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## Eclipsing Desire: Masculine Anxiety and the Surrealist Muse

Marcella Munson

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## Eclipsing Desire

### Masculine Anxiety and the Surrealist Muse

J'ai pris, du premier au dernier jour, Nadja pour un génie libre [. . .]. Elle, je sais que dans toute la force du terme il lui est arrivé de me prendre pour un dieu, de croire que j'*étais* le soleil.<sup>1</sup>

André Breton, *Nadja*

When Louis Aragon, in his 1928 text *Traité du style*, posits surrealism as “l’inspiration reconnue, acceptée, et pratiquée [. . .] non plus comme une visitation inexplicable, mais comme une faculté qui s’exerce,”<sup>2</sup> he deftly articulates several of the deep paradoxes subtending the surrealist literary project while simultaneously signaling its tangled gender politics. Not only must the (male) writer receive ideas and make aesthetic, political, and literary connections whose origins lie beyond the rational (and indeed often arrive only through the female muse), but he must seek a way to articulate these through language. Further, the surrealist author must let down his rational guard and allow the Other to enter him in order to receive these signals and reflect on his own subjective process while still remaining in active control of his own text, his own pen, his own muse.

The privileged surrealist muse was, of course, woman—woman as image or rhetorical trope, to be sure, herself displaced by the act of writing. But understanding this place of “privilege” held by the woman as muse demands analysis of the deep anxiety which the privilege given to the feminine provokes in surrealist models of masculine subjectivity. For literary surrealists, desire for, but especially of, the female disrupts the authorial body and challenges the status of the authorial text. And whereas this anxiety surrounding woman is readily seen in

the overwhelming variety of surrealist artistic images where the creative and destructive, active and passive roles woman is to fulfill are on display (woman as muse, *femme-enfant*, *femme-folle*, and *dévo-reuse*), this anxiety can also be clearly traced in many foundational surrealist texts.<sup>3</sup> I will consider three in particular: Aragon's *Traité du style* (1928), Breton's *Nadja* (1928), and Eluard's "L'amoureuse" (published in *Mourir de ne pas mourir*, 1924). In each of these texts, woman as figure makes reflective apprehension of masculine subjectivity possible and yet simultaneously provokes crisis by highlighting the insufficiency of literary form and its close ties to male creative activity. Aragon's *Traité du style*, with its aggressively polemical presentation of the writer's relationship to female visitation and its role in the act of male production, will set the stage for a reading of gender anxiety in two particular surrealist texts: Breton's *Nadja* and Eluard's "L'amoureuse."

### I. Sténographies de l'angoisse: the *Traité du style*

If the fundamental paradox of surrealism as articulated by Aragon pits chance and inexplicable truth (*visitation*) against determination and assigned meaning (*faculté*), it also opposes the feminine to the masculine by positing man as writer and interpreter of signs and woman as muse and text, she who indicates or bears signs. Aragon's term "visitation" implies no less, connoting as it does the arrival of a mysterious (and therefore neither controllable nor predictable) feminine Other—specifically the Virgin Mary—who will allow the male surrealist subject access to that which lies beyond reason.<sup>4</sup> Katharine Conley has shown how, despite the surrealists' virulent anti-religious stance (and we might add, perhaps *because* of this), the Virgin becomes a privileged, if troubled, symbol of creative activity for many of them. Both anti-symbol and "straightforward" symbol, the Virgin represents both those repressed (feminine-sibyl) aspects of the male author himself and the creative act or text itself. Her body thus functions as polyvalent sign precisely because of its unpredictability and liminal status, inhabiting as it does the realm of the surreal (disrupting chronological time) and the "real" (participating in chronological time) (Conley, *Immaculée* 607). Seen in this light, Aragon's term "visitation" resonates with other aspects of the surrealist project, such as *L'Immaculée Conception*. By invoking the encounter of the Virgin and John the Baptist while the lat-

ter was still in his mother's womb, the term *visitation* even suggests itself as veiled *mise-en-abîme* for several privileged surrealist motifs: the englobing female body, and the power of the female presence to provoke a strong, even "involuntary," verbal reaction in man. Aragon's depiction of the mysterious "visitation inexplicable" thereby stands in sharp contrast to "la faculté qui s'exerce," the male subjective intellect which will seek to interpret and thereby bring meaning and order to the signals that have been received in the presence of the feminine.

Moreover, by choosing the verb *s'exercer* Aragon underscores the notion that the author's intellect must work to create and/or uncover meaning. Aragon's description of surrealism thus foregrounds masculine energy and concomitant fatigue: surrealism itself, he says, is an activity "normalement limitée par la fatigue. D'une ampleur variable suivant les forces individuelles" (187). The creation of the surrealist text is, in other words, an act with boundaries largely defined by the energy of the author's physical body, his textual (and, as we shall see, sexual) stamina. But if the surrealist project depends heavily on the physical "vigueur" and integrity of its male author, there is nevertheless danger in the author's remaining entirely independent and self-enclosed. Displacement into the Other must occur; if not, the author risks reproducing the "aperçu banal" of a pseudo-Valéry whose text repeats "Je me voyais me voir: je, pronom personnel [. . .] je me voyais, me voyant [. . .] c'est un tout dépourvu de personnalisation [. . .] il ne reste à perte de vue que M. Valéry devant un seul miroir, ne faisant aucune découverte" (157).

Ennui—and worse, inauthenticity—becomes linked to this self-reflexive banalization of language, syntax, even experience itself. The self-contained author—"celui-ci qui se croit seul" (30)—is fooling himself, Aragon warns, for not only is such a mode of production illusory but it is undesirable as well since it prevents the author from finding true meaning or having authentic experiences. Aragon's pointed physical description of *celui qui écrit* emphasizes the circular isolation which leads to stagnation and work of a singularly stultifying kind: "quand au bout de sa page avec une sorte de soupir il jette autour de lui un regard idiot mais circulaire" (32). A text whose author took only himself for inspiration would itself by extension also be "idiot," "circulaire" and *soupir*-inducing. Such an isolated author, Aragon posits, would in fact miss the point of writing by conflating physical environment with literary production, and thereby lose vital control over the act of production:

Mais il s'agit d'épier son comportement. Il écrit. Il tient donc un porte-plume, et qu'on ne cherche pas à m'embarrasser avec le décor, les gens qui dictent, les littérateurs de métro, les crayonneurs en pleine Nature, les dactylographes de la poésie, les sténographies de l'angoisse [. . .]. (31)

Notably, Aragon heightens the sense of literary degradation by explicitly evoking types of mechanical recording associated with feminine labor; although *écriture automatique* was a privileged means of accessing the “authentic,” here Aragon presents two specifically female-dominated models of automation, “dactylographie” and “sténographie.” By combining “littérateurs” and “métrô,” “crayonneurs” and “nature,” “dactylographes” and “poésie,” Aragon banalizes literary production by bringing it into the domain of repetitive and dulling mechanical work, thus degrading the act of writing or creating “literature” even further; as Rudolf Kuenzli has noted, it is the woman’s job to record and the man’s job to create and innovate—the woman is for the surrealists “the medium, the hands, through which the dreams of the surrealists are preserved on paper. She is, so to speak, a recording machine.”<sup>5</sup> Aragon’s auto-reflexive author thus runs grave risks indeed: not merely the inability to achieve authentic insights and experiences or to reflect on his own subjectivity, but a concomitant degradation of his literary output into domains of “mere” feminine reproduction. He would reproduce and not produce.

The solipsistic author also risks losing control of his own body and physical gestures as he is overrun by “les tics nerveux [qui] se donnent libre cours sur son visage et dans toutes les zones débiles de son misérable corps” (32). This lack of control over his own body leads Aragon—and his reader—to further question the amount of authorial control such an author could possibly exercise over his “corps d’écriture,” when even the ink from his pen “affleusement s’étale,” blending in neatly with his “ruisselante sueur” (32). To be sure, the metaphor of an outpouring of ink and/or sweat has other connotations as well, and here Aragon carefully underscores the link between textual output and sexual pleasure (in particular, the autoerotic) by clarifying at the very beginning of the *Traité* those whom he is addressing:

. . . tout ce qui est capable de tenir un porte-plume, depuis l’enfant au berceau jusqu’au vieillard au cercueil, tout ce qui a la débilité nécessaire au maintien entre les doigts de cette machine grinçante, qu’on aurait tort de comparer pour cela à un

moulin, et que seul un observateur superficiel compare habituellement à la seiche [. . .] parce qu'elle puise ses analogies dans les moeurs mêmes de l'écrivain et du bateau, l'un et l'autre se masturbant d'une façon très longue et très obscène à décrire au moyen l'un de ses parasites et l'autre de son instrument de travail. (25–26)

The “ce qui” capable of holding a pen is graphically—and exclusively—coded as masculine, for Aragon makes it clear that here the “instrument de travail” is at once the *porte-plume* and the phallus. Both are seen as appropriate “machines grinçantes” for a surrealist author to manipulate, in distinct counterpoint to the stenographic machines which belong more appropriately to the feminine sphere. To write, then, is to actively seek and achieve sexual pleasure—and just as the solipsistic author will produce inauthentic text, so too will the solipsistic seeker of pleasure.

Both textual and sexual creation become especially fraught with anxiety when one considers what the surrealist muse (for instance, the woman as recorder of text, or recipient of sexual passion) might say if asked to comment on masculine production, that moment of (literary and physical) outpouring which she has dutifully received. Aragon slyly evokes this problematic of female response in a curious episode where the *porte-plume* held in the auto-reflexive writer's tight, spasmodic grip is asked to speak for itself and explain “comment [. . .] tu te sortis du danger, sans perdre tout à la fois et la tête et l'honneur” without being “mangé lors du dernier naufrage” or drowned in “cette tempête soudaine” (33).<sup>6</sup>

How is it possible, in other words, that the pen (the woman) retain its (her) individuality to avoid being subsumed, even consumed, by the creative act itself? If Aragon here suggests that it is the woman who is more in danger of being consumed in the act of passion than the man, thereby reversing typical surrealist gender codification, are we to read this as a defense not just against the “excess” of women but against a potentially negative judgment of the author? In fact, the *porte-plume* expresses resentment as soon as it begins to speak, announcing “Que me veut-on? La brute.” Even more troublesome, however, is the *porte-plume*'s immediate challenge of Aragon's earlier conviction that it is firmly and absolutely “inconscient” of its role as intermediary in the writing process. The pen violently refutes this point, addressing the author and announcing “J'en ai assez du rôle d'intermédiaire,” and further, “Ils

appellent ça penser, pensez donc.” We are witness here to a subtle game, for we can read the “ça” back to multiple antecedents: the author’s ideas, their written expression, the flow of ink on the page, the author’s body itself with all its excess. The woman thus refers the man back to his own pen (instrument of literary production), his own phallus (instrument of sexual desire), his own text.<sup>7</sup>

For Aragon, then, subjective reflection on the writing process can never be fully unraveled. Indeed, the speaking *porte-plume* goes so far as to mark his wielder’s body as a metonymic container of language, and thus irreducibly a product of that language. This is accomplished by equating physical traits with graphical characteristics of the French language: “Une absurde moustache, ou tout au moins l’équivalent calorifique de cet ornement circonflexe,” and further, “à chaque trait [de plume] correspond sa tare morale” (34). Both author and language are thus dragged into the realm of the bourgeois quotidien, and the metonymic conflation of body and text is so complete that the “équivalent calorifique” seems to refer both to the mustache itself—perched as it is atop that facial feature responsible for taking in enough energy for the body to survive—and the act of producing literature as Valérian waste of “calories.”

But if the *porte-plume* has challenged the perceptions of the masculine writing subject, not least by declaring the production of literature a “coutume sauvage et répugnante,” it decides nevertheless that it prefers it, “parce qu’autrement bénignes et curieuses les pratiques traditionnelles [. . .] de la déformation systématique des lèvres au moyen d’un simple bâtonnet d’ivoire” (37). This clinical, even mechanical, description of the textual act elided with the sexual produces a curious interpretive effect, for it suggests there is something in the experience of both acts which forces the involuntary production of speech—a quality that Eluard had already recognized and expressed succinctly in “L’amoureuse” when declaring that the dreams of his muse made manifest before him “[le] font rire, pleurer et rire, / Parler sans avoir rien à dire” (I, 11–12).<sup>8</sup>

Aragon’s *Traité du style* thus displays strong anxiety centered around the conflict between the masculine “faculté” of the author and the feminine “visitation” of the muse who provokes unrehearsed speech (and who might even herself speak). The personification of this tension through the speaking *porte-plume* draws attention to the dan-

ger of solipsistic reflection occurring without displacement of the male subject onto—or into—an Other, a female muse. But if Aragon's *Traité* invokes a feminine-coded "visitation" the better to problematize masculine authorial "faculté" in polemical terms, Breton's *Nadja* and Eluard's "L'amoureuse" narrate a deeper crisis of masculine authority marked by the tension between the desire for ultimate convergence and the concomitant acute awareness, made visible by the representation of the female muse, that such a convergence has not only not been achieved, but was in fact never possible. Both texts articulate this impossibility of convergence through metaphors of displacement: the "fantôme" and the sunset in *Nadja*; the solar eclipse in "L'amoureuse."

## II. Flee(t)ing Women: *Nadja* and "L'amoureuse"

The surrealist poetic ideal in which love is contrasted to happiness and bodily integrity, and only possible in relation to an Other, finds clear articulation in Eluard's well-known poem entitled, simply, "L'amoureuse." But upon close examination the poem's deceptively simple language reveals itself as a stark example of the anxiety of masculine authorial displacement provoked by the necessary (and yet perilous) confluence of man and woman, poet and muse:

Elle est debout sur mes paupières  
Et ses cheveux sont dans les miens,  
Elle a la forme de mes mains,  
Elle a la couleur de mes yeux,  
Elle s'engloutit dans mon ombre  
Comme une pierre sur le ciel.

Elle a toujours les yeux ouverts  
Et ne me laisse pas dormir.  
Ses rêves en pleine lumière  
Font s'évaporer les soleils,  
Me font rire, pleurer et rire,  
Parler sans avoir rien à dire.

Eluard's point of departure is the woman who gives her form to the man (and vice-versa); she is indispensable to the process of textual production and poetic equilibrium. But although her presence seems to open up new interior vistas of possibility for the poet, we are also witnessing the displacement of the male writing subject. The title itself



stands as a microcosm of this simultaneous displacement and *plénitude*; although “amoureuse” implies and even demands the presence of another object (both of grammar and desire), Eluard, by explicitly invoking the muse through this term, chooses to present the poet as subject elliptically embodied only in his female muse. This imbrication of poet and muse in Eluard’s poem stands in stark contrast to Breton’s *Nadja*, a text whose very title denies such a relationship of privilege between author and woman in refusing to evoke the coexistence of the lover. Instead, signaled by its unmoored title, *Nadja* is a narrative that wanders, much like its impermanent muse who declares herself, when asked by Breton, to be “l’âme errante” (82).

But while Breton’s encounter with *Nadja* might seem haphazard, thus proving him to be acting out his cherished surrealist ideal of being “au hasard de [ses] pas” (81), the encounter has nevertheless already been determined by the *voies* of language. As Breton says, he is in pursuit of “l’événement dont chacun est en droit d’attendre la révélation du sens de sa propre vie, cet événement que peut-être je n’ai pas encore trouvé mais sur la voie duquel je me cherche” (69). Here we re-encounter Aragon’s paradox of masculine passivity in the face of the feminine: in order to recognize the event when one encounters it, one must be both passive (non-anticipatory as to the form the event will take) and active (in the case of Breton, this entails long walks through the streets of Paris). The term *voie*, notably, also connotes Breton’s walks, for it evokes a set path, whether *chemin*, *passage*, *artère*, *route*, or *rue*—all of which imply a pre-established route, and suggest a teleological aim. A second sense of the term *voie* as *piste* or *trace*—that which aids in the tracking of an animal or object—illuminates further, suggesting that Breton hunts *Nadja* much as he hunts the signal or sign which will indicate what direction to go in, what event to attend, what interpretation to give words. But if it is *Nadja* who has visionary sight it is Breton who, tracing the streets of Paris, will write the text and place *Nadja* in it. In this sense, the title itself functions as a *voie* for both Breton and the reader to follow; the title simultaneously foreshadows and forestalls both the poet’s—and the text’s—final destination.<sup>9</sup>

In “L’amoureuse,” the theoretical primacy of the relationship between muse and male subject does not initially seem compromised. Both are anamorphically imbricated (with anamorphosis itself a privileged surrealist form) as the (implied) poet and (explicit) muse estab-

lish their relationship to one another in the first few lines of the poem. The description of poet and muse echoes the effect of the title; neither poet nor muse achieve an autonomous presence or independent description since both share the same form, from their interlaced “cheveux” down to the form of the hands and even the color of the eyes.<sup>10</sup> It is only when we reach the line “elle a la forme de mes mains” that Eluard evinces anxiety similar to that made manifest in Aragon: to what extent can the author apprehend Otherness, and to what extent will the Other always merely reflect a short-circuited image of the authorial self? And how can we know?

Eluard’s poem offers no easy answers. By comparing trait after trait of the muse to the poet, the poem produces a sensation of verbal vertigo. The reader has no stable external point of reference from which to view the couple, the two are dissociated from their proper physical attributes and melded into a single form.<sup>11</sup> Whereas the woman has both the form and the color of the poet’s hands and eyes respectively, the very next line (“Elle s’engloutit dans mon ombre”) negates the presence of the man’s body to which the woman is being compared by emphasizing his shadow. Displaced from his own physical body, he is only manifest and made visible thanks to the presence of the Other (the woman), as a shadow can never exist without a body.

In *Nadja* Breton is also described as a disembodied author defined by a shadowy Other, albeit an Otherness not initially displaced onto the body of the woman muse but onto the author himself. The text begins with Breton taking himself as his own initial literary and cognitive subject and asking “Qui suis-je? Si par exception je m’en rapportais à un adage: en effet pourquoi tout ne reviendrait-il pas à savoir qui je ‘hante?’” (9). With this somewhat oblique reference to the adage “dis-moi qui tu hantes, et je te dirai qui tu es,” Breton avers his existence as surrealist author who seeks to achieve the capacity for subjective self-reflection through an Other but who finds himself bodiless in the process. Breton transforms himself through language into a metaphorical shadow at once both ghost and spirit: “il me fait jouer de mon vivant le rôle d’un fantôme [. . .] il fait allusion à ce qu’il a fallu que je cessasse d’être, pour être *qui* je suis” (9). This authorial shadowing, symbolic of formal representational insufficiency, is embedded in the unusual structure of the text itself, a striking confluence of image and word. Both language and form come to emphasize the insufficiency of

one single mode of representation, be it verbal or visual; the photographs themselves comment on the unreliability of the text.<sup>12</sup> But if in *Nadja* all of this is initially evoked in the metaphor of the author as “fantôme,” Eluard will turn to a different metaphor of displacement—the solar eclipse—to highlight the insufficiency of traditional poetic, even linguistic, form.

By concentrating on those parts of the body which have traditionally represented female beauty (the hair, the eyes, and the hands), albeit through reference to the body of the male poet, Eluard displaces the stereotypical romantic description of the woman into the male creative realm thereby underscoring its lack of poetic or descriptive power.<sup>13</sup> But at this point in the poem the poet turns to a curious simile: “Elle s’engloutit dans mon ombre / Comme une pierre sur le ciel.” But whereas some critics, and most notably Rivas, have suggested that to read these terms as referential is to misread the poem by taking too literally its claim to mimesis, it is not that simple: we must read these terms both as referential and as non-mimetic trace seeking to negate traditional literary criteria of presence and transcendence if we are to read the ways in which this poem codes crises of authorial and formal interpretation—or, as Rivas puts it, the ways in which this poem illustrates in classic surrealist fashion “the nothingness that the literary enterprise ultimately is” (495).<sup>14</sup>

Hidden in the comparison of the woman as stone set against the male sky is the most radical enactment of masculine displacement in the poem: while critics have seen in this image an abandonment of “normal,” or natural, proportions and distances—perhaps true if one reads this as a description of a stone sinking into a body of water—this does not obtain if one reads the description as a solar eclipse, with the moon (the stone) moving to cast a shadow over the sun (the sky).<sup>15</sup> As in a solar eclipse where the moon comes between the sun and the earth, the woman comes between the poet and the physical world itself, as the line “Elle est debout sur mes paupières” suggests. Here the woman blocks the poet’s view, cutting him off from the world of sight. But if the muse takes from him his visual access to the world, she nevertheless succeeds in encasing him in a new world of shadows and dreams, a textual space conducive to the act of creation (both textual and biological, one suspects). Indeed, the privileged (and highly eroticized) dream world behind the “paupières,” where man is “active dreamer”

and woman is stimulus whose essence is granted through man's thought, is openly represented in many surrealist images; this is most dramatically illustrated in the famous composite illustration in which numerous photos of male surrealists, all of whom have their eyes closed, are placed in a tight border around Magritte's painting of a naked woman.

Despite the muse's dependence on the male creator, and despite her existence in "pleine lumière" far from the darkened and fruitful world of male textual creation where imagination is never allowed to sleep, it is nevertheless she who mediates the poet's access to the outside world through her open eyes; for as Eluard insists, "Elle a toujours les yeux ouverts." The open eyes are a key detail here (as they are also in *Nadja*, where the only photographic image of Nadja presented to the reader is a composite and repeating image of her famous "yeux de fougère" in isolation). Unlike the woman's closed eyes shown in many surrealist images of women (Man Ray's famous photograph *Primacy of Matter over Thought* [1929] is a prime example), the Eluardian muse's closed eyes announce her particular role vis-à-vis the poet: she is there to make sure that the poet remains firmly cocooned in a state of productive passivity. Linked to the outside world by remaining both "debout" and "éveillée," the woman's "rêves en pleine lumière / Font s'évaporer les soleils."

The woman's plural "rêves" precede—and provoke—the plural "soleils." There is nothing inherently odd about a plurality of dreams; the plural suns, on the other hand, are troubling, striking the reader instantly as an "impossible" fragmentation of a traditional—and overtly masculine—oneness: the sun as traditional symbol of power, logic, clarity, even (historically) the French monarchic state. Through pluralization, the sun and its long list of perceived attributes (male, active, hot—in distinct counterpoint to the moon's perceived attributes of female, passive, cold) lose their singular claim to authority. No longer grounded in mimetic representation, the sun is decentered from its one-time universal position and is now emblematic of not merely a fragmented but an evanescent perspective destined to vanish. The woman muse thus disrupts the economy of the masculine writing project—for the man's poem itself, if we read the implications of the eclipse, does not merely deny the man's interpretation of events as the only possible way of perceiving reality. Rather, the eclipse suggests

that the masculine (solar) perspective is fundamentally incapable of such apprehension, for as we know, an eclipse can be rendered visible as noteworthy phenomenon only from a “third” (earth-bound) perspective outside of either antipode (sun or moon). More critically, the eclipse/poem *exists* as event only from a third perspective which is far distant from that of either pole (sun/poet or moon/muse).

The last two lines of the poem (“[Ses rêves] Me font rire, pleurer et rire, / Parler sans avoir rien à dire”) are a final manifestation of the masculine anxiety contained in the pluralized and evaporating suns. After multiplicity and evaporation there is no unity (nor even a body), and yet these lines form a couplet, echoing a recognized element of traditional poetic form. The clichéd quality of these final lines, coupled with the suggestion that all of the poet’s words are empty verbiage (it is he who “[parle] sans avoir rien à dire”), serves to negate not merely the writing of traditional poetry as literature, but masculine textual production itself. The disjunction between the presence of recognizable form (the couplet, or even the clichéd ending) and the apparent lack of content is acute. It is crucial to note that this disjunction between form and function can—and must—be extended to the entire poem. If Eluard chooses to use a stanzaic form with a recognizable topos and vocabulary, it is with the clear intent of setting the reader up for certain formal literary expectations which will be subverted and thus never fully met.

For Breton, too, the sun is also used to describe the impossibility of meeting formal expectations, whether literary or artistic. Near the end of *Nadja* Breton evokes the short interval “qui sépare ces dernières lignes de celles qui, à feuilleter ce livre, paraîtraient deux pages plus tôt venir de finir” (175). As Breton notes, this interval is negligible for the “lecteur pressé” but “démessuré et d’un prix inappréciable” for the author himself, raising the question “Comment pourrais-je me faire entendre?” There is no easy answer, and his former muse Nadja is “si loin” (176). At the end of this section Breton appears to come to a resolution about this matter, suggesting that his faith in female incarnations of the marvelous has not changed and that a new muse has entered the picture: “la Merveille en qui de la première à la dernière page de ce livre ma foi n’aura du moins pas changé, tinte à mon oreille un nom qui n’est plus le sien [Nadja]” (176–77).

But a curious footnote to this section hints at deeper anxiety than the main narrative stream might otherwise admit. He describes walking along the quai du Vieux-Port in Marseille at sunset and chancing upon a painter (“étrangement scrupuleux”) who is rushing to finish his painting of the sunset itself. The painter’s “tache correspondant à celle du soleil” sinks lower and lower on the painting, and by the end “il n’en resta rien” (175), either of the physical sun or of its trace on the canvas—as Breton tells us, the painter “fit disparaître le rouge d’un mur, chassa une ou deux lueurs qui restaient sur l’eau.” The painting itself, normally an object intended to preserve an act of perception, suddenly becomes a vivid testament to the fleeting nature of reality, the unbridgeable gap between reality and perception, and the insufficiency of representational practice itself. This leaves Breton as author quite shaken: “Son tableau, fini pour lui et pour moi le plus inachevé du monde, me parut très triste et très beau” (175).

In light of this footnote, Breton’s earlier summation of their creator/muse relationship (“J’ai pris, du premier au dernier jour, Nadja pour un génie libre [. . .]. Elle, je sais que dans toute la force du terme il lui est arrivé de me prendre pour un dieu, de croire que j’étais le soleil”) indeed becomes tragic, for if Breton has misjudged Nadja’s capacity for embodying “la beauté convulsive” she, in turn, has misjudged his ability to embody unified authorial knowledge and intent. They have depended on each other for self-definition, even awareness of their own existence, but they will never be able to unite. Just as a shadow can never merge with a physical body existing in time and space, and just as in an eclipse the sun and moon remain far apart, so do the poet and muse remain on different planes of existence and joined—and only briefly at that—through the text. For Eluard, the anxiety runs even deeper: not only do poet and muse inhabit opposite and irreconcilable poles of existence, but the literary text itself lies outside of the full apprehension of either pole. Reminiscent of the split sign, surrealist author and muse hang in careful balance precisely because of their disjunction, their habitation of opposite antipodes. It is thus perhaps no surprise that the sun is evoked so frequently in surrealist texts and images as a metaphor for privileged and unified—and distinctly masculine—authorial perception, creation, and knowledge: through it, surrealist artists can articulate their anxieties centering

around their own identity, the possibilities and limitations of language and literary form, and the implications of the female muse's participation in the process of textual creation.

*Florida Atlantic University*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Cited in André Breton, *Nadja* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964) 130. All quotations from *Nadja* refer to this edition.

<sup>2</sup>Louis Aragon, *Traité du style* (Paris: Gallimard, 1928) 187. All quotations from *Traité du style* refer to this edition.

<sup>3</sup>For fuller elaboration on various means by which the surrealists articulated the literary and artistic roles of women, see *Surrealism: Desire Unbound*, ed. Jennifer Mundy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

<sup>4</sup>See Katharine Conley, "Writing the Virgin's Body: Breton and Eluard's *Immaculée Conception*," *The French Review* 67.4 (1994): 600–608; revised and reprinted in Conley, *Automatic Woman: The Representation of Woman in Surrealism* (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1996) 27–48.

<sup>5</sup>Rudolf Kuenzli makes this point in reference to Man Ray's 1924 photograph entitled *Waking Dream Séance* in which a group of surrealists (all men) cluster around Simone Breton as she dutifully transcribes (with the aid of a typewriter) one of their dreams. See Kuenzli, "Surrealism and Misogyny," *Surrealism and Women*, ed. Mary Ann Caws, Rudolf Kuenzli, and Gwen Raaberg (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993) 19.

<sup>6</sup>The *porte-plume* as object in fact recalls both female and male sexual organs: if the instrumental portion of the *porte-plume* is associated with the phallus, the feathers were often associated by surrealist artists with parts of the female anatomy. Mary Ann Caws discusses this in regard to a reproduction of André Masson's mannequin for the Surrealist Exhibition of 1938; as Caws notes, the curled feathers placed over the mannequin's lower abdomen are clearly equated with the Fallopian tubes. See Caws, "Ladies Shot and Painted: Female Embodiment in Surrealist Art," *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985) 263–265.

<sup>7</sup>Even, perhaps, his own unconscious. Although I do not address Freudian or Lacanian criticism explicitly in this article, it is worth noting that Aragon seems to presage Lacan's famous dictum "ça parle." By having the *porte-plume*—both as extension of the authorial body and as the female Other—state "Ils appellent ça penser; pensez donc," Aragon seems to suggest that the body is, in fact, always caught in the play of meaning production, as well as being a tool on which the basis of linguistic performance rests. For a clear example of the psychoanalytic critical reception given to surrealist photographic production, and the explicit connection these images make between the woman and the phallus, see Hal Foster, "Violation and Veiling in Surrealist Photography: Woman as Fetish, As Shattered Object, As Phallus," chap. 8 in Mundy, 203–226.

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<sup>8</sup>Cited in Paul Eluard, *Œuvres complètes*, 2 vols., Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1968) I, 140.

<sup>9</sup>For further elaboration on *Nadja* as emblematic of the failed and degraded urban encounter in the tradition of Baudelaire's *passante*, see Daniela Daniele, *The Woman of the Crowd: Urban Displacement and Failed Encounters in Surrealist and Postmodern Writing* (Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000) 45–60.

<sup>10</sup>See Katharine Conley, "Anamorphic Love: The Surrealist Poetry of Desire," chap. 4 in Mundy, 101–124.

<sup>11</sup>See Pierre David, "A corps perdu ou la sublimation chez Eluard," *Langue Française* 56 (1982): 39.

<sup>12</sup>See Renée Riese Hubert, *Surrealism and the Book* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) 256–269; see also Annette Shandler Levitt, *The Genres and Genders of Surrealism* (New York: St. Martin's, 1999) 51–65.

<sup>13</sup>Colette Winn argues that in Eluard's poetry the privileged symbol of desire for productive exchange between the poet and the outside world is the hand. She also suggests that this exchange is achieved, and that the hand "délivre le poète de l'horreur de la page blanche" (268). I would suggest that to code the hand as that which "rend possible le contact qui fait ressentir la présence, la chaleur, la vie de l'autre" (278) sidesteps the true import of the poetic metaphor in Eluard. See Colette Winn, "Le symbolisme des mains dans la poésie de Paul Eluard," *Romanische Forschungen* 95.3 (1983): 264–289.

<sup>14</sup>Rivas sees aviary imagery as a crucial element of Eluard's poem "L'amoureuse," and suggests that its phonetic polysemism ("comme une pierre sur le ciel" and "commune pie erre sur le ciel") is that which signals the Derridean trace, enabling the text to transcend mimetic representational concerns. Most recent surrealist criticism does in fact focus on dialectics of paradox and not on mimetic readings; Rivas makes it clear that the interpretation of surrealist texts would benefit from incorporating both. For more on anti-mimetic trends in interpreting surrealist literature, see Daniel E. Rivas, "Eluard's 'Amoureuse': Mimesis and Semiosis," *The French Review* 55.4 (March 1982): 489–496; see also Hubert, 24–26 and *passim*.

<sup>15</sup>See Hubert, 257.