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**Surrealism- Literature**

Surrealists innovated techniques to tap the unfiltered power of the subconscious and reinvigorate the written word. Using "automatic writing," Surrealists worked in a trance-like state without interruption or later revision as a means of producing work that had not been deadened by their rational intellect. Their interest in collaboration and chance occurrence produced techniques like the exquisite corpse, in which individuals took turns drawing figures or writing lines while simultaneously obscuring preceding sections of the text or image. Works created through such collaborative strategies often merged sketches, photographs, cut ups, poetry, and prose to create a collaborative collage that transcended established aesthetic categorizations. This genre blurring was itself a testament to Surrealists' determination to eradicate old aesthetic molds.

Figure 1: *Cadavre Exquisite*. 1926-7. Yves Tanguy, Joan Miró, Max Morise, and Man Ray. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. An example of the exquisite corpse.

André BRETON and Philippe SOUPAULT's *The Magnetic Fields* (1920) was the first major Surrealist work and used automatic writing to create an entirely new type of poetry enlivened by the power of the unconscious. The work's often disjointed blend of poetry and prose moved freely without regard to conventions of form or subject. While the book did not receive wide acclaim, it served as a the catalyst for further experimentation and helped to separate Surrealism from DADA, as it sought not simply to tear down established works but create a new, more potent art.

**Surrealist novels used the movement's principles to undermine and recreate the form itself. André Breton's novel *Nadja* (1928)was at once a romance novel, philosophical treatise, memoir, and photographic storyboard. The work praises chance and impulse as a way of discovering meaning in a world deadened by routine and finds in a young woman named Nadja an irresistible embodiment of surrender to non-rationality and the chaotic pulls of the universe. Similarly, Louis ARAGON's *Paris Peasant* (1926)*,* Philippe Soupault's *The Last Nights of Paris* (1929), and the novels of René CREVEL explore the cityscapes of Paris and other urban spaces—Crevel's *Babylon* (1927), for example, explores Marseilles. Like *Nadja*,these novels display a fascination with certain locales' ability to overwhelm the senses and produce moments of profound psychological and aesthetic intensity, what the Surrealists called "daily magic." However, they also critique the crass materialism and superficiality of France and their moments of transcendence are but brief breaks in a storm of ideological and spiritual malaise. The autobiographical nature of these texts is typical of Surrealist fiction, which blurs the line between fiction and non-fiction. However, such works were not limited to the urban experiences of men in France. For example, Leonora CARRINGTON's *Down Below* (1944) chronicles her institutionalization in Spain during World War II and guides the reader through the depths of the sanitarium and her madness. Regardless of differences in form or content, Surrealist prose is distinguished by its ability to successfully collapse the boundaries between fact and fiction and consciousness and unconsciousness to provide glimpses of a reality that lies beneath and beyond our rational intellect.

Figure 2: A cutout created by Nadja. Plate 32 from *Nadja*. (New York: Grove Press, 1960).

Surrealist poetry moved away from regulated conventions in both form and intention, creating free-form expressions in which language was not packaged into clearly defined relationships, but became unstable and able to simultaneously invoke multiple significations. Paul ÉLUARD, one of the leading Surrealist poets, insisted on a new language that could create new modes of perception and liberate the mind. Such liberation would take a myriad of forms. Robert DESNOS, who published a number of poetic collections throughout the 1920s and 1930s before dying in a concentration camp in 1945, was especially adept at using automatic writing and frequently worked under hypnosis to further free his mind from the bounds of constrained consciousness. The results were often playful and unsettling, a typical combination in the genre, but one that Desnos was especially adept at creating. When writing *Rrose S*é*lavy* (1922), Desnos entered a trance and tapped into the spiritual consciousness of Rrose Sélavy, a fictional double of Marcel Duchamp. The work includes hundreds of aphorisms that freely combine subjects, objects, and puns to offer nonsensical "wisdom" that paradoxically embraces and satirizes the tradition of wisdom literature by positing "advice" that exists outside of rational logic or practical application. The Surrealist assault on the status quo was not limited to aesthetics and ideology, but also the political institutions that structured them. For example, Benjamin PÉRET's poetry rejected the premise that the world must be understood. This allowed him to incorporate bizarre references, themes, and symbols, which he then used to defamiliarize symbols, experiences, and beliefs that readers would have known in a conventional sense. The goal of his work was to shock readers and undermine institutions that falsely regulated life, including the government, the army, and the church. In this way, the aesthetic and existential impulses of Surrealism were inherently political, a fact that would lead many Surrealists to embrace and champion political causes during the 1940s and 1950s.

Figure 3: Marcel Duchamp as Rrose Sélavy. 1920-21. Man Ray. The Sameul S. White 3rd and Vera White Collection. Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Surrealist poets' exploration of sexual and gender norms offer a model for how the movement successfully challenged and overturned false and existentially repressive social constructions. Gisèle PRASSINOS, who was fourteen when she was "discovered" by Breton, produced vignettes that were a blend of poetry and prose and invoked the pre-logical insights of the "child-woman," who in the Surrealist tradition operated outside of rational "adult" discourses. Joyce MANSOUR's *Screams* (1953), her first collection of poetry, uses Egyptian mythology to overturn purified visions of reproduction and motherhood as well patriarchal constructions of death, sex, and the female body, which objectified women and trapped them in a passive and ideologically impotent position. She continued this exploration in her later work, especially *Torn Apart* (1955), in which she used Surrealist principles to give women agency and validate them as sexual, intellectual, and physical beings. Even works that were not feminist in a traditional sense nonetheless attempted to reimagine how men and women perceived and interacted with one another. For example, Breton's well-known poem "Free Union" (1931) envisions romantic passion free from the constraints of marriage. This theme of challenging accepted conventions, both aesthetic and social, can be seen as the unifying thread of Surrealist poetry, which uses the aforementioned focus on creating a "new language" to innovate, radically new understandings of art and life.

Although Surrealism's time as a coherent school was brief, it has continued to inspire literary movements. The Beats, the New York School of Poets, and a host of other writers and movements have used the principles of Surrealism to push the boundaries of their world and, in the process, continued the transcendent vision of the movement's founders.

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