his bat sails bloodying the sea, mouth to her mouth's kiss.
>
> Joyce, *Ulysses* (1922)

With the onset of the First World War Feuillade ceased production of the *Fantômas* series, but the following year launched *Les Vampires* (1915–16), featuring future surrealist icon Musidora (Jeanne Roques) as Irma Vep, a criminal *femme fatale* in clinging black body-suit.[130] With titles such as *Le cryptogramme rouge*, *Le spectre* and *Les yeux qui fascinent*, Feuillade continued the sensationalist tradition of *Fantômas*, combined with a modern poetry derived from popular culture and the detective story.[131] The 'Vampires' of the title are a secret criminal gang, closely modelled on the exploits of the *Fantômas* series, and while the connections with the vampire tale of the late gothic novel (particularly Bram Stoker), are oblique, this is very much the territory of the popular crime novel into which the gothic had by this time migrated.

While rooted in ancient fears of the return of the dead, for surrealism the vampire figure descends more from its sexualisation during the Middle Ages as the Succubus, a female visitor who sexually drained young men, resulting in illness or death, together with its male counterpart, the Incubus. Such creatures were conceived early on as 'demons', unqualified enemies of the Church – a point reinforced in Lewis's *Monk* and a further reason for their attraction for surrealism. The modern variant of the myth is given a further twist in Sheridan Le Fanu's 'Carmilla' (1872), which features a female vampire and deploys the conceit of being presented in the guise of one of the psychological case studies of the learned Doctor Hesselius, thus anticipating Breton's penchant for the style of the medical case study in his writings.[132] 'Carmilla' is sited on the classic gothic terrain of the ancient moated castle, lost in a forest in Styria, and relates the tale of the sudden arrival of a beautiful stranger who preys by night upon the young women of the region. Le Fanu combines the languid, lesbian eroticism of Carmilla, with a heavy, miasmal atmosphere of decay, to create a somewhat decadent, eroticised version of the *revenant*. Carmilla assumes different guises using anagrams of her name, Carmilla/Marcilla, a device echoed in the case of Irma Vep (Vampire) and continued by Breton and Aragon in their review *The Treasure of the Jesuits* (1928), which features Musidora as 'Mad Souri' and 'Mario Sud'.[133] Alison Milbank

includes Le Fanu's tale amongst a number of such works dealing with supernatural themes, where the supernatural is naturalised whilst reality is rendered 'phantasmal', as with Radcliffe, Wilkie Collins and others.[134] But above all, it is the sexually predatory aspect of the vampire that would colour surrealism's attraction to the sub-genre, constituting a central model of surrealist femininity.

Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) in some ways follows Le Fanu's literary conceit, purporting to comprise of a collection of documents – journal entries, letters, logbook entries, telegrams and newspaper cuttings – all intended to blur the boundaries between reality and fantasy.[135] This is further reinforced by situating the novel within the recognisably urban environment of the modern city, while also retaining the fantasy of the gothic castle, in the form of Castle Dracula, a rotting pile on the frontier of Transylvania. The novel is also an extraordinary reflection on the bureaucratisation of modern life of the time – a dizzy profusion of meetings, shorthand, minute taking, typing up and duplicating, of inventories, timetables, receipts and legal documents – rooted in Dracula's negotiation of a property transaction in England. And surrealism itself plays with such aspects of the corporate 'everyday' in its Bureau de recherches surréalistes, with its office hours, staff of *permanents*, headed letters and logbook.[136] Stoker's novel was first translated into French only in 1920 and was followed soon after by the release of Murnau's *Nosferatu* – a pirated version of the novel – such that the vampire theme had become part of the culture of the period of the 'mouvement flou', out of which surrealism would emerge, as well as more broadly of modernism itself (in Joyce, Eliot, etc.). The vampire tale itself, though, had spread rapidly to France a century earlier – John Polidori' short story *The Vampire* (1819) had been almost immediately translated into French and then quickly adapted to the stage, with the result that, according to E.F Bleiler, 'by the 1820s the theatrical life of Paris was almost obsessed by the vampire theme'.[137] We later discover traces of vampirism in Lautréamont, where, in the First Canto his protagonist Maldoror speaks of how sweet it would be to 'snatch brutally from his bed' a young boy and to 'sink your long nails into his breast', and then 'drink his blood, sucking the wounds . . .'.[138] Then again, as his baleful presence menaces the peace of a family when he appears as the tempter, we're told that Maldoror was 'branded with a nickname in his youth' – '*The vampire!*'.[139]

As a figure whose night-time assaults on its victims in their beds, draining them of their lifeblood, bore strongly sexual connotations, the vampire carried the same attractions for surrealism as the figures of the Succubus and the Incubus. Louis Aragon's languid, dreamlike essay 'Enter the Succubi' (1926), relates the tale of 'female demons' who prey sexually upon their victims while they sleep, by turns assuming the form of past lovers, sapping them of their vigour, then afterwards exposing themselves as demons.[140] Robert Desnos's mesmeric 'Diary of an Apparition' (1927), in a nod to Stoker's *Dracula*, simulates the form of journal entries detailing the nightly visits of what is implied to be a former lover, confounding any clear distinction between dream and reality.[141] Breton seems to invite similar visits when he writes of the immediate postwar period, recalling that: 'Every night I would leave the door to my hotel room open in hopes of finally waking beside a companion I hadn't chosen'.[142] In the course of the surrealists' inquiries into sex (1928–32), Breton observes that 'I would very much like to be a vampire, an incubus, etc.' and he also recalls how Giorgio de Chirico entertained him in a Pigalle café in identifying the undead with the aid of a small mirror – just as Jonathan Harker observes the absence of Count Dracula's

reflection in a small shaving mirror in Stoker's novel.[143] And we could add to this list inspector Juve in *Juve contre Fantômas*, seated in a restaurant observing Fantômas in a small mirror concealed in a monocle.

In 1922 Aragon assured the collector Jacques Doucet that: 'The idea that an entire generation made of the world was formed at the cinema and it's a film that sums it up, a *feuilleton*. Youth fell in love with Musidora in *Les Vampires*'.[144] This, of course, included an infatuated Breton, who went to see Musidora in *Le Maillot noir* at the Bobino in July 1917, tossing a bunch of roses onto the stage and writing to her the following day.[145] Breton also wrote to Fraenkel at the time, enthusing that 'Musidora really is the modern woman'.[146] Michel Sanouillet too argues her importance for an entire generation in embodying 'modern woman' – the spirit of adventure and contempt for accepted norms – and notes claims that Musidora had appeared at a Dada event staged at the Théatre de l'Œuvre in March 1920.[147] But the vampire figure also evokes anxieties and it has been argued by Elizabeth Ezra that it 'can be linked to the anxieties and traumas engendered by World War I', pointing to fears of 'infiltration and physical violation'.[148] Henri Béhar poses Musidora as 'the very spirit of demoralisation', linking her to Breton's earlier discovery of the work of Moreau and the figure of the *femme fatale*, combining sensuality and evil.[149] In his heavily mannered essay 'Jacques Vaché', Breton particularly recalled their wartime friendship in terms of their cinema-hopping days in Nantes: 'The thrilling poster: *They're back.–Who?–The Vampires*, and in the darkened auditorium the red letters of *That same evening*'.[150] That the films also carried a subversive edge is evidenced in the temporary banning of the series by the Prefect of Police, M. Lépine, who objected to the portrayal of the police as ineffectual, further enhancing the subversive appeal of *Les Vampires* for surrealism.[151]

Modelling his new series on the success of *Fantômas*, Feuillade replaced the detective with the investigative journalist and provided his criminal protagonist, the Grand Vampire, with a female assistant, Irma Vep, while extending the black Fantômas-style cowled costume to the entire gang of vampires. Feuillade also continued his practice of using actual Parisian locations: crowded boulevards, railway stations, and the 'Zone', with its associations of illicit pleasures and criminality. The demolition of the Parisian fortifications constructed under Thiers during the 1840s had been under discussion since the 1880s and their ineffectiveness was again demonstrated with the German advance during the early years of the First World War.[152] A 250-metre dead zone had been declared on either side of the fortifications circling Paris, but had become the cluttered site of makeshift dwellings and factories, characterised by Rifkin as an 'unhygienic, illegal and marginal life of the city edges'.[153] The Zone was the habitat of the *chiffonnier*, the rag-picker, and the *fripier*, the second-hand clothes dealer, as photographed by Atget, a guise also assumed by Juve in the *Fantômas* series. Such characters tapped into the popular unconscious, constructing of the Zone a mythical landscape of marginalised figures, gangland wars, killings over sexual rivalry and illicit sex. The demolition of the Zone was declared in 1919, with land disposal decrees issued in 1924, but clearance and redevelopment of the land was long drawn out. Already by the 1920s the Zone had come to be viewed nostalgically as a mythicised site of alterity, criminality and amusement, as portrayed in André Bailly's *Adieu aux fortifications* (1930), where Bailly finds himself torn between pleasure and its renunciation, reconciled, says Rifkin, in nostalgia.[154] The flea-markets, a favourite haunt of Breton in search of striking or bizarre objects, as for example in *Nadja* with

its photograph of the flea-market of Saint-Ouen, are posed by Rifkin as 'a dream of semi-alterity for the petit bourgeois . . . because they offer an easy attachment to the longing for popular origins through a release from the courtesies of the inner city rounds of consumption'.[155] For Feuillade, a key figure in the construction of this myth, the Zone functions to resolve the contradiction that criminality is both everywhere, with crooks like Irma Vep indiscernible from any innocent bank clerk, while at the same time precisely located on a barren patch of land where the gang will atavistically gather in some rundown shack – as they do in *Fantômas versus Fantômas* – to divide their booty. The Zone figures in several of the episodes located in Paris, either as wasteland and embankments, or as buildings associated with the Zone (makeshift huts, *guingettes*, etc.) and is invariably associated with criminality, louche entertainment or the kidnapping of enemies.

This liminal zone thus constitutes another prime example of the Benjaminian 'outmoded', where urban space itself is rendered obsolete by the technology of war – advanced artillery, bomber aircraft – and comes to assume a radical new potential as the embodiment of popular fantasy. Finally, the Zone is also revolutionary insofar it anticipates its future transformation as one of the quintessential transitory spaces designated by Marc Augé as *non-places* – like airport terminals, motorways and service stations – becoming by the 1970s the *périphérique*, the traffic-clogged ring-road that endlessly circles the city of Paris.[156]

Aragon and Breton returned to the theme of *Les Vampires* in the script of their 1928 end-of-year revue 'Le Trésor des jésuites', featuring the return of Musidora as the 'rat d'hôtel', depicted in an accompanying photograph, sheathed in black silk, as published in the Belgian review *Variétés* in 1929.[157] The title came from the case of a recent unsolved murder mystery in which the victim was the cashier of the Catholic Missionaries and the piece was used by the surrealists as a vehicle to attack the Jesuits, Freemasons and the French government. Bonnet reveals that the play is based on a collection of newspaper cuttings of the year's events – very much the approach of Souvestre and Allain and their 'cabinet de trucs' – and that, according to *Détective* magazine, the unfortunate cashier had been in possession of 'certain documents that had to be taken from him at all cost' and had been bludgeoned to death with a crucifix.[158] This is again very much an example of the 'outmoded', looking back to the long superseded fashions of the wartime period and the era of silent film, somewhat nostalgically evoking the more magical aspects of the group's youth.

Murnau's *Nosferatu* was a great favourite of Breton's, though the director was subsequently sued by Stoker's widow for plagiarising his novel, while Tod Browning later produced an authorised version of *Dracula* starring Bela Lugosi that premiered in New York in February 1931, shortly before Breton began writing his *Communicating Vessels*. In that book Breton recounts a dream of 26 August 1931, in which a 'madwoman' poses a threat to another woman, 'X', from whom he had recently parted.[159] The scene then shifts to a store, where a young girl showing Breton neckties is interrupted by a salesman who shows him a 'Nosferatu' tie – a garnet red tie that bears the doubled features of Nosferatu and which Breton reads in classic Freudian terms as a phallic symbol. In his analysis of the dream, Breton explains that the 'madwoman' is in fact Nadja, the protagonist of his 1928 novel, interned some years previously, and makes clear that he still feels guilt about the 'involuntary responsibility I might have had in the elaboration of her delirium and consequently in her internment' – a guilt with which 'X' had reproached Breton in their quarrels.[160] For Breton, the region in

which he was writing, the Basses-Alpes, recalled the landscape of Murnau's *Nosfertatu*, causing him:

> to evoke in a conversation the sentence that I have never been able to see on the screen without a mixture of joy and terror: 'When he was on the other side of the bridge, the phantoms came to meet him'.[161]

The bridge, like the necktie, figures for Breton as a sexual symbol and he sees in all of this, an invitation to 'cross the bridge' and to liberate himself of the 'emotional and moral' scruples concerning his private life that had reduced him to his present low state, thus enabling a return to the world of 'action'.[162] While Breton insists that every element of his dream is explicable in terms of borrowings from everyday events in his life, he nonetheless concedes 'elements that the imagination uses poetically' – an 'irreducible residue' that he designates 'the poetic marvelous' – amongst which we would include the intervention of the gothic in the figure of the vampire and its multiple associations for Breton.[163] The vampire dream thereby enables the '*vital leap*', 'movement itself in the noblest sense of the word', thus inciting Breton to take his destiny in his own hands, to cross the bridge and return to the world of action.[164]

Conclusion: everyday life and the myth of the *Titanic*

I want to conclude by returning to the question of surrealism's relationship with everyday life and the use it made of popular cultural artefacts such as the *Fantômas* novels or the films of Feuillade, using the critique of Henri Lefebvre, the theorist of the everyday who was involved in surrealism's short-lived rapprochement with the *Philosophies* group in 1925. Lefebvre roots his 1947 *Critique de la vie quotidienne* in the Marxist concept of alienation, a state he sets out to 'pierce through' in order to attain that of 'disalienation'.[165] As Michel Trebitsch observes, the everyday is for Lefebvre the site of an 'original plenitude' – the unity of individual and society, etc. – prior to specialisation and alienation, which is the result of modernity; yet everyday life still retains for him some trace of that original authenticity.[166] Lefebvre shared with Breton the conviction that human potential and happiness could be achieved in the *present*, rather than deferred to some future, post-capitalist utopia – rooted in their shared admiration of Fourier – though they differed radically in their methods, with Lefebvre long persisting in his engagement with orthodox communism. While strongly attracted by surrealism Lefebvre is critical of the movement's attempt to revalorise the everyday through the concept of the 'marvellous', arguing that in 'abandoning the everyday in order to find the marvellous and the surprising . . . Surrealism rendered triviality unbearable'; but while this in itself was 'a good thing', the negative consequence was 'transcendental contempt for the real, for *work* for example'.[167] For Lefebvre, as Michael Gardiner observes, surrealism 'reinforced rather than overcame the perennial bourgeois separation between spirit and matter, mind and body, ideal and reality'.[168] Throughout the book Lefebvre refers scornfully to *Monsieur* Breton, accusing surrealism of 'abandoning the everyday in order to find the marvellous and the surprising', posing the movement as simply the culmination, or perhaps rather the decadence, of romanticism, where what was once genuinely 'marvellous' is debased to the level of 'the weird and the bizarre'.[169] But Lefebvre surely distorts the surrealist project in accusing it of trying to 'live outside of the real world', turning *against* all

reality, and he simply refuses to accept that surrealism was in any way successful in its efforts to transform or re-enchant everyday life. Dismissing the surrealist 'marvellous' as a 'cheap and contaminated substitute for mystery' (which he tellingly locates in Dante and the Eleusian Mysteries) Lefebvre entirely misinterprets the surrealist aspiration that stretches right from the early search for the 'modern spirit', pervading its efforts to re-enchant *contemporary* reality.[170] Attempting to evaluate the surrealist project in more narrowly conventional political terms is both to misinterpret the movement's aims – surrealism operates more as a subversive *virus* than as any form of direct political confrontation – and to grossly underestimate its undoubted cultural influence. As this chapter has attempted to demonstrate, surrealism roots its aspiration to transform life in the immediate, the popular 'everyday', and in the world of modernity within which it was immersed. And located within public space on the streets of Paris, as Breton himself has affirmed: 'The street, which I believed could offer my life its surprising detours . . . was my true element: there as nowhere else I caught the breath of the possible'.[171]

We end by returning to *Fantômas* and its eventual *dénouement* in the very last chapter of the 32nd volume.[172] The *Titanic* sank into the icy depths of the north Atlantic on 15 April 1912, providing the only sufficiently epic ending for the *Fantômas* series. Thus, Fantômas and his nemesis Juve were still locked in mortal combat aboard the liner, now renamed the *Gigantic*, as it crashed into the ice-bank, at which point catastrophes erupted in Paris, London, Brussels and Madrid. As the ship goes down, Fantômas finally reveals that he and Juve are in fact twin brothers, on one level exposing the deep affinity between the series and the gothic novel's intense concern with both heredity and the complicity of good and evil. But if Juve is the embodiment of the Law and Fantômas that of unbridled criminality, the suspicion that there exists some secret complicity between the two would surely have occurred to many readers, made evident in the pair's symbiotic relationship, in the many occasions when one impersonates the other, or in the pervasive aura of global conspiracy through which Fantômas corrupts the law. Deconstruction theory too might support such a reading, as with Derrida's assertion that 'law is always an authorised force', where such force is 'essentially implied in the very concept of *justice as law (droit)*', and hence that the law is itself both rooted in and enforced through violence.[173] The idea of such a secret complicity, rooted in the Faustian pact, runs through the history of the gothic novel – in *The Monk*, *The Devil's Elixirs* and in Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* – and pervades the *Fantômas* series. But Fantômas's ultimate revelation also amazed the book's co-author Allain, who knew nothing of it, further reinforcing the claims for the series as an example of automatism – the last chapter was in fact written by Souvestre, already seriously ill and who died in February 1914, before Allain was ever able to gain any explanation from him of this final mystery.

Notes

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3 Gothic psychology and the 'humid backroom of spiritualism'

> Now I concede that the breakneck career of Surrealism over rooftops, lightning conductors, gutters, verandas, weathercocks, stucco work – all ornaments are grist to the cat-burglar's mill – may have taken it also into the humid backroom of spiritualism. But I am not pleased to hear it cautiously tapping on the windowpanes to inquire about its future.
>
> Walter Benjamin, 'Surrealism. The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia' (1929)

Surrealism, spiritualism and the problem of the subject

Walter Benjamin's clear unease at surrealism's venturing into the murky gloom of the séance hall, a space shared with 'down-at-heel dowagers, retired majors and émigré profiteers', is perhaps understandable.[1] Breton himself uses a similar analogy in the 'Manifesto of Surrealism', though to refer to the *inner* voice rather than that of spirits, when he refers to an insistent phrase about 'a man cut in two by the window', a phrase, he says '*which was knocking at the window*'.[2] Benjamin's distaste for this 'backroom of spiritualism' could be traced back at least to Robert Browning's *Mr Sludge 'The Medium'* (1864), a long poem that mercilessly satirises the carping, cringing tone of the exposed charlatan and the banalities of the séance, and in fact Breton, in a radio interview recorded in 1951, situates his own position as mid-way between the dismissal of Browning and the openness of Victor Hugo, known for the séances he ran on Guernsey around 1855.[3] Superstition, as Jay Winter has shown, pervaded the mentality of the military during the First World War, adding to the suffocating ambiance of what Breton characterised simply as 'idiocy' – the celebrated 'de-braining machine' of Alfred Jarry – an atmosphere that he and his group sought to evade at all cost.[4] Yet surrealism emerges out of the experience of men who had just survived the bloodbath of the trenches, a time when contact with the dead was an everyday reality.

Surrealism starts to take shape during the years 1919–24, the period of Paris Dada and what is often referred to as the *mouvement flou*, embracing the more short-lived *époque des sommeils* or 'period of sleeps' of 1922, when Breton and the *Littérature* group began to investigate the work of mediums and alternative psychic states. Breton, as we saw, had been a medical student when the war broke out, serving as a medical auxiliary where he came into close contact with shell-shock victims. Listening to their stories, Breton became convinced that his patients existed in effect on another level of reality, one extreme of which would be where the mind teeters over into madness, as expressed in his short wartime text *Sujet*. This piece relates to the case of a patient

hospitalised after he began to expose himself recklessly on the tops of the trenches, believing the entire war to be a sham staged simply for his benefit, where the corpses came from the dissecting rooms.[5] It's an issue that Breton returns to most directly with his 1928 autobiographical narrative *Nadja*, with its famous opening line, 'Who am I?', to which he responds that 'perhaps everything would amount to knowing whom I "haunt"'.[6] So that the problem of 'the subject' is immediately identified as the crux of the problem – the problematic of identity, the relationship with one's inner life, the role of the unconscious, the realm of one's dreams, etc. – posed here in terms of the spectral, the 'haunted' subject. Who, then, *is* the subject, and who is speaking? Encouraged by his wartime reading of Freud, Breton became convinced that there must exist some realm outside everyday rationality and that this must be linked to the role of the unconscious. The problem then becomes one of how to tap into this other realm – one response to which was the development of the technique of automatic writing, first exploited by Breton and Soupault in May 1919.

The war had provoked both a resurgence in mediumistic activities and a turn to spiritualism, in Britain as well as in France, as bereaved relatives turned to mediums in an attempt to make contact with the war dead. Surrealism's concern with such activities, though, was simply as a means to gain access to this other, *inner* realm – the unconscious – particularly through the use of automatism, and was very definitely not intended to imply any belief in either spiritualism or the existence of some 'other side'. In his radio interviews with André Parinaud Breton asserts that they were 'deeply suspicious of everything that came under the heading of spiritualism', while conceding that such psychism 'had detected certain powers of the mind, of singular character and no small importance'.[7] Given surrealism's virulent opposition to the Catholic Church, spiritualism's claim to be an alternative religion would have been anathema for Breton, such that any dabbling in séances carried certain dangers for the movement and he was careful to specify that they adopted only 'the external apparatus of spiritualism'.[8] But we can also view surrealism's involvement in mediumistic activity as both exploiting a technique that provided access to some alternative state – thereby expanding the scope of the subject – while also furthering the movement's immersion in everyday life and popular beliefs.

Following the formal launch of the Surrealist movement in 1924, Breton returned to the topic in the following year with 'A Letter to Seers', while Artaud followed this with his own, more exalted, open letter in 1926, discussed below. Mediumship also returns in Breton's *Nadja* in the figure of Madame Sacco (Figure 3.2) – one of many thousands of such seers in Paris alone, with names such as Mme. de Delphes or Mme. de Thèbes – significant not only in relation to surrealism's own experiments with séances, but also because of the centrality of mediumism to debates within French psychiatry of the 1920s.[9] Breton returns to the subject in his 1933 essay, 'Le Message automatique', his most detailed and affirmative discussion of mediumism and related states, now framed within the context of the '*gothic psychology* of F.W.H. Myers' and his concept of the 'subliminal self'.[10] The pertinence of this strand of 'gothic' psychology in the work of Myers, Théodore Flournoy, William James, Joseph Babinski and Gaëtan Gatian de Clérambault to surrealism has been little investigated, and this chapter seeks to evaluate its impact upon surrealist thought. Babinski, for example, with whom Breton studied at La Pitié hospital for a time in 1917 while undergoing wartime training as an 'auxiliary doctor' – and someone he admired enormously – is known to have attended séances, including those of Eusapia Paladino in 1912.[11] We

also know that, in 1886, Babinski had carried out various unpublished experiments with telepathy, attempting to transfer images over distance, such that we see here the outline of an aberrant, 'gothic' branch of science that proved of crucial influence in the formation of surrealism.[12]

The 'period of sleeps' and the return of the dead

While *Fantômas* could be claimed to provide the avant-garde with a model of writing distinct from the early modernist tradition, insofar as it radically breaks with the conventional unitary author function and in its place provides a fragmented, plural voice immersed in the popular culture of everyday life, surrealist automatism takes this to another level, developing writing as a collective, incoherent flow of consciousness that attempts to tap directly into both the personal and the collective unconscious. Taken a stage further, this assumes the form of the somnambulistic states assumed by Robert Desnos and René Crevel in 1922, a period later recalled by Crevel in a 1932 essay, 'The Period of Sleeps'.[13] Crevel was still in uniform at the time, performing national service, but while on leave on the Normandy coast became briefly involved with a girl whose mother held séances. Invited to join the family in the evening, Crevel discovered the mother to be 'a well of theosophy and occult sciences' and during the course of the séance was awakened to learn that he had quickly passed into a sleep, making various utterances.[14] The mother proposed initiating Crevel into spiritualism, but his military duties required his return to Paris, where he immediately informed Breton of his discoveries.[15] Breton showed a keen interest in the matter and on 25 September, together with Max Morise and Desnos, launched a series of séances with his wife Simone at their rue Fontaine apartment. Those sessions subsequently expanded to embrace other members of the *Littérature* group and beyond, including Aragon, Man Ray, Francis Picabia and his partner Germaine Everling, Roger Vitrac and Giorgio de Chirico. Crevel showed a talent for putting himself into a mediumistic sleep, after which he would chant and declaim – tales of 'shady dealings', a wife who drowns her husband, etc. – an irrational account, says Michel Carassou, 'composed of violent images intermingled with obscenities': 'The axe. *I said* the axe. An old man brandishes it. The woman will be naked. Of course, she's an adulteress'.[16] Breton played the role of hypnotiser ('*magnétiseur*') and there's a strong sense in all of this, of ambitious acolytes – principally Crevel and Desnos – performing to demand, rivalling each other in their desire to meet their leader's desire for spectacular results. The atmosphere of those séances is well captured in the breathless account left by Simone Breton in a letter to her friend Denise Lévy:

> We're living simultaneously in the present, the past, and the future. After each séance we're so dazed and broken that we swear never to start up again, and the next day all we can think about is being back in that catastrophic atmosphere where we all take each other's hands with the same anxiety.[17]

There's a powerful sense here of *addiction*, or of finding oneself in the grip of forces over which one has no control, and the group held daily sessions until mid-October 1922. Giorgio de Chirico though, in his *Memoirs*, parodies what he saw as the melodramatic pretensions of those sessions, which he says 'reached the heights of comedy', when in an 'atmosphere of false meditation and ostentatious concentration André

Breton walked about the studio reading in a sepulchral voice extracts from Lautréamont'.[18] Two young men, Chirico continues, are then presented to the group, one of them declaring he can draw any portrait from memory, at which 'An hysterical woman's voice shrilled out: "We want a portrait of Proust!"'. One of the men then falls into a trance and 'with the gestures of a somnambulist' begins to draw in a respectful silence; when the drawing is declared complete they all rush forward and 'yelled together: "It's Proust! It's Proust's eye!"'.[19]

Francis Picabia, too, attended a number of those séances and like de Chirico, treats them with ridicule in his novel *Caravansérail*, drafted in 1924 but published only some fifty years later.[20] As ever with Picabia, the book is very much a platform for his own strident opinions, based mainly on his own life and acquaintances, referring explicitly to Breton and his circle in a parody of the séances held at the rue Fontaine. Picabia makes clear that he attended simply for amusement or 'diversion' and portrays the automatist outpourings as a stream of inanities, close to hysteria: 'In the garage of Rolls Royces, the smoke descends from the sky, transforming all the guitars into umbrellas!'.[21] Desnos is depicted as being questioned by Breton while in a trance, proclaiming himself the 'great leader of the sweepers', hammering his fist on the table and weeping, claiming to be 'an immobile point in space . . . more brilliant than the sun', then tumbling to the ground and scuttling around the room on all fours 'like a madman'.[22] Péret and Aragon are similarly portrayed proclaiming nonsense while in a hypnotic trance, while Crevel too makes an appearance, complaining in a 'thunderous' voice of his cook – that 'there are no more cooks because the pyramids are too high' and that 'all the cooks go for a ride on camels' back'.[23] While ridiculing the séances, Picabia is nonetheless using them in a roundabout way as Breton intended, to create new works – the camel idea also found its way into Picabia and René Clair's film *Entr'acte* (which dates from the same year as *Caravansérail*), in one of the film's most striking scenes, where a camel hauls a hearse in a funeral procession.

But it would be wrong to simply dismiss the séances as fashionable parlour games. Crevel's outpourings were both deeply disturbed and strikingly misogynistic – Breton refers to him as 'psychologically very complex' – and his continual railing against women, Carassou observes, expressed his deep hatred of his mother, the woman who had compelled him to look on the corpse of his father immediately following his suicide by hanging when Crevel was only fourteen years old.[24] Crevel himself has written that he would put himself into a sleep in recalling a phrase that continually haunted him – '*Les robes de Mme. de Lambelle vont être mises aux enchères*' ('The dresses of Mme. de Lambelle will be put up for auction'). This enigmatic phrase was linked to a childhood memory and referred to his 'troubled fascination' with a wax tableau in the Musée Grevin depicting the recently severed head of Mme. de Lambelle being presented to Marie-Antoinette.[25] On pronouncing the magic phrase, Crevel recalls: 'My head strikes the wood. I cease to exist'.[26]

The relationship of spiritualism with this period in French history is the subject of an article by Paul Le Cour published in the medical journal *Æsculape* in November 1924, coinciding precisely with the launch of surrealism.[27] Le Cour was incited to write the article by the recent death of Dr. Geley, director of the Institut Métapsychique International in an air crash as he flew from Prague, his suitcases filled with the plaster casts of Polish spirits. Le Cour recounts how he and Geley had conducted investigations into ectoplasm with the celebrated medium Eva C. in 1917–18, during

the course of which the 'pallid face' of a woman with 'strange, hallucinatory eyes' materialised on the medium's breast, where it was photographed by Le Cour.[28] During a séance held shortly after that incident, Le Cour claims to have been contacted by Émilie de Sainte-Amaranthe, who declared herself a victim of the Terror. Le Cour claimed to recognise her features in the photograph taken with Eva C. – an image of which Geley had noted that the neck had appeared as if severed and tinged with red. Subsequent investigation, claims Le Cour, revealed that such a person had indeed been executed on the Place du Trône as part of a group of fifty-four condemned to death for a plot against the life of Robespierre. The photograph itself (Figure 3.1) has a certain haunting quality, as though glimpsed in darkness through thin gauze, though the heavy lipstick and eye make-up surely suggest something rather more recent than the Revolutionary era, possibly a cutting from a popular magazine of the time. What is more curious though, is that this spectral image should have been reproduced shortly after as a photomontage illustrating the surrealist poem *The Public Bird* (1926), a major work by the Serbian writer Milan Dedinac.[29] Dedinac, a member of the Belgrade surrealist group, had sent copies of the book to Breton, as well as to Eluard and Aragon.[30] According to Milanka Todić, the photomontages in that book don't illustrate any particular aspect of the poem, but rather are intended to convey 'an experience of the marvelous' and to 'confirm the surrealist idea of convulsive beauty' – and

Figure 3.1 Paul Le Cour, *Materialisation of Emilie de Sainte-Amaranthe*, ca.1918, from *Æsculape* (November 1924)

certainly, if we are to follow Le Cour, the image literally embodies that convulsive history.[31]

We discover echoes of that same revolutionary era, a crucial historical reference for Breton, in *Nadja*, where the unconscious bloody past of place erupts in the present. As the light fades after a dismal evening at a restaurant on the place Dauphine, 'one of the worst wastelands in Paris', Nadja hallucinates a crowd: 'And the dead, the dead!'.[32] Leaving the square they cross the river and walk toward the Conciergerie, once a medieval prison and site of the Revolutionary Tribunal that condemned thousands to the guillotine, where Nadja becomes obsessed with observing a window above the moat, and 'wonders who she might have been in Marie-Antoinette's circle'.[33] The Conciergerie also figures in a pencil drawing by Nadja, in which the windows over the moat are carefully depicted, two in the form of large 'eyes', such that the façade appears as though animated, flanked on either side by the historic pointed towers, with sexually suggestive vertical slits for windows.[34] Breton later expands further on the historical connotations of that triangle of land at the tip of the Ile de la Cité in his 1950 essay 'Pont Neuf', where he writes that 'the place Dauphine, at dusk, is still endowed with an infinite magnetizing force and suggestiveness', posing the river itself as a reclining female body in which he detects 'the sex of Paris'.[35] It was on this spot, he notes, that the execution of the Templars was carried out on 13 March 1313, an event viewed by some, he suggests, as 'largely responsible for the revolutionary destiny of the city'.[36] What strikes Breton is the conflation of both 'how amazingly unsafe and at the same time how *detaining* the place seems', combining both intense eroticism and a long history of crime and death.[37] In the case of Crevel the traumatic evocation of the Terror, with the severed head suggestive both of castration and death, serves to invoke oblivion; while with Breton, the bloody history of Paris stretching from the medieval to the Revolutionary era returns to haunt the present, creating a malaise that pervades the place Dauphine with its hallucination of the dead, a harbinger of the mounting delirium of Nadja that will culminate in her terminal incarceration – effectively her death as a subject.

Breton quickly reported those early experiments in a key essay, 'Entrée des médiums', published in *Littérature* (November 1922), where he provides an early definition of surrealism, posed in terms of 'a certain psychic automatism that corresponds very well to the dream state'.[38] Citing *The Magnetic Fields* as the first fruit of that discovery, Breton claims that nothing else could provide a 'greater revelation' than what he calls 'that magic *dictation*' – a term suggestive of the conscious self's subservience to that other voice and the opening up of lines of communication with a radically other space.[39] Nonetheless, at a time when spiritualism and the '*métapsychique*' had become highly topical within French society, Breton makes quite plain his rejection of the 'spiritualist perspective', refusing to admit 'that any communication whatsoever can exist between the living and the dead'.[40] Notwithstanding the attempt to exclude them, the dead assert their presence from the outset, with Crevel's very first pronouncement on entering a hypnotic sleep concerning a woman who murders her husband, while Desnos, on being questioned '*What do you see*?', responds '*Death*' and makes a drawing of a hanged woman beside a path.[41] Bonnet notes that the theme of death is a constant in the utterances of Desnos, as well as in the drawings and paintings that he made depicting the deaths of various members of the group, and that death also pervades the 'bloody scenes' evoked by Crevel.[42] Typical of Desnos's paintings of the period is *Ci-gît Eluard* (*Here Lies Eluard*) of 1922–23, an

arrangement of symbolic objects organised into a landscape that includes a cruciform tombstone inscribed 'Here Lies Eluard who was blue and fluid', alongside a hand pierced by an arrow. Moreover, the tense atmosphere of those séances, conducted as Bonnet notes, in darkness, amid cries and strained silences – sessions, Breton wrote, that left them 'confused, trembling with gratitude and fear' – is also suggestive of the melodramatic gloom of the gothic.[43] Breton's written accounts of the séances tend to favour Desnos and Péret, while providing scant detail on Crevel's contribution, though in an unpublished text Breton expresses his regret at not being able to reproduce any of the 'improvisations' of Crevel, finding a parallel only in the tone of *Maldoror* and recollecting (perhaps inaccurately) Crevel's magical phrase, 'the "vente des chapeaux de la princess de Lamballe"'.[44] Long after Crevel's death, Breton regretted that no recording had been made of the séances – a potentially 'invaluable document, something like Crevel's *sentient specter*'.[45] Breton has also written that Desnos's 'verbal improvisations were always of an *oratorical* character' and that frequently he made them out to be 'the speeches of Robespierre at the Convention', all of which again serves to situate the sessions within the revolutionary context that lies at the heart of the gothic.[46]

These initial experiments were concluded with the short play *Comme il fait beau!* (1923), a collaboration between Breton, Péret and Desnos published in *Littérature*.[47] Dedicated to Max Ernst, the play is constructed as a form of textual collage that makes extensive use of dialogue uttered by Péret and Desnos while in hypnotic sleeps.[48] The work builds on the earlier *S'il vous plaît* (1920) of Breton and Soupault, a provocative four-act play written in 1919 in the wake of *Les Champs magnétiques*, and which deployed automatist techniques to challenge theatrical conventions. *S'il vous plaît* first sets up a conventional love triangle, but then frustrates audience expectations as the narrative becomes increasingly disjunctive, particularly in the third act, where a young man and a prostitute meet in a café and engage in an apparent dialogue actually composed of two quite separate monologues.[49] J.H. Matthews links this technique to Breton's discussion of poetic language in the first 'Manifesto', where he asserts *dialogue* as the most appropriate form of surrealist language, where 'two thoughts confront each other', as each 'treats the opposing thought as an enemy'.[50] Taking dialogical examples from 'certain pathological states of mind', Breton insists that there is 'no conversation in which some trace of this disorder does not occur'.[51] We discover such a crossed dialogue between Péret and Desnos, each supposedly in a mediumistic trance, in *Comme il fait beau!*, where a disjunctive narrative involving creatures in a tropical forest is picked up by Desnos and translated into word-play in the style of Rrose Sélavy.[52] The play opens upon a forest containing a 'genealogical tree' on which are inscribed the names of figures revered by the group – Sade, Vaché, Roussel, Lautréamont, Freud, Jarry, Fantômas, etc. – with a large mirror in the background, presumably reflecting back the audience's own image. The animal personages – monkey, anteater, 'leaf-insect', kangaroo, spider – figure only as transmitters of the dialogue and recall the use of such disturbing talking creatures in Lewis Carroll or Raymond Roussel. Derived directly from the séances conducted with Péret and Desnos in December 1922, the smooth transfer from the séance room to the theatre again evidences the highly theatrical character of the mediumistic performance. The text, composed in the form of the disjunctive dialogue, also clearly exemplifies Breton's model of automatic poetry as set out in the 'Manifesto', where he gives examples of pathological dialogues, including 'Ganser syndrome, or beside-the-point

replies'.[53] We constantly discover such forms of dialogue, together with signs of mental distress, in *Comme il fait beau!*:

Leaf-insect: See how beautiful I am in my mica-microbe dress.
First Monkey: The sand is everywhere, everywhere. The trees diminish. The sand rises. I feel my sex, which lengthens, which lengthens. It's no more than a point. It disappears like a cloud.

He weeps.[54]

This automatic dialogue is extrapolated with additional material, including poetry, cultural references and an attack on religion in the form of a parody of the Book of Genesis – again evidencing Breton's recurring concern with origins and creation:

I. In the beginning the chain bracelet created tobacco and anthracite.
II. The tobacco was formless and clean-shaven. The fumes covered the faces of the walkers and the spirit of the chain bracelet floated on the alcohol. . . . .[55]

The play concludes with the 'Great Ode to Silexame', a satirical ode composed around an array of pharmacological terms – 'Silexame hydrogénol, Silexame urodonal . . .' – an industrial poetry of the everyday derived from a medical prospectus that Desnos had worked on as a translator.[56] We can see in all of this a kind of pathological model of language and communication, already alert to the voice of the unconscious, and which taps into the contemporary vogue for spiritualism and its rootedness in death. But also here, the discovery of a new form of creativity that would prove central to surrealism.

In the back parlour of Madame Sacco

> Madame Sacco, clairvoyante, 3 Rue des Usines, who has never been mistaken about me . . .
> Breton, *Nadja* (1928)

This initial phase of experiments with mediumism lasted only a short period and Breton later said he had been compelled to abruptly terminate them, referring obliquely to '(c)onsiderations of elementary mental hygiene' and citing an incident at the home of Marie de la Hire, when, at two o'clock in the morning, a group encouraged by Crevel 'were trying to hang themselves from the coatrack', and another when Desnos was seen 'chasing Eluard across the lawn with a knife'.[57] With the ending of those séances in February 1923, followed in 1924 by the publication of the first 'Manifesto' and the entry into politics with the Rif War of the following year, surrealism enters what Breton refers to as 'its reasoning phase'.[58] Nonetheless, as we have seen in the case of *Nadja*, mediums, clairvoyance and related psychic phenomena continued to figure prominently in surrealist thought. Jean Clair has claimed that Breton was 'an authoritarian and confused mind' whose model of the unconscious was rooted in romanticism and mysticism, rather than in Freud, and that there was a consequent lack of cohesion between Breton's communism and his mystical beliefs.[59] For Clair, Breton's *Nadja* is emblematic of that split, manifesting a troubling oscillation between a reading of the urban landscape through the optic of revolutionary and utopian politics,

M^me^ Sacco, voyante, 3, rue des Usines... *(p. 93)*.

Figure 3.2 Mme. Sacco, from André Breton, *Nadja*, 1928

and the mysticism of Mme Sacco.[60] Breton reproduces a portrait of Mme. Angelina Sacco in *Nadja* (Figure 3.2), with his dry assurance that 'she has never been mistaken about me', whereas, as Etienne-Alain Hubert has shown, her predictions were rather wide of the mark.[61] Hubert notes that Breton provides an account of a visit to Mme. Sacco in a letter of 9 July 1925 to his wife Simone, detailing her prediction that he would travel to China and would lead a political party.[62] Mme. Sacco was also visited by other surrealists, including Georges Sadoul, who left a 'mocking and scornful' account, by Monny de Boully, a colleague of Dedinac in the Belgrade surrealist group, as well as by Max Ernst, who refused to produce a portrait of Nadja when warned by Mme. Sacco that a woman named Nadia or Nadja 'will do physical harm to the woman he loves'.[63]

In his 'Lettre aux voyantes', which appeared in *La Révolution surréaliste* in October 1925, Breton opposes the clairvoyant sensibility to the materialism and religiosity that

pervade everyday life.[64] In a lyrical and somewhat playful text, Breton writes of 'girls as lovely as the day' in the grip of religion, while man is accused of crass materialism and a 'mania for control' opposed to the world of the spirit; man, he adds, has failed to heed '*the orders of the marvelous*', such that his imagination is 'a theater in ruins'.[65] Michael Sheringham notes that the text was included in the re-publication of the 'Manifesto' in 1929, suggesting that Breton accorded it some theoretical significance, and insists that Breton deploys the figure of the *voyante*, not to predict the future, but rather 'to deepen the sentiment that the future, but a radically unpredictable and surprising future, is already there in the present'.[66] The reference to mediumism is thus used to map out some alternative to a narrow, utilitarian view of reality – to open up a whole new field of possibilities for a potential future – while the subject must assume an attitude of openness (*disponibilité*) to that potentiality.

The following year, Artaud's 'Lettre à la voyante' – dedicated to Breton – appeared in *La Révolution surréaliste* (December 1926), assuming a more exalted tone, but at the same time a more intimate, confessional relation with the clairvoyant.[67] For Artaud the *voyante* is a consoling figure providing absolution to the tormented supplicant, as is suggested in the appeal that 'the repressed be spread out at last before the fine steady eye of an absolutely pure judge', reconciling him with the eventuality of his own death.[68] In contrast with Breton's cynicism, Artaud posits the meeting with the *voyante* in transcendental terms, as 'an active state of spiritual communication', a consoling form of 'seduction' inducing the renunciation of pride and will.[69] For both men the *voyante* serves to orient the subject toward a possible future, though whereas Breton maintains an ironic distance, referring to the 'miraculous intercessions' of the medium, Artaud's text by contrast reveals a more fervent desire that the medium might actually provide the absolution he seeks.

In his 1929 novel, *Êtes-vous fous?*, a book immersed in the everyday poetry of the city, Crevel's male protagonist visits a 'Pythonisse', a Madame de Rosalba, described as the 'oracle of the Batignolles', a woman whose earthy street slang and stream of absurd predictions would surely have confirmed all of Benjamin's worst fears.[70] Of all Crevel's novels, following *Détours* (1924), *La Mort difficile* (1926) and *Babylone* (1927), *Êtes-vous fous?* is the one that deals most directly with surrealism, both in its content and its evasive writing – characterised by Edouard Roditi as 'in many ways untranslatable' – and like much of his work is semi-autobiographical, often returning to psychological problems, to homosexuality, suicide and death.[71] 'Spurning the use of glasses of water', writes Crevel, 'even that at the bottom of which Cagliostro made out the severed head of Marie-Antoinette', Madame de Rosalba spreads her palms to form an ocean and plunges, diving down 'a thousand leagues, under the seas of the future', to make her predictions.[72] She foresees a meeting with 'a redhead', a fancy marriage in Paris with the bride in white satin, with washrooms, motors and lots of organ music, where the guests will be 'none of your riff-raff' – the President of the Republic in person and the Pope will send his blessing – where they spend all afternoon drinking champagne, followed by a honeymoon in Italy.[73] By the time they reach Venice, 'the redhead realises she's pregnant' and nine months later gives birth to a blue baby – 'The nurse can't believe her specs' but 'Alas! This eccentric little baby dies young, at the age of three minutes'.[74] The absurdity of the séance in its parodic promise of brides and babies is heightened by our subsequent understanding of Crevel's own complex sexuality, as detailed for example in his letters of the time to Marcel Jouhandeau, where he relates his sexual fantasies, evoking the succubus and incubus,

and reminisces about sailors and boys from Toulon and Marseille, whose 'lips smelled of red wine'.[75] Crevel dedicated the book to Paul and Gala Eluard, no doubt recalling the séances held at their Saint-Brice home in 1922, soon after those staged by Breton at the rue Fontaine.

Raymond Queneau, Breton's brother-in-law via his first wife Simone, was marginally involved with surrealism from 1924, contributing to *La Révolution surréaliste* from April 1925, and returning later to that phase of his life in his novel *Odile* (1937). Set in 1925, *Odile* is again semi-autobiographical, tracing the involvement of its protagonist, Travy, with a group of writers and artists headed by Anglarès – a character clearly based on Breton – following his military service in Morocco. Much of the humour of the book derives from the incongruous clash between the group's dabbling in the irrationalism of psychic phenomena, while at the same time becoming involved in communist politics from the time of the Rif War. Queneau describes Travy and his poet friend, Saxel, attending a séance held by a medium using the name 'Elisa', staged against the cheap theatrical backdrop of red velour curtains with gold tassels. The medium invokes the spirit of Lenin, who asks who the new 'comrades' are and whether they're members of the Communist Party, and is in turn questioned by Saxel, causing a stir in the room by asking 'How can one reconcile dialectical materialism and a belief in the immortality of the soul?'.[76] After demanding 'Silence!', 'Lenin' gives an obfuscatory response, claiming such questions would only finally be resolved when a classless society had been achieved – 'once the expropriators have been expropriated' – before turning to the 'latest mistake made by diabolic Jew and black magician Leon Davidovitch Trotsky'.[77] Trotsky figured prominently in Breton's political formation, and in *Nadja*, the narrative proper begins with Breton in the Rue Lafayette, where, 'after stopping a few minutes at the stall outside the *Humanité* bookstore and buying Trotsky's latest work', he writes, 'I continued aimlessly in the direction of the Opéra'.[78] Breton watches the passers-by, observing somewhat sententiously that, 'No, it was not yet these who would be ready to create the Revolution', before his attention turns to the eye make-up of a passing blonde, a woman who is soon introduced as Nadja.[79] In *Odile*, too, when the lights are turned on as the séance ends, the medium is revealed as a pale young blonde and Queneau's protagonists determine the need to 'penetrate the proletariat' – by sleeping with the medium – and it is clear that, for Queneau, there is an element of hypocrisy as well as absurdity in the attempt to reconcile mediumism with political activism.

Spiritualism, automatism and 'The Automatic Message'

> I think we owe more than is generally conceded to what William James justly called the *gothic psychology* of F.W.H. Myers . . .
>
> André Breton, 'The Automatic Message' (1933)

Breton returns to the question of automatic writing in his landmark essay 'The Automatic Message', first published in *Minotaure* in 1933, where he once again invokes automatism as a source of *inspiration*, a means of short-circuiting the usual clichés of writing. Breton's principal concern in that essay is with the sources of creativity, rejecting at the outset all 'the imbalances inherent in the modern civilised personality' – the 'senile horror of spontaneity', the overly 'rationalistic refinement', the constant urge to 'correct' and 'polish' – and advocating instead the products of chance

and spontaneity.[80] More specifically he proposes a range of spectral techniques – clairvoyance, crystal-gazing, automatic writing – derived from the world of séances, the occult and the work of creative visionaries, as offering an alternative path for surrealism. And he carefully distinguishes the surrealist use of automatism from the productions of mediums, who, he says, are 'wholly passive', operating in 'an entirely *mechanical* fashion', and who have 'absolutely no idea what they are writing or drawing'.[81] But Breton is even more scathing of those mediumistic works that are 'contaminated', as he says, by 'pathetic spiritualist literature', and which promote 'the idea that the dictating element is external; in other words that "spirits" exist' – 'clarity', he adds, 'demands the use of this nauseating term'.[82] Breton's over-insistence on this point signals both a fear of any association with religion, as well as with any belief in the 'beyond', confining surrealist automatism to the unleashing of the *inner* voice. The spiritualist's aim, says Breton, is that of 'dissociating the medium's psychological personality', whereas that of the surrealist 'is nothing less than to unify that personality'.[83] Moreover, we should note that what Breton calls this language of 'revelation' is not restricted to artists and mediums – it's a language, he insists, that is 'not in any way supernatural' and is available to all. Nonetheless, as Roger Cardinal rightly observes, the entire weight of Breton's essay, borne out in its copious illustration, serves to destroy any such 'disputable' distinction, and to which he adds the evidence of the first 'Manifesto' where Breton explicitly refers to early surrealist automatists as 'deaf receptacles' and 'modest recording devices'.[84] Moreover, Breton's essay makes prominent use of Victorien Sardou's mediumistic writing and drawing taken from *La Revue Spirite* in 1858 and it is striking how much of the imagery and other materials used by Breton is drawn from spiritualist and psychic journals, including the *Occult Review*, *Annales des sciences psychiques* and the *Revue métapsychique*. There's surely some contradiction in the surrealist attitude toward the spectral, where on the one hand the surrealists sought to tap into this 'other' realm in deploying automatism and the techniques of the séance, while on the other disclaiming any association with spiritualism or the dead. Cardinal suggests that it is less the notion of the 'beyond' as such that alarms Breton, as the displacement of the source of inspiration, 'no longer the expression of the individual creative subject, but the trace of a psychic elsewhere, more distant and much less certain'.[85] Peter Gorsen argues that the surrealists maintain a kind of parallelism between corporeal materiality and a parallel spiritual-mental plane, such that the kind of 'unity' claimed by Breton is in fact unachievable:

> While in their understanding of philosophy, the Surrealists remained uncompromising materialists, as aestheticians and artists they sided with the Symbolist and Abstractionist avant-garde that advocated spiritualist and theosophical ideas.[86]

I would go further and suggest that it was precisely by maintaining this tension between the materialist and spectral camps that surrealism was able to remain both creative and politically radical: that its irrationalism and commitment to the spectral prevented it from ever becoming simply a conventional political movement, while its materialism protected it from aestheticism or mere escapism. Surrealism, as affirmed by Breton in the 1924 'Manifesto', essentially *is* this belief in 'the future resolution of those two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory', inhabiting that precarious fault-line between the two, where the engagement with mediumism presented another such contradiction.[87]

Breton traces the current that he is exploring in 'The Automatic Message' back to its source in the work of Charcot, with his work on hysteria, viewing it as an aspect of psychology rather than of occult phenomena and citing Dr. von Schrenck-Notzing, at the First International Congress of Psychology, held in Paris in 1889, where he referred to the 'artistic value of expression stemming from hysteria and hypnosis'.[88] Baron Schrenck-Notzing was a German psychiatrist and prominent psychic researcher who collaborated with eminent scientific figures such as Myers and Charles Richet, the founder of the pseudo-science of the 'métapsychique' in France. Schrenck-Notzing investigated many noted mediums, including Eusapia Paladino, and between 1909–13 carried out an extensive photographic investigation of the medium Eva C., in collaboration with a French researcher Juliette Alexandre-Bisson. First published as *Materialisations-Phaenomene* in 1913, such psychic research was regarded with even more disdain in Germany than in Britain and France, and Schrenck-Notzing acknowledges being considered by mainstream science as either mad or a dupe, observing that a Parisian detective agency had been secretly hired by someone to observe his medium and her guardian for some eight months, in the hope of uncovering fraud.[89]

Schrenck-Notzing shared the dominant explanatory model of the period, rejecting the 'spiritualist' hypothesis in favour of a 'psycho-dynamical conception', explaining the phenomena he observed in terms of some kind of projection of psychic energy on the part of the medium.[90] The baron's real concern was with evidencing the manifestation of that energy in the form of a claimed new substance – ectoplasm.[91] On the question of the 'artistic value' that Breton attributes to Schrenck-Notzing's approach to mediumism, while he does state that 'Mediumistic activity may be compared with artistic creation', there is actually very little in his work to support such a reading, where mediumism is overwhelmingly portrayed in psychopathological, and particularly hysterical, terms. The medium (Eva C.), described as 'excitable', 'unstable' and as highly susceptible to hypnotisation, is quite clearly portrayed as a classical hysterical type in the tradition of Charcot, and Schrenck-Notzing refers explicitly to her 'hysterical temperament'.[92] The situation of Eva C. – under the control of her 'protectress', Mme. Bisson, manipulating and exploiting her with male investigators such as Schrenck-Notzing and Richet on the fringes of aristocratic society – surely recalls the plot of a gothic novel. There are certain clear parallels with Radcliffe's heroine Emily in *Udolpho*, in the grip of Mme. Cheron following her father's death, while Cheron herself is in the sway of Count Montoni, as he attempts to marry off Emily. Similarly, Bisson too is constantly travelling around – to Biarritz, St. Jean de Luz, Munich and Paris – obsessively conducting her bizarre experiments with the eccentric baron, while trailed by private detectives.

Æsculape – gothic medicine

Breton refers twice in 'The Automatic Message' to the medical review *Æsculape*, the official organ of the Société internationale d'histoire de la médecine, a lavishly illustrated periodical launched in 1911 that focused upon the relationship between medicine and the arts. *Æsculape* regularly contained articles on topics that we might characterise as a kind of 'gothic medicine' – on mediums, monstrosity, occultism, Satanism, insanity and suicide – and which would be of immediate relevance to the emergence of surrealism. This neglected source throws a great deal of light on the emergence of Breton's interest in a number of topics outside mainstream science and

medicine, pointing to the wider significance of his medical training in relation to his concern with psychology and its relation to the visual. Launched only shortly before the start of his medical formation, *Æsculape* would clearly have been of immediate interest to Breton, re-directing his existing early interest in areas such as Symbolist art, in the direction of non-Western art, anthropology and the emergent field of the 'art of the insane'. And we might also suggest some influence upon the form of *La Révolution surréaliste*, with its heteroclite accumulation of imagery, just as Breton drew upon the style of the medical case history in his writing of *Nadja*.

From the outset mediumism and psychic activity feature regularly in the pages of *Æsculape*: the issue of February 1911 opposes the occultist Dr. Gérard Encausse (Papus) on 'Les faits psychiques', against the views of a sceptic, Professor Grasset, whose 'Les faits du spiritisme et nos connaissances sur l'au-delà' includes photographs of Eusapia Paladino in a trance and concludes that spiritualism must be consigned to the period of the 'pre-scientific'.[93] Breton would have discovered in those pages photographs of the phantom 'Katie King', images of the levitation of tables and objects, the English medium Chambers performing before a crowd, images of apparitions, the doubling of living persons and many other striking illustrations. Dr. Geley's 'Spiritisme et métapsychisme' continued the debate in June 1911, claiming the '*métapsychique*' – defined in terms of aberrant phenomena outside known laws – as constituting a new science, one that 'dis-occults' the occult, bringing the unknown within the purview of mainstream science.[94] An issue that same year included an article by the prominent theosophist Annie Besant setting out the argument for Theosophy, as well as drawings produced under hypnosis and an article on palmistry, 'La main de Madame Simone', bringing us back again to the world of female mediums with a palm reading by the clairvoyant Mme de Thèbes. In 1913 *Æsculape* featured the spirit photographs of the celebrated medium Dr. Hausmann, who had recently died in the United States, along with articles on reincarnation, divination, the mystical drawings of Marie Egoroff and an article on the alchemist Nicolas Flamel. We also find an article on self-representation by criminals which includes some discussion of French anarchists, including Émile Henry, with drawings produced in prison by police murderer Jean-Jacques Liabeuf of his trial and of a dream in which he escapes from prison in a curious pointed balloon, clambering up a rope as his gang bombard the prison guards below. Unfortunately for Liabeuf this was not a premonitory dream, as he was executed on 1 July 1910, leaving a final pathetic letter to his mother in which he asks her forgiveness.[95] And we also find an article reflecting upon 'art and the insane', which analyses a number of drawings and other graphic works by patients identified by specific psychopathological conditions – acute mania, dementia, persecution complex, etc. – another field which would find an important place within Breton's surrealist aesthetic, most strikingly perhaps in 'Les Possessions', a 1930 collaboration with Eluard in which the authors simulate mental debility, acute mania, etc.[96]

A 1911 article in *Æsculape* under the banner of 'morbid psychology', 'Les Amoureuses des prêtres', explores cases of erotic monomania involving priests, recalling the temptation of Saint Antony as depicted by Rodin, and observes that 'in the middle ages they sent to the stake those who possessed a Succubus, female demon, tempter of priests'.[97] Recalling as it does the plot of Lewis's *Monk* and the seduction of the monk Ambrosio by Matilda, herself a female demon who escapes the stake only through her pact with Satan, the article would no doubt have been of interest to Breton. But it also curiously recalls the strange case of the abbé Ernest Gengenbach, a defrocked priest to whom Breton, as editor, was no doubt delighted to open the pages of *La Révolution*

surréaliste in order to embarrass the Catholic church. Like the Spaniard in Maturin's *Melmoth*, Gengenbach had been a reluctant seminarist pressed into the priesthood by his parents, and who eventually revolted. A letter from Gengenbach opens the October 1925 issue, relating the abbé's intended suicide in the lake of Gérardmer following an 'amorous episode with a young actress at the Odéon', a scenario that itself bizarrely echoed a play that Gengenbach had recently witnessed, *Romance*, featuring an idyllic encounter between a young pastor and an Italian singer. Alas, on being defrocked by the Jesuits, Gengenbach relates, 'my young girlfriend, who would have loved to become my mistress had I continued to wear the cassock (which exercises a morbid attraction upon certain women), abandoned me once I became no more than a banal civilian . . .' and he despondently concludes saying that the episode had left him 'un désespéré, un révolté et un nihiliste'.[98]

Among the automatic drawings contained in 'The Automatic Message' is one by the occultist Comte de Tromelin which Breton references to a copy of *Æsculape* dating from 1913. The image (Figure 3.3) depicts a woman standing, eyes closed, apparently

Figure 3.3 Comte de Tromelin, 'Temptation of a young woman by Satan', n.d., from *Æsculape*, 1913, p. 64

inhaling from a bunch of flowers held before her, while surrounded by a host of floating spectral figures – an image that, for Breton, must have strikingly recalled the Starace cover of *Le Bouquet tragique* (1912) in which a terrified woman inhales poison from black roses sent by Fantômas, that other Satan (see Figure 2.5).[99] The original context is an article by Dr. Charles Guilbert on clairvoyance and the 'objectification of cerebral conceptions', which discusses eight images by Tromelin based on occult and magic themes.[100] Guilbert considers how a strong mental conception comes to assume such importance for the subject that it precludes all other ideas and takes on the form of a *sensorial* impression – in effect, a 'hallucination'.[101] While such cases are often dismissed as insanity, Guilbert argues that in the case of Tromelin the cause is purely '*psychic*' and free of any spiritualist influence – a view that chimes with Breton's. Tromelin's automatist drawings were produced quite quickly while in a waking state, by first blackening an entire sheet with a thick pencil, next sketching out the principal figures of the image in order to 'trigger off the central theme', then picking out the details with a hard pencil, and finally removing any excess pencil markings with a piece of bread.[102] Guilbert characterises this technique as 'cerebral automatism', a state of 'conscious somnambulism' provoked voluntarily and based on Tromelin's deep study of occultism, and rejects any association with madness, insisting instead upon the 'rationalism and positivism of occultism'.[103]

In another image Tromelin depicts a somewhat gruesome occult Sabbat, a swarming mass of bodies and body parts exuding eroticism and death, while another set in a kind of dungeon, portrays a priestess raising a chalice before a smoking cauldron (Figure 3.4) beside which is a Bruegelesque composite of fish and bird, surrounded by

Figure 3.4 Comte de Tromelin, Untitled (Le Sabbat), ca. 1902–7, from *Æsculape*, 1913

worshipping figures and spectral faces. Tromelin himself, like some bizarre character from Huysmans – an occultist Des Esseintes – provides a delirious account of his years of mediumistic activity in his *Les Mystères de l'Univers* (1907), where he expounds on his drawing techniques and the various ideas that obsessed him, ranging from spirits and occultism, to ideas about immortality and the origin of religions.[104] After being informed by Papus that his works were guided by spirits, Tromelin relates how a kind of 'devil's pact' with the spirits mysteriously appeared at the foot of one of his drawings, after signing which a host of luminous, coloured spirits emerged from his bathroom mirror promising to guide him in the magic and cabalistic arts, as well as endowing him with various powers and the title of 'Magus'.[105] Tromelin clearly suffered terrifying hallucinations – of spirits and demons in the form of animals and bats – describing an 'infernal Sabbat' at night in his bedroom, when he experienced invisible beings walking over his body and subjecting him to various 'trials'.[106] Those experiences clearly formed the basis of his drawings, characterised by Tromelin as only 'semi-mediumistic' because partly subject to conscious control. The drawings obsessed him for some two or three years and he refers to them as 'that magic writing', suggesting that they might also be labelled 'satanic' as they're 'rather infernal'.[107] We can already see in all of this a kind of 'reterritorialisation' of occult phenomena, effecting a migration from the realm of spirits and insanity to that of more mainstream psychic phenomena, and how this would further stimulate Breton's deepening interest in occult and magic phenomena during the 1930s.

Publication of *Æsculape* was suspended during the wartime period, but resumed in January 1923, by which time most scientific figures of any stature had abandoned any serious interest in psychic phenomena and there is little discussion of the topic in the new series. So that while *spiritisme*, fed by the war and the all-pervasive presence of death, had become both a popular phenomenon as well as contributing to serious debates within medical science during the period of Breton's wartime formation, by the early 1920s and the time of the emergence of surrealism it had acquired a rather different resonance, viewed more as part of an outmoded and increasingly lost pre-war world.

Myers, '*gothic psychology*' and the 'black tide of mud'

> I had at first great repugnance to studying the phenomena alleged by Spiritualists; to re-entering by the scullery window the heavenly mansion out of which I had been kicked through the front door.
>
> Frederic W.H. Myers, from *Collected Poems*.[108]

In the light of the above discussion we are now in a better position to appreciate the relevance for Breton of the writings of Frederic Myers and the qualification of his work by William James as 'gothic psychology'. We can immediately sense in the above quotation how Myers' obvious distaste at being involved in goings-on in the scullery strikingly anticipates Benjamin's own reservations about life in the back-parlour. Myers had begun attending séances during the 1870s, and in 1882, together with prominent figures such as Henry Sidgwick and Edmund Gurney, became a founding member of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), a body devoted to the 'systematic attempt to investigate the large group of debatable phenomena designated by such terms as mesmeric, psychical and Spiritualistic'.[109] As Roger Luckhurst demonstrates,

Gurney and Myers turned their backs on British psychiatry's commitment to scientific naturalism, instead combining the dynamic psychology that they took from their links with continental psychology, with their own brand of psychical research.[110] Through his brother Arthur, Myers maintained important links with developments in continental experimental psychology, as well as with William James at Harvard. Whereas Schrenck-Notzing rejected spiritualist explanations of the phenomena that he observed, Myers, like Sidgwick, was of an earlier generation still in the grip of the gap left by religious doubt, seeking proof of the persistence of 'human personality' after death as the foundation of the moral order, without which human existence would lack all higher purpose and, crucially, would lack any reason to adopt any one ethical code above any other.[111] As the product of the researches of the SPR, in 1886 Myers, Gurney and Frank Podmore published *Phantasms of the Living*, a work essentially concerned with providing evidence of telepathy and embracing, they write, 'all transmissions of thought and feeling from one person to another, by other means than through the recognised channels of sense' – including the appearance of 'apparitions'.[112]

The characterisation of Myers' work as 'gothic' is borne out not only by its conceptual aberrance, but also by its obsession with death and with the pursuit of communication with the dead and dying, not least by those within Myers' own immediate social circle. Leonard Ashley notes that Podmore, one of Myers' core collaborators, was found drowned in 1910, 'in very little water', probably having committed suicide 'over the threat of exposure of his scandalous private life', while Gurney 'died in Brighton from "misadventure" – an overdose of the chloroform he used to take for relief from migraine'.[113] And we could add that Gurney lost three sisters in an accident on the Nile. Myers lost his own father when he was only around eight years old, and according to Janet Oppenheim's account was driven by the desire for contact with Annie Marshall, the wife of a cousin, 'a woman whom he adored, but could not marry', and who, severely depressed, had committed suicide in 1876.[114] Marshall had been torn by guilt over the treatment of her husband Walter; grown increasingly erratic in his behaviour and later treated for syphilis, he was one day certified by the family doctor as insane, 'immediately seized by two men, bundled into a horse-drawn cab and taken to a nearby asylum' – a fate that strikingly recalls that of Stanton when he falls into a distracted state in *Melmoth*.[115] Myers' posthumous book *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death* (1903) was a condensation of a vast body of psychic research, culled mainly from the *Proceedings* and *Journal* of the Society for Psychical Research, as well as from *Phantasms of the Living*. Certainly this is not what most would acknowledge as 'science', amounting to no more than subjective and uncorroborated anecdotes describing spectral encounters with distant relatives and friends, either when at the point of death or in great peril. Such popular beliefs inevitably recall those of the gothic novel, as in *Melmoth*, where spectral visits by Melmoth prefigure the victim's death.[116] What Breton would refer to as 'gothic psychology' therefore constituted a field parallel to that of mainstream psychology – one rooted in non-objective methodologies such as personal testimony, the plausibility of witnesses and the work of the amateur scientist – a world already left behind by the advance of empiricism.

Human Personality is therefore an attempt to systematise a vast compendium of psychic 'facts', claimed as evidence of telepathy, and sets out Myers' model of the 'subliminal' mind. As Robert McDermott observes, James is generous in crediting

Myers with that concept – something he had anticipated in his own *The Hidden Self* – suggesting that the question of its structure and topography should be designated the 'Myers problem' and declaring Myers the leader of the new 'romantic' movement in psychology.[117] Myers adopts the terms 'supraliminal' and 'subliminal' to denote 'the mental life that goes on "above" and "below" the ordinary threshold of consciousness', claiming that the subliminal self sends messages telepathically 'upwards to the supraliminal self' and that such telepathic transfers also take place *between* subjects.[118] Those terms are used, Myers explains, 'to express the mental life which goes on 'above' and 'below' the ordinary threshold of consciousness', where consciousness is conceived as only a very narrow band within a vast psychical spectrum of human potentiality.[119] The 'subliminal' is thus an expanded notion of what lies below that threshold, embracing all sensations, thoughts and emotions outside the scope of the supraliminal, and Myers advances a subliminal self that is as complex and coherent as that of the supraliminal consciousness.[120] As Bonnet demonstrates, James never actually refers explicitly to Myers' thought as 'gothic psychology', though he does make a direct analogy between Myers' subliminal region and the experience of nature, claiming that 'nature shows itself everywhere as gothic, never classic', as a veritable 'jungle' where all is disorder.[121] Breton therefore deploys the gothic here – at least in part – to signal his opposition to the ordered rationality of the classical and an affinity instead with the organic excess of the gothic. This is evidenced in the profusion of decorative imagery illustrating Breton's article and is particularly clear in the fussy, organic elaboration of Ferdinand Cheval's *Palais idéal*, a distant relative of Walpole's castle fantasy. Constructed by this Hauterives postman between 1879 and 1912, the palace was claimed as the realisation of a dream. Certainly we can see in that fabulous construction elements of the medieval castle, as in the turrets, crenellated walls and circular central tower of the 'Tour de Barbarie', while the rambling structure as a whole is suggestive of a gradual accretion over time and the accumulation of detail typical of the gothic. Breton returns again in a 1954 essay to the question of mediumistic art and his earlier suggestion that what unites the work of Sardou, Cheval, Petitjean and others, conferring on them their 'very special organic and rhythmic unity', is that 'nature offers us the model'.[122] As well as the superfluity of detail and the excess of decoration, Breton adds a certain contiguity with 'works of Far Eastern or pre-Colombian American origin', which he says 'endows the medium's work with a quality of *sacredness*' absent from most of modern art.[123]

Myers also associates the ideas of inspiration and 'genius' with certain productions of the subliminal self, writing of a '*subliminal uprush*' of 'ideas matured below the threshold', where such subliminal action is the result of automatism, adding that: 'The flash of genius is a brief automatism'.[124] For Myers there are two types of automatism, 'sensory' and 'motor', and such uprushes into everyday life must be considered as '*messages* from the subliminal to the supraliminal self'.[125] The essential question for Breton in 'The Automatic Message', is to establish exactly what constitutes the 'subliminal' as the seat of the creative inner self, a question that he links to the fate of automatic writing for surrealism and the need for 'a complete *return to basic principles*'.[126]

Breton opened his discussion with an obscure phrase that came to him on the point of sleep – '*Oh no no, my bet's Bordeaux Saint-Augustin . . . That's a book all right*' – and which he explains in clinical terms as 'verbal impulse'. This refers, he continues, to the enigma of 'intellectual locution', a phenomenon which in philosophy 'calls into question the reality of the external world', while in art it 'gives credence . . . to the

notion of genius'.[127] Myers too privileges the moment of the threshold of sleep as the source of "illusions hypnagogiques" (Maury), 'vivid illusions of sight or sound . . . which sometimes accompany the oncoming of sleep'.[128] And both Myers and Breton use the term 'hallucination' to refer to these intense internal impulses, whether visual or aural. We should also recall that Breton's essay is headed by photographs of crystal balls produced by Man Ray and in Myers too we find a discussion of 'crystal-vision'. Myers attributes to the Elizabethan occultist Dr. Dee the first systematic attempts to analyse the imagery experienced in the crystal ball, but views that imagery not in terms of the 'occult', but rather in terms of the '*control of inward vision*', drawing a parallel with 'hypnotic suggestion' as another means of establishing such control.[129] For both Breton and Myers, then, these automatic products of the 'subliminal self' are strongly associated with the highest levels of creativity, posed in terms of the notion of 'genius', and both are concerned to hunt them down to their very source.

The argument for Myers' greater significance to the emergence of surrealism (as against that of Freud) was first made by Jean Starobinski in a 1968 essay, 'Freud, Breton, Myers', where he claims a total misunderstanding between Freud and surrealism.[130] Freud famously wrote (to Breton) that he had no idea what surrealism wanted with psychoanalysis, while his conception of art, says Starobinski, was premised on the healthy accommodation of the unconscious within conscious life, rather than upon any art emerging directly from unconscious activity.[131] Breton, by contrast, sought the breakdown of those boundaries, 'working toward the triumph of a monism both magical and materialist', though Starobinski concedes Breton's enduring respect for Freud's work, particularly in his writings on dreams.[132] Bonnet, however, utterly refutes such a reading of Myers' importance for Breton's conception of automatism and the emergence of the movement, insisting that Breton was only alerted to Myers towards the end of 1924, thus subsequent to the first 'Manifesto' with its canonic definition of surrealism.[133] Nonetheless, as the above discussion has made clear, if Breton was unfamiliar then with Myers' own work, the strand of parapsychology that he represents was already a key element of what would become surrealism. For Starobinski, Breton's 1924 definition of surrealism, posed in terms of 'psychic automatism in its pure state', relied more heavily on the work of nineteenth-century psychiatry – Janet, Charcot, Liébault – than on Freud, 'and yet more on the aberrant spiritualist, parapsychological, mediumistic branch'.[134] Because nineteenth-century psychiatry viewed automatism in very negative terms, as a reversion to a primitive mode of thought associated with the 'disintegration' of the psyche, Breton turned elsewhere for a positive evaluation of automatism, finding it in in England in the work of the SPR, and in France in the work of Richet. Starobinski claims that Breton drew heavily on Myers' *Human Personality* for much of the content of 'The Automatic Message', particularly because it provided him with a notion of automatism linked to a theory of the 'subliminal self' that accorded a privileged status to the productions of the unconscious and which therefore suited Breton's purpose better than the Freudian model.[135] And to further complicate their relation, as John Gray observes, it was actually Myers who first introduced Freud to an English-speaking audience, when he gave an account of the recent papers by Freud and Breuer on hysteria at a meeting of the SPR shortly after their publication in Vienna in January 1893.[136] We could also add that, that notwithstanding misunderstandings between Breton and Freud, the 'Second Manifesto' of 1930 clearly reaffirms a commitment to Freudianism in the realm of ideas, where Breton states bluntly that: 'Surrealism believes Freudian criticism to be the first and only one with a really solid basis'.[137]

On balance we might say that, while Freud is undoubtedly the primary and enduring influence upon Breton's thought in this area, Breton nonetheless draws strategically upon thinkers such as Myers and Janet in order to radicalise and break with Freudian orthodoxy in formulating his own, surrealist model – as for example he does in *Communicating Vessels* in relation to dream theory. Bonnet notes that whereas Freud features in Breton's correspondence between 1916–20, Myers only appears there from late 1924 and that Breton acquired a copy of the French translation of Myers' *Personnalité humaine* only in early 1925.[138] Moreover, Bonnet argues that Breton tends to treat Myers' 'subliminal self' and Freud's 'unconscious', almost as though they were direct equivalents, which would again support the contention that Breton deploys Myers more as a supplement, than an alternative to Freudian theory.[139] And we should also recall that, despite certain parallels between the two concepts, there are equally enormous differences between the two thinkers: Myers, essentially a philologist who developed a concern with certain psychical phenomena, shows no interest in Freud's ideas on the central role of sexuality, while Freud absolutely rejects any occult or spiritualist influence on his model of the psyche. And it was precisely on this issue that in 1910, as Gray reminds us, Freud urged Jung's commitment to the theory of sexuality as 'an unshakable bulwark' against 'the black tide of mud . . . of occultism'.[140] Finally, then, if Breton does come late to Myers's writing, the 'gothic' strand of psychology that he represents is nonetheless *there from the outset*, while Breton's engagement with occultism and magic would only continue to grow down the history of the surrealist movement, transforming our understanding of what actually constitutes 'surrealism'.

Mozart on Jupiter – Hélène Smith on Mars

Breton made full use of the opportunity afforded by *Minotaure* to make 'The Automatic Message' a profusely illustrated essay, featuring some two-dozen automatic and mediumistic writings, drawings and paintings. In addition to the occultist drawings of Tromelin discussed above, Breton includes work by the miner Augustin Lesage, the tanner Machner, spirit portraits by the medium Léon Petitjean, as well as drawings by Nadja, Victor Hugo and others. Breton's text is preceded by an example of Victorien Sardou's automatic engravings, featuring Mozart's house on Jupiter, an extraordinary organic structure, both constructed of and decorated with living plants that are eventually petrified, and which strikingly anticipates the neo-gothic organicism of Gaudí.[141] Breton also includes a number of automatic texts and drawings, including Uranian and Martian writings, by the medium known as 'Hélène Smith' (Cathérine-Elise Müller). Smith acquired an international reputation through her collaboration with the philosopher and psychologist Théodore Flournoy, who occupied a chair in psychology created for him at the University of Geneva where Ferdinand de Saussure also taught.

Through his work in experimental psychology Flournoy had become interested in spiritualism and began attending séances with Smith in 1894. Fascinated by the products of her imagination, Flournoy eventually spent five years attending her séances and recording her tales, culminating in the publication in 1900 of his *Des Indes à la planète Mars* (*From the Indies to the Planet Mars*). The book is very much rooted in that collaboration and relates the long, novelistic tales developed by Smith while

in a somnambulistic state, and which took the form of at least three distinct cycles, each with their own cast of characters. These assumed personas related to previous existences – including an Arab princess, an Indian princess named Sinandini and Marie-Antoinette of France – recounted in three long narrative cycles that Flournoy refers to as 'dreams' or as 'somnambulistic novels': the 'Martian', 'Hindu' or 'Oriental', and 'Royal' cycles.[142] Smith's spirit guide, Léopold, also figures throughout the narratives, assuming in the Royal cycle the persona of Count Cagliostro (Giuseppe Balsamo), the celebrated eighteenth-century alchemist, occultist and forger.[143] In the 'Martian Cycle', Smith enters into contact with the inhabitants of Mars and it is here that the glossolalia she produces is at its richest. Apart from the vividness of her writings and drawings, much of the intense attraction held by Hélène Smith for Breton surely lies in the wholly positive evaluation of her capacities by Flournoy, who insisted upon her 'normality' and intelligence, as against the usual attribution of hysteria and morbidity to mediums within French psychiatric circles. Flournoy saw in her an 'exceptionally gifted subliminal Self' ('*un Moi subliminal*'), interpreting her creations as a kind of 'protest of the ideal', the product of a strong sense of feeling out of place in her family and everyday life.[144]

In his *Spiritism and Psychology* (1910), the heavily abridged translation of *Des Indes à la planète Mars*, Flournoy makes clear at the outset that for him Spiritism is 'a complete error', though at the same time he accepts the reality of phenomena not yet fully explained by science and which he claims as human 'forces and faculties'.[145] Flournoy proposes a 'psychological theory of mediumship', whereby phenomena such as telekinesis, clairvoyance and telepathy are explicable in terms of 'mental processes inherent in mediums themselves', more specifically the processes of the 'subconscious', including 'emotional complexes, latent memories, instinctive tendencies . . .'.[146] In this Flournoy is close to Myers, though he could also be said to employ in his analyses, *avant la lettre*, Freudian concepts such as desire, repression and unconscious motivation.

For Marina Yaguello, Flournoy's *Des Indes à la planète Mars* reads like a novel, recalling the science fiction of Jules Verne, while Ranjanna Khanna points to Michel de Certeau's observation that: 'What utopia is to social space, glossolalia is to oral communication'.[147] Flournoy himself sees the Martian cycle as rooted in the utopian belief in the possibility of life on Mars, citing Camille Flammarion's recent book *La Planète Mars et ses conditions d'habitabilité* (1892):

> We dare hope that the day will come when means unknown to our present-day science will bring direct witnesses of the inhabitants of other worlds, and even, no doubt, put us in contact with these space brothers.[148]

Smith herself believed implicitly in the reality of her trips to Mars, which began in November 1894 when she found herself floating in a fog of various colours. From this fog she then spotted three enormous globes, one of which she identified as Mars, where she discovered:

> Carriages without horses or wheels, sliding along, giving off sparks . . . people quite like ourselves, except that both sexes wear the same costume, formed of loose-fitting trousers and a long smock, tailored at the waist and adorned with drawings.[149]

And she begins to speak the Martian language: 'mitchma mitchmou minimi tchovaninem mimachineg masichinof . . .'.[150] In one of the almost childlike drawings that Smith produced of her adventures, *Ultramartian Landscape* (1900), Mars appears as a flat, rocky plain from which curious little geysers of flames emerge, while in the foreground a Martian with a flattened oval head and pointed ears, wearing a brown pleated skirt and sandals, is stroking the head of a hairy dog-like creature with several horns (an image in fact reproduced in *Æsculape*, July 1912). As we shall see in our conclusion where I discuss the work of Chiaki Kawamata, one area into which the gothic eventually migrates is that of science fiction, where fantasies of life on Mars can be traced back to this earlier moment in the meeting of science and mediumism. Breton's inclusion of examples of Smith's Ultramartian and Uranian texts, together with her drawings, would suggest that he similarly detects in this a utopian message of possibility, a point where the balloon of the imagination finally disposes of the ballast of the dead, the weight of the past and the gloom of the séance room, floating off in search of new worlds. Moreover, he discovers a similar message about breaking free of the constraints of reason, in the writing of Myers:

> There are complex, powerful groups of concepts which are formed outside (some will say beyond) articulate language and reasoned thought. There is a path upwards, through ideal space, which some see as the only genuine ascent . . .[151]

Breton concludes 'The Automatic Message' by evoking the power of hallucination and of the imagination of the child to destroy the distinction between the subjective and the objective, between the imaginative and the sensory, ending, somewhat improbably, with an allusion to the visions of the Catholic mystic, Teresa of Avila.[152]

It would surely have been impossible for Breton to have aligned himself so explicitly with 'metapsychic' thought during the early 1920s, at a time when, in the work of researchers such as Richet, Schrenck-Notzing and Geley, it still aspired to the status of credible science. Such an accommodation only became possible once it had become outmoded and gradually discredited, by which time it acquired a poetic value and the patina of the 'gothic'. Breton's return to these spiritualist and occult sources, read through a 'gothic psychology' rooted in Myers' highly positive conceptualisation of the 'subliminal' – as creative, protective – is thus a strategy intended to reinvigorate surrealist production through a return to automatism. But to an automatism stripped of literary affectation – to spontaneity and the democratisation of the production of art.

While Bonnet is doubtless correct in her judgement that Starobinski overstates the influence of Myers as against that of Freud on Breton's thought, critics have nonetheless tended to underestimate the enormous impact of mediumistic, parapsychological and related phenomena – as this chapter has detailed – upon both the emergence and subsequent development of surrealism. If Freudian theory provided surrealism with the technique through which to explore the unconscious, the gothicism of Myers and Flournoy, together with the associated apparatus of séances and spiritualism served to site the movement within a much more ancient tradition and would lead in the postwar era to a more sustained engagement with occultism and magic. If, as we shall see in the next chapter, Breton is to take the part of Freudian theory in his dispute with the positivism of French psychiatry, he is nonetheless still in thrall to that 'magic *dictation*' and the insistent call of Myers' subliminal self.

Notes

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16 Ibid., p. 42.
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19 Ibid., p. 120.
20 See also Picabia's *L'oeil Cacodylate* (1921), a Dada 'wall' of graffiti and gossip, surrounding a single, staring eye.
21 Francis Picabia, *Caravansérail* (Paris: Pierre Belfond, 1974), pp. 83–84.
22 Ibid., p. 85.
23 Ibid., p. 91.
24 Breton, *Conversations*, p. 66.
25 Crevel, *L'esprit contre la raison*, p. 273.
26 Ibid., p. 273.
27 Paul Le Cour, 'Les apparitions matérialisées d'une victime de la terreur', *Æsculape*, Paris (November 1924).
28 Ibid., p. 256.
29 See Milanka Todić, *The Impossible: Surrealist Art* (Belgrade: Muzej primenjene umetnosti, 2002), pp. 18 and 256.
30 Ibid., p. 165.
31 Ibid., p. 166.
32 Breton, *Nadja*, p. 83.
33 Breton, *Nadja*, p. 85.
34 Nadja's drawings are reproduced in *La Révolution surréaliste* (exh. cat.), Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2002, pp. 176–77.
35 Breton, 'Pont Neuf', in Breton (ed.), *Free Rein* (*La Clé des champs*) (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), pp. 227 and 225. See also Max Ernst's *Le Jardin de la France* (1962), which gives visual expression to this idea.
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37 Ibid., p. 226.

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43 Breton, *The Lost Steps*, p. 92.
44 Breton, 'Notes et variantes' in Breton, *OCI*, p. 1303.
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51 Ibid., pp. 34–35.
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53 Ibid., p. 34.
54 Breton, Desnos and Péret, *Comme il fait beau!*, in Breton, *OCI*, pp. 439–40.
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58 Ibid., p. 71.
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69 Ibid., p. 127.
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74 Ibid.
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124 Myers, *Human Personality*, pp. xxx, xl and 21.

125 Ibid., p. 222.
126 Breton, 'The Automatic Message', p. 19.
127 Ibid., p. 15.
128 Myers, *Human Personality*, p. xvii.
129 Ibid., p. 240.
130 Jean Starobinski, 'Freud, Breton, Myers', in Starobinski (ed.), *L'Oeil vivant II: La relation critique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970 and 2001). Originally published in *L'Arc* no. 34 (October 1968), pp. 87–96.
131 Ibid., pp. 384–85.
132 Ibid., p. 385.
133 Bonnet notes that Breton only came across Myers through a correspondent with the Bureau de recherches surréalistes – see Bonnet, Notes, in Breton, *OCII*, p. 1526.
134 Starobinski, 'Freud, Breton, Myers', p. 388.
135 Ibid., p. 394.
136 Gray, *The Immortalization Commission*, p. 46.
137 Breton, 'Second Manifesto of Surrealism', in Breton (ed.), *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, p. 160.
138 Bonnet in Breton *OCII*, pp. 1525–26.
139 Ibid., p. 1526.
140 Freud as cited by Jung, in Gray, *The Immortalization Commission*, p. 47.
141 *Minotaure* nos. 3–4 (1933), p. 54.
142 Théodore Flournoy, *Des Indes à la planète Mars* (1899) (Paris: Slatkine, 1983), p. 32.
143 Friedrich Schiller's *The Armenian; or, the Ghost-Seer* (1795) (London: H.B. Symonds, 1800), with its Masonic séances and satanic rite invoking the dead, conducted by a 'Sicilian', is based on Cagliostro's career. See Vol. 1, pp. 27–54.
144 Flournoy, *Des Indes à la planète Mars*, p. 43.
145 Théodore Flournoy, *Spiritism and Psychology* (London and New York: Harper and Bros., 1911), pp. viii and 31.
146 Ibid., p. viii.
147 Marina Yaguello, 'Introduction', in Flournoy, *Des Indes à la planète Mars*; Ranjana Khanna, 'Latent Ghosts and the Manifesto: Baya, Breton and reading for the future', *Art History*, vol. 26 no. 2 (April 2003), p. 249.
148 Camille Flammarion, cited in Flournoy, *Des Indes à la planète Mars*, pp. 133–34.
149 Flournoy, ibid., p. 138.
150 Ibid., p. 143.
151 Myers, cited in Breton, 'The Automatic Message', p. 32.
152 Breton, ibid., p. 32.

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4 The Theatre of Blood
Breton and the psychiatrists

> But for me to descend into what is truly the mind's lower depths . . . means to follow the Rue Fontaine back to the Théâtre des Deux Masques . .
>
> André Breton, *Nadja* (1928)

Surrealism and theatre

Surrealism has always maintained a somewhat ambivalent relationship with theatre. From the time of the *Littérature* group of the early postwar years, André Breton and his circle included theatre amongst their literary experiments in the form of short sketches, as with Breton and Philippe Soupault's *S'il vous plaît* (1920) or Roger Vitrac's *Poison* (1923). Such works tended to be essentially textual pieces, showing little concern for the mechanics of actually staging the work and were conceived more as occasional events in the manner of Dada performances, rather than as plays to be performed over a period of time. Boulevard theatre fell under the same ban as commercial journalism, but writers such as Vitrac and Artaud were nonetheless drawn to the theatre – and in some cases tossed overboard by Breton for their pains – in particular with the mass expulsions of the 'Second Manifesto' of 1930, when Artaud was scathingly dismissed as 'an actor' and 'man of the theatre'.[1] Surrealist theatre has been relatively neglected since a flurry of research was carried out during the 1960s and 1970s, but in the light of recent developments in performance theory now looks more interesting as an expression of the broadly performative nature of surrealism itself, while also, as I want to demonstrate here, serving as a vehicle for the acting out of various psychopathological states.[2] I want to focus in particular here on Grand Guignol theatre, and more specifically on the *grand-guignolesque* piece *Les Détraquées* ('The Deranged'), a highly controversial play first staged in 1921 and analysed in some detail by Breton in his 1928 book *Nadja*. And I want to consider in particular the ways in which this engaged Surrealism within debates of the period around issues of sexuality (particularly fetishism), the defining of insanity and the powers of doctors to incarcerate. At stake in this is Surrealism's political project for the total liberation of the individual and its claim to determine the status of reality – more specifically here, the issue of the defining of insanity and of the state's powers to deprive the insane subject of her liberty.

'Grand Guignol' is a term that designates both a specific place and also a genre of theatre. As place, it refers to the original Grand Guignol theatre – the 'théâtre des peurs' located in Pigalle, which operated from 1897 until it finally closed down in 1962. Its close proximity to Breton's rue Fontaine apartment, where (apart from the

war years) he lived from 1922 until his death in 1966, makes the theatre and its garish posters (Figure 4.1), part of the texture of the daily life of Breton and, more broadly, of Surrealism. Sensationalist posters by designers such as Adrien Barrère featured a bloody parade of torture chambers, flagellated women and botched experiments, evidencing the eruption within the everyday of sexual fantasies, anxieties about medicine and the advance of science. The actual theatre itself, situated at the end of the short impasse Chaptal, was a former chapel, a highly atmospheric building with grilled

Figure 4.1 Adrien Barrère, *L'Homme qui a tué la mort*, Grand Guignol, Paris, 1928

boxes and two carved angels overlooking the stage.[3] But the term also designates the genre of popular theatre staged there: short, gory plays that combine eroticism with absurdly excessive violence, teetering between horror and the nervously comic. According to Agnès Pierron, principal historian of the genre, Grand Guignol is essentially eroticism under the cover of horror.[4] Pierron observes that the term '*grand-guignolesque*' has been widely used in relation to real-life events – to the *faits divers* of the newspaper columns – sudden explosions of violence or insanity that burst through the veil of everyday normality. And these were events that also attracted the attention of the Surrealists, featuring regularly in the columns of *La Révolution surréaliste*.[5] The blurring of the line between reality and fiction was intrinsic to Grand Guignol – the original director of the theatre on its opening in 1897, Oscar Méténier, a former police secretary, would appear on stage before each programme dressed in black, and would recount the details of some recent gory crime. Méténier was succeeded in 1899 by Max Maurey, a journalist, such that the links between theatre and everyday reality were intrinsic to the genre, and this strand of realism and authenticity was continued in a number of collaborations between playwrights and prominent figures from the worlds of psychology and psychiatry. I therefore want to focus here on the role of three men – Joseph Babinski, Alfred Binet and Gaëtan Gatian de Clérambault – all of whom figure prominently in the debates that then raged within French psychology and the practice of psychiatry. More specifically, the work of Binet and Babinski will be read through their involvement in Grand Guignol theatre and the gothic tenor of the issues with which they engage there, particularly as informed by a kind of 'gothic psychology' concerned with themes such as insanity, spectacular violence, sexual perversion and incarceration. In the case of Clérambault we explore the work of a man who embodies the state's power to incarcerate and whose own life comes to resemble a grotesque tale from the pages of Grand Guignol.

Nadja: madness, surrealism and Grand Guignol

'Madness', writes Pierron, 'is the grand-guignolesque theme par excellence', with a particular focus upon manias and 'special tastes': obsessives, necrophiliacs and child murderers.[6] This in itself would be sufficient to attract the attention of Breton, given his own medical training, his wartime experience with shell shock victims and the role played by insanity in the emergence of surrealism. But his specific concerns at the time of the production of *Nadja* during 1927–28 – sexuality, the defining of insanity, the powers of incarceration – provided even more compelling reasons for his interest then in Grand Guignol theatre. First published in May 1928, *Nadja* recounts Breton's brief relationship with a woman who, during the course of the book, becomes increasingly deranged, claiming premonitory powers and experiencing hallucinations, and who is ultimately incarcerated in an asylum from which she never emerges. Disturbing on many levels, the book was written – at least in part – in the style of a medical case history, engaging in doctrinal disputes with a psychiatric profession for which Breton expresses his 'general contempt', by virtue of their oppressive powers of incarceration and mistreatment of internees.[7] Early in the book Breton reveals his enthusiasm for the short play *Les Détraquées*, first staged in February 1921 at the Théâtre des Deux Masques, where the repertory was focused on *grand-guignolesque* type works. Critical reception of the play was withering – *Comœdia*'s critic, Georges Bourdon, poked the play like some unsavoury object at the end of a stick and refused to review it,

reproaching himself for even mentioning its title.[8] Breton, though, rose to the play's defence and went to see it three or four times. But why should this piece of theatre have exercised such a powerful grip on Breton's imagination and why such hostility? More importantly, what does it tell us of Surrealist attitudes toward sexuality and of their relationship with issues of psychopathology, and how did this issue serve to position Surrealism politically in relation to contemporary debates within French psychiatry, particularly with regard to the alienist's powers of incarceration?

In many ways Breton's most accessible work, *Nadja* has attracted extensive academic analysis, including feminist readings that explore Breton's attitudes in relation to gender and madness, as well as of the deployment of photographs in the book, but as we saw with the figure of the *voyante*, still repays critical attention.[9] Significantly, as Bonnet notes, it is the only one of Breton's books that he revised, introducing important variations and suppressing certain details in the revised edition of 1963.[10] Particularly relevant here is Susan Rubin Suleiman's subtle reading that focuses on Breton's description of *Les Détraquées* and which particularly sites the work in relation to Breton's contemporaneous celebration of the hysterical woman.[11] If we follow Breton's train of thought from the book's provocative opening question 'Who am I?' – a question that would amount, he suggests, 'to knowing whom I "haunt"' – Breton concedes that the 'objective', 'deliberate', manifestation of his existence constitutes only a fraction of his actual existence, the full scope of which is quite unknown to him.[12] And he sets out to consider the uniqueness of that existence and its difference from that of other writers and artists, laying out he says, 'in the margin of the narrative' of the book, 'only the most decisive episodes of my life' – decisive insofar as they rely solely on chance events and encounters.[13] Breton accordingly describes his usual 'haunts' in Paris – the streets, theatres and cinemas that he visits with friends, offering as an example of his tastes, *The Grip of the Octopus*, a melodramatic crime serial. And in theatre Breton indicates the significance for him of the now demolished Théâtre Moderne, with its ridiculous acting and dubious atmosphere, while also including documents in the book – copies of letters and other printed material – that like the photographs serve to entrench the narrative within material reality. Breton thus begins a train of thought that assumes an increasingly erotic quality, before cohering into a sexual fantasy – 'I have always, beyond belief, hoped to meet, at night and in a woods, a beautiful naked woman' – which he then links to an anecdote of having seen at the 'Electric-Palace' cinema, 'a naked woman, who must have come in wearing only her coat, [who] strolled, dead white, from one row to the next'.[14] The fantasy is thus partially realised in reality – as Breton insists, 'it might happen'. 'But for me to descend', he continues, 'into what is truly the mind's lower depths, means to follow the Rue Fontaine back to the Théâtre des Deux Masques', where the repertory consisted largely of Grand Guignol.[15] It is at this point that Breton finally reveals his 'unbounded admiration' for *Les Détraquées*, the *only* dramatic work that he chooses to recollect, but which he insists 'loses almost everything' in not being '*seen*'; it is thus essentially a *visual* experience like those that preceded it, rather than a literary one, and as with cinema, a highly voyeuristic experience that unfolds before a static spectator within a darkened space. The trajectory of Breton's thought, then, often couched in explicitly Freudian terms, is clearly suggestive of a journey to the inner recesses of the mind, to sexual fantasy and the probing of the unconscious.

The play itself is set in the wood-panelled office of the principal of a school for girls, depicted in a photograph that Breton included in the book, made by the Henri

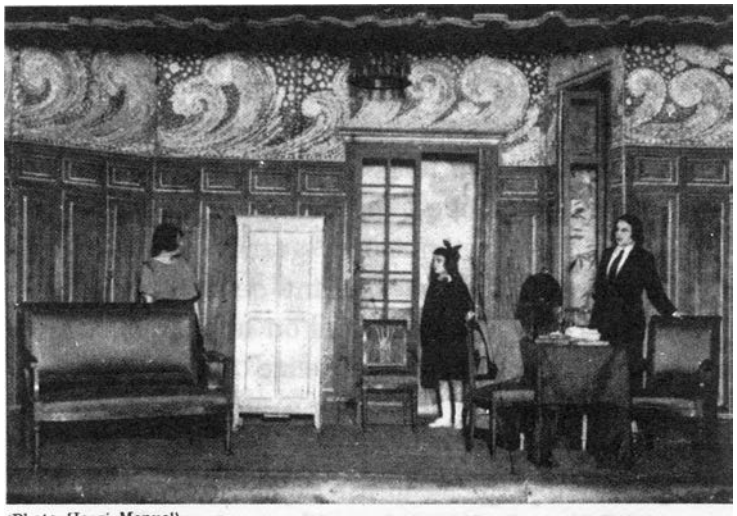

Figure 4.2 *Les Détraquées* as reproduced in Breton's *Nadja*, 1928

Manuel studio (Figure 4.2), where we see the main protagonists onstage. Breton describes how, in an atmosphere of 'great nervous tension' the principal, Mme. Challens, somewhat mannishly dressed, awaits the arrival of Mademoiselle Solange, a teacher of dance and deportment, whose arrival the previous year coincided with the mysterious disappearance and death of one of the pupils.[16] The grandmother of one of the girls appears, having received a tearful letter begging to be taken away from the school, but is all too easily appeased. Solange finally arrives, described by Breton as '[d]ark' with 'magnificent eyes that mingle languor with subtlety, cruelty, despair', and at once hitches her skirt to inject herself in the thigh; both women, it emerges, are opium addicts and obsessively observe the fearful girl at play. What must also have been of acute interest for Breton as he first experienced the play in 1921, would have been the social use of drugs, then still a raw nerve in the wake of the death in January 1919 of his close wartime friend Jacques Vaché of an opium overdose.[17] We are told that the murdered girl's absent mother is also a morphine addict undergoing treatment, while Solange and her lover too are part of a network of bourgeois women using drugs and organising private opium dens. Breton would have been familiar with such circles through his association with Francis Picabia, who also writes of his use of drugs in poems such as 'Une nuit chinoise à New York' or 'Magic City', and who would visit Luna Park with Apollinaire in search of opium.[18] Beyond the topical interest of the drug theme then – its social and criminological dimension – the use of opium would have raised both personal issues as well as aesthetic questions about the role of drugs within the creative process, a path along which Breton had no intention of leading Surrealism.

The women observe the girls at play like ravenous animals watching their prey, suggesting questions about surrealist attitudes towards femininity, maternity and childhood. Surrealism tended to celebrate childhood as a phase of creativity later repressed

by social conditioning and which it viewed nostalgically as a period from which that generation was brutally torn by the war, whereas maternity was viewed very differently. Surrealism eroticised the female body while denigrating the woman's maternal role, in part as a rejection of the postwar pro-natality campaign aimed at repopulating the country, where procreation became simply a patriotic 'duty'. This is made clear in the surrealists' discussions of sexuality (which began in the same year as the publication of *Nadja*), where, when asked about having children, the responses were brutal: Breton was 'opposed', Pierre Naville found it 'regrettable', Tanguy opined it 'odious', while Jacques Prévert declared that he would 'kill it on the spot'.[19] The theme of the menaced child would no doubt have immediately recalled for Breton the protagonist of Lautréamont's *Les Chants de Maldoror*, the 'evil phantom' whose baleful presence provokes the sudden death of the child Edward and who later in the novel hunts down the young Mervyn.[20] The question of the nature of evil is central to Lautréamont's concerns in that book and one to which we return in considering the work of Bataille, as well as in relation to Breton's revived interest in magic and the figure of the devil during his wartime exile. In *Les Détraquées*, Mme. Challens also claims to have special powers over the menaced girl, claiming that she had only to think of her and the girl came to her, like a somnambulist: 'I watched her . . . I fixed her . . . she fell asleep!'.[21] Breton describes the following key moment in the play as the two women stare from the balcony at the child:

> Silence. A BALLOON FALLS IN THE ROOM. 'There she is, she's coming up'. . . . The child of a moment ago enters without a word . . . her eyes fixed on the principal's; she walks on tiptoe. Curtain.[22]

This silent moment comes like a point of suspension in the play, like some Lacanian knot where we experience a sudden shift from one order of experience to another, where, as the curtain falls, we know that what we fail to see is the realisation of the women's fantasy, a fantasy that resists symbolisation and which can only point to the eruption of the real within the symbolic.

With the opening of the second act the child has disappeared, the local doctor arrives and people begin to connect events of the previous year with the reappearance of the mysterious Solange. After fruitless searches and much speculation, the principal goes to open a cabinet, where, accompanied by an 'unforgettable scream', 'The child's bloody corpse appears, head downward, and falls onto the floor'.[23] Solange, in a sudden '*crise de démence*', throws herself upon the corpse and is arrested. The author, P.-L. Palau, later recalled that the play caused a 'scandal without precedent' and that he was 'heaped with abuse', but that it was nonetheless a popular success, playing another 278 times to packed houses and was re-staged a further three times.[24] That such an obscure and somewhat perverse work should strike such a chord with postwar audiences is surely striking, suggesting that, beyond mere sensation seeking, the play did in fact engage with a volatile cocktail of contemporary concerns consequent upon the war, issues that found their focus in the social role of women and in female sexuality.[25]

Breton is clearly utterly seduced by Solange, played by Blanche Derval, whose stock portrait from the Manuel studio he reproduces in the book, describing her as 'too alluring to be true' – a remark that echoes his description of the evil Matilda in *The Monk*, as 'less a character than a continual temptation'.[26] Suleiman, too, is struck by

Breton's infatuation, observing that what 'excites and mesmerises him, is the spectacle of female "otherness": madness, murderousness, lesbianism' – to the extent that his account of the play ends with the child's scream, where the last thing Breton wants, observes Suleiman, is the psychiatrist's subsequent explanation of what the women are doing.[27] We could perhaps add to this list of fascinations the extreme *sadism* of the women, excitedly watching a child in the playground attacking another, and described in the script as 'quivering, gripped by an indescribable elation'.[28] And the great puzzle of the play, for Breton, concerns he says, 'precisely what Solange and her partner are a prey to that transforms them into these magnificent predatory beasts'.[29] Pursuing this line of thought, Breton himself assumes the role of the analyst and, after first refusing to relate 'a rather squalid dream' that he had been unable to shake off during the day and which he connects with the issues raised by *Les Détraquées*, then recounts some details of the dream in which he attacks with his cane an enormous insect, which then thrusts its hairy legs down his throat, provoking 'inexpressible disgust'. Assuming an overtly psychoanalytic vocabulary, Breton sees in this evidence of the 'super-determinant' role, in the Freudian sense, 'which certain powerful impressions are made to play', though his writing becomes notably evasive at this point as he approaches what is surely the core of his fantasy, and we need to probe the play further to tease out exactly what is at stake in all of this.[30]

In order to clarify the underlying structure of Breton's discussion it is worth recalling here a page of photos from Breton's personal album, in which he creates a kind of devotional triad of portraits of formational figures from the time of his medical training: at the top is Charcot, the fountainhead from which spring the two strands of psychiatry represented below: on the one hand Freud, who trained under Charcot for several months during 1885–86 and who Breton visited in 1921 while on his honeymoon; and alongside him a figure representing a very different path for French psychiatry to that of Freudian psychoanalysis – the eminent neurologist Joseph Babinski.[31] Very schematically then, Freud and Babinski represented for Breton two opposed models of psychiatry – Freudian psychoanalysis, as against the increasing French reliance upon neurology and a psychology stripped of metaphysics, rooted firmly instead in the organic. And we might suggest that their opposition – echoing those structural tensions that we encountered in our first chapter, between the attractions of occultism and the rejection of Spiritism and other phenomena tainted by religion – is one of the themes played out in *Nadja*.

Les Détraquées was originally credited to P.-L. Palau and 'Olaf' (Breton refers to the assistance of a 'surgeon'), but in 1956 he re-published the play as an insert to the Surrealist periodical *Le Surréalisme, même* (October 1956) (Figure 4.3), where he revealed (in a short text by Palau) that the co-author was in fact Babinski.[32] Breton also included there a portrait of Babinski – the same image, in fact, as figured in his private album. Babinski had written extensively on hysteria, neurology and pathological anatomy, was a founding member of the Société de Neurologie, as well as being a great enthusiast for opera and serving as house doctor at the Paris Opera.[33] His co-author, Pierre Palau, a well-known actor in boulevard theatre, writes that the play was based on 'somewhat equivocal events' that took place at an institution for young girls in a Paris suburb and that, while emphasising the drama, was intended to closely conform to 'scientific' truth.[34] Palau characterises the case in terms of 'a circular and periodic case of madness', for which Babinski provided his clinical expertise. Breton had in fact been taught by Babinski in 1917, whilst a medical student at the

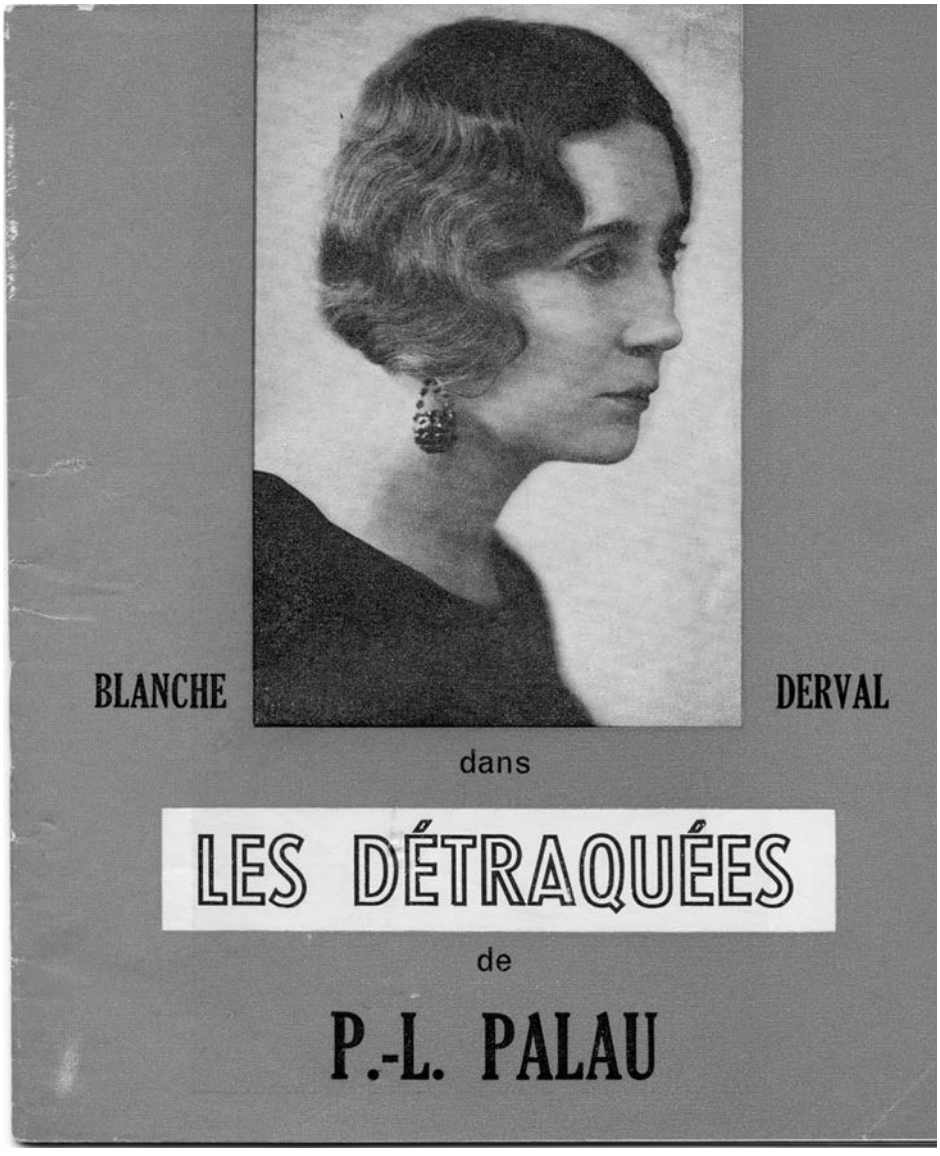

Figure 4.3 P.-L. Palau, *Les Détraquées* – insert in *Le Surréalisme, même* no. 1 (October 1956)

neurological centre of the Hôpital de la Pitié, when Babinski predicted for him – as Breton later recalled with some amusement – 'un grand avenir médical!'[35] In a sense, given Breton's contribution to the field of the mind, Babinski was not entirely wrong and it is undeniable that his medical training decisively influenced many areas of Breton's thought. Breton's library also contained inscribed copies of Babinski's writings, so we can be sure he was familiar with his work and seems to have remembered him with some affection.

Babinski had studied under Charcot at the Salpêtrière during the era when hysteria still dominated the field and he figures prominently in André Brouillet's tableau *Une leçon clinique à la Salpêtrière* (1887), in which Charcot's star performer, Blanche Wittmann, collapses into his waiting arms. The image is characterised by Georges Didi-Huberman in terms of the 'psychiatric theatricality of the Salpêtrière', a 'hypnotic theater' of 'repetitions, rehearsals, staging'.[36] Charcot himself rehearsed the stages of the hysterical attack that he sought in his female performers, adds Didi-Huberman, 'by throwing himself into a pantomime of symptoms before his audience'.[37] This intense theatricality is underscored by the inclusion among the watching audience of the writer and dramatist Jules Claretie, director of the Comédie française and author of *Les Amours d'un interne* (1881). Claretie believed that hysterics manifested a form of 'natural' dramatics that could be deployed in the theatre, and his involvement here anticipates Grand Guignol's resort to authentic psychiatric themes and the deployment of actual medical case histories as theatrical spectacle.[38] According to Jean-Marie Pradier, 'Charcot exercised an enormous influence upon literature and theatre', citing the example of writers including Alphonse and Léon Daudet, Zola and Huysmans.[39] Apart from theatre, Babinski was also fascinated by the paranormal, telepathy and mediums – the 'gothic' underside of early modern science – and like a number of other eminent French scientists carried out scientific 'tests' with the celebrated Italian medium Eusapia Paladino, as well as researching the mental transfer of images over a distance using telepathy.[40] The performances of female mediums such as Eva C. in many ways replicated those of hysterics, with a very similar power structure and erotic sub-text, such that the séance room could be viewed as one of the privileged locations to which hysteria migrated as its medical status was discredited during the 1890s and the early twentieth century.

As a medical student, Breton would therefore have been familiar with this continuation of Charcot's theatrics into his own era, through Babinski's own weekly demonstrations of patients, and it's therefore unsurprising that Surrealism should have celebrated the 'Cinquantenaire de l'hystérie' in 1928, accompanied by photographs drawn from Charcot's *Iconographie de la Salpêtrière* of the eroticised performance of the hysterical crisis. Amongst some playful teasing of Freud and Babinski, Breton and Aragon remind Freud of the rootedness of his method in Charcot's teaching and of the erotic underside of hysteria. And they conclude with a new definition of hysteria as a system of 'reciprocal seduction' that aims to subvert the subject's moral compass – no longer a pathology, but rather 'a supreme medium of expression'.[41] While on one level a mocking 'celebration' of an outmoded and now somewhat absurd diagnosis, if read in conjunction with *Nadja*'s pointed critique of French psychiatry and its power to incarcerate, the essay constitutes a concerted attack upon a central pillar of the state's claims over medical knowledge and its power to deprive the subject of her liberty. Published in the same issue of *La Révolution surréaliste* as an extract from *Nadja*, along with transcripts of the first two surrealist discussions of sexuality, it becomes clear that there were important links for surrealism, between these various investigations of sexuality and insanity, and their relationship with the role of the state in policing sexuality and the mind.[42] Of central concern here is the issue of liberty, as explicitly articulated in the first 'Manifesto': 'The mere word freedom is the only one that still excites me'.[43] And which by the time of the 'Second Manifesto' of 1930 is posed in terms of a more explicitly political agenda: 'I believe it is impossible for us to avoid most urgently posing the question of the

social regime under which we live, I mean the acceptance or non-acceptance of this regime'.[44]

In *Les Détraquées* it is the local doctor who assumes the role of detective, recognising in Solange a patient that he had encountered in an asylum and informing the police superintendent that she is 'an unhinged erotomaniac, a morphine addict . . . with perversion of the sexual instincts'.[45] And he advises the hapless superintendent that he should consult the 'traité de psychologie' of Dumas, then the very latest summation of psychology in France. We know, of course, that he *won't* consult that weighty tome, but if he *had* he would have discovered there Dumas's description of 'periodic psychosis', a manic-depressive condition in which periods of lucidity alternate with outbreaks of psychotic illness.[46] In the play it is clearly the manic side of the equation that is to the fore, and which Dumas characterises in terms of cynicism, evil-mindedness, deception and debauchery. 'The erotic tendencies', writes Dumas, 'are generally over-inflamed, and the patient, man or woman, abandons himself to them without restraint'.[47] Dumas particularly associates this hyper-eroticism with bourgeois women, adding that: 'Contrary to the normal habits of their *mileu* . . . one sees women of the best education suddenly launched into the most extreme erotic debauchery'.[48] This is precisely the case with the women in *Les Détraquées*, who move in elevated bourgeois circles, and whose mounting passion is expressed via the metaphor of the oppressive summer heat and a gathering storm – very much a cliché of the genre – and which finds its release in the murder of the child. But when the policeman tries to link perversion with sexual 'inversion' i.e. homosexuality, the doctor objects, arguing that sexual inversion is still a form of love, whereas sexual perversion authorises the most 'abominable acts', from 'flagellation' and 'bloody wounds', right through to the murder of children, in pursuit of the 'supreme pleasure'.[49] It is an issue to which we return in chapter seven in the yet more bloody case of Erzsébet Báthory.

Alfred Binet, fetishism and Grand Guignol

The mystery concerning the child's death is deepened in the play by characters pricking themselves on what turn out to be pen nibs scattered around the principal's desk – an enigma finally resolved by our detective-doctor, who explains why the child, although strangled, is covered in blood, declaring it to be a case of *fetishism*. This reference to fetishism points us directly to the work of Babinski's colleague and close contemporary Alfred Binet, a pioneer in clinical psychology whose work extended widely across psychology and educational reform. Like Babinski, who he knew from their time together at the elite Louis-le-Grand lycée, Binet trained under Charcot at the Salpêtrière during the early 1880s, initially supporting Charcot in his dispute with the Nancy School, but by 1890 had abandoned Charcot's views on hysteria – though he too retained Charcot's emphasis upon visual analysis: 'Our human science', wrote Binet, 'is entirely visual'.[50]

Binet first deployed the term in 1877 and his 1888 paper 'Le fétichisme dans l'amour' was produced during what Robert Nye has called the 'classificational golden age of contemporary sexology', of the 1880s and 1890s.[51] Laurent Fedi argues that Binet introduces a new element into the ongoing discussion on the medicalisation of sex and that his work on fetishism marks a major rupture in that debate.[52] As Pradier observes, the pioneering work in sexology of researchers such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Henry Havelock Ellis introduced terms such as 'sadism' and 'masochism'

into public discourse, generating wide interest that dramatists and writers responded to.[53] In his paper Binet deploys the term 'fetishism' in relation to psychology, making the striking claim that 'everyone is more or less a fetishist in love' and hence that fetishism *qua* sexual perversion is simply a matter of degree.[54] Fetishism for Binet is close to *obsession* – an obsessive focus on a single body part, an attribute or object: the hand, lips, hair, a certain smell. But Binet also conceives 'sexual inversion' as simply another form of fetishism – as a form of 'perversion' that only assumes this particular form as a result of some fortuitous incident: so he suggests, somewhat implausibly, that 'a man who now loves only men might, in a different milieu, have loved only night bonnets or the nails of ankle-boots'.[55] Binet also strongly links fetishism to *decadence*, where diminished sensory experience prompts a turn to alternative and increasingly more intense forms of excitation, precisely as in *Les Détraquées*, where the two women – both, as Mme. Challens declares, '*grandes dames*' – turn to drugs and extreme forms of sexual experience. In structural terms, Binet presents fetishism as an extra perversion to be added to the four proposed by Ball in 1887: 'Sanguinaires', 'Nécrophiles', 'Pédérastes' and 'Invertis'.[56] What's surely extraordinary about *Les Détraquées*, is that it somehow contrives to embrace all five sexual perversions – though, as we've noted, in the play Babinski has the doctor reject the idea of 'inversion' as a form of perversion. In this he's rather more liberal than Breton, who, in one of the Surrealists' discussions of sex held in January of 1928, while proclaiming an enthusiasm for *all* perversions, singles out homosexuality as the only 'perversion' that he condemns.[57] Binet concludes his paper on fetishism with a striking theatrical metaphor: 'Perverted love', he declares, 'is a theatrical presentation whereby a merely accessory actor advances toward the footlights and takes the major role'.[58] And I want to pursue this idea further in relation to Binet's own theatrical work.

Like Babinski, Binet was an avid theatregoer who first became actively involved in theatre as a result of an enquiry into the work of creative writers that he conducted in 1893, when he got to know the writer and actor André de Lorde, self-styled 'Prince of Terror'. The two men collaborated on at least five plays, including *L'Obsession* (1905), *L'Homme mystérieux* (1910), and possibly *Un crime dans une maison de fous* (first staged in 1925). All are works that deal with psychopathological themes – obsession, pathological violence and murder – and engage with social debates of the period, such as the definition and detection of insanity, powers of internment, or the treatment of the insane. According to Theta Wolf, Binet studied patients at the Bicêtre asylum who manifested conditions similar to those deployed in his plays, and de Lorde also writes evocatively, rather in the oneiric style of Le Fanu, of spending several days at an asylum in the Ardennes with Binet, observing pathological cases, such that there is strong evidence that the dramas – as with both *Nadja* and *Les Détraquées* – are rooted in actual case histories.[59] It's also claimed by Bernard Andrieu that Binet in effect used theatre to objectify, to give *visual* form, to psychopathology, which again suggests the enduring legacy of Charcot's semiotic method despite the discrediting of his theory of hysteria during the 1890s.[60]

Binet and de Lorde also produced a play under the title *Une leçon à la Salpêtrière* (1908), directly referencing Brouillet's painting and clearly relating to Binet's experience while studying under Charcot. In that play, a young hysteric whose arm is paralyzed during a botched experiment using electricity has her revenge by flinging vitriol in the face of the arrogant young intern who was responsible.[61] Such experiments recall the work of Duchenne de Boulogne using electrical currents directed via

electrodes in order to stimulate facial muscles and hence simulate a whole range of facial expressions, recorded in photographs and published in Duchenne's *Mécanisme de la physiognomie humaine* (1862).[62] These often bizarre images of an elderly man, grinning idiotically, squinting and contorting his features as Duchenne applies the electrodes to his face, include some quite disturbing images suggestive of the torture victim, firmly situating this work at the 'gothic' end of the scientific spectrum.

Binet therefore brought to the stage the authenticity of his own clinical experience, though according to several accounts, was obliged to conceal his association with such a dubious form of theatre and would appear at rehearsals wearing a false beard. Pierron also notes claims of Babinski assuming such a disguise, strikingly exposing the way in which these men led double lives – and we could add to this the case of de Lorde, who held a respectable daytime role as conservator at the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal.[63] De Lorde himself, in a short essay 'Les fous en liberté', describes an everyday street scene in which a crowd gathers, gaping and laughing around a wildly gesticulating man, until a gendarme eventually arrives, 'paternally' intervening and allowing the 'oddball' to freely leave – but the next day you may read, says de Lorde, that he went home and murdered someone.[64] This same 'blindness' of the law is echoed in Buñuel's *Un chien andalou*, where again an officious gendarme intervenes in such a street incident where a disturbed woman poking a severed hand is surrounded by a crowd – he salutes her, clears the crowd and sends her on her way, upon which she immediately commits suicide under a speeding car.

This problematic of the detection of mental aberration is pursued in Binet and de Lorde's *L'Obsession* (1905), where a concerned man consults a celebrated alienist, telling him of his brother's obsession with murder, but the doctor fails to realise that the man is talking about his *own* obsession, allowing him to return home where he murders his son.[65] With *L'Homme mystérieux* (1910) Binet and de Lorde returned to the same theme of insanity concealed behind a façade of normality, pitting the magistrate, presented in the play as inclined to be taken in by the external façade and grant liberty, against the more perceptive doctor, who penetrates that deceptive screen, detecting the underlying pathology.[66] In the play a businessman is driven insane by overwork and incarcerated, but subsequently, with the business facing bankruptcy without him, relatives are able to convince a magistrate of his sanity despite the doctor's objections; he is released and immediately murders his family. De Lorde based the play on an actual case history related to him by his doctor father and the psychiatrist Gilbert Ballet has described the piece as 'a striking picture of truth'.[67] For Binet the line between sanity and madness was often a very fine one and he observed that: 'At bottom, almost always, we have in us this little grain of sand that could, from one day to the next, stop dead the fine mechanism of reason'.[68] Binet thus claims special expertise for psychology in being able to penetrate the simulation of normality presented by 'l'homme mystérieux', to detect the insanity lurking within and hence justify the profession's power to incarcerate the insane.

These plays therefore directly relate to debates in France around non-normative sexuality (whether in terms of sexual practices or new sexual identities such as that of the *garçonne*), the defining of insanity and the powers of incarceration accorded to doctors under the law of 1838, which provided for either voluntary or compulsory internment. For surrealism they engage too with the subject's conception of 'reality' and with the movement's absolute championing of the concept of liberty – 'liberty', as Breton affirms in the first Manifesto, 'the only word that still elates me' – as against

the powers of the state.[69] And it's precisely with regard to those powers that surrealism first directly confronted French psychiatry in 1925, in the 'Lettre au Médecins-Chefs des Asiles de Fous', now credited to Robert Desnos. In that open letter, psychiatry is ridiculed for its 'pretentious pathogeneses', the asylums attacked as 'dreadful gaols' and the profession charged with 'arbitrary internments'.[70] Breton's attack on the profession in 1928 thus builds on that prior critique, but now within the charged context – which we now consider – of the intense theoretical debates then being fought out within French psychiatry.

Breton and Clérambault: the dispute with French psychiatry

'I was told several months ago', Breton writes, 'that Nadja was mad', and that 'she had had to be committed to the Vaucluse sanitarium'.[71] Ridiculing the pretensions of psychiatry, Breton identifies in particular the figure of Professor Claude at Saint-Anne, 'with his dunce's forehead', reproducing Claude's official portrait and slyly following this with his own portrait by the same Manuel studio, in a kind of pastiche of institutional portraiture. Henri Manuel also served as official photographers to the French government and it is revealing that, just after *Nadja* was published they undertook a major project in French prisons and institutions for the Ministry of Justice, aimed at demonstrating how inmates were engaged in useful work and education.[72] Against such ameliorative claims, Breton instead asserts of sanatoria that 'madmen are *made* there, just as criminals are made in our reformatories' and that 'all confinements are arbitrary'. Breton goes on to accuse the psychiatric profession of depriving people of their liberty 'for a peccadillo', claiming psychiatry to be in a 'retarded infancy', where even the most conscientious psychiatrist is unconcerned with cures.[73] And he adds the incendiary claim that, were he to be confined, 'I would take advantage of any lapses in my madness to murder anyone, preferably a doctor, who came near me'.[74] This provocation was quickly seized on by the French psychiatric profession, thus opening a bad-tempered exchange between Breton and French psychiatry.

The ensuing debate brought Breton into direct conflict with the imposing figure of the neuro-psychiatrist Gaëtan Gatian de Clérambault, characterised by his biographer Alain Rubens as, at that time, the 'leading psychiatrist in France' and last of the great classical 'alienists'.[75] An extreme patriot and war veteran – a man who had volunteered for the front while in his forties – Clérambault attacked the Surrealists as 'extremists' who condemn all traditions.[76] In an exchange reported in the minutes of the Société Médico-Psychologique, Pierre Janet too, in a flurry of pathologised rhetoric, condemned the works of the Surrealists as the 'confessions of obsessives and dubious types', while Clérambault dismissed them as 'extremists' and as 'Methodists' who simply rely on a particular technique to produce their works.[77] For Clérambault the Surrealists were in the tradition of the 'Gongoristes', recalling for him the obscure use of language of the Spanish baroque poet Luis de Góngora, a linguistic style sometimes associated with Jacques Lacan, who in 1928 became an intern under Clérambault at the Infirmerie Spéciale – a relationship that was to sour when Clérambault publicly accused Lacan of plagiarising his work in a piece intended as an 'homage' to his 'seul maître'.[78]

Clérambault, like Babinski and Binet, had again been trained in the French semiotic tradition and continued Charcot's technique of close observation of clinical cases, including the public examination of patients before an audience. Serge Tisseron observes

the centrality of the *image* in Clérambault's work, as well as the intensely theatrical nature of his approach.[79] French postwar psychiatry was broadly divided between two opposing camps: those claiming that delirium had a *psychic* origin, led by Claude, while opposed to them were the advocates of an *organic* source, headed by Clérambault. Following a stream of papers on 'l'automatisme mental' between 1909 and 1920, Clérambault's reputation was then in the ascendant, with his 'Syndrome S' having become, as Rubens notes, the lynch-pin of modern French psychiatry.[80] The debate was decided at the 1927 Congress of French Alienists and Neurologists, held at Blois, where the organicists prevailed, such that Breton's intervention on questions of internment and treatment in *Nadja*, came at a crucial time.[81] The significance of this dispute for Breton is underscored by his making it the leading issue of the 'Second Manifesto', where he reproduces relevant documents from the *Journal de l'Aliénation Mentale*.[82] There, Paul Abély reports of a book passed to him by 'an especially dangerous and demanding madman', which was 'being freely passed from hand to hand among the inmates' – in fact Breton's *Nadja*, with its rhetorical threat against doctors – which Abély poses as 'tantamount to inciting to murder'. In the following exchange between Janet and Clérambault, they attack the surrealists as 'obsessives', urging the protection of the authorities against such a 'campaign of slander'.[83] Frequently either overlooked as simply a preamble to the 'Second Manifesto' or overshadowed by the internecine bloodletting that dominates much of the Manifesto proper, this dispute points to issues central to Breton's thinking in that document, particularly concerning the problem of the mind and the status of insanity, the attitude of 'revolt' and the central question of liberty.

Renowned for his penetrating 'clinical gaze' and incisive reports, Clérambault was employed over almost three decades (1905–34) by the Infirmerie spéciale of the Préfecture de Police in Paris in examining and certifying those brought in as insane, and was therefore an enormously powerful, as well as highly symbolic, gatekeeper between the worlds of sanity and insanity. Working in the gothic pointed tower of the Palais de Justice, Clérambault's days were spent examining and certifying a sad stream of cases of addiction, poverty, criminality, or mere aberrant behaviour – cases in fact like that of Nadja, hauled in by the police after, as Breton describes it, indulging in 'eccentricities . . . in the hallways of her hotel', taken into the Infirmerie spéciale and certified at Saint-Anne.[84] It would be difficult to find a more symbolically charged site as expression of the state's power to incarcerate, the most iconic element of which is the Conciergerie, essentially a prison strongly associated with the *ancien régime*. The site retains three pointed towers from the medieval era, one of which, the 'Bonbec Tower', had contained a torture chamber and is also closely linked with the Reign of Terror, having housed the Revolutionary Council from which thousands were led to their deaths on the scaffold.[85] The Conciergerie is also linked to the gothic novel via the purple prose of Mercier de Compiègne's *Les nuits de la Conciergerie, rêveries mélancoliques* (1795), purportedly composed 'in haste' amongst the victims of the Revolution, weeping 'tears of blood' in the depths of the 'shadowy den in which tyranny had buried us'.[86]

Breton's clash with Clérambault and Janet over the determination of insanity, together with its sanctioning and policing by the state, thus cut to the heart of the surrealist commitment to 'liberty', where the contested border between sanity and insanity constituted a crucial battlefront in the surrealist mission to downgrade the role of reason and to reconfigure reality. That Breton prefaces the 'Second Manifesto'

with this dispute – posed as one of 'the old antinomies hypocritically intended to prevent any unusual ferment on the part of man' – evidences the theoretical importance it held and again demonstrates the crucial role played by gothic themes and motifs at crucial points in the development of the movement.[87] Clérambault again crosses Breton's path in the Rue du Paradis, which I consider next, returning us to the figure of the *voyante* and leading into an analysis of the central role played by fetishism in Clérambault's thought.

The *voyante* of the rue de Paradis and the 'passion for stuffs'

> There is a surrealist light: at the time of day when towns burst into flame it is the light that falls on the salmon pink display of silk stockings . . .
>
> Louis Aragon, 'A Wave of Dreams'[88]

During the course of his random walks around Paris as related in his *Communicating Vessels*, Breton describes 'wandering along about six o'clock in the Rue du Paradis', when he is suddenly struck 'some strange object' in a window display that causes him to double back.[89] In what turned out to be a hosiery store, Breton discovered a curious arrangement of silkworm cocoons, together with a mannequin's leg and stockings – objects that, he 'probably found seductive unconsciously for a few seconds', before developing a fantasy of those items being arranged in a small glass-fronted bookcase 'in the Gothic style'.[90] Breton's chance wanderings in such psychically and historically charged locations – as we saw with *Nadja* – lay the foundations of what is later developed as the psychogeography of the Situationists and contemporary writers such as Ian Sinclair. During the 1890s the street had been the site where Henriette Couédon, 'la voyante de la rue de Paradis', had held court as the most celebrated medium of her time, receiving up to five hundred clients in a day.[91] When in a state of trance Couédon would prophesy in a rapid, rhymed, automatic flow, believing that she was being 'spoken through' by the Angel Gabriel. Her prophesies – 'the Seine will flow with blood, fires will destroy the Hôtel de Ville, the Bourse and the Opéra' – strikingly anticipate the type of sensationalist plot found in *Fantômas* and clearly tap into the same strand of populist fantasy that perhaps serves to express some of the anxieties and grievances of modern urban existence.[92] Rubens observes how the alienist 'dispossesses' the subject of her speech, transforming it into symptomatic forms such as 'logorrhoea', where all such 'symptoms' are evaluated negatively, as 'lacks', 'absences', etc.[93] And he cites Desnos's 'Lettre aux Medecins-Chefs', in which he complains that the alienist simply doesn't listen to his patients, treating their constructions as no more than a 'salad of words'.[94]

Couédon was the subject of a report made in 1896 by the physician and occultist 'Papus', a pupil of Saint-Yves d'Alveydre who we consider in a later chapter in relation to Breton's involvement with magic.[95] Papus notes that an ecclesiastical commission had investigated the phenomenon, concluding that, while certainly not inspired by the Angel Gabriel, the girl may have been inspired by the devil.[96] Charles Richet, too, had investigated, concluding of Couédon's case that 'her delirium is therefore of the domain of fancy, and perhaps of mental medicine'.[97] For Papus, though, Couédon presents a 'second state' – a state of possession by some dead person – in which she manifests authentic gifts of prophesy, accurately predicting, for example, the downfall of a minister a fortnight before the event occurred.[98]

A quarter century later, living as a recluse and suffering delirium and megalomania, Couédon was certified – by Clérambault himself – as a case of 'débilité mentale', becoming the subject of his paper 'La fin d'une voyante' (1920).[99] Clérambault's diagnosis posed Couédon as a case of 'automatisme mental' – essentially a hysteric – suffering a long period of 'Spiritist Delirium' accompanied by psychic hallucinations and sexual preoccupations resulting from her frustrated marriage plans.[100] As Martine Girard explains, Clérambault's 'automatisme mental' designated purely psychic (as opposed to sensorial), pre-verbal phenomena – thoughts, obsessions – which erupt automatically into the consciousness of the subject, creating a split in the self and providing the first signs of psychosis.[101] For Clérambault this constituted the 'kernel of the psychoses', the 'basal syndrome', and was rooted, he insisted, in some organic origin.[102] The actual symptoms of the disease – whether signs of possession, hypochondria, erotomania, etc. – were for him simply the secondary 'superstructure', all simply different forms of expression of the same basal syndrome.[103] Abandoned by the Church, dropped by the fashionable set, and having renounced marriage in favour of her career as a seer, Couédon came to consider that her life had been wasted. Consumed by bitterness, she suffered chronic dissociation and increasing mental deterioration, ultimately finding herself the object of one of Clérambault's celebrated clinical analyses.

For Clérambault there were strong links between Spiritist deliria and psychosis, traceable back to some organic root that he explained in terms of his 'automatisme mental' and later as the aforementioned 'Syndrome S' – a nosological quagmire that was challenged by Claude and others. Whereas the alternative model of automatism within French psychiatry, as with Janet's 'automatisme psychologique', treated such phenomena more broadly in terms of unconscious mental activity, Clérambault's 'automatisme mental' was criticised in debates of the period as both morbid and mechanical.[104] Jean Garrabé, though, argues that Clérambault wasn't simply a crude mechanist, but that he had dropped the term 'automatism' by 1927, instead developing his 'Syndrome S', and that his model can be read as one of 'ideogenesis', i.e. ideational rather than organic.[105] Nonetheless, Clérambault remains strongly associated with the organicist, materialist camp of French psychiatry.

Clérambault himself, though, was a rather more complex character than his daytime occupation and authoritarian reputation might suggest. Over many years he maintained an obsession with fabrics, first made evident in a 1908 paper 'Passion érotique des étoffes chez la femme', where he analyses the cases of women who stole fabrics – usually silks – for sexual gratification.[106] While on one level this echoes the world of Zola's *Au bonheur des Dames* (1883), modelled on the *Bon Marché* department store, with its orgiastic descriptions of drapery halls ravaged by crazed *bourgeoises* during the sales, Clérambault's clients were detainees suffering mental problems rooted in miserable relationships and addictions. Although he treats these cases as 'sexual perversions', Clérambault is careful to distinguish his patients from fetishists – fetishism, for him, is an exclusively male phenomenon accompanied by an elaborate fantasy life, whereas his own case studies derived their pleasure directly from the materials themselves.[107] And he in fact defends male fetishism, describing it as a sexual perversion that nonetheless remains 'an homage to the opposite sex'.[108] Fetishism was also very much a concern of Clérambault's department, where Paul Garnier, a predecessor as head physician of the Infirmerie spéciale, had published his *Les Fétichistes, pervertis et invertis sexuels* in 1896.[109]

Building on recent research into the sexual aberrations, Garnier argues for understanding of those 'unfortunates' suffering a malformation of the psycho-sexual instincts, though he insists that the law must be severe with vice and 'pederastic prostitution'.[110] For Garnier, fetishism can be divided into two broad types: 'heterosexual', where the cult object remains '*essentially feminine*', or alternatively, the 'homosexual fetishism of the invert', characterised in terms of 'morbid love'.[111] Garnier's essential concern consists in separating 'vice' from 'illness' and his analysis very much reflects thinking of the time on the sexual perversions, rooting fetishism in a 'morbid heredity'.[112]

Fetishists, Clérambault writes, 'indulge in veritable debauches of the imagination in which their favoured object figures', celebrated in writings and in drawings.[113] And, we might add, in *photographs*. Seriously wounded during the war, while convalescing in Morocco between 1917–20 Clérambault made a haunting series of portraits of the draped figure (Figure 4.4), and on his death in 1934 left behind around five hundred such photographs, along with a collection of sumptuous fabrics. Clérambault's photographs, in the intense theatricality through which the obsession is staged, could be compared with Binet and Babinski's deployment of Grand Guignol, insofar as all three men are using cultural media in order to give *visual* form to psychopathological concepts. In these spectral images the body of the subject is entirely effaced in favour of the highly sculptural arrangement of the fetishised fabric; and many of the images are also *sequential*, suggestive of a minimal narrative or fantasy – a small performance created for the eye of the camera.

Breton resumes his attack on French psychiatry in a 1930 essay, 'La Médecine mentale devant le surréalisme', ridiculing 'the staggering pretension' of Dr. de Clérambault in seeking the protection of the state for psychiatrists against critics like the Surrealists and against the dangers posed by their patients.[114] In a directly *ad hominem* assault on Clérambault, Breton claims it surprising 'that a conscience of that calibre, that a mind of that quality, hadn't found the means to put itself entirely at the disposition of the police and of bourgeois justice', damning any doctor who collaborates with the judicial system in the capacity of 'expert' as being either 'a cretin or a villain'. Condemning such functionaries as 'instruments of social repression', Breton recalls the abuse of alienists' medical reports during the war, observing that the situation was no better since then under civil law.[115] And he detects in recent mental medicine a tendency to denounce as 'pathological' all that fell outside the 'pure and simple adaptation to the external conditions of life', embracing everything from poetry and art, to all-consuming love and revolutionary action. Breton concludes in sounding the alarm 'against the growing abuse of power' of those viewed 'less as doctors than as gaolers', branding them as 'purveyors of prisons and scaffolds'.[116] Lurking in his pointed tower, Clérambault therefore embodied for Surrealism the state's claim to determine the understanding of 'reality' and to sanction any deviation from that understanding, underpinned by its monopoly over the resort to violence and the power to deprive the subject of her liberty.[117]

The scandal that suddenly blew up in the wake of Clérambault's suicide, when in 1934 he sat down in front of his mirror and put a bullet through his head, saw the publication of some rather unsavoury speculation about his private life, including intimations of homosexuality and sexual perversion. This both damaged Clérambault's posthumous reputation as well as threatening to undermine the post he long held as official gatekeeper at the door of the asylum, and appears to have prompted the

Figure 4.4 Gaëtan Gatian de Clérambault, *Femme drapeé*, ca. 1917–20

curious, somewhat hagiographic biography produced in 1942 by Elizabeth Renard as her medical thesis. Renard counters the implication of homosexuality by producing what is surely an absurdly improbable anecdote of Clérambault in Morocco, enjoying a sexual dalliance with two sisters who are so impressed with his performance that they also bring along a cousin.[118] In fact, all of the evidence suggests a decidedly austere, authoritarian figure – as Renard herself observes, Clérambault was a very 'difficult' character who would refer to himself as 'the old paranoiac' and who had a 'horror of marriage'.[119] Renard's account is dismissed – surely rightly – by Rubens, as a 'risible portrait' of Clérambault, and who instead detects there 'a real hatred of women', detailing the alienist's abuse of his patients.[120] Rubens cites a revealing interview with Paul Sivadon, who joined Clérambault as a young intern in 1930, and who refers to him as 'an impossible personality who's perhaps a pervert', adding that there was with him 'a sadistic element that one frequently encountered in the homosexuality clinic'.[121] Wilhelm Stekel, writing in 1930, again reflects the attitudes of the period when he argues that all fetishism is 'a retreat from the female, flight from woman', claiming that 'homosexual fetishism' is 'the end in every case of fetishism'.[122] Stekel writes that the 'true fetish lover dispenses with the sexual partner and gratifies himself with a symbol', a symbol that might assume the form of an object or a piece of clothing, characterising such fetishism in terms of 'obsessional neurosis'.[123] Articles of clothing are particularly privileged as fetish objects by Stekel, who argues that: 'the draping permits the phantasy to increase the voluptuousness of the draped object many fold'.[124] Moreover, Stekel notes an element of repetition compulsion in all of this, observing that: 'There is in all fetishism a tendency to the formation of series and a sort of harem'.[125] Clearly a complex personality, Clérambault's health and eyesight had deteriorated considerably during his final months, resulting in a severe depression that found its focus in the delusion that he had defrauded someone in the purchase of a painting.

Clérambault's suicide created a sensation in the newspapers, touching a popular nerve of resentment against those who 'arbitrarily' deprived people of their liberty, and seeming to provide an ironic revenge in the idea of the alienist who himself goes mad. The entire affair, with its mix of insanity, sexual perversion and suicide was at the time perceived in terms of the purely *grand-guignolesque*, with one report likening it to 'an account in the manner of Edgar Poe, three Acts for the Grand-Guignol', thus returning the genre to its origins in the *faits divers* columns of the newspapers.[126] In its wake the press resurrected the 'Daltour Affair', in which a man reported to the police by his landlord as 'a dangerous madman' had been handed over to Clérambault for observation at the Infirmerie spéciale. A friend who visited him there found him 'locked up in a narrow and revolting cell, situated over a water closet' and berated Clérambault as a 'torturer doctor'.[127] News of Clérambault's suicide was suppressed by the police over the weekend, but following a radio announcement reporters began to turn up at door of his house, launching what Renard characterises as a 'witch hunt' against the dead alienist. Clérambault had a collection of wooden lay figures on which he used to study the hanging of his draperies, and these, together with other evidence of eccentricity, provided the papers with all they required. Press reports speculated on Clérambault's 'singular oddities', particularly his 'mania for sumptuous materials' and the 'strange collection of wax mannequins', as well as on details of his private life.[128] There were in fact no 'wax mannequins', but their invention suggests an implied link with Hoffmann's tale 'The Sandman', in which the student Nathaniel is driven insane

through his obsession with the mannequin Olympia and while in a frenzy commits suicide. The bulk of the reporting, as Renard and Rubens observe, was sensationalist and rather prurient: *L'Humanité*, for example, exclaimed that Clérambault gave himself over to 'all the frenzies of a solitary and despairing Eros'.[129] Clérambault might have appreciated the irony of the report of his suicide appearing on the front cover of *Excelsior* alongside the equally sensational case of Matuska, the medium and derailer of trains, a mass-murderer who was then appearing in a Budapest court facing the death penalty. Matuska's defence maintained that he had acted while under hypnosis and the case centred on the issue of whether his apparent insanity was genuine, or whether he was in fact a 'disimulateur' – precisely the question to which Clérambault had devoted his entire professional life.[130]

L'Humanité observed that it was not unusual for families to take along members that they wanted rid of to the Infirmerie spéciale, to have them interned, while *L'Ami du people* claimed that 'an unbalanced person, if not a madman' had for years been examining and certifying people, where his signature alone sufficed to deprive someone of their liberty indefinitely.[131] The newspaper demanded 'how many "suspects", during the last fourteen years, have passed through the hands of the insane alienist' and called for an enquiry into all the cases certified by Clérambault over the past decade – the very last thing the authorities would have contemplated.[132] Such exposure of the arbitrary dimension of the internment process, already berated by Breton, together with the damage incurred to both French psychiatry and to Clérambault's own reputation, as well as to the pivotal role he held, clearly set alarm bells ringing within the profession. This resulted in a press campaign to promote the new head of the Infirmerie spéciale as a dynamic 'new broom' (he was in fact already Clérambault's assistant), and to Renard's rather clumsy effort to restore Clérambault's tarnished reputation.[133] For Rubens the profession opted to shore up Clérambault's position as a bulwark against the spread of Freudian psychoanalysis and in opposition to a model of psychology oriented towards language and the ideas of the patient.[134]

The day following the reports of Clérambault's suicide *Excelsior*'s front page contained a rather similar report in which 'a lunatic visiting his girlfriend interned at Saint-Anne killed her with a bullet in the mouth' – precisely, in fact, how Clérambault had shot himself – after which the killer too attempted to commit suicide with a bullet to the temple.[135] We can't know if the two incidents were in any way related and in many ways it hardly matters, as the circular nature of the process of actuality and its reporting is readily apparent, with the newspapers feeding on daily life, just as life itself replicates the *faits divers*, providing yet more material for the Grand Guignol. While Clérambault's death marked the end of an era – that of the great alienist trained in the classic French tradition – in terms of Breton's quarrel with French psychiatry, little had really changed. This would have been made clear to Breton only a few years later when Artaud too, after being certified as insane in 1937 was brought to Saint-Anne, where he was examined by Lacan, amongst others, as he began the long incarceration that ended only in 1946. And Breton's return to *Les Détraquées* in 1956 surely confirms that the *grand-guignolesque* presentation of the issues raised there – the defining of insanity, the state's power to incarcerate, the determination of reality – remained as pressing concerns for Surrealism into the postwar era.

Notes

1 André Breton, 'Second Manifesto of Surrealism' in Breton (ed.), *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, pp. 130 and 134.
2 See for example Michael Benedikt and George E. Wellworth, *Modern French Theatre: The Avant-Garde, Dada and Surrealism* (New York: Dutton, 1964); J.H. Matthews, *Theatre in Dada and Surrealism* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1974); David G. Zinder, *The Surrealist Connection: An Approach to a Surrealist Aesthetic of Theatre* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1976 and 1980); Annabelle Melzer, *Dada and Surrealist Performance* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).
3 The building has been restored and is currently used as a drama workshop and theatre.
4 Agnès Pierron, *Le Grand Guignol. Le Théâtre des peurs de la Belle Epoque* (Paris: R. Laffont, 1995), p. xi.
5 Pierron, ibid., p. ii; See for example, 'La Désespérée au parapluie' and 'Le Suicidé par persuasion', *La Révolution surréaliste*, no. 1 (December 1924), pp. 13 and 16.
6 Pierron, ibid., p. xxiii.
7 Breton, *Nadja*, p. 141.
8 *Comœdia*, Paris (21 February, 1921), p. 1.
9 See Roger Shattuck, 'The *Nadja* File', *Cahiers Dada/Surréalisme*, no. 1 (1966); Anna Balakian, *André Breton: Magus of Surrealism* (New York: OUP, 1971); Susan Gardner, 'Dora and Nadja: Two Women in the Early Days of Psychoanalysis and Surrealism', *Hecate*, no. 2 (January 1976), pp. 23–40; Marguerite Bonnet in Breton, *OCI*, pp. 1495–565. For an analysis of the use of photographs in *Nadja* see: Ian Walker, *City Gorged With Dreams* (Manchester and New York: MUP, 2002), pp. 48–67; David Bate, *Photography and Surrealism* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004), pp. 88–111.
10 Bonnet, in Breton, *OCI*, p. 1495.
11 Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics and the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 88–118.
12 Breton, *Nadja*, p. 11.
13 Ibid., p. 19.
14 Ibid., p. 39.
15 Ibid., pp. 39–40.
16 Ibid., p. 40.
17 'Opium', press cuttings dated 7 and 9 January 1919 reproduced in *Littérature*, no. 7 (September 1919), in Dawn Ades (ed.), *The Dada Reader: A Critical Anthology* (London: Tate Publishing, 2006), pp. 169–71. Vaché had been discovered dead, naked in bed in a Nantes hotel room, with a group of American soldiers another of whom also died, raising suggestions of homosexuality, which as Michel Carassou observes, Breton pointedly ignored. Carassou claims that one of those alleged to be present, Pierre Lanöe, was known for his homosexual partners – see Carassou, *Jacques Vaché et le groupe de Nantes* (Paris: Place, 1986).
18 See Francis Picabia, *Ecrits*, Vol. I, 1913–1920 (Paris: Pierre Belfond, 1975), pp. 40 and 60.
19 José Pierre (ed.), *Investigating Sex: Surrealist Research 1928–32* (London and New York: Verso, 1992), pp. 60–61.
20 Lautréamont, *Maldoror*, pp. 44–49.
21 P.-L. Palau, *Les Détraquées*, republished in *Le Surréalisme, même*, no. 1 (October 1956), p. 97.
22 Breton, *Nadja*, p. 45.
23 Ibid., p. 49.
24 Palau, 'Postscript', *Les Détraquées*, p. 117.
25 Florence Tamagne suggests a rise in homosexuality and lesbianism as a consequence of the increased homosociality of wartime conditions, the shortage of men in wake of war, etc. There was also wide concern over drug abuse. See Tamagne, *Histoire de l'homosexualité en Europe* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2000).
26 Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism', p. 15.
27 Suleiman, *Subversive Intent*, p. 103.
28 Palau, *Les Détraquées*, p. 99.

29 Breton, *Nadja*, p. 50.
30 Ibid., p. 51.
31 See *André Breton: La Beauté convulsive* (exh. cat.), Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1991, p. 89.
32 Palau, *Les Détraquées*, p. 117.
33 See Jacques Philippon and Jacques Poirier, *Joseph Babinski: A Biography* (New York: OUP, 2009).
34 Palau, *Les Détraquées*, p. 117.
35 Breton, *Nadja*, revised French edition (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), n.1, p. 54.
36 Georges Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière*, trans. Alisa Harz (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2003), p. 244.
37 Ibid., p. 244.
38 Pierron, *Le Grand Guignol*, p. 306.
39 Jean-Marie Pradier, 'La Science ou la passion d'éventrer', *Europe*, nos. 835–36 (Novembre–December, 1998), p. 114.
40 Philippon and Poirier, *Joseph Babinski*, pp. 34–36; Dr. François Bernouard, *Un grand médecin. J. Babinski (1857–1932)* (Paris: Typographie François Bernouard, 1934), n.p.
41 André Breton and Louis Aragon, 'Le Cinquantenaire de l'hystérie', *La Révolution surréaliste*, no. 11 (March 1928), pp. 20–22.
42 See *La Révolution surréaliste*, no. 11 (March 1928).
43 André Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism', in Breton (ed.), *Manifestoes*, p. 4.
44 Breton, 'Second Manifesto of Surrealism', in Breton (ed.), *Manifestoes*, p. 139.
45 Palau, *Les Détraquées*, p. 107.
46 Georges Dumas, *Traité de Psychologie*, Vol. II (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1924), p. 947.
47 Ibid., p. 953.
48 Ibid.
49 Palau, *Les Détraquées*, p. 110.
50 Alfred Binet, *Œuvres complètes*, Vol. 1 (Saint-Pierre-du-Mont: Eurédit, 2001), p. 39.
51 Robert A. Nye, 'The Medical Origins of Sexual Fetishism', in Emily Apter and William Pietz (eds.), *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 13.
52 Laurent Fedi, *Fétichisme, Philosophie, Littérature* (Paris: l'Harmattan, 2002), p. 231.
53 Pradier, 'La Science ou la passion d'éventrer', pp. 115–16.
54 Alfred Binet, 'Le fétichisme dans l'amour', in Binet (ed.), *Études de psychologie expérimentale* (Paris: O. Doin, 1888), p. 3.
55 Ibid., p. 44.
56 Ibid., p. 6.
57 Breton in Pierre (ed.), *Investigating Sex*, p. 28.
58 Binet, cited in Theta H. Wolf, *Alfred Binet* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1973), p. 72.
59 Wolf, ibid., p. 38; André de Lorde, *Au pays de la folie*, in Alfred Binet, *Études de psychologie dramatique*, selected by Agnès Pierron (Geneva: Slatkine reprints, 1998), p. 237.
60 Bernard Andrieu, introduction to Binet, *Œuvres complètes*, p. 90.
61 Alfred Binet and André de Lorde, *Un leçon à la Salpêtrière*, in Pierron, *Le Grand Guignol*.
62 G.-B. Duchenne de Boulogne, *Mécanisme de la physiognomie humaine* (Paris: Jules Renouard, Libraire, 1862).
63 See Pierron, *Le Grand Guignol*.
64 André de Lorde, 'Les fous en liberté', in Alfred Binet (ed.), *Etudes de psychologie dramatique*, texts selected by Agnès Pierron (Geneva: Slatkine reprints, 1998), p. 241.
65 André de Lorde, Alfred Binet and Max Maurey, *L'Obsession* ou *Les deux forces* (1905), in Pierron, *Le Grand Guignol*.
66 André de Lorde and Alfred Binet, *L'Homme mystérieux*, in Binet, *Études de psychologie dramatique*.
67 Gilbert Ballet in André de Lorde, *La Folie au théâtre* (Paris: Fontemoing, 1913), p. viii.
68 Binet, *Études de psychologie dramatique*, p. 234.
69 Breton, *Manifeste du surréalisme*, in Breton, *OCI,* p. 312.

70 Desnos, 'Lettre aux Médecins-Chefs des Asiles de Fous', *La Révolution surréaliste*, no. 3 (15 April 1925), p. 29.
71 Breton, *Nadja*, p. 136.
72 Françoise Denoyelle, 'Le studio Henri Manuel et le ministère de la Justice: une commande non élucidée', *Revue d'histoire de l'enfance 'irrégulière'*, no. 4 (2002), at: http://rhei.revues.org/index56.html (accessed 19 November 2015).
73 Breton, *Nadja*, p. 139.
74 Ibid., pp. 140–41.
75 Alain Rubens, *Le Maître des insensés. Gaëtan Gatian de Clérambault* (Paris: Institut Synthélabo, 1998), p. 224.
76 Breton, 'Second Manifesto', in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, p. 121.
77 'Annales médico-psychologiques', *Journal de l'Aliénation Mentale*, December 1929, in Breton 'Second Manifesto of Surrealism', *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, pp. 119–23.
78 See Rubens, *Le Maître des insensés*, p. 226.
79 Serge Tisseron, *Gaëtan Gatian de Clérambault, psychiatre et photographe* (Paris: Laboratoires Delagrange, 1990), p. 16.
80 Clérambault used the term 'automatisme mental' as a purely pathological concept rooted in an organic source. Janet refers to 'automatisme psychologique' and does engage with the productions of mediums and automatic writing, bringing him somewhat closer to some of the concerns of surrealism. Breton's use of the term 'automatisme psychique' initially owes something to Janet, but clearly diverges radically in the way it is applied to cultural phenomena and in the two men's entirely different conceptions of insanity. See also Gaëtan Gatian de Clérambault, *L'Automatisme mental*, with a preface by Jean Garrabé (Paris: Laboratoires Delagrange, 1992).
81 Pascal Le Maléfan, *Folie et Spiritisme* (Paris: l'Harmattan, 1999), p. 210.
82 'Annales médico-psychologiques', in Breton (ed.), *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, pp. 119–23.
83 Ibid., p. 122.
84 See Pierre Moron, Martine Girard, Henri Maurel and Serge Tisseron, *Clérambault maître de Lacan* (Le Plessis-Robinson: Synthélabo, 1993); Breton, *Nadja*, p. 136 and *OCII*, Notes, p. 1513.
85 See Jean Garrabé's Preface to Gaëtan Gatian de Clérambault, *L'Automatisme mental*, pp. 11–12.
86 C.-F.-X. Mercier de Compiègne, *Les nuits de la Conciergerie, rêveries mélancoliques* (Paris: La Veuve Girouard, 1795), Preface and p. 8.
87 Breton, 'Second Manifesto', *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, p. 123.
88 Louis Aragon, 'A Wave of Dreams', *Papers of Surrealism*, no. 1 (Winter 2003), p. 8, at: www.surrealismcentre.ac.uk/papersofsurrealism/journal1/ (accessed 28 August 2016).
89 Breton, *Communicating Vessels*, p. 98.
90 Ibid.
91 See Catherine Lemaire, preface to Gaëtan Gatian de Clérambault, *La fin d'une voyante* (1920) (Le Plessis-Robinson: Synthélabo, 1997).
92 Clérambault, *La fin d'une voyante*, p. 18.
93 Rubens, *Le Maître des insensés*, p. 216.
94 Ibid.
95 Papus, *Le cas de la voyante de la Rue de Paradis, d'après la tradition et la magie* (Paris, 1896).
96 Ibid., p. 8.
97 Charles Richet cited in Papus, ibid., p. 9.
98 Papus, ibid., p. 20 and p. 31.
99 Clérambault, *La fin d'une voyante*, p. 14.
100 Ibid., p. 14.
101 Martine Girard, 'Gaëtan Gatian de Clérambault' in Moron, Girard, Maurel and Tisseron (eds.), *Clérambault maître de Lacan*, pp. 29–30.
102 Clérambault cited by Girard, ibid., p. 40.
103 Elizabeth Renard, *Le Docteur Gaëtan Gatian de Clérambault. Sa vie et son œuvre (1872–1934)* (Le Plessis-Robinson: Synthélabo, 1992), p. 114.
104 Garrabé, Preface to Clérambault, *L'Automatisme mental*, pp. 26–27.

105 Ibid., p. 27.
106 Gaëtan Gatian de Clérambault, 'Passion érotique des étoffes chez la femme', reproduced in Yolande Papetti, Françoise Valier, Bernard de Fréminville and Serge Tisseron (eds.), *La Passion des étoffes chez un neuro-psychiatre. G.G. de* Clérambault (Paris: C. Corlet, 1980).
107 Clérambault, 'Passion érotique des étoffes chez la femme', ibid., p. 24 and p. 33.
108 Clérambault cited in ibid., p. 9.
109 Paul Garnier, *Les Fétichistes, pervertis et invertis sexuels. Observations médico-légales* (Paris: J.-B. Baillière et fils, 1896).
110 Ibid., p. vi.
111 Ibid., p. 21 and p. 92.
112 Ibid., p. viii.
113 Clérambault cited in 'Passion érotique des étoffes', p. 9.
114 André Breton, 'La Médecine mentale devant le surréalisme', *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, no. 2 (October 1930), pp. 30–31. See Rubens for a more detailed discussion of this article.
115 Ibid., pp. 30–31.
116 Ibid., p. 32.
117 Clérambault's suicide would also have been of immediate concern for a movement that had published the results of its own 'Enquête sur le suicide' in 1925 (*La Révolution surréaliste*, no. 2, pp. 8–15) and which lost many friends (Vaché, Crevel and others) to a similar fate, including Jacques Rigaut who shot himself in 1929 and the poet Jean-Pierre Duprey, who was interned at Saint-Anne shortly before his suicide in 1959.
118 Renard, *Le Docteur Gaëtan Gatian de Clérambault*, p. 56.
119 Ibid., p. 57.
120 Rubens, *Le Maître des insensés*, pp. 267 and 239.
121 Paul Sivadon, cited in Rubens, ibid., p. 238.
122 Dr. Wilhelm Stekel, *Sexual Aberrations: The Phenomena of Fetishism in Relation to Sex* (1930), trans. Dr. S. Parker (New York: Liveright, 1952), pp. 3–4.
123 Ibid., p. 13.
124 Ibid., p. 21.
125 Ibid., p. 33.
126 'Du "Grand Guignol"', *L'Ami du people* (20 November 1934), p. 1.
127 Renard, *Le Docteur Gaëtan Gatian de Clérambault*, p. 82.
128 'Mystérieux suicide du Dr. de Clérambault', *Excelsior* (20 November 1934), p. 3.
129 *L'Humanité*, 20 November 1934, cited in Rubens, *Le Maître des insensés*, p. 284.
130 *Excelsior*, 20 November 1934, p. 1. Sylvestre Matuska stood accused of derailing trains in five European countries, including the Basel-Berlin express in 1931, when 108 people were injured, and the later attack on the Vienna-Budapest express, causing 22 deaths and 14 injuries.
131 *L'Ami du people* (20 November 1934), p. 2.
132 Ibid., p. 2.
133 See Rubens, *Le Maître des insensés*, pp. 284–85. Also see *Excelsior* (12 December 1934), p. 1.
134 Rubens, ibid., p. 285.
135 *Excelsior* (21 November, 1934), p. 1.

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5 Dark angel of surrealism

Artaud, electroshock and black magic

> He was very handsome back then, and when he moved he dragged behind him a gothic landscape pierced throughout by lightning.
>
> André Breton, *Conversations* (1952)

Artaud, occultism and the late work

Antonin Artaud's own life frequently reads as though from a Gothic novel, from his early identification with the romantic figure of the 'accursed outsider', as with the 'Wandering Jew', through to his later wanderings in Mexico and Ireland.[1] We could add to this the melodramatic excess of his acting style, his various addictions, religious and magical obsessions, culminating in his mental breakdown and internment in the asylum at Rodez, where he was subjected to primitive medical experiments.[2] For a short period between his first involvement with the surrealist group in September 1924 until cast out in December 1926 due to his immersion in theatre and disinterest in politics, Artaud seemed to offer a possible alternative path to that of mainstream Bretonian surrealism. While focusing on Artaud's own writings and drawings from the time of his breakdown in 1937, through the long period of incarceration and up to his death in 1948, I want to retain a view of the relation of his central preoccupations – in particular magic, the occult and psychiatry – with surrealism's own concerns. A core concern in those works is that of the body – a corporeal, suffering body – but a body that is also gendered, a neglected aspect of the study of Artaud's work, and where I want to consider what it would mean to think of that bodily dimension in terms of a 'gothic' model of masculinity.

Artaud's project could be considered 'gothic' in terms his core concerns during the mid-1930s, when issues such as incest, purity and cruelty come to dominate his thought, together with a growing obsession with magic, the Cabbala and the Tarot. Linked to this is an increasingly intense struggle waged by Artaud against God and an implacable fate, recalling the theme of Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*, where Manfred fights against the vengeance of the past, or again, the satanic themes of Lewis's *Monk* or Maturin's *Melmoth*, echoed in Artaud's increasing concern with demons, succubae and incubi. I want to focus in particular upon the role of magic in that thought, in part preparing for the discussion of that theme in the work of Breton in the following chapter. Writing, observes Adrian Morfee, is something essentially '*magical*' for Artaud, where stating something is the equivalent to having 'performed' it.[3] It's a form of enactment through which Artaud continually realises himself, while at the same time always failing to fully do so, forming the cornerstone of his Theatre of

Cruelty during the period 1931–35 and leading directly to the Spells and 'gris-gris' that he began to produce in 1937. Morfee sees in the sprawling archive of Artaud's late writings, beginning at Rodez, a return to the themes of the twenties and thirties, in particular the idea that 'neither his body nor his self belongs to him', evolving into the notion that they have been removed by demons, parents, and in particular by God himself.[4]

Between 1945 and 1948, the final few years of his life, Artaud produced a series of remarkable drawings – deeply disturbing images produced in the immediate wake of his long electroshock treatment and towards the end of a long period of incarceration – works which are often read in terms of his reconstructing his shattered body, but which I also want to read in terms of Artaud's own troubled masculinity. Electroshock was at the time an untested and little understood therapy and will be considered here both as a crude new technology – a form of 'gothic medicine' – as well as being linked to a quite specific conception of the mind, a form of 'gothic psychiatry', used coercively to enforce a dominant model of normative reality.

Artaud as gothic outsider: surrealism's lost path

Georges Bataille, recalling his first meeting with Artaud in a brasserie on the rue Pigalle, describes him as 'handsome, dark and emaciated', observing his 'grave silence and terrible edginess': 'He looked like a caged bird of prey with dusty plumage which had been apprehended at the very moment it was about to take flight . . .'.[5] Bataille's description suggests a character from Maturin or Poe, and indeed, in 1927, when he learned of Jean Epstein's intention to produce a film of Poe's 'The Fall of the House of Usher', Artaud canvassed the support of Abel Gance, insisting that:

> I do not make many claims in this world, but I do claim to understand Poe and to be myself a man very much like the Master of Usher. If I don't have this man in my bones, *no one in the world does*. I am his physical and psychological embodiment.[6]

While on one level an actor bidding for a coveted role, Artaud is nonetheless making here a very large identificatory claim upon the character of Roderick Usher, a man who inhabits a rotting gothic pile composed of 'many dark and intricate passages'. Usher's mansion is decked out with 'sombre tapestries' and 'phantasmagoric armorial bearings', subsisting in an atmosphere of 'irredeemable gloom'.[7] Physically, Poe portrays Usher in terms of a 'cadaverousness of complexion', observing the 'ghastly pallor of the skin', while in his character he manifests an 'incoherence' of manner recalling that of 'the lost drunkard, or the irreclaimable eater of opium' – a man who suffers from some unspecified malady, 'a constitutional and a family evil'.[8] Artaud too, throughout his entire life suffered from a nebulous array of illnesses – headaches, bodily pains, anxieties, lassitude – in the wake of a childhood attack of meningitis, exacerbated by his long-term addiction to laudanum. In his early correspondence with Jacques Rivière Artaud complains of: 'A sickness which affects the soul in its most profound reality, and which infects its manifestations. The poison of being. A veritable *paralysis*'.[9] And in a letter to René Allendy, with whom Artaud for a short time underwent a failed attempt at psychoanalysis, he wrote of himself as 'blessed by the gods', but adds that: 'there is something rotten in me, there is a sort of fundamental flaw in my psyche that prevents me from enjoying the things that destiny offers me'.[10]

Artaud also told Gance that: 'I have the plague in the marrow of my nerves and I suffer from it'.[11]

Anna Balakian characterised Artaud as the 'dark angel of surrealism', the one who, as Breton observed, went 'right through the mirror' and whose behaviour frequently alarmed those who encountered him.[12] Robert Desnos, writing of the time when Artaud lived with the actress Génica Athanasiou, notes Artaud's disregard for bodily hygiene as a sign of his growing instability, recalling that 'he would piss at night on the carpets of the hotel room', and describes having watched him gnawing at a Roquefort cheese with long, blackened nails.[13] Artaud himself, Desnos observes, explained such behaviour in terms of his 'contempt for the body' and his 'horror of all flesh'.[14] And we could also add the testimony of Anaïs Nin, for a time close to Artaud, who recalled that: 'I looked at his mouth, with the edges darkened by laudanum, a mouth I did not want to kiss. To be kissed by Artaud was to be drawn towards death, towards insanity . . .'.[15]

Paule Thévenin has suggested that had surrealism not been identified with the person of Breton, then at a certain point in the 1920s it might well have been linked to that of Artaud, citing Artaud's claim in September 1924, when resisting the surrealists' invitation to join them, to be 'far too surrealist for that'.[16] Maxime Alexandre, in a television interview, has said that Artaud 'represented revolt in its pure state', claiming that Artaud 'was perceived by Breton, and therefore by the whole of the group, as incarnating a certain form of surrealism': 'With Artaud it was the face of revolt, the "black angel" side, "I am the dark one, the widower, the unconsoled"'.[17] Artaud assumed control of the short-lived 'Bureau de recherches surréalistes' in January 1925, promoting its activities with some energy, but by April the office was definitively wound up.[18] Artaud's most striking contribution to surrealism is perhaps his brief editorial control of *La Révolution surréaliste*, realised in the third issue where he includes a series of open letters that, in exalted tones, make wild appeals to the heads of asylums, the rectors of the European universities, the Dalai Lama, the Pope and to the Schools of Buddha.[19] Mark Polizzotti goes so far as to suggest that that for many in the group during this period, Artaud 'became the true leader of Surrealism'.[20] The unsigned manifesto that opens that third issue, 'À Table', was also drafted by Artaud, making an appeal to the marvellous, calling for the abandonment of logic and for a reconception of the mind.[21] The manifesto is headed by a photograph of a medieval suit of chain mail on a lay figure, with steel helm and battle-axe, suggesting the metaphor of an imposing, armoured façade concealing a vacant interior, and echoing Artaud's call to 'Leave the caves of being!' – an image that recalls Poe's House of Usher, rotting from the inside.

This brief period of Artaud's ascendancy within surrealism was abruptly cut short by Breton, who, clearly alarmed at the direction in which Artaud threatened to take the movement, re-asserted editorial control of the fourth issue. Michel Surya suggestively observes that Artaud was the 'black, disintegrating side of Breton' and the one who 'showed what the stakes of surrealism should have been had everyone practiced what they preached'.[22] Breton's leading article on assuming control is a call to order, rejecting 'literary' pretensions, slapping down 'small acts of sabotage' and attempting to pin down exactly what is meant by 'surrealist *revolution*'.[23] Breton's article was tellingly headed by an automatic drawing and for Thévenin it was *automatism* that marked the point of clearest divergence between Artaud and surrealism, with Artaud advocating a far more active than receptive approach, and one more in line with his

obsession with *control* over his work and body. On dreams, too, Thévenin sees a sharp divergence: whereas for surrealism dreams are associated with romanticism, the marvellous, etc., for Artaud the dream contains some knowledge of *death* and of some interior truth or inner reality of the subject.[24] We might take the example of an incestuous dream reported by Artaud in *La Révolution surréaliste*, where he relates how, in the costume of monks he and some friends had hunted down a group of women, including his sister, and that: 'We had them on the tables, on the corner of the chairs, on the stairs'.[25] Artaud's mother then arrived in the costume of an abbess and Artaud writes that they had worn the long robes 'to conceal our sin', again pointing to the theme of incest that was to haunt his work.[26] As Marguerite Bonnet observes, the gap between Breton and Artaud was more of an *existential* than an ideological order, citing Artaud's assertion thrown down in a letter: 'Cinema, Revolution, I don't give a damn for them, my being first and foremost'.[27] For Polizzotti, while both men maintained a strong ethical stance and a shared commitment to 'revolt', for Breton 'passion was still the passion of reason', whereas for Artaud 'revolt was visceral, paroxysmal and wholly bound up with his own soul'.[28]

Breton himself later observed that the 'space that Artaud led me into always strikes me as abstract, a hall of mirrors' and that he viewed Artaud's 'half-mystical path' as 'more of a dead end'.[29] Artaud, Breton adds, was 'possessed by a kind of rage', observing of the group under Artaud's sway that: 'without our quite realizing it, we had been seized by frenzy, and that the air had rarefied around us'.[30] But Balakian considers that while the rest of the group moved on, Artaud 'never went beyond the feeling of contempt for the absurdity of the world'.[31] Artaud was formally excluded from the group, along with Soupault, on 27 November 1926, following his refusal to demonstrate any allegiance to the Communist Party, henceforth fully committing himself to his project for the Théâtre Alfred-Jarry. Thereafter, while the movement is very much identified with the person of Breton, Artaud signals, for a short time, a potential alternative path for surrealism – one that would perhaps have quickly seen it running out of steam, as Breton feared, or more likely, just driven it onto the rocks.

Theatre, alchemy and magic

Artaud is perhaps best remembered for his contributions to the theatre, both as theoretician as well as actor on both stage and screen. Jean-Louis Barrault famously characterised Artaud as an 'homme-théâtre' – precisely the epithet used contemptuously by Breton to dismiss him – while Alain and Odette Virmaux write that Artaud is 'wholly theatre, in his life, in his being'.[32] Life and performance are inextricably interwoven for Artaud and I want to consider here Artaud's conception of theatre in terms of 'magic', and how that recourse to magic comes to permeate Artaud's wider worldview, as developed in both his writings and drawings. And I want to think this advocacy of magic in terms of Artaud's call for a return to a medieval mentality and the kind of 'gothic' subjectivity that this might imply.

Outside the surrealist movement, during the 1920s Artaud pursued a career in writing and film, becoming increasingly immersed in the theatre, first during the period 1926–30 with the Alfred Jarry Theatre, and then from 1932–35 with the project for the Theatre of Cruelty. As early as his 1927 'Manifeste pour un théâtre avorté' Artaud would assert that: 'We consider theatre to be a true work of magic'.[33] Following his exclusion, in a post-script attacking the surrealists Artaud rejects the idea that

revolution is to be found in communism, arguing that 'the most urgent Revolution to accomplish is a sort of regression in time', a return to the habits and mentality of the Middle Ages.[34] For Artaud, the function of theatre was not simply the presentation of plays, but more importantly the uncovering of the mind's 'obscure, hidden and unrevealed aspects, by a sort of real, physical projection'.[35] In a 1928 pamphlet Artaud again wrote of the Alfred Jarry Theatre as 'a sort of *magical operation*' that extends life, insisting again that, 'in fact we are dealing with magic'.[36] However, this deployment of the term 'magic' within Artaud's thought would expand to embrace all forms of creative activity, whether in theatre, surrealism or the visual arts. In his essay 'In Total Darkness, or, The Surrealist Bluff' (1927), Artaud's conception of surrealism is close to his model of theatre, when he declares that 'Surrealism has never meant anything to me but a new kind of magic . . .'.[37] Here he poses surrealism as similarly bringing to light what is concealed, buried, by bringing that material to the surface through the use of dream, imagination, etc.

Artaud returns to the theme of magic in his 1932 essay 'Alchemist Theatre', where he claims a 'secret similarity between the fundamental principles of theatre and those of alchemy', suggesting that in all the arts, the imaginary plays in the mental realm, the equivalent of that which in the physical realm '*really* turns matter into gold'.[38] Both alchemy and theatre, Artaud argues, are 'chimeras', the symbols of alchemy and the '*virtual reality*' of theatre both pointing instead to some deeper, 'deadlier, archetypal reality'.[39] Artaud would further intensify his pursuit of that reality in his project for the Theatre of Cruelty, where, in his 'First Manifesto' he rejects text in favour of gesture, thought and dream.[40] In terms of actual works that fit this theatre, he includes Romantic melodrama and the tales of the Marquis de Sade – 'Theatre in the sense of constant creation, a wholly magic act . . .'.[41] And in 'Theatre and the Plague' Artaud likens the impact of theatre on its audience to that of the 'unconsumed despair of the lunatic screaming in an asylum', which he suggests might produce an eruption of the plague.[42]

Just such an intense, interior plane of reality, similarly posed in terms of the suffering body, is encountered in the gothic novel, as with parallel scenes of madness in *The Monk* or in *Melmoth*, or again, Sade screaming out in the Bastille, often claimed as inciting the people of Paris to revolt. Artaud's deployment of the metaphor of contagion suggests both the remorseless power of pestilence as well as the idea of an implacable fate, the *fléau de Dieu* against which mankind impotently rails. Posing the plague as an invisible scourge that fails to conform to physical laws of transmission, Artaud cites the precedent of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, where during the visitation of pestilence upon Florence, the narrator and his companions caroused unscathed in open country, while:

> In a castle nearby, transformed into a fortified citadel with a cordon of armed men to prevent entry, the plague transforms the entire garrison and its occupants into corpses and spares the men at arms who alone have been exposed to contagion.[43]

For Jane Goodall this striking anecdote affirms that: 'In Artaudian metaphor, the power base of horror is always inside, a molten core of being which erupts, like the plague, in defiance of all logically calculated defences'.[44] And she argues that Artaud 'assaults the fortress of rational, egocentric consciousness from which he is outcast'.[45] Artaud's inversion of the metaphor of the castle as protective shell of the inner self is in fact in line with the deployment of that motif in gothic literature, where, for an age in which the fortress had long been superseded as a mode of defence – as we saw with

the military Zone surrounding Paris – from Walpole to Stoker the menace is already internalised, lurking somewhere within the castle itself. Likewise, Goodall observes, with Poe's 'The Masque of the Red Death', in which Prince Prospero seeks to seal himself inside one of his gothic 'castellated abbeys' against the 'Red Death', which had 'long devastated the country'.[46] But death is already inside – symbolised in the 'blood-tinted panes' and the ominous ebony clock of the seventh chamber – and rather than an impenetrable sanctuary, the palace is transformed into a treacherous death trap.

After initial successes in theatre and in film, Artaud's career – on the surface at least – was one of disappointments. During the 1930s Artaud came increasingly under the influence of alchemy and of various religious cults, particularly Gnosticism, while ideas like 'purity' and the rejection of all sexuality as evil gained an increasing hold on his thought. These obsessions are developed at some length in Artaud's *Héliogabale ou l'Anarchiste couronné* (1934), a semi-fictional account of the short, depraved life of the third-century Roman emperor Heliogabalus, characterised by Artaud in terms of a 'pederast king' who 'wants to be a woman' and is 'a priest of the Masculine.'[47] This is a key text for any understanding of Artaud's attitudes towards masculinity, where we see his intense identification with this bisexual boy-God, priest of a phallic cult. In a letter to Jean Paulhan, Artaud writes that in *Heliogabalus* 'I think I have realized myself', while Anaïs Nin, recalls him in a taxi, arms outstretched, proclaiming 'I am Heliogabalus, the mad Roman Emperor . . . The Revolution will come soon. All this will be destroyed'.[48]

The book opens with the striking statement: 'If there is around the corpse of Heliogabalus, dead without a tomb . . . an intense circulation of blood and excrement, there is around his cradle an intense circulation of sperm'.[49] The entire text stages a bloody battle of the sexes – of the sun and the moon – fought precisely, Artaud argues, to establish the idea of the masculine and the feminine out of chaos, in which struggle Heliogabalus himself serves to reconcile the two opposed principles.[50] It depicts weak emperors ruled over by powerful women, as reflected in Artaud's own childhood, with masculinity posed in terms of a celebration of the phallus, but where phallic power exists only under the permanent threat of castration. Artaud describes the fantasied temple of Astarté with its fifty-metre high phalluses, and he creates an extraordinary phallic fantasy of Heliogabalus' frenzied dash to seize the crown of Rome:

> Now tearing at breakneck speed in his wagon . . . behind him the ten-ton Phallus . . . in a kind of monumental cage seemingly made for a whale or a mammoth . . . Dragged by three hundred enraged bulls who are urged on by howling packs of chained hyenas, the Phallus, on an immense low platform with wheels as broad as the thighs of elephants, rides through European Turkey, Macedonia, . . . at the speed of a running zebra.[51]

Artaud's hallucinatory vision of enervated flesh strikingly recalls Walpole's equally homoerotic description in *Otranto* of 'An hundred gentlemen bearing an enormous sword, and seeming to faint under the weight of it'.[52] We can already see in Artaud's wheeled phallus a kind of Deleuzian 'desiring-machine', a core element of Deleuze and Guattari's re-conceptualisation of desire as a *social* force, rather than one confined within the nuclear family, where desire no longer figures as 'lack' but rather as the driving, productive force of the libidinal economy.[53] And machines that, as with Picabia's absurd desiring-machines, or like Artaud himself, locked in a symbiotic struggle with his various ailments and addictions, 'work only when they break down, and by

continually breaking down'.[54] But tempering phallic power, ritual castration permeates *Heliogabalus*, where Artaud writes that: 'Sacks of male members are thrown from the tops of the towers with the cruellest abundance . . . ', adding that 'Good, evil, blood, sperm . . . embalming oils . . . create innumerable irrigations around the generosity of Heliogabalus'.[55] Artaud would later return in his drawings to this same confusion of elements, with their promiscuous flows of bodily fluids, organs and members, their machinic assemblages of body and machine, and their retributive assaults upon the body – particularly upon the sexual organs. And we discover, too, an obsessive concern with cycles of procreation and destruction, where it is worth observing that Artaud's mother bore some nine children, only three of which survived infancy. Heliogabalus therefore provides for Artaud a profoundly riven model of masculinity, split between masculine and feminine, between divine and profane, combining the sun god Eliogabalus with a mortal being. And he embodies, too, Artaud's curious fantasy of rescue by a regiment of loyal women, in which the two Julias – mother and grandmother – rescue Heliogabalus during his battle with Macrin.

Another of the recurring obsessions within Artaud's work of this period was that of incest. We find this in *Heliogabalus* as well as in Artaud's 1935 adaptation of *Les Cenci* for the Theatre of Cruelty, based both on Shelley's tragedy, *The Cenci* (1819), and on Stendhal's 1837 translation of the sixteenth-century dossier used by Shelley. The play relates the tale of the perverse Papal Count François Cenci, who orders the murder of his own sons and brutally rapes his daughter Beatrice, before being murdered at the instigation of his daughter and wife Lucrezia – again a body of avenging women. Cenci presents very much as an amoral, depraved precursor of Sade – someone prepared to crush anyone weaker than himself and who seeks to pit his own monstrous ego against that of authority: 'For me, life, death, god, incest, repentance, crime do not exist. I obey my own law'.[56] Cenci's gruesome murder, where a nail is put through his eye and his throat, would later find an echo in the mutilated bodies of Artaud's late drawings. In his pursuit of an intensely visceral experience on the part of the audience, Artaud also deployed sound during the performance, introducing a recording of the vibrations of the great bell of Amiens cathedral. In invoking Amiens, a thirteenth-century gothic cathedral, with its celebrated sculptural frieze of the Last Judgement on its West front, Artaud brings to the theatre the atmosphere of the Middle Ages, attempting to recreate there the same intensely corporeal experience that would have stirred the bowels of the prostrate medieval peasant – again evoking the gothic mentality of unquestioning commitment advocated in Artaud's writing.

Gnosticism and mysticism in Artaud's thought

Artaud's growing concern during this period with the ideas under discussion – purity, plague, implacable fate and the notion of conflict between humanity and a vengeful God – was decisively influenced by his interest in Gnosticism, linked in turn to his increasing immersion in areas such as alchemy, the Cabbala, astrology and the Tarot.

Gnosticism is a modern term used to designate a complex range of religious beliefs contemporaneous with early Christianity and often posed by early polemicists as heretical sects.[57] As Karen King observes, while resistant to definition, Gnosticism has come to be defined in terms of 'the conviction that matter is evil and that emancipation comes through gnosis', where 'gnosis' designates an 'esoteric knowledge of spiritual truth . . . essential to salvation', but that the term has far wider application in fields including

philosophy, literary studies, politics and psychology.[58] Particularly relevant to Artaud's thought is gnostic dualism, which as R.A. Gilbert observes, 'views the non-material, spiritual world as good but treats the visible, material world of matter as irremediably evil'.[59] In gnostic thought, in a process of self-realisation the transcendent God generates a series of heavenly beings culminating in Sophia (wisdom), who 'gives birth to the evil Demiurge' and who in turn creates the worlds of matter.[60] Simon Magus, one of the originators of gnostic thought was posed by his detractors as a magician, and as Giovanni Filorama has shown, Gnosticism pervades much of modern thought, in Novalis, Nerval, Hugo, down to surrealism, in a search 'often pursued by means of esoteric and Cabbalistic techniques'.[61] Early in 1937 Artaud became increasingly pre-occupied with astrology and the Tarot, taking lessons in the reading of Tarot cards with the Cuban Manuel Cano de Castro. He also become obsessed with a small Toledo dagger given to him by a 'sorcerer' in Havana and with a curiously formed, knotted walking stick given to him by René Thomas, which he claimed to be that of St. Patrick.[62] This cane, which Artaud forbade any woman to touch, also doubled as a symbol of male virility. Camille Dumoulié detects in all of this the 'rigorous logic' of a delirium in which Artaud comes to enact an identification with Christ as a doubled figure who is both sacrificial victim as well as 'Prince of the Apocalypse, king and destroyer of this world'.[63]

In July 1937 Artaud published a short apocalyptic pamphlet, *Les Nouvelles Révélations de l'Être*, where the anonymous author was given as 'Le Révélé'.[64] In its exalted tone the text marked a return to the surrealist letters of the 1920s. But it also combined Artaud's own longstanding sense of separation from his being with a Gnostic conception of man's separation from his true potential, through the intermediary of a false world, posed now in terms of the concept of the 'Void': 'Until now my suffering consisted in refusing the Void. The Void was already within me'.[65] Based upon a Tarot card reading for 19 June 1937, Artaud makes a series of increasingly apocalyptic predictions – that 'Man will recover his stature' and 'will re-impose the Supernatural', that 'nature is about to revolt', and he proclaims a Nietzschean 'reclassification of all values', culminating in the prophecy that: 'I FORESEE DESTRUCTION BY FIRE'.[66] We can also see in this the influence upon Artaud's thought of Lucas van Leyden's *Lot and his Daughters* (ca.1509), which he analysed in a 1931 lecture 'Mise en scène and Metaphysics'.[67] Artaud points there to the 'profoundly incestuous quality' of that apocalyptic image, in which Lot cavorts drunkenly like some primal father with his daughters, while in the background, divine retribution in the form of flaming meteors is inflicted upon a burning city set upon a hillside. The earlier concern with incest now assumes the form of an obsession with sexual purity, the mortification of the body and an obsessive concern with divine wrath. Artaud makes his own prediction of destruction under the heading of 'Hell', posed as an 'infernal destruction, since Hell represents fire', signalling a growing preoccupation within his thought with the figure of Satan, with demons, succubae and incubi, and extending to a concern with magic and spells. We can see in Artaud's increasingly mystical and religious obsessions of the thirties, certain parallels with the major themes of Lewis's *Monk*: a world in which Satan is very present, but not God; and the idea of some cosmological drama being fought out over the individual's body and soul. A further manifestation of these themes is found in another mystical text concerned with the opposition of good and evil, 'Life and Death of Satan Fire', where Artaud writes of an 'evil fire which rises', an 'image of rebellion' that 'burns itself': 'IT PUNISHES ITSELF'.[68] Artaud insists that fire figures here not as a signifier of 'Hell', but rather 'alchemically', as a means of reduction, operating as a

means of burning and destroying a vast image of Satan, such that he is 'reduced and burnt to cinders . . . starting to die himself'.[69] And he observes that 'everything that stops us living is a mere refraction of Satanic thought', suggesting that for Artaud, 'Satan' comes to figure for all that intervenes between himself and authentic being.[70]

Surrealists such as Max Ernst had long shown an interest in topics such as alchemy, while Breton, Kurt Seligmann and others became increasingly interested in magic and the Tarot by the late thirties. But there is with Artaud a far more literal belief in the reality and efficacy of these phenomena. Artaud asserts in *Les Nouvelles Révélations de l'Être* that 'to burn is a magic action' and that it is necessary 'to burn in advance and at once . . . *all that which for us represents things*, in order not to risk burning everything'.[71] Artaud wrote to Breton on 27 May, warning of some 'horrible thing' that he had learned of someone Breton knew, including a drawing of what is surely his magical dagger surrounded by other arcane, anchor-like symbols.[72] During early 1937, following a chance meeting in a cafe, Artaud and Breton had become reconciled and in their correspondence we see the emergence of the epistolary 'Spells' that Artaud began sending around May 1937 and which he resumed during 1939. After a visit to Breton and Jacqueline, Artaud wrote to Breton posing the couple as the Sun and the Sea, with their baby daughter Aube as an 'Apparition', 'a tempest of purity', claiming her as a 'Being born of Destiny' and predicted for her a 'fateful and great' future.[73] In a sign of his growing mental deterioration, Artaud wrote to Jacqueline on 28 July urging that she never dismiss him as a 'false magician' or mock his cane, adding cabbalistic signs to his message. And in a final letter to Breton prior to his fateful Irish trip, Artaud revealed his growing anger with everything, expressed in terms of a purifying power of *burning* and destruction. Artaud also writes there of wishing to return to the confidence he had once placed in Breton, expressing his astonishment that Breton had 'come *to the same point as me*', with the sole difference being that his own pessimism was absolute – though Breton might well have demurred.[74]

Artaud's Irish trip: spells and gris-gris

Accounts of Artaud's time in Ireland during 1937 are confused, but he maintained a steady correspondence with Breton, the journalist Anne Manson and others during that tormented journey, enabling us to trace the further development of his delusions in those writings. Artaud disembarked at Cobh on 14 August in search of 'the living sources' of a 'very ancient tradition', travelling to Galway and staying for a time in the village of Kilronan on one of the Aran Islands, where he visited Celtic monuments, eventually landing up in Dublin.[75] In this, Artaud was also following in the footsteps of the Irish playwright John Millington Synge, best known for his *The Playboy of the Western World*, the tale of an apparent patricide that caused riots when first staged in Dublin in 1907. Artaud's growing disturbance and the increasing grip of the occult on his thought are immediately apparent in a letter to Breton of September 1937, where he writes that: 'I will thus call upon the Black Magicians, on those who deny God, in order to destroy him better . . .'.[76] On 5th September his sexual and religious obsessions exploded with particular violence in the earliest surviving example of his Spells, sent to Lise Deharme from Galway, in which he declaims that: 'I will have a red-hot iron cross rammed into your stinking Jewess's hole and then I'll trample ('MUMMER') over your dead body . . .'.[77] According to Sylvère Lotringer, before leaving Paris Artaud had a heated argument with Deharme, 'who doubted the sincerity of his pagan beliefs in a

plurality of gods and called him a "mummer" and a "quack"'.[78] The spell also metaphorically enacts violence upon its addressee's body by way of a large hole burnt in its centre beside the word 'fire', and is inscribed with cabbalistic symbols – crosses and triangles – together with significant numbers relating to the date. Soon after, Artaud sent Jacqueline Breton a protective spell from Dublin – 'a Spell to the first one who will dare touch you. I'll crush his braggart's little snooty snout to *pulp*'.[79] This letter bears an inverted cross pointing to the word 'ANTECHRIST', which is emphatically underscored several times, suggesting a syncretistic mixture of magic and religion.

We know from further letters that by mid-September, Artaud claimed to be in daily dialogue with Jesus Christ, that it was Christ's own cane that he carried with him and that Christ was revealing to him the future – the imminent 'End of the World' – ordering him to do what he must.[80] We also know that Artaud eventually tried to obtain shelter at the Jesuit College, where he caused some kind of altercation resulting in his arrest and imprisonment at Mountjoy prison, until his deportation from Ireland on 29 September. This mixture of bodily deprivation, increasing mental derangement and religious obsession, culminating in confrontation with the Jesuits, all strongly recalls similar scenes recounted in Lewis's *Monk*, or the Spaniard's tale in Maturin's *Melmoth* where the young novice recounts his increasingly desperate attempts to escape from the monastery. And we could add stock gothic themes of incarceration and insanity.

Interned upon his arrival back in France, Artaud sent further Spells during 1939 while held at the asylum of Ville-Évrard, where we see further elaboration in the technique of their production – Artaud would later write that:

> the goal of all these drawn and coloured figures was to exorcise the curse, to vituperate bodily against the exigencies of spatial form, of perspective, of measure, of equilibrium, of dimension and, via this vituperative act of protest, to condemn the psychic world which, like a crab louse, digs its way into the physical and, like an incubus or succubus, claims to have given it shape . . . .[81]

And Artaud adds that he afterwards changed his manner, 'understanding that it was as a magician that I was interned, poisoned and bewitched'.[82] For Agnès de la Beaumelle the spells function magically as 'explosive attacks', bodily assaults upon 'impurity' and perceived enemies, inaugurating a new phase in Artaud's graphic production that anticipates his technique in the large drawings made at Rodez.[83] The burns she reads as 'obvious signs of aggression and purification', while in the doubled cross in a spell sent to Jacqueline Lamba, Beaumelle sees an echo of Artaud in the role of a monk, 'brandishing a crucifix over Joan of Arc's head in Carl Dreyer's film'.[84] As his letters of the time make clear, Artaud was filled with an enormous rage, expressed in the extreme violence of his vociferations and in his aggressive literary and graphic style, developed more fully in the Rodez drawings. And this rage finds its outlet in the spells and drawings, both of which, says Beaumelle, 'have a real exorcistic function and must emit magic powers'.[85]

The spells of 1939, with their elaborate scorch marks and burnt holes, together with wider use of a range of colours and cabbalistic signs, are even more theatrical than those of 1937 and seem to bear a heavier menace. A spell sent to Sonia Mossé, a painter and dancer with whom Artaud had a brief relationship before his journey to Ireland, threatens her with a living death – 'you will never cease passing away . . ./I launch upon you/a Force of Death/and this Spell/won't be revoked . . .'.[86] Mossé, a friend of Cécile Schramme and of Jacqueline Breton, exhibited at the International Surrealist Exhibition

of 1938, where she produced one of the surreal mannequins – a shrouded figure crawling with large insects – displayed in the Street of Mannequins. Like Robert Desnos, of Jewish origin, she too died after being deported during the Second World War. It's perhaps ironic that Artaud should also have tried to send a Spell to Hitler around September 1939, in which he claims to have met Hitler at the cafe Ider in Berlin, in 1932, when Artaud would have been there filming *Coup de feu à l'aube* with Serge de Poligny. Written in violet crayon and bearing several burnt holes and cabbalistic signs, Artaud directs his Spell, he says, as a 'warning' to Hitler.[87] The spell sent to Roger Blin, actor, theatre director and close friend of Artaud (22 May 1939), also bears extensive burns, blood-like scarlet smears of paint and arcane symbols in purple crayon, suggestive of some ancient and mysterious document. The text, with its coloured underscoring and occasional capitalisation, menaces those who prevent Artaud obtaining heroin or who touch Anne Manson, threatening to 'pierce them alive on a Paris square' and to 'perforate and burn their marrow', punishments that recall the imagery of Dreyer's *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* or the gothic excess of Lewis's *Monk*.[88]

Artaud and the immediacy of the body

If Artaud advocates a return to the mentality of the Middle Ages, at the core of that conception is his attitude toward the *body*, where, for Artaud, everything proceeds via the physical body. As early as 1925 Artaud writes: 'Nothing touches me, nothing interests me except what addresses itself *directly* to my flesh.'[89]; 'I am a man', he insists, 'by virtue of my hands and my feet, my belly, my heart of meat . . . '.[90] Artaud roots all thought in the flesh, 'in the nervous vitality of the marrow'.[91] But far from any essentialist, biologically rooted model of the subject, Artaud's is a body that he himself remakes, such that masculinity is not simply performed, but rather the male body, the subject himself becomes a construction. In *Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu* (1948) Artaud insists that 'Man is sick because he is badly constructed' and must be placed 'on the autopsy table to remake his anatomy'.[92] It is not difficult to discern a somewhat Frankensteinian quality to this utopian project of remaking man through his anatomy, as well as in the *guignolesque* experiments using electricity conducted by Artaud's doctors, recalling the contrast in Mary Shelley's novel between her protagonist's idealistic aspirations and the horrors of his actual methods, and which we find echoed in some of Artaud's drawings, awash with body parts, severed limbs and botched operations. For Artaud, as with the gothic novel, there is an acute and often melodramatic awareness of the physicality of the suffering body, and for both, the mortificatory attitude of Catholicism toward the body provides a key reference.

Artaud makes clear his antipathy towards the concept of representation in a rejection of all forms of mediation and a rigid insistence upon *immediacy*, writing that: 'there is nothing I abominate and execrate so much as this idea of spectacle, of representation.'[93] Representation is for Artaud a 'turning away from life', and he also attacks the terms 'virtuality', 'non-reality' and 'spectacle'; for him all expression must come directly through the body – and a body posed as intensely corporeal – as a suffering site of flesh, of nerves and of bone.[94] Jacques Derrida, in his essay 'To unsense the subjectile', reads Artaud's project in the Spells and drawings in large part as a struggle with representation, where the surface or support – what Artaud calls the '*subjectile*' – is treated as though inhabited by demons, occupied by 'all these persecuting evils emerging from the depths to haunt the supports'.[95] More specifically, he adds, the subjectile intends 'what

is in some way lying below (*subjectum*) as a substance, a subject, or a succubus'.[96] Writing and drawing are no longer conceived in Artaud's work in terms of forms, but rather as the 'action of forces' that presided over their production, where drawing becomes a project to recreate the expropriated body, 'a place of combat' as well as 'a place of incubation' that 'gives birth to everything'.[97] The term 'subjectile' thus embraces both the subject himself, as well as the surface he draws on, scrapes and stabs at, such that drawing becomes a kind of violent battle with the support and with his own devils, in order to give birth to the work.[98] But this struggle also gives birth to the subject himself, enabling the re-appropriation of a body expropriated by God, society and language.[99] What is surely striking in this is the central role of the 'demonic' – of demons, succubae, Satan – as embodying all that against which Artaud wrestles, all that persecutes him, suggesting again the decisive influence on his thought of Lewis and Maturin, combined with that of the occult and mystical sources in which Artaud immersed himself.

Electroshock and the 'dissolution-reconstruction' of the body

Following his initial internment in France, Artaud was returned to Paris in April 1938, first to Sainte-Anne in the service of Professor Claude, and then in February 1939 to the asylum of Ville-Évrard, near Paris. With the onset of the Second World War and the German occupation, the inmates of asylums suffered particularly badly and Artaud's family and friends, notably Desnos, became very concerned at his deterioration. Having suffered dramatic weight loss and losing of most of his teeth, Artaud is described by Desnos as raving like Saint Jerome, gnawed constantly by cravings for laudanum.[100] Deprived of food and fuel, Ville-Évrard experienced a massive increase in mortality – among men it rose from 87 in 1939, to 308 in 1941 – such that Artaud was immersed in bodily suffering and surrounded by constant death.[101] His supporters therefore arranged his transfer, in February 1943, into the care of Dr. Gaston Ferdière, head of the psychiatric hospital at Rodez in the unoccupied zone and known in surrealist circles. On being first admitted to Rodez where he was re-examined, Artaud wrote furiously to Dr. Latrémolière, one of Ferdière's assistants, denying being syphilitic and disavowing all sexual activity, a factor that was also perhaps at the root of what he describes as 'an obscure hatred of the Father'.[102] Hereditary syphilis remained a not uncommon diagnosis during the thirties, when Henri Ey and Julien Rouart identified it as being particularly associated with psychic dissolution.[103] Artaud was diagnosed at the time as schizophrenic, though Margit Rowell suggests that a more appropriate diagnosis might have been 'confabulatory paraphrenia', a delusional form of psychosis not accompanied by mental deterioration, as in the case of Nerval.[104] It was Artaud's misfortune to have presented as an appropriate candidate for the innovatory treatment of electroshock therapy, then little understood and still at a primitive level of development.

The history of electroshock therapy in France and its use in the case of Artaud has been well documented by Florence de Mèredieu and I therefore want to focus here on certain specific aspects of that history, in particular how French medicine conceived its operation on the body and how this meshed with Artaud's own conception of the remaking of subjectivity.[105] Electroshock was only a part of a much wider shift in psychotherapy during the 1930s, part of a response to research into brain functions and developments in chemotherapy. It also coincided with the re-categorisation in 1937 of the old asylums as 'psychiatric hospitals', redirecting their mission from control to therapy, a central plank in which was the adoption of convulsotherapy. Shock therapies

had been practiced since Classical times but during the 1920s became far more sophisticated, taking epilepsy as their model, where the body suffers a sudden shock and is plunged into a crisis that exhausts the system, following which the patient benefits from a period of respite. Insulin had been injected to produce coma during the 1920s, and in 1935 Ladislaus von Meduna began using Cardiazol injections to similar effect. But these methods – unpredictable and with disturbing side effects – were very much therapies of last resort. In 1938, the Italian neurologist Ugo Cerletti determined that electricity could be used to induce epileptic-type fits, launching psychiatry along the path of electroshock treatment. Despite the war, the French began experimenting with electroshock during 1940. Two of the pioneers in France, Marcel Lapipe and Jacques Rondepierre, were experimenting with the assistance of Alfred Binet on both animals and men at Ville-Évrard in 1941, at a time when Artaud was still there, though not then considered a suitable case for such treatment. Artaud's own mother requested the use of electroshock on her son as early as 1942 and later wrote to Ferdière: 'J'ai grande confiance en l'Électricité . . . '.[106] Electroshock resurrected old debates within French psychiatry on the conception of the psyche, with Lapipe and Rondepierre assuming a somewhat mechanical model of the mind conceived as some broken down mechanism requiring repair. Their description of cases where the patient fails to go into a classic convulsive crisis, resulting in high-pitched shrieking, 'often in prolonged howling, as though expressing a dreadful terror', suggests something of the disturbing aura surrounding electroshock during its early experimental phase.[107] For practitioners like Ferdière, though, electroshock seemed to offer a way forward with more intransigent cases, while providing large savings in the cost of treatment – Mèredieu even writes of 'a kind of 'Taylorisation' of mental illness' during the wartime period.[108] Artaud himself was to characterise electroshock as 'Black Magic' – not far from the truth, given that its practitioners hadn't the slightest idea as to how it actually operated on the brain.[109] How, then, did French medicine conceive its operation?

A major landmark in the shift in French psychotherapy was a 1936 paper by Ey and Rouart in which they attempt to apply some of the main principles of the work of the English neurologist John Hughlings Jackson to French neuro-psychiatry.[110] The pair were disciples of Claude at Sainte-Anne – again pointing to the central role of Breton's *bête noire* – and it was at that hospital that Artaud was declared by Jacques Lacan to be '*fixé*' and hence untreatable.[111] Sarah Wilson notes that Ferdière too had been an intern there in 1934 and suggests that 'Rodez could be considered to have been an annexe of Sainte-Anne during the war'.[112] In their paper Ey and Rouart translated and analysed some of the work of Hughlings Jackson dating from the 1880s. Jackson had been a significant influence on the early writings of Freud while the latter's thinking was still in the grip of neurology, but Jackson's work only began to appear in French during the 1920s, with his *Selected Writings* appearing in English only in 1932. While Jackson's work could therefore be claimed to be quite topical, it was clearly rooted in what was by then very dated conception of the mind and based on the evolutionary theory of the English sociologist Herbert Spencer. Jackson was important for French psychiatry in bringing together neurology and psychiatry, allowing doctors to escape the constraints of either the neurological or the purely psychogenetic. Jackson's innovation was in conceiving the psyche in *dynamic* terms, as the product of a long evolutionary process, and it is this dynamic conception of mind that Ey and Rouart advocated for French psychiatry in place of the old 'mechanical' model.[113] For Jackson, evolution meant 'an ascending development in a particular order', proceeding from the most

simple and automatic processes, to the most complex and voluntary.[114] Conversely, 'dissolution' was viewed as the 'reverse of evolution', where mental illness and diseases of the nervous system were conceived as forms of regression or 'dissolution'.[115] 'Insanity', Jackson argues, 'is dissolution, beginning in the highest nervous processes'.[116]

Jackson's theory was therefore perfectly suited to explaining the rapid operation of electroshock on the mind, as used for example in Paul Delmas-Marsalet's analysis of 1943.[117] Delmas-Marsalet characterises electroshock in terms of a very rapid dissolution and reconstruction of the psychic functions; between the two processes is the state of *coma*, a reduction to zero of psychic functioning. He also adopts a very striking architectural metaphor, likening mental illness to the impact of a *cyclone* destroying a building, putting parts of it out of use until rebuilt according to the architect's plans.[118] It is worth recalling that, in his early correspondence with Rivière, Artaud characterised his tormented mental life in terms of being jolted 'with a sudden and unexpected electricity, a repeated electricity', and which he likens to 'profound tornadoes' of the mind.[119]

Ferdière, too, conceived of electroshock according to the dissolution-reconstruction model. Defending his treatment of Artaud he writes of 'the reconstruction of the personality',[120] and in his autobiography observes of electroshock that Delmas-Marsalet had 'correctly defined it as 'a process of dissolution-reconstruction'.[121] We know, too, that Ferdière was visited at Rodez by Henri Ey and was clearly familiar with Ey and Rouart's paper and the ideas of Jackson. Convinced of its effectivity, Ferdière submitted Artaud to some fifty-eight shocks between June 1943 and January 1945 and in the course of that treatment – strongly questioned by some – we see Artaud returning both to drawing and to his own writing.[122] A clear parallel can be drawn between psychiatry's dissolution and reconstitution of the self through electroshock, and Artaud's own project for the remaking of man's anatomy. We know that Ferdière regularly discussed his treatment with Artaud and it would therefore be unsurprising to find some of those ideas from medicine finding their way into his work.

Whereas the official image of electroshock was one of modernity and technical efficiency, the reality at the level of the patient was very different and could certainly be qualified as 'gothic'. Accounts of Cerletti's pioneering role in electroshock treatment never fail to mention that the idea came to him while seeing pigs being stunned at the Rome abattoir before slaughter, such that the therapy is always rooted in barbarity and death. Artaud suffered damaged vertebrae on only his third treatment and wrote of it as a 'horrible torture', adding that: 'Each application has plunged me in a terror that endured each time for several hours'.[123] Like all convulsotherapies it was disturbing to watch and observers were discouraged, but nonetheless, the lack of visual documentation, compared for example with that of hysteria, is quite striking.

In 1944 various attempts were made by Pierre Mignard at Lyon to record the motor phenomena of the body during electroshock.[124] Initial efforts using direct observers were soon abandoned as the movements were simply too fast and too complex. The team then turned to cinematography, using a 16mm camera, and tried analysing slowed-down projections on multiple screens. But again, electroshock proved too complex to properly analyse and Mignard therefore abandoned visual analysis in favour of a device that simply recorded muscle movement. All that remains is a somewhat disturbing pairing of images worthy of the late gothic novel, reproduced as both positives and negatives of a blindfolded patient and of the electrical equipment itself. The results recall some of Douglas Gordon's installations, as with his *Hysterical* (1995), which uses vintage footage of a masked woman during a hysterical attack, or

the more purely gothic science of his *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1995) which uses footage from Rouben Mamoulian's 1931 *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, screened as both positive and negative images, suggestive of the divided self.

But in the year of Artaud's death Hollywood provided a rather more sympathetic portrayal of the use of electroshock treatment by American psychiatry in Anatole Litvak's 1948 melodrama *The Snake Pit* (Figure 5.1). Olivia de Havilland stars in the film

Figure 5.1 The Snake Pit (dir. Anatole Litvak), 1948

as Virginia Cunningham, a confused writer who, having lost her identity and behaving in an erratic manner, finds herself committed to an asylum by her husband where she is restored to normality by a kindly psychiatrist, Dr. Kik, using a combination of electroshock and psychoanalysis.[125] Here electroshock therapy serves only to kick-start the mind, following which Freudian analysis is used to reveal the underlying psychic narrative – very different from Artaud, where truth is rooted in the reconstruction of the corporeal body itself. Litvak had served during the war with the Special Services Film Unit of the US Army, during which time he encountered the use of psychiatry in the rehabilitation of servicemen suffering post-traumatic stress disorder – an echo of Breton's initial encounter with shell shock.[126]

Filmed in part in a California mental hospital, *The Snake Pit* was conceived as a 'problem film' probing a topical social issue, and was based on five months of research by Litvak at the Brooklyn State Hospital into conditions and practices within American mental institutions.[127] The film shows electroshock being used *en masse* as a cost-saving therapy, as fearful patients queue for treatment, though the more disturbing bodily aspects of the treatment are not depicted. While on the one hand promoting the latest medical technology, at the level of narrative the asylum location sites the film on classic gothic territory, as we are reminded when a sadistic warder goads and then suddenly strait-jackets Mrs. Cunningham, in a reprise of the constraint of Stanton in *Melmoth*. Whereas the film does present a disturbing picture of overcrowded mental hospitals and is credited with prompting some reform of the American system, the depiction of electroshock is far from that experienced in France during Artaud's wartime incarceration and was aimed more at reassuring the public about a disturbing and unexplained new medical technology.

In a late text created for a radio broadcast made in July 1946, 'Aliénation et magie noire', Artaud himself explicitly conceives French psychiatry – and in particular its use of electroshock therapy – in terms similar to those that we are characterising here as 'gothic' psychiatry, asserting that: 'Insane asylums are conscious and premeditated repositories of black magic'. This, insists Artaud, is not 'just because doctors promote magic by their ill-timed and hybrid methods of treatment, it's because they practice it', adding that 'there's nothing like an insane asylum to tenderly incubate death, and to keep the dead in an incubator'[128] Artaud refers to the liminal state induced by electroshock as 'Bardo', a Tibetan term used to designate the state of limbo between death and rebirth, as found in the *Bardo Thodol*, often known as the 'Tibetan Book of the Dead'. 'Bardo', writes Artaud, 'is the pang of death into which the self falls with a splash', and that 'electric shock, like Bardo, creates phantoms'.[129] To undergo 'the electric shock of Bardo' is therefore to enter a kind of twilight state in which the victim 'never again rises out of its darkness, and his life has been lowered by a notch'.[130] But Artaud has also left us a striking series of drawings that further enrich our understanding of his experience of electroshock treatment and I want to turn here to their analysis.

Electroshock and the Rodez drawings

While critics may disagree about the impact upon Artaud of his electroshock treatment, with some insisting that he had never ceased to write (though mainly letters, Spells and appeals), nonetheless, by September 1943 we see a resumption of more focused writing. But also, encouraged by Ferdière as a form of art therapy, we see a

return to drawing in February 1944, when Artaud writes of 'my Return to Life'.[131] The earliest surviving work is comprised of images of daggers, crosses and arcane symbols, immediately reiterating longstanding concerns in Artaud's writings and acting career, and in the religious and magical obsessions found in his notebooks. One strand of that iconography might derive from Artaud's advocacy of a medieval mentality and hence from the cinematic roles where some of those ideas found visual expression, as with his role as a monk in Carl Dreyer's 1928 *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*, a silent film that relies so heavily upon the extraordinary facial expression of Renée Jeanne Falconetti and which has been qualified by David Bordwell as 'one of the most bizarre, perceptually difficult films ever made'.[132] Shot with a lavish budget, the film set included a vast recreation of Rouen castle and featured a tonsured Artaud in the role of Massieu, the Dean of Rouen, brandishing a crucifix before the transfigured body of Joan as she burns at the stake.[133] More than simply acting parts though, Artaud strongly identified with the characters and ideas embodied in those roles, deploying the same gothic imagery in his writing, as with his assertion that:

> if there is something infernal and truly damned in these times, it is this dithering artistically over forms, instead of being like those tortured at the stake, signalling through the flames.[134]

A copy of the original film, long thought lost, was discovered only in 1981 in the cupboard of a mental hospital outside Oslo, while Falconetti too suffered severe mental problems and took her own life in 1946.[135] In Gance's *Lucrèce Borgia* (1935) Artaud plays Girolamo Savonarola, a fifteenth-century Dominican friar, preacher and prophet, hanged and burned in Florence in 1498, after '[r]elentless interrogation and bone-breaking torture', by a dogmatic Catholic Church.[136] Like Lewis's monk, Savonarola is an inspired preacher, but who challenges the corrupt authority of the Borgias and the papacy, culminating in the film in his expiry in an *auto-da-fe*. The gothic iconography of bodily suffering – of persecution, incarceration and torture – thus readily lent itself to Artaud's own dismal situation and hence to the elaboration of his ideas in his drawings.

Throughout the course of his electroshock therapy, which began in June 1943, Artaud made repeated requests for the treatment to be ended, describing it in a letter to his mother as 'a dreadful torture'.[137] In a letter to Dr. Latrémolière he describes its effects with great acuity, including its taking away his memory, numbing his thought and heart, and rendering him absent from his self, 'like a corpse beside one still living who is no longer himself'.[138] What is immediately striking in the large drawings that he began to produce when the electroshock treatment ended in January 1945, is the extreme fragmentation and the damage inflicted upon the body, with body parts – faces, penises, breasts, limbs – scattered across the entire surface of the paper. As the title of *L'être et ses foetus* (ca. January 1945) suggests, there's also an emphasis upon reproduction, sexual organs and on processes of emergence and birth. Paule Thévenin, Artaud's executor, poses these drawings as 'battlefields' in which Artaud – 'terrorised' and 'like a hunted beast' – struggles to reconstruct his shattered body and to reconstitute the self.[139] But we should also consider this as a reconstruction of a *gendered* self. In Artaud's *L'immaculée conception* (January 1945) the inscription reads: 'The immaculate conception/ was the assassination of the principle/ of MAN/ who is a cannon mounted on wheels'. The cannon at the centre of the image (Figure 5.2) recalls the wheeled phallus from *Heliogabalus*, ejaculating a stream of homunculi, genitals

Figure 5.2 Antonin Artaud, *L'immaculée conception*, January 1945

and bones in an explosive giving-birth – a parody of God the creator, as the artist assumes his procreative role. The image can be read as a metaphor for a castrated masculinity that combines creation and destruction, fragmentation of the body and rebirth. Artaud also insists that these works are not drawings in the sense of 'works of art', but rather *documents*: 'you must look at them and understand what's *inside*' – that they are records of 'struggle', 'anger', intense emotion.[140] In *Le soldat au fusil* (October 1945-January 1946) the phallic wheeled cannon motif recurs, but now in various stages of fragmentation, while on the left of the image are various castrative figures of women either bearing, or themselves becoming, huge scythes – such that the drawing becomes a gendered staging of forces, as with the battle of the sexes depicted by Artaud in *Heliogabalus*.[141]

But we should also read these works, after Derrida, as battles with representation itself, in an effort to give utterance to the unrepresentable experience of electroshock. In *La bouillabaisse de formes dans la tour de babel* (February 1946) we discover, according to Mèredieu, the actual depiction of an electroshock device, in the box-like shape to the left, with dials on its front and with wires suggestive of bolts of electricity emerging from it (Figure 5.3). The machine in Artaud's drawing also has a curious

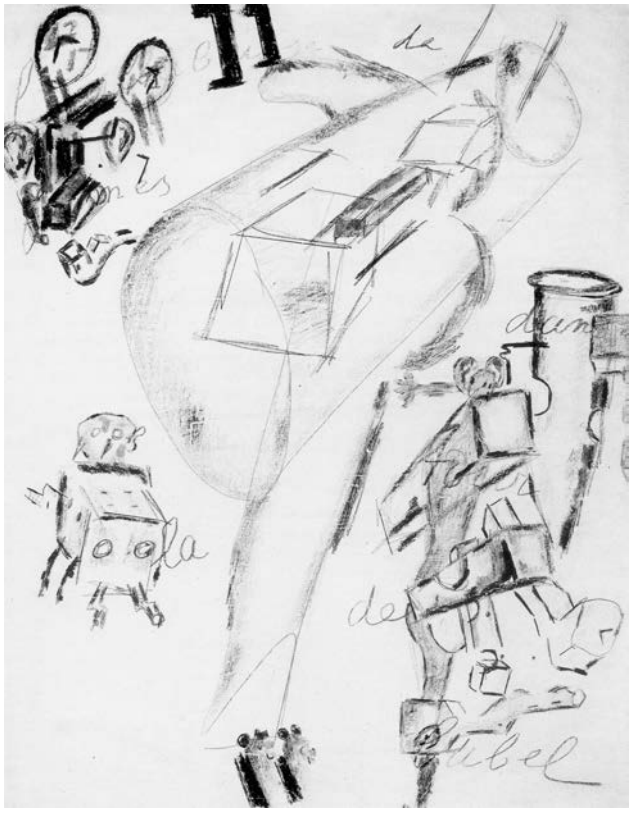

Figure 5.3 Antonin Artaud, *La bouillabaisse de formes dans la tour de babel*, February 1946

bird-like face emerging from its top, suggestive of the animation of the inorganic, in a further evocation of a medieval mentality, as with Brueghel or Bosch. At the centre of the image are two opposed box-like forms that suggest some kind of apparatus, surrounded by a blue, cylindrical 'aura', linked in turn to vivid red lines suggestive of electrical circuits. Artaud wrote that '[t]o hand a man over to electroshock or to insulin is to kill him', conceiving it as a 'therapy of slow death', a voiding of the body of its self ('moi').[142] Artaud also characterises that process in terms of 'un état flaque' – as fluid – where the body loses its boundaries and form, becoming a 'puddle'.[143] In 'Insanity and Black Magic', Artaud writes that 'Those who live, live off the dead. [. . .] and there's nothing like an insane asylum to tenderly incubate death, and to keep the dead in an incubator'.[144] The drawings therefore attempt to give expression to what cannot be represented – particularly the experience of death, conceived by Artaud as the liminal state of 'Bardo'.[145] Artaud also wrote that he had 'died' at Rodez 'in the trances of an electroshock', detaching from his own body and seeing it lying there below him on the bed, and asserting that we are 'no more than Revenants'.[146] And as we saw above, Artaud used the term '*Void*' in relation to this sense of separation – what we might pose as a gaping tear in experience, an intolerable gap that the drawings attempt to fill.

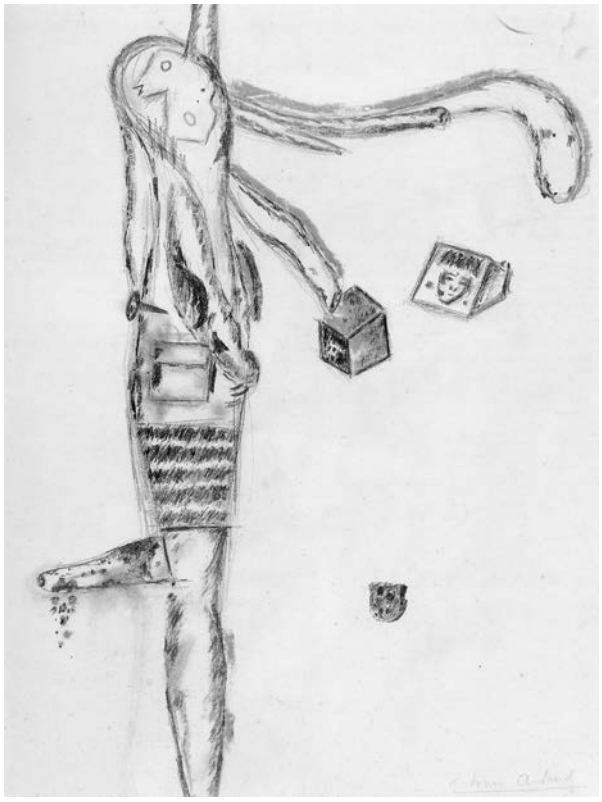

Figure 5.4 Antonin Artaud, *Le Totem*, ca. December 1945–February 1946

So that we can see these 'written drawings' too as part of this effort, not only to reconstruct the dismembered subject, but also to fill in that traumatic hole in experience.

We need to read this image in tandem with another, Artaud's *Le Totem* (ca. December 1945–February 1946), which depicts a rigid, prone figure connected by wires to a glowing red box, again clearly suggestive of the operation of electroshock (Figure 5.4). Jacques Prevel, in fact, suggested the title, and though Thévenin believed she saw in it Artaud's 'cane of St. Patrick', what we see here is surely a very precise depiction of the experience of electroshock treatment.[147] When the electric current is applied there is at first a tensing of the muscles followed by extreme rigidity, with arms and legs bent or raised and the mouth opened wide, and it is this 'tonic' phase that seems to be suggested here. Box-like devices – one again animated with a face – are wired to the head, and as in the previous image, the vivid red colouring along the wires suggests the application of an electric current. Pain is evoked by the large nail driven into the torso and by the red patch on the back, either of which may refer to Artaud's damaged vertebrae, depending on which direction the body is taken to be facing. Artaud firmly believed that, when he was nineteen, he had been stabbed in the back by a pimp in Marseille, so we can be sure that this suffering figure is Artaud himself and that what is represented is the moment of electroshock – the tensed figure cast into the void of Bardo.

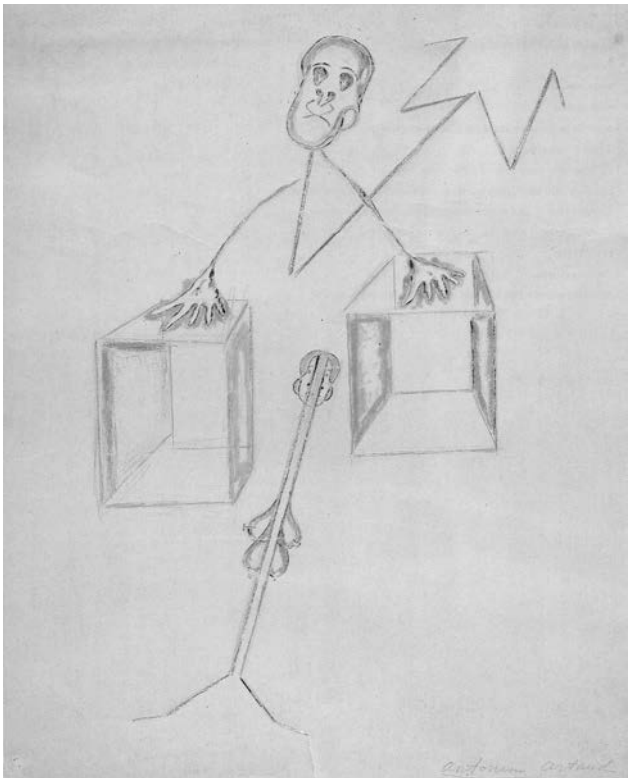

Figure 5.5 Antonin Artaud, *La Mort et l'homme*, ca. April 1946

In *La Mort et l'homme* (ca. April 1946) we discover a body now entirely stripped of its organs (Figure 5.5). This might be explained in terms of Artaud's obsession with purity, discarding the organs as the source of man's misery – of physical pain, cravings, sexual desires – resulting in the 'body without organs' later elaborated by Deleuze and Guattari. In *To have done with the judgement of God*, Artaud argues that man's anatomy must be remade, that he must be stripped bare, scraped of God, 'and with God his organs', adding that 'there is nothing more useless than an organ'.[148] In his commentary on this particular image, the body is reduced, Artaud writes, to 'a tick-tock of clockwork', a 'straight ruler', 'a stick that walks, with a bit of flesh on it . . . '.[149] The mechanical rocking of the stick-like metronome-figure in the foreground suggests the on/off action of a switch. The flying figure above is that of death, whose zigzag form suggests a lightning bolt or electrocution, like the sudden eruption of death in life; and Artaud describes death as stealing the lungs – the box-like forms that symbolise breath, life – as the body tumbles into the void. It is worth noting that Jean Delay, discussing in 1946 the impact of electroshock upon cases of extreme melancholy, observes feelings of guilt and incurability that extend to the destruction of organs and of the corporeal self: 'the patient declares he no longer has a stomach, no mouth, no kidneys, no heart, and sometimes even, no body' – what Delay calls a 'delirium of negations'.[150] Whether or not Artaud would fit such a diagnostic category, the correspondence with his own obsessions is surely striking.

Artaud's vampiric bodies

In Artaud's cardinal drawing *Le théâtre de la cruauté* (ca. March 1946) (Figure 5.6), we clearly see both the continuity of his thought with concerns dating from the period of his immersion in cinema and theatre, interwoven with themes drawn from the gothic – in particular, the vampire myth. The image depicts four overlapping coffins containing the apparently still-living bodies of women, inscribed with cabbalistic signs and shaded in reds, blue and yellow. Artaud attached particular importance to this drawing, writing to Dr. Dequeker to recover it together with another drawing, *La machine de l'être*, after they were left in his room at Rodez. Artaud writes of 'The 4 coffins in the shape of a carafe stopper, with the 4 heads of the beings that I love most in the world', asking 'where are they in actual life? Tell me where, in which country is Flora, the beautiful Rumanian'.[151] The women represent Artaud's surrogate family of female rescuers – his 'daughters of the heart to be reborn' – laid out in their coffins, waiting to rise up and rescue Artaud. Artaud had long maintained the fantasy that Breton and his group of women supporters had fought a battle at Le Havre in which Breton had been killed while attempting to free him, a recurring motif that reiterates the protective role assumed by women in his work.[152]

Le théâtre de la cruauté also clearly recalls the photographs that Artaud had produced for his planned film of *The Monk*, with Agnes (Juliette Beckers), forced at

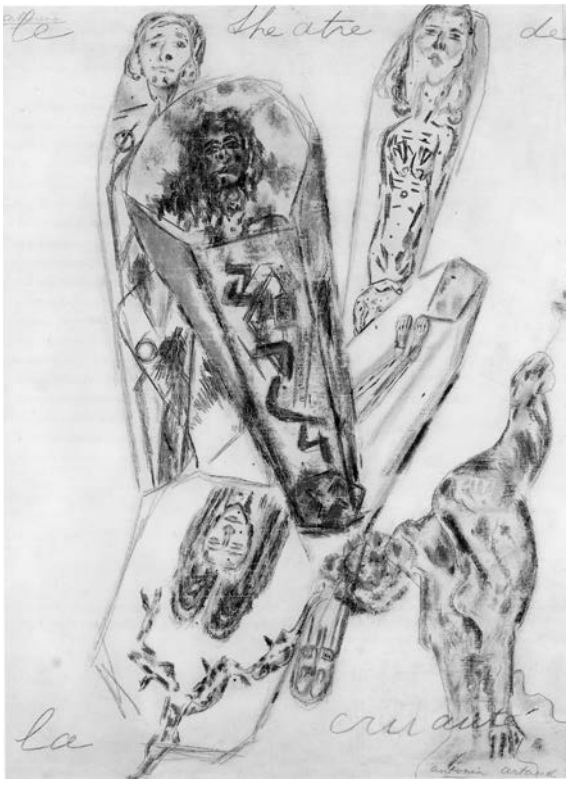

Figure 5.6 Antonin Artaud, *Le théâtre de la cruauté*, ca. March 1946

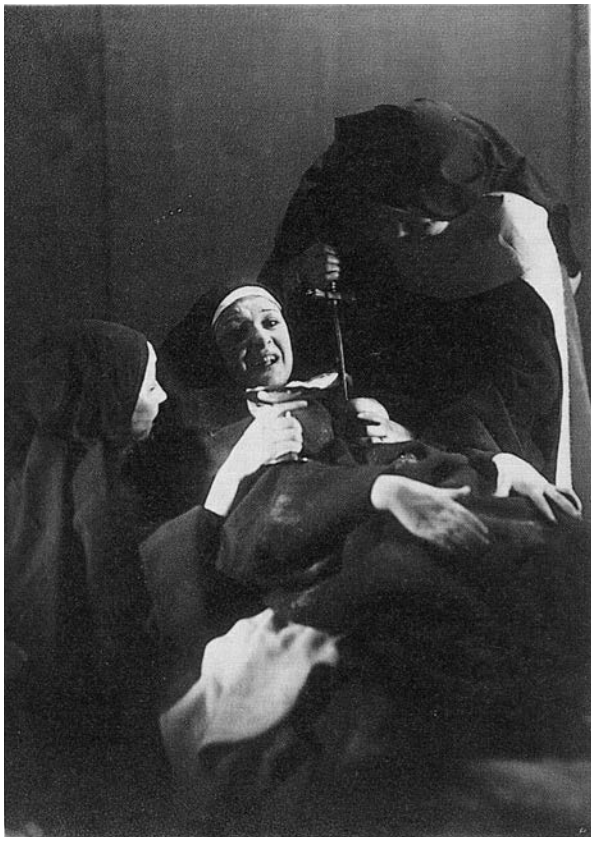

Figure 5.7 Anon, 'L'Empoisonnement', 1931

knifepoint to take poison (Figure 5.7), and then, still alive, lying in her casket, wrapped in a shroud. But the images also recall the scene in Stoker's *Dracula*, where Jonathan Harker discovers the coffins in the crypt of Count Dracula's castle where Dracula and the three 'weird sisters' sleep by day, and Artaud would be familiar with the scene in Murnau's *Nosferatu* in which Hutter (Harker in Stoker's novel) discovers Nosferatu in his coffin. In Murnau's film, the letter that the Count sends to his property agent is, like one of Artaud's Spells, awash with skulls, bones and occult symbols. Nosferatu brings the plague to Bremen, travelling by sea with his coffins, as the entire crew are gradually killed off – assumed, when they finally reach port, to have been stricken by the plague, another of Artaud's core obsessions. Female purity also assumes particular significance here, portrayed in the novel as being able to defeat evil, as Lucy sacrifices herself to the Count in order to save her husband.

Artaud is also surely returning to ideas first developed in a screenplay that he produced in 1929, *Les 32*, a vampire tale that Stephen Barber suggests plagiarises Murnau.[153] In Artaud's script, a woman who had been abandoned, pregnant, by her lover, is drawn to a young teacher, looking to him for some kind of 'intervention of an occult order'.[154] The teacher carries out various occult rites using a sword and a rotating

glass ball set before a mirror, by which means he is able to invoke various demons and spectres:

> An entire world seemed to parade in the mirror, like a marine respiration, an aquatic world full of filaments and globules of exploding air. Anxious paws seemed to scrape the glass, emerging from the virtuality of the mirror. A bestial face appeared. An infinity of masks, of phosphorescent eyed beasts, all filled with a disquiet, a boundless anxiety.[155]

The young man suffers a breakdown and a sturdy woman is hired as his housekeeper, but she is gradually reduced to a shadow of her former self, with the clear implication that he is feeding upon her vitality. With the outbreak of war, the teacher securely bars and bolts the house before leaving, like Dracula, in a curious old vehicle with a huge load of trunks. But once gone, the townsfolk break down the door with explosives and rush to discover the contents of the cellar, where they find thirty-two crates that are opened to reveal – 'Horror!' – the dismembered bodies of thirty-two women. The tale concludes in Turkey, where 'traces of the vampire have been rediscovered', and where the teacher has been hunted down to a hospital where he lies dying, still accompanied by his companion.[156]

The theme of the vampire also pervades Artaud's late work in a more general sense in relation to the concept of '*envoûtement*' or 'bewitchment', a term that recurs in his Rodez writings, used particularly in relation to occult sexual acts visited upon Artaud's own body. Writing, for example, to Dr. Latrémolière in March 1943, Artaud complains of 'the hordes of demons which afflict me night and day' and of the 'filthy erotic manipulations they are constantly performing on me'.[157] In a letter to Peter Watson of July 1946, Artaud wrote of his body being prey to predators day and night – of kissing and sucking his 'dead' body, making him ill: 'For there would be no diseases were it not for vampires, spellbinders and initiates'.[158] And in a letter to Breton as late as 1947, Artaud claims that: 'I live possessed, smothered, defiled day and night by incubi and succubae'.[159] For Morfee, Artaud associates all sexual activity with demons, bound up, he argues, with 'the figure of the vampire, a predominant mode of existence for Artaud'.[160] Morfee contends that the incubi and succubae of *Suppôts et Supplications*, Artaud's final, posthumous collection of texts, 'act vampirically', suggesting the idea of the vampire attacking the viscera and thus acting as a source for Artaud's project to create the 'body without organs', as a means to pre-empt such an assault.[161] Right from the earliest writings God is posed as a 'thieving God', separating Artaud from his own thought, and in the late writings Artaud writes of a 'God who vampirises me'.[162] God and his minions, argues Morfee, 'are nothing other than metaphysical vampires', taking possession of human identities and their bodily supports, in order 'to feed their existential appetites'.[163] And he cites Artaud's assertion that: 'Believing themselves living [the selves] they don't realise that it's their vampire, their enemy; that *other* who has always wanted themselves . . .'.[164] The vampire, then, for Artaud, figures as the emblem of all that feeds parasitically upon the body, acting in particular as a demonic, sexual predator.

A final book project, *50 dessins pour assassiner la magie*, was suggested by Pierre Loeb but remained unpublished at Artaud's death. Evelyne Grossman argues that, for Artaud, 'art was always indistinguishable from magic', reflecting his lifelong interest in the occult sciences, though she distinguishes his approach from that of the surrealists, which she characterises as more 'documentary or ethnological' – a somewhat restricted view of surrealism's engagement with magic, as we shall see in the next chapter.[165] Grossman views Artaud's interest in non-Western cultures as lying in

their retaining links with vital, magical forces underlying material phenomena, posing magic as a powerful means of *communication* with that unseen realm.[166] The text itself, written in January 1948, is reproduced from the school notebooks in which Artaud wrote it, first piercing the pages with eleven holes concentrated around the bottom-half of the pages, such that the layout of the text is partly determined by the arrangement of holes, as it is forced down a narrow defile where it has to avoid a cluster of piercings of the page. The text therefore becomes more staccato and urgent at such points, as when Artaud asserts that:

> They are not drawings
> they figure nothing . . .
> They are notes
> words
> pier glasses,
> because they are ardent
> corrosive
> incisive
> thrown forth
> by who knows what
> submaxillar
> subspatular
> whirlwind
> of vitriol[167]

Quite apart from any magical or symbolic effect, the piercings therefore also have an immediate impact upon the structure and rhythm of the text itself. The work is the product of a rite, a performance in which Artaud would write while chanting and hammering upon a block of wood as he declaimed the text. The words themselves, writes Artaud, 'are in fact merely commentary on action that has really occurred', 'merely a limited figuration' of what has 'magically worked its effects'.[168] To the end then, Artaud pursues a parallel path to that of surrealism in his rejection of the limits of material reality, insisting instead upon the reality of this other, invisible world that he accessed through the rites of magic. And in late texts such as 'Van Gogh le suicidé de la société' Artaud continues right to the end to attack French psychiatry – 'no better than a den of apes' – asserting that 'the psychiatrist does not exist who is not a well-known erotomaniac' (Ferdière's thesis was in fact on the subject of *L'érotomanie*).[169]

In the late stages of terminal cancer, Artaud died in March 1948 of an overdose of medication, less than two years after leaving Rodez in May 1946 and following over eight years of incarceration. Artaud's own gothic journey had in many ways been no less extraordinary than that recounted by Lewis or Maturin – a *poète maudit* inhabiting a body and mind wracked by various addictions and obsessions – culminating in his long internment under the German occupation and suffering some fifty-eight electroshock sessions. Far from the reassuring image of the therapy portrayed by Litvak's film, for Artaud, victim of the primitive stages of its development, electroshock was rather a throwback to an almost medieval 'torture' of the body, while its explanation in terms of 'dissolution-reconstruction' ironically echoed his own project for the reconstruction of the body – though to very different ends. As Artaud's late drawings demonstrate, his advocacy of a 'medieval mentality', his intense identification with various monastic roles in cinema and with Lewis's *Monk*, as well as his religious and magical

obsessions, all provided him with a range of gothic motifs and themes through which to articulate his own incarceration and bodily suffering. And we can therefore see in the work of Artaud yet another transmutation – both in body and spirit – of the gothic.

Notes

1 See Florence de Mèredieu, *C'était Antonin Artaud* (Paris: Fayard, 2006); Camille Dumoulié, *Antonin Artaud* (Paris: Seuil, 1996); Jacob Rogozinski, *La Passion d'Antonin Artaud* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 2011); Alain and Odette Virmaux, *Antonin Artaud: Qui êtes-vous?* (Lyon: La Manufacture, 1996).
2 See André Roumieux, *Artaud et l'asile*, Vol. 1: *Au-delà des murs, la mémoire* (Paris: Séguier, 1996); Laurent Danchin, *Artaud et l'asile*, Vol. 2: *Le cabinet du docteur Ferdière* (Paris: Séguier, 1996).
3 Adrian Morfee, *Antonin Artaud's Writing Bodies* (Oxford and New York: Clarendon, 2005), p. 51.
4 Ibid., p. 71.
5 Georges Bataille, 'Surrealism From Day to Day', in Bataille (ed.), *The Absence of Myth: Writings on Surrealism* (London and New York: Verso, 1994), pp. 42–43.
6 Antonin Artaud, Letter to Abel Gance, November 27, 1927, in Susan Sontag (ed.), *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), p. 167.
7 Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Fall of the House of Usher', in Poe (ed.), *Selected Tales* (Oxford and New York: OUP, 1980), pp. 64–65.
8 Ibid., pp. 65–66.
9 Artaud, Letter to Jacques Rivière, 25 May 1924, in Artaud, *Selected Writings*, p. 44.
10 Artaud, Letter to René Allendy, 30 November 1927, in Artaud, *Selected Writings*, p. 169.
11 Artaud, Letter to Abel Gance, 27 November 1927, ibid., p. 168.
12 Anna Balakian, *Surrealism: The Road to the Absolute* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 243.
13 Robert Desnos, letter to Ferdière, 26 March 1943, in Danchin, *Artaud et l'asile* Vol. 2, p. 35.
14 Desnos, ibid.
15 Anaïs Nin, cited in Martin Esslin, *Artaud* (London: Fontana, 1976), p. 38.
16 Artaud, letter to Mme. Toulouse, ca. September 1924, cited in Paule Thévenin, *Antonin Artaud: Fin de l'ère Chrétienne* (Paris: Éds. Lignes-Léo Scheer, 2006), p. 21.
17 Maxime Alexandre, TV interview, 1974, in Odette and Alain Virmaux, *Artaud Vivant* (Paris: Nouvelles éditions Oswald, 1980), p. 47.
18 See Mark Dion, *Bureau of the Centre for the Study of Surrealism and Its Legacy* (London: Book Works, 2005).
19 Artaud himself was responsible for the letters to the Pope, Dalai Lama and Buddhist Schools, as well as collaborating with Michel Leiris on that to the university rectors, while Desnos and Théodore Fraenkel were charged with the letter to the heads of asylums.
20 Mark Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of André Breton* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995), p. 233.
21 Artaud, 'A Table', trans. as 'Dinner is Served', in Artaud (ed.), *Selected Writings*, pp. 103–4.
22 Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille: An Intellectual Biography* (London and New York: Verso, 2002), p. 73.
23 André Breton, 'Pourquoi je prends la direction de La Révolution surréaliste', *La Révolution surréaliste*, no. 4 (15 July 1925), pp. 1–3.
24 Thévenin, *Antonin Artaud: Fin de l'ère Chrétienne*, pp. 175–76.
25 Artaud, 'Rêve', *La Révolution surréaliste*, no. 3 (15 April 1925), p. 3.
26 Ibid.
27 Artaud, letter of 3 October 1925 to Génica Athanasiou, cited in Marguerite Bonnet, *André Breton: Naissance de l'aventure surréaliste* (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1988), p. 383.
28 Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind*, p. 235.
29 André Breton, *Entretiens*, translated as *Conversations*, p. 86.
30 Ibid. pp. 84 and 86.

31 Balakian, *Surrealism*, p. 243.
32 Alain et Odette Virmaux, *Antonin Artaud*, p. 46.
33 Artaud, 'Manifesto for an Abortive Theatre' (1927), in Claude Schumacher (ed.), *Artaud on Theatre* (London: Methuen Drama, 1989), p. 33.
34 Artaud, post-script to 'Manifeste pour un théâtre avorté', in Artaud, *Œuvres*, p. 234.
35 Artaud, 'Manifesto for an Abortive Theatre', in Schumacher, p. 32.
36 Artaud, 'The Alfred Jarry Theatre (1928 Season)', in Schumacher, p. 35.
37 Artaud, 'In Total Darkness, or, the Surrealist Bluff' (1927), in Artaud (ed.), *Selected Writings*, p. 142.
38 Artaud, 'Alchemist Theatre', in Schumacher, p. 97.
39 Ibid., p. 98.
40 Artaud, 'The Theatre of Cruelty – First Manifesto' (1932), in Schumacher, pp. 100–101.
41 Artaud, letter to Jean Paulhan, 14 November 1932, in Schumacher, p. 107.
42 Artaud, 'Theatre and the Plague' (1934), in Schumacher, p. 114.
43 Artaud cited in Jane Goodall, 'The Plague and Its Powers in Artaudian Theatre', in Edward Scheer (ed.), *Antonin Artaud: A Critical Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 66.
44 Ibid., p. 67.
45 Ibid., p. 68.
46 Poe, 'The Masque of the Red Death', in Poe, *Selected Tales*, p. 136.
47 Artaud, *Héliogabale, ou l'Anarchiste couronné* (1934), *OCVII*, p. 67.
48 Artaud, letter to Jean Paulhan, 1 June 1934, in Artaud, *Selected Writings*, p. 337; Anaïs Nin, cited in Stephen Barber, *Antonin Artaud: Blows and Bombs* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1993), p. 61.
49 Artaud, *Héliogabale*, p. 11.
50 Ibid., p. 33.
51 Artaud, from *Heliogabalus*, in Artaud, *Selected Writings*, pp. 320–21.
52 Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, p. 56.
53 See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Athlone Press, 1984).
54 Ibid., p. 8.
55 Artaud, *Selected Writings*, p. 327.
56 Antonin Artaud, *The Cenci* (London: Calder and Boyars, 1969), p. 17.
57 Karen L. King, *What Is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap, 2003), pp. vii and 1–3.
58 Ibid., p. 5.
59 R.A. Gilbert, *Gnosticism and Gnosis: An Introduction* (Bristol: Antioch Papers, 2012), p. 40.
60 Ibid., p. 41.
61 Giovanni Filoramo, *A History of Gnosticism* (Cambridge, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), pp. xiv–xv.
62 Ronald Hayman, *Artaud and After* (Oxford: OUP, 1977) – see Ch.8.
63 Dumoulié, *Antonin Artaud*, p. 89.
64 Artaud, *Les Nouvelles Révélations de l'Être*, in Artaud, *Œuvres*, pp. 787–99.
65 Artaud, 'The New Revelations of Being', in Artaud (ed.), *The Death of Satan and Other Mystical Writings* (London: Calder and Boyars, 1974), p. 64.
66 Ibid., pp. 70–77.
67 Artaud, 'Mise en scène and Metaphysics' (1932) from *The Theatre and Its Double* (1931–36), in Artaud, *Selected Writings*.
68 Artaud. 'Life and Death of Satan Fire', in Artaud (ed.), *The Death of Satan*, p. 9.
69 Ibid., pp. 9–10.
70 Ibid., p. 11.
71 Artaud, *Les Nouvelles Révélations de l'Être*, in Artaud, *Œuvres*, p. 798.
72 Artaud, letter to Breton, 27 May 1937, in Artaud, *Œuvres*, p. 803.
73 Artaud, letter to Breton, July 1937, in Artaud, *Œuvres*, pp. 808–9.
74 Artaud, letter to Breton, 30 July 1937, in Artaud, *Œuvres*, p. 812.
75 Artaud, cited in Evelyne Grossman, 'Antonin Artaud: Vie et Oeuvre', in Artaud, *Œuvres*, p. 1751.

76 Artaud, letter to Breton of September 1937, in Schumacher, p. 161.
77 Artaud, letter to Lise Deharme, 5 September 1937, in Margit Rowell, *Antonin Artaud: Works on Paper* (exh. cat.), New York, MOMA, 1996, p. 148.
78 Sylvère Lotringer, 'The Art of the Crack Up', in Edward Scheer (ed.), *100 Years of Cruelty: Essays on Artaud* (Sydney: Power/Artspace, 2000), p. 179.
79 Artaud, 'Spell for Jacqueline Breton', 17 September 1937, in Rowell, *Works on Paper*, p. 148.
80 Artaud, letter to Anie Besnard and René Thomas, 14 September 1937, in Artaud, *Œuvres*, p. 834.
81 Artaud, 'Les figures sur la page inerte . . .' (February 1947), in Rowell, *Works on Paper*, p. 42.
82 Artaud, 'Les figures sur la page inerte . . .', in Artaud, *Œuvres*, p. 1467.
83 Agnès de la Beaumelle, 'Spells and Gris-Gris: Introduction', in Rowell, *Works on Paper*, p. 39.
84 Ibid., p. 40.
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6 Heritage of the accursed

Surrealism, magic and the alchemical quest

> Conscious or not, the process of artistic discovery, if it remains foreign to the entirety of its metaphysical ambitions, owes no less fealty to the form and even the means of advancement of the highest magic.
>
> Breton, *Arcane 17* (1947)

Introduction: Breton, surrealism, magic

The presence of magic is evident from the outset as one of the many constituents that would make up surrealism. Magic and alchemy – particularly the associated idea of *transformation* and the medieval thought-system out of which they emerge – are fundamental to Breton's conception of surrealism, both providing the source of essential surrealist concepts and exercising a decisive influence upon the development of the movement at key moments in its history. Magic pervades the overheated atmosphere of the séance room, hovers in the background of core concepts such as the 'marvellous' and is explicitly present in the work of artists such as Max Ernst, who had a deep interest in alchemy.[1] Marcel Duchamp made a particular study of occult texts while working as a librarian at the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève during the immediate pre-war era, and we could add the influence of alchemy on works such as Breton's *Les Vases communicants* and *L'Amour fou*.[2] Magic erupts spectacularly in the 'Second Manifesto', signalling surrealism's 'occult turn' and the more insular tenor of the movement during the thirties, indicated by the hermetic emblem on the cover of *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution*.[3]

During his wartime exile in New York Breton was initially close to the Swiss painter Kurt Seligmann, a collector from the late 1930s of hermetic texts that strongly marked his own writing and artwork. Focusing first on Breton's wartime exile and his relationship with fellow exiles that include Seligmann and Denis de Rougemont, the analysis considers the impact of war, contemporary concern with the concept of evil and its embodiment in the figure of the Devil or Satan, one of the core themes of the gothic novel, as in the Faustian pact. Drawing on the writings of Eliphas Lévi, Hugo and others, we see a total revaluation of Satan's role in Breton's thought in the figure of Lucifer, the rebel angel, at the culmination of his *Arcane 17*. Convinced of the failure of male-dominated Western thought, Breton turned increasingly to alternative and utopian thought systems in the work of Charles Fourier, Flora Tristan and others, while developing a deep interest in hermetic systems, alchemy and the Tarot, culminating in his writing during 1944 of *Arcane 17*. These developments would strongly mark the postwar surrealist movement, as immediately demonstrated in the

international exhibition 'Surrealism in 1947', organised as an initiatory journey and pervaded by concepts derived from occultism.[4]

Breton's immersion in hermetic themes would culminate in the troubled production of his final new book, *L'art magique* (1957), where his ideas on the inter-relationship of magic with art are most fully developed. Following in the footsteps of poets and visionaries like Hugo, Novalis and Nerval, for Breton magic and occultism tap into the imagination as a new source of creativity both for artists and writers, while as non-rational systems they continue the surrealist assault on the dominance of reason and the reality system. Magic brought with it a rich iconography, but it also carried a strong spiritual dimension fundamental to Breton's thought, as in the idea of the initiatory quest – whether for the Philosopher's Stone, the mythical Grail or surrealism's own 'supreme point'. Finally, among the most significant contributions in this field were those of women surrealists such as Ithell Colquhoun and Leonora Carrington and the chapter concludes with an analysis of some of their core gothic-themed works – contrasting conceptions of the occult to that of Breton.

The alchemical tower

> And you showed me, in passing, the Tour Saint-Jacques under its pale scaffolding, rendering it for some time now the world's great monument to the hidden.
>
> Breton, *L'Amour fou* (1937)

Taking as his starting point Rimbaud's 'alchemy of the word', in the 'Second Manifesto of Surrealism' Breton claims surrealism as taking up the challenge set by the author of *Un Saison en enfer* at the start of 'a difficult undertaking'.[5] And Breton notes the 'remarkable analogy' in terms of their goals, between the surrealists and the alchemists, pointing to the case of Flamel in 'the admirable fourteenth century', building on the works of Abraham the Jew and Hermes, stating explicitly that: 'the philosopher's stone is nothing more or less than that which was to enable man's imagination to take a stunning revenge on all things'.[6] Subsequently, Breton writes evocatively in *L'Amour fou* (1937) of his first, midnight rendezvous with Jacqueline Lamba and of their walking together through Paris in the early hours of the morning, through Les Halles and past the scaffolded Tour Saint-Jacques.[7] Breton maintained a long-standing fascination with the surviving sixteenth-century tower, sole remainder of the church of Saint-Jacques la Boucherie, originally the parish church of the butchers in the nearby markets of Les Halles, demolished in 1797. And Breton cites a snippet of his own poem 'Vigilance':

> In Paris the Tour Saint-Jacques swaying
> Like a sunflower.[8]

This recalls for Breton the two meanings of the word '*tournesol*' in French: both the flower that turns toward the sun, and also the 'reactive agent used in chemistry . . . reddening at the contact of an acid', combining to create 'the complex conception I form of the tower', thus embracing the alchemical pursuit of the transformation of metals.[9] The tower also figures in the book in Brassaï's atmospheric photograph (cover image), captured at night under a layer of frost, its flying gargoyles and sculpted medieval figures set against bare wintry branches and a bleak night sky. The church had once formed the starting point of the medieval pilgrimage to Tours and on to Santiago de Compostela

('*compost stellae*' to the alchemists), while Nicolas Flamel had been a patron of the church and was buried under its floor. His tombstone, with its arcane symbols, was said to have been designed by Flamel himself and can be seen today in the Musée de Cluny. The alchemist and writer Fulcanelli, too, discusses the alchemical significance of the pilgrimage as an allegory of the creation of the Great Work, asserting that all alchemists are obliged to make this 'symbolic voyage' to Compostela, an 'emblematic city' sited not on Spanish territory, but rather 'on the very terrain of the philosophical subject'.[10] And an alchemical journey that is complete when a 'brilliant *star*' appears in the alembic of primal matter.[11] We should also add the tower was significantly linked, particularly for Breton, with the work of Nerval, who was born nearby, on the rue Saint Martin, and hanged himself in what was then the rue de la Vieille Lanterne.[12]

Breton returns later in *L'Amour fou* to the tower motif, this time in a photograph of a castle in the form of a pointed tower captioned with the phrase: 'On the side of the abyss, made of philosophers' stone, the starry castle opens'[13] – in fact a picture postcard of 'Star Castle', in Prague, itself a city of towers, which Breton visited in 1935, describing it as '*la capitale magique de toute l'Europe*'.[14] As Patrick Rivière observes in Richard Danier's analysis of surrealism and alchemy, Breton associated the tower with that in the myth of Mélusine in which the transformation from woman to water-serpent occurred each Sabbath, a figure that he also associated with Nadja.[15] And Rivière also points to the connection with the 'athanor', the alchemical 'Tower furnace', such that the tower itself becomes a symbol of transformation. We could also add the significance for Breton of the Tower in the Tarot pack – the sixteenth Arcanum – which depicts a tower struck by lightning, from which two figures fall, and which signifies *change*, the break with the established order. For surrealism then, the tower signifies the starting point of a great quest – movement and transformation – with the Star as its terminal point, the attainment of reciprocal love.

Breton would later return to the Tour Saint-Jacques in the texts appended to *Arcane 17* in 1947 to form 'Ajours', where he relates the events told to him by the young painter Jacques Halpern, who lived nearby. Taking the number of a passing bus (21) coinciding with the number of chiming bells (3) as premonitory, Halpern returned to the park below the tower on the 21st of the month, at three in the afternoon, led there he said, by 'a mysterious and irresistible force', and was approached by a young man who spoke with him until it began to rain.[16] The man gave his address, describing the building and staircases, but when the painter went there, summoned by a dream, although exactly as described, neither concierge nor tenants knew anything of the stranger, and Halpern saw in the encounter a manifestation of the 'marvellous'. For Breton the site held enormous significance and he writes that: 'It is certain that my spirit has often roamed around this tower, for me powerfully charged with occult meaning'.[17] The tower, with its lost church signified for Breton the idea of subterranean life, connected too with the figure of Flamel and the legends of his return after his death, claimed as the 'Man in black' seen on tombstones, 'in which the alchemists recognised the Crow whose head must be cut off', an allusion to the alchemical process of putrefaction.[18]

Surrealism in exile: alchemy and the Devil's share

The early interest shown by surrealism in alchemy and magic intensified with the onset of the Second World War, when the surrealists gathered in Marseilles during the winter of 1940/41 while attempting to flee France, created their own version of the

Marseilles Tarot.[19] After a long sea journey via Martinique, during which he conversed regularly with fellow passenger Claude Lévi-Strauss, Breton and his family finally arrived in New York in June 1941.[20] Refusing to adopt the English language, Breton confined himself largely within a circle of exiles and fellow surrealists that included Seligmann, Yves Tanguy, Kay Sage, Matta, Gordon Onslow-Ford and Nicolas Calas. Seligmann had abandoned Europe in 1939 for New York, where he was instrumental in arranging the escape of Breton and others, and where his strong interest in magic and the occult would in turn stimulate that of Breton. Once settled in New York, in the spring of 1942 Breton looked to the future in drafting his 'Prolegomena to a Third Surrealist Manifesto or Not', where he considers 'the postulate that "there is no society without a social myth"' and the extent to which such a myth might be *imposed* in fostering a desired state of society.[21] But he also observes 'a certain return to the study of the philosophy of the Middle Ages as well as to the "accursed" sciences', contact with which 'has always been maintained through the intermediary of '"accursed" poetry'.[22] Already we see Breton mapping out the direction and concerns of postwar surrealism, when myth and the occult would come to constitute core concerns. The most prominent such mythical figure, pervasive within medieval thought and in the gothic novel, is that of Satan, a particular concern during wartime when the issue of evil, social values and the postwar order was much debated.

Surrealist debates conducted in the pages of the wartime journal *VVV*, edited by David Hare, embraced a range of occult-related themes, as with Seligmann's essay 'The Evil Eye', which claimed 'fascination through the evil eye' as among 'the most feared magico-diabolic forces', purportedly 'producing poisonous emanations which penetrate into the victim's body'.[23] Magic is rooted in childhood, the lost 'state of grace' often evoked by surrealism, in Roger Caillois's essay 'The Myth of Secret Treasures of Childhood', where he observes the power invested in the 'magical' objects treasured by children: a bit of tin foil, knives, a silvered marble.[24] Such treasures without monetary value are 'fetishes' as well as 'secrets' – 'powerful and active' as with magic – enabling the child 'to disappear at will, to paralyze from a distance, to read thoughts, and to be carried in an instant to wherever you want to go'.[25] We can perhaps also see in this the 'revaluation of values' that Breton also discovered in his wartime reading of utopian thinkers like Fourier, in his pursuit of some alternative social system to replace a bankrupt technocratic order that had already produced two global wars within the span of his own lifetime.

We also discover in *VVV* a survey of mythical figures that continued to haunt the surrealist imaginary, where a number are associated with the gothic, including the Vampire, Succubus and Incubus, and the 'Bloody Nun' from Lewis's *Monk*.[26] Such figures were already featuring in surrealist painting of the period, particularly in the work of Seligmann, Brauner and Hérold, as with Seligmann's *La deuxième main de Nosfératu (The Superfluous Hand)* of 1938, an agglomeration of contorted body parts, obscure objects and arcane symbols, suggestive of some monstrous figure, from which a claw-like hand emerges. Further evidence of the impact of alchemy upon Breton's thought can be found in his visual piece for the catalogue of the exhibition *First Papers of Surrealism*, 'On the survival of certain myths', which includes both 'The Philosopher's Stone' and 'The Grail', and culminates in Breton's own '*Grands Transparents*'.[27]

The influence of the occult upon surrealism was further confirmed in Seligmann's 'Prognostication by Paracelsus', which included extracts from a rare text by the

Swiss occultist and physician dating from 1536. Prognostication, or 'necromancy', is declared by Paracelsus as 'an uncertain art' and one that demands both imagination and faith in nature: 'Imagination is like the sun. The sun has light that is not tangible, but which nevertheless can set a house on fire . . .'.[28] Whereas Paracelsus later recanted his entire system, Seligmann notes the enduring impact of his writing on artists and poets, not least in his insistence upon self-knowledge and his conception of man as 'microcosm', such that through self-understanding, 'he knows the universe and understands its working'.[29] An important influence for Novalis, Paracelsus would quickly feed into Breton's writing, while his elevation of the role of imagination is already present in Breton's claim in the 'First Manifesto' that: 'Imagination alone offers me some intimation of *what can be* . . .' – and it is this path via the poets, linking occultism with romanticism, that is pursued by Breton.[30]

The same issue of *VVV* also contains a photograph (Figure 6.1) of a somewhat sinister shop window display created for Brentano's bookshop by Seligmann, Duchamp

Figure 6.1 Brentano's window display arranged by Kurt Seligmann, Marcel Duchamp and André Breton, New York, 1942[37]

and Breton, to promote the Swiss writer Denis de Rougemont's latest book, *La Part du Diable* (1942). Like Breton, Rougemont had been mobilised (in Switzerland) during the early stages of the war and had then made his way to New York in September 1940, where he envisaged the main struggle against Nazism being organised.[31] Rougemont's central concern in the book was with America's failure to intervene in the war and his broad thesis is that of a general absence within democracies – and in America in particular – of belief in the Devil, citing Baudelaire's claim that: 'The finest ruse of the Devil is in persuading us that he doesn't exist'.[32] The Bible, by contrast, insists on the Devil's actual existence, speaking much less of 'evil' as a general concept and instead condensing that Evil in the figure of Lucifer, an archangel '*in revolt*', fallen from heaven, and thus transformed from 'Angel of Light into Angel and Prince of Shadows'.[33] Rougemont complains, moreover, of the way that evil had come to be embodied in the figure of Hitler – a commonplace of the time found even in Breton's 'Prolegomena', where he asserts that 'poor mortals once prided themselves on having put the devil in his place, which made him decide, they say, to finally show himself in person'.[34]

Rougemont also muses on the broader status of occultism, citing the response of Jung who, when asked if he believed in the occult, related the case of a woman who had come to him suffering a phobia of birds, fearing they would attack her. She was herself convinced though that these were simply delusions and looked to Jung to cure her of the phobia. Analysis brought to light various typical complexes that were explored and disposed of, but the bird phobia remained stubbornly resistant. In despair, Jung attempted a final session of analysis during the 'torrid heat' of summer, at his villa on the banks of Lake Zurich – proposing that they use the pavilion by the water, Jung took his patient out into the garden, where, he concludes, '*the birds attacked her!*'.[35] One interpretation of Jung's remarks might be that, indeed, 'the birds attacked her', but that this bore no relationship at all to her phobia. Nonetheless, Jung's strong emphasis upon the reality of the attack suggests he was powerfully struck by the realisation of his patient's fears and that at a certain level this touches on our understanding of the 'occult'.[36] Jung's longstanding involvement in the research of occult phenomena finds its focus in providing psychological explanations of phenomena including Spiritualism, mediumism, clairvoyance and visions, such that an 'occult' reading of the incident might point towards prognostication. Jung's anecdote, then, suggests a rather deeper, psychic dimension to the occult, and one that chimes with Breton's acute attention to the 'inner voice' and the workings of the unconscious.

Rougemont first met Breton in June 1942 while both men were working for the Office of War Information, where Breton served as an announcer on the programme 'The Voice of America speaks to the French'.[38] Breton turned to Duchamp for ideas for the Brentano's display and it was he who hung unfurled black umbrellas from the ceiling, suggestive writes Rougemont, of 'the wings of giant bats'.[39] The centrepiece was formed of an improvised altar topped with black candles, with a large claw-like hand at its base, evocative of some ceremonial magic rite. On the backdrop behind the altar Seligmann painted various occult symbols sourced from Grillot de Givry's *Le Musée des sorciers* (1929), including crudely inscribed heads from a sixteenth-century occult image, 'Official Portraits of Dignatories of Hell', topped by that of Lucifer as 'Emperor'.[40] Beside those demonic heads Seligmann added a magic circle containing a burning brazier inside a triangle flanked by two lit candles, detailed in Grillot de Givry as 'The Triangle of the Pacts'.[41] The window was also decorated with numerous

effigies of the Devil borrowed from the collection of an antiquarian, among which Rougemont identified at its centre the figure of Baphomet, an androgynous bearded figure with breasts and a female sex, said to have been used in initiatory rites by the Knights Templar during the Middle Ages and on whom an article by Dr. Bérillon had appeared in *Æsculape* in 1913.[42] Seligmann would have been well aware of the details of that idolatrous ceremony, with its denial of Christ and its three 'revolting kisses' – on the mouth, the navel, and, as Bérillon delicately puts it, 'at the terminal orifice of the digestive apparatus' – which would suggest that the display was conceived as a kind of blasphemous initiation ceremony.[43] Seligmann's fascination with the figure of Baphomet is also evidenced in several of his paintings, including his *Baphomet I (Priest of Baphomet)* of 1947, and *Baphomet (Knights Templar)* of 1948. The Knights Templar were also traditionally believed to be in possession of some great treasure, posed in more modern times in terms of the Holy Grail and the tale of its pursuit, considered in the final chapter in the work of Julien Gracq. Directly behind the Brentano's 'altar' was a large Tarot card of the Devil, the 15th Arcanum, painted by Seligmann and featuring a winged Devil on a pedestal above two bound demons, a design based on that of the Marseilles Tarot.[44] Entering this desecrated space from the left is one of Seligmann's animal-like figures, wearing a kind of masonic tabard inscribed with occult symbols, a look of open-mouthed alarm on his snout-like face.

Seligmann had built up an extensive library on the occult and was working during the war on a history of magic, eventually published in 1948 as *The Mirror of Magic* (Figure 6.2).[45] With its rather jolly looking devils on the cover and subtitled 'A History of Magic in the Western World', Seligmann's book aimed at a broad readership, tracing the development of magic from its roots in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, through medieval Europe and on to the eighteenth century, embracing Gnosticism, alchemy, witchcraft, the Cabbala and black magic rites. Much of the discussion is focused on alchemy, posed by Seligmann in terms not so much of the transformation of base metals into gold, but in the more profound sense of the *spiritual* transformation of man himself, where 'the alchemist sought a union of soul and mind with the divine'.[46] For Seligmann magic originated in the opposition of Good and Evil, hence of good and evil spirits, and the consequent emergence of the magical arts as a form of protection.[47] But there's very little *analysis* here of the principles or philosophy that underpin magic, nor indeed any meaningful engagement with much of the extensive literature on the subject. Seligmann also ends his survey rather abruptly, prior to the occult revival of the nineteenth century, making no connection whatsoever with modern art or with surrealism. He concludes rather vaguely that magic 'sprang from man's longing to partake of the divine *through knowledge*', that it acted as an alternative to 'blind belief', and hence that it stimulated scientific research.[48] José Pierre judged the book 'disappointing' and Charles Henri Ford was (privately) even more damming, dismissing 'these casual sweepings through arcane literature . . . with the original speculation at zero'.[49]

Seligmann's conception of magic becomes more clear when considered in the context of his artwork, focused upon the human body, as with his 1941 collaboration with modern dancer and choreographer Hanya Holm on the ballet *The Golden Fleece*, subtitled 'An Alchemistic Fantasy' (Figure 6.3). As Stephan Hauser has shown, Seligmann was responsible for the concept, narrative and costumes, based loosely on an early seventeenth-century alchemical text, *La Toyson d'Or* of Salomon Trismosin, and on Flamel's *dream* of the alchemical process – a key factor for surrealism.[50] In highly allusive language Trismosin's text traces the seven symbolic stages in the alchemical

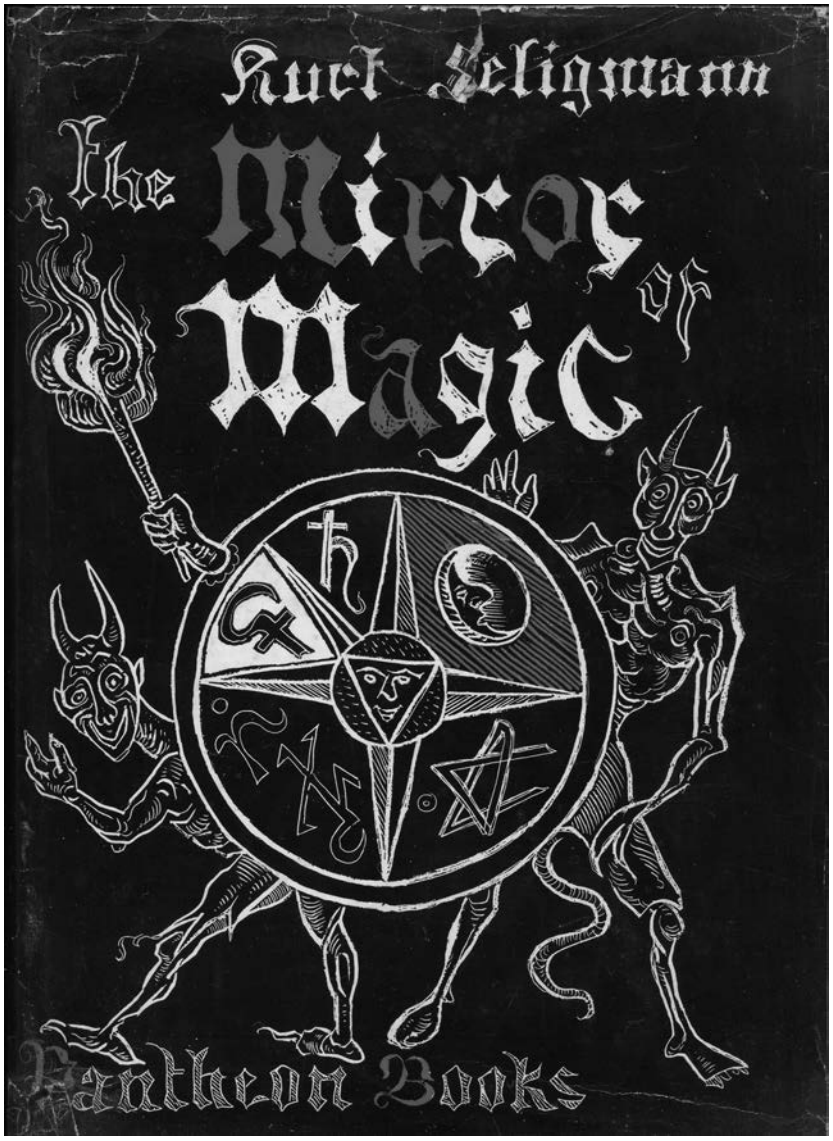

Figure 6.2 Kurt Seligmann, *The Mirror of Magic*, 1948

process, summarised by Seligmann as 'conceived as three steps leading to wisdom and perfection', thus tracing an initiatory journey that 'was believed to be in harmony with the working of the universe' – an idea that we find again in Gracq.[51] While the treatise was illustrated with coloured allegorical plates, Seligmann takes only the general concept of the alchemical stage finding embodiment in an allegorical figure, while ranging across both his own artwork and other hermetic texts to create his costumes.

The figure of 'Fire', for example (Figure 6.4), in radiant head-mask, can be traced to similar radiant figures in allegorical images that would later appear in *The Mirror of*

Figure 6.3 *The Golden Fleece: An Alchemistic Fantasy*, 1941. Collaboration of Kurt Seligmann and Hanya Holm

Figure 6.4 Earth, Fire and Water, *The Golden Fleece: An Alchemistic Fantasy*, 1941

Figure 6.5 'Massacre of the Innocents', in R. Abrahami Eleazaris, *Uraltes Chymisches Werck*, Leipzig (1760)

Magic. More specifically, we can point to the image of the 'Massacre of the Innocents' (Figure 6.5), which Breton discusses in the 'Second Manifesto', where he writes of Flamel's discovery of his 'prime agent', his 'matter', portrayed as:

> a king with a great cutlass who was having a multitude of infants killed before his eyes . . . whilst the blood of said children was then gathered by other soldiers and put into a large vessel, in which the Sun and the Moon of heaven came to bathe.[52]

Isn't this '*the* Surrealist painting?', Breton enthuses. Critics of the time read Seligmann's costumes as 'surrealist', such that the opera could be read in terms of the

'quest' – the surrealist aspiration to attain Breton's 'supreme point'. In his 1942 'Prolegomena' Breton poses art as a 'great expedition' in which 'each artist must take up the search for the *Golden Fleece* all by himself'.[53] And in this he follows Éliphas Lévi, who calls the Golden Fleece '"the hide of the sun", the luminous substance that man is called to appropriate to obtain his deliverance, the symbolic representation of the completion of the Great Work'.[54] Breton ends that text in proposing his new myth of the '*Grands Transparents*', borrowing an idea from William James, and suggesting we might be living alongside invisible, higher beings 'whose existence we do not suspect', thus both rooting surrealism in a mythical past, while also projecting it into a speculative future.[55]

Seligmann wrote in 1946 of his fascination with magic in relation to the role of the painter, observing that:

> Magic philosophy teaches that the universe is one, that every phenomenon in the world of matter and that of ideas obeys the one law which co-ordinates the All. Such doctrine sounds like a program for the painter: is it not his task to shape into a perfect unity within his canvas the variety of depicted forms?[56]

In his paintings and engravings Seligmann was strongly influenced by the work of the sixteenth-century Swiss artist Urs Graf, with its cowled monastic figures, horned devils, grotesque dancing peasants and knights in elaborate suits of armour.[57] Seligmann's own work is similarly conceived in terms of the dynamic body, transformed into highly mannered, fantastic forms, often in the guise of opened-up, hybrid figures, where the flesh mutates into flowing bands of material or hangs in tatters. Alchemical and occult themes feature in works such as *Initiation* (1946), in which a blindfolded female figure is led into a group of fantastic hooded and winged figures in some hermetic ceremony, or as in his *The Alchemists* (1949/50) in which two tattered figures watch over a glowing alembic.

For the launch of *The Mirror of Magic*, in May 1948 Seligmann staged a magic rite in his New York Studio as a form of salon performance art (Figure 6.6). In formal evening dress, Seligmann appears in photos alongside the surrealist painter Enrico Donati inside a magic circle, surrounded by a fashionable crowd of young New Yorkers.[58] Far from the tradition of Dada provocation or the magic rites of Aleister Crowley, Seligmann's performance rather anticipates the polite rituals of Yves Klein, a follower of Max Heindel's West Coast Rosicrucianism. Often strained in their relations, Breton and Seligmann became estranged at some point in 1943 following a quarrel over interpretation of the Tarot, and though Seligmann never returned to Europe after the war, his legacy in the deployment and visualisation of occult concepts endures in postwar surrealism, in its concern with magic and in the idea of the quest.[59] One such direct influence is suggested in Wifredo Lam's 1948 painting *Belial, Emperor of the Flies*, which echoes the depiction of Belial, a Hebrew term for the Devil, in Seligmann's book.[60] The relationship of the two men culminated in their collaboration on re-publication of Breton's *Pleine Marge* (1943), a poem which opens with Breton's assertion that 'Je ne suis pas pour les adeptes', but which goes on to cite Meister Eckhart, 'my master in the hostel of reason', Jansenius, and the Bonjour brothers, founders of the convulsionary Fareinist sect, tracing a trajectory suggestive of an initiatory journey.[61] In Seligmann's occult etching, the Latin text 'Lucifer my dear friend and servant' is inscribed within a magic circle, alongside Breton's initials in the significant form of

Figure 6.6 Kurt Seligmann, 'Magic Evening' held in Seligmann's studio, May 1948

'1713', and though part of a wider collaboration that was never realised, the figure of Lucifer would feature prominently in Breton's next major publication, *Arcane 17*.[62]

Arcane 17: transparency and the magic of place

> Rebellion is its own justification . . . It's a spark in the wind, but a spark in search of a powder keg.
>
> Breton, *Arcane 17*

Breton and Duchamp would collaborate again in April 1945 on another window display at Brentano's Fifth Avenue bookstore, to promote the publication of Breton's *Arcane 17*, first issued in a luxury edition in December 1944, with four Tarot card designs by Matta. The centrepiece was a headless female mannequin dressed only in

a short apron, with a water tap on her thigh, which has been read as suggestive of androgyny, one of the core concepts of alchemy.[63] Alongside this eroticised mannequin was an enlargement of the book cover, with Matta's image of what was clearly, despite the heavy stylisation of the figures, a couple making love.[64] Breton appears in photos of the installation, standing eyes closed beside the display, as though the scene were a kind of projection of his dreams upon the glass window. Themes of transparency and the window are also to be found in the writings of the Greek writer Nicolas Calas, a member of the surrealist group in Paris in the late 1930s who had gone into exile in New York in 1940, where he was closely associated with Seligmann and Breton.[65] Calas was active in promoting surrealism in the United States and in his *Confound the Wise* (1942) ranges across poetry, architecture, psychoanalysis, art and urban space. Calas's most suggestive ideas emerge in the book's concluding essay, 'The Evil Eye', where he discusses the transformation of urban space in New York, reconceived in terms of 'panoramas' – Broadway, the East River, etc. Linked to this Calas notes the diminution of the role of windows with the skyscraper, from the theatrical and mysterious, to the purely functional, while the drama of the individual psyche comes to be played out on screen or in the shop window:

> New York's power of fascination consists in the fact that it has become a panorama. Shop windows replace with their display of small panoramas the lost vision of windows. All that is oppressing and unoriginal in individual life is being sublimated in the role man is learning to play himself and that he is teaching his mannequins and human dolls to act, in shop windows, on the stage, or on the screen. The panorama is being gradually turned into art.[66]

All of this, along with Calas's attacks on the related cult of privacy, resonates with Breton's vaunted 'transparency', his partiality for crystal and his deployment of the window display as the projection of unconscious desire and the socially repressed – confirmed in the vitriolic protests that the Brentano display provoked. Calas concludes that 'the vision of the poet must be diabolical', on the model of the child or the shaman, and that 'he must have an evil eye if light is to be thrown on images and new forms are to come into existence'.[67]

While there are increasing references to the occult and related fields in Breton's earlier writings, it is only really with *Arcane 17* that we begin to see the emergence of a coherent philosophy that would incorporate occult ideas within the body of thought that would guide postwar surrealism. In calling in the 'Second Manifesto' for the 'occultation' of surrealism, Breton observed that the movement would not be wasting its time in 'probing seriously into those sciences which . . . are today completely discredited'.[68] Calling for surrealism to pursue Rimbaud's 'alchemy of the word', Breton links that quest to Flamel and alchemy, to 'the secrets of Hermes', and to Abraham the Jew.[69] Danier contends that hermeticism, and alchemy in particular, run right through Breton's writings, while Bauduin identifies in August Viatte's *Victor Hugo et les illuminées de son temps* (1942) a 'turning-point' in Breton's perception of the role of occultism within Romanticism and Symbolism in particular, reinforced by other scholarly studies of the period (Albert Béguin, Jean Richer, Georges Blin).[70] While there are clearly moments, texts, when concern with the occult is particularly intense, when considered as part of Breton's broader affirmation of the medieval mentality – of the gothic, the non-rational, mediumism, etc. – it

can be seen to pervade Breton's thought and to figure prominently in the development of key surrealist concepts.

Arcane 17 was written at a particularly significant juncture in Breton's life, following a period of depression occasioned by the breakup of his marriage to Jacqueline Lamba and exacerbated by Breton's deep unease with his American exile. Breton met and soon after married Elisa Claro, a young Chilean widow, stimulating him to write a third book in the line of *Nadja* and *L'Amour fou* – books that pose the transformational love relationship as a form of 'magic' – celebrating and cementing their relationship. For Henri Béhar *Arcane 17* was written 'to ward off ill fortune' and 'to reverse the direction of history, personal and collective', suggesting the way in which magic served Breton as a vicarious form of empowerment.[71] The immediate occasion of the book was a trip made by the couple in the autumn of 1944 to the Île Bonaventure on the estuary of the St. Lawrence river, where the striking natural landscape was posed by Breton in terms of a kind of magic of place. Breton first sets out a series of parallels between his own state of despondency in the wake of the loss of his wife and the situation of France under German occupation, where in each case the desired outcome is one of regeneration or renewal. Speculating on the form of postwar society Breton rejects the idea of 'progress' as measured in purely economic terms, arguing instead the need to rethink social values from top to bottom and the substitution of ideas derived from 'adventurers of the mind', significantly including Paracelsus alongside Sade and Saint-Just.[72] Having resulted in two world wars, male-dominated thought is judged by Breton to be bankrupt and the time come to turn to that of the feminine, posing thinkers such as Flora Tristan as alternative models.

Arcane 17 is in essence a token of love – of unique, reciprocal love – the original manuscript of which, with its collaged maps, news cuttings, photographs, tickets and tarot cards, Breton presented to Elisa.[73] Breton's new love is linked to the Tarot card of L'Etoile, the 17th Arcanum – the card of 'Hope' – with its complex connotations of fertility and regeneration.[74] Danier provides an alchemical reading of the book and in this follows Michel Beaujour who claims Breton's arena in *Arcane 17* as that of 'high magic', citing Breton's claim in his 'Ajours' to be 'walking alongside Nerval along the golden furrow'.[75] Beaujour notes the impact of Breton's postwar friendship with René Alleau, author of numerous texts on alchemy, hermeticism and the occult, including his *Aspects de l'Alchimie traditionnelle* (1953). Alleau gives the symbolism of the 17th Arcanum as 'Hope', where a young woman kneeling beside a stream is depicted pouring 'essences' from two urns: that poured from a golden urn is 'active', '*animus*', and vivifies the water in the stream, while that from a silver urn is 'passive', '*anima*', impregnating the earth and promoting fertility.[76]

Transparency again returns as an important theme of the book, as Breton slips in and out of sleep in a room looking out on the lac des Sables, where, in oneiric passages, he writes of the window frame being transformed into an image of Mélusine and then into a gigantic Tarot card in which he sees the night sky and the stars of the 17th Arcanum. There are clear echoes in this of the Brentano's window display created for Rougemont, with its enlarged Tarot card of the Devil, suggesting a symbolic progression from the earlier dark days of the war and of Breton's own troubled private life. Breton had been attracted to that particular coastline in part by the presence of agates, an impure form of quartz, recalling the 'eulogy to crystal' in *L'Amour fou*, where he opposes that mineral to willed, human attempts to create art or beauty, writing of it as 'nonperfectible by definition' and adding that: 'The house where I live, my

life, what I write: I dream that all that might appear from far off like these cubes of rock salt look close up'.[77] A metaphor, then, of interior transparency that, as we see later, is found in the writings of Saint Teresa: 'The great enemy of mankind', Breton concludes in *Arcane 17*, 'is opacity'.[78]

In turning to esotericism – a term he prefers to 'occultism' – Breton is again careful to distinguish it from spiritualist claims, cautiously arguing that it has at least the 'immense advantage' of enabling man 'to make connections linking objects that appear to be the farthest apart and partially unveils to him the mechanism of universal symbolism'.[79] The poets of the nineteenth century, he observes, already understood this, noting that Hugo was linked to the school of Fabre d'Olivet (a writer and scholar of Hebrew who promoted the work of Pythagoras), adding that Nerval's sonnets refer to Pythagoras and to Swedenborg. Étienne-Alain Hubert reads in Breton's caution an unwillingness to subscribe to any rigid initiatory path, while at the same time wishing to exploit any opportunity offered by esotericism in 'discovering new relationships with the world'.[80] For Patrick Rivière, Breton discovers in magic the principle of correspondences summarised in Paracelsus' nostrum – 'There is nothing in heaven and on earth that is not also in man' – and which he finds restated in Novalis: 'We are in relation with all parts of the universe, as well as with the future and the past'.[81] And the sway of the poets is further asserted in Breton's claim that Baudelaire borrows his theory of correspondences from occultism, while Apollinaire was influenced by the Jewish Kabbala – and that consciously or not, artistic discovery remains the 'vassal' of 'high magic'.[82]

Towards the end of the book Breton explicitly invokes the occult in citing Lévi's mystical account of initiation into the 'Eleusinian mysteries', in which the initiate, having triumphantly passed all of the tests and touched all the holy objects, is fleetingly approached by a veiled priest, whispering in his ear 'the last and most terrifying of all the secrets', contained in the enigmatic phrase: '*Osiris is a black god*' – 'Dark words', adds Breton, 'more radiant than onyx!'.[83] Hubert suggests that Breton deciphers in this gnomic phrase 'the necessary and painful implication of death and of life, of human misfortune and rebirth'.[84] Breton poses the spiritual quest that is involved here in terms of the trial of passing through an endless series of rooms, of letting oneself be submerged in the 'eccentric circles of the depths' where the compass can no longer serve as a guide.[85] But having passed through the extreme suffering of this test, a '*change from a negative to a positive value*' is effected, such that the initiate passes from the 'inaccessibly human over to the side of the accessible (*disponible*)', at which point the mysterious words can be fully understood: essentially, that through suffering the full potential of life is revealed.[86] In this we again see how Breton appropriates occult concepts, adapting them to the needs of surrealism and effecting a realignment of values, where the attitude of *disponibilité* had long been advocated as one of openness to chance and possibility. Hubert also observes that Breton was an attentive reader of Lévi – whom he characterises as a kind of 'Facteur Cheval of esotericism' – particularly of his richly illustrated *Dogme et rituel de la haute magie* (1856) and his *Histoire de la magie* (1860).[87] It is from the 'swirling doctrines' of Lévi (rather than the more conventional tables of Papus), adds Hubert, that Breton takes the idea of the Tarot as purportedly transmitting the 'hieroglyphics' of the Caballistic science of the high priests of Israel, and his interest in the esoteric consists primarily in the extent to which it feeds the expansion of the imagination and the enrichment of poetry.[88] Lévi's imagistic approach held an obvious appeal for visual artists and we know that Matta

too was inspired by his work, promoting his writings among American artists during his period in New York.[89]

Breton finally returns at the very end of his book to the motif of the star – the 'early morning star' – pondering the question of its origins. For him the birth of this star is the supreme expression of Romantic thought, where he discerns an analogy between two texts – on the one hand Lévi's 'Testament de la liberté', and on the other Hugo's epic poem 'La Fin de Satan'. Breton's book thus culminates with the re-evaluation of the incendiary figure of Lucifer, the rebel who refused to be a slave and who draws in his train as he falls, a shower of stars and suns. In this way, says Breton – again borrowing from the imagination of Lévi – Lucifer 'gives birth' to two sisters: Poetry and Liberty.[90]

Surrealism and its critics: the postwar occult turn

On Breton's return to France in May 1946 *Arcane 17* received a broadly positive review from Georges Bataille in *Critique* (July 1946), where he acknowledges that 'Breton is right to recognize necessity in the fact that modern poetry is often a tributary of esotericism'.[91] But he adds that in a world dominated by rationalism 'those modes of thought represented by the tradition of high magic could clearly no longer have a place', objecting that Breton doesn't sufficiently separate such archaic thought systems from their original 'material ends' (the protection of cultivation, etc.).[92] Breton, though, shows scant interest in what Bataille dismisses as the 'vulgar efficacy' once attributed to magical formulas, whether in the form of ceremonial magic or the spells of Artaud, but rather is concerned with the transformational power of magic through language – the analogical tradition of the poets – and through that of the imagination.[93] Given the wartime circumstances of its initial launch, *Arcane 17* had to await republication in June 1947 before it would influence the direction of postwar surrealism, as the movement struggled to re-establish itself in a radically transformed cultural context. Attacked both by communists and by Sartre, the book received little media attention, while one reviewer, Pierre Caminade, noted that it had been '*consigned to silence*' by the press, and tellingly observed that a clear statement of Breton's position on magic was now awaited.[94]

While other thinkers of the period provided some support for Breton's position on occultism, they also posed the danger of exposing surrealism to association with religious modes of thought. Jules Monnerot's *La Poésie moderne et le sacré* (1945) posed poetry in terms of 'substitutive satisfactions' invented by man, both as a compensation and also a protest 'against the oppressive hegemony of the reality principle'.[95] Monnerot roots poetry in ancient thought – in magic – claiming that: 'poetry is magic for magic's sake, magic without hope, the poet a magician given to rites in themselves, and expects nothing of them'.[96] More contentious though, as Jean-Louis Bédouin points out, was Monnerot's suggestion of surrealism as part of a constellation that could come to be seen as '*préreligeuse*', an association that, as in the case of the 'Carrouges Affair', exposed the movement to accusations of an affiliation with religion.[97]

Michel Carrouges, a Catholic philosopher and friend of Breton, in his 1947 essay 'Surréalisme et occultisme' looks to occultism to explore some of the deepest currents running through surrealism and to examine the movement's current ambitions.[98] Carrouges poses surrealism's 'highest aspiration' in terms of the dialectical reconciliation of the 'apparently opposed poles' of materialism and occultism, observing that Breton's

writings are scattered with names from the worlds of alchemy and occultism, including Flamel, Lulle and Lévi.[99] While the concept of reconciling antinomies in order to reach the 'supreme point' as stated in the 'Second Manifesto' may seem Hegelian, Carrouges observes that Breton in fact later specifies that it is 'a view inherited from the occultists'.[100] The concept of the 'supreme point' derives, says Carrouges, from the Cabbala and plays a major role in the 'Zohar' where it is known as 'Kether', and 'where it designates the point of origin of creation, the point of action through which God created the world'.[101] Such a point, Carrouges adds, is found throughout occult writings – in John Dee, Grillot de Givry and Nicolas de Cusa – and while its religious connotations might be put to one side, allowing surrealism to claim it as the point of reconciliation of materialism and idealism, it nonetheless remains an unattainable absolute and one to which an attachment to the idea of 'God' still clings.[102] In fact, as Breton makes clear in his 'Situation of surrealism' lecture, surrealism's aims here are both more modest and resolutely secular – to 'reduce these oppositions which have been presented as insurmountable': reason versus madness, 'the opposition of dream and "action"', and the opposition of 'mental representation' and 'physical perception'.[103] Carrouges also considers the occult notion of the 'recuperation of lost powers', to which surrealism at times seems to have recourse, as with lost psychic powers transcending the world of perception, but again these are very much earthly, human powers. Carrouges's association with Catholicism would eventually lead in February 1951 to protest and serious dissent within the group, finally resolved by Breton in the usual manner by expulsions and the severing of all links with Carrouges – but this all lay ahead.

Breton's affirmation of the occult and the new orientation of the group was spectacularly realised in July 1947 with the opening of the *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* at the Galerie Maeght. Organised around a theme of 'initiation', the exhibition led the viewer through a series of stages, from precursors such as Maturin and Lautréamont, to a room of twelve 'altars' devoted to a surrealist pantheon of figures whose creations lent themselves to some mythical interpretation (Rimbaud, Jarry, Roussel and others). Intended in part as a riposte to those proclaiming the death of the movement, the 1947 exhibition, as Durozoi observes, aimed at demonstrating the changes that the war had brought about in surrealist production, as well as orienting surrealism toward a new myth.[104] While myth, at Breton's instigation, provided the core concept, occultism and alchemy served to situate specific mythical figures and precursors within an initiatory journey.[105]

In his catalogue essay, 'Before the Curtain', Breton recalls the dark, oppressive atmosphere of the 1938 International Surrealist Exhibition as 'only too premonitory, too portentous' and suggests the current show should be viewed in the same perspective.[106] Once again rejecting the reign of reason, Breton instead affirms the '*great disorientation*' and the power of dreams, claiming that the 'surrealist undertaking . . . had been in existence long before it became codified', as the continuation of 'an almost immemorial past'.[107] While assimilating surrealism to this far broader cultural current enables Breton to rebuff claims that it could ever 'die', it is surely at the cost of both diluting the identity of surrealism itself, as well as obscuring – as we shall see in relation to Breton's *L'Art magique* – what is intended by terms like 'magic art' or the 'occult'. Breton cites Frazer's claim that magic "has contributed to emancipate mankind from the thralldom of tradition" and that "if the black art has done much evil . . . it has yet been the mother of freedom and truth" – a claim close to the premise of *Arcane 17*.[108] Again reading esoteric thought through poets (Lautréamont, Nerval,

Rimbaud) whose writing he accepts as permeated by occult concepts, Breton argues that such works 'equip the mind with new keys', posing magic as a living force in the present – a conceptual framework and source of creativity – rather than a body of knowledge in its own right.[109]

The 'language of birds': Fulcanelli, alchemy and the gothic

On Sunday 27 April 1947, Breton, together with the artists Jacques Hérold and Victor Brauner, finally climbed to the summit of the Tour Saint-Jacques – a kind of reprise after more than a quarter of a century, of the trip to Saint Julien-le-Pauvre. Breton was somewhat disappointed, though, by the lack of atmosphere, by its over-restoration and by the somewhat mundane weather station sited above the head of the statue of Pascal – though he concedes the 'superb' view it afforded of Paris, of its arteries, its passers-by, and its 'simplistic and particular little game of prostitution'.[110] The tower must therefore be read metaphorically as enabling a certain 'point of view', and one that inspired other surrealists, as with André Pieyre de Mandiargues, whose play *Arsène et Cléopâtre* describes hermetic sex-rites performed at the site, again voyeuristically viewed from the Tour Saint-Jacques.[111] Mandiargues was influenced by René Guénon, prolific writer on the esoteric tradition, whose work he discovered around 1945, later observing that Breton's interest in hermetic thought intensified around 1947 and claiming that: 'René Guénon c'est un peu notre maître à tous, n'est-ce pas?'[112] But as already demonstrated, Breton's concern with such thought clearly had much deeper roots, erupting most explicitly in the discussion of magic in the 'Second Manifesto' with its 'supreme point' – a concept that, as Joyce Lowrie observes, is pre-figured by Guénon in a 1926 text.[113] And an affirmation of occult thought made alongside an equal commitment to historical materialism, enabling Breton to refute accusations of idealism.[114]

Breton returns to the subject of occultism with 'The Lamp in the Clock' (1948), an essay that begins as a gloomy meditation on postwar reality, characterised as a 'foul corridor' extending from the death camps to nuclear oblivion – an echo of the situation that Breton's generation encountered in the wake of the First World War.[115] Rejecting the intellectually bankrupt options of a world polarised between 'materialism and idealism', Breton instead seeks 'a new way out', signs of which he detects in in Fulcanelli's *Les Demeures philosophales* (1929), citing the example of the documents contained in the 'marvellous wizard's book in the Castle of Dampierre', and naming the occultist Saint-Yves d'Alveydre, considered below.[116]

Fulcanelli's book asserts the pre-eminence of gothic art and thought over that of the Renaissance, citing Charles de Remusat's claim that the Middle Ages was a period of 'serious meditation' and 'profound research', and saluting gothic masterpieces as 'possessing to the supreme degree the initiatory power of an erudite and transcendent philosophy'.[117] For Fulcanelli gothic culture served as a conduit for ancient esotericism expressed in allegorical form, and in particular for the transmission of alchemy from ancient Egypt, first via the Arabs and then later the Crusaders. Fulcanelli claims alchemy as the pinnacle of medieval science, harbouring a certain arcane knowledge passed down from antiquity and embedded in the facades of gothic structures such as Notre Dame in Paris or the fabulously decorated 'Manor-house of the Salamander' at Lisieux – but a knowledge veiled by allegory. Whereas science is based on empiricism, alchemy is 'exclusively philosophical', enabling man to 'penetrate the mystery of facts' and to 'identify it ultimately with the supreme Intelligence, soul of the Universe, Light, God'.[118]

In his essay 'Fronton-Virage' (1948), a discussion of Jean Ferry's analysis of Roussel's play *La Poussière de soleils*, Breton attempts to 'formulate a law proclaiming the deep unity of the pursuits of so-called high magic and of what I am not afraid to call high poetry', in that Roussel's method could be likened to that of the 'hermetic philosophers' who embedded a coded message in their texts.[119] Moreover, Breton suggests that Roussel, 'being an *adept*', might well have been in contact with occultists and like them fell under the obligation to pass on his secret in concealed form.[120] In his own analysis of Roussel's play, which he had attended during the thirties with Aragon, Breton claims that Roussel endeavoured '*to provide us with the rudiments necessary for undertaking what the alchemists mean by the Great Work*', though in concealed form.[121] Breton likens Roussel's method to that of the '*language of birds*' deployed in cabbalistic circles to disguise a message – "a phonetic idiom based only on assonance" and Breton makes liberal use of Fulcanelli in support of his argument.[122] Again, the occult is clearly conceived by Breton primarily as a new source of creativity.

Breton's admiration of Fulcanelli was shared by the poet and critic Vincent Bounoure, who in an essay published in *Le surréalisme, même* in 1958, treated alchemy as a philosophical system whose first object was 'the regeneration of man', a project founded on the restoration of the 'fundamental powers of thought'.[123] Fulcanelli, a mysterious figure whose identity has never been properly established, was himself deeply influenced by the writings of Basil Valentine. Valentine was believed to have been a fifteenth-century Benedictine monk whose *Les Douze clefs de la philosophie*, an allegorical discourse on alchemy conducted between a sage and an impetuous youth, was republished by Les Éditions de Minuit in 1956.[124] The text is illustrated with twelve curious allegorical drawings that trace the pursuit of the mythical Stone through the various stages – purification, testing, putrefaction, union of sulphur and mercury, etc. – as for example in the fourth 'key', where a skeleton stands upon a coffin in a graveyard, flanked by a burning candle and an apparently 'dead' tree, suggestive of a cycle of corruption and regeneration.

Seligmann's *Mirror of Magic* finally appeared in New York in 1948, adding to a growing body of texts on magic and occultism during the postwar era, including Robert Amadou and Robert Kanters' 1948 *Anthologie littéraire de l'occultisme* (an anthology that concludes with Breton), Amadou's *L'Occultisme* (1950) and Jérôme-Antoine Rony's *La Magie* (1950). Amadou adopts a very broad conception of occultism, both as a philosophy and as a 'vision of the universe', defined in terms of 'the ensemble of doctrines and practices founded on the theory of correspondences', and it this expansive view of occultism as a philosophy of life that colours Breton's own approach.[125] In 1953 Breton began work on his own book on the 'art of magic', though this would prove a very different kind of publication and a more troubled project.

A key influence, both on those texts and among surrealist artists, was undoubtedly Grillot de Givry's *Le Musée des sorciers* (1929), essentially an iconography of occultism, ranging across the history of sorcery, magic and astrology. Of direct relevance to our concern with the gothic motif of Satan is the emphasis placed by Givry upon sorcery and demonology, in particular the various proto-surrealist typologies of demons beginning with *The Magus* (1801) of the English demonologist Francis Barrett. Eccentrically illustrated by Barrett himself, the book included such figures as the Incubus, a rather jolly, bearded type, described by Givry as 'a kind of comic-opera coalman who wouldn't even alarm a boarding school of little girls'.[126] Even more bizarre, though, were the seventy-two 'portraits' of demons by Louis Breton, made '*according to formal documents*', contained in J.-A.-S. Collin de Plancy's *Dictionnaire Infernal* of 1863, an extraordinary collection

Figure 6.7 Louis Breton, *Ashtoreth*, n.d.

of hybrid figures combining animal and human forms.[127] Breton's curious depiction of Ashtoreth (Figure 6.7) in the form of a crowned, naked man astride a winged dragon-like creature, is described by Givry as resembling 'one of those frightful little usurers who rob the sons of good families in supplying them with stuffed crocodiles'.[128] Another of Breton's demons, Buer, reappears in Max Ernst's cover for the 'Ernst' issue of *View* magazine (April 1942) (Figure 6.8) and Seligmann too includes a selection in *The Mirror of Magic*, where he tells us that Buer was 'an expert in ethics and logic' who 'commands fifty devil-legions'.[129] Equally strange is the figure of the demon Baal, a spider-like creature combining the heads of an overfed cat, a 'debonair' toad, and a rather morose looking monarch that recalls the illustrations of Tenniel in the *Alice* tales.

We also discover in Grillot de Givry the unfortunate case of Alexandre-Vincent-Charles Berbiguier de Terre neuve du Thym, a man tormented throughout much of his adult life by an army of demons or '*farfadets*' (elves or goblins) led by Satan. Berbiguier recounted his torment over three volumes published in 1821 as *Les Farfadets, ou tous les démons ne sont pas de l'autre monde*. There, Berbiguier relates how his life was suddenly overturned at the age of thirty-two, when at a Tarot card reading he was delivered over by two women – 'disciples of Satan' – to a life of continual persecution by *farfadets*.[130] However, deeply religious and a fervent royalist, Berbiguier turned against his tormentors – 'those abominable vampires' – declaring himself the 'scourge

Figure 6.8 Max Ernst, *View* cover design, April 1942

of the *farfadets*' and devoting his life to their destruction.[131] Treated in Paris by Pinel, who declared him a case of 'monomania', Berbiguier furiously rejected any questioning of his sanity, declaring Pinel a 'representative of Satan'.[132] An 1889 memoir of Berbiguier by his contemporary, Alphonse Alkan, recalls that he would spike ox-hearts with pins in order to destroy the *farfadets*, and that on one memorable occasion his neighbours had to break into his home, where they discovered him 'almost asphyxiated' before an enormous oven containing pierced ox-hearts.[133] Alkan adds that Berbiguier applied to the authorities to place at his disposal the place de l'École de Médecine, in order that he could build a gigantic pyre there and thus reduce all his enemies to ashes in a vast auto-da-fé – an application that was flatly rejected.

Berbiguier's luxuriant hallucinations have been compared with those of Senatspräsident Schreber, famously analysed by Freud, but it could also be said that they bathe in the same cultural climate as the gothic novel. Berbiguier's account appeared only a year after Maturin's *Melmoth* and shares certain themes – persecution by Satan, the religious imperative, insanity and magic rites – albeit clearly a text of a very different order. We should also note the very curious lithographs contained in Berbiguier's book depicting notable scenes from his struggle against the *farfadets*, including the fateful consultation of the Tarot, rescue by firemen, and a scene in which Berbiguier scorns demons imprisoned in bottles on his desk, while confronted by Pinel in the form of a horned devil. Berbiguier also figures in a frontispiece (Figure 6.9), like a martyr, hand

Figure 6.9 Frontispiece to A.-V.-C. Berbiguier de Terre neuve du Thym, *Les Farfadets*, 1821

on heart, surrounded by the emblems of his personal Calvary – a pierced heart, sticks of sulphur, apotropaic herbs – and his faithful squirrel Coco, killed in an act of malice by 'Pinel-the-*farfadet*'.

Breton and *L'Art magique*

While references to the occult run throughout the history of surrealism, the concept of 'magic' is couched in rather more allusive terms, becoming more explicit only in the 'Second Manifesto' where Breton cites the Third Book of Magic: 'Anyone who, desirous of attaining the supreme goal of the soul, sets out in search of the Oracle . . . must detach his mind completely from commonplace things' and 'must purify his mind . . .'.[134] In 1953 Breton accepted a commission from the Club Français du Livre to produce the first of a five-volume series on the history of art. The title, *L'Art magique*, was not of Breton's choosing and was to prove the source of some confusion, both as to the meaning of the term and to the scope of the project itself. The book itself was a rather elaborate production, opening out into two halves, hung on both front and back covers, though Breton was never happy with the quality of the illustrations and some images proved unobtainable.[135]

Breton returned to the method he had often deployed in surrealist journals, of launching an 'inquiry' – in this case posing a number of questions and asking respondents to rank eleven images dating from ancient Egypt to Kandinsky, in terms of their magical resonance. As is clear from the responses, while surrealist associates, artists, writers and specialists in the occult tended to be broadly supportive, the anthropologists were rather more sceptical of the entire concept of 'l'art magique', with Lévi-Strauss insisting that one must specify *which* society and *which* magic, and that in fact magic has very little relation with art.[136] Lévi-Strauss precisely identifies the cause of all Breton's travails when he asserts that the terms 'magic' and 'art' are defined by Breton in such broad terms as to make serious reflection impossible, a fault line that in fact runs right through the book. And Roger Caillois bluntly asserts that: 'There is no magic art. The concept is contradictory . . . and simply introduces an artificial unity between phenomena of quite different orders'.[137] As the work dragged on Breton suffered writer's block, experiencing real 'anguish' at his inability to complete the project and wrote to Pierre Molinier in December 1955 that the task plunged him into such a depression that 'life itself was at stake'.[138] Breton turned to Gérard Legrand, then a young poet and philosopher associated with surrealism, to assist with the survey and the concluding historical section, while Breton alone drafted the long introduction. The book was finally published in 1957, but remained for Breton, as Hubert observes, an 'unloved child'.[139]

Breton launches *L'Art magique* with Novalis's reaffirmation of Paracelsus' dictum that "there is nothing in heaven or on earth that is not also in man" and that we exist "in relation with all parts of the universe, as well as with the future and the past".[140] In Novalis Breton identifies a crucial 'nodal point', a conjunction of the poetic and the philosophic, through which he approaches 'l'art magique' both from a historical and a contemporary perspective, and to which he adds the importance of the *ethical* attitude that he detects in Novalis as a precondition of magic.[141] Breton again follows directly in the tradition of Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Mallarmé and Villiers de L'Isle Adam, who all drew inspiration from Éliphas Lévi. And a magic that Breton specifies as 'transcendent' and in opposition to that of 'sorcery', as condensed in Lévi's

formula that 'the visible is the manifestation of the invisible'.[142] Breton also cites Jacob Boehme, for whom 'magic' is "not in itself anything other than will".[143] And finally, a model of magic founded upon the 'theory of correspondences' as providing the indispensable key to 'truly penetrating to the heart of the real'.[144]

While rooting his conception of magic in poetry, Breton does nonetheless engage with the scientific tradition, citing the work of Frazer, who, in *The Golden Bough* reduces magic to the concept of 'sympathetic' magic, operating according to two fundamental principles: 'first, that like produces like, or that an effect resembles its cause; and second, that things which have once been in contact, but have ceased to be so, continue to act on each other . . .'.[145] Likewise in relation to anthropology, citing Marcel Mauss's *Theory of Magic* and Durkheim's monumental *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1915), Breton observes that both men root their conception of magic in the concept of *mana*. Mauss sought to extend the concept of magic beyond Frazer's model of sympathetic magic, proposing *mana* as a shared, active quality found in all that he understands as magic; *mana*, he asserts, is 'the magician's force' – '*mana* is power, par excellence'.[146] But if for both Durkheim and Mauss, magic and religion are rooted in *mana*, with magic confined to the superseded mentality of a distant *past*, Breton's own conception of magic as a *living* force deeply rooted in the human psyche finds little support in anthropology. And with the exception of Freud, Breton acknowledges irreconcilable differences between his own approach to magic and that of what he dismisses as a 'civilization of *professors*'.[147] In fact it would be Lévi-Strauss in his 1962 book *Totemism* who would attempt to overturn Durkheim's model by insisting that 'totemism should not be considered an aspect of religion at all'.[148] As against the functionalist model that animals are 'good to eat', Lévi-Strauss instead argues there that totems are chosen because they are 'good to think', providing retrospective support for Breton's own arguments against functionalism and his contention that primal cultures *did* engage in abstract thought.[149]

If at odds with the scientists, Breton is closer to the occultists, citing at length the work of Louis Chochod. But in his *History of Magic* Chochod bluntly declares himself a 'partisan of spiritist doctrines', citing Allan Kardec, the father of French Spiritisme and his follower Flammarion, relying on a nineteenth-century language of 'odic' forces and 'magnetic fluids'.[150] This is all clearly at odds with Breton's dismissal of the 'nauseating' terminology of spiritualism and its association with organised religion.[151] And while Chochod claims magic as 'at once an art and a science', quite distinct from religion, like Lévi he roots it in knowledge transferred to mankind by fallen angels and a Creationist model of human history, where the idea of recovering man's 'lost powers' necessarily assumes some primal 'fall'.[152] Lévi too, though often posed as a materialist, took minor orders before turning to occultism, and whereas the early, firebrand Lévi of the *Dogma and Ritual of High Magic* makes wildly extravagant claims for magic, in his later *History of Magic* Lévi declares his deeply held Catholic faith, condemning all 'practical' forms of magic.[153]

L'Art magique, though, is essentially concerned with visual art, taking as its premise that the 'magico-biological' character of metaphor is not confined to written poetry, but is found equally in the visual arts.[154] Moreover, Breton suggests that *all* art finds its origin in magic, citing the 'holy terror' that seizes the artist in the wake of his creation and the artist's sense of impotence in the face of the powers of nature – a connection gradually suppressed by the dominance of rationalism.[155] Breton's selection therefore

extends beyond artworks that are the *direct expression* of magic, to embrace those with some form of *affiliation* with magic, while in contemporary work he looks to art that survives the disappearance of magic, restoring something of art's lost power. So for example, in relation to primal artefacts, Breton and Legrand reject utilitarian explanations, insisting instead that 'there exists in man a specifically *magic* mentality' which is 'biologically anchored'.[156]

The problem with all of this, as Lévi-Strauss foresaw, is that it is dauntingly broad – ranging from cave drawings, right through the entire history of Western art (albeit with a focus on the Germanic tradition) – lacking any meaningful connection with what most would regard as 'magic', and might equally have been labelled 'enchanted art' or 'art of the marvellous'. Focusing upon work that embodies the irrational or the ambiguous as the expression of a distinctively 'modern spirit', Breton traces a path through the work of artists such as Bosch, Dürer and Altdorfer, via the reassertion of the role of the imagination and the 'inner voice' in the work of the romantics and Symbolists, through to the work of modernists such as Picasso and Braque. Breton's conception of 'magic art' is therefore one that eschews realism and the reign of reason, asserting instead the claims of the imagination and interiority, and posing the central concerns of art, somewhat vaguely, as 'fundamentally of a magic order'.[157] As the book culminates in a chapter on surrealism as 'magic rediscovered' – an art, Breton claims, firmly oriented toward the *future* – it is tempting to conclude that Breton is again looking here to evade the 'gravediggers' of surrealism in situating the movement within a far broader current rooted in deep-seated human needs, and hence his assurance that surrealism could never 'die'.[158] For Durozoi the book 'confirmed the lesson already provided by the reflections on Gothic art' – that surrealism was 'part of a very long history' and that history would show that 'it had a deep connectivity with the unchanging aspects of the mind'.[159] And in this he echoes the distinction made by Jean Schuster on announcing the death of 'historical surrealism' in October 1969, while affirming the continuance of 'eternal surrealism' as "an ontological component of the human spirit".[160]

While clearly problematic in its attempt to redefine the field, *L'Art magique* was nonetheless a major contribution to surrealism's postwar occult turn and a significant theoretical advance on Seligmann's work on magic. Rejecting Frazer's model of human evolution as a progression from belief in magic, succeeded by religion and culminating in science, Breton instead attempted to rethink the category of 'magic' and its relationship with art, posing the magic mentality as an essential and enduring aspect of humanity – and a mentality *still alive in contemporary art*. José Pierre considered it 'one of Breton's key texts', and notwithstanding its problems, *L'Art magique* should be considered as central to our understanding of the conceptual apparatus of postwar surrealism.[161]

Magic and the symbolism of colour: Saint-Yves, Filiger and Baskine

A curious omission from *L'Art magique*, as Marc Le Gros has observed, is that of the writer and occultist Alexandre Saint-Yves d'Alveydre, a utopian thinker inspired by the philologist Fabre d'Olivet. Saint-Yves proposed a form of ideal government that he termed '*Synarchie*' and which he expounded in a series of books and pamphlets during the 1880s, including his *Mission des Juifs* (1884) and *Les Etats généraux*

(1888), most of which were to be found in Breton's library.[162] Breton first encountered his work as early as 1925 and his name begins to figure in Breton's writings during the 1940s, and though he appears in an early plan of *L'Art magique*, thereafter mysteriously disappears.[163] Papus tells us that following the sudden death of his beloved wife Saint-Yves withdrew into his hermetic studies, where he was guided by his wife's 'angel', and that she inspired his core invention – *L'Archéomètre*.[164] This device essentially comprised of a colour wheel as used by painters, set out in the form of a twelve-pointed star containing a smaller circle and star, upon which are inscribed numbers and inscriptions in several languages (French, Arabic, Assyrian, etc.). Papus characterises the device as 'the instrument used by the Ancients for the constitution of all the esoteric myths of the religions', as well as being the canon of ancient art, whether in the form of poetry, architecture, music or theogony.[165] In his somewhat rambling text, Saint-Yves bemoans the decline of Christianity with the rise of humanism and the dominance of anarchy and individualism, proposing to fill the ensuing spiritual vacuum with a synthesis of Christianity, Brahmanism and other eastern religions. As well as being an astrological instrument, the *Archéomètre* is described by Saint-Yves as a tool for artists and architects, used to 'determine the relations between words, ideas, colours and forms'.[166]

The influence of the *Archéomètre* can be seen in the work of the symbolist painter Charles Filiger, a number of whose works figured in Breton's collection, apparent for example in his *Chromatic Notation* (n.d.), where the polychromatic star at the centre of the image, with its facetted face, echoes that of the device of Saint-Yves, framed by a proliferation of complex geometric forms. Breton had already written on Filiger in a 1951 essay, 'Alfred Jarry as Precursor and Initiator', where he describes him being driven from Paris through lack of funds and settling in Brittany where he painted on the coast at Le Pouldu, with Gauguin, in 1890.[167] Breton returns to Filiger in a 1958 exhibition review, 'Concerning Symbolism', praising him alongside Paul Sérusier as 'the two most important artists to emerge from Pont-Aven', so it is again puzzling to find such scant mention of Filiger in *L'Art magique*.[168]

During the postwar period Breton also promoted the work of the little-known painter Maurice Baskine, whose work again indicates the use of both a system of magical colour symbolism as well as allegory in communicating his alchemical obsessions.[169] Baskine was self-taught, becoming attached to the surrealist group in 1946 and contributing one of the twelve 'altars' included in the exhibition *Le Surréalisme en 1947*.[170] Baskine's works combine ideas derived from his reading of Nerval, Baudelaire and Nostradamus, but often presented in the language of alchemy – as with an undated sculptural object based on a stove and topped by a standing female figure, which signifies the alchemical 'athanor' or furnace. Somewhat like Seligmann, Baskine embodies the alchemical stages and apparatus in his allegorical figures, as again with his undated *Athanor soleil au Phénix* (Figure 6.10). Here the athanor – transformed into an animate object – metamorphoses into the Phoenix that emerges from the flames after the process of sublimation, signifying 'resurrection', subsequent to the earlier phase of 'blackening' or putrefaction. Another (untitled) painting suggests the chemical wedding, an idea taken from the writings of Christian Rosenkreuz, and which figures in the alchemical iconography as the wedding of king and queen, sulphur and mercury, sun and moon, etc. And we often find in Baskine this same principle of the resolution of opposites, fundamental both to alchemy

Figure 6.10 Maurice Baskine, *Athanor soleil au Phénix*, n.d.

and to surrealism, culminating in a radiant figure, as with his triptych *La mère folle*, n.d. (Figure 6.11).

There are strong similarities here with the English occultist Aleister Crowley's self-portrait, *The Sun (Study for Tarot)* (1920) (Figure 6.12), both in the radiant head and in the magical colour symbolism of red and gold, and Crowley in fact developed highly complex tables of correspondences between colours, zodiac signs, planets, etc. in his 1909 book *777*.[171] In Baskine there are clearly certain conventions of the genre that might also be traced to the work of František Kupka, as with his *Yellow Spectrum*

Figure 6.11 Maurice Baskine, *La mère folle*, ca. 1946–50

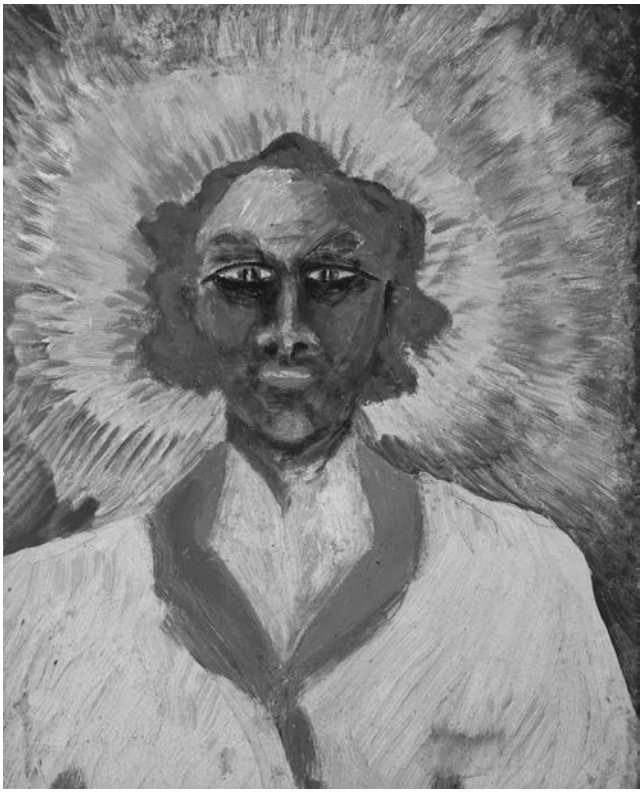

Figure 6.12 Aleister Crowley, *The Sun (Study for Tarot)*, 1920

(1907), a spectral portrait in golden yellows and strident orange that references Reichenbach's 'auras'. Similar ideas drawn from the literature and practice of magic and alchemy, including the work of Crowley, were central to the work of the British surrealist and occultist Ithell Colquhoun, as well as in that of Leonora Carrington, suggesting a quite distinct deployment of occult concepts – more overtly linked to the gothic novel – among women surrealists, that we now consider.

The magic-gothic of Leonora Carrington and Ithell Colquhoun

Carrington's best-known text, *Down Below* (1944), the account of her lapse into madness during the German occupation of France, qualifies as 'gothic' on many counts. The nightmare journey Carrington made to Spain following the arrest of Ernst, her then lover, and her subsequent treatment by the psychiatric profession and forced incarceration, bears comparison with the experience of Artaud. Like Artaud, Carrington was subjected to convulsotherapy, but via the more traditional method of Cardiazol injections – what she refers to as 'the Great Epileptic Ailment' – rather than electrotherapy, and through which she was eventually restored to lucidity.[172] Carrington similarly characterises her experience in terms of *death*, writing of how she was radically transformed by her illness as she entered a catatonic state – 'I was possessed' – adding that: 'It was very much like having been dead'.[173] Carrington's bodily obsessions, too, bear comparison with Artaud's, as when she writes of her conception of Madrid as 'the world's stomach', and her delusion that 'I had been chosen for the task of restoring this digestive organ to health'.[174] There are also parallels in Carrington's deployment of alchemical themes with the work of Colquhoun, as with her use of a crystal to observe Madrid, her reference to the egg as 'the macrocosm and the microcosm' and her discovery of hermetic messages in signs: 'when I read AMAZON COMPANY or IMPERIAL CHEMICALS, I also read CHEMISTRY AND ALCHEMY, a secret telegram addressed to myself . . .'.[175] *Down Below* in particular, with its mixture of insanity, nuns, alchemy and incarceration, can therefore be read very much as a contemporary updating of traditional gothic motifs, but read through a surrealist sensibility, and hence again as a form of gothic surrealism.

Carrington's *The Hearing Trumpet* (1974), inspired in part by Robert Graves' *The White Goddess* (1952), invokes various mythical figures in the pursuit of the Holy Grail. The narrative is situated in part within an institution – the 'Well of Light Brotherhood . . . financed by a prominent American cereal company' and located in a building in the form of a medieval castle – where Carrington's protagonist joins a group of initiates devoted to 'Inner Christianity' and becomes involved in the quest for the Grail.[176] The novel pastiches many of the stock gothic motifs, including the animate portrait of a (leering) nun, the intervention of the supernatural, fragments of ancient documents and the inevitable underground passage.[177] Somewhat like the writings of Colquhoun, Carrington's approach is highly syncretic, bringing together a range of gothic and occult themes – embracing alchemy, Catholicism, myth, occultism, etc. – but functions only on a literary level, whereas Colquhoun's writing was deeply rooted in her lifelong involvement in occult circles and magical practice.

Colquhoun, cast out of the English Surrealist Group in April 1940 when its leader E.L.T. Mesens attempted to assert a more political line of action and to prevent members from exhibiting with other groups, maintained a deep interest in magic, alchemy,

occultism and the Tarot, that she continued outside the group.[178] In 1961 Colquhoun's 'gothic' novel *Goose of Hermogenes* was finally published – a book originating in her surrealist writings of the late thirties, some of which were first published in the *London Bulletin* and later incorporated into the novel.[179] The 'goose' of the book's title is explained in an epigraph attributed to the seventeenth-century writer and alchemist 'Eirenaeus Philalethes', as one of the synonyms for the elixir produced as the culmination of the alchemical quest:

> It is our door-keeper, our balm, our honey, oil, urine, maydew, mother's egg, secret furnace, true fire, venomous dragon, Green Lion, Bird of Hermes, Goose of Hermogenes . . .[180]

Colquhoun's *Goose* is again both allegorical and alchemical, with each chapter organised around the successive stages in the production of the Great Work, beginning with 'Calcination', then progressing through stages such as 'Solution' and 'Putrefaction', before finally culminating in the more mystical 'Projection'. The narrative traces the path of Colquhoun's female protagonist from her arrival on her uncle's mysterious island, his obscure occult experiments there, her confinement and night-time investigations of the island and his mansion, the hallucinatory magic sex rites carried on in the grounds, and her eventual escape. Both gothic and surreal, the book deploys surrealist writing techniques within a formal alchemical structure, to create an innovative fusion of occult surrealism.

A reviewer of Colquhoun's earlier book, *The Crying of the Wind. Ireland*, rightly detected in her writing 'the authentic touch of the Gothic novelist', an orientation that she fulfils in *Goose of Hermogenes*, not only in the book's oneiric atmosphere and gothic narrative structure (journey/confinement/escape etc.), but also in its deployment of specifically gothic motifs (including monks, vampires and the 'undead').[181] But Colquhoun also attains an authentically 'gothic' surrealism in her deployment of surrealist techniques, as with the insertion of dream accounts, the use of disjuncture and the combining of dissonant elements, as well as more broadly in the book's often hallucinatory questioning of reality and a continual undermining of subjective stability. From the outset the book is pervaded by an oneiric atmosphere, as with the narrator's arrival at a convent where she is assaulted by a monk who she pushes from a high window, out onto the 'terrible sea and rocks below', such that she could see 'only an empty shirt falling through the air'.[182] Arriving at her uncle's mansion, the narrator discovers him absorbed in his occult experiments, recalling elements of Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll, as from outside his door she is astonished to hear 'sounds like growls or groans coming from the other side of it'.[183] The occultist, with his white, skull-like head, passing noiselessly, recalls Stoker's Dracula: 'So faint was the apparition and so shadowy the air that I could be certain of nothing, not even if it were my uncle, nor any being of human flesh and blood'.[184] This vampire motif is resumed in the chapter titled 'Putrefaction', dominated by themes of death, ghosts and visions, when the narrator becomes convinced that she is already among the dead and which concludes: 'For more than a year now I have had on my throat the mark of a vampire's tooth. Here at my uncle's mansion, a bat flew at my bedroom window . . .'.[185] The 'gigantic, phallic quill feather' that Colquhoun's narrator discovers standing alone in the landscape and to which she is both drawn but also fears, both recalls surrealist motifs, as well as the enormous phallic sword of *The Castle of Otranto*.[186]

The fusion of the surreal with the allegorical-occult is apparent when the narrator finally meets her uncle and is warned by him:

> Do not be misled for a moment . . . this place is not what at first sight it seems. Do not be deceived by the port, the strand, the square . . . The real village is not there. But look inland, up the valley, there you will find . . . the more persistent counterpart, like a reservoir defended by a wall.[187]

Colquhoun's writing is both surreal – in its subversion of external, ocular reality – but also mystico-allegorical, in its orientation toward the completion of the Great Work and the attainment of some mystical higher reality. Automatism assumed a privileged role in both Colquhoun's artwork and writing, as evidenced in her 1952 article 'Children of the Mantic Stain', where she defines her approach in terms of 'Psychomorphology': 'the discovery by various automatic processes of the hidden contents of the psyche and their expression through different media'.[188] Colquhoun's occultist orientation is apparent here in the concept of the 'mantic or divinatory power of the image', which she marries with the surrealist concept of 'objective chance', even suggesting that surrealist automatist techniques might be aligned with specific elements: fumage with fire, écrémage with water, etc.[189] Returning to the novel, in the chapter titled 'Sublimation', the narrator discovers in her uncle's occult library a range of what are in fact authentic occult and alchemical texts, including for example *The Golden Age Restored* of Henricus Madathanas, Petrus Bonus's *A New Pearl of Great Price*, and various works by the seventeenth-century Welsh philosopher and alchemist Thomas Vaughan (Eugenius Philalethes), including his *Anima Magica Abscondita*, *Coelum Terrae* and *Aula Lucis*.[190] In inserting such 'real world' texts within a gothic fantasy, Colquhoun both reasserts the authenticity of the alchemical journey undertaken there by her protagonist, while also embedding within the text a *mise en abîme* of the alchemical structure that frames the book. This same recursive effect is later produced in the chapter 'Replication', where the narrator relates entering a long corridor 'from which I could view a series of chambers containing each a sort of emblematic tableau', all of which are 'solid counterparts' of engravings that she had earlier encountered in *The Book of Lambspring* of Nicholas Barnaud Delphinas. That text consists of fifteen allegorical engravings with accompanying verses, many of which deal with aspects of duality – the first tableau, for example, depicts a large fish-tank containing two connected fish, one red, the other blue – and recalls the tableaux contained in Raymond Roussel's *Locus Solus* (1914), in which his scientist protagonist, Martial Canterel, demonstrates his curious inventions, culminating in a series of eight *tableaux vivants* in which the resurrected dead re-enact the most significant moments of their lives.[191]

What is also quite distinctive in Colquhoun's deployment of occult themes is her inclusion in *Goose of Hermogenes* of a sado-masochistic night-time ritual that recalls the 'sex magick' of Aleister Crowley. Colquhoun had sought entry to the Golden Dawn as early as the 1920s, but was only later admitted to a successor organisation, the Order of the Temple of the Orient, in the early 1950s, becoming deeply absorbed in ritual magic and the work of Crowley.[192] In the chapter 'Exaltation', the narrator is drugged one night by a robed figure and wakes to discover herself in the grounds, surrounded by a circle of shadowy figures, where she is lifted onto the armless torso of a faun and whipped by her uncle: 'Every lash sent a shudder of delight through me', until 'an icy jet coursed through me to my furthest limbs and I fell insensible'.[193]

Recalling Artaud's strategy in his *The Monk*, there is again ambiguity in the book as to whether or not the ceremony occurred, or whether it was rather 'hallucination', further blurring the boundaries between dream and reality. Eroticism is a recurring motif within the narrative, albeit often explored in scenes that suggest dream fragments, frequently in relation to the narrator's parents and siblings, as when her mother is identified in a kind of ghostly brothel in the role of 'Madame'. Colquhoun's incorporation of her own dreams within the narrative makes a stark contrast with Breton's deployment of dream analysis in *Communicating Vessels* to explore his own interior concerns, as well as with Artaud's exploration of themes of incest in his own dreams (discussed above). In the final resolution of the book, the narrator returns to her father who greets her naked as he emerges from his bath, hugging and kissing, but who fails to realise that he is actually dead; when told of this he disappears, finally 'laid to rest', enabling the narrator to depart towards the rising sun – a parallel with Breton's lyrical day-break at the final resolution of *Communicating Vessels*.

Conclusion: surrealism's alternative occult paths

Magic and occultism therefore assume a quite distinct role in the work of women artists such as Carrington and Colquhoun, to which we could add Leonor Fini, Valentine Penrose, Dorothea Tanning – one closer to the gothic novel and often posed in terms of personal bodily experience, and in the case of Colquhoun, informed by a deep commitment to occult thought and magical practice. If surrealism's engagement with the occult intensifies with the onset of war, this reflects in part the urgency of replacing a bankrupt socio-economic order that had resulted in two global conflicts, substituting instead non-rational mentalities, asserting the role of women and looking beyond the war to the future both of surrealism and of humanity itself. In this, alchemy provides a shared paradigm through which the surreal quest may be pursued, but inflected very differently in the work of Colquhoun, Carrington and other women artists. Insofar as Breton assumes the conceptual apparatus of occultism, a strategy pursued down the history of the movement, it is in pursuing the path indicated by his chosen poets as that of the imagination, where what '*was being thought*' will 'give way at last to the *thinkable*' – the 'golden pathway' of the initiatory journey, whether of alchemy or the Grail, in pursuit of surrealism's 'supreme point', that 'certain point in the mind' where opposites 'cease to be perceived as contradictions'.[194]

Notes

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2 Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *Duchamp in Context* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998) – for a concise account of attempts to portray Duchamp as an alchemist, see Appendix B (pp. 231–32).
3 For a detailed history of surrealism's engagement with occultism see Tessel M. Bauduin, *Surrealism and the Occult* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014).
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5 Breton, 'Second Manifesto of Surrealism', in Breton (ed.), *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, p. 173.
6 Ibid., pp. 173–74.
7 Breton, *Mad Love* (1937), trans. Mary Ann Caws (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), p. 47.
8 Breton, from *Le Revolver à cheveux blancs*, cited in *Mad Love*, ibid., p. 47.

9 Ibid., p. 47.
10 Fulcanelli, *Les Demeures philosophales*, 3rd edition, in 2 Vols. (Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1965), p. 312.
11 Ibid., p. 312.
12 See Claude Pichois and Michel Brix, *Gérard de Nerval* (Paris: Fayard, 1995), pp. 33 and 365–68.
13 Breton, *Mad Love*, p. 98.
14 Breton cited in *André Breton: La beauté convulsive* (exh. cat.), Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1991, p. 220. See also Derek Sayer, *Prague: Capital of the Twentieth Century* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013), p. 437.
15 Patrick Rivière, 'Preface' in Richard Danier, *L'Hermétisme alchimique chez André Breton* (Villeselve: Ramuel, 1997), p. vii.
16 André Breton, 'Ajours', in Breton (ed.), *Arcane 17* (1947) (Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1971), pp. 135–37.
17 Ibid., p. 138.
18 Ibid., p. 138.
19 See Breton, 'The Marseilles Deck', in Breton (ed.), *Free Rein* (*La Clef des champs*, 1953) (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), pp. 49–50.
20 See Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind*, pp. 485–95.
21 Breton, 'Prolegomena to a Third Surrealist Manifesto or Not', in Breton (ed.), *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, pp. 287–88.
22 Ibid., p. 288.
23 Kurt Seligmann, 'The Evil Eye', *VVV*, no. 1 (June 1942), p. 46.
24 Roger Caillois, 'The Myth of Secret Treasures in Childhood', *VVV*, no. 1 (June 1942), pp. 5–6.
25 Ibid.
26 'Concerning the Present Day Relative Attractions of Various Creatures in Mythology and Legend', *VVV*, no. 1 (June 1942), pp. 62–63.
27 Breton, 'On the Survival of Certain Myths', *First Papers of Surrealism* (1942), in Breton, *OCIII*, pp. 127–42.
28 Paracelsus, cited in Kurt Seligmann, 'Prognostication by Paracelsus', *VVV*, nos. 2–3 (March 1943), p. 96.
29 Ibid., pp. 96–97.
30 Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism', in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, p. 5.
31 See Denis de Rougemont, *Journal d'une époque, 1926–1946* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968).
32 Baudelaire cited in Denis de Rougemont, *La Part du Diable* (New York: Valiquette, 1942), p. 18.
33 Ibid., pp. 19–21.
34 Breton, 'Prolegomena to a Third Surrealist Manifesto', in Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, p. 288.
35 Rougemont, *La Part du Diable*, pp. 41–42.
36 See C.G. Jung, *Psychology and the Occult* (London: Routledge, 2008).
37 See Stephan E. Hauser, *Kurt Seligman,1900–1962: Leben und Werk* (Basel: Schwabe, 1997), p. 222 – image credited to Sammlung Arturo Schwarz, Milan. The Arturo Schwarz Collection is now in the collection of the Israel Museum, Jerusalem.
38 Rougemont, *Journal*, pp. 514–15.
39 Ibid., p. 527.
40 See Émile Grillot de Givry, *Le Musée des sorciers, mages et alchimistes* (Paris: Librairie de France, 1929), translated as *Illustrated Anthology of Sorcery, Magic and Alchemy* (London: Zachary Kwinter Books Ltd, 1991), p. 130.
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42 Dr. Bérillon, 'Le Baphomet, l'idole androgyne des Templiers' in two parts, *Æsculape* (January and February 1913).
43 Bérillon, 'Le Baphomet', part 1, ibid., p. 3.
44 Rougemont, *Journal*, p. 527.
45 Kurt Seligmann, *The Mirror of Magic* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1948). Extracts from the book appeared in *View* magazine (Series 5, no. 5) in December 1945, in the article 'Heritage of the Accursed', which considers magic in terms of 'forbidden knowledge'.

46 Ibid., p. 129.
47 Ibid., p. 25.
48 Ibid., p. 482.
49 José Pierre, *André Breton et la peinture* (Lausanne: Editions l'Age d'Homme, 1987), p. 309; Charles Henry Ford, in Hauser, *Kurt Seligmann*, n.879, p. 421.
50 Salomon Trismosin, *La Toyson d'Or, ou La Fleur des Thresors* . . . (Paris: C. Sevestre, 1613).
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55 Breton, 'Prolegomena', pp. 293–94.
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57 See Rainer Michael Mason, *Kurt Seligmann: Œuvre gravé* (Geneva: Editions du Tricorne, 1982), p. 7.
58 See Hauser, *Kurt Seligmann*, p. 272.
59 See Mark Polizzotti for one account of the split between Breton and Seligmann, in Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind*, p. 514.
60 See fig.87 in Seligmann, *The Mirror of Magic*.
61 Breton, *Pleine Marge*, *OCII*, pp. 1179–82.
62 See Hauser, *Kurt Seligmann*, p. 229.
63 Craig Adcock, 'Duchamp's Eroticism: A Mathematical Analysis', in Rudolf E. Kuenzli and Francis M. Naumann (eds.), *Marcel Duchamp: Artist of the Century* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1990), p. 163.
64 See Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: A Biography* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997), pp. 348–49.
65 See Effie Rentzou, 'Nicolas Calas: A Life in the Avant-Garde', *Greekworks.com* (February 15, 2004), at: www.greekworks.com/content/index.php/weblog/extended/nicolas_calas_a_life_in_the_avant_garde/ (accessed 24 August 2016).
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67 Ibid., p. 267.
68 Breton, 'Second Manifesto of Surrealism', in Breton (ed.), *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, p. 178.
69 Ibid., p. 173.
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72 Breton, *Arcane 17* (Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1971), pp. 37–38. Trans. Zack Rogow as *Arcanum 17* (Kobenhavn and Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2004).
73 See Béhar for facsimile of original manuscript.
74 There are seventy-eight cards in a Tarot deck, usually referred to as 'Arcana', of which twenty-two are the Major Arcana, giving details of important events in the near future, while the remaining fifty-six Minor Arcana provide information on more distant events. These latter are divided into four suits of fourteen cards, designated as Clubs, Cups, Swords or Coins.
75 Michel Beaujour, 'André Breton ou la transparence', in Breton (ed.), *Arcane 17*, 'Série le monde en 10/18' (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1965), p. 163.
76 Beaujour, after Alleau, ibid., pp. 169–71.
77 Breton, *L'Amour fou* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), p. 11.
78 Breton, *Arcane 17* (Paris, 1971), p. 36; *Arcanum 17*, p. 58.
79 Breton, *Arcanum 17*, p. 117.

80 Étienne-Alain Hubert, 'Notice', in Breton, *OCIII*, p. 1172.
81 Paracelsus and Novalis, cited by Rivière in Danier, *L'Hermétisme alchimique chez André Breton*, p. vi.
82 Breton, *Arcane 17*, p. 96; *Arcanum 17*, p. 118.
83 Breton, *Arcane 17*, p. 97; *Arcanum* 17, p. 118.
84 Hubert, 'Notice' to *Arcane 17*, in Breton, *OCIII*, p. 1172.
85 Breton, *Arcanum 17*, p. 119.
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87 Hubert, in Breton, *OCIII*, p. 1171.
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89 Elizabeth A.T. Smith and Colette Dartnell, 'Crushed Jewels, Air, Even Laughter', in *Matta in America: Paintings and Drawings of the 1940s* (exh. cat.), MOCA Los Angeles, 2001, p. 20.
90 Breton, *Arcane 17*, p. 109; *Arcanum 17*, p. 131.
91 Georges Bataille, 'Le Surréalisme et sa différence avec l'existentialisme', in Bataille (ed.), *The Absence of Myth: Writings on Surrealism* (London and New York: Verso, 1994), pp. 64.
92 Ibid., pp. 64–65.
93 Ibid., p. 65.
94 Pierre Caminade cited by Bonnet, in Breton, *OCIII*, p. 1175.
95 Jules Monnerot, *La Poésie moderne et le sacré* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), p. 16.
96 Ibid., p. 18.
97 Jean-Louis Bédouin, *Vingt ans de surréalisme, 1939–1959* (Paris: Editions Denoël, 1961), p. 83; for a discussion of the development of the concept see 'The supreme point' in Michael Richardson and Krzystof Fijalkowski (eds.), *Surrealism: Key Concepts* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 248–54.
98 Michel Carrouges, 'Surréalisme et occultisme', *Les Cahiers d'Hermes*, no. 2 (1947).
99 Ibid., p. 194.
100 Breton from 'Situation du surréalisme', cited in Carrouges, ibid., p. 195. The 'Second Manifesto' refers only to 'un certain point de l'esprit' – later, in *L'Amour fou* this becomes a 'point sublime'.
101 Carrouges, 'Surréalisme et occultisme', p. 195.
102 Ibid., p .199.
103 Breton, 'Situation of Surrealism Between the Two Wars', in Breton, *What Is Surrealism?: Selected Writings*, edited by Franklin Rosemont (New York and London: Pathfinder, 1978), p. 245.
104 Gérard Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 466.
105 For details of the exhibition see Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros* – ch.5.
106 Breton, 'Before the Curtain', in Breton (ed.), *Free Rein*, pp. 80–81.
107 Ibid., pp. 82 and 84.
108 Sir James Frazer, cited in Breton, ibid., p. 85.
109 Ibid., p. 86.
110 Breton, 'Ajours', *Arcane 17*, p. 139.
111 See Joyce O. Lowrie, 'René Guénon and the Esoteric Thought of André Pieyre de Mandiargues', *French Review*, vol. 58 no. 3 (February 1985), p. 395.
112 Ibid., p. 391.
113 Ibid., p. 396.
114 Breton, 'Second Manifesto', p. 140–42.
115 Breton, 'The Lamp in the Clock', in Breton (ed.), *Free Rein*, p. 108.
116 Fulcanelli, cited in Breton, ibid., pp. 115–16.
117 Fulcanelli, *Les Demeures philosophales*, pp. 65 and 68.
118 Ibid., p. 89.
119 Breton, 'Fronton-Virage', in Breton (ed.), *Free Rein*, p. 185.
120 Ibid., p. 186.
121 Ibid., p. 191.
122 Ibid., p. 188.
123 Vincent Bounoure, 'Préface à un traité des matrices', *Le surréalisme, même*, no. 4 (Spring 1958), p. 14.

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132 Ibid., p. 64.
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134 Breton, 'Second Manifesto of Surrealism', in Breton (ed.), *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, p. 178.
135 Breton, *Formes de l'art,* Vol. 1, *L'Art magique* (Paris: Club français de l'art, 1957). Most artworks lack dates and many are untitled – a new edition in a more conventional format with better quality colour illustrations was published by Phébus in 1991.
136 Breton, *L'Art magique* (1957), in Breton, *OCIV*, p. 123.
137 Roger Caillois, in 'Enquête', *L'Art magique*, p. 133.
138 Breton, letter to Pierre Molinier, cited in Étienne-Alain Hubert, 'Notes' to *L'Art magique*, in Breton, *OCIV*, p. 1219.
139 Hubert, ibid.
140 Novalis cited in Breton, *L'Art magique*, in Breton, *OCIV*, p. 50.
141 Breton, ibid., p. 53.
142 Lévi cited in Breton, ibid., p. 64.
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145 J.G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*: *A Study in Magic and Religion*, 3 Vols, vol. 1. 2nd edition (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd.,1900), pp. 9–10.
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157 Ibid., p. 100.
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162 See 'Hermétisme et alchimie dans la bibliothèque d'André Breton', in Michel Murat (ed.), *André Breton* (Paris: Ed. de l'Herne, 1998), p. 37.
163 Marc Le Gros, 'Entre Charles Filiger et André Breton: Saint-Yves d'Alveydre', in *Charles Filiger. André Breton. A la recherche de l'art magique* (exh. cat.), Musée des beaux-arts, Quimper, 2007, pp. 26–27.
164 Papus, 'Saint-Yves d'Alveydre et son œuvre', in Alexandre Saint-Yves d'Alveydre, *L'Archéomètre. Clef de toutes les religions & de toutes les sciences de l'antiquité* (1911) (repub. Paris: G. Trédaniel, 1986), n.p.

165 Papus, ibid.
166 Saint-Yves d'Alveydre, ibid., p. 134.
167 André Breton, 'Alfred Jarry as Precursor and Initiator', in Breton (ed.), *Free Rein*, p. 253.
168 André Breton, 'Concerning Symbolism', in Breton (ed.), *Surrealism and Painting*, p. 362.
169 See *Maurice Baskine: Peintre, Sculpteur, Alchimiste* (exh. cat.), Cahors, Grenier du Chapître, 1990.
170 Marcel Jean, *The History of Surrealist Painting* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1960), n. p. 342.
171 Edward Alexander Crowley, *777. Vel, Prolegomena symbolica . . .* (London: Walter Scott Publishing Co., 1909).
172 Leonora Carrington, *The House of Fear – Notes From Down Below* (London: Virago, 1989), pp. 192–95 and pp. 207–8.
173 Ibid., p. 18.
174 Ibid., p. 171 and p. 176.
175 Ibid., pp. 175–76.
176 Leonora Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet* (1974) (London: Virago, 1991), p. 10.
177 Ibid., pp. 23–24.
178 See Eric Ratcliffe, *Ithell Colquhoun* (Oxford: Mandrake, 2007); Richard Shillitoe, *Ithell Colquhoun: Magician Born of Nature*, 2nd edition (N.P.: pub. Lulu, 2010).
179 Ithell Colquhoun, 'The Double Village', *London Bulletin*, no. 7 (December 1938-January 1939), p. 23; 'The Moths', *London Bulletin*, no. 10 (February 1939), p. 11; 'The Volcano' and 'The Echoing Bruise', *London Bulletin*, no. 17 (15 June 1939), pp. 15–16.
180 Eirenaeus Philalethes, cited in Ithell Colquhoun, *Goose of Hermogenes* (1961) (London and Chester Springs: Peter Owen, 2003), n.p.
181 TLS review of Colquhoun's *The Crying of the Wind. Ireland*, 30 September 1955, cited in Eric Ratcliffe's introduction to *Goose of Hermogenes*, n.p.
182 Ithell Colquhoun, *Goose of Hermogenes*, p. 9.
183 Ibid., p. 25.
184 Ibid., p. 25.
185 Ibid., p. 57.
186 Ibid., p. 49.
187 Ibid., p. 20.
188 Ithell Colquhoun, 'Children of the Mantic Stain' (1952), reproduced in Michael Bracewell (ed.), *The Dark Monarch* (exh. cat.), Tate St. Ives, 2009, p. 100.
189 Colquhoun, ibid., pp. 104–5. Fumage, developed by Wolfgang Paalen, involves holding paper over a flame or candle, while écrémage, a process associated with Conroy Maddox, entails floating inks or oil-paint on water.
190 Colquhoun, *Goose of Hermogenes*, pp. 79–80.
191 Raymond Roussel, *Locus Solus* (1914) (Paris: Gallimard/Pauvert, 1979).
192 Ratcliffe, *Ithell Colquhoun*, p. 98.
193 Colquhoun, *Goose of Hermogenes*, p. 102.
194 Breton, 'Second Manifesto', pp. 177 and 123.

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7 Return to the castle

Transgression and Sadean violence in the postwar era

> Human psychism in its most universal aspect has found in the Gothic castle and its accessories a point of fixation so precise that it becomes essential to discover what would be the equivalent for our own period.
>
> Breton, 'Limits not frontiers of surrealism' (1937)[1]

Surrealism and the 'castle problem'

In his 1936 essay 'Limits not Frontiers of Surrealism' Breton locates the origin of *The Castle of Otranto* in dream and automatic writing, musing on whether there are perhaps 'places particularly suitable for the manifestation of this kind of sensibility' – what he characterises as 'observatories of the inner sky' – and posing this as 'the *castle problem*'.[2] Apart from Walpole, Breton also cites Huysmans' locating of *En Rade* 'in an abandoned castle' and adds his own fantasy of acquiring a large property near Paris – 'a kind of castle whose wings have been clipped'.[3] Breton also suggests the example of the 1933 film *Berkeley Square* (dir. Frank Lloyd), in which 'the new owner of an old castle manages, in a state of hallucination, not only to bring to life those who lived there in former times, but to mingle with them in such a way as to discover the problem of his *present* difficulties'. In fact, more mansion than 'castle', the gloomy old house in Berkeley Square is inherited by the young American architect Peter Standish (Leslie Howard), who becomes convinced it will carry him back from 1933 to 1784, when an ancestor of the same name had travelled from America to London in order to marry his cousin Kate. Returning to the house he finds himself transported back in time and falls in love with Kate's sister Helen, a relationship that will remain frustrated when she eventually learns the 'truth' and persuades him to return to his own time. At the beginning of the film, Peter is portrayed as deeply disturbed, almost 'hysterical', obsessed by the journal of his ancestor and clearly ill-at-ease in his relationship with his overbearing fiancée Marjorie – the 'problem' that the time travel sets out to resolve. The 'castle', with its ghosts of the past, thus provides the psychic space within which Peter is able to plumb the depths of his own unconscious and resolve the problem of an unhappy relationship.[4]

If, as Breton claims then, the human psyche discovers in the Gothic castle such a precise 'point of fixation' that we should seek its contemporary equivalent, we should first consider why the castle should have such a powerful resonance for surrealism and the various ways in which it has found expression within surrealist art and writing. The primary function of any castle was to provide defence against assault or invasion, hence its association with security and protective retreat, whether physical or psychic, while in another direction the castle is associated with fairy-tale and the magical. But it also signifies that

which *endures* – the continuation of the past in the present, or the return of some haunting remnant of the past. In his *Château des Pyrénées* (1959), René Magritte conjures up the very image of impregnability, the ideal to which all castles aspire – an utterly unassailable bastion, carved from a single, vast and craggy rock, hovering impossibly above a choppy sea, yet paradoxically set against an untroubled sky (Figure 7.1). Magritte's title plays on the French idiom 'bâtir des châteaux en Espagne', or its English equivalent 'castles in the

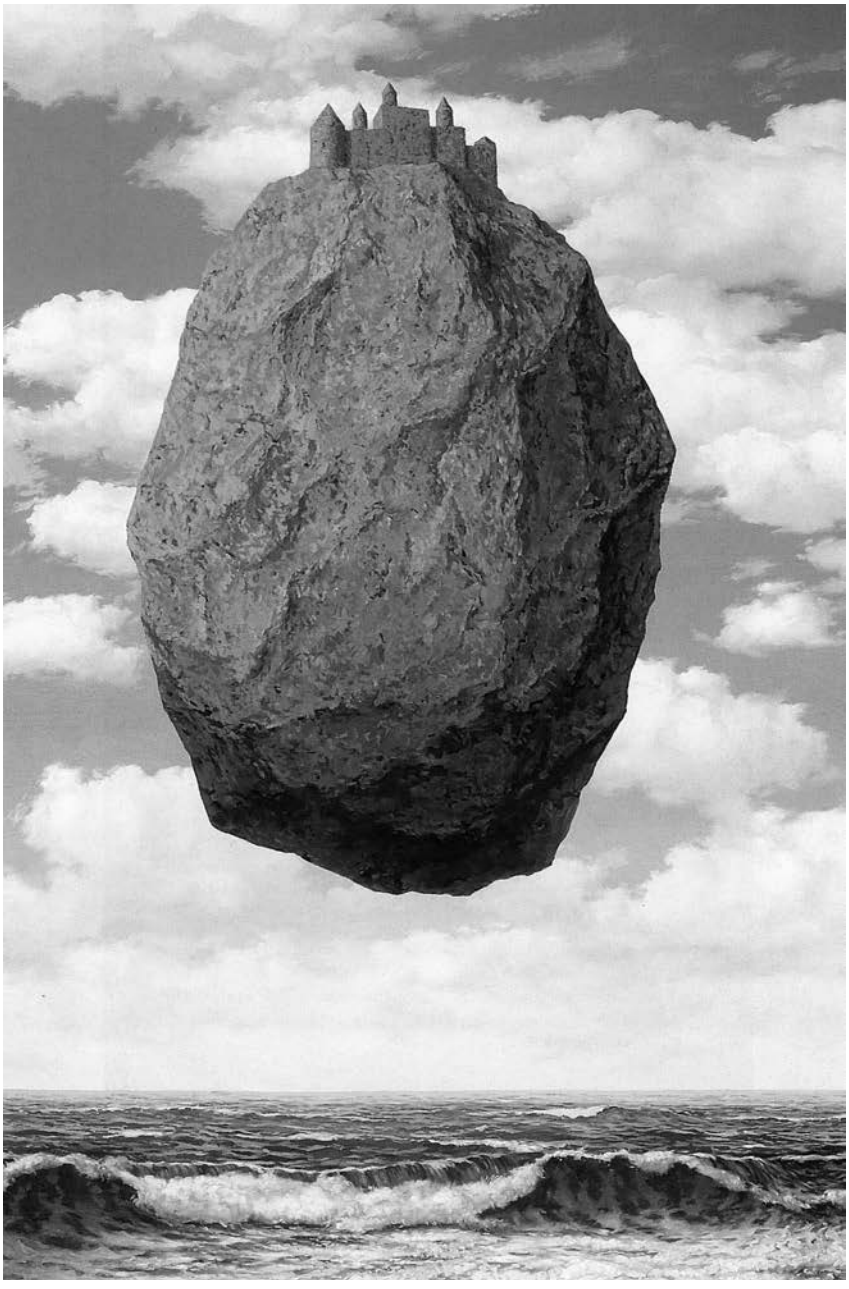

Figure 7.1 René Magritte, *Le Château des Pyrénées*, 1959

air', hence the defiance by Magritte's castle of the laws of gravity, hovering above the earth like some Platonic ideal of the type 'castle'. The title also references *Les visions du château des Pyrénées* (1809), a gothic novel wrongly attributed in translation to Ann Radcliffe.[5] Painted on commission for Harry Torczyner, Magritte wrote to him that:

> Castle in the Pyrenees is a romantic 'Gothic' novel which has the charm and the faults of a rather extravagant literary school. You may be disappointed by the book when you read it, but delighted by the atmosphere it conjures up.[6]

Magritte conceived the hovering rock as a kind of spectral remnant of the old order, informing Torczyner that: 'this apparition will leave the Old World for the New. Your office will be haunted by it'.[7] Part of a series of images on the theme of 'petrification' – again a form of preservation of the past – Magritte's composition also suggests the relationship of the conscious to the unconscious mind, where consciousness, figured in the castle, constitutes only the 'tip of the iceberg', below which lurks the vast, unformed mass of the unconscious.[8] Such a psychic model is similarly articulated by Peter Brooks, who observes that: 'The Gothic castle, with its pinnacles and dungeons, crenellations, moats . . . realised an architectural approximation of the Freudian model of the mind'.[9]

I therefore want to pursue the metamorphosis of the castle motif from Breton's inner 'observatories', taking first Julien Gracq's *Château d'Argol* and then considering the influence of the writings of Sade, focusing in particular on his long lost novel *Les 120 journées de Sodome*. The direct impact of that work is explored in André Pieyre de Mandiargues' *L'Anglais décrit dans le château fermé* and the chapter concludes with an analysis of Valentine Penrose's poeticised account of the bloody career of Erzsébet Bathory. In this, the gothic castle is considered not simply as revelatory of the *interior* and as an expression of *transgression*, but also in its engagement with contemporary history, where the work of Sade assumed a new significance in relation to the cataclysmic violence of the war, the Holocaust and postwar conflicts.

Au Château d'Argol: ritual violence and imaginary space

Notwithstanding his well-known antipathy towards the novel form, Breton extended a cordial welcome to Julien Gracq following the publication in December 1938 of his first book, *Au Château d'Argol*. Writing to Gracq in May 1939 Breton enthused that the book had 'placed me for the first time at the heart of my own preoccupations, of my own desires'.[10] The two men met later that year at Nantes and in his December 1942 address to Yale students, Breton would trace a line from *Les Champs magnétiques* to Gracq's *Argol*, in which book he asserts that surrealism, 'on the literary level', had 'reached its highest point'.[11] Already in 'Limits not Frontiers of Surrealism', Breton had pointed to the gothic novel as one key to the uncovering of the '*latent content*' of an age – 'the secret depths of history which disappear beneath a maze of events'.[12] Just as the ominous tone of the 1938 International Exhibition of Surrealism was subsequently claimed by Breton as anticipating the imminent war, the violence of Gracq's book can similarly be read – notwithstanding Gracq's assertion that it would be 'naïve' to consider the book 'from a symbolic point of view' – as a symbolic manifestation of the underlying currents of its time.[13]

Indeed, Breton's 1936 discussion of the gothic novel was made in the context of premonitory observations on 'a period of such upheaval, when Europe – even the world itself – may at any moment become one furnace'.[14] Gracq's novel may therefore be taken as a response to Breton's challenge to elaborate the '*collective myth*' of its time, just as the *roman noir* did for the late eighteenth century.[15] For Gracq, as Simone Grossman argues, myth constitutes 'the new sacred through which man links himself to the mystery of the world' and a means of 'reconciling man with life', thus satisfying a thirst both for the irrational and for mystery in a world fully explained by science.[16] And as Clément Borgal has observed, Gracq's language is permeated by the use of terms such as 'magic', 'spell' and 'philtre', in which he follows Breton's rejection of the realist novel in favour, as Gracq himself wrote, of 'projecting anew . . . the same magical light that was that of the Middle Ages', and by an intimate relationship between man and landscape that Borgal equates with the medieval attitude to land.[17] Gracq himself, in his 1948 study *André Breton*, characterises surrealism (after Monnerot) in terms of a social 'set' close to that of the Round Table, or a knighthood in search of the Grail, observing that 'the significant idea of the castle prowls around' that group.[18] We might therefore explore Gracq's deployment of the gothic – and more specifically of the gothic castle – in elaborating that myth and its implied relationship with the escalating violence of the period. Written during Gracq's only period of political activism in the French Communist Party (1936–39), *Argol* might also be read, on a rather broad level, as symbolic of the mounting tension of the *drôle de guerre*, characterised by Gracq as a period of 'waking dream', as Europe drifted inexorably towards war.[19]

In a preliminary 'Note to the Reader' Gracq makes clear that it is the question of *evil* that concerns him in *Argol*, an issue that he pursues through the 'always alluring repertory of crumbling castles, noises, lights, spectres in the night, dreams . . .' and the 'potent marvels' of Otranto, Udolpho and 'The House of Usher'.[20] And in his book on Breton Gracq insists upon a 'key word, a word of strength', a 'magic' word associated with 'sacrilege' and profanation, 'on which the flag of Breton flies' – the word *noir* – a 'touchstone' of surrealism.[21] Gracq's claim is that the word reveals more of the 'innermost being', the *moral* inner being, of the person deploying it, than of the object of which it is used – an assertion we should retain in relation to Gracq's own updating of the *roman noir*. Gracq's posing of the question of evil, alluding directly to the period of the book's gestation, must be read particularly through Sade and Lautréamont, writers of whom Gracq praises Breton's role in exposing their *vertu* in what he characterises as a quite astonishing act of 'transubstantiation' – 'literally *passed through* by the best of their spirit'.[22]

The novel opens with the chance purchase by Gracq's protagonist, Albert, of the château of Argol, situated at the heart of a forest on the Brittany coast. Albert's 'quest' is that of knowledge – more specifically *self*-knowledge – and following a long period of initiation steeped in philosophical texts, he undertakes the arduous trek across moorlands, rising up to the gothic manor itself. As with Radcliffe's *Udolpho*, the castle is posed as a monolithic, sublime object that seems to gaze down upon Albert from its battlements as he approaches. Dominating the surrounding countryside, the castle figures metaphorically as surrealism's 'supreme point', as the place where a whole range of contradictories – self and other, good and evil, male and female, etc. – are contested and, in a sense, resolved. As André Peyronie rightly observes, waiting, anticipation and an openness to events – the surrealist attitude of *disponibilité* – all play a

key role in the novel, where the intensity of anticipation serves to 'force the hand of destiny' and where, somewhat like magic, it operates through ritual and the force of the *will*.[23] And the object of that expectation, as Peyronie notes, is 'revelation': 'it's the dazzling event that both changes the course of time and clarifies the meaning of life and of death'.[24] The intensely anticipated arrival of his old friend Herminien, Albert's 'diabolic twin', accompanied by Heide – the mediator and object of intense rivalry between the two men – thus initiates a series of aggressive and increasingly tragic confrontations, leading to a form of self-understanding. In this, as Jean-Paul Goux observes, Heide acts as a form of 'catalyst' in enabling Albert/Herminien to break out of their doubled relationship, provoking the 'Incomparable Event' which enables the subject to accede to his/her truth.[25] But in opposition to the traditional gothic conception of the castle in terms of darkness and mass, Albert's castle instead presents as a crucible, flooded with light – the battleground of what is actually more a Nietzschean confrontation of wills than a Hegelian dialectic – within which characters are ritually tested in the affirmation and understanding of self.

Au Château d'Argol is organised spatially in terms of a fixed set of locations: the castle, the forest, the sea, the graveyard, the chapel, the avenue and the room. Hegel is introduced at the outset as a primary determinant of Albert's thought and the book is structured around a series of oppositions seeking some resolution: self and other, day and night, horizontal/vertical, male/female, reality/dream, etc. Gracq acknowledges in his 'Notice' the influence of both surrealism and the gothic novel, and *Argol* can be viewed in many ways as a direct response to Breton's challenge to formulate the contemporary variant of the château. But it's also written in the wake of Gracq's reading of Saint Teresa of Avila's *The Interior Castle*, a mystical meditation upon prayer, posed in terms of the metaphor of the divine castle, where she writes: 'I thought of the soul as resembling a castle, formed of a single diamond or a very transparent crystal, and containing many rooms . . .'.[26] Teresa's method is based upon knowledge of self through meditation and prayer, in a constant battle against evil – a struggle echoed in that between Albert and Herminien, though posed in very different terms. In *The Interior Castle* the supplicant progresses through prayer and self-knowledge to the central core, 'the principal chamber in which God and the soul hold their most secret intercourse', ultimately culminating in 'divine union'.[27] In the chapter of *Argol* titled 'Death', Herminien reveals to Albert that he has discovered the existence of a secret passage 'whose *entrance* alone was clearly indicated . . . as though its *destination* must, at all costs, be kept secret'.[28] The passage, as with that in Lewis's *Monk*, proves labyrinthine, but is eventually revealed as opening onto Heide's chamber – the inner sanctum containing the body of Heide, metaphorically equated with the Chalice of blood. As Peyronie observes, the castle figures as a microcosm of the world, where to discover its centre is to reach that of the universe itself, abolishing the distinction between interior and exterior, self and other – hence the 'supreme point' sought by surrealism.[29] The reference to Teresa is perhaps again inspired by Breton's extoling of her capacity to transform reality through her visions, thus inaugurating a long line of mediums and poets – though he drily regrets that she was '[u]nfortunately . . . no more than a saint'.[30]

This tortuous path to knowledge is figured metaphorically in the architecture of the castle itself – Argol is described from the outside as visually disorienting in its erratic arrangement of piercings and ogival windows, while its interior, with its 'endlessly winding corridors interrupted by stairways and steep descents', is characterised as a

'three-dimensional labyrinth'.[31] Argol also presents, as in the gothic novel, as a highly *theatrical* space – paradoxically, a play without dialogue – where the narrative unfolds in a series of tableaux (the Graveyard, the Chapel of the Abyss, etc.). But as with Breton's proposal for a 'relais', Gracq too updates the gothic castle, flooding the upper levels of Argol with light, lining its walls with furs and reflective copper, and creating a terrace bathed in bright sunlight. And paradoxically, somewhat like Magritte's fantasmal castle-rock, the castle terrace is likened to 'the bridge of a tall ship riding the waves', floating above an 'ocean of trees'.[32]

Gracq's text is developed on two levels – that of literal 'reality' and that of allegory – but where reality has so little substance that all is essentially played out on a poetic, imaginary plane. *Argol* is also a text permeated by ritual, particularly in relation to the inflicting of (sexual) violence, as in the chapter 'The Forest' where, following 'endless rains' and mounting anxiety, Herminien, armed with a hunting rifle, takes Heide out into the forest of Storrvan where Albert later finds her naked, bound and bloodied.[33] Albert subsequently discovers in Herminien's room an engraving in 'the style of certain of the most hermetic works of Dürer', that 'represented the sufferings of King Amphortas', set within a gigantic Piranesian temple – a *mise-en-abyme* of Argol itself – in which 'Parsifal was touching the fallen king with the mystic lance', surrounded by the watching knights.[34] This myth of the Holy Grail constitutes a recurring motif within Gracq's oeuvre, providing the main theme of his 1948 play *Le Roi pêcheur*.[35] Gracq conceived *Argol* as a 'demoniac version' of Wagner's *Parsifal*, in which the wounded Amphortas, custodian of the Grail, awaits the cure from Perceval's lance. This theme is made explicit in Gracq's citation of Hegel, who draws a parallel between the myth of the Fall and the progression of spiritual life in its separation from animal life, to consciousness of itself, concluding with the phrase: '*The hand that inflicts the wound is also the hand that cures it*'.[36] Knowledge of good and evil then, is both 'the cause of the Fall, but also, the only possible redemption', where 'one could be freed only by knowledge, essential, living knowledge'.[37]

On one level, then, *Argol* traces a path toward the attainment of Breton's 'sublime point', explicitly cited in Gracq's preface to *Le Roi pêcheur*, but where Perceval on finally reaching the Castle of Montsalvage in fact fails to pose the long awaited question; the curse remains unlifted and the quest continues, such that the 'supreme point' is not one to be actually reached in Gracq's mythology. In this the Grail functions rather like some Lacanian 'lost object' – *objet petit a*, cause of desire – something to be endlessly pursued but never attained. Heide thus stands in for that object, aligned with Amphortas by Grossman, who argues that Heide, with her 'dazzling wound' where Albert 'quenches his thirst', thus figures as the Grail.[38] Whereas the ritual sexual violence inflicted upon Heide remains ambiguous, it relates directly to the increasingly violent confrontation played out between Albert and Herminien, his 'black and fraternal angel', and the fracturing of their imaginary, mirrored relationship.[39] Bataille, in his *Eroticism* (1957), argues that we're 'discontinuous' beings who 'yearn for our lost continuity', suffering an 'obsession with a primal continuity linking us with everything that is'.[40] Eroticism is thus the attempt 'to substitute for the individual isolated discontinuity a feeling of profound continuity'. For Bataille it is through the violation of the individual's solitariness – 'through death if need be' – that continuity of existence is to be attained, and in *Argol*, the achievement of such *authentic* continuity is only at the price of first destroying the narcissistic bond that unites Albert and Herminien.[41] In this it is Herminien as 'tempter' who reveals

to Albert his own desire – the violation and death of Heide, as foretold when he first inscribed her name on a tombstone at the beginning of the book, and where she will be buried at the novel's end. For Bataille eroticism is 'primarily a religious matter', bounded – like violence – by taboos, where transgression 'does not deny the taboo but transcends it and completes it'.[42] Goux contends that Albert and Herminien are confronted with *limits* and with the temptation to transgress those limits, and that it is Heide who, as 'the very object of interdiction', embodies that transgression.[43] The death of Heide thus marks, for Goux, the assimilation of Albert to Herminien, where knowledge has led to death, or in Bataille's terms, we could add that violent death 'disrupts the creature's discontinuity', marking a return to 'the continuity of all existence'.[44] And the death not only of Heide, but also – presumably at the hand of Albert – that of Herminien, the 'mysterious traveller' who is ambushed in the woods, dying as a dagger glides 'between his shoulder blades like a handful of snow'.[45] But if Hegel provides the intellectual framework of Gracq's book it is surely Sade who drives the narrative whilst exposing the reality of human nature – a nature that, ultimately, binds that narrative to the tragic unfolding of history. And it is therefore the continuing influence of Sade that must now be considered in relation to surrealism in postwar France.

Sade as sign: liberty and transgression

> 'it is not the object of libertine intentions that fires us, but the idea of evil'
>
> Sade, *120 Days of Sodom*

The France to which Breton returned in May 1946 was a country still both scarred and convulsed by the continuing reverberations of the Second World War, and a country in which surrealism would assume a very different place within French postwar culture. Cultural life had resumed in Paris by the autumn of 1944, following the country's liberation, but it was only with the final capitulation of Germany on 8 May 1945 that the camps began to deliver up their final secrets.[46] With the tales of returning survivors and the accumulating evidence of the full extent of the Holocaust, the prevailing conception of human nature was radically shaken and the writings of Sade assumed a new relevance. Already in 1944, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, had brought together the writings of Sade and Nietzsche in order to demonstrate how both writers expose how the calculating logic of Enlightenment and its 'rationalisation of every aspect of bourgeois existence' culminates in totalitarianism's total liberation from Christian ideology and attendant virtues such as humanity and compassion.[47] One of the great 'beacons' of the movement, Sade had played a central role from the outset in surrealism's subversive deployment of eroticism and in its commitment to liberty and the full realisation of the potential of the individual. Apollinaire declared Sade 'the freest spirit that ever lived', an apothegm repeated approvingly by Breton, while Sade's obsessive pursuit of desire and trenchant atheism had a particular resonance for surrealist iconoclasm.[48] Paul Eluard first set out the surrealist position on Sade as beacon of liberty and scourge of Christian morality in his 1926 essay 'D.A.F. de Sade, écrivain fantastique et révolutionnaire', and the following year expanded on that view in *Clarté*, offering a critique that, as Jonathan Eburne observes, demanded 'a broader conception of liberation as an upheaval of the ideological structures that govern human experience, and no longer simply as an

exercise of bodily appetites'.[49] Eluard reiterated that position when he lectured on Sade during the 1936 International Surrealist Exhibition, observing that Sade 'desired to give back to civilized man the force of his primitive instincts', and claiming him – somewhat implausibly given his equivocal political record – as 'devoted body and soul to the revolution'.[50] As Blanchot has observed: 'if Sade was indeed able to see himself as sharing an affinity with the Revolution, it was only insofar as the Revolution represented . . . the possibility of a lawless regime'.[51]

Interest in Sade's writings intensified during the late thirties in the work of artists such as Man Ray, André Masson and Jacques Hérold, inspired in particular by the studies of Maurice Heine and Gilbert Lely. Heine, in his 1933 essay 'Le Marquis de Sade et le Roman Noir', posed Sade as a pioneer of the gothic genre, citing his *Justine, ou les Malheurs de la Vertu* (1791) as a true example of the *roman noir*. And while, as Heine observes, there is no direct evidence of Sade having read the early English gothic novels – Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* was translated into French in 1767, and *The Old English Baron* in 1787 – nothing better accounts for the obvious influence of the gothic upon his writing.[52] But it is in the isolated castle of *Les 120 journées de Sodome* that we see a gear shift from the gothic of the supernatural, deserted chambers and rusting suits of armour, where instead Sade provides us with a torture chamber, characterised by Heine as a kind of 'laboratory' that anticipates the work of Poe.[53] In this, says Heine, Sade is truly 'alarming', 'terrifying', taking the gothic formula to an entirely other level in an 'experimental debauch' without equivalent. But Sade's true significance for Heine consists in his 'systematically pessimist, philosophical conception' of man's position in the world, and his discovery in 'a domain that would become that of psychology and introspection, [of] the elements of terror respectful of natural laws'.[54] Heine's claim would in turn be echoed in Breton's assertion in 1940 of Sade as 'the most authentic precursor of Freud's work and of modern psychopathology in general', posing him as establishing 'a true science of mores'.[55]

Svein Fauskevåg has claimed that, for surrealism, Sade functions more at the level of *semiotics*, where the content of the sign 'Sade' is 'a making equivalent of liberty and desire'.[56] This deployment of the Sade-sign is perhaps most obvious in the work of surrealist visual artists such as Masson and Man Ray and I want to probe further the connotations of that sign, focusing on its functioning in the photographic work of Man Ray. Man Ray had been introduced to Apollinaire's writings on Sade by the poet Adon Lacroix, his first wife, and later spoke enthusiastically of Sade to Henry Miller, affirming that for him 'Sade represented complete and absolute liberty'.[57] Man Ray's *Hommage â D.A.F. de Sade*, a photograph that depicts the severed head of a woman resting on a book under a glass cloche, appeared in *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* in 1930, along with an unpublished letter by Sade.[58] The main impact of Sade here is found in the channelling of desire through a perverse eroticism, as with Man Ray's deadpan account of being invited in 1930 to the hotel of the writer-traveller William Seabrook to keep watch over a girl, 'nude except for a ragged loincloth', chained to the staircase newel, and of how he and Lee Miller spent the evening playing cards with her.[59] Photographs he made in Seabrook's hotel enact similar Sadean fantasies, as with that of a woman bound in a leather harness, while in a related image her breasts are menaced with pincers by a masked woman in black leather and long evening gloves, a very faint echo of some of the perversions detailed in the second part of Sade's *120 journées*.

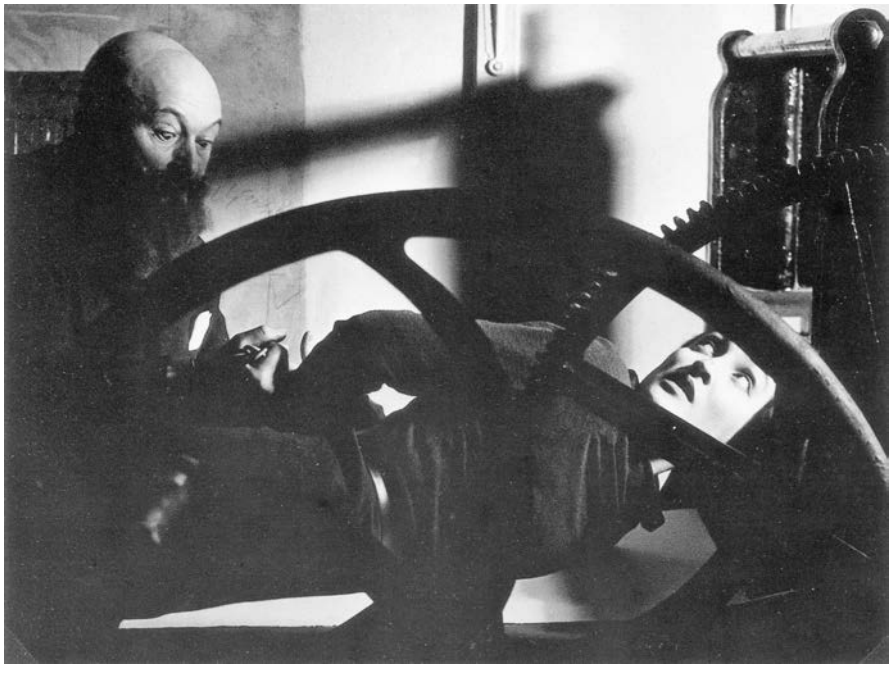

Figure 7.2 Man Ray, *Érotique voilée*, 1933

Man Ray's more oneiric 1933 series *Érotique voilée* (Figure 7.2) presents a Sadean scenario in which a bound Meret Oppenheim is menaced on a large printing press by Louis Marcoussis, while in other images her naked body is smeared with black printer's ink.[60] While suggestive of a torture chamber, Marcoussis's melodramatic posturing in false beard is perhaps closer to the world of Binet and Grand Guignol than to Sade. The series has been read by Alain Sayag as referencing the case of Henri Désiré Landru, the French 'Bluebeard' guillotined in 1922 for the murder of some ten young women having lured them to his house in Paris, burning their dismembered corpses in his oven.[61] Sade is also directly referenced in Man Ray's sacrilegious *Monument à D.A.F. de Sade* (1933), a photograph of the crease of a woman's buttocks framed by an inverted crucifix, evoking an act of violation by a monk in *Justine*, while also echoing the profanation of the host in *120 journées*. Beyond its subversive eroticism we can discern in this provocation a manifestation of surrealism's anti-clericalism of 1930s, as well as a reference to black magic rites, for which the gothic novel provides the model.

While living on the rue Campagne-Première Man Ray discovered Heine to be a close neighbour and when informed by him that no portrait existed of Sade, set out to learn all he could of the writer and in turn created his own portraits. The first was a sketch reproduced at the conclusion of *Les mains libres* (1937), produced in collaboration with Eluard, and subsequently in portraits painted in 1938 and 1940.[62] In Man Ray's 1938 *Portrait imaginaire de D.A.F. de Sade* (Figure 7.3) Sade appears in profile as an indomitable fort-like figure built in stone, set against the blazing backdrop of the

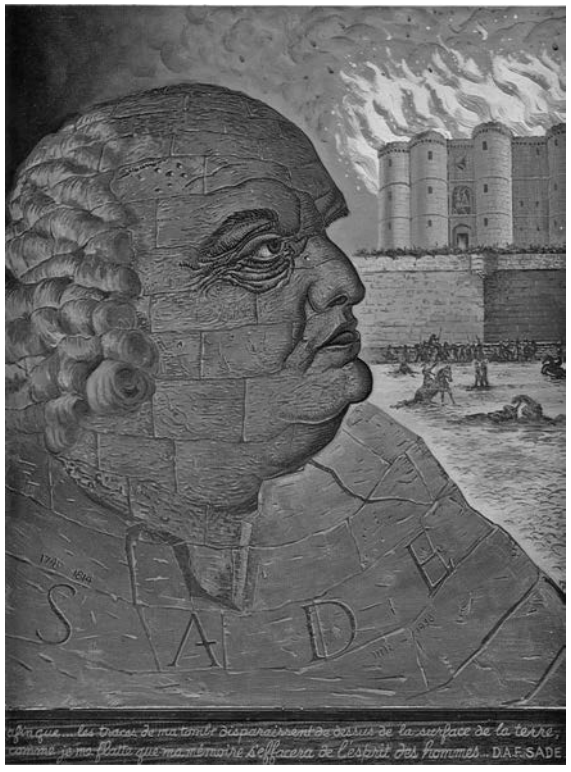

Figure 7.3 Man Ray, *Portrait imaginaire de D.A.F. de Sade*, 1938

medieval Bastille and a ruddy sky reflected in the paving stones below, as though the streets of Paris were awash with blood. In this transubstantiation of flesh into stone, Sade comes to embody the medieval castle in his own person, both container and contained. Surrealism saw significance in the fact that Sade had been held in the Tour de la Liberté (so-named, in fact, because its occupants were accorded certain privileges), underlining his role for surrealism as beacon of liberty, based on claims that his cries had incited the people to storm the Bastille, as in Desnos's book *La Liberté ou l'amour!* (1927), where we find the bold claim that 'he was the instigator of the day of the 14th July where liberty was born!'.[63]

Eluard too saw significance in the absence of any portrait of either Sade or Lautréamont, stressing the solitariness of both writers and posing them as enabling man to attain self-knowledge and hence to escape his isolation from others through 'fraternisation'.[64] However, as Neil Cox has argued, surrealism's core conception of Sade in terms of 'desire frustrated by repressive authority', suffering arbitrary imprisonment, 'either as punishment for perverse sexual acts or for writing pornography or for his radical political views, or for all three' was in fact 'not well founded'.[65] As Cox notes, most of Sade's biographers now concur that Sade's imprisonment was more the direct product of his mother-in-law's concern to contain scandal and that his morality and

politics, far from rational or consistent, were more a 'paradoxical combination of Enlightenment libertarianism, aristocratic privilege and legitimisation of his personal sexual foibles'.[66] During the immediate postwar period Sade's thought underwent a major revaluation, becoming associated by some with Nazi violence, but at the same time opening up Sade as both a thinker and writer, and expanding his consideration from the earlier focus on a perverse eroticism.

With the decision by Jean-Jacques Pauvert in 1947 to begin publication of the complete works of Sade, together with the appearance of important new considerations of the writings by figures such as Bataille, Pierre Klossowski and Maurice Blanchot, followed later by Gérard Legrand, Annie Le Brun and others, the full implications of his thought would become increasingly apparent.[67] While eroticism – and often a 'perverse' eroticism too easily assimilated to the name of Sade – would continue as a core aspect of surrealist artwork and writing (Molinier, Bellmer, Benoît, etc.), the depths of human depravity exposed by the war and in particular by the Holocaust and the torture of members of the Resistance, inevitably meant that the debate around Sade would demand more probing analysis.[68] In this, the gothic castle assumes a new significance as symbol of absolute power, as site of confinement and abuse of the human body, where secret tunnels and in particular the torture chamber are revealed as nodal points of the human psyche. Sade's name thus assumed a fresh, but also highly problematic significance for a postwar generation – both as a writer and as a philosopher – while the specific role of torture would become a fiercely controversial issue during the 1950s in relation to its widespread resurgence in the war in Algeria.[69] Focusing on what is perhaps Sade's most 'gothic' text, *Les 120 journées de Sodome*, I want to consider how the castle itself, in its space, structure and materiality, posed a challenge to the liberatory rhetoric of much postwar thought and the extent to which Sade served, as surrealism claimed, as a revelator of the depths of the human mind.

Utopia of Evil: Sade and his critics in the wake of war

With the final ending of the war in August 1945, sealed by the launch of the nuclear age with the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the question of violence on an unimaginable scale attained its first realisation. As Alphonso Lingis has observed, not only did the Second World War confront European thinkers with 'the refutation of their progressivist, liberationist Enlightenment understanding of technological development', but also, 'the extremities of gratuitous cruelty and of the destruction of European industries and nations seemed to confront Europeans with *the unthinkable*'.[70] Tristan Tzara, in his book *Le Surréalisme et l'après-guerre* (1947), observes the 'grisaille' of the postwar era and, while proclaiming the eclipse of the surrealist movement, nonetheless affirms the revolutionary tradition of Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Lautréamont, asserting that culture must be directed toward the liberation of man.[71] After the Nazis and the death camps, he argues, 'nothing must any longer appear more sacred than respect for human life and its freedom of expression'.[72] Despite Sade's limitations as a philosopher, leaning heavily as he does on the conventions of his age, he nonetheless attained a new cultural relevance in this transformed landscape.

Following Heine's death in 1940, serious work on Sade had been continued by Lely, Jean Paulhan, Klossowski and others, generating critiques in which the problem of

'evil' and the depths of human nature figured as central stakes. Paulhan's preface to the re-publication in 1946 of *Les Infortunes de la Vertu* characterised Sade's book as 'the most ingenious, and also the most extensive, of all Gospels of Evil'.[73] Pointing to our fascination with such figures and to the belief that the murderer is somehow transformed through his act, Paulhan concurs that there is something to be learned from that experience.[74] Paulhan distinguishes Sade from the devices of the gothic novel intended to 'amaze' the reader, as with resort to the supernatural, instead admitting only of 'natural man' – above all, no gods – in Sade's dissection of the virtues and vices.[75] And in bluntly confronting man as he finds him, Sade anticipates Freud and Krafft-Ebing, providing us with the foundations 'for a whole science of man'.[76]

The following year saw the appearance of Klossowski's far more extensive analysis in his *Sade mon prochain* (1947), where, as Lingis observes, Klossowski set out to show how Sade's was a system founded upon reason, albeit 'Sade's reason is aberrant, enslaved to evil passions'.[77] Klossowski engages seriously with Sade's work as a philosophical system, posing it as oscillating – despite their contradictions – between the rationalism of Voltaire and the materialism of La Mettrie's *L'Homme machine*. But it is the mechanist explanation that comes to dominate Sade's thought, pushed by him 'to the point of delirium', with the human subject essentially the product of 'physiological reflexes'.[78] Sade reads those reflexes, though, through the faculty of the *imagination*, where they assume the form of 'obscene alternatives, perversions', and where the subject is driven by 'dark forces', forces that 'resist any rationalist explanation'.[79] At the level of the social, Sade's understanding of 'liberty' in terms of an extreme libertarianism translates as a society in which few things could be labelled 'crimes' – a society, says Klossowski, 'in the state of permanent immorality', characterised by him as a '*utopia of evil*'.[80] And for Klossowski, Sade espouses the philosophy of the Enlightenment only 'in order to reveal the darkness of its foundations', exposing the 'dark forces' disguised as social values through which the collectivity defends itself by concealing its bad conscience.[81] A common critique of the readings of Klossowski, Bataille, Blanchot and others is articulated by Viola Brisolin, when she observes they were 'much more concerned with corroborating their own worldviews than uncovering the real Sade', glossing over 'the more unpalatable aspects of Sade's writing' and transforming it into 'discourse', 'rhetoric' etc.[82] And she cites Annie Le Brun's complaint that 'the mad effort of Blanchot, Bataille and their followers to enable words to live without things is realised at the cost of a general demetaphorization, itself utterly opposed to the Sadean approach'.[83]

Sade remained a touchstone for surrealism as France emerged from the war, serving as a provocation in major public showings of surrealist work in 1947, in the 1959 'EROS' exhibition, and in the Sadean themes of the 'Absolute Deviation' exhibition of 1965. To what extent, though, does surrealism's deployment of Sade – as model of perverse eroticism, beacon of liberty, sign of insurrection, etc. – respond to the changed moral imperative of the postwar world, particularly in relation to the legacy of violence, whether of the war itself or in the resumed colonial conflict of the Cold War era? A central problem for any such consideration of Sade is surely his apparent evacuation of the notion of subjectivity – as Marcel Hénaff observes, the indifference of psychoanalysis with regard to Sade's texts derives from their absence of a subject, where subjectivity and subject are conjured away at the outset in Sade's reduction of the subject to the 'mechanical' status of the machine.[84] Mario Praz too asserts that 'Sade empties his world of all psychological content except the pleasures

of destruction and transgression, and moves in an opaque atmosphere of mere matter'.[85] Such a reading of Sade, though, is precisely what would be challenged by Maurice Nadeau, rejecting that materialism as a façade and insisting instead, rather like Klossowski, that Sade's system is actually driven by the *imagination*, and hence linking him to the idea of permanent insurrection. While emphasising Sade as emblem of the erotic imagination, surrealism had from the outset also acknowledged him, as Desnos observed in his 1923 text 'De l'érotisme', as 'intellectually superior', insisting in a letter to Jacques Doucet that, above all else, 'SADE is a moralist'.[86] This more nuanced reading of Sade, though, has tended to be overshadowed by Sade as emblem of uncompromising, obsessive desire, in his deployment by artists such as Matta, Boiffard and Masson.

The continuing centrality of Sade for surrealism was made manifest in the 1947 exhibition at the Galerie Maeght, a central purpose of which was to demonstrate the cohesion of the movement and its shared commitment to a 'new myth', while aiming more broadly at the regeneration of postwar culture.[87] Sade's continued relevance was affirmed by Nadeau in his catalogue essay 'Sade, ou l'insurrection permanente', hailing Sade as contributing major ideas on the nature of man and his activities. For Nadeau, while Sade was moulded in the ideas of Voltaire, d'Holbach and Buffon, his apparently solidly materialist construction was no more than a 'façade', 'his theory of libertinage a decoration, his determinism a false window', and despite the apparent rationality of his explanations, his work 'appears the product of a deep irrationality'.[88] With Sade, Nadeau too insists that the flesh is the servant of the imagination rather than of crude biology or 'animal spirits', while his essential discovery is that Nature provides man with 'two essential faculties permitting him to accomplish his being: desire and imagination'.[89] For Nadeau, then, Sade aims beyond the world of appearances and of material Nature, and instead 'believes in the existence of a vast and hidden reality' – a 'surreality'.[90]

Sade's influence was also apparent elsewhere in the 1947 exhibition and in subsequent artwork, as well as figuring in the postwar surrealist periodicals. Jacques Hérold, particularly vulnerable as a Rumanian Jew, had been unable to escape France via Marseilles and in 1942 was drawn to the Luberon where he visited the remains of Sade's château, eventually returning to Paris where he joined the *Main à Plume* group. While waiting at Marseilles Hérold had designed the 'Sade' card for the Marseilles deck, but produced little work during the war due to the extreme poverty of his situation. After visiting the ruins at Lacoste, Hérold painted *La Liseuse d'aigle* (1942), a spiky, armour-like figure reading from a large green tome, and when in 1949 Gilbert Lely produced a volume of unpublished letters by Sade under the title *L'Aigle, Mademoiselle*, Hérold's frontispiece was a reworking of that image.[91] Hérold later produced a series of etchings, images of a 'veiled eroticism' much admired by Breton, for a deluxe edition of another of Sade's letters, *La Vanille et la manille*, for the Drosera series in 1950.[92] Bellmer, too, based a number of drawings explicitly on Sade's writings, as with his frontispiece for a 1950 edition of *Justine, ou Les Malheurs de la vertu* – a drawing of tumescent body parts – or again, a series of drypoints titled *To Sade*, as well as the drawings *Les Crimes de l'amour* that he produced in 1961 on Sadean themes.

The publication of Maurice Blanchot's *Lautréamont et Sade* in 1949 signalled another landmark in the study of Sade, where the conflict between the enjoyment of liberty and the unfettered exercise of power was now posed as a pivotal issue.

Sade's philosophy is, for Blanchot, very clear: that 'each one has no other law than his pleasure', a philosophy of absolute, natural isolation, entirely indifferent to the consequences for the other and antithetic to any notion of community.[93] Blanchot grasps that it is the question of *power* that is at the heart of Sade's system and that the exercise of power is a function of social organisation. The Sadean hero thus arrogates to himself the right to torture and murder by virtue of his power and social prestige, such that, in this 'insane' logic, 'Liberty' is reduced to the freedom to submit to the libertine's desires.[94] The essential theme of the Sadean narrative, says Blanchot, is 'to virtue all the misfortunes, to vice the happiness of a constant prosperity', dictated by a rigid Providence, or rather a 'Providence noire' – a reversal of values like that encountered in the gothic novel, in which crime must flourish (albeit there, only until the eventual dénouement).[95] What motivates Sade's system, for Blanchot, is a 'spirit of destruction', a rage against both God and Nature, where what is utterly intolerable for Sade, is that the more he destroys, the more he serves Nature, since all destruction is immediately incorporated within fresh cycles of creation.[96] Sade's system is therefore, for Blanchot, ultimately driven by destructive energy, by the 'transcendent power of negation', rather than by desire – a reading that opens up new perspectives on Sade's thought while highlighting some of the limitations of surrealism's own celebration of his work.[97]

Bataille, too, returns to the postwar debate on Sade, having in an 'open letter' of 1930 – 'The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade' – berated the 'pretentious hypocrisy' of those who on the one hand rank Sade's writings above all else, while simultaneously treating Sade as a '*foreign body*', denying him 'the least place in public or private life.[98] For Eburne, Bataille's contention was that the surrealists 'suppressed Sade's moral difficulty beneath an idealized abstraction of his philosophy', developing what was, for Bataille, 'merely an elaborate form of idealism'.[99] Returning again to Sade in *Literature and Evil* (1957), Bataille poses the violence of Sade's system – the subject's destruction of his object, 'our fellow human beings' – as an attempt to transcend the limitations imposed by social constraints and to re-establish some contact with 'immensity', as in the realm of sacrifice.[100] But whereas sacrifice is 'passive', desire is active, 'and desire alone makes us live in the present', such that only through the experience of desire, says Bataille, can 'full consciousness' be attained.[101] And for Bataille it was Sade, 'nurturing an interminable desire' inflamed by his long confinement, who 'prepared the way to this consciousness'. Bataille concludes in observing the 'poetic splendour' that such a 'difficult truth' should be formulated only against the backdrop of the Revolution and Sade's long incarceration – the extraordinary irony that this gothic prison, the Bastille, should be the 'crucible' in which Sade should exceed the 'limitations of being'.[102]

The perception that surrealism had failed to directly confront some of the more contentious issues raised by Sade's thought was posed in Ferdinand Alquié's *Philosophie du surréalisme* (1956), a broadly sympathetic analysis that observes the importance for surrealism of Sade's assault on religion and the idea that the true meaning of revolt is to be discovered in the intensity of desire.[103] Alquié contends, though, that rather than providing a critical analysis of Sade, surrealism had preferred to promote the reading of his works and to visualise scenes of Sadean cruelty. The surrealists, Alquié asserts, 'don't tell us clearly whether they approve or disavow the specifically sadistic act' and adopt an analogous attitude with Lautréamont, 'that other Sade', where Breton has said (in *Les Pas perdus*) that 'the time is not yet come to examine

the moral scope of the work of Ducasse', signalling clearly that their work 'can't be put in precepts'.[104] But if Sade is to be read, as surrealism affirms, as a moralist, then a response to these issues in the transformed postwar world surely becomes even more urgent – not the least of which, Alquié observes, is the position of women, posed by Breton in *Poisson Soluble* as 'servants of happiness', but in fact transmuted in Sade into 'tortured slaves of pleasure'.[105] The transformed situation of woman in postwar France, newly enfranchised since 1944, is something to which surrealism seems at times oblivious, as with its 1958 'Inquiry into Striptease', yet surely needed to confront in its elevation of Sade.[106]

Simone de Beauvoir, in her essay 'Faut-il brûler Sade?', contends that the 'cult' of Sade is in fact a betrayal of his thought, developing instead a critical reading more attuned to the sexual politics of Sade, where she judges him, if not a coherent philosopher, nonetheless a 'great moralist'.[107] Observing Sade's strong sense of 'contempt and disgust' for women, de Beauvoir notes the central role assumed by debasement in his model of the erotic, where eroticism constitutes 'the meaning and expression of his whole existence'.[108] The issues raised by de Beauvoir are perhaps most acutely posed in Sade's *120 journées*, where I want to first consider the question of evil in relation to the aftermath of the war and revived colonial violence.

Absolute power and the abyss: *The 120 Days of Sodom*

> 'the butcheries of Sade are hardly different from experiments in a chemical laboratory'
> Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony* (1951)

Sade's *Les Cent vingt Journées de Sodome*, considered by many commentators as the culmination of his work, assumed a new relevance in the wake of the Second World War. During this period Bataille had planned a work of philosophy on the problem of evil, but which finally emerged in 1957 as a collection on writing, *Literature and Evil*, where he discusses Sade's book. It was, wrote Bataille, 'the first book to express the true fury that man holds within him and which he has to control and conceal', and 'the first expression of the full horror of liberty'.[109] It is a work, he adds, that no-one could read, 'unless he is totally deaf to it . . . without feeling sick', and the only book 'in which the mind of man is shown *as it really is*'.[110] In an essay written in 1947 on the aftermath of the war, Bataille had observed that:

> Like you and I, those responsible for Auschwitz had a human nose, mouth, voice and reason, they were able to make love, have children. . . . Man's image is henceforth inseparable from a gas chamber.[111]

Refusing to simply label those responsible as *monsters*, Bataille instead insisted on their humanity, and that Auschwitz existed at the outer limits of the humanly possible, rather than as something outside the human frame. As Surya observes: 'In a word, they were men, neither more nor less than we also claim to be', adding that, in the case of Hiroshima too, 'Bataille denounced its inalienably *human* character'.[112] Sade's work, particularly in its engagement with questions of violence and evil, therefore assumed fresh relevance during the Cold War era, while the question of torture would also return as an inflammatory issue with the outbreak in November 1954 of France's war in Algeria.[113] Denouncing that re-emergence of torture, many surrealists

were signatories in 1960 to the highly controversial 'Declaration of the 121', which condemned 'French militarism . . . [which] has gone as far as the restoration of torture and its reinstatement as an institution in Europe' and called for 'the destruction of the colonial system'.[114] Pieyre de Mandiargues later recalled being interrogated about his own participation, in the celebrated *Tour pointue*, by 'a young and glacial individual'.[115]

Bataille distinguishes *individual* morality – which is of a sovereign character – from *social* and *political* morality, and which is subject to different constraints in the interest of the preservation and continuity of any organised society.[116] As Surya observes, the impetus of the individual to attain such sovereignty entails the slippage 'towards what universal morality designates as *Evil*' or 'transgression', whereas in the case of an entire society such slippage belongs, as Bataille asserts, 'to a new and exceptional law', of which Auschwitz is the 'decisive, undisputed and irreducible' sign – a law that became a sign of 'radical Evil'.[117] At the individual level this consists in the 'unleashing of passion', whereas at the level of society it instead entails the 'unleashing of *power*'. Radical Evil is thus bound by Bataille to power, and more specifically, to the power of the state. And for Praz, Sade's originality lay precisely in his reversal of the ethical orthodoxy of his time, where:

> 'Everything is good, everything is the work of God', becomes in him 'Everything is evil, everything is the work of Satan': It is therefore necessary to practice vice because it conforms to the laws of nature . . . which insists upon destruction.[118]

This issue assumes a new light in relation to Sade's *120 journées*, which for Annie Le Brun constitutes the 'kernel' of his work, the 'first crystallisation of the bleakest possible perspectives which constitutes the universe of Sade', posed by Le Brun as this 'block of abyss', where 'Sade's whole universe is rooted in Silling'.[119]

As with Artaud, Sade's own life strikingly enacts many of the features of the *roman noir*, but where the former epitomised the 'Accursed Outsider', Sade plays out the persecuted prisoner left rotting in various prisons and castles, consequent on the various debauches of his early life – particularly the flagellation of Rose Keller of Easter 1768 and the affair of the 'aphrodisiac candies' of 1772.[120] Imprisoned under *lettres de cachet* at the behest of his formidable mother in law, the Présidente de Montreuil, Sade very much perceived himself as the victim of her vengeance – the classic gothic combination of incarceration and injustice, as in Lewis or Maturin – and was even executed in effigy after fleeing the death penalty, again recalling the exploitation of the Inquisition in those novels. In his final internment at the asylum of Charenton, where he staged his own plays for the inmates, Sade played out his final gothic role, echoing that of Stanton in *Melmoth*, as the sane man locked up amongst the insane, dying there in 1814.

Sade completed his *120 journées* in October of 1785, while still imprisoned in the Bastille, then drafted a final manuscript in microscopic writing on a twelve-meter roll of paper, long thought lost in the chaos of the storming of the Bastille, but which later re-emerged to be privately published only in 1904.[121] Forewarning his reader to 'prepare your heart and your mind for the most impure tale that has ever been told since our world began', Sade proceeds to catalogue some six hundred perversions or 'passions', related by four female storytellers who had 'spent their lives in the most furious debauchery', proceeding from the 'simple', to the 'complex', then

escalating to the 'criminal' and culminating in the 'murderous'.[122] Those perversions are framed within a narrative in which four notorious libertines conspire together to organise a four-month debauch for which they kidnap a group of boys and girls, together with the four storytellers, a cohort of 'fuckers', ladies-in-waiting and other staff, who are all then carried off to the isolated château of Silling. Led by the insatiable Duc de Blangis, together with his perverse brother the Bishop of X***, the banker Durcet and a former judge, the Président de Curval, they represent the aristocracy, Church, finance and the law, conforming to the laws of their own constitution and in many respects constituting a mini-state. Klossowski equates their libertinism with a 'religion of evil', where, notwithstanding Sade's affirmed atheism, crime ensues from the existence of some 'infernal God'.[123] All the ills inflicted upon the world by that God are posed as justifying evil and as legitimising it in advance, or as Sade writes: 'if I receive evil from others, I enjoy the right of returning it', and hence, 'evil becomes good for me'. Modelled in part upon Boccaccio's *Decameron* and inspired by Dante's *Inferno*, Sade's dystopian state is thus figured as a spiralling descent into Hell.

What immediately strikes the reader are the extraordinary precautions taken by Sade's protagonists to protect and conceal their debauch from outside intervention: the château, a 'remote and isolated retreat', is situated deep in the Black Forest, reachable only after a long and arduous journey, and protected by 'a sinister and mean hamlet of charcoal burners and gamekeepers'.[124] The moated Château Silling itself is reached by a narrow path edged with precipices and surrounded by a thirty-foot high wall, to which Sade adds that: 'in order to forestall external attack', the libertines destroy the connecting bridge behind them, and brick up all the entrances.[125] On one level we are in the familiar territory of the gothic castle of Radcliffe or Walpole, but where Sade exacerbates and darkens all the usual ingredients, taking them to an entirely new plane. Blanchot gives particular emphasis to Blangis' warning to his victims that '*you are already dead to the world*', a chilling reminder that their fate was sealed, and which in the immediate postwar world would inevitably have recalled the remorseless logic of the 'final solution', again effected in total secrecy and absolute evasion of the gaze of the outside world. For Blanchot, Sade's system is founded upon the 'transcendent power of negation', where its objects are wholly annihilated even prior to their ultimate destruction.[126]

The entire venture undertaken at Silling is conceived like a military campaign – 'as within a besieged citadel' – where Sade's continual deployment of military terminology is striking: all sexual activity is conceived in terms of 'assaults'; penises are 'cannons', 'pikes', or weaponry; and brute force pervades throughout.[127] Moreover, a rigid – but also arbitrary – military discipline prevails, with severe penalties for all infringements and where any attempt at evasion is punishable by death. For Hénaff, Sade's is a *feudal* model dominated by a military caste, affording total control over the bodies of others, at a time when that absolute authority was under threat.[128] Moreover, the misogyny that pervades Sade's text, with its constant anxieties about the female body – the libertines we're told, 'wed women to hold slaves' and constantly revile the female body – strikingly recalls that detailed in Klaus Theweleit's classic study of the fascist mentality.[129] As Barbara Ehrenreich observes, as a 'theory of fascism', Theweleit's book 'sets forth the jarring – and ultimately horrifying – proposition that the fascist is not doing "something else", but doing what he wants to'.[130] The acts of rape and torture committed are thus neither 'symbolic acts' nor substitutes

for other, repressed desires, but are the desired ends in themselves, and, what is 'far worse', 'these acts of fascist terror spring from irreducible human desire'.[131] Le Brun, though, is careful to distinguish Sade from the operation of fascism, arguing that the 'ideological masking' of the latter 'draws on all the gaudy stereotypes of race, family, fatherland and countryside', whereas 'the disrobing found in Sade', by contrast, lays bare the passions without any questionable justifications.[132] While clearly dealing with phenomena of an entirely different order, there are nonetheless strong resonances here that suggest some common psychological roots.

Sade's narrative operates according to a rigidly predetermined formula, with the narrator announcing at the outset that 'the mechanism was to start functioning'.[133] Against claims for Sade in terms of literary 'liberation', Joan DeJean instead reads his 'literary fortress' as 'essentially faithful to a typically Classical concern for order and control' – more specifically as 'dedicated to the constraint, control and repression of all forces of (natural) disorder'.[134] Hénaff observes that the task of the Sadean discourse is to 'say everything', a paradoxical call for both 'totality' and at the same time, 'excess' – a contradiction insofar as one can't simultaneously have both, itself a sign of the excess that drives Sade's system.[135] The *120 journées* is thus characterised by Hénaff as a 'dictionary of perversions', encyclopaedic in its ambition. But while some commentators acknowledge that Sade's text is incomplete, in fact only the first month is actually narrated by Duclos, the first storyteller, after which the remaining three months are simply given as short synopses of the remaining perversions. Stripped of all narrative embellishment, the bulk of the perversions paradoxically find expression in the formulaic iteration of increasingly barbaric acts, culminating in the 'hell passion'. The effect of this artless, obsessive taxonomy is disturbing, siting Sade's conception of man as close to the mechanicity of La Mettrie. And as Hénaff notes, 'the ambition to "tell all" is normally the business of paranoia', in which connection we could add Sade's obsessive calculations, his pursuit of 'signals' in the numbers and dates he discovers in his wife's letters, as well as the utter negation of the 'other' in his texts.[136]

Sade's treatment of the quintessential spaces of the gothic novel – monasteries, fortresses, torture chambers – is intensely theatrical, such that his *120 journées* might be characterised as a form of *psychic theatre*. Hénaff observes the theatricality of Sade's deployment of his characters, with its language of 'performances' and 'scenes', 'where what matters is the development of a tableau', and where bodies are arranged, manipulated and observed, in the service of 'libertine mastery'.[137] In a related argument, de Beauvoir contends that Sade, lacking the detachment to confront reality, contents himself in his writing with projecting his fantasies, suggesting that: 'His accounts have the unreality, the false precision, and the monotony of schizophrenic reveries'.[138] De Beauvoir contends that Sade projects in these tableaux – 'abstract incarnations of evil' – a secure 'enchanted domain', where: 'Caves, underground passageways, mysterious castles, all the props of the Gothic novel take on a particular meaning . . . They symbolise the isolation of the image'.[139] The gothic, particularly the castle, thus functions for Sade as this abstraction from reality – the protected inner sanctuary within which his erotic fantasies can be securely projected.

If Gracq's castle is a *centrifugal* space, spiralling out into the surrounding spaces – the forest, the sea – and on into the immensity of the rotating night sky, Sade's is by contrast *centripetal*, circling down into its own innards. The dark secret at the heart of Sade's machine is its torture chamber, accessed by moving a 'fatal stone'

beneath which 'a spiral stairway, very narrow and very steep', leads down into 'the bowels of the earth', terminating in 'a vaulted dungeon closed by triple doors of iron, and in which was displayed everything the cruelest art and the most refined barbarity could invest of the most atrocious . . .'.[140] What Sade finally attains here in the metaphorical depths of the mind, far beyond the reach of any censorious gaze, is 'tranquillity', where the imagination is finally allowed full reign. Gérard Legrand, in his 1961 essay 'Pour le bon usage de Sade', observes the 'immensity of [Sade's] discovery' of the 'limitless potentiality of sex in us', while dismissing the tendency of some specialists to view Sade as simply a precursor of Krafft-Ebing.[141] Posing Sade rather as a moralist, Legrand rejects any notion that Sade advocated that anyone should copy his heroes, claiming his aim as instead to demonstrate to the 'honest man' what Hydras were sleeping at the bottom of his 'enlightened consciousness'. Legrand also challenges the uncritical assimilation of Sade to eighteenth-century libertinism, claiming that he exposes libertinism as what Legrand characterises as an ever-escalating 'reign of perversity' incapable of ever attaining fulfilment, and claiming for Sade the temperament of a metaphysician despite his contempt of metaphysics.[142] But that he feels obliged to state that 'Sade n'était pas hitlérien' again demonstrates the dangers that a contemporary tendency to equate Sade with fascism still posed for surrealism.[143]

In the celebrated closing scene of Luis Buñuel's *L'Age d'or* (1930), Sade's protagonists finally emerge from their self-imposed incarceration in the Château Silling, as their leader – transformed into the figure of Christ – returns to dispatch a final victim. In an open letter to Buñuel, Heine praised the film for its disturbing the 'dirty conscience' of 'decent people', insisting that the deployment of Sade, albeit brief, was a historic landmark that 'splatters with a stain of true blood, a screen too used to streaming with rose water'.[144] For Heine, in evoking Sade's text and in substituting Jesus for the scandalous leader of this 'School of Libertinage' – thereby pointing up the moral relativity of all such schools of thought – Buñuel aligns the film with 'liberty'. And a liberty, Heine argues, essential to the health of cinema against the greed of business and the 'tyranny of the censors'.[145] Following protests by the Ligue Anti-Juive and Ligue des Patriotes, the film was banned in France until 1981 and little seen there for many years, attesting in part the incendiary power of Sade's name in this provocation against the values of Church and State. As Matthew Gale observes, part of the controversy surrounding the film derived from explicit political references contained in Dalí's screenplay, as with the ceremony of the 'Founding of Rome' toward the beginning of the film, intended as a parody of Italian fascism.[146]

It's therefore somewhat ironic in that light, that Pasolini's *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma* (1975) – a film in a very different vein – should have transferred the site of Sade's dystopia to Mussolini's short-lived fascist Republic of Salò. While somewhat outside the parameters of this book, it's worth observing of Pasolini's film, that while loosely based on Sade and containing many explicit references to the Holocaust, *Salò* is an allegorical work that extends the director's critique of capitalism's commercial reach, and that as Alessia Ricciardi observes, Pasolini 'stated decisively that he was trying to present fascism in visionary terms rather than as the logical or historical consequence of Sade'.[147] Somewhat like Breton with his 'relais', Pasolini relocates Silling to a modern villa, discovering there a contemporary equivalent of the gothic château as a modernist expression of power and affluence (the paintings by Léger, art

deco furnishings etc.). The updated château thus again becomes a vehicle through which to analyse current issues, further expanding on the postwar debate on violence, as with the film's explicit references to wartime fascism and the Holocaust (troops rounding up their victims, their naked inspection, etc.).[148] Pasolini cites a number of texts on Sade in his opening credits and was particularly influenced by the ideas of Blanchot and Klossowski. *Salò*'s reductivist conflation of Sade with fascism was attacked by intellectuals such as Barthes and Foucault, while its mixing of literary fiction with still raw wartime atrocities caused wide offence, criticised even by supporters of Pasolini such as Italo Calvino.[149] Pasolini's bloody murder by a young hustler on a beach prior to the film's release has ensured the film has been read through his own sexuality and the equation of sex with power, where his purchase of the bodies of young men from the working-class *borgade* has echoes of Sade's own expending of vast fortunes on the bodies of working women. Hugely controversial, *Salò* remains banned in some countries and continues to generate debate around the interpretation of Sade's inheritance.[150]

The castle in ruins: Pieyre de Mandiargues, Toyen and Štyrský

Surrealism's 'initially rather poetic vision of Sade', Cox observes, had developed into a 'celebration of perverse sexuality' as an emblem of revolt against bourgeois morality, as with the movement's interventions during the 1930s in the cases of Violette Nozières and the Papin sisters, which went beyond mere provocations.[151] But we see a further shift in the wake of the war and the above debates, as evidenced in André Pieyre de Mandiargues' 1953 novel *L'Anglais décrit dans le château fermé*, published originally under the pseudonym Pierre Morion and claimed by its author as 'one of the rare examples of the surrealist novel'.[152] First associated with the movement in 1946, Mandiargues shared certain affinities with surrealism, as with the eroticism and the oneiric quality of his writing, along with a common taste for the gothic novel, and though he only ever had 'one foot in the group', nonetheless contributed to surrealist catalogues and periodicals.[153] Mandiargues sites his novel on the isolated island château of Gamehuche off the Brittany coast, a former fort composed of a keep with surrounding wall and towers, built in granite. The castle's owner is Montcul, a shady character clearly in the mould of Sade's villains, who had cynically exploited his contacts with the Resistance during the war, and who invites an old friend to his retreat to indulge in 'certain games' and 'carry out certain experiments'.[154] Mandiargues clearly sets out here to shock, and we can see in this, as David Bond observes, the influence of Bataille's conception of eroticism as transgression, where such transgression assumes the form of a tightly constrained ritual.[155] Mandiargues had spent the war in Monaco attempting to direct his dreams under the influence of Hervey de Saint-Denys' book and has said that he thought both sides in the conflict to have been 'in the grip of evil' – the novel can therefore also be read as a critique of the myth gathering around the wartime Resistance.[156]

As with Sade's *120 journées*, Mandiargues' tale is similarly realised in the torture and abuse of a group of women and children brought to the island, the devouring of copious quantities of shit and erotic foodstuffs, and in somewhat 'surreal' set pieces such as a bloody debauch in a pool of octopuses. The novel, writes Mandiargues, 'was to be the last word in eroticism and sadism, like a kiss bestowed on the principle

of Evil', and as with Sade's Silling, at its core is the torture chamber.[157] Mandiargues updates that motif in the light of the atrocities of the recent war, such that it is now kidnapped Nazi officers who are tortured and sexually violated by two Jews, though quite clearly the Jewish 'avengers' are as much violated in this fantasy as are their victims, as with Montcul's black accomplices, where again the formerly abused become in turn the abusers, providing somewhat ambivalent support for the deployment of Sade as moralist.

The narrator finally flees the island as Montcul, increasingly deranged, prepares an enormous explosion that will erase both the castle and the island itself, and the novel ends with the phrase 'Eros is a dark god', a nod to the ending of Breton's *Arcane 17* and a clue pointing to the novel's origins in surrealist discussions of alchemy.[158] Mandiargues has referred to a 'black eros', which he has defined in terms of 'the boundless community where good and evil become one and where all things are rigorously equal', a theme that can be traced in the moral ambiguity of *L'Anglais*.[159] And signalled in alchemical terms in the recurring motif in his works of a bound white woman within a magic circle, engaged in sex rites with black male figures, symbolising duality and unity in the conjunction of opposites[160] Mandiargues could thus be said to deploy Sade to suggest the infection of evil as consequent upon the excesses of the war and has observed that his book was translated into Italian only a few years before Pasolini created *Salo*, suggesting some influence on that film.

The destruction of the castle at the culmination of Mandiargues' novel, following the model of Walpole's *Otranto*, also recalls the final scenes of Henry Hathaway's 1935 film *Peter Ibbetson* (Figure. 7.4), based on the 1891 novel by George du Maurier and starring Gary Cooper as Ibbetson. The plot concerns a pair of lovers

Figure 7.4 Peter Ibbetson (dir. Henry Hathaway), 1935

Figure 7.4b (Continued)

separated in childhood who meet later in life, but who are then permanently separated by Ibbetson's accidental murder of his lover's husband. Admired by Breton, the film sees the lovers overcome tragedy by meeting again in their dreams, thus realising the surrealist aspiration to unify life and dream, as in Nerval's *Aurélie*. During sleep the two lovers meet and play like children in idyllic alpine landscapes, where Ibbetson creates a fairy-tale castle out of clouds, but which is struck by lightning, dissolving spectacularly in an apocalyptic ending.[161]

An 'altar' devoted to *Peter Ibbetson* was created by Toyen for the 1947 surrealist exhibition, thus incorporating both novel and film within the hermetic and darkly Sadean thematic of that exhibition.[162] Toyen's altar comprised a complex installation titled *La Fenêtre de 'Magna sed Apta'*, after du Maurier's novel, referring both to the blissful childhood home of Ibbetson's lover (*Parva sed Apta*) and to the concept of a psychic window – as in *Arcane 17* – upon which human fantasies may be projected. Somewhat like Sade, Ibbetson was imprisoned for twenty-five years, eventually going mad and being then interned in an asylum, where he wrote his memoir.[163] There Ibbetson relates the destruction of his Parisian childhood idyll on the death of his parents, his shiftless youth in London, pursuit of the Countess of Towers and his meeting her in a dream, where she teaches him how to direct his dreams – 'dreaming true' – again clearly recalling the work of Hervey de Saint-Denys and the notion of 'lucid dreaming', by which process Hervey was able to direct the dream in analysing the dream state itself.[164] But, 'more than a mere spectator', Ibbetson learns to participate in his dreams such that the dream becomes more real than his life in prison: 'it was a life within a life – an intenser life'.[165] Toyen's assemblage featured two interlocking male and female hands that reach

out to each other from adjoining window casements, suggesting the realisation of the lovers' dream: 'that strange sense of the transfusion of life at the touching of the hands! Oh, it was *no dream*!'.[166] Imprisoned following his murder of his natural father, Ibbetson and his lover meet each night in their dreams, where they are able to pass through the 'enchanted window' of *Parva sed Apta* and travel anywhere in the world they wish. As with Sade's use of writing, Ibbetson is thus able to evade his gaolers through the power of imagination, and to realise the surrealist aspiration to the merging of dream and reality.

During the 1920s Toyen had been a part of the Devětsil group in Prague and went on with Jindřich Štyrský, Karel Teige and others to form the Prague surrealist group, before settling in Paris in 1947 and becoming a significant figure in postwar French surrealism.[167] Eroticism had figured prominently in the work of the Prague surrealists, with Toyen contributing in the early thirties to Štyrský's review *Erotická*, and producing illustrations for an edition of Sade's *Justine*.[168] But in a break with the erotic readings of Sade, Toyen's 1946 *At the Château La Coste* (Figure 7.5) instead depicts a fox drawn upon a crumbling wall from which wild mushrooms sprout, but where the illusory fox holds a dead bird under its claw, alluding to the ferocity of Sade's thought, to the power of imagination, and to Sade's conception of nature as a constant cycle of destruction and creation. Štyrský visited the ruins of Sade's castle at La Coste in 1932, when he made a series of atmospheric photographs of the site.[169] A selection of those images accompanied the publication of Štyrský's essay 'Kraj markýze de Sade' ('The Land of the Marquis de Sade'), which first appeared in the Czech periodical *Rozpravy Aventina* (September 1933), presenting a somewhat romanticised view of Sade and his affection for his sister-in-law.[170]

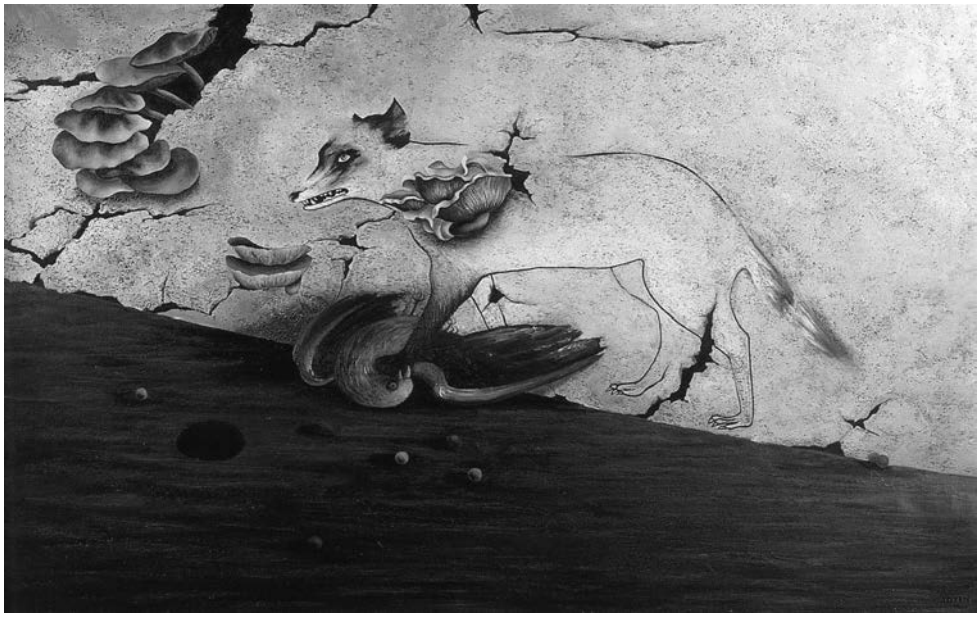

Figure 7.5 Toyen, *At the Château La Coste*, 1946

Hérold was eventually able to buy a run-down second home at Lacoste and he too appears in photographs, with Gherasim Luca, amid the ruins of the château, evidencing the continued hold that Sade's castle maintained upon the surrealist imaginary. And Breton too was to realise his dream of owning a castle, when he acquired a property in 1950 at Saint-Cirq-la-Popie, finally allowing him to realise the wish he expressed in the first Manifesto, of gathering his friends together – again evidenced in photographs – in his own castle.

Erzsébet Báthory: the 'pale vampire' of the Carpathians

Sade remained a key point of reference for surrealism throughout the 1950s, and as a prelude to the 'EROS' exhibition that opened in December 1959, the Canadian artist Jean Benoît staged a performance at the Paris apartment of Joyce Mansour. In the *Execution of the Testament of the Marquis de Sade*, Benoît appeared in a cadaverous mask and elaborate winged costume to enact Sade's final testament (read by Breton), in which he expresses his wish to be buried without religious ceremony or burial marker, and that his grave be sown with acorns, such that: 'the traces of my tomb will disappear from the surface of the earth'.[171] Benoît gradually divested himself of various symbols of man's enslavement, exposing a phallus modelled on precise measurements given by Sade in the *120 journées*, and the performance culminated in his branding himself on the breast with the word 'SADE' – a feat immediately replicated by Matta, then seeking re-admission to the group.[172] Such a public affirmation of the Sade-sign – seared, quite literally, into the flesh – clearly tended toward the spectacular and fanatical, while other readings at the event emphasised Sade's revolutionary spirit, collectively reaffirming his centrality to the movement. But to the name of Sade surrealism was about to add that of a female precursor, fracturing the hitherto assumed association of sexual violence and male sexuality.

In 1962 the poet and writer Valentine Penrose published *Erzsébet Báthory: La Comtesse sanglante*, a semi-fictionalised account of the life of the sixteenth-century Hungarian countess – characterised by Georgiana Colville as a 'sadistic and obsessional monster' – who was said to have tortured and murdered some six hundred young women.[173] Penrose had long been associated with surrealism, maintaining regular contact with the English and French groups through her former husband, the English surrealist Roland Penrose, as well through other artists and writers.[174] Penrose's book appeared soon after Bataille's *Les Larmes d'Eros*, completed only shortly before his death in 1962, in which he analysed the 'diabolical' aspect of eroticism, and by which he intends its imbrication with death.[175] This sense of *anguish* – a 'haunting fear of death' – is perhaps nowhere more strikingly exemplified than in the case of Báthory. Bataille juxtaposes photographs of the ruins of three castles – that of Gilles de Rais at Machecoul, Sade's castle at Lacoste and Báthory's Csejthe lair – thus suggesting the connection between the castle as symbol of absolute power and the excesses that such unbridled authority enabled. Csejthe is depicted as a ruined fortress overlooking a bleak mountain range, conveying well the utter isolation and impregnability sought by Báthory and by Sade's villains at Silling, in seeking to evade the gaze of law. Speculating that Báthory 'loved it for its savageness, its walls that muffled all sounds . . . its lugubrious aspect', Penrose adds that '[s]he perhaps found there the security that sorcery and crime always demanded'.[176] Csejthe, Penrose observes, like many such castles perched on mountains built by Charlemagne, had few windows and square

towers, with enormous cellars and underground tunnels dug into the mountainside.[177] And she recounts how the masons constructing a new castle were claimed to wall up a young woman, alive, in order to bring abundance and ensure succession, such that, 'for centuries, the castle thus rested on a frail skeleton'. Penrose therefore evokes a poetic vision of events at Csejthe: 'vampires and ghosts are still there, and, in a corner of the cellars, the clay pot containing the blood ready to be poured over the shoulders of the Countess'.[178]

Penrose recounts Báthory's perverse beauty, her claimed lesbianism, her intense cruelty and her growing immersion in philtres and magic, intended to preserve her youth and beauty. With the constant absence of her husband in military campaigns, Báthory – 'the pale vampire' – was left to give free reign to her innate sadism, torturing and murdering young girls, usually pale-skinned and blonde, then bathing in their blood in order to retain the highly-valued pallor of her own skin.[179] And blood characterised by Penrose as 'the mysterious fluid where the alchemists had sometimes thought to find the secret of gold'.[180] Like Bataille, Penrose draws a parallel with the case of Gilles de Rais, arrested at Machecoul in 1440 under suspicion of similarly invoking the use of sorcery and of murdering children in order to use their blood for his rejuvenation. Penrose's text, as Karen Humphreys has argued, supports Bataille's conception of transgression, observing that: 'Like Bataille, Penrose points to eroticism as the origin of power relations, as the well-spring of transgressive behaviours'.[181] Cruelty, Bataille argues, is one of the forms assumed by violence, and while not necessarily erotic, like eroticism it embodies the conscious intention 'to trespass into a forbidden field of behaviour'.[182] Báthory's transgression can thus be conceived in Bataillean terms as the breaking of taboos, as the breaching of the boundary between the profane and sacred worlds through the unbridled exercise of a violently perverse eroticism. In this she exercised the unlimited control over the bodies of her subjects that enabled her to enact at the level of the real what Sade would be able to fantasise only at the level of the imaginary. Whereas Bataille is happy to ignore this distinction throughout his book, his discussion culminates in a series of excruciating photographs of the Chinese torture of the 'Hundred Pieces', in which a living body is butchered before a watching crowd, and where the unbearable actuality of such violence is asserted through the indexical reality of the photograph.[183] Bataille's conclusion brings us finally to a parallel with that point sought by surrealism – 'the identity of these perfect contraries, divine ecstasy and its opposite, extreme horror' – that point where 'the religious horror disclosed in sacrifice becomes linked to the abyss of eroticism'.[184]

Báthory's bloody hecatomb was finally terminated only when reports of tortured bodies tossed from castle windows reached Mathias, king of Hungary, who insisted that she be put on trial. Even then, her relatives resisted in order to protect the family's honour and, while her underling accomplices were gorily executed, the countess herself was condemned to be walled into a chamber in her own castle, leaving only a small opening for food and water.[185] Bataille speculates that, had Sade been aware of Báthory, she 'would have made him howl like a wild beast', but that he can venture such a claim 'only under the emblem of tears', in 'opening consciousness to the representation of what man really is'.[186] In terms of its influence upon surrealism, the Polish director Walerian Borowczyk, who also collaborated with Pieyre de Mandiargues, drew on Penrose's *Báthory* for the third of the episodes in his *Immoral Tales* (1974).[187] But more broadly, the book further expanded the debate within surrealism on the heritage of Sade – more specifically, from a female perspective – while strikingly

exposing the limits of the human and the role of the medieval castle as embodiment of the excesses it made possible.

Conclusion: liberty at the limits of the human

Benoît would return in 1965 in *Le Nécrophile* for a reprise of his 1959 performance, this time in the guise of Sergeant Bertrand, now transformed – in an echo of Man Ray's portrayal of Sade – into a human castle, his face a death's mask amid a graveyard of crosses. The case of the necrophilic Sergeant Bertrand, which erupted during the troubled period 1847–48, had been analysed by Heine, who considers the gothic in relation to the political convulsions of the Revolution, observing that 'bloody events of a turbulent era or of the intense repression of the consequent reaction', seem to produce 'exceptional pathological cases'.[188] François Bertrand, the 'Vampire of Montparnasse', had disinterred the corpses of women from Parisian cemeteries, committing acts of necrophilia and cannibalism upon them, and leading Benoît to link his acts to the 150 'murderous passions' narrated by Sade.[189] Heine contends that the case 'reveals a reality more vertiginous than all romanesque horror', concluding that for him, the literary merits of the gothic novel are 'negligible', whereas 'their profound interest lies elsewhere'.[190]

Given that Desnos perished at Terezin in June 1945, Ernst's first wife Luise Straus-Ernst died at Auschwitz, and that Lee Miller had witnessed first-hand the liberation of Buchenwald and Dachau in April of 1945, capturing in unbearable photographs the aftermath of the excesses committed there, surrealism would have good personal reason to consider critically the lesson of Sade. However, as Eburne observes, Ernst's son Jimmy, in his account of the surrealists' wartime exile 'excoriates the group's ostensible lack of concern for the realities of the Holocaust', while that absence – however justified – inevitably tarnished the movement's postwar reputation.[191] Nonetheless, surrealism's continued serious engagement with the thought of Sade served as a reminder that those wartime barbarities were not confined to fascism. When Bataille gave evidence in 1956 at the trial of Jean-Jacques Pauvert, indicted for publishing four books by de Sade, he affirmed that: 'I consider that for someone who wants to go to the depths of what man signifies, the reading of Sade is not only commendable, but essential'.[192]

In *Attaquer le soleil*, the catalogue to a major exhibition curated by Annie Le Brun marking the bicentenary in 2015 of his death, Le Brun rejects the idea of Sade as some fixed monument, posing him instead – dynamically and conceptually – as the one who leads us furthest from ourselves, 'to the frontier between the human and the inhuman'.[193] For Le Brun, the 'imprescriptible scandal' of Sade's thought consists in its revealing that 'cruelty is at the heart of man', a desire rooted in his very origin, and in thus opening up a 'dangerous path' for other writers and artists.[194] Citing his expression of the unprecedented 'vertigo' that Sade writes of discovering during his incarceration, Le Brun argues that is 'precisely out of that vertigo that he invents a new mental space', and one able to rival those in which the unconscious had hitherto established its 'theatres'.[195] It's clearly such a theatrical psychic space that surrealist artists like Masson, Bellmer and Matta exploit in their work, albeit one that has perhaps tended to overshadow that parallel moral lesson that surrealism derives from Sade's work in his consequent revelation of the depths of human depravity. And it is to the mutation of these interior spaces – inner castles – that I want finally to turn in the Conclusion.

Notes

1 Breton, 'Limits Not Frontiers of Surrealism', in Rosemont (ed.), *What Is Surrealism?*, p. 158. First published in Herbert Read's *Surrealism* (London: Faber, 1936 and 1971).
2 Ibid., p. 158.
3 Breton refers here to his essay 'Il y aura une fois', *OCII*, p. 49.
4 Long thought lost and rediscovered only in the 1970s, *Berkeley Square* also exercised a grip upon H.P. Lovecraft, whose classic sci-fi tale 'The Shadow Out of Time' was inspired by the film's theme of time travel.
5 In fact, a translation of Catherine Cuthbertson's *Romance of the Pyrenees* (London: G. Robinson, 1807).
6 René Magritte, letter dated 27 April 1959, in David Sylvester (ed.), *René Magritte. Catalogue Raisonnée*, Vol. III (London: Menil Foundation/Philip Wilson, 1993), p. 313.
7 Ibid., p. 313.
8 See also Magritte's *Souvenir de Voyage* (1955), where the petrified figure, based on the poet Marcel Lecomte (known for his masochism), has been likened to Sade, thus linking the image to Man Ray's *Portrait imaginaire de D.A.F. de Sade* – in Sylvester, ibid., p. 248.
9 Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 19.
10 Breton, letter of 13 May 1939, cited in Dominique Perrin, *De Louis Poirier à Julien Gracq* (Paris: Editions Classiques Garnier, 2009), p. 360.
11 André Breton, 'Situation of Surrealism Between the Two Wars', in Breton (ed.), *Free Rein* (*La Clé des Champs*) (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), p. 54.
12 Breton, 'Limits not Frontiers', in Rosemont (ed.), p. 155.
13 Julien Gracq, *The Castle of Argol* (1938), trans. Louise Varèse (Norfolk, CT: New Directions Books, ca.1951), p. 144.
14 Breton, 'Limits not Frontiers', in Rosemont (ed.), p. 152.
15 Gracq would again update the château motif in his 1945 novel *Un Beau ténébreux*, in the form of a seaside hotel – the Hôtel des Vagues – where the lives of the guests are transformed by the arrival of an enigmatic stranger, Allan, another Perceval type seeker.
16 Simone Grossman, *Julien Gracq et le surréalisme* (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1980), p. 141.
17 Clément Borgal, *Julien Gracq: L'écrivain et les sortilèges* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1993), pp. 13–14 and 39.
18 Julien Gracq, *André Breton. Quelques aspects de l'écrivain* (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1948), p. 34.
19 Gracq cited in Perrin, op. cit., p. 252. Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron first makes this suggestion, observing the sense of 'historic fatality' of the novel, in her *Le Surréalisme et le roman* (Lausanne: Editions L'Age d'homme, 1983), p. 346.
20 Gracq, *Argol*, p. 145.
21 Gracq, *André Breton*, pp. 39–40.
22 Ibid., p. 31.
23 André Peyronie, *La Pierre de scandale du 'Château d'Argol' de Julien Gracq* (Paris: Archives des lettres modernes, 1972) (1), IV, no. 133, p. 11.
24 Ibid., p. 10.
25 Jean-Paul Goux, *Les Leçons d'Argol* (Paris: Temps Actuels, 1982), p. 13. Also see Annie-Claude Dobbs, *Dramaturgie et liturgie dans l'œuvre de Julien Gracq* (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1972), p. 29.
26 Saint Teresa, *The Interior Castle, or The Mansions*, 3rd edition (London: Thomas Baker, 1921), p. 38.
27 Ibid., pp. 40 and 148.
28 Gracq, *Argol*, p. 128.
29 Peyronie, *La Pierre de scandale*, p. 20.
30 Breton, 'The Automatic Message', in Rosemont (ed.), *What Is Surrealism?*, p. 109.
31 Gracq, *Argol*, p. 11.
32 Ibid., p. 14.
33 Ibid., pp. 83 and 95–96.
34 Ibid., pp. 122–23.

35 See Yves Bridel, *Julien Gracq et le dynamisme de l'imaginaire* (Lausanne: Éditions L'Âge d'Homme, 1981), pp. 70–73. The myth of the Grail originates with Chrétien de Troyes and his uncompleted *Perceval, the Story of the Grail* (1181–89), later reworked by Wolfram von Eschenbach and by Wagner in his *Parsifal* (1882).
36 Hegel cited in Gracq, *Argol*, p. 22. We recognise here one of the two main principles of Frazer's 'sympathetic magic' – *contiguity* and *similarity* – where things that have once been in contact continue to influence each other.
37 Gracq, *Argol*, p. 23.
38 Grossman, *Gracq et le surréalisme*, p. 152.
39 See Jean-François Marquet, 'Au Château d'Argol et le mythe hégélien', in Jean-Louis Leutrat (ed.), *Julien Gracq* (Paris: Editions de l'Herne, 1972).
40 Georges Bataille, *Eroticism* (1957) (London and New York: Marion Boyars, 1987), p. 15.
41 Ibid., pp. 20–21.
42 Ibid., pp. 31 and 63.
43 Goux, *Les Leçons d'Argol*, p. 28.
44 Bataille is here citing himself, *Eroticism*, p. 82.
45 Gracq, *Argol*, p. 141.
46 For an overview of the post-war cultural context in France see *Aftermath: France 1945–54. New Images of Man* (exh. cat.), Barbican Gallery, London, 1982; Alyce Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005).
47 Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (London and New York: Verso, 1997), p. 88.
48 Apollinaire cited in André Breton, 'D.-A.-F. de Sade', in Breton, *Anthology of Black Humor* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1997), p. 18.
49 Paul Eluard, 'D.A.F. de Sade, écrivain fantastique et révolutionnaire' in *La Révolution surréaliste* (1 December 1926), pp. 8–9; Jonathan P. Eburne, *Surrealism and the Art of Crime* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2008), p. 145.
50 Paul Eluard, 'Poetic Evidence', in Read (ed.), *Surrealism*, pp. 176–77.
51 Maurice Blanchot, *Lautréamont and Sade* (1949) (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 15.
52 Maurice Heine, 'Le Marquis de Sade et le Roman Noir', *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, no. 239 (August 1933), pp. 192–93.
53 Ibid., p. 195. The Sadean 'laboratory' returns us again to *grand guignol* and the work of Poe, influencing surrealism in, for example Jan Svankmayer's short film *The Pit, the Pendulum and Hope* (1983).
54 Ibid., pp. 204–5.
55 Breton, *Anthology of Black Humor*, p. 18.
56 Svein Eirik Fauskevåg, *Sade dans le surréalisme* (Oslo and Toulouse: Solum forlag, 1982), pp. 217 and 234.
57 Man Ray cited in Merry Foresta et al., *Perpetual Motif: The Art of Man Ray* (exh. cat.), National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, 1988, p. 326.
58 Maurice Heine, 'Actualité de Sade', *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution*, no. 2 (October 1930), pp. 3–7 and 37.
59 Man Ray, *Self Portrait* (1963) (London: Bloomsbury, 1988), pp. 154–55.
60 In Breton, 'La beauté sera convulsive', *Minotaure*, no. 5 (February 1934), p. 15.
61 Alain Sayag, 'D'une exposition à l'autre', *Man Ray: La Photographie à l'envers* (exh. cat.), Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1998, p. 14.
62 Neil Baldwin, *Man Ray: American Artist*, 2nd edition (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2000), p. 212.
63 Fauskevåg, *Sade dans le surréalisme*, pp. 235–37; Robert Desnos, *La Liberté ou l'amour*, in Desnos, *Œuvres*, pp. 389–90.
64 Eluard, 'Poetic Evidence', in Read (ed.), *Surrealism*, pp. 179–81.
65 Neil Cox, 'Critique of Pure Desire, or When the Surrealists Were Right', in Jennifer Mundy (ed.), *Surrealism: Desire Unbound* (exh. cat.), Tate Modern, London, 2001, p. 247.
66 Ibid.
67 For an account of the subsequent trial of Pauvert between 1956–58 see Perrine Coudurier, 'The Survival of Sade in French Literature of the 1950s', in Thomas Baldwin, James Fowler and Ana de Medeiros (eds.), *Questions of Influence in Modern French Literature*

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68 We should also add here the publication in 1954 of Pauline Réage's *Histoire d'O*.
69 See Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1995).
70 Alphonso Lingis, translator's introduction to Pierre Klossowski, *Sade My Neighbour* (1947) (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1991), p. ix.
71 Tristan Tzara, *Le Surréalisme et l'après-guerre* (1947) (Paris: Nagel, 1966), p. 7.
72 Ibid., p. 42.
73 Paulhan's preface, 'The Marquis de Sade and His Accomplice', was republished in Marquis de Sade, *Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom, and Other Writings* (New York: Grove Press, 1965).
74 Ibid., pp. 4–5.
75 Ibid., p. 13.
76 Ibid., p. 18.
77 Lingis in Klossowski, *Sade My Neighbour*, p. xi. For a discussion of Klossowski's major revision of this text in the edition of 1967 see Jane Gallop, *Intersections: A Reading of Sade With Bataille, Blanchot and Klossowski* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), pp. 85–103.
78 Klossowski, *Sade my Neighbour*, p. 68.
79 Ibid., p. 69.
80 Ibid., p. 62.
81 Ibid., pp. 63 and 65.
82 Viola Brisolin, *Power and Subjectivity in the Late Work of Roland Barthes and Pier Paolo Pasolini* (Bern and Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011), p. 89; See also Gallop, *Intersections*.
83 Le Brun cited in Brisolin, ibid., p. 90.
84 Marcel Hénaff, *Sade: The Invention of the Libertine Body* (1978) (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 37.
85 Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony* (1933 and 1951), 2nd edition (Oxford and New York: OUP, 1970), p. 106.
86 Robert Desnos, cited in Fauskevåg, *Sade dans le surréalisme*, p. 269.
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88 Maurice Nadeau, 'Sade, ou l'insurrection permanente', ibid., p. 36.
89 Ibid., p. 41.
90 Ibid., pp. 37–39.
91 See Sarane Alexandrian, *Jacques Hérold* (Paris: Fall éd., 1995), p. 102.
92 Ibid., pp. 102–3.
93 Maurice Blanchot, *Lautréamont et Sade* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1963), p. 19.
94 Ibid., pp. 19–23.
95 Ibid., p. 23.
96 Ibid., pp. 39–40.
97 Ibid., p. 36.
98 Georges Bataille, 'The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade', in Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), p. 92.
99 Eburne, *Surrealism and the Art of Crime*, p. 146.
100 Georges Bataille, *Literature and Evil* (1957) (London and New York: Marion Boyars, 1993), p. 122.
101 Ibid., pp. 123–24.
102 Ibid., p. 125.
103 Ferdinand Alquié, *Philosophy of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969).
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105 Ibid., p. 79.
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109 Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, p. 108.
110 Ibid., pp. 121–22.
111 Bataille from 'Note sur *Réflexions sur la question juive* de Jean-Paul Sartre', cited in Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille: An Intellectual Biography* (London and New York: Verso, 2002), p. 359.
112 Surya, *Georges Bataille*, pp. 360–61.
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123 Pierre Klossowski, 'Nature's Destructive Principle', in Sade (ed.), ibid., pp. 67–68.
124 Sade, *120 Days*, p. 235.
125 Ibid., p. 240.
126 Blanchot, *Lautréamont et Sade*, p. 36.
127 Sade, *120 Days*, pp. 240, 285, 295–96 and 314.
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129 Sade, *120 Days*, p. 192; See Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, 2 Vols (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987 and 1989).
130 Barbara Ehrenreich, 'Foreword' to Theweleit, ibid., Vol. I, p. xi.
131 Ibid., p. xii.
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136 Ibid., p. 62.
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139 Ibid.
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172 See Mahon for a detailed account of the performance, in *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros*, pp. 154–58.
173 An account said to be in her own hand lists some 610 victims. Valentine Penrose, *Erzsébet Báthory. La Comtesse sanglante* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1962), p. 223.
174 Georgiana M.M. Colville, introduction to Valentine Penrose, *Écrits d'une femme surréaliste* (Paris: Editions Joëlle Losfeld, 2001), p. 16.
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176 Penrose, *Erzsébet Báthory*, p. 47.
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178 Ibid., p. 7.
179 Ibid., pp. 85 and 88.
180 Ibid., p. 91.
181 Karen Humphreys, 'The Poetics of Transgression in Valentine Penrose's *La Comtesse sanglante*', *The French Review*, vol. 76 no. 4 (March 2003), p. 745.
182 Bataille, *Eroticism*, pp. 79–80.
183 One of these images had been reproduced in 1923, in George Dumas's *Traité de psychologie* – Bataille had obtained a print in 1925 from a psychoanalyst and it had played, he writes, a 'decisive role' in his life. Bataille, *Tears of Eros*, p. 206.
184 Bataille, *Tears of Eros*, p. 207.

185 Báthory survived in those conditions for over three years, dying suddenly, 'without cross and without light', in August 1614, never having repented her crimes. Penrose, *Erzsébet Báthory*, pp. 227–28.
186 Bataille, *Tears of Eros*, pp. 139–40.
187 See Michael Richardson, *Surrealism and Cinema* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2006), pp. 114–18.
188 Heine, 'Promenade à travers le Roman noir', *Minotaure*, no. 5 (1934), p. 1.
189 See Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros*, p. 190.
190 Heine, 'Promenade . . .', p. 1.
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Conclusion

Gothic surrealism and the mutation of inner space

> The images of surrealism are the iconography of inner space. [. . .]
> To move through these landscapes is a journey of return to one's innermost being.
> J.G. Ballard, 'The Coming of the Unconscious' (1966)

A major ambition of this book has been to contribute further to the growing body of scholarship (Rabinovitch, Szulakowska, Lachapelle et al.) demonstrating the centrality of fields such as occultism, magic, mediumism, spiritualism etc. – and to which we can add the particular contribution of the gothic – in the development of modern culture.[1] As has become increasingly clear during the course of this discussion, the role assumed by precisely those areas in the formation and conceptual development of surrealism has been decisive, particularly at certain key moments in the history of the movement, whether in its initial emergence and the defining of 'surrealism', in the production of core texts such as *Nadja* or *Communicating Vessels*, or in the decisive call in the 'Second Manifesto' for the 'occultation' of the movement. And a crucial element of which is the advocacy by Breton and Artaud of a 'medieval' mind-set, where the gothic assumes the wider significance of a mentality opposed to that of Enlightenment reason, ruled instead by the imagination and facilitated by an attitude of *disponibilité* – of openness to the operation of chance and to the possibilities offered by the world. As against the tendency in much of the literature to consider surrealism's mediumism in terms of abruptly terminated early experiments in automatism, this book has demonstrated how such activity has been part of a coherent constellation of ideas embracing occultism, magic, hermetic thought and alternative psychic states, that have been seen to resonate down the history of the movement. Deeply rooted in Romanticism, Breton's orientation of surrealism has been seen to be consistently guided by the example of the poets, following in the footsteps of Novalis, Nerval and Baudelaire – themselves steeped in occult knowledge – becoming yet more entrenched during the postwar era in his concern to situate surrealism within the deepest traditions of human thought (in analogy, correspondences, magical thought, etc.). And in the model of alchemy, the concept of the initiatory journey in pursuit of some ultimate goal provides both an *ethical* attitude and a certain spirituality outside that of religion, and the overarching aim of surrealism's pursuit of its own 'sublime point'.

The very broad scope of the gothic's hold upon surrealism has inevitably resulted in the exclusion here of many relevant topics and of important work relating to gothic and occult themes, particularly visual artwork. The occult-themed work of artists such as Leonora Carrington, Victor Brauner, Jacques Hérold, Roberto Matta and

others, would require more space than is available here, and there are already significant studies of that work.[2] Similarly with the visual work of Ithell Colquhoun, which would complement the discussion here of some of her writings, and where there is still much scope for further research.[3] Colquhoun's own deep involvement in occult phenomena – ranging from alchemy, cabbalism and Tarot, to Crowleian sex magick and modern druidism – throughout her adult life, represents an alternative path to that of Breton, whose main concern was clearly never with occultism in its own right, but rather insofar as it contributed to his concern with new sources of creativity and the expansion of the imagination.

Considered more broadly as a form of cultural matrix onto which we can map various related fields – whether as gothic medicine, the 'gothic psychology' of Myers, Grand-Guignol theatre, or occultism – the gothic can be seen as providing surrealism with a coherent perspective from which to consider some of the movement's central concerns. The gothic novel in particular has been seen to have been a key reference in the development of Breton's thought, whether in establishing precursors, elevating the role of the imagination, in formulating core surrealist concepts such as the 'marvellous', in the prominence of dreams, or in giving expression to the movement's anticlericalism. In its advocacy of the *roman noir*, surrealism opposes to the clear light of reason all that is encapsulated in the word 'noir', Gracq's 'touchstone' of surrealism, as emblem of obscurity and darkness, of the irrational, the perverse and the esoteric. Narrowly defined, the gothic novel, whether in Radcliffe, Lewis or Maturin, has been brandished by surrealism against mainstream literature – particularly against the realist novel – as an alternative form of creativity. Above all, Breton's 'castle problem', where the castle ruin figures as site of reflection, posed by Le Brun as a problem of 'point of view, more precisely, of angle of view' – that of a space 'neither subjective nor objective' – where a central preoccupation for Breton was with establishing the contemporary form of a conceptual motif so deeply entrenched in the human psyche.[4]

Such a reconfiguring of the gothic castle is encountered, too, in the work of Maurice Fourré, welcomed to surrealism by Breton for his *La Nuit du Rose-Hôtel* (1950).[5] Fourré's curious novel *La Marraine du sel* (1955) is set in the rectilinear walled city of Richelieu and weaves a complex web of tangled relationships, sorcery and the historical resonance of place. In his preface Bruno Duval suggests that the multi-layered quality of the novel might be compared to the alchemical 'Great Work', while Fourré's Duchampian wordplay (the 'marchand du sel', etc.) bears some comparison with the allegorical language of esoteric and alchemical texts.[6] The novel was inspired in part by the then current case of Marie Besnard, 'l'Empoisonneuse de Loudon', sited close to Richelieu, and which inevitably recalls the events of the possessions of the seventeenth century with their aura of sexual hysteria and the grim fate of Urbain Grandier, the Catholic priest accused of forming a pact with the devil and then burned at the stake. The novel's focus is the relationship between Clair Harondel and a widow, Mariette Allespic, who deploys 'magic spells' – including 'a circle of hearts pierced by a needle' – to bewitch Harondel, and who communicates with him via telepathy.[7] Fourré's description of the statue of Richelieu on its socle, shrouded in fog, 'walking without advancing', recalls Brassaï's photographs of Paris at night in fog, and in particular the surreal 1932 image of Marshal Ney brandishing his sword in thick fog, where in the background we see the incongruous glow of a modern neon 'hotel' sign. And in that same fog Harondel imagines he sees the ghost of M. Abraham Allespic,

suspected victim of arsenic poisoning at the hand of his wife, an allegation made in a mysterious inscription that appears on the wall of the Hôtel de la Rose Blanche.

In another symbolic scene suggestive of the influence of surrealism, the wax mannequins of a bride and groom in the window display of the Magasin Allespic begin to melt before a horrified crowd on a hot summer's day – evoking 'laughter, cries of horror and disgust' – as wax tears run down the sorrowful face of the groom, dripping onto his dinner jacket, the faces horrifically ageing and decomposing as the figures eventually collapse in the sun.[8] And when the Allespics return later to discover the disaster, they find in the melted wax of the groom's chest, 'a whole handful of pins', while beneath her 'virginal satins', the bride is 'pierced through' by 'a gilded magic needle', 'dishonoured in her mortal remains by the waxy ejections'.[9] The allusion to Duchamp's *Large Glass* – a work subjected to extensive alchemical exegesis – is obvious here, while Fourré's highly sinuous, ceremonious writing style recalls the esoteric allusions of Fulcanelli. As Audoin observes, although relations between the two men appear to have cooled after the first novel, on Fourré's death Breton wrote that he felt he had never known anyone more 'enigmatic and more fascinating than Maurice Fourré, nor who appeared to me in possession of more *great* secrets'.[10]

If we were to consider, finally, the terrain onto which the surrealist gothic has more recently migrated, one such area would be that of science fiction, or perhaps more specifically, the 'interior space' proposed by J.G. Ballard in his 1962 essay 'Which Way to Inner Space?'. There he rejects the genre's obsession – stimulated by the then ongoing 'space race' – with rockets and the exploration of outer space, insisting instead that 'it is *inner* space, not outer, that needs to be explored'.[11] In a brief article of the following year Ballard muses upon how far 'the landscapes of one's childhood . . . provide an inescapable background to all one's imaginative writing'.[12] Ballard observes there that 'speculative fantasy . . . is an especially potent method of using one's imagination to construct a paradoxical universe where dream and reality become fused together' and that this 'internal landscape' – a zone he again designates 'inner space' – can be likened to that of surrealism.[13] Matta, for example, drawing upon both his architectural training and the reading of Freud, was acutely aware of the psychological dimension of his imaginary structures and landscapes, and as Martica Sawin has observed, 'it was apparent from the start that the psyche for [Matta] was to be visualised in architectural terms, that inner space as well as outer had biomorphic furnishings'.[14] Matta referred to such spaces as 'inscapes', suggestive of inner landscapes, and as Claude Cernuschi has observed, 'likened himself to some cosmonaut of the inner world'.[15]

Or migrated perhaps to the futuristic magic of the Japanese writer Chiaki Kawamata's 1984 *Genshi-gari* (literally 'hunting the magic poems' and translated as *Death Sentences*), a novel that combines surrealism with science fiction, shuttling between the New York of Breton's wartime exile and postwar Paris.[16] There Breton encounters a young Asian poet, Who May, who deploys incantations or spells in his writing – a poetic 'spell', a 'mirror' of words and then finally a fatal literary intoxicant, 'The Gold of Time' – leaving Breton and Duchamp dumbfounded, and in the novel it is this encounter that lies behind Breton's 'deep attraction to magical practices'.[17] For Kawamata, it is again Ballard's 'inner space' where the book's real meaning is played out, while narrative strands dealing with battles fought out on Martian colonies – traceable back to Flournoy's 'other worlds' or the glossolalia of Hélène Smith – figure more as pastiches of the clichés of the genre. In Kawamata's book, poetry, words,

assume the alchemical power of transformation, seducing, transforming – and ultimately destroying – their reader. And we are again returned here to the romantic lineage of Novalis and Nerval, and to that of the 'alchimie du verbe' of Rimbaud, the 'golden pathway' that Breton would pursue throughout his life.

Notes

1 See Introduction for full references of those sources. Also see *Sofie Lachapelle, From Spiritism and Occultism to Psychical Research and Metapsychics in France, 1853–1931* (Baltimore MA: Johns Hopkins, 2011).
2 See for example Susan Davidson (ed.), *Victor Brauner: Surrealist Hieroglyphs* (Ostfiledern-Ruit: Menil Foundation/Hatje Cantz, 2001); Stefan van Raay et al., *Surreal Friends: Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varo and Kati Horna* (Farnham: Lund Humphries, 2010); Susan L. Aberth, *Leonora Carrington: Surrealism, Alchemy and Art* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2004); Sarane Alexandrian, *Jacques Hérold* (Paris: Fall éd., 1995).
3 See also my essay 'Desert Islands: Magic and Modernity in the Work of Ithell Colquhoun', in Patricia Allmer (ed.), *Intersections – Women Artists/Surrealism/Modernism* (Manchester: MUP, 2016).
4 Annie Le Brun, *Les Châteaux de la subversion*, p. 48.
5 Fourré's first novel, *La Nuit du Rose-Hôtel* was published by Gallimard in 1950 as the first (and only) book in Breton's 'Collection Révélation'.
6 Bruno Duval, Preface to Maurice Fourré, *La Marraine du Sel* (Talence: L'Arbre vengeur, 2010), p. 13.
7 Fourré, ibid., pp. 27, 30 and 41. See also Philippe Audoin's essay in Audoin, *Maurice Fourré, rêveur définitif,* suivi de *Le Caméléon Mystique* (Paris: Le Soleil noir, 1978).
8 Fourré, *La Marraine du Sel*, pp. 97–99.
9 Ibid., p. 100.
10 Breton cited in Audoin, *Maurice Fourré*, p. 26.
11 J.G. Ballard, 'Which Way to Inner Space?', in Ballard (ed.), *A User's Guide to the Millennium*, (New York: Picador, 1996), p. 197.
12 J.G. Ballard, 'Time, Memory and Inner Space', in Ballard (ed.), ibid., p. 199.
13 Ibid., p. 200.
14 Martica Sawin cited in Claude Cernuschi, 'Mindscapes and Mind Games: Visualising Thought in the Work of Matta and His Abstract Expressionist Contemporaries', in Elizabeth T. Goizueta (ed.), *Matta: Making the Invisible Visible* (Chestnut Hill, MA: McMullen Museum of Art, 2004), p. 54.
15 Cernuschi, ibid., p. 61.
16 Kawamata Chiaki, *Death Sentences* (1984) (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).
17 Kawamata, ibid., p. 77.

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