

***Le merveilleux* in the writings of
Gisèle Prassinós and Leonora Carrington**

Abigail Victoria Richards

PhD French

Supervised by Dr Ruth Hemus

School of Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures

Royal Holloway, University of London

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Declaration of authorship

I, Abigail Richards, hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own and that work by others has been clearly referenced.

Signed – Abigail V Richards

Date – 3 September 2019

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To Mum and Dad and cat Jaz.

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Abstract

This thesis explores *le merveilleux* in the experimental writings of two avant-garde women artist-writers who worked in dialogue with Surrealism – Turkish-born Gisèle Prassinos (1920-2015) and British-born Leonora Carrington (1917-2011). Prassinos’s ‘automatic’ writings were discovered by chance by her brother who introduced her to the surrealist group in 1934 while Carrington was introduced to the group by Max Ernst in 1937. Carrington has received more scholarly and popular attention than Prassinos who remains a lesser-known figure. In 2017, we celebrated the centenary of Carrington’s birth and she is now one of the best-known creative women of the French avant-garde. We are also approaching the one-hundredth anniversary of Prassinos’s birth and so this is an opportune time to bring her writings to the foreground. The Surrealists cast both young women into the role of the *femme-enfant*. In my thesis, I disentangle their identities as writers from this trope of the surrealist mythic image of woman.

Taking André Breton’s 1924 and Pierre Mabille’s 1940 theories of the surrealist *merveilleux* as a starting point (and Tzvetan Todorov’s 1970 theory of it as a literary genre as a point of comparison), I demonstrate that *le merveilleux* is an expansive concept. The Surrealists assigned *le merveilleux* a special status in their writings and redefined it from a specifically surrealist perspective. I argue that *le merveilleux* (as the discovery of the extraordinary in the ordinary) emerges as a key concept in Prassinos’s and Carrington’s texts and that this aspect of women’s writing in relation to Surrealism remains unexplored. Through original close readings of a range of their writings, I bring to light my interpretations of *le merveilleux* in their prose and poetry. Overall, this thesis will present an alternative version of the surrealist

merveilleux, extend what we know about it, and argue that women's texts must be taken into account in a fuller appraisal of surrealist writing.

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Introduction

'Give them their voice: they had one'¹

Over the past fifty years there has been a surge in the scholarly and popular attention paid to the creative women who worked in the context of Surrealism. From the 1970s, feminist scholars began to recognise the importance of their paintings and writings to this avant-garde literary and artistic movement. Since I began researching and writing my thesis in 2015, there has been a wave of exhibitions on women artists associated with this movement. In 2015, a retrospective on Leonora Carrington was held at the Tate Liverpool, followed by 'Dreamers Awake' at White Cube, Bermondsey in 2017, 'Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up' at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 2018, and 'Dorothea Tanning' at the Tate Modern in 2019, not forgetting the upcoming 'Dora Maar' exhibition also at the Tate Modern.² Although these creative avant-garde women are receiving more and more attention, Mary Ann Caws's rallying call, '*Give them their voice: they had one*' is as relevant to today as it was thirty years ago. She calls on scholars to continue to give voice to avant-garde women artists and writers and to listen to their diverse voices.

¹ Mary Ann Caws, 'Seeing the Surrealist Woman: We Are a Problem', in *Surrealism and Women*, ed. by Mary Ann Caws and others (Cambridge, MA; London, England: The MIT Press, 1991), p.12. This volume was originally published as the journal *Dada/Surrealism*, 18, 1990.

² The exhibition 'Dreamers Awake' explored the legacy of Surrealism through the works of more than fifty women artists including Eileen Agar, Carrington, Lee Miller, Tanning, and Leonor Fini.

This thesis gives voice to the subversive writings of Gisèle Prassinos and Leonora Carrington and explores the surrealist theme of *le merveilleux* in their prose and poetry which is the original angle of my thesis.

This introduction is divided into two sections – ‘Methodology, context, and timeliness’ and ‘*Le merveilleux* – theory and practice’. In the first section, I will set out my approach and underscore the importance of my research. I will discuss whether Prassinos and Carrington can be considered as Surrealists, and the complex role of women in Surrealism in terms of their inclusion as mythic *femmes-enfants* and exclusion as creative individuals. I will also consider the timeliness of my thesis in light of recent events, exhibitions, and publications on Prassinos and Carrington. In the second part of this extended introduction, I will discuss André Breton’s and Pierre Mabille’s theories of the surrealist *merveilleux* and Tzvetan Todorov’s theory of *le merveilleux* as a literary genre to provide a theoretical framework which I will refer to throughout this thesis.

A review of the literature on the women artists and writers associated with Surrealism, the surrealist *merveilleux* in writing, and on Prassinos and Carrington is divided up over the introduction and eight chapters. In addition to Prassinos’s and Carrington’s literary oeuvres, I will draw on their artistic works in particular in the case of the latter since the themes in her writings are interconnected with those in her paintings and create a verbal-visual narrative. Over the following chapters, I will draw comparisons between Prassinos’s and Carrington’s writings, the themes present in their works, and their versions of *le merveilleux*.

The corpus of this thesis is divided in two; chapters one to four are dedicated to close readings of Prassinos’s early writings and chapters five to eight are devoted

to Carrington's surrealist narratives. Of the trajectory of my thesis, I begin with Prassinós as a fourteen-year-old writer and surrealist child prodigy and end with Carrington's portrayal of herself as a ninety-nine-year-old woman in her novel *Le cornet acoustique* (1974). My thesis therefore spans from childhood to old age. In chapter one titled 'Disentangling the identity of Prassinós from that of *femme-enfant*', I will introduce Prassinós and her writings and discuss her introduction to and involvement with the surrealist group. I will analyse Man Ray's (in)famous 1934 photograph of Prassinós and work through her assigned identities of the mythic *femme-enfant* and 'Alice II'. In chapter two 'An alternative version of surrealist *écriture automatique*', I will discuss the experimental technique of automatic writing as a way to access *le merveilleux* and Prassinós's thoughts on this way of writing. I will analyse four of her texts from the 1935 collection *La sauterelle arthritique* looking at both form and theme to consider to what extent her writings can be understood as exercises in surrealist *écriture automatique*. In chapter three 'Into the dark – Prassinós and *humour noir*', I will discuss the surrealist artistic-literary mood of black humour, the significance of Breton's inclusion of Prassinós in his *Anthologie de l'humour noir* (1940), and analyse her contribution to the surrealist understanding of this notion through her four texts featured in the original edition of this volume. Similar to the technique of *écriture automatique*, I discuss the mood of *humour noir* as a way to access *le merveilleux*. In the final chapter on Prassinós 'Nature, animals, and the female consciousness', I will explore the way that Prassinós draws on familiar-unfamiliar flora and fauna in her (bio)diverse early writings in *Trouver sans chercher* (1934-1944) to express her female consciousness and to voice issues of identity, gender, and society as a way to access and present *le merveilleux*. Overall, I

underscore the literary-artistic value of her diverse early writings and the ways that they subvert and extend surrealist themes and techniques to present her own version of the marvellous.

Moving on to Carrington, in chapter five 'Leonora Carrington - artist, writer, and woman of ideas', I will introduce Carrington and her creative practice. I will also provide a close reading of Max Ernst's preface to Carrington's first published short story 'La maison de la peur' (1938) and of the story itself which introduces the reader to the surrealist themes in her early writings and invites the reader into her real-imagined world. In chapter six 'Rebel women in Carrington's early writings', I will focus on Carrington's insurgent female characters in her stories from the collection *La dame ovale* (1939). These heroines rebel against upper-class and patriarchal society and subvert the surrealist image of woman as a passive *femme-enfant*. In chapter seven 'The embodied *merveilleux* in Carrington's memoir *En bas* (1945)', I will analyse the role of the body in her autobiographical account of her experience of psychic disorder and confinement to a psychiatric hospital in Santander, Spain. I will explore Carrington's identification of her body with the world (at war) around her, the self with the other, and the way that she relates her experience and writes *through the body* which I term an embodied *merveilleux*. In the final chapter on Carrington titled 'Women's time and old age in *Le cornet acoustique* (1974)', I will discuss Carrington's brilliant novel and the way that she subverts the surrealist celebration of childhood and reimagines old age as a way of accessing *le merveilleux* through the figure of the old woman. In the conclusion, I will summarise what I understand by the surrealist marvellous and my interpretation of it in Prassinós's and Carrington's writings.

My thesis takes a feminist approach in that I give voice to two women artist-writers, pay critical attention to their writings, and make feminist readings of their texts thinking about the oppression of women by men and the oppressive ideologies present in patriarchal society. Familiar with French feminist theory, my thesis is informed by the theories set out by Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) in *Le deuxième sexe* (1949) and by Hélène Cixous (1937-present) in *Le rire de la méduse* (1975).³ Beauvoir's treatise centres on women's gendered identity and experience and in the introduction she questions 'qu'est-ce qu'une femme ?' before discussing the way that man defines woman in relation to him, as other.⁴ Like Beauvoir, Carrington reflects on what is a woman in her essay 'The Emancipation of Women' (1970).⁵ In chapter two of *Le deuxième sexe*, Beauvoir draws on the role Breton assigns to woman as other and the figure Nadja.⁶ The way that the Surrealists imagined woman as other in art and literature forms the context to my thesis. While Beauvoir discusses gender bias in society, Cixous writes about it in language. In her essay, Cixous encourages woman to write herself and theorises a new way of writing through the body which she terms *écriture féminine*.⁷ I will discuss this theory in more detail in chapter seven drawing a parallel with the way that Carrington writes through the body. This thesis is also influenced by American scholar Judith Butler's

³ Simone de Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe 1 / 2* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1949; repr. 1976) and Hélène Cixous, *Le rire de la méduse et autres ironies* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2010).

⁴ Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe 1*, no page numbers.

⁵ Leonora Carrington, 'The Emancipation of Women' (Mexico, 1970), in *Cultural Correspondence (Surrealism Today and Tomorrow)*, 12-14, 1981, pp.89-90.

⁶ Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe 1*, no page numbers.

⁷ Cixous, *Le rire de la méduse et autres ironies*, pp.37-68.

(1956-present) theories on the performative nature of gender and sex presented in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990).⁸ It is important to note that I do not read Prassinós's and Carrington's writings predominantly through feminist theory but through the surrealist theories of *le merveilleux* which I explore in this introduction. I approach Surrealism from a feminist angle and provide an overview of the position of women in Surrealism, their exclusion as creative individuals and inclusion only as *femmes-enfants*, and disentangle their identities as writers from this trope. An important nuance to note is that my thesis is informed but not framed by feminist theory but by the surrealist theories of *le merveilleux* and I expand this theory to allow me to discuss women's avant-garde writing.

Methodology, context, and timeliness

Researching and writing my thesis over the past four years has been a dynamic process which has led me to Edinburgh and Paris. In Edinburgh, I visited the Roland Penrose and Gabrielle Keiller Archive at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art (Modern Two) and in Paris, I visited the Gisèle Prassinós Archive (Fonds Gisèle Prassinós) at the Bibliothèque historique de la Ville de Paris (BHVP) which consists of unpublished poetry and prose by Prassinós as well as drawings, photographs, tapestries, and letters. These unpublished archival materials have informed my thesis, for example at the Penrose Archive, I was able to access

⁸ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York; London: Routledge, 1990; repr. 1999).

insightful correspondence from Carrington to Penrose on the drafting of her novel *Le cornet acoustique* (1974) which I will draw on in chapter eight.⁹ During several research trips to Paris, I visited the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF) where I was able to access first-edition French texts by Prassinos and Carrington which are out of print. I also visited the Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD) where I was able to consult a *dossier* of newspaper articles on Prassinos and the Bibliothèque de l'Hôtel de Ville (BHdV).

Unfortunately, the Edward James Archive at West Dean College, West Sussex remained closed throughout the timespan of researching my thesis because of the ongoing project of cataloguing the archive. At the Archive, a large part of the Cultural Papers consists of James's correspondence with artists such as Salvador Dalí, René Magritte, and Carrington.¹⁰ The cataloguing of the Papers is an exciting project which will advance future research on Carrington and Surrealism. An update on the project reveals that the Papers consist of Carrington's correspondence to James from 1946-1981 with a number of her original drawings and a sketchbook. In these letters, Carrington discusses 'her artworks in progress, the sales and planned

⁹ 'Correspondence: Carrington, Leonora; Ernst, Max; Tanning, Dorothea (1928-1984)', Roland Penrose Collection, National Galleries of Scotland Archives and Special Collections [GMA A35/1/1/RPA704].

¹⁰ 'Cataloguing the Edward James Archive', 13 February 2018 <https://www.westdean.org.uk/study/school-of-arts/blog/collections-library-and-archive/cataloguing-the-edward-james-archive> [accessed 27 January 2019].

exhibitions of her paintings, her home life and connections in Mexico City, and her vexations concerning her estranged family in England'.¹¹

As part of my research, I visited a number of exhibitions including 'Leonora Carrington: Transgressing Discipline' in 2015, 'Surreal Encounters: Collecting the Marvellous' at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art (Modern One) in 2016, 'Dreamers Awake' in 2017, 'Modern Couples: Art, Intimacy and the Avant-garde' at the Barbican Art Gallery in 2018-19, and 'Dorothea Tanning' in 2019.¹² These contemporary exhibitions and corresponding catalogues have ensured that my research is as up-to-date as possible. The retrospectives dedicated to Carrington and Tanning reveal a renewed interest in the work of the women artists associated with Surrealism. However, as Antonia Cundy argues, whilst 'temporary exhibitions reflect what is currently fashionable; it is the permanent collections of institutions which write history' and so the National Galleries of Scotland's recent acquisition of one of Carrington's paintings is of great significance as I will discuss.¹³ In addition to primary archival material, surrealist texts and journals, and photographs, I have studied

¹¹ 'ABC: Cataloguing the Edward James Archive', 10 January 2019

<https://www.westdean.org.uk/study/school-of-arts/blog/collections-library-and-archive/abc-cataloguing-the-edward-james-archive> [accessed 27 January 2019].

¹² 'Leonora Carrington: Transgressing Discipline', Tate Liverpool, 6 March – 31 May 2015, 'Surreal Encounters: Collecting the Marvellous', Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art (Modern One), 4 June – 11 September 2016, 'Dreamers Awake', White Cube, Bermondsey, 28 June – 17 September 2017, 'Modern Couples: Art, Intimacy and the Avant-garde', Barbican Art Gallery, 10 October 2018 – 27 January 2019, 'Dorothea Tanning', Tate Modern, 27 February – 9 June 2019.

¹³ Antonia Cundy, 'Why the Resurgent Interest in Female Surrealists Needs to Be Reflected in Museum Collections', 28 November 2018 <https://frieze.com/article/why-resurgent-interest-female-surrealists-needs-be-reflected-museum-collections> [accessed 15 May 2019].

volumes, articles, and reviews by scholars which demonstrate an expanding critical landscape in relation to avant-garde women.

Context

Gisèle Prassinos was born in 1920 in Istanbul, Turkey while Leonora Carrington was born in 1917 in Lancashire, England. Prassinos emigrated to Paris as a child in 1922 and Carrington moved to the capital city as a young woman in 1937. Prassinos was introduced to the surrealist group at the age of fourteen in 1934 and Carrington met the group the same year that she moved to the city. Although both young women were accepted into the group as artist-writers, they were celebrated as *femmes-enfants* and not as equal members. However, it is worth noting at the outset that there is no homogeneous surrealist male movement and reactions to both artist-writers by surrealist circles changed over time as they became more accepted as creative individuals. They both worked in the context of Surrealism at a similar time; Prassinos's first texts were printed in the surrealist reviews *Documents 34* in 1934 and *Minotaure* in 1935 and her first book *La sauterelle arthritique* was published that same year while Carrington's first short story 'La maison de la peur' was published in 1938.¹⁴ Both women wrote in French with Carrington also writing in English and Spanish.

¹⁴ 'Gisèle Prassinos, 'Poèmes', *Documents 34*, 2, 1934, pp.5-7 and 'Contes et Poèmes', *Minotaure*, 6, 1935, pp.63-64. Gisèle Prassinos, *La sauterelle arthritique avec une préface de Paul Eluard et une photographie par Man Ray* (Paris: Editions G.L.M., 1935). Leonora

There is some evidence to suggest that Prassinis and Carrington knew of each other. In 'Souvenirs surréalistes', Prassinis recalls that she met Carrington at a surrealist group meeting at a café on Place Blanche, 'Je fis la connaissance de Max Ernst, Léonora Carrington, Hans Harp [sic, Arp], et Hans Bellmer'.¹⁵ However, she does not recall their chance encounter with any enthusiasm. One practical reason as to why they did not become surreal friends is because Carrington moved to Saint-Martin d'Ardèche in the south of France in the summer of 1938 and did not return to Paris whereas Prassinis lived in the city until her passing in 2015. Prassinis and Carrington contributed to a 'roman en collaboration' titled 'L'Homme qui a perdu son squelette' (1939). The first three chapters written by Arp, Marcel Duchamp, Paul Éluard, Ernst, Georges Hugnet, Henri Pastoureau, and Prassinis were published in the fourth issue of the Paris-New-York periodical *Plastique*.¹⁶ The remaining three chapters by Arp, Carrington, Duchamp, Éluard, Hugnet, Prassinis, and Ernst were printed in the following issue.¹⁷ It is interesting that Prassinis and Carrington were the only two women to have contributed to this collaborative novel which suggests that they were highly regarded as writers. However, this perhaps contradicts the idea that they were accepted into the group as artist-writers but celebrated as

Carrington, 'La maison de la peur', in *Un divertissement*, ed. by Henri Parisot (Paris: Librairie G.L.M., 1938), no page numbers.

¹⁵ Gisèle Prassinis, 'Souvenirs surréalistes'. Bibliothèque historique de la Ville de Paris (BHVP), fonds Gisèle Prassinis, [MS-FS-01-0029].

¹⁶ Arp, Duchamp, Éluard, Ernst, Hugnet, Prassinis, Ernst, 'L'homme qui a perdu son squelette', *Plastique*, ed. by Sophie Taeuber-Arp, 4, 1939, pp.2-6.

¹⁷ Arp, Carrington, Duchamp, Éluard, Hugnet, Prassinis, Ernst, 'L'homme qui a perdu son squelette', *Plastique*, 5, 1939, pp.2-9.

femmes-enfants. Nevertheless, I am not interested in Prassinos and Carrington because of their relationship to each other but because of their different versions of *le merveilleux* which they express through their writings.

It also can be suggested that Prassinos and Carrington knew of each other since Carrington was familiar with Herbert Read's volume *Surrealism* (1936) and in his essay '1870 to 1936' Hugnet features Prassinos as a 'young surrealist poet' whose poems effectively contribute to the appointed task of Surrealism and whose efforts extend the world beyond literature and survey the irrational beyond the real.¹⁸ He features Prassinos's letter 'Souillure sarcastique' along with a poem by Valentine Penrose and Alice Paalen.¹⁹ In addition, Carrington's texts *La maison de la peur* (1938), *La dame ovale* (1939), *Le cornet acoustique* (1974), a typescript of *Pigeon vole* (1940) (with corrections by Breton) are advertised in the catalogue of the 2014 auction of Gisèle and Mario Prassinos's collection which could suggest that Prassinos was familiar with her work.²⁰ Prassinos and Carrington were also the only two women to be featured in Breton's *Anthologie de l'humour noir*; Prassinos was included in the original 1940 edition while Carrington was added to the revised 1950 issue.²¹ I will discuss the significance of their inclusion in the *Anthologie* in chapter three.

¹⁸ Georges Hugnet, '1870 to 1936', in *Surrealism*, ed. by Herbert Read (London: Faber and Faber, 1936), p.233.

¹⁹ Ibid, pp.234-235.

²⁰ *Gisèle et Mario Prassinos : Une collection*, ed. by Claude Oterelo (Paris: Claude Oterelo, 2014), p.12.

²¹ André Breton, *Anthologie de l'humour noir* (Paris: Editions du Sagittaire, 1940) and (Paris: Éditions du Sagittaire, 1950).

In academic and journalistic writings on women and Surrealism, Prassinos and Carrington are often labelled as ‘women (or female) Surrealists’ or ‘femmes surréalistes’.²² However, the question of whether these two women were actually Surrealists is more complex than this. What does it mean to be a ‘woman Surrealist’ in a movement which modelled women as *femmes-enfants*? Prassinos did not consider herself as a Surrealist by choice. In an undated interview, she declares that she was not a member of the surrealist group since she did not adhere to their theories (of *écriture automatique* or *femme-enfant*).²³ In fact, it was only after she was abandoned by the group that she read the surrealist manifestos.²⁴ However, in the interview, Prassinos seems to contradict herself as she reveals that she was not proud to have been a Surrealist which suggests that she was a Surrealist without having chosen to be one.²⁵ In an interview in 1975, Prassinos states ‘J’ai été surréaliste par hasard’ referring to the way that her writings were discovered by chance by her brother and the surrealist group.²⁶ Moreover, in an interview in 2003, Prassinos declares ‘Je suis “née” surréaliste, surréaliste sans le savoir’ which reveals

²² See *Surrealist Women: An International Anthology*, ed. by Penelope Rosemont (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), Georgiana Colville, *Scandaleusement d’elles: Trente-quatre femmes surréalistes* (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1999), and Roberta Smith, ‘Female Surrealists Reemerge in 2 Startling Shows’, *New York Times*, 13 June 2019 <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/13/arts/design/leonora-carrington-paintings.html> [accessed 19 June 2019].

²³ S. Druet, ‘Gisèle Prassinos: d’Alice II à la reconquête de l’esprit d’enfance’ <http://litrur.free.fr/112.htm> [accessed 19 May 2019].

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Marion Renard, ‘Gisèle Prassinos, brodeuse et conteuse’, *Le Monde*, 12 December 1975, page number not known.

that she was inherently a Surrealist.²⁷ This suggests that one can be a Surrealist even before Breton's 1924 *Manifeste* and raises the question whether anyone can be a Surrealist. I argue that Prassinis had always seen the world as a strange place and worked in a proto-surrealist way which the Surrealists would later adopt and define as their own. Carrington did not think of herself as a Surrealist, 'I was never a Surrealist, I was with Max'.²⁸ It was Max Ernst who introduced her to the surrealist group in Paris. Interestingly, both Prassinis and Carrington did not consider themselves as members of the surrealist group. This is perhaps because they considered being labelled as Surrealists as restrictive and strove for independence.

Nevertheless, both women worked in the context of Surrealism and so could be considered as Surrealists. In *Surrealist Women: An International Anthology* (1998), Penelope Rosemont outlines who is a Surrealist and who is not. She makes a distinction between writers who have expressed themselves in a surrealist voice and those who have manifested real affinities with Surrealism from those who actually participated in the movement. In the anthology, she assembles ninety-seven women writers who have played an active role in Surrealism and creates a checklist to identify who is a 'Surrealist' (and who is not) –

I define a surrealist as one who

(1) considers herself/himself a surrealist and/or

²⁷ Dominique Rabourdin, 'Gisèle Prassinis, surréaliste sans le savoir', *Le magazine littéraire*, 422, July 2003, p.87.

²⁸ Susan L. Aberth, *Leonora Carrington: Surrealism, Alchemy and Art* (Surrey: Lund Humphries, 2010), p.37.

(2) is recognized as surrealist by surrealists and accepts being so designated,
and

(3) takes part in surrealist activity by

(a) producing work recognized by surrealists as a contribution to
surrealism;

(b) collaborating on surrealist periodicals;

(c) participating in surrealist exhibitions;

(d) publishing under the movement's "Surrealist Editions" imprint;

(e) co[-]signing surrealist tracts;

(f) taking part in Surrealist Group meetings, games, demonstrations,
or other activities; and/or

(g) otherwise publicly identifying herself/himself with the aims,
principles, and activity of the Surrealist Movement.²⁹

She explains that the women who meet one or two of the numbered criteria and at least two of the lettered criteria are Surrealists. Mary Ann Caws's approach differs from Rosemont's and in the preface to *Surrealist Painters and Poets: An Anthology*, she argues that the most important reason for inclusion in a surrealist anthology is the artist's own self-characterisation and not whether others characterised them as Surrealists.³⁰ Like Caws, Rosemont features both Prassinis and Carrington in her anthology and therefore considered them as Surrealists. Prassinis did not identify herself as a Surrealist however she was recognised as one by them. She took part in

²⁹ *Surrealist Women*, ed. by Rosemont, p.xxxvii.

³⁰ *Surrealist Painters and Poets: An Anthology*, ed. by Mary Ann Caws (Cambridge, MA; London, England: The MIT Press, 2001), p.xix.

surrealist activities by producing 'automatic' writings (see chapter two), contributing to the surrealist reviews *Documents 34* and *Minotaure*, and was present at surrealist group meetings (albeit as a model of their theories rather than as a member).

Carrington did not consider herself as a Surrealist and although she was recognised as such by them she did not accept the designation. Therefore, one could argue that she does not fulfil Rosemont's criteria. Carrington did however take part in surrealist activities by contributing to the surrealist journals *View* and *VVV* and took part in seven international surrealist exhibitions between 1938 and 1966.³¹ Her paintings, *The Silent Assassin* (1938(?)) and *What Shall We Do Tomorrow, Aunt Amelia?* (1938(?)) were displayed at the 'Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme' at the Galerie Beaux-Arts, Paris in 1938. Salomon Grimberg argues that she officially joined the group when she exhibited with them in 1938 but that she maintained that she was not a Surrealist 'dans le vrai sens du mot' and that it was 'le seul mouvement artistique où elle pouvait créer librement'.³² However, Rosemont's (and Grimberg's) point that being a Surrealist means participating in surrealist exhibitions is not a strong enough argument.

Rosemont's checklist is therefore a starting point but it is not definitive. Her list of criteria for inclusion in the surrealist canon is prescriptive and misses out all sorts of nuances. It raises the question what can be achieved by including individuals

³¹ Leonora Carrington, 'White Rabbits', *View*, 9-10, 1941-1942, p.7, 'The Sisters', *View*, 11-12, 1942, pp.7-8, 'Waiting', *VVV*, 1, 1942, pp.49-50, 'The seventh horse', *VVV*, 2-3, 1943, pp.128-130, 'Down Below', *VVV*, 4, 1944, pp.70-86. *Surrealist Women*, ed. by Rosemont, p.102.

³² Salomon Grimberg, 'Les Origynes : La sculpture récente de Leonora Carrington', in *La femme s'entête : La part du féminin dans le surréalisme*, ed. by Georgiana M.M. Colville and Katharine Conley ([Paris]: Lachenal & Ritter, 1998), p.307.

in certain canons? Writing Prassinis and Carrington into the surrealist canon brings advantages as well as limitations to the readings of their work. In my thesis, I move beyond Rosemont's relatively instrumental approach since we no longer need to be proving who is a surrealist and who is not. More recently, the women who worked in the context of Surrealism are being considered as independent artists and writers.³³ On the one hand, this is problematic since they chose to work against the backdrop of Surrealism and their work subverts and extends surrealist themes. Considering them as independent artist-writers overlooks the significant contributions that they made to this literary-artistic movement. On the other hand, these women are no longer confined to a specific canon and their work can be interpreted freely. Prassinis and Carrington have frequently been annexed as 'women Surrealists'. However, this term is problematic since there does not exist a homogeneous 'woman surrealist' entity. Therefore, I will not label Prassinis and Carrington as 'women Surrealists' but as creative women who worked *in dialogue with* Surrealism.

Included as sources of creative inspiration and excluded as creative individuals, the role of women in Surrealism is complex. Throughout history, women artists and writers who worked in dialogue with Surrealism have been overshadowed by the male Surrealists and undervalued by scholars.³⁴ However, since the 1970s there has been a renewed interest in their creative oeuvre. In 1971, Xavière Gauthier published *Surréalisme et sexualité* in which she discusses the representation of women in surrealist painting and poetry and in 1977, the French

³³ See the one-woman exhibitions 'Leonora Carrington', Tate Liverpool, 2015, 'Dorothea Tanning', Tate Modern, 2019, and 'Dora Maar', Tate Modern, 2019-2020.

³⁴ See *Surrealist Women: An International Anthology*, ed. by Rosemont, p.xxxi.

review *Obliques* devoted an issue to 'La femme surréaliste' which presents the first 'dictionnaire' of thirty-five 'women surrealists' from Belen (Nelly Kaplan) to Unica Zürn.³⁵ Although the editor acknowledges that this list is 'arbitraire, provisoire et incomplète', it is nevertheless a starting point.³⁶ This special issue of *Obliques* features an article by Gloria Orenstein 'Les femmes du surréalisme' in which she discusses woman as *femme-enfant*, a number of women artists associated with Surrealism from Carrington to Kahlo, and calls on scholars to 'réécrire l'histoire de l'art' and 'refaire l'histoire occultée de ces femmes artistes'.³⁷ This issue also features Ernst's preface to and Carrington's story 'La maison de la peur' (1937), 'L'attente' (1941) translated into French by Jacqueline Chénieux, an essay 'Leonora Carrington et la tunique de Nessus' also by Chénieux, and an interview with Carrington by Germaine Rouvre along with three reproductions of her paintings.³⁸ It also features five of Prassinós's short texts ('Les germes', 'J'ai du mérite', 'Il me semble que je prospère', 'Mon bras droit', 'Je partirai sans eux'), an essay by Chénieux 'Gisèle Prassinós disqualifiée disqualifiante', a bibliography, and a photograph of one of her tapestries.³⁹

On art, Whitney Chadwick published the pioneering and comprehensive volume *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* in 1985 and on literature,

³⁵ Xavière Gauthier, *Surréalisme et sexualité* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971). *Obliques (La femme surréaliste)*, ed. by Roger Borderie, 14-15, 1977.

³⁶ *Obliques*, p.3.

³⁷ Gloria Orenstein, 'Les femmes du surréalisme', in *Obliques*, pp.61-64. This article first appeared in English as 'Women of Surrealism', *Feminist Art Journal*, 1 (1973), pp.15-21.

³⁸ *Obliques*, pp.80-92.

³⁹ *Ibid*, pp.206-215.

Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron discusses women's writing in *Le surréalisme et le roman (1922-1950)* (1983).⁴⁰ Chadwick writes on Carrington's life, paintings, and also briefly on her writings and Chénieux-Gendron features an essay on Carrington 'Les contes de Leonora Carrington : le tissage d'une « intersubjectivité »' and one on Prassinos 'Gisèle Prassinos : comment minimiser le malheur ?'.⁴¹ In her *Anthology*, Rosemont relates the significance of women's contributions to Surrealism through three-hundred extracts by ninety-seven women and Caws's volume *Surrealism and Women* (1991) features sixteen essays which focus on the writings and paintings of Prassinos, Oppenheim, Carrington, Joyce Mansour, Kay Sage, Remedios Varo, Fini, Valentine Hugo, Aube Elléouët, Agar, and Tanning.⁴² In *Automatic Woman: The Representation of Woman in Surrealism* (1996), Katharine Conley examines the surrealist portrayal of women and the writings of Carrington and Zürn and in *Scandaleusement d'elles: trente-quatre femmes surréalistes* (1999), Georgiana Colvile counts Prassinos and Carrington among the thirty-four 'femmes surréalistes' and features extracts of their writings.⁴³ In a more recent volume titled *Intersections: Women artists/surrealism/modernism* (2016), Patricia Allmer brings together a number of essays to create a dialogue between Surrealism and Modernism and

⁴⁰ Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1985; repr. 2002). Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron, *Le surréalisme et le roman (1922-1950)* (Lausanne, Suisse: Editions l'Age d'homme, 1983).

⁴¹ Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, pp.66-80. Chénieux-Gendron, *Le surréalisme et le roman*, pp.254-263 and pp.305-308.

⁴² *Surrealist Women*, ed. by Rosemont and *Surrealism and Women*, ed. by Caws and others.

⁴³ Katharine Conley, *Automatic Woman: The Representation of Woman in Surrealism* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1996) and Colvile, *Scandaleusement d'elles*, pp.60-73 and pp.244-253.

features an essay by Victoria Ferentinou on Carrington's novel *The Stone Door* (1978).⁴⁴

Despite the recent scholarship on women in Surrealism, in *In Montparnasse: The Emergence of Surrealism from Duchamp to Dalí* (2018), Sue Roe features all the major male figures of Surrealism but omits the majority of women associated with the movement.⁴⁵ Aside from Éluard's wife Gala (later Gala Dalí) and Breton's first wife Simone (née Kahn) and a fleeting reference to Miller as Man Ray's lover and model and to Oppenheim's surrealist object, there is no mention of the other women who worked in the context of Surrealism. This is somewhat surprising and disappointing for a contemporary study on Surrealism. However, the timeframe of Roe's volume ends in the 1930s and the majority of the creative women did not come to Surrealism until then or later as I will discuss. I am also struck by the fact that two of Prassinou's lesser-known short stories 'Chevelure arrogante' and 'Le Spectre de Chateaubriand' from the collection *La sauterelle arthritique* (1935) and an extract from Carrington's narrative *Down Below* from *VVV* (1944) are featured in the volume *The Sources of Surrealism* (2006) and are recognised as primary surrealist sources alongside those by Breton, Ernst, Aragon, and others.⁴⁶ More recently, in

⁴⁴ *Intersections: Women artists/surrealism/modernism*, ed. by Patricia Allmer (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016).

⁴⁵ Sue Roe, *In Montparnasse: The Emergence of Surrealism from Duchamp to Dalí* (London: Penguin Random House, 2018). This volume featured as BBC Radio 4's 'Book of the Week' in June 2018.

⁴⁶ Gisèle Prassinou, 'Chevelure arrogante' and 'Le Spectre de Chateaubriand' and Leonora Carrington, *Down Below*, in *The Sources of Surrealism*, ed. by Neil Matheson (Hampshire: Lund Humphries, 2006), pp.520-522 and pp.735-738.

The Milk Bowl of Feathers: Essential Surrealist Writings (2018), Mary Ann Caws features a number of texts by often overlooked women writers including Claude Cahun, Carrington, Léona Delacourt (Nadja), Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, Mina Loy, Maar, Mansour, Oppenheim, Prassinis, Alice Rahon, and Sage which underscores the significance of their writings to Surrealism.⁴⁷

The position of women in Surrealism is complex. In his *Second manifeste du surréalisme* (1929), Breton declares 'Le problème de la femme est, au monde, tout ce qu'il y a de merveilleux et de trouble.'⁴⁸ Here, he perceives woman to be a problem. However, I argue that it is the role assigned to woman in Surrealism that is problematic. Chadwick declares that 'No artistic movement since Romanticism has elevated the image of woman to as significant a role *in the creative life of man* [my emphasis] as Surrealism did; no group or movement has ever defined such a revolutionary role for her.'⁴⁹ She seems to be referring to the muse whose role was to inspire. However, this is not a 'revolutionary role' since women had long been assigned the role of muse. What is revolutionary about Surrealism is the way that it allowed women to create their own personal and artistic identities. Chadwick continues, 'And no other movement has had such a large number of active women participants, their presence recorded both in the poetry and art of male Surrealists,

⁴⁷ Mary Ann Caws, *The Milk Bowl of Feathers: Essential Surrealist Writings* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 2018). See Carrington's 'The Sand Camel', trans. by Rikki Ducornet, pp.23-24 and Prassinis's 'Arrogant Hair', trans. by Fabienne Lloyd and 'Loving Poem', trans. by Caws, pp.66-67.

⁴⁸ André Breton, 'Second manifeste du surréalisme (1930)', in *Manifestes du surréalisme* ([Paris]: Gallimard, 1985), p.129.

⁴⁹ Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, p.7.

and in the catalogues of the international Surrealist exhibitions'.⁵⁰ However, if this is the case, then why were they overlooked by scholars before the 1970s? Gwen Raaberg adds 'No women, though, had been listed as official members of the original surrealist movement, not had they signed the manifestoes.'⁵¹ Their participation in Surrealism is therefore unclear. It seems that although they played an active role, they did not adhere to the surrealist theories. Moreover, in a surrealist group photograph taken at the 'International Surrealist Exhibition' in June 1936, the Buenos Aires-born artist Agar (1899-1991) is notably the only woman present.⁵² However, this is an edited photograph – the image of Breton (who was not present) has been collaged over chairman Rupert Lee and (secretary?) Ruthven Todd and more importantly the seated row of women has been cropped.⁵³ These women have been rendered unimportant and superfluous and are evidently not considered as members of the group.

Many women came to Surrealism in the 1930s and Raaberg remarks that it was not until then that women began to be given a more significant role in the movement.⁵⁴ Some of the women who came to Surrealism were discovered by male members of the group. For example, Agar, Kahlo, Oppenheim, and Sage were 'living

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Gwen Raaberg, 'The Problematics of Women and Surrealism', in *Surrealism and Women*, ed. by Caws and others, pp.1-2.

⁵² This photograph was printed in the 1938 *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme* (Paris: José Corti, 1995), p.54.

⁵³ Ruthven Todd is not listed as secretary in the catalogue of the 'International Surrealist Exhibition', London, 1936.

⁵⁴ Raaberg, 'The Problematics of Women and Surrealism', in *Surrealism and Women*, ed. by Caws and others, p.2.

proof of the efficacy of the chance encounter and the eruption of the “marvelous” into the world of everyday reality’.⁵⁵ Prassinós’s writings were also discovered by her brother who introduced her to the group. Others came to Surrealism through personal relationships with male members of the group – Fini, Hugo, Jacqueline Lamba, Maar, Miller, Penrose, Rahon, and Varo. However, women were attracted to Surrealism ‘not just as companions to the men [...] but as artists in their own right.’⁵⁶ Although Carrington was introduced to the group by Ernst, she aspired to be an artist from a young age. Almost all of these women, especially Carrington, were ‘in revolt against the conventional female roles assigned to them by family, class, and society’ and although they worked in the context of Surrealism many considered themselves as independent of the group.⁵⁷ Perhaps what attracted them to Surrealism was the fact that the Surrealists took a stand against patriarchal institutions which underscore women’s oppression. However, as Allmer states, ‘whilst surrealist thought radically challenged hierarchies, it often remained blind to its own gender politics, locked in a heterosexual, sometimes homophobic, patriarchal stance positioning and constructing women (and never men) as artists’ muses, *femme-enfants*, virgins, dolls, and erotic objects.’⁵⁸ It was therefore not as radical in revolutionising the position of women in society as it at first seemed to be.

⁵⁵ Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, p.9.

⁵⁶ Conley, *Automatic Woman*, p.3.

⁵⁷ Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, p.11.

⁵⁸ *Angels of Anarchy: Women Artists and Surrealism*, ed. by Patricia Allmer (Munich; Berlin; London; New York: Prestel, 2009), p.13.

The Surrealists initially celebrated woman as other and created an idealised image of her as *femme-enfant*, neither woman nor child but somewhere in-between. However, they did come to recognise women as artists and writers; Éluard wrote the preface to Prassinós's first collection and Ernst to Carrington's first short story.⁵⁹ The *femme-enfant* was a naïve young woman in touch with the world of dreams, the unconscious, and the realm of the imagination. Moreover, she was a way of accessing *le merveilleux* with Breton describing her as 'le conducteur merveilleusement magnétique'.⁶⁰ Rosemont argues that the trope of the *femme-enfant* is not restrictive or sexist but that 'the child-woman is a proud and defiant being who refuses to surrender the child's boldness, curiosity, and spirit of adventure' and not a figment of Breton's imagination but a real phenomenon exemplified by Oppenheim, Prassinós, Maar, and Carrington.⁶¹ However, I argue that the misogynistic category of *femme-enfant* is more restrictive than liberating as there was no 'homme-enfant' or male equivalent. I will discuss Prassinós as *femme-enfant* in chapter one and Carrington as this idealised image of woman in chapter five. As Robert Benayoun states, while the Surrealists exalted 'LA femme', they did not equally revere 'LES femmes'.⁶² In other words, they celebrated woman as the mythic *femme-enfant* but did not celebrate *real* women. Of the role assigned to

⁵⁹ Eluard, 'Preface', in Prassinós, *La sauterelle arthritique*, no page number. Ernst, 'Preface', in Carrington, 'La maison de la peur', no page number.

⁶⁰ *Rupture Inaugurale*, ed. by Sarane Alexandrian and others (Paris: Éditions surréalistes, 1947), page number not known.

⁶¹ *Surrealist Women*, ed. by Rosemont, p.xlvii. See Sarane Alexandrian, *Les libérateurs de l'amour* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1977), p.242.

⁶² Robert Benayoun, *Érotique du surréalisme* (Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1965), p.87.

women in Surrealism, Carrington explains that they 'were very secondary to the men in those days. The women were considered to be the muse, the people who were there to inspire and incidentally do the washing, do [the] cooking, and do the cleaning [...] and they were not really considered to be artists'.⁶³ She explains that it has been a 'very tricky subject' with woman presented as 'an inactive, unreal element in the life of a male artist'.⁶⁴ It was perhaps because of this secondary status that the women artists and writers chose to work independently of the surrealist group. However, speaking of her time in Paris with them, Carrington asserts 'I was with the Surrealists, I didn't have to fit into anything' which suggests that she enjoyed a certain freedom.⁶⁵

The representation of the female body by male surrealist artists and writers differs from that by women. Gauthier makes a general observation that in surrealist poetry by men 'la femme est le plus souvent une entité merveilleuse, bonne, douce et belle. L'homme l'aime et l'admire' whereas in their paintings 'elle est souvent dangereuse, méchante, sanguinaire. L'homme la hait et la torture.'⁶⁶ It is strange that the Surrealists romanticised woman in their poetry yet presented her as monstrous in their paintings. Nevertheless, the Surrealists presented woman as other in both their poetry and paintings. The surrealist perception of woman is illustrated in a montage printed in the twelfth issue of *La révolution surréaliste* in

⁶³ *The Flowering of the Crone: Leonora Carrington, Another Reality*, dir. by Ally Acker (Reel Women Media, 2009) <https://rhul.kanopy.com/video/flowering-crone-leonora-carrington-another-reality> [accessed 13 August 2018].

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Gauthier, p.332.

1929.⁶⁷ A painting by René Magritte is framed by sixteen head-shots of the male members of the group. A nude woman gazes away from the viewer and completes the sentence 'je ne vois pas [la femme] cachée dans la forêt'.⁶⁸ The men with their eyes closed do not see her but the woman of their dreams, a fantasy. As Colvile observes 'Quelle que soit la représentation de la femme, elle demeure invisible, tout en étant centrale.'⁶⁹ Similarly, in Man Ray's photograph *Waking Dream Séance* (1929), a young woman sits at a typewriter surrounded by male members of the surrealist group.⁷⁰ The woman, Simone Breton (née Kahn who married Breton in 1921), records their dreams yet she has none of her own. This image was printed on the front cover of the first issue of *La révolution surréaliste* and therefore sets out woman's role in the surrealist movement as a recording device.⁷¹ For Breton, the writer's role as a 'modeste *appareil enregistreur*' was a positive one and here woman is assigned this positive role which suggests that they thought of her as capable of recording *le merveilleux*. Nevertheless, in both the montage and photograph, woman is presented as an agent of the male Surrealists' dreams and desires.

The women artists and writers who worked in dialogue with Surrealism were creative and subversive. As Chadwick states 'Alienated from Surrealist theorizing

⁶⁷ Untitled montage. *La révolution surréaliste*, 12, 15 December 1929.

⁶⁸ I use the term 'nude' according to John Berger's distinction 'To be naked is to be oneself. To be nude is to be seen naked by others and yet not recognized for oneself.' See Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Books, 1972), p.54.

⁶⁹ Colvile, *Scandaleusement d'elles*, p.9.

⁷⁰ Front cover of the first issue of *La révolution surréaliste*, 1, 1 December 1924.

⁷¹ Breton, 'Manifeste du surréalisme (1924)', in *Manifestes du surréalisme*, p.39.

about women, and from the search for a female muse, women turned instead to their own reality.⁷² Many of their works have an autobiographical aspect and are self-portraits. As Colvile observes, 'Alors que les autoportraits sont plutôt rares chez les hommes surréalistes, la profusion de ce genre chez les femmes s'avère phénoménale' and cites Agar, Cahun, Carrington, Fini, Hugo, Kahlo, Miller, Lamba, Rahon, and Varo.⁷³ These women sought to create their own images of woman and her world. They created their own personal and artistic identities alongside empowering new visions of femininity and of what it means to be a creative woman. They made significant contributions to Surrealism and as Rosemont declares 'To ignore their contributions is to ignore some of the best of surrealism.'⁷⁴ Whilst the male Surrealists depicted women as *femmes-enfants*, the women presented themselves in the guise of alchemist, magician, goddess, artist, explorer, scientist, shaman, and moreover as the Great Mother (as can be seen clearly in Carrington's creative oeuvre).⁷⁵ They developed their own innovative artistic and textual strategies to subvert surrealist patriarchal ideologies. They did not reproduce the surrealist image of woman as *femme-enfant* but created their own vision and version of surrealist practice.

⁷² Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007), p.313.

⁷³ Colvile, *Scandaleusement d'elles*, p.11.

⁷⁴ *Surrealist Women*, ed. by Rosemont, p.xxix.

⁷⁵ Gloria Feman Orenstein, 'The Methodology of the Marvelous', *Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literatures*, 42, 4 (1998), 329-340 (p.332).

Timeliness

The timeliness of my thesis is demonstrated by the fact that we are approaching the centenary of Prassinós's birth (1920-2015) and in 2017 we celebrated the one hundredth anniversary of Carrington (1917-2011). We are also nearing the centenary of Breton's first *Manifeste du surréalisme* which was published in 1924 and marks the beginning of the literary-artistic movement. This illustrates the relevance of my thesis on Prassinós and Carrington. Moreover, in 2019 Bloomsbury published the first comprehensive *International Encyclopedia of Surrealism* which provides an overview of the international scope of the movement and an A-Z of the individuals who worked in dialogue with it and marks a renewed interest in Surrealism as a literary-artistic-intellectual movement.⁷⁶

To celebrate Carrington's centenary, a number of events were organised in her country of birth, the United Kingdom and in her adopted country, Mexico. On 30 June 2017, the 'Leonora Carrington Centenary Symposium' was held at Edge Hill University, Ormskirk which I had the opportunity to attend.⁷⁷ Its aim was to celebrate and to bring into discussion the work of the artist-writer, to extend her

⁷⁶ *The International Encyclopedia of Surrealism (Volumes 1 – 3)*, ed. by Michael Richardson and others (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic Publishing, 2019). Carrington is featured in the second volume (pp.149-155) and Prassinós in the third (pp.209-212).

⁷⁷ 'Leonora Carrington Centenary Symposium', Edge Hill University, Ormskirk, 30 June 2017 <https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/ice/ice-conference-30th-june-2017/> [accessed 13 August 2018]. *Leonora Carrington: Living Legacies*, ed. by Ailsa Cox, James Hewison and others (Delaware: Vernon Press, 2020) is based on the papers, presentations, and performances given at the Leonora Carrington Centenary Symposium in 2017.

legacy, and as Roger Shannon writes in his blog post ‘to re lancastrianise’ her.⁷⁸ In addition to academic papers, the symposium incorporated poetry readings by published poet Penny Sharman, a performance of the dance ‘Imaginarium’ by James Hewison and Michelle Man, an exhibition ‘Un Vestido para Leonora’ by artist María Bueno, a performance of Carrington’s *The Hearing Trumpet* by theatre group Dirty Market, and Carrington’s son Gabriel Weisz Carrington in conversation with Professor Roger Shannon (Edge Hill University) and Carrington’s cousin (and journalist) Joanna Moorhead.⁷⁹ It also featured a screening of the experimental film *Female Human Animal* (2017) starring Chloe Aridjis, directed by Josh Appignanesi and a preview of the BBC documentary, *Leonora Carrington: The Lost Surrealist* (2016).⁸⁰ I will draw on the papers presented, dance, theatre adaptation, conversations, and films in my writing on Carrington.

In Mexico, events held to celebrate Leonora’s legacy include a one-day symposium, ‘100 años de una artista: Leonora Carrington’ held in Mexico City in April 2017.⁸¹ That same year Carrington’s bronze sculptures were installed on Paseo

⁷⁸ Roger Shannon, ‘Re Lancastrianising Leonora’ <https://blogs.edgehill.ac.uk/comment/2017/07/27/re-lancastrianising-leonora/> [accessed 11 October 2017].

⁷⁹ Gabriel Weisz Carrington in conversation with Professor Roger Shannon <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QjPOXUtTkjQ&t=12s> [accessed 11 December 2018].

⁸⁰ *Female Human Animal*, dir. by Josh Appignanesi (Minotaur Film, 2018). *Leonora Carrington: The Lost Surrealist*, dir. by Teresa Griffiths (BBC Four, 2016). First aired on 10 December 2017.

⁸¹ ‘100 años de una artista: Leonora Carrington’, la Biblioteca de México Ciudadela, 6 April 2017 <http://www.leocarrington.com/100-a-os-de-leonora--100-years-of-leonora.html> [accessed 21 September 2018].

de la Reforma in Mexico City.⁸² In March 2018, a museum dedicated to Carrington was opened in the Mexican state of San Luis Potosí.⁸³ The museum is a former state prison and therefore a suitably incongruous space for surrealist art. The museum welcomed over forty-five-thousand visitors in the first five months which demonstrates her popularity in Mexico.⁸⁴ In mid-August, a second museum devoted to Carrington was opened in Xilitla, a town in the state of San Luis Potosí, a short distance away from Edward James's surrealist sculpture garden, Las Pozas.⁸⁵ Its location is significant since Carrington often travelled there to visit her friend and patron, Edward James. In 2018, a large-scale retrospective, 'Leonora Carrington: Cuentos Mágicos' was held at the Museo de arte moderno in Mexico City between 21 April and 23 September.⁸⁶ On display were paintings, sculptures, and books by the artist-writer as well as photographs and documents from collections held in

⁸² Susannah Rig, 'Leonora Carrington Museum is a Surreal Location for Surrealist Art', 10 July 2018 <https://mexiconewsdaily.com/mexicolife/leonora-carrington-museum/> [accessed 11 December 2018].

⁸³ Museo Leonora Carrington, San Luis Potosí <http://www.leonoracarringtonmuseo.org> [accessed 28 October 2018].

⁸⁴ Rig, 'Leonora Carrington Museum is a Surreal Location for Surrealist Art'.

⁸⁵ 'Museum Dedicated to Leonora Carrington to Open in the Mexican Town of Xilitla' <https://latinamericannewsdigest.com/museum-dedicated-leonora-carrington-open-mexican-town-xilitla/?print=pdf> [accessed 11 December 2018]. Jardín Escultórico Edward James, Las Pozas <https://www.laspozaxilitla.org.mx/en/> [accessed 11 December 2018].

⁸⁶ 'Leonora Carrington: Cuentos Mágicos', Museo de arte moderno, 21 April – 23 September 2018 <https://mam.inba.gob.mx/leonora-carrington-cuentos-magicos> [accessed 28 October 2018].

Mexico, the United States, and Europe.⁸⁷ The comprehensive exhibition catalogue features fifteen insightful essays on different aspects of Carrington's life and work.⁸⁸ Overall, the opening of two museums and a large-scale exhibition demonstrates her renown in Mexico where she is celebrated as a Mexican artist.

Recent exhibitions on Carrington in the UK include 'Leonora Carrington: The Celtic Surrealist' which was held at the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA) in Dublin in 2014.⁸⁹ This was the first major retrospective of Carrington's work in Ireland. On display were paintings, sculptures, tapestries, and works on paper from 1940s onwards with a focus on the imagery that inspired her as a child and on the cultural influences of Mexico.⁹⁰ The following year, to coincide with the Year of Mexico in the UK, 'Leonora Carrington: Transgressing Discipline' was held at Tate Liverpool.⁹¹ This exhibition explored Carrington's diverse creative practice and her distinctive perspective on Surrealism.⁹² Surprisingly, this was the UK's first solo exhibition of Carrington's oeuvre for over twenty years. In 1992, an exhibition, 'Leonora Carrington: Paintings, drawings and sculptures 1940 – 1990' was held at the

⁸⁷ 'Leonora Carrington: Cuentos Mágicos'

<https://www.mexicoescultura.com/actividad/187290/en/leonora-carrington-magical-tales.html> [accessed 11 December 2018].

⁸⁸ *Leonora Carrington: Magical Tales*, ed. by Tere Arcq and Stefan van Raay (Mexico: Galerías y museos, 2018).

⁸⁹ 'Leonora Carrington: The Celtic Surrealist', Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA), Dublin, 18 September 2013 – 26 January 2014.

⁹⁰ 'Leonora Carrington: The Celtic Surrealist' http://www.imma.ie/en/page_236722.htm [accessed 11 December 2018].

⁹¹ 'Leonora Carrington: Transgressing Discipline', Tate Liverpool, 6 March - 31 May 2015.

⁹² Unfortunately, an exhibition catalogue was not published to support this retrospective.

Serpentine Gallery in London and was the first major exhibition of her visual and plastic arts.⁹³ These exhibitions dedicated to Carrington in Ireland, the UK, and Mexico demonstrate the international appeal and scope of her oeuvre.

To coincide with Carrington's centenary, there has been a wave of publications on Carrington and English translations of her writings which add to a significant corpus on her oeuvre.⁹⁴ These include Joanna Moorhead's biography *The Surreal Life of Leonora Carrington* (2017) and a volume edited by Jonathan Eburne and Catriona McAra titled *Leonora Carrington and the international avant-garde* (2017) which reconsiders her place in and significance for Surrealism through her art and writings.⁹⁵ Both texts have informed my thesis. Many of her writings have been translated into English including *The Complete Stories of Leonora Carrington* (2017), *The Debutante and Other Stories* (2017), *Down Below* (2017), *The Milk of Dreams* (2017), and *The Skeleton's Holiday* (2018).⁹⁶ These translations have improved the

⁹³ 'Leonora Carrington: Paintings, drawings and sculptures 1940 – 1990', Serpentine Gallery, London, 11 December 1991 – 26 January 1992.

⁹⁴ See chapters five to nine in which I draw on scholarly work on Carrington and the bibliography.

⁹⁵ Joanna Moorhead, *The Surreal Life of Leonora Carrington* (London: Virago Press, 2017), *Leonora Carrington and the international avant-garde*, ed. by Jonathan P. Eburne and Catriona McAra (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017).

⁹⁶ Leonora Carrington, *The Complete Stories of Leonora Carrington*, trans. by Kathrine Talbot and Anthony Kerrigan (St. Louis, MO: Dorothea, a publishing project, 2017), Leonora Carrington, *The Debutante and Other Stories*, trans. by Kathrine Talbot, Marina Warner, Paul de Angelis, Anthony Kerrigan (London: Silver Press, 2017), Leonora Carrington, *Down Below* (New York: The New York Review of Books, 2017), Leonora Carrington, *The Milk of Dreams* (New York: New York Review Children's Books, 2013), Leonora Carrington, *The Skeleton's Holiday* (London: Penguin Random House, 2018).

accessibility of her texts to the English-speaking world. However, they do not offer readings or interpretations of her writings. In addition, the original French editions of her writings remain out of print and are only accessible in specialised libraries. In my thesis, through close analyses of her surrealist writings in the original French, I aspire to bridge this gap and contribute to recent scholarship on Carrington. Looking to the future, the illustrated children's book, *Out of This world: The Surreal Art of Leonora Carrington* (2019) introduces Carrington (as an artist) to a new generation.⁹⁷

The exhibitions, inauguration of museums, and English translations of her writings, not forgetting the recent acquisition of Carrington's oil painting *Portrait of Max Ernst* (c.1939) by the National Galleries of Scotland in 2018, have brought her to the forefront of the public consciousness.⁹⁸ This acquisition is significant since it demonstrates that galleries are investing in works by women artists associated with Surrealism and it will form part of the National Galleries of Scotland's world-famous collection of surrealist artworks. Carrington is no longer one of the lesser-known women of Surrealism but arguably one of the best-known creative women of the French avant-garde. In addition, Carrington was once better known as a painter than a writer and this is now changing with the recent publications of her writings albeit in translation. Nevertheless, despite being a British artist, the Tate Modern owns only two sketches by Carrington, *Do you Know My Aunt Eliza?* (1941) and *I am an*

⁹⁷ Michelle Markel and Amanda Hall, *Out of This world: The Surreal Art of Leonora Carrington* (New York: Balzer + Bray, 2019).

⁹⁸ Leonora Carrington, *Portrait of Max Ernst* (c.1939) <https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/164061/bird-superior-portrait-max-ernst> [accessed 13 May 2019].

Amateur of Velocipedes (1941) which the gallery purchased in 2004.⁹⁹ Many of her artworks remain in private collections which highlights the significance of the large-scale retrospectives at the Tate Liverpool and at the Museo de arte moderno, Mexico City in making her work accessible to the public and scholars alike.

To date there are no known events organised to celebrate Prassinos's centenary in 2020. With Carrington's centennial celebrations in mind, this would be an opportune time to bring her writings to scholarly and popular attention and to showcase her colourful mythical and biblical tapestries. A recent English translation of Prassinos's texts under the title *The Arthritic Grasshopper: Collected Stories (1934-1944)* was published in 2017 which suggests a renewed interest in her writings.¹⁰⁰ In the introduction, Bonnie Ruberg hopes that this translation will be 'a gateway – an open door onto the work of a writer who deserves far more attention than the history of art and literature has yet paid her'.¹⁰¹ A selection of her writings translated into English was published under the title *Surrealist Texts* in 2014.¹⁰² However, it was issued in a limited edition of eighty-five copies and therefore although it was a step forward in making her texts accessible to an English-speaking readership it was a somewhat limited one. As with Carrington's texts, the original French editions of her

⁹⁹ The Tate also holds on long-term loan two oil paintings by Carrington, *Eluhim* (1960) and *Transference* (1963) <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/leonora-carrington-7615> [accessed 2 July 2019].

¹⁰⁰ Gisèle Prassinos, *The Arthritic Grasshopper: Collected Stories (1934-1944)*, trans. by Henry Vale and Bonnie Ruberg (Cambridge, MA: Wakefield Press, 2017).

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, p.xv.

¹⁰² Gisèle Prassinos, *Surrealist Texts*, trans. by Ellen Nations, illustrated by Bruce Hutchinson ([California]: Black Scat Books, 2014).

writings are out of print and are therefore difficult to access. One hopes that to celebrate the centenary of Prassinos's birth, her texts in French will be reissued.

Prassinos remains a relatively little-known figure of Surrealism in France and Annie Richard is currently the leading scholar on Prassinos and her oeuvre. Other scholars have studied and published on her work, for example José Ensich's *A l'écoute de Gisèle Prassinos: une voix grecque* (1986), Madeleine Cottenet-Hage's *Gisèle Prassinos ou le désir du lieu intime* (1988), and Marie-Claire Barnet's *La femme cent sexes ou les genres communicants : Deharme, Mansour, Prassinos* (1998).¹⁰³ Note that no new volume dedicated to an analysis of Prassinos's writings has been published for over twenty years and much more has been written on Carrington's texts than Prassinos's as reflected in the bibliography.

The latest exhibition of Prassinos's artwork was held as recently as 2018 at the galerie simoncini in Luxembourg which displayed fifty of her drawings alongside those by her brother Mario.¹⁰⁴ This was the first exhibition of her work for over fifteen years. Previous exhibitions of her tapestries include 'Le monde suspendu de Gisèle Prassinos' at the Bibliothèque historique de la Ville de Paris (BHVP) in 1998, 'La légende dorée de Gisèle Prassinos' curated by Annie Richard as part of the colloquium on Surrealism and *le merveilleux* at Cerisy-la-Salle in 1999, 'Gisèle et

¹⁰³ José Ensich and Rosemarie Kieffer, *À l'écoute de Gisèle Prassinos : une voix grecque* (Québec, Canada: Éditions Naaman de Sherbrooke, 1986), Madeleine Cottenet-Hage, *Gisèle Prassinos ou le désir du lieu intime* (Paris: Editions Jean-Michel Place, 1988), Marie-Claire Barnet, *La femme cent sexes ou les genres communicants : Deharme, Mansour, Prassinos* (Bern; Berlin; Frankfurt; New York; Paris; Wien: Peter Lang, 1998).

¹⁰⁴ 'Gisèle Prassinos/dessins-portraits', galerie simoncini, Luxembourg, 1 June – 14 July 2018 <http://www.galeriesimoncini.lu/pages/expositions.html> [accessed 13 May 2019].

Mario Prassinos' at the Galerie La Hune Brenner, Paris, and 'Les tentures' at the Maison de la Grèce, Paris in 2003.¹⁰⁵ The fact that the exhibition of her tapestries formed part of the colloquium on Surrealism and the marvellous suggests that they present the surrealist *merveilleux* in the plastic arts. At present, the majority of her tapestries are held in private collections; nine of which form part of the Fonds Gisèle Prassinos at the BHVP.

***Le merveilleux* - theory and practice**

In this section, I will outline a number of theories of *le merveilleux* to provide a theoretical grounding for my thesis. I will discuss two surrealist theories of *le merveilleux* - Breton's 1924 theory in *Manifeste du surréalisme* and Pierre Mabille's theory in *Le miroir du merveilleux* (1940). I will also discuss Tzvetan Todorov's theory of *le merveilleux* as a literary genre in *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (1970) as a point of comparison. For the Surrealists, *le merveilleux* was not a literary genre but an abstract concept. I will draw out some points of comparison between all three theories to further understand the expansive concept of *le merveilleux*. Other theories of it include Michel Leiris's theory of 'le merveilleux moderne' in *Essai sur le*

¹⁰⁵ 'Le monde suspendu de Gisèle Prassinos', BHVP, 13 March – 3 May 1998, 'La légende dorée de Gisèle Prassinos', Abbaye de Hambye, 2 – 12 August 1999, 'Gisèle et Mario Prassinos', Galerie La Hune Brenner, Paris, 6 – 22 March 2003, and 'Les tentures', Maison de la Grèce, Paris, 26 May – 8 June 2003.

merveilleux (1926).¹⁰⁶ I will also discuss the concept of convulsive beauty which was first introduced in Breton's novel *Nadja* (1928) and developed in *L'amour fou* (1937).

Surprisingly there are only a handful of publications dedicated to the presence of *le merveilleux* in surrealist literary works. Two of the most important volumes on the surrealist *merveilleux* in writing are *Mélusine N.XX : Merveilleux et surréalisme* (2000) and Tania Collani's *Le merveilleux dans la prose surréaliste européenne* (2010). The volume *Merveilleux et surréalisme* features a number of papers on different aspects of *le merveilleux* in surrealist text and image from the colloquium which was held in August 1999 at Cerisy-la-Salle.¹⁰⁷ In *Le merveilleux dans la prose surréaliste européenne* (2010), Collani discusses the theme of metamorphosis in Prassinós's short story 'Transformation' and in Carrington's stories 'La débutante' and 'La dame ovale'.¹⁰⁸ In her insightful review of the volume, Ruth Hemus comments on the way that Collani gives note to Carrington's writings, examining her alternative visions of *le merveilleux* and what they reveal about Surrealism's evolution and expansion.¹⁰⁹ In my thesis, I will provide close readings of my interpretations of *le merveilleux* in the writings of Prassinós and Carrington.

¹⁰⁶ Michel Leiris, *Le merveilleux*, ed. by Catherine Maubon (Bruxelles: Didier Devillez Éditeur, 2000).

¹⁰⁷ *Merveilleux et surréalisme*, ed. by Nathalie Limat-Letellier (Lausanne, Suisse: Éditions L'Age d'Homme, 2000).

¹⁰⁸ Tania Collani, *Le merveilleux dans la prose surréaliste européenne* (Paris: Hermann Éditeurs, 2010), pp.451-455.

¹⁰⁹ A review of Collani's *Le merveilleux dans la prose surréaliste européenne* by Ruth Hemus in *French Studies*, 66, 1 (2012), 105-106 [https://academic-oup-com.ezproxy01.rhul.ac.uk/fs/article/66/1/105/526843](https://academic-oup.com.ezproxy01.rhul.ac.uk/fs/article/66/1/105/526843) [accessed 25 March 2019].

In *Simulating the marvellous: psychology - surrealism – postmodernism*

(2013), David Lomas discusses Surrealism and the theme of simulation and traces the etymological root of the noun 'marvellous' and its meaning throughout history.¹¹⁰ The volume *Surrealism, Occultism and Politics: In Search of the Marvellous* (2018) examines the relationship between occultism and Surrealism with an essay by Ferentinou on Carrington and the goddess.¹¹¹ Other invaluable publications on *le merveilleux* in a surrealist context include Lewis Kachur's *Displaying the Marvelous: Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dalí and Surrealist Exhibition Installations* (2003) in which he discusses the problem of displaying the marvellous in surrealist exhibition space and Hal Foster's *Compulsive Beauty* (1993) in which he explores the marvellous and its two cognates of convulsive beauty and objective chance.¹¹² Objective chance can also be termed coincidence; it is the chance encounter of an individual and the unexpected which propels one into another realm. It is objective in that it is governed by something greater, by a force external to our powers. Although Foster makes extensive use of Breton's *Nadja* and *L'amour fou* and Aragon's *Le Paysan de Paris* (1926), he does not mention the writings of Prassinou or Carrington. In addition to publications, a recent exhibition held at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern

¹¹⁰ David Lomas, *Simulating the marvellous: psychology - surrealism – postmodernism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

¹¹¹ *Surrealism, Occultism and Politics: In Search of the Marvellous*, ed. by Tessel M. Bauduin, Victoria Ferentinou and Daniel Zamani (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018). See Victoria Ferentinou, 'The Quest for the Goddess: Matriarchy, Surrealism and Gender Politics in the Work of Ithell Colquhoun and Leonora Carrington', pp.173-193.

¹¹² Lewis Kachur, *Displaying the Marvelous: Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dalí and Surrealist Exhibition Installations* (Cambridge, MA; London, England: The MIT Press, 2003). Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, MA; London, England: The MIT Press, 1993).

Art (Modern One) in Edinburgh in 2016 was devoted to the surrealist *merveilleux*.¹¹³

The exhibition 'Surreal Encounters: Collecting the Marvellous' displayed works from the collections of Roland Penrose, Edward James, Gabrielle Keiller, and Ulla and Heiner Pietzsch. It illustrates the problem of capturing and displaying the marvellous as discussed by Kachur.

When discussing *le merveilleux* in the context of Surrealism, it is necessary to take Breton's theory of it as a starting point. In his *Manifeste* (1924), in which he sets out the movement's main principles, Breton introduces the concept of *le merveilleux*. As Claude Letellier and Natalie Limat-Letellier state 'Nul doute que « l'appétit du merveilleux », « la passion du merveilleux » règnent dans l'aventure surréaliste' which confirms that *le merveilleux* was at the heart of Surrealism.¹¹⁴ Breton defines *le merveilleux*, discusses its presence in literary works and in fairy tales, and provides two examples of it. He subversively introduces the concept by declaring 'mon intention était de faire justice de la *haine du merveilleux* qui sévit chez certains hommes, de ce ridicule sous lequel ils veulent le faire tomber.'¹¹⁵ He reveals that not all men appreciate *le merveilleux* and that it is not a universally admired concept. He dismisses such an attitude as ridiculous and suggests that some men wilfully ignore it. These individuals are not Surrealists since the quest for *le merveilleux* is the driving force of Surrealism. In the *Manifeste*, Breton defines *le*

¹¹³ 'Surreal Encounters: Collecting the Marvellous', Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art (Modern One), 4 June – 11 September 2016. Three of Carrington's paintings were displayed at this exhibition - *The House Opposite* (c.1945), *Portrait of the Late Mrs Partridge* (1947), and *Ladies Run, There is a Man in the Rose Garden* (1948).

¹¹⁴ *Merveilleux et surréalisme*, ed. by Limat-Letellier, p.11.

¹¹⁵ Breton, *Manifestes*, p.24.

merveilleux as 'le merveilleux est toujours beau, n'importe quel merveilleux est beau, il n'y a même que le merveilleux qui soit beau.'¹¹⁶ Here, he defines it in relation to beauty; *le merveilleux* is beauty(?). However, he does not clarify what it is since he does not explain what he means by beauty and therefore encodes rather than decodes the surrealist concept. The beauty that he writes of is perhaps convulsive beauty which he introduces four years later in his illustrated novel *Nadja* (1928).

Nadja is a first-person narrative of a chance encounter and short-lived relationship with a young woman on the streets of Paris. It introduces the surrealist themes of identity, chance, desire, psychic disorder, and moreover convulsive beauty. At the end of the novel, Breton explains that beauty is neither static, 'c'est-à-dire enfermée dans son « rêve de pierre »', nor dynamic, 'c'est-à-dire plus étourdie qu'un flocon dans la neige, c'est-à-dire résolue, de peur d'être mal étreinte, à ne se laisser jamais embrasser'.¹¹⁷ This visual image of a dream made of stone is a reference to the opening line ('Je suis belle, ô mortels! comme un rêve de pierre') of Charles Baudelaire's poem 'La Beauté' from *Fleurs du mal* (first published in 1857).¹¹⁸ He continues 'ni dynamique ni statique, la beauté je la vois comme je t'ai vue.'¹¹⁹ Beauty is neither fixed nor in flux but somewhere in-between, poised between movement and stillness. The indirect object pronoun 'te' refers to Nadja who

¹¹⁶ Ibid, pp.24-25. Breton and Éluard also define *le merveilleux* in relation to beauty in *Dictionnaire abrégé*, p.17.

¹¹⁷ André Breton, *Nadja* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1964), p.189.

¹¹⁸ Charles Baudelaire, *Les fleurs du mal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.38.

¹¹⁹ Breton, *Nadja*, p.189.

embodies the concept of beauty since in the narrative Breton is struck by the beauty of her eyes 'curieusement fardée'.¹²⁰ She is continually moving from one place to another in the city (and eventually descends into psychic disorder). This suggests that beauty is connected with desire and movement. Breton visualises surrealist beauty as 'un train qui bondit sans cesse dans la gare de *Lyon* et dont je sais qu'il ne va jamais partir, qu'il n'est pas parti.'¹²¹ This is an image of convulsive beauty, a beauty which provokes irregular jerks or jolts. It is an image which he returns to in *L'amour fou* and recalls Fernand Léger's *Ballet mécanique* (1924) ('le premier film sans scénario') which presents the mechanisms of a machine in motion.¹²²

Reflecting on beauty, Breton imagines 'Le cœur humain, beau comme un sismographe.'¹²³ A human heart is the source of life and a heart is associated with love. By comparing a human heart to a scientific instrument that registers and records the sudden movements of an earthquake, he suggests that the human heart is as beautiful as a machine or that the regular rhythm of the beating heart is as beautiful as the irregular tremors of an earthquake. Breton then presents a newspaper article which reports a plane lost at sea (île de Sable) as an example of convulsive beauty.¹²⁴ It is perhaps convulsive in the way that the terrible news shocks the reader. In the final line, Breton announces 'La beauté sera CONVULSIVE [Breton's emphasis] ou ne sera pas.'¹²⁵ The adjective 'convulsive' refers to the nature

¹²⁰ Ibid, p.72.

¹²¹ Ibid, p.189.

¹²² Fernand Léger, *Ballet mécanique* (1924).

¹²³ Breton, *Nadja*, p.190.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

of a convulsion which is a violent, involuntary contraction or spasm of the muscles. Foster rewords this as 'Beauty will be not only convulsive or will not be, but also compulsive or will not be.'¹²⁶ He elaborates that beauty is 'convulsive in its physical effect, compulsive in its psychological dynamic' and that it is therefore not only physical but psychological.¹²⁷ Moreover, the term 'convulsive' could be used to describe the process of reading *Nadja* which is illustrated with forty-eight photographs of people, places, objects, and drawings. The reader turns forwards or backwards a few pages to align the text with the image (or vice-versa) which disrupts the linear process of reading and mimics the jerking-jolting effect that Breton describes.

The association of beauty with movement is continued in *L'amour fou* (1937) which was written almost a decade later.¹²⁸ The opening chapter was first published as an article titled 'La beauté sera convulsive' in *Minotaure* in 1934.¹²⁹ In this article-chapter, Breton explains what he means by the term 'convulsive', 'Le mot « convulsive » [...] perdrait à mes yeux tout sens s'il était conçu dans le mouvement et non à l'expiration exacte de ce mouvement même.'¹³⁰ It does not describe an object in motion but the end point of the movement. Breton continues 'Il ne peut, selon moi, y avoir beauté – beauté convulsive – qu'au prix de l'affirmation du rapport

¹²⁶ Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, p.23. Marie-Claire Barnet also rewords this as 'la Beauté sera subversive ou ne sera pas'. See Barnet, *La femme cent sexes ou les genres communicants*, pp.123-153.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ André Breton, *L'amour fou* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1937).

¹²⁹ André Breton, 'La beauté sera convulsive', *Minotaure*, 5, 1934, pp.8-16.

¹³⁰ Breton, *L'amour fou*, p.15.

réciproque qui lie l'objet considéré dans son mouvement et dans son repos.'¹³¹ He seems to contradict himself here since he states that convulsive beauty does not denote the end of a movement but the relation between an object in motion and at rest. Nevertheless, it is clear that surrealist beauty is connected to kinetic energy. Breton regrets not illustrating the text with a photograph of 'une locomotive de grande allure qui eût été abandonnée durant des années au délire de la forêt vierge.'¹³² This is a powerful visual image which juxtaposes the potential speed of a train with the stillness of a forest to create an image of convulsive beauty. It also contrasts the machine and nature, the inanimate and the animate.

In addition to movement, convulsive beauty is associated with a confusion of the animate and the inanimate. Breton visualises himself in a cave in the Vaucluse observing the formation of stalactites, 'Il était presque inquiétant d'assister à la formation continue d'une telle merveille.'¹³³ He then imagines himself in the Grotte des Fées (also known as La Grotte Demoiselles) near Montpellier marvelling at the 'manteaux minéral gigantesque'.¹³⁴ These formations are examples of convulsive beauty since stalactites and stalagmites are formed from continually dripping water, the end point or result of a motion. He admires the natural formations of crystal and coral which conflate the inanimate and the animate, 'L'inanimé touche ici de si près l'animé que l'imagination est libre de se jouer à l'infini sur ces formes d'apparence

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid, p.16.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

toute minérale'.¹³⁵ The article is illustrated with six *gros-plan* photographs of coral and crystal specimens captioned 'Entre Les Haies de Mésanges Bleues de L'Aragonite et la « Grande Barrière » Australienne'.¹³⁶ This photomontage combines and conflates the animate coral and the inanimate mineral and the viewer is struck by their natural beauty and textures. The images of the coral recall Professor Pierre Aronnax's vivid descriptions of coral in Jules Verne's underwater narrative *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers* (1869-70).¹³⁷ Breton states that convulsive beauty cannot be evoked by 'les voies logiques ordinaires' but by the illogical and the irregular and illustrates this with an image created by *écriture automatique*.¹³⁸ In the article, Breton provides a photograph by Brassai (Gyula Halász (1899-1984)) captioned 'L'image, telle qu'elle se produit dans l'écriture automatique' (1931) of an electrical spark.¹³⁹ It is perhaps the spark of inspiration needed to begin writing automatically or the spark created when two incompatible images collide which ignites *le merveilleux*.

Breton divides convulsive beauty into three aesthetic categories - 'érotique-voilée', 'explosante-fixe', and 'magique-circonstancielle'.¹⁴⁰ In *L'amour fou*, he features a photograph captioned 'Explosante-fixe' and in the article, he features two additional photographs with the captions 'Érotique-voilée' and 'Magique-circonstancielle'. Perhaps Breton does not include these two images in the published

¹³⁵ Ibid, p.17.

¹³⁶ Breton, 'La beauté sera convulsive', p.11.

¹³⁷ Jules Verne, *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers* (Paris: Livre de Poche Jeunesse, 2014)

¹³⁸ Breton, *L'amour fou*, p.21.

¹³⁹ Breton, 'La beauté sera convulsive', p.10.

¹⁴⁰ Breton, *L'amour fou*, p.26.

volume to allow the reader to appeal to their imagination. ‘*Explosante-fixe*’ is a photograph taken by Man Ray in 1934 and depicts a female dancer in a choreographed frame.¹⁴¹ Her dress and raised arms, the use of light and dark, and the out-of-focus image all emphasise the explosiveness of the movement. In ‘*Érotique-voilée*’ (1933), a photograph also taken by Man Ray, a nude woman (the artist Oppenheim) stands behind the wheel of a printing press.¹⁴² Her female body which represents erotic desire is concealed by the wheel. The third photograph which was taken by Brassai in 1931 captioned ‘*Magique-circonstancielle*’ defamiliarises the familiar and the object (a sprouted potato) resembles a science fiction monster.¹⁴³ This category represents the magical or illusionary transformation of an object. Overall, Breton’s three categories associate convulsive beauty with energy (‘*explosante-fixe*’), the erotic (‘*érotique-voilée*’), and transformation (‘*magique-circonstancielle*’). Breton illustrates convulsive beauty in the visual image but how is it conveyed in text? I will explore this in my close readings of Prassinós’s and Carrington’s writings.

In the *Manifeste*, Breton relates that *le merveilleux* in literature has the potential to transform the ‘*genre inférieur*’ of the novel.¹⁴⁴ He dislikes the novel with its emphasis on description and use of stock images. He draws on Matthew G. Lewis’s (1775-1818) gothic novel *The Monk* (1796) as ‘*une preuve admirable*’ of its

¹⁴¹ Ibid, p.19. ‘*La beauté sera convulsive*’, p.8.

¹⁴² Ibid, p.15.

¹⁴³ Ibid, p.16.

¹⁴⁴ Breton, *Manifestes*, p.25.

potential.¹⁴⁵ Mabilie and Todorov also discuss *le merveilleux* in Lewis's works. Of *The Monk*, Breton states 'J'entends que ce livre n'exalte, du commencement à la fin, et le plus purement du monde, que ce qui de l'esprit aspire à quitter le sol [...] il constitue un modèle de justesse, et d'innocente grandeur.'¹⁴⁶ The narrative aspires to move above and beyond the real which is the essence of Surrealism. He admires the 'rien n'est impossible à qui sait oser' attitude of the novel and the logical role that the ghosts play.¹⁴⁷ Breton attempts to justify his seemingly arbitrary choice of text by explaining that he chose *The Monk* because 'la plupart des exemples que ces littératures auraient pu me fournir sont entachés de puérité, pour la seule raison qu'elles s'adressent aux enfants.'¹⁴⁸ This reveals that *le merveilleux* is present in children's books and aligns *le merveilleux* and childhood an idea that I will return to in chapter eight in a discussion of ageing. He argues that children who grow up reading books which narrate *le merveilleux* do not appreciate fairy tales as adults since they become indifferent to it. However, Breton seems to contradict himself since he acknowledges that there are fairy tales written for adults as well as children. This is evident in the subversive fairy tales of Prassinis and Carrington which are often dark and violent and therefore not suitable for children. In my thesis, I explore manifestations of *le merveilleux* in diverse literary works of prose and poetry. Surrealism began as a literary movement and so although Breton discusses *le merveilleux* in literature, he does not discuss it in art.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, p.26.

Breton states that 'Le merveilleux n'est pas le même à toutes les époques'.¹⁴⁹

It is not fixed but in flux and is flexible as it adapts to different situations. The idea that *le merveilleux* changes, adapts, and evolves over time and throughout history suggests that it cannot only be present in the novel and in fairy tales but in diverse genres and can also be extended to art. As a concept, *le merveilleux* has the extraordinary abilities to shape-shift and time-travel. I argue that the creative women associated with Surrealism were almost certainly aware of the surrealist *merveilleux* since it was at the heart of the movement. However, they did not write with the conscious aim of accessing or expressing it. As a scholar, I read their writings through the lens of *le merveilleux*. If *le merveilleux* has the ability to evolve, then the women artists and writers associated with Surrealism were able to mould albeit unconsciously their own visions of it and moreover create a version shaped by their own experiences, creative imagination, and artistic-literary innovations. Breton's statement conveys the relevance of *le merveilleux* to the twenty-first century and to the possibility of a modern-day marvellous. He adds 'il participe obscurément d'une sorte de révélation générale dont le détail seul nous parvient.'¹⁵⁰ Although *le merveilleux* will lead to the discovery of the extraordinary in the ordinary, only fragments of it are visible to the naked eye.

Breton lists examples of *le merveilleux* as 'les ruines romantiques, le mannequin moderne ou tout autre symbole propre à remuer la sensibilité humaine durant un temps.'¹⁵¹ It can be discovered in the historical or the modern, in

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

destruction or creation, and in the most unlikely of objects or places. Foster interprets that 'les *ruines romantiques*' evoke 'the space of the unconscious' and that 'le *mannequin moderne*' evokes 'its status as both intimate and alien'.¹⁵² He argues that what renders them marvellous is the way that 'each combines or conflates two opposed terms: in the ruin the natural and the historical, and in the mannequin the human and the nonhuman' which suggests that *le merveilleux* can be found in the collision of opposing states.¹⁵³

Breton's identification of 'le *mannequin moderne*' as an embodiment of *le merveilleux* is significant. The mannequin is an inanimate object which represents the animate; it is nonhuman yet represents the human. The figure of the mannequin therefore combines these opposing states. In the surrealist context, the mannequin alludes to Hans Bellmer's *poupées* which represent the dismemberment of and violence towards the female body.¹⁵⁴ The mannequin is a recurrent surrealist motif and featured as an art installation in the 1938 'Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme' in Paris.¹⁵⁵ One of the most commented on and photographed displays of the exhibition was the mannequin corridor-street which was lined on one side with sixteen mannequins. Each mannequin had been designed by a different artist or writer. Some press critics remarked 'that the Surrealists transcribed their innovative

¹⁵² Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, p.21.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Bellmer's photographs of the dismembered doll appeared in the surrealist review *Minotaure*, 6, 1935, pp.30-31.

¹⁵⁵ 'Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme', Galerie Beaux-Arts, Paris, 17 January – 22 February, 1938.

search for “convulsive beauty” and “the marvelous” in terms of display.¹⁵⁶ Perhaps the choice of the mannequin was to illustrate Breton’s earlier identification of it as an embodiment of *le merveilleux* and perhaps the role of the mannequin was to display it to the unsuspecting visitor. A mannequin is typically a model of the female human body and for the male Surrealists the female body was a source of sexual or erotic desire onto which they could project their own fantasies. This suggests an association between the female body, desire, and *le merveilleux*. I will discuss the notion of an embodied *merveilleux* in chapter seven in ways that will take the female body beyond a passive object seen through the male gaze. The mannequins represented the fetishisation of the female body and all but one of the individuals chosen to style them were men. The only female stylist was Sonia Mossé who remains a little-known figure. In fact, her name was omitted from the 1938 pseudo-dictionary *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme* which further illustrates the way that creative women were written out of the history of Surrealism.

The use of the mannequin in the 1938 exhibition raises the question how do you display *le merveilleux*? Both Kachur and Anabelle Gørgen draw on the metaphor of the butterfly collector or lepidopterist. In her essay, Gørgen questions how can one pin down its explosive presence and how can one collecting the marvellous avoid the pitfalls facing the butterfly collector?¹⁵⁷ A butterfly is difficult to catch and once caught and pinned in a display case its beauty diminishes. Its beauty is its

¹⁵⁶ Kachur, *Displaying the Marvelous*, p.23.

¹⁵⁷ Annabelle Gørgen, ‘Discovering, Collecting, Staging, Selling the Marvellous’, in *Surreal Encounters: Collecting the Marvellous*, ed. by Annabelle Gørgen and others (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 2016), p.26.

colourful markings and moreover its ability to fly. Once caught, what made the butterfly beautiful disappears. This raises the questions how do artists and writers capture or display *le merveilleux* in their creative oeuvre? How do Prassinis and Carrington present their versions of *le merveilleux* in their writings?

A second theory of the surrealist *merveilleux* can be read through Mabile's volume *Le miroir du merveilleux* (1940). Mabile (1904-1952) was a doctor, writer, and editor of the art-literary review *Minotaure*. In this volume, he explores manifestations of it through literary works with an interest in the ethnological, anthropological, and the magical. In the 1962 foreword titled 'Pont-levis', Breton writes favourably on Mabile and relates the importance of the volume to understanding 'l'esprit surréaliste', presenting *le merveilleux* as key to the surrealist spirit.¹⁵⁸ Mabile introduces *le merveilleux* as being buried beneath numerous interpretations of it.¹⁵⁹ He explains that by studying the term 'merveilleux', he will be able to explore the concept.¹⁶⁰ Whilst the adjective 'merveilleux' has lost its meaning, the noun has retained its significance.¹⁶¹ Similarly, the adjective and noun 'surreal' has lost its original meaning and is often used as a synonym for the fantastic and the bizarre. For Mabile, *le merveilleux* 'évoque l'ensemble des phénomènes extraordinaires et incroyables qui constituent les ressorts essentiels des récits fantastiques' and therefore denotes the extraordinary.¹⁶² He traces the etymological

¹⁵⁸ André Breton, 'Pont-levis' (May 1962), in Pierre Mabile, *Le miroir du merveilleux* (Paris: Les éditions du minuit, 1962), p.16.

¹⁵⁹ Mabile, *Le miroir du merveilleux*, p.18.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, p.20.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

root of the word 'merveilleux' to 'merveilles', which derives from the Latin 'mirabilia', to 'miroir'.¹⁶³ He discovers that 'miroir' belongs to a strange word group ('mirer, se mirer, admirer, admirable, merveille et ses dérivés miracle, mirage, enfin miroir') and that 'miroir' and 'merveilleux' are connected.¹⁶⁴ I will discuss the importance of the mirror to *le merveilleux* in Carrington's account *En bas* (1945) in chapter seven and in *Le cornet acoustique* (1974) in chapter eight.

Mabille reflects 'Où règne le merveilleux?' and questions whether it is imagined by the human mind which expresses it, assigns it a poetic and plastic form, and transforms it into a concrete object or whether it belongs to the outside world.¹⁶⁵ He questions whether we are capable of grasping it or whether our senses have been dulled by daily life.¹⁶⁶ He suggests that *le merveilleux* is at once internal and external ('N'est-il pas à la fois dans l'être et en dehors de lui'), that it can exist within the self and the other, in the body and the world around us.¹⁶⁷ I will return to Mabille's theory in chapter seven since these ideas are of great importance when considering Carrington's memoir *En bas*. As Mabille declares '*le merveilleux est partout*'; it is omnipresent.¹⁶⁸ However, as Breton observes, not everyone is open to it. Mabille states that a volume on *le merveilleux* cannot be written but that it can present 'une orientation définie'.¹⁶⁹ This suggests that *le merveilleux* cannot be

¹⁶³ Ibid, p.22.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, p.30.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, p.32.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, p.37.

pinned down and alludes to the metaphor of the butterfly collector; *le merveilleux* cannot be caught. Collani argues that Mabile's theory of the surrealist *merveilleux* 'trouve son expression la plus parfaite dans les productions littéraires de Gisèle Prassinos, de Leonora Carrington [...] dans leurs textes, nous ne retrouvons plus les repères de la vie quotidienne et moderne qui étaient pourtant fondamentaux dans le merveilleux surréaliste des années vingt.'¹⁷⁰ However, I argue that in their early writings, Prassinos and Carrington draw on the everyday and the familiar but render it unfamiliar and unstable. Throughout my thesis, I will draw on Breton's and Mabile's theories of the surrealist *merveilleux*, however, it is not my intention to confine Prassinos's and Carrington's writings to them.

A third theory of the *le merveilleux* can be found in Bulgarian theorist Todorov's (1939-2017) volume *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (1970) in which he defines three literary genres - 'le fantastique', 'l'étrange', and 'le merveilleux'.¹⁷¹ He argues that all three genres are connected and that a narrative moves from the genre of 'le fantastique' to 'l'étrange' or to 'le merveilleux'. He explains

S'il décide que les lois de la réalité demeurent intactes et permettent d'expliquer les phénomènes décrits, nous disons que l'œuvre relève d'un autre genre : l'étrange. Si, au contraire, il décide qu'on doit admettre de nouvelles lois de la nature, par lesquelles le phénomène peut être expliqué, nous entrons dans le genre du merveilleux.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ Collani, p.459.

¹⁷¹ Tzvetan Todorov, *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1970).

¹⁷² Ibid, p.46.

For Todorov, a narrative belongs to *le merveilleux* if at the end of it the events cannot be explained by reality but by the imaginary. Therefore, the fantastic is not an autonomous genre but is connected to 'l'étrange' and 'le merveilleux'. Todorov illustrates this with a diagram 'étrange pur / fantastique-étrange / fantastique-merveilleux / merveilleux pur'.¹⁷³ The genre of the fantastic is therefore linked to the marvellous. However, as Julien Levy remarks 'whereas Surrealism is fantastic, all fantasy is not Surrealist.'¹⁷⁴

It is interesting that Breton, Mabille, and Todorov all draw on the gothic novel. Todorov distinguishes two subgenres of the roman noir - the 'surnaturel expliqué' or 'l'étrange' and the 'surnaturel accepté' or 'merveilleux' and agrees with Breton that *le merveilleux* is present in the novels by Lewis.¹⁷⁵ Todorov assigns the three genres a temporal quality, 'le merveilleux correspond à un phénomène inconnu, encore jamais vu, à venir : donc à un futur' whereas 'l'étrange' corresponds to the past and 'le fantastique' to the present.¹⁷⁶ The idea that 'le merveilleux' refers to the future supports Breton's theory of a modern *merveilleux*. Both Todorov and Breton seem to agree that *le merveilleux* is present in diverse literary works and like Breton, Todorov aligns 'le merveilleux' with fairy tales, 'le conte de fées n'est qu'une des variétés du merveilleux'.¹⁷⁷ In order to define 'le merveilleux pur', Todorov identifies four subtypes - 'un merveilleux hyperbolique', 'le merveilleux exotique', 'le

¹⁷³ Ibid, p.49.

¹⁷⁴ Julien Levy, *Surrealism* (New York: The Black Sun Press, 1936), p.28.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, p.47.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, p.59.

merveilleux instrumental’, and ‘*le merveilleux scientifique*’ or science fiction.¹⁷⁸ These categories demonstrate its many different aspects. Todorov concludes his theory of the literary ‘*merveilleux*’ with a quotation from Mabille’s *Le miroir du merveilleux*, ‘le but réel du voyage merveilleux est [...] l’exploration plus totale de la réalité universelle.’¹⁷⁹ This exploration of a universal reality encompasses the imaginary since Surrealism was concerned with moving above and beyond reality to a ‘*sur-réalité*’. *Le réel* and *le surréel* are at the core of *le merveilleux*. This reference to Mabille’s volume suggests that Todorov’s theory is founded on the surrealist understanding of the concept. Collani observes, ‘Le merveilleux des surréalistes évolue dans la sphère de la vie réelle et quotidienne, en se différenciant de manière évidente de l’approche structurelle et générique proposée par [...] Tzvetan Todorov.’¹⁸⁰ For the Surrealists, *le merveilleux* was not a literary genre or category but the discovery of the extraordinary in the ordinary, the everyday.

For Breton, the surrealist *merveilleux* is connected to beauty or moreover convulsive beauty, it has the ability to evolve over time, and conflates opposites (the historical and the modern, the animate and the inanimate). Mabille’s theory of *le merveilleux* is that it is the extraordinary, at once internal and external, and that its explosive presence cannot be pinned down. For Todorov, it is a literary genre, a category which denotes the imaginary, the supernatural accepted, and looks to the future. Overall, I understand the surrealist *merveilleux* to be an expansive-elastic concept. It is the discovery of the extraordinary in the ordinary and moves above and

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, pp.60-62.

¹⁷⁹ Mabille, *Le miroir du merveilleux*, p.24. Cited in Todorov, p.62.

¹⁸⁰ Collani, p.109.

beyond the real to the realm of the surreal. In the following chapters, through close readings of Prassinós's and Carrington's writings, I will relate my interpretations of *le merveilleux* to their prose and poetry. Although the theories of *le merveilleux* discussed are all by men, it is not exclusively a male domain and is open to interpretations by both men and women. The creative women who worked in the context of Surrealism moulded their own versions and visions of it. I do not suggest that the concept itself is gendered (i.e. male) but that the Surrealists only considered it from a male point of view. There is no fixed criteria of what *le merveilleux* is in art or literature since it is not a static but a dynamic concept. Over the following pages, I seek to illustrate an alternative version of *le merveilleux* by women and to consider it from a female perspective. It is not my intention to demonstrate Breton's or Mabile's surrealist theories of *le merveilleux* in the writings of Prassinós or Carrington but to illuminate their own understandings of what it is, where it can be found, and how they present it in their works. I will explore how their vision of *le merveilleux* fits in and breaks with the male Surrealists' perception of it and how it extends what we know about this surrealist phenomenon.

Chapter one – Disentangling the identity of Prassinos from that of *femme-enfant*

‘Qui suis-je?’¹

Gisèle Prassinos was an artist and writer who worked in dialogue with Surrealism in the 1930s. She was born on 26 February 1920 in Istanbul, Turkey to a Greek father and an Italian mother (and died on 15 November 2015). Her father Lyssandre Prassinos was a professor of French and editor of the French art-literary review *Logos*. Her family, mother and father, brother, two aunts, grandmother and ‘faux grand-père français’, emigrated to France in 1922 to escape the hostilities between Turkey and Greece. Her father sold his library of over one hundred thousand volumes to pay for the journey to France.² They first moved to Puteaux before settling in Nanterre, a heavily industrialised inner-city suburb of Paris. In her autobiographical novel *Le temps n’est rien* (1958), Prassinos vividly describes Nanterre in the early 1920s as an area of uncultivated fields strewn with litter, pools of stagnant water, and tufts of grass ‘trop vite étouffées sous les pieds des enfants’.³ In Nanterre, to make a living, her erudite father ‘[a] dessin[é] des clous pour des catalogues’ while the women worked as seamstresses.⁴ Prassinos had an older brother named Mario (1916-1985) who came to play a decisive role in her

¹ Breton, *Nadja*, p.9.

² Cottenet-Hage, *Gisèle Prassinos ou le désir du lieu intime*, p.17.

³ Gisèle Prassinos, *Le temps n’est rien* ([Paris]: Plon, 1958), p.5.

⁴ Cottenet-Hage, *Gisèle Prassinos ou le désir du lieu intime*, p.18.

involvement with the surrealist group. Mario became a painter and has received more recognition than his sister arguably because of his medium (or gender) rather than being more talented than Gisèle. Together they produced the collaborative volume *Calamités des origines* (1937) written by Gisèle and illustrated by Mario.⁵ However, in an act of surrealist subversion, Mario's six drawings are commented on by Gisèle's short texts; the text illustrates the images. In 'Exquises esquisses by Gisèle and Mario Prassinos: The Craftswoman, the Writer and Her Brother', Marie-Claire Barnet focuses on the theme of the *cadavre exquis* in this collaborative volume and on the notion of conflict.⁶ As children, Gisèle and Mario adapted to their new surroundings better than their parents and would create 'des huttes d'indiens « empanachées de feuilles de marronniers »'.⁷ Growing up in this neglected neighbourhood taught them to appeal to the realm of their imagination.

In Paris, Prassinos studied at the communal school of Nanterre, the lycée Racine, and at the lycée of Saint-Germain-en-Laye. Between 1937 and 1954, she worked successively as a short-hand typist, a nursery teacher at École Active de St-Cloud, and as a secretary at an art gallery. She resumed writing after the Second World War. In 1974, she made 'bonshommes de bois' and tapestries which inspired

⁵ Jean-Mario Prassinos, *Calamités des origines : 6 dessins commentés par Gisèle Prassinos* (Paris: GLM, 1937).

⁶ Marie-Claire Barnet, 'Exquises esquisses by Gisèle and Mario Prassinos: The Craftswoman, the Writer and Her Brother', in *On Verbal / Visual Representation: Word & Image Interactions 4*, ed. by Martin Heusser and others (Amsterdam; New York, NY: Rodopi, 2005), pp.193-205.

⁷ Cottenet-Hage, *Gisèle Prassinos ou le désir du lieu intime*, p.19.

her novel *Brelin le frou ou le portrait de famille* (1975).⁸ She referred to her wooden figures, embroidery, tapestries, and her fabric collages or patchworks as her 'artisanat' or craft. Between 1945 and 1958, in collaboration with her husband Pierre Fridas (who she married in 1949), Prassinos translated many texts by Níkos Kazantzákis (1883-1957) from Greek into French. This confirms that Prassinos was able to understand Greek as well as French.

Prassinos was introduced to the surrealist circle at the age of fourteen in 1934. Her experimental writings were discovered by her brother who showed them to Henri Parisot (who he had met at the Sorbonne) which marked her introduction to the surrealist group. In a letter dated 25 September 1934 addressed to Mario, Parisot describes her writings as 'un véritable coup de foudre pour les surréalistes' which underscores the impact that they had on the group.⁹ As Makward and Cottenet-Hage observe 'Peu d'écrivains ont obtenu des surréalistes la consécration que Gisèle Prassinos a reçue avant quatorze ans.'¹⁰ She was invited to surrealist group meetings and was considered to be a model of the *femme-enfant* and embodiment of *écriture automatique*, and above all a surrealist child prodigy. However, a few years after the publication of *La sauterelle arthritique* in 1935, the Surrealists claimed that she had stopped writing, 'Breton s'est désintéressé. Il avait

⁸ Gisèle Prassinos, *Brelin le frou ou le portrait de famille* (Paris: Pierre Belfond, 1975).

⁹ *Correspondance d'Henri Parisot avec Mario et Gisèle Prassinos (1933-1938)*, ed. by Catherine Prassinos and Thierry Rye (Paris: Éditions Joëlle Losfeld, 2003), p.16.

¹⁰ Christiane P. Makward and Madeleine Cottenet-Hage, *Dictionnaire littéraire des femmes de langue française : De Marie de France à Marie NDiaye* (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 1996), p.480.

dit que ça ne durerait pas, que je cesserais d'écrire.'¹¹ Yet they were mistaken and Prassinos continued to write and publish texts up until and after the war. Perhaps they claimed that she had stopped writing since she no longer wrote automatically or perhaps she had outgrown her role as *femme-enfant*. Colvile observes that although Prassinos left the surrealist group in 1939, 'comme tant de femmes qui ont traversé le mouvement surréaliste, elle n'a jamais vraiment cessé de faire du surréalisme, malgré elle.'¹² The surrealist spirit of subversion remained with her.

Prassinos was invited to attend surrealist group meetings at the Café des Deux Magots (Saint-Germain-des-Prés, Paris) where she met Ernst, Carrington, Arp, and Bellmer. In an interview, she states that she only attended their group meetings three or four times and that she did not play an active role in their discussions.¹³ She also reveals that once she was asked to write a short story in front of the Surrealists to prove that she wrote the texts herself.¹⁴ In December 1939, she wrote a two-stanza poem titled 'En allant aux Deux Magots' which was later published in *L'homme au chagrin* (1962).¹⁵ There are two different drafts of this poem; the 1939 and 1941 drafts are the same whereas the 1940 one differs and was published in *L'homme au chagrin*.¹⁶ Writing on the 1940 version, the poem has a dark, pessimistic

¹¹ Renard.

¹² Colvile, *Scandaleusement d'elles*, p.244.

¹³ Renard.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Gisèle Prassinos, 'En allant aux Deux Magots', in *L'homme au chagrin* (Paris: GLM, 1962), p.32.

¹⁶ Gisèle Prassinos, 'En allant aux Deux Magots'. BHVP, fonds Gisèle Prassinos, [MS-FS-01-0214].

tone and begins 'J'habite l'histoire de jours indifférents' which suggests that the days are of little interest and of little importance to her. In 'Souvenirs surréalistes', Prassinos recalls 'Il y eut les rendez-vous au bistrot [sic, bistro] de la Place Blanche où je m'ennuyais beaucoup. En effet, je ne comprenais pas ce que l'on y disait.'¹⁷ This would explain the indifference that Prassinos expresses in the poem. Instead of remarking on the surrealist group discussions as one would expect, she observes 'Le feu les plats / seulement le feu et les plats' and waits for 'le soleil' or 'le brouillard'. This conveys the idea that she is not interested in or does not understand the Surrealists' conversations. In the second stanza, Prassinos imagines 'Le tort écrase mon cœur'. This metaphor and verb 'écraser' conveys the way that she was dulled by rather than inspired by their activities. She continues 'Sournois / je guette dimanche / toujours au bout de la semaine' as she personifies and threatens the day of the week. The verb 'écraser' combined with the adjective 'sournois' and verb 'guetter' all convey the dark tone of the text. Prassinos expresses no enjoyment at attending the surrealist group meetings and as Barnet observes she felt 'misplaced, exposed, as if in a play rehearsal when at the Place Blanche meetings'.¹⁸

Prassinos's texts were first published in the Belgian journal *Documents 34* in 1934 and in the French surrealist 'revue artistique et littéraire' *Minotaure* in 1935.¹⁹ Her texts published in *Documents 34* under the title 'Poèmes' are 'La sauterelle arthritique', 'Chevelure arrogante', 'Souillure sarcastique', and 'Description d'une

¹⁷ Gisèle Prassinos, 'Souvenirs surréalistes'. BHVP, fonds Gisèle Prassinos, [MS-FS-01-0029].

¹⁸ Barnet, 'Exquises esquisses by Gisèle and Mario Prassinos', in *On Verbal / Visual Representation*, ed. by Heusser and others, p.197.

¹⁹ Prassinos, 'Poèmes', *Documents 34* and 'Contes et Poèmes', *Minotaure*.

noce' along with Man Ray's photograph of Prassinos, and a drawing by her captioned 'Le refroidissement du globe terrestre'. Her texts published in *Minotaure* under the title 'Contes et Poèmes' are 'Tragique Fantasme', an untitled poem and story, 'La difficulté d'une ascension', 'Poème amoureux', 'Lotion capillaire', and 'Bloc'. In 1935, her first book *La sauterelle arthritique* was published with a frontispiece by Man Ray and a preface by Paul Éluard.²⁰ In 1976, she published *Trouver sans chercher (1934-1944)*, a collection of prose and poetry which she wrote during her 'période surréaliste'.²¹ Her early surrealist publications include *Une demande en mariage* (1935), *Quand le bruit travaille* (1936), *Facilité crépusculaire* (1937), *La lutte double* (1938), and *Le feu maniaque* (1939).²² However, she continued to write and publish prose and poetry throughout her life. Prassinos also wrote five novels (*Le temps n'est rien* (1958), *La voyageuse* (1959), *La confidente* (1962), *Le visage effleuré de peine* (1964), and *Le grand repas* (1966)). The most commented on narrative by Prassinos is *Brelin le frou* which marks her transition from writer to artist.²³ Over the following chapters, I will analyse a selection of her early surrealist writings from the collections *La sauterelle arthritique* (1935) and *Trouver sans chercher (1934-1944)* (1976).

²⁰ Prassinos, *La sauterelle arthritique*.

²¹ Gisèle Prassinos, *Trouver sans chercher (1934-1944)* (Paris: Editions Flammarion, 1976).

²² Gisèle Prassinos, *Une demande en mariage* (Paris: Éditions G.L.M., 1935), *Quand le bruit travaille* (Paris: G.L.M., 1936), *Facilité crépusculaire* (Paris: René Debresse Éditeur, 1937), *La lutte double* (Paris: Librairie GLM, 1938), and *Le feu maniaque* (Paris: Robert J. Godet, 1939).

²³ Prassinos, *Brelin le frou*. See Madeline Cottenet-Hage, 'Humour, sexe et fantaisie, *Brelin le frou* ou *Le portrait de famille* de Gisèle Prassinos', in *La femme s'entête*, ed. by Colville and Conley, pp.172-200.

The themes present in Prassinos's early writings are diverse and subversive and encompass the surrealist themes of 'non-sens, fantastique, onirisme, humour noir, violence des images, pastiches et conversations absurdes, collages'.²⁴ I would agree with Jean-Paul Clébert that 'Certains textes de Gisèle Prassinos font mal à lire, comme font mal à voir certains tableaux surréalistes'.²⁵ This is perhaps one of the reasons why her writings are not as popular as Carrington's. However, the reader must look beyond the familiarity of a narrative and at the unfamiliar compulsive-convulsive images created. Her early texts allow us access to a child's world and are witness to a child's imagination. They appeal to the wide margins of the reader's imagination, encourage the reader to look at the world differently, and illustrate the way that 'l'esprit qui plonge dans le surréalisme revit avec exaltation la meilleure part de son enfance.'²⁶ Other surrealist themes present in her writings include metamorphosis and a juxtaposition of reality and the dream to form 'réalités contradictoires'.²⁷

There are a number of seminal studies dedicated to Prassinos and her creative oeuvre, for example Enschedé and Kieffer's volume titled *À l'écoute de Gisèle Prassinos : une voix grecque* (1986) and Cottenet-Hage's *Gisèle Prassinos ou le désir*

²⁴ Makward and Cottenet-Hage, *Dictionnaire littéraire des femmes de langue française*, p.480.

²⁵ Jean-Paul Clébert, *Dictionnaire du surréalisme* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1996), p.487.

²⁶ Breton, *Manifestes*, p.52.

²⁷ A. Clerval, *La quinzaine littéraire*, August 1967. Cited in Clébert, *Dictionnaire du surréalisme*, p.488.

du lieu intime (1988).²⁸ The latter is an exploration of Prassinos's oeuvre and the themes present in her writings in which she analyses a number of Prassinos's early texts but her comments are often brief.²⁹ Annie Richard's *Le monde suspendu de Gisèle Prassinos* (1977) inspired and became the catalogue to the exhibition of Prassinos's tapestries held at the BHVP in 1998.³⁰ The objective of this exhibition was to showcase the originality and creativity of her plastic oeuvre.³¹ She also wrote *Le bible surréaliste de Gisèle Prassinos* (2004) which is a commentary on a number of Prassinos's tapestries.³² In addition to these two publications, Richard has written a number of essays on Prassinos and her writings.³³ Barnet's volume *La femme cent sexes ou les genres communicants : Deharme, Mansour, Prassinos* (1998) is also an invaluable study on the artist-writer and analyses her writings under the surrealist themes of 'érotique voilée', 'subversion', 'beauté subversive', 'bestiaire fantastique',

²⁸ Enschedé and Kieffer, *À l'écoute de Gisèle Prassinos : une voix grecque*. Cottenet-Hage, *Gisèle Prassinos ou le désir du lieu intime*.

²⁹ Cottenet-Hage, *Gisèle Prassinos ou le désir du lieu intime*.

³⁰ Annie Richard, *Le Monde suspendu de Gisèle Prassinos* (Paris: HB Éditions, 1997).

³¹ See the exhibition press pack which forms part of the *dossier documentaire* on Prassinos held at the Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), [DOS PRA].

³² Annie Richard, *La bible surréaliste de Gisèle Prassinos* ([Bierges, Belgium]: Editions Mols, 2004), p.12.

³³ Annie Richard, 'Gisèle Prassinos ou la Révolution surréaliste de l' « écolière ambiguë »' <http://melusine-surrealisme.fr/wp/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Annie-Richard-Gisele-Prassinos.pdf> [accessed 6 March 2019] and 'L'allégorie de la femme-enfant alias Gisèle Prassinos comme aporie de genre dans le surréalisme', *Itinéraires (Genres et avant-gardes)*, 1 (2012), 147-159 <https://journals.openedition.org/itineraires/1314> [accessed 10 August 2019].

and 'amour fou'.³⁴ The volume *Correspondance d'Henri Parisot avec Mario et Gisèle Prassinos (1933-1938)* (2003) is a collection of one hundred and four letters sent by Parisot to Mario and Gisèle between 1933 and 1938.³⁵ These documents provide an invaluable insight into the circumstances surrounding Prassinos and the publication of her writings.

In *Correspondance*, out of the one hundred and four letters, only five of them are addressed directly to Gisèle (including one which is addressed to both her and her brother). Mario is assigned the role of his sister's spokesperson. This raises the question why did Parisot not write to Gisèle? If she was able to draft surrealist texts, then she was capable of replying to his letters. Perhaps Parisot did not correspond directly with Gisèle since she was a child when he first met her. Or perhaps it was a question of gender and to preserve her role as a passive *femme-enfant*. Or perhaps the letters addressed to Gisèle, like the written replies by herself and her brother, have not yet been rediscovered.

Prassinos's early writings were considered as surrealist and were published in Vítězslav Nezval's Czech journal *Surrealismus* (1936), Read's *Surrealism* (1936), and Julien Levy's volume of the same title (1936).³⁶ In this volume, Levy lists Prassinos among the 'outstanding newcomers' to Surrealism and refers to her as 'half surrealist-child, half child-surrealist' which presents her as a mythic hybrid

³⁴ Barnet, *La femme cent sexes*.

³⁵ *Correspondance*, ed. by Prassinos and Rye (Paris: Éditions Joëlle Losfeld, 2003).

³⁶ Gisèle Prassinos, 'Černý den', 'Rozhovor', *Surrealismus*, ed. by Vítězslav Nezval (Praha: Jozef Janda, 1936), pp.17-18, 'Souillure sarcastique', in *Surrealism*, ed. by Read, 'Arrogant Hair', trans. by Fabien Lloyd in Levy, *Surrealism*, pp.174-176.

creature.³⁷ Her writings also appeared in a number of journals and reviews in the 1930s which demonstrates the popularity of her writings.³⁸ Five of Prassinos's texts were included in Jean-Louis Bédouin's anthology *La poésie surréaliste* (1964) and nine of her poems on writing are featured in *Elles: A Bilingual Anthology of Modern French Poetry by Women* (1995).³⁹

Gisèle Prassinos's identity and legacy have come to be represented by a photograph taken by Man Ray in 1934.⁴⁰ Man Ray (Emmanuel Radinski) (1890-1976) was a 'peintre pré-surréaliste et surréaliste' and photographer.⁴¹ The photograph, captioned 'Gisèle Prassinos présente ses poèmes' depicts the fourteen-year-old schoolgirl reading to the surrealist group. Six male Surrealists, Mario Prassinos, Parisot, Benjamin Péret, René Char, Breton, and Éluard have gathered around her. Prassinos wears a black dress with a white collar and gazes down at the manuscripts she holds which gives the impression that she is reading from them. The lamp on the shelf behind her casts her into the surrealist spotlight as a *femme-enfant* and embodiment of *écriture automatique*. The members of the surrealist group are all

³⁷ Levy, p.28.

³⁸ See Gisèle Prassinos, 'Chevelure arrogante', *Jeune Europe*, September 1935, p.8, 'Une chute des rêves', 'Transformation', and 'La naissance', *Cahiers G.L.M.*, 1, May 1936, pp.8-13, 'Réclame', *Feuillets inutiles*, 19, 1936, no page number.

³⁹ Jean-Louis Bédouin, *La poésie surréaliste* (Paris: Editions Seghers, 1964), pp.292-296. The only other woman writer featured is Joyce Mansour. *Elles: A Bilingual Anthology of Modern French Poetry by Women*, ed. by Martin Sorrell (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1995), pp.158-171.

⁴⁰ Man Ray, *Gisèle Prassinos Reading her Poems to the Surrealists* (1934) <https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/43480/gisèle-prassinos-reading-her-poems-surrealists> [accessed 9 July 2019].

⁴¹ Breton and Eluard, *Dictionnaire abrégé*, p.16.

dressed smartly in suits which presents a formal occasion. Éluard poses with a cigarette and Parisot holds a number of papers which are perhaps Prassinós's manuscripts awaiting publication. Their gaze is directed at Prassinós which suggests that they are fully engaged in and enchanted by her texts.

It is worth noting that there are three different versions of this photograph. In one version, similar to the image discussed, Breton looks away from Prassinós with his hand positioned on his chin as if he is absorbed in her text. Another version shows the Surrealists studying copies of the text that she is reading. Their gaze is directed at the papers and not at Prassinós which presents the idea that they are more interested in her texts as exercises in *écriture automatique* than in her as a *femme-enfant*. Breton was in possession of all three versions of the photograph which were advertised in the catalogue to the infamous 'André Breton, 42, rue Fontaine' auction at the Hôtel Drouot in 2003.⁴² The first version of the photograph discussed was listed for an impressive twelve to fifteen thousand euros.⁴³ He was also in possession of numerous books by Prassinós and her manuscripts which demonstrates his appreciation of her experimental writings.⁴⁴ This recognition and appreciation of Prassinós by Breton suggests changing attitudes by the surrealist circles to her as a writer.

⁴² *André Breton, 42, rue Fontaine (15 et 17 avril 2003 (Photographies))* (Paris: Calmels Cohen, 2003), p.73, p.168, and p.249.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p.73.

⁴⁴ *André Breton, 42, rue Fontaine (7 et 9 avril 2003 (Livres II))* (Paris: Calmels Cohen, 2003), pp.97-100. *André Breton, 42, rue Fontaine (11 et 12 avril 2003 (Manuscrits))* (Paris: Calmels Cohen, 2003), pp.160-161.

In the preface to *Le rêve*, written in 1947, Prassinos recalls the day that the photograph was taken. One Sunday, wearing a dress sewn especially for the occasion by her two aunts, she was taken to Man Ray's apartment. This suggests that her family were aware of the importance of this opportunity to be photographed with the surrealist group to her future career as a writer. She tells us that Breton and his wife Simone, Éluard, Péret, Char, and Man Ray were all present. It is interesting to note that Breton's wife was there since she does not appear in the photograph. Perhaps she was omitted because the Surrealists did not consider her as a member of the group. This recalls the cropping of the front row of women from the 1936 surrealist group photograph taken at the 'International Surrealist Exhibition' in London (see introduction). The way that Prassinos recalls this scene with great detail underlines the significance of this day. Prassinos remembers,

On me fit asseoir et on me regarda. Ils dirent des choses que je ne comprenais pas mais qui me remplissaient de confusion parce que je devinais qu'il s'agissait de moi. On me demanda de lire un de mes textes à haute voix. Ils l'écoutèrent tous d'un air recueilli, sans un mot, sans un geste, les yeux fixés sur moi. Ils m'impressionnaient tant que ma voix tremblait, s'éraillait et menaçait de s'éteindre au milieu de chaque phrase.⁴⁵

The fact that she did not understand them and the way that they spoke *about* her in her presence and not *to* her implies that they did not consider her as an equal member of the group but as an object of interest. As Susan Rubin Suleiman observes

⁴⁵ Gisèle Prassinos, *Le rêve* (Paris: Fontaine, 1947), pp.11-12.

Prassinos 'was less a member of the group than a "child prodigy"'.⁴⁶ The asyndetic list ('Ils l'écoutèrent tous d'un air recueilli, sans un mot, sans un geste, les yeux fixés sur moi') conveys the intensity of the scene and the verbs 's'érailler' and 's'éteindre' convey the way that she felt overwhelmed by the situation.

Prassinos recounts the moment that the photograph was taken, 'Il fallut prendre des attitudes très naturelles, ce qui était difficile. On changeait de place constamment, calculant la position d'un coude sous un menton, d'un pied qui devait ou non se voir, etc... Moi, je n'osais bouger, raide, avec un papier que je devais faire semblant de lire, entre les mains.'⁴⁷ This reveals the extent to which the photograph was staged to present a certain image of Prassinos and the surrealist group.

Afterwards Man Ray led her upstairs to take her portrait. She recalls that the application of make-up ('cette marque attirante et paralysante') made her feel uncomfortable and that she felt intimidated by the futuristic studio lights which she likens to the robots in H.G. Wells's (1866-1946) science fiction novels.⁴⁸ The role of the make-up was to make her resemble the neither woman nor child *femme-enfant*.⁴⁹ This portrait was reproduced in the original edition of Breton's *Anthologie* (1940).⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics, and the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, MA; London, England: Harvard University Press, 1990), p.31.

⁴⁷ Prassinos, *Le rêve*, p.12.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p.13 and p.12.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p.13.

⁵⁰ Breton, *Anthologie* (1940), no page number.

The group photograph formed the frontispiece to *La sauterelle arthritique* (1935).⁵¹ The image functions as a visual introduction to the young writer. Richard states that ‘la présence de la photo dans [...] *La Sauterelle arthritique* [...] contribue pour une grande part à construire la réception de l’œuvre. Loin de mettre sur la voie de l’identité singulière du « qui suis-je ? », on est dans « les femmes-fantômes du surréalisme »’.⁵² The image makes it difficult to disentangle her identity and her writings from the figure of the *femme-enfant*. This photograph has been widely reproduced in all studies on Prassinos including Richard’s *Le monde suspendu* and *La bible surréaliste*.⁵³ It also forms the cover image of Cottenet-Hage’s *Gisèle Prassinos ou le désir du lieu intime* and that of *Correspondance*.⁵⁴ The image plays a significant role in her legacy and has been displayed at many exhibitions including ‘Surreal Encounters: Collecting the Marvellous’. Bequeathed to the gallery by Keiller in 1995, the photograph was displayed as an image that captures the surrealist *merveilleux*. Prassinos as *femme-enfant* embodies *le merveilleux* and her writings as exercises in *écriture automatique* are a way of accessing it. Unfortunately, this photograph is omitted from the otherwise comprehensive exhibition catalogue, its significance

⁵¹ Prassinos, *La sauterelle arthritique*.

⁵² Annie Richard, ‘Gisèle Prassinos ou la Révolution surréaliste de l’« écolière ambiguë »’ <http://melusine-surrealisme.fr/wp/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Annie-Richard-Gisele-Prassinos.pdf> [accessed 6 March 2019]. See Georgiana M.M. Colville, ‘Les femmes-fantômes du surréalisme’, in *L’entrée en Surréalisme* ([Paris]: Éditions Phénix, 2004), ed. by Natalie Limat-Letellier and others, pp.155-171.

⁵³ Richard, *Le monde suspendu*, p.25 and p.31 and *La bible surréaliste*, p.12.

⁵⁴ Cottenet-Hage, *Gisèle Prassinos ou le désir du lieu intime* and *Correspondance*, ed. by Prassinos and Rye.

overlooked.⁵⁵ Not only has this photograph been overlooked but Prassinos's place in it has also on occasion been overshadowed.

In the 'Courrier des lecteurs' section of *Le monde télévision* issued on 19 April 2003, Richard writes a response to an article published the previous week.⁵⁶ She explains that the article was dedicated to a film titled *André Breton, malgré tout* (2005) directed by Fabrice Maze and was illustrated by Man Ray's photograph. She tells us of her astonishment that whilst the caption listed the names of the men present in the photograph, Prassinos's name was not recorded. Her name, the *raison d'être* of the image, was omitted. This omission of her name reduces her to an 'accessoire, transparente, sans nom'.⁵⁷ She has become irrelevant and inconsequential. Richard congratulates the article for illustrating the way that creative women associated with Surrealism are overlooked and the difficulty in bringing to light their active role in the movement.⁵⁸ This highlights the importance of my thesis in giving voice to and bringing women's surrealist writings to the foreground.

The photograph has both a positive and negative impact on Prassinos's identity and legacy. On the one hand, Prassinos is presented as an autonomous writer and a creative individual. Moreover, it is thanks to this image which has been widely reproduced that we know of Prassinos and her oeuvre. In fact, this

⁵⁵ *Surreal Encounters*, ed. by Görge and others.

⁵⁶ Annie Richard 'Pour Gisèle Prassinos', 'Courrier des lecteurs', *Le monde télévision*, 19 April 2003, page number not known.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

photograph inspired Cottenet-Hage to research the identity of the adolescent and the texts she was reading that day.⁵⁹ However, on the other hand, Prassinis is presented as a *femme-enfant*, 'l'écolière ambiguë', and as an embodiment of *écriture automatique*. She is a model of surrealist tropes and theories. The widespread reproduction of this photograph has served to circulate the image of Prassinis as the Surrealists saw her and not as how she saw herself. In fact, in the preface to *Le rêve*, Prassinis describes herself as 'deux personnes' – as 'Gisèle Prassinis-imprimée [...] et moi, qui n'avait rien à voir avec « la jeune poétesse » assez intimidante'.⁶⁰ She assigns herself two seemingly incompatible identities (from her point of view), two realities as a published writer and a fourteen-year-old schoolgirl. Her sense of self has become destabilised.

In addition to *femme-enfant* and an embodiment of *écriture automatique*, in the introduction to Prassinis in his *Anthologie* (1940), Breton assigns her multiple identities. He first identifies her as a *femme-enfant*, 'Ne reste plus à dresser sur l'horizon de l'humour noir que ce que Dali a appelé le « monument impérial à la femme-enfant »'.⁶¹ This is a reference to Salvador Dalí's painting *Monument impérial à la femme-enfant* (1929). Dalí ('peintre, poète, théoricien surréaliste depuis 1929') later identified the *femme-enfant* of the title as Gala (Elena Ivanovna Diakonova, 1894-1982) who was his muse and later his wife.⁶² She is present in the icons of the kneeling skeletal figure in the lower right-hand corner, the female buttocks in the

⁵⁹ Cottenet-Hage, *Gisèle Prassinis ou le désir du lieu intime*, p.9.

⁶⁰ Prassinis, *Le rêve*, p.14.

⁶¹ Breton, *Anthologie* (1940), p.254.

⁶² Breton and Éluard, *Dictionnaire abrégé*, p.9.

centre of the phallic-shaped rock, and the female bust emerging from the flower on the left.⁶³ One can draw a parallel between Dalí's identification of Gala as *femme-enfant* and Breton's presentation of Prassinós as this mythic figure.

Having identified Prassinós as *femme-enfant*, Breton then presents her as a literary character. Drawing on William Shakespeare's tragedy *Romeo and Juliet* (1597), Breton states 'J'y mettrais quatorze de mes dents, dirait la nourrice shakespearienne, qu'elle n'avait pas encore quatorze ans quand il nous fut donné de l'entendre pour la première fois'.⁶⁴ This is based on the nurse's comment on Juliet's age in act 1, scene 3, 'I'll lay fourteen of my teeth, and yet to my teen be it spoken, I have but four, she's not fourteen.'⁶⁵ Here, Breton alludes to the first time that he met Prassinós and to Man Ray's photograph. He continues, 'c'était aussi la reine Mab, la sage-femme entre les fées'.⁶⁶ It is in act 1, scene 4 that Romeo's cousin Benvolio asks 'Queen Mab, what's she?' to which Mercutio, Romeo's close friend, replies 'She is the fairies' midwife'.⁶⁷ For Breton, Prassinós is 'la reine Mab, la sage-femme entre les fées', a mythic figure who visits the dreams of men while they sleep. She is a muse whose role is to inspire the male Surrealists. Although Breton mentions her unique position in the *Anthologie* as the youngest writer, he does not mention her position as the only woman writer in the volume. These references to

⁶³ Ian Gibson, *The Shameful Life of Salvador Dalí* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997), p.259.

⁶⁴ Breton, *Anthologie* (1940), p.254. In his *Manifeste* (1924), Breton lists Shakespeare as among those who he considers as Surrealists (p.37).

⁶⁵ William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. by Jill L. Levenson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.171.

⁶⁶ Breton, *Anthologie* (1940), p.254.

⁶⁷ Shakespeare, p.138.

Prassinos's age ('femme-enfant', 'elle n'avait pas encore quatorze ans', 'elle parût d'une génération en retard sur les auteurs qui la précèdent ici immédiatement') become somewhat repetitive and suggest that this is all that he sees in her.

In addition to identifying Prassinos as Queen Mab, Breton states, 'C'est la « jeune chimère » de Max Ernst, c'est l'écolière ambiguë que, sous le titre « L'écriture automatique », présente une couverture de *La Révolution surréaliste*.'⁶⁸ *Jeune chimère* (1921) is the title of a collage by Max Ernst. It depicts a human-object hybrid figure in the style of a *cadavre exquis*. The lower half of the figure is composed of a young girl wearing a dress and shoes fastened with ribbons whereas the upper half of the figure is that of a strange object which resembles a telescope. Perhaps this hybrid figure is Alice from Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* in which Alice describes herself as shutting up and opening out like a telescope on drinking a magic potion and eating a cake respectively.⁶⁹ Here, Breton alludes to Prassinos as an Alice figure. He also identifies her as 'l'écolière ambiguë'; the adjective 'ambiguë' suggests that her identity is difficult to pin down. He also presents Prassinos as an embodiment of *écriture automatique* and refers to the photograph on the front cover of the combined ninth-tenth issue of the journal *La révolution surréaliste* dated 1 October 1927.⁷⁰ It depicts a woman dressed as a schoolgirl sat at a child's desk. However, the female figure is not Prassinos since she was born in 1920 and would have only been seven years old when the issue was printed. I will discuss this photograph in more detail in relation to *écriture automatique* in chapter two.

⁶⁸ Breton, *Anthologie* (1940), p.254.

⁶⁹ Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (London: Harper Press, 2010), pp.6-10.

⁷⁰ *La révolution surréaliste*, 9-10, 1 October 1927, no page number.

Breton assigns Prassinos various identities of '*femme-enfant*', Queen Mab, 'jeune chimère', 'l'écolière ambiguë', and an embodiment of *écriture automatique*. However, he does not identify her as a writer which is her most important role. He does cite an extract from her short story 'Tragique fantasme' (c.1935) and comments on her unique tone (see chapter two). However, he seems more interested in Prassinos as a model of the surrealist trope of *femme-enfant* and theory of *écriture automatique* than in her creative writings. Breton's introduction to Prassinos first formed the introduction to her collection *Le feu maniaque* (1939).⁷¹ This is a somewhat strange introduction since Breton assigns her multiple mythic identities which overshadow her identity as a writer. It anticipates Breton's introduction to Carrington as a witch in his *Anthologie* (1950) and Ernst's introduction to her as a horse in his preface to 'La maison de la peur' (see chapter five).

In *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme* (1938), Breton and Éluard identify Prassinos as '« Alice II ». Poète surréaliste.'⁷² Alice refers to the fictional character in Carroll's children's literary classics *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and its sequel *Through the Looking Glass* (1871). The Surrealists admired his writings and in *Dictionnaire abrégé*, he is defined in relation to Alice, 'qu'était devenue la liberté humaine? Elle résidait toute entière dans les frêles mains d'Alice'.⁷³ This is interesting since in his essay 'Limits not Frontiers of Surrealism', Breton declares that

⁷¹ Prassinos, *Le feu maniaque*, pp.9-10.

⁷² Breton and Eluard, *Dictionnaire abrégé*, p.22. Leonora Carrington was not included in the *Dictionnaire* which is interesting since two of her paintings were exhibited at the 1938 Paris 'Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme'.

⁷³ *Ibid*, p.6.

Surrealism is the only intellectual effort on an international scale which 'holds out for the liberation of the human spirit.'⁷⁴ The surrealist objective to free the human spirit rests in the hands of Prassinós as Alice. Prassinós's hands are not frail but strong and allow her to write imaginative prose and poetry. Writing on *Through the Looking Glass*, Mabilles states 'Alice, par le jeu des suppositions, par la manœuvre désagrégeante [sic] de la logique, parvient à détruire les limites du sens commun, elle se construit alors un monde merveilleux.'⁷⁵ The adjective 'désagrégeante' is a neologism and derives from the verb 'désagréger' meaning to break up logic in this case. Therefore, Prassinós as Alice is able to enter a world the other side of the mirror which is perhaps *le merveilleux*. Before discussing Prassinós as 'Alice II', it is interesting that Prassinós is characterised as 'poète surréaliste' and not 'poétesse surréaliste'. The feminine noun 'poétesse' is considered as pejorative ('a ridiculous word, [...] synonymous with foolish innocence, nature [...] or old-lady respectability') and so referring to her as 'poète' implies a level of respect.⁷⁶ It also confirms that Breton and Éluard considered her as a surrealist writer.

Breton and Éluard present Prassinós as the successor ('Alice II') of Carroll's literary character and as a real life Alice. In 'Surrealism's Curiosity: Lewis Carroll and the *Femme-Enfant*', Catriona McAra identifies the Alice figure as the *femme-*

⁷⁴ André Breton, 'Limits not Frontiers of Surrealism', in *Surrealism*, ed. by Read, p.99.

⁷⁵ Mabilles, *Le miroir du merveilleux*, p.24.

⁷⁶ Xavière Gauthier, 'Is there such a thing as women's writing?', in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (Hertfordshire: The Harvester Press, 1981), p.161.

enfant.⁷⁷ Alice is a literary character who exists in the pages of Carroll's novels whereas the *femme-enfant* is a mythical figure. However, they are similar in that both are girls or young women with the ability to access their unconscious. This raises the question why did the Surrealists identify Prassinos as 'la nouvelle Alice'? First, it is necessary to consider the character of Alice and what she represents. Alice is a curious child of school age. In the untitled poem which forms the preface to the novel, she is described as a 'dream-child' since her adventures in Wonderland are those of a daydream.⁷⁸ It recalls the *femme-enfant* since, like a 'dream-child', the *femme-enfant* is in touch with her unconscious. In the opening pages, Alice follows the White Rabbit down a rabbit hole without thinking and finds herself in 'a land Of wonders wild and new'.⁷⁹ In Wonderland, Alice experiences a number of strange adventures, she meets the hookah-smoking Caterpillar, the vanishing Cheshire Cat, the Mad Hatter and the March Hare and plays a nonsense game of croquet with live hedgehogs as balls and flamingos as mallets. In this imaginary land anything is possible. Throughout her time in Wonderland, Alice is not afraid to make her voice heard. She speaks up when she does not understand and when she disagrees with others. Prassinos similarly makes her voice heard through her writings.

Perhaps the Surrealists identified Prassinos as 'la nouvelle Alice' because when they first discovered her she was fourteen years old. Or perhaps the Surrealists

⁷⁷ Catriona McAra, 'Surrealism's Curiosity: Lewis Carroll and the *Femme-Enfant*', *Papers of Surrealism*, 9 (2011)

https://www.research.manchester.ac.uk/portal/files/63517393/surrealism_issue_9.pdf
[accessed 8 February 2019].

⁷⁸ Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, no page number.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

identified her imagination with Alice's wild and wondrous one. Alice enters Wonderland in her dream whereas Prassinós creates a real-imagined world through her writings. Moreover, the Surrealists believed that Prassinós could transcribe her unconscious thoughts through *écriture automatique*. It is likely that the Surrealists identified the theme of nonsense in Prassinós's writings with that in Carroll's *Alice* novels. However, they did not liken her to the author but to the character of Alice. Carrington, like Prassinós, was also identified as an 'Alice' figure. In a painting titled *Alice in 41* (1941), Ernst depicts a nude female figure wearing a heavy cloak.⁸⁰ The woman in the painting is Carrington who Ernst identifies as Alice. Therefore, the label 'Alice' was not only applied to Prassinós but to other women associated with Surrealism. On the one hand, the identification of Prassinós (and Carrington) as Alice is positive since the character has an unrivalled imagination. However, on the other hand, Alice is a fictional, imagined character whereas Prassinós is a real living person. The trope of Alice clearly overshadows her identity as a writer. In Carroll's novels, Alice does not grow up and remains a child. Perhaps the Surrealists wanted Prassinós to remain to child forever since when she grew up and no longer wrote in an automatic way they were no longer interested in her. As Richard states 'Pour les surréalistes, elle restera à jamais *Alice II*, sans devenir d'écrivain'.⁸¹ However, Prassinós could not remain an Alice figure forever.

In conclusion, Prassinós was assigned multiple identities such as *femme-enfant*, an embodiment of *écriture automatique*, 'la reine Mab', 'jeune chimère',

⁸⁰ Max Ernst, *Alice in 41* (1941) <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/38542> [accessed 7 February 2019].

⁸¹ Richard, 'La légende dorée', in *Merveilleux et surréalisme*, ed. by Limat-Letellier, p.234.

'écolière ambiguë', and 'Alice II'. These identities mask her individual one as an autonomous writer. Although Prassinós was first identified as a *femme-enfant*, I acknowledge that there are changing reactions by the surrealist circle to her as a writer. The widespread reproduction of Man Ray's (in)famous photograph of Prassinós reading to the Surrealists in publications and exhibitions serves to reinforce these mythic identities. However, I am aware that if we do not use this photograph, then what do we show? Her individual identity is buried beneath these mythic ones which conflate the real and the imaginary. Just as Breton opens his novel *Nadja* (1928), we can imagine Prassinós questioning 'Qui suis-je?'.⁸² Her own identity has become entangled in a web of surrealist tropes and theories. Over the following chapters, through original close readings of her writings, I seek to disentangle her identity as a writer from that of *femme-enfant* or Alice and *écriture automatique*.

⁸² Breton, *Nadja*, p.9.

Chapter two – An alternative version of surrealist *écriture automatique*

‘Ces saletés sont magnifiques’¹

Written automatically, this phrase can be read as a definition of *écriture automatique* since unconscious thoughts (‘Ces saletés’) which are often cast aside in favour of conscious ones are now treasured (‘sont magnifiques’). It is the opening line of an untitled poem by Prassinós published in the sixth issue of the art-literary review *Minotaure* in 1935.² In the foreword to *Le rêve* (1947), Prassinós confirms that she wrote these words ‘machinalement’ or automatically.³ *Écriture automatique* is an experimental surrealist way of writing. The Surrealists considered Prassinós’s writings to be exercises in this technique and this was the main reason why they were interested in her. In this chapter, I will outline the surrealist theory of *écriture automatique* in Breton’s *Manifeste du surréalisme* (1924) and article ‘Le Message Automatique’ (1930), not forgetting Breton and Philippe Soupault’s collaborative volume *Les Champs magnétiques* (1920). I will then discuss Prassinós’s thoughts on *écriture automatique* drawing on texts written by and interviews with the writer before analysing four of her early surrealist writings. Published in her collection *La sauterelle arthritique* (1935), the four texts are - ‘La sauterelle arthritique’, ‘Une conversation’, ‘Le Spectre de Châteaubriand’, and ‘Chevelure arrogante’. I will focus on form in ‘La sauterelle arthritique’ and ‘Une conversation’ and narrative and

¹ Gisèle Prassinós, untitled poem, *Minotaure*, 6, 1935, p.64.

² Ibid.

³ Prassinós, *Le rêve*, p.9.

theme in 'Le Spectre de Châteaubriand' and 'Chevelure arrogante'. I suggest that her writings differ from surrealist *écriture automatique* both formally and thematically. In this chapter, I seek to demonstrate how Prassinós's writings work with and break from the surrealist theory of *écriture automatique* and how she ultimately creates her own version of automatic or surrealist writing.

Surprisingly there are few publications or essays on Prassinós's writings in relation to *écriture automatique*. This is perhaps because her early texts are often accepted as examples of automatic writing since the Surrealists considered them to be so. Cottenet-Hage discusses Prassinós's 'automatic' writings in *Gisèle Prassinós ou le désir du lieu intime* (1988) and Richard discusses them briefly in *Le monde suspendu de Gisèle Prassinós* (1997).⁴ However, there remains much research to be carried out and scope for original comment.

Automatism is key to Surrealism and to the surrealist *merveilleux*. In fact, in his first *Manifeste* (1924), Breton defines Surrealism as 'Automatisme psychique pur par lequel on se propose d'exprimer, soit verbalement, soit par écrit, soit de toute autre manière, le fonctionnement réel de la pensée.'⁵ The aim of writing or drawing automatically was to express the unconscious, the unknown, and the self. The unconscious is a source of knowledge which has the potential to expand frontiers. He continues 'Dictée de la pensée, en l'absence de tout contrôle exercé par la raison, en dehors de toute préoccupation esthétique ou morale.'⁶ This can be read as a

⁴ Cottenet-Hage, *Gisèle Prassinós ou le désir du lieu intime*, pp.39-66 and Richard, *Le monde suspendu*, pp.30-34.

⁵ Breton, *Manifestes*, p.36.

⁶ *Ibid.*

definition of Surrealism and also of *écriture automatique* which is the technique of writing freely without conscious control. The Surrealists aspired to write automatically since it was 'le véhicule [...] de la révélation', a way to reveal one's true thoughts.⁷ Moreover, it was a way of accessing *le merveilleux*. As Mabille states 'L'utilisation systématique du rêve, de l'écriture automatique, le rejet du contrôle réfléchi, l'abolition des barèmes artistiques ont permis de rejoindre les sources du merveilleux.'⁸ Unconscious thought creates and juxtaposes ideas and images which spark *le merveilleux*. The term *écriture automatique* comes from French psychologist Pierre Janet's volume *L'automatisme psychologique* which was first published in 1889 and therefore began as a scientific theory.⁹ However, the Surrealists experimented with it as a literary-artistic technique to produce remarkable texts and images.

In the *Manifeste*, Breton recounts that one evening, before falling asleep, 'une assez bizarre phrase' came to him from his unconscious '*qui cognait à la vitre*'.¹⁰ The phrase was 'Il y a un homme coupé en deux par la fenêtre' and was illustrated by a visual image of 'un homme marchant et tronçonné à mi-hauteur par une fenêtre perpendiculaire à l'axe de son corps.'¹¹ The reader is presented with the image of a phrase from the unconscious waiting the other side of a window to be let

⁷ André Breton, 'Le message automatique', *Minotaure*, 3-4, 1933, p.62.

⁸ Mabille, *Le miroir du merveilleux*, p.53.

⁹ Pierre Janet, *L'automatisme psychologique : essai de psychologie expérimentale sur les formes inférieures de l'activité humaine* (Paris: Ancienne Librairie Germer Baillière et Cie, 1889).

¹⁰ Breton, *Manifestes*, p.31.

¹¹ *Ibid*, pp.31-32.

in and not shut out which is often the fate of unconscious thoughts. Breton lets in this strange *cadavre exquis(esque)* phrase which represents the unconscious. He likens this experience to one by the Nobel Prize-winning author Knut Hamsun (1859-1952). Hamsun awakens in the early hours of the morning to the thought of 'mille choses me trottaient en tête'.¹² He recalls that 'quelques bons morceaux' and 'très belles phrases' came to mind and that such excellent phrases kept on coming and so he began to write them down.¹³ He describes it as 'comme si une veine se fût brisée en moi'.¹⁴ This simile is visceral and visual as one imagines words and images flowing freely and forming scenes and characters. Enjoying the free flow of ideas, he relates that they came to him so quickly that he could not write them down in time which implies that the speed of thought is faster than that of writing. Although Breton does not refer to this as *écriture automatique*, it is clear that it is.

A key aspect of this technique is speed. Drawing on his experience of working as a medical assistant at a psychiatric centre in Saint-Dizier during the First World War, Breton experiments to 'obtenir d'eux [les malades], soit un monologue de débit aussi rapide que possible, sur lequel l'esprit critique du sujet ne fasse porter aucun jugement'.¹⁵ This presents the technique as a scientific-artistic experiment. I will discuss Breton's role as a medical assistant and the effect that this had on surrealist aesthetics in chapter seven. The idea of speaking (or writing) as quickly as possible was to outpace critical thought. He concludes that 'la vitesse de la pensée n'est pas

¹² Ibid, p.32.

¹³ Ibid, p.33.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

supérieure à celle de la parole' but it is clear that the speed of thought is greater than that of writing.¹⁶ He acknowledges that with '*écriture de la pensée*', one is at the mercy of 'la première distraction extérieure' which emphasises the difficulty of writing in an automatic way since one is surrounded by external stimuli.¹⁷

Putting theory into practice, Breton and Soupault experiment with this technique of writing. Breton observes a number of similarities between their automatic texts such as 'même vice de construction, défaillances de même nature [...] l'illusion d'une verve extraordinaire, beaucoup d'émotion, un choix considérable d'images d'une qualité telle que nous n'eussions pas été capables d'en préparer une seule de longue main [...] quelque proposition d'une bouffonnerie aiguë.'¹⁸

Syntactical inconsistencies, vivid visual images created by the juxtaposition of words, and a playful humour can be considered as characteristics of *écriture automatique*. These texts are also characterised by a strangeness and an absurdity.¹⁹ Although there is no checklist of what *écriture automatique* is (or is not), I will draw on these features in my close readings of Prassinós's early surrealist writings.

Breton commends Soupault's ability to resist the urge to edit his writings, 'Je dois [...] lui rendre cette justice qu'il s'opposa toujours, de toutes ses forces, au moindre remaniement, à la moindre correction au cours de tout passage de ce genre'.²⁰ Breton's theory of *écriture automatique* is to write unconsciously without

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid, p.34.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid, pp.34-35.

²⁰ Ibid, p.34.

editing it consciously. In 'Le message automatique', he imagines crossings-out as rust, 'la rature odieuse afflige de plus en plus la page écrite, comme elle barre d'un trait de rouille la vie.'²¹ Just as rust coats iron or steel and corrodes it, crossings-out destroy the freedom of a text. Nevertheless, writing seven years after the publication of his *Manifeste*, Breton admits that there is still much research to be carried out 'sur les conditions dans lesquelles, pour être pleinement valable, un texte ou un dessin « automatique » devrait être obtenu.'²² This suggests that there is no definitive method of how to write an automatic text which is an important point when considering whether Prassinos's texts can be considered as automatic.

In addition to the process of writing automatically, Breton comments on the process of reading automatic texts. He reveals that 'Il est, en effet, fort difficile d'apprécier à leur juste valeur les divers éléments en présence, on peut même dire qu'il est impossible de les apprécier à première lecture.'²³ I would agree with Breton that it is necessary to read an automatic text more than once to appreciate its artistic-literary value and its compulsive-convulsive images (compulsive in that they derive from unconscious thought, convulsive in that they produce shock). This is the approach that I have taken when analysing Prassinos's 'automatic' texts. On the first reading, the reader understands the gist of the text while on subsequent readings, the reader is able to analyse the themes and ideas present. It is clear that automatic writing is as much a process of thinking (or not thinking) as it is writing and reading.

²¹ 'André Breton, 'Le message automatique', p.55.

²² Ibid, p.57.

²³ Breton, *Manifestes*, p.34.

I will now discuss Prassinós's thoughts on *écriture automatique* before analysing four of her early surrealist texts. Published in 1935 when she was fifteen years old, *La sauterelle arthritique* is a collection of prose and poetry with texts written in the form of dialogue ('Une conversation') and letters ('Souillure sarcastique'). In the preface, Éluard comments that her texts are 'tous différents, tous merveilleux'.²⁴ This confirms the idea that *le merveilleux* is present in different types of texts as discussed in the introduction. Her writings capture the surrealist spirit, narrate surreal scenes, and convey the power of the extraordinary in the ordinary. Éluard introduces the key themes as 'morale de dissociation, de suppression, de négation, de révolte, morale des enfants' and a 'humour lugubre' to which one could add the themes of nature, animals, society, and the supernatural.²⁵ As Cottenet-Hage states 'Lire Prassinós, première époque, c'est prendre rendez-vous avec le hasard et la surprise. [...] Pourquoi pas ? La question n'a plus de sens.'²⁶ The reader is to expect the unexpected since 'tout est possible' in her early writings.²⁷

Writing thirteen years later, Prassinós recalls 'Lorsqu'on me montra un exemplaire de mon premier livre : « La Sauterelle Arthritique » [...] je ne pus croire qu'on s'était donné tout ce mal pour moi [...] J'avoue qu'en me devenant accessible, l'Imprimerie baissa aussitôt dans mon estime ainsi qu'une partie de l'humanité'.²⁸ Contrary to expectation, she does not seem pleased with its publication. In fact, she

²⁴ Paul Eluard, 'Préface', in Prassinós, *La sauterelle arthritique*, no page number.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Cottenet-Hage, *Gisèle Prassinós ou le désir du lieu intime*, p.47.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Prassinós, *Le rêve*, p.13.

was more pleased with Éluard's preface which reads as if it was written 'machinalement' than with being published.²⁹ She explains 'Je me demandais comment des gens mûrs et respectables comme les poètes à qui j'avais été présentée, pouvaient prendre au sérieux mes jeux d'écriture. C'était presque une déception.'³⁰ She is bemused that her writings have been taken so seriously and feels that she has disappointed the Surrealists. Prassinos perhaps felt that her writings were being mistaken for something that they were not. The way that Prassinos refers to her texts as 'jeux d'écriture' is significant since it implies that she wrote these texts for fun. Similarly, the Surrealists enjoyed playing verbal and visual games. For them, games were a way to subvert academic modes of enquiry, unlock the door to the unconscious, and to free the imagination.³¹ For example, the game of *cadavre exquis* was more than just a game to the Surrealists, it was 'un système, une méthode de recherche, un moyen d'exaltation et de stimulation, une mine de trouvailles enfin, peut-être une drogue.'³² However, referring to her writings as games perhaps masks their literary-artistic value.

The Surrealists recognised Prassinos's early writings as exercises in *écriture automatique*, as a 'veritable illusion of automatic language *par excellence*'.³³ For

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ *A Book of Surrealist Games*, ed. by Alastair Brotchie and Mel Gooding (Boston, MA: Shambhala; London: Redstone, 1991), p.10.

³² Simone Collinet, 'Les Cadavres Exquis', in *Le Cadavre exquis, son exaltation*, ed. by Arturo Schwarz (Milan: Galleria Schwarz, 1975), p.30.

³³ Marianne van Hirtum on Gisèle Prassinos. Cited in *Surrealist Women*, ed. by Rosemont, p.78.

example, in the preface to *La sauterelle arthritique*, Éluard writes of her texts as proof that *écriture automatique* unlocks the door of the unconscious.³⁴ However, unconvinced that she wrote the texts herself, they first made her write an automatic text in their presence. The famous photograph by Man Ray as discussed in chapter one captures this scene. However, perhaps they had reason to be sceptical. Barnett reveals that some of Gisèle's famous automatic texts were forged by her brother Mario not because she was incapable of writing them but as a practical joke.³⁵ As Mario recalls 'devant sa boisson, blanche aussi, un anis appelé 'Oxygénée', me manifestant sa froideur polie et une suspicion inexplicable'.³⁶ In the surrealist spirit of play, Carrington also played jokes on Breton and the Surrealists (see chapter seven).³⁷ In hindsight, Prassinis was aware that she modelled their theory of writing from the unconscious, 'j'illustrais leur théorie. J'étais une preuve que l'inconscient existe, et qu'il peut fonctionner.'³⁸ She therefore seems to have practised automatic writing or a variation of it without knowing at the time just as many argue that she was a Surrealist 'sans le savoir'.

As discussed in chapter one, Breton identifies Prassinis as an embodiment of *écriture automatique*, 'c'est l'écolière ambiguë que, sous le titre « L'Écriture

³⁴ Eluard, 'Préface', in Prassinis, *La sauterelle arthritique*, no page number.

³⁵ Barnett, 'Exquises esquisses by Gisèle and Mario Prassinis', in *On Verbal / Visual Representation*, ed. by Heusser and others, p.197

³⁶ Mario Prassinis, *Prassinis : Rétrospective de l'œuvre peint et dessiné* (Aix-en-Provence: Présence contemporaine, 1983), p.23.

³⁷ See Breton's introduction to Carrington in *Anthologie* (1950), p.333.

³⁸ Druet.

automatique », présente une couverture de *La Révolution surréaliste*.³⁹ The front cover of the ninth-tenth issue of the journal is illustrated with a photograph captioned 'L'ECRITURE AUTOMATIQUE'.⁴⁰ It depicts a woman dressed as a schoolgirl sat at a child's desk. She has been made up to look like the surrealist *femme-enfant* just as Prassinis was in Man Ray's photograph. The wearing of makeup and dark lipstick suggests that the *femme-enfant* is a role-play. Her gaze is not directed at the page or the camera which 'emphasizes both Woman's capacity for clairvoyance and her lack of mental engagement in the process.'⁴¹ She holds a pen as if she is waiting for the free flow of words and images as experienced by Hamsun. The image and caption confirm the link between the surrealist trope of woman as *femme-enfant* and *écriture automatique*. While the *femme-enfant* is a young woman in touch with her unconscious, automatic writing is a way of expressing it. The image confirms that women are able to practice *écriture automatique*. However, to what extent does the woman in the image represent her own unconscious? As Conley states 'the woman's body inspires automatic writing and represents it' which suggests a link between the *femme-enfant*, the female body, *écriture automatique*, and *le merveilleux*.⁴²

In the foreword to *Le rêve*, Prassinis provides an insight into how she wrote her early texts and how she came to this way of writing.⁴³ One day, during the school holiday, thirteen-year-old Prassinis began to write out of boredom. Sat at a table,

³⁹ Breton, *Anthologie* (1940), p.254.

⁴⁰ *La révolution surréaliste*, 9-10, 1 Octobre 1927. This image also illustrates the definition of *écriture automatique* in *Dictionnaire abrégé*, p.4.

⁴¹ Conley, *Automatic Woman*, p.1.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Prassinis, *Le rêve*.

she took 'une belle carte mauve' which 'je brûlais d'entamer depuis la veille'.⁴⁴ This reveals her fervent desire to begin writing. Her imagination can no longer play 'ce rôle inférieur' and is 'sur le point de reprendre ses droits'.⁴⁵ It is ready to emerge like a butterfly from a chrysalis and break free. She was given the coloured cards as a gift 'pour me consoler de ne pas pouvoir aller en vacances' since her family did not have the means to do so.⁴⁶ She therefore began writing to amuse herself, 'pour rêver, m'évader, tuer mon ennui', and above all to escape from reality.⁴⁷ This marks the beginning of her illustrious career as a writer which spans over eighty years.

Prassinos continues '« Ces saletés sont magnifiques ». J'écrivis ces mots machinalement. Ayant commencé la carte par son côté étroit, le mot *magnifiques* finissait juste la ligne ; j'en ajoutai deux au hasard, au milieu de la ligne suivante : « Pourquoi pas », pour le plaisir de l'œil.'⁴⁸ The adverb 'machinalement' refers to the way that she wrote these words automatically or unconsciously whereas the adverb 'au hasard' implies that she added 'Pourquoi pas?' consciously to make the text aesthetically pleasing. This confirms that her texts have a visual element and also alludes to the dual role of the unconscious and conscious in her writings. She initially wrote without conscious thought before adding words consciously. As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, she is writing on an untitled poem which begins 'Ces

⁴⁴ Ibid, p.9.

⁴⁵ Breton, *Manifestes*, p.14 and p.20.

⁴⁶ Prassinos, *Le rêve*, p.9.

⁴⁷ Jeanine Warnod, 'Entretien avec Gisèle Prassinos en janvier 1987', in *Regards sur Minotaure : la revue à tête de bête*, ed. by Claude Gaume (Genève: Musée d'art et d'histoire, 1987), p.249.

⁴⁸ Prassinos, *Le rêve*, pp.9-10.

saletés sont magnifiques / a répondu mon soulier / une odeur d'élastique'.⁴⁹

Prassinós continues to write 'sans réfléchir' and discovers that the final word of the third line also ends in 'iques' ('une odeur d'élastique').⁵⁰ This is not a conscious decision but an unconscious one or perhaps a coincidence (objective chance). She adds 'Alors, je m'aperçus que je faisais des vers, et, très satisfaite, je couvris la carte de phrases incohérentes mais volontairement symétriques.'⁵¹ Unconscious disordered phrases are juxtaposed with conscious ones which are made visually or aurally symmetrical. Therefore, it is clear that Prassinós's version of *écriture automatique* combines unconscious and conscious thought. In the spirit of Breton's call for the resolution of contradiction in his *Second manifeste du surréalisme* (1930), Prassinós combines the conscious and the unconscious, the voluntary and the involuntary.

Prassinós's brother Mario encouraged her to write this way which she enjoyed doing so since her texts made others burst out into laughter.⁵² In an interview, Prassinós confirms that she continued to write 'automatically' to make her father laugh and moreover to be noticed by him.⁵³ She continues 'Mon père s'était toujours beaucoup occupé de mon frère, mais de moi beaucoup moins. Il m'adorait, mais vous savez, dans les familles orientales [...] la culture, ce n'est pas

⁴⁹ Prassinós, untitled poem, *Minotaure*, p.64.

⁵⁰ Prassinós, *Le rêve*, p.10.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Druet. See also Warnod, 'Entretien avec Gisèle Prassinós en janvier 1987', in *Regards sur Minotaure* ed. by Gaume, p.249.

pour les filles, alors il ne s'intéressait pas vraiment à ce que je faisais.'⁵⁴ It is interesting that she came to this way of writing as the result of the culture of her Greek-Italian family since women were not regarded as highly as the men. In contrast, Carrington saw art not as a way of impressing her nouveau-riche family but escaping them and the expectations placed on her as a young woman (see chapter five).

Prassinós admits that she did not know of the surrealist technique of *écriture automatique* at the time of writing. She argues that her writings were not automatic in the surrealist sense, 'Pour moi, je n'ai jamais pratiqué l'écriture automatique, telle que la décrit Breton, laquelle, je pense, est une utopie.'⁵⁵ The way that Prassinós describes it as a utopia or an ideal suggest that she considers such a theory to be unrealistic. However, she later seems to contradict herself as she describes it as 'un bon moteur de création'⁵⁶ She is aware that in theory surrealist *écriture automatique* opens up numerous creative possibilities but in reality it cannot exist. She explains that 'Dès le début, même avant d'écrire des poèmes conscients, j'écrivais une phrase automatique, et je trouvais dans cette phrase un personnage, une atmosphère, qui m'aidaient à continuer. Ce n'était donc pas entièrement de l'écriture automatique.'⁵⁷ This recalls Hamsun's simile of a vein bursting and scenes and characters forming. The idea of Prassinós being inspired by 'une phrase automatique' suggests that automatic writing was not more than a starting point or

⁵⁴ Druet.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

a springboard and presents automatic thought as a way of freeing the imagination. She admits that 'l'écriture déverrouille le subconscient [...] Mais au bout d'un moment, la conscience revient dans une assez forte mesure.'⁵⁸ For Prassinos, *écriture automatique* as theorised by the Surrealists does not and cannot exist since a text can never entirely be automatic.

Prassinos argues that automatic writing is a process of writing, thinking, and editing. She reasons 'il est sûrement possible de trouver quelque chose dans tout ce fatras. C'est possible, certainement, mais il faut retravailler cette matière. Le plus important dans l'écriture, c'est le travail.'⁵⁹ This idea that a text written automatically must be manually reworked is of great importance when discussing whether her writings are exercises in surrealist *écriture automatique*. Of her writings, Prassinos reveals 'Vous ne pouvez pas savoir comme mes textes sont travaillées, retravaillés pour parvenir à l'harmonie. Je cherche le bon mot dans le dictionnaire ; certes, quand je ne le trouve pas j'en mets un autre, mais enfin, je biffe, je rature. Je ne crois pas qu'on puisse se contenter de l'automatisme.'⁶⁰

Although a text can be written automatically, it must then be redrafted. Therefore, one can argue that Prassinos practised her own version of surrealist *écriture automatique*. Her version of automatic writing combines and conflates unconscious and conscious thought and fulfils the surrealist objective of eliminating all boundaries and barriers and of not limiting but expanding frontiers.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

I will now discuss whether Prassinos's early experimental writings can be considered as exercises in surrealist *écriture automatique*. 'La sauterelle arthritique', the first text in the collection of the same name, is a poem in which a grasshopper narrates its day.⁶¹ It conforms to the conventions of poetry since it is written in lines with a clear rhythm and rhyme scheme. It is written in the first-person from the unusual perspective of an insect. In the poem, the grasshopper is personified since arthritis is a condition associated with humans more so than with animals and in one scene the insect smokes a pipe ('puis l'estomac gros j'ai bourré ma pipe'). This recalls the hookah-smoking caterpillar in Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.⁶² I will discuss the significance and role of the arthritic grasshopper in chapter four.

The poem has a regular rhythm and rhyme scheme which has been carefully constructed and combines two different voices. The lines of the poem alternate between ten and three syllables, 'j'ai cherché partout un lieu de repos / pourquoi pas'. There are two exceptions to this – the sixth line has four syllables ('il faut le dire') and the final line has seven ('ton soulier est détaché'). The final line breaks with the rhythm of the text which underscores its importance. The narrator-grasshopper addresses the reader with the second person possessive pronoun 'ton' which implies a familiarity between the insect and the reader. Perhaps the grasshopper is playing a joke on the reader who checks whether their shoelaces are untied. As mentioned, the text combines two voices and so 'ton' could also refer to the grasshopper which personifies the insect as wearing shoes. Moreover, the

⁶¹ Prassinos, 'La sauterelle arthritique', in *La sauterelle arthritique*, no page number.

⁶² Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, p.37.

rhythm of the poem perhaps reflects the arthritic, irregular movement of the grasshopper. The longer ten syllable line syntactically mirrors the grasshopper at rest and the shorter three syllable line mimics the insect in motion.

The poem has an alternating rhyme scheme (ABAB), 'j'ai trouvé un rail avec du goudron / il faut le dire / ma fleur a perdu son premier bouton / mais en rire'. Overall, this regular rhythm and rhyme scheme makes the text a pleasure to read. It is similar to a nursery rhyme and in the preface Éluard refers to the text as a 'comptine'.⁶³ However, nursery rhymes are for young children and this text is punctured with an unfriendly, pessimistic voice. Perhaps there are nursery rhymes, just as there are fairy tales, for children and adults alike.⁶⁴ It recalls the scene in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* where Alice tries to recite 'How doth the little busy bee' but 'her voice sounded hoarse and strange, and the words did not come [out] the same as they used to do'.⁶⁵ Perhaps, Prassinos, like Alice, having entered her wild and wondrous imagination confuses the words of a nursery rhyme with another text. Instead of 'How doth the little busy bee' Alice recites 'How doth the little crocodile' which is a parody of Isaac Watt's (1674-1748) poem. The regularity and familiarity of the rhythm and rhyme scheme is deceiving as it is at odds with the irregular and unfamiliar images in the text.

In 'La sauterelle arthritique', Prassinos cleverly juxtaposes two voices – that of the grasshopper and an unknown voice. Each line of the text alternates between these two voices. The unknown voice is pessimistic; it is undermining ('pourquoi

⁶³ Éluard, 'Préface', in Prassinos, *La sauterelle arthritique*, no page number.

⁶⁴ Breton, *Manifestes*, p.26.

⁶⁵ Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, p.13.

pas'), mocking ('mais en rire'), and sarcastic ('quelle douleur') and interjects the insect's narrative. It is perhaps a dialogue between the grasshopper's or Prassinos's conscious and unconscious. The plosive alliteration in 'pourquoi pas' conveys the power of this voice. Although the reader cannot ignore it, the grasshopper does not respond or react to these remarks. Overall, the poem's form, in particular its regular rhythm and rhyme scheme, implies that it was written or edited with conscious control. However, the absence of capital letters throughout the text could suggest that it has been written automatically and the final full stop presents it as a continuous narrative.

Every fourth line of the poem begins with a verb conjugated in the first-person and in the *passé composé*, 'j'ai cherché', 'j'ai trouvé', 'j'ai piqué', 'j'ai craché', 'j'ai mangé'. This anaphora presents the poem as a series of actions as the grasshopper goes about its day. In addition to the rhythm and rhyme scheme, this repetition could suggest that the text has been written or edited consciously. The verbs 'chercher' and 'trouver' imply a complete cycle of looking for something and finding it. The grasshopper is looking for a place to rest ('un lieu de repos'), perhaps a final resting place now that it is arthritic and old, but finds 'un rail avec du goudron' which implies that the cycle is not yet complete. The verbs 'chercher' and 'trouver' anticipate the title of Prassinos's collection *Trouver sans chercher (1934-1944) (1976)* which I will discuss in chapter four. The title can be interpreted as a definition of *le merveilleux* which Prassinos finds without looking for. The image of 'un rail avec du goudron' is an industrial image which reflects the industrial suburbs of Nanterre in which Prassinos grew up. The grasshopper which represents nature is juxtaposed

with this industrial image. It recalls Breton's convulsive image of a speeding train in a forest which contrasts the machine and nature (see introduction).⁶⁶

'La sauterelle arthritique' is a collage of ideas in which one can identify a number of lexical sets. These sets help the reader to make sense of the text. One can identify a lexical set of flora and fauna, 'sauterelle', 'fleur', 'bouton', and 'vache' which convey a desire to explore the outdoors. Some of the words chosen by Prassinós have multiple meanings, for example the noun 'bouton' can mean button, switch, flower bud, pimple or spot depending on its context. This confirms that there is no singular or definitive interpretation of her writings since the words have been removed from their original context. One can also identify a lexical set of writing, 'papier', 'craché', 'encre', 'la gomme à écrire'. The rubber alludes to the difficulties of drafting or redrafting a text and conveys Prassinós's own way of writing unconsciously before editing it consciously. One could also add 'blouse' to create a lexical set of school terms which reminds the reader that Prassinós was a fourteen-year-old schoolgirl at the time of writing. There is also a lexical set of cooking ('poêle [sic, poêle] à frire', 'dégustant', 'mangé', 'l'estomac gros') and illness ('arthritique', 'attraper', rougeole') which are areas that Prassinós would have been familiar with.

The poem evokes striking visual images. In the *Manifeste*, Breton states that 'l'atmosphère surréaliste créée par l'écriture mécanique [...] se prête particulièrement à la production des plus belles images.'⁶⁷ These images are not conventionally but convulsively beautiful. The reader is presented with the image of

⁶⁶ Breton, *L'amour fou*, p.15.

⁶⁷ Breton, *Manifestes*, p.49.

a grasshopper spitting into a frying pan ('j'ai craché de l'encre dans la poêle [sic, poêle] à frire [...] tout en dégustant de la gomme à écrire') which aligns writing with the creative process of cooking. In her oeuvre, Carrington associates cooking with female creativity.⁶⁸ The verb 'cracher' has a double meaning and could refer to the grasshopper spitting ink into the frying pan or the pan spluttering ink. Another convulsive image is the grasshopper eating sound which has measles ('j'ai mangé du son qu'avait la rougeole'). Here, Prassinos presents the image of sound waves which are invisible to the human eye as suffering from the visible illness of measles. I argue that these convulsively beautiful images have been produced by automatic writing. Overall, the regular form of the poem implies that the text has been written consciously whereas the compulsive-convulsive visual images suggest that it has been written unconsciously. It is likely that Prassinos wrote the text automatically before editing it manually or wrote the text with both unconscious and conscious thought.

Having discussed automatic writing and poetry, I will now discuss it in relation to dialogue. 'Une conversation' is written in the form of a dialogue between a man and his(?) horse. It was first published in *La sauterelle arthritique* (1935) and later in *Trouver sans chercher (1934-1944)* (1976) and was also featured in Breton's *Anthologie de l'humour noir* (1940) which I will discuss in the following chapter.⁶⁹ As

⁶⁸ See Susan L. Aberth, 'The Alchemical Kitchen: At Home with Leonora Carrington' http://www.martinajohnston.org/art/12.06.29_Nierika_Aberth_Susan.pdf [accessed 11 August 2019].

⁶⁹ Prassinos, 'Une conversation', in *La sauterelle arthritique*, no page number, in *Trouver sans chercher*, pp.30-31, in Breton, *Anthologie* (1940), p.255.

the title reveals, the text is a conversation between two characters. The use of the indefinite article 'une' as opposed to 'la' implies that this is a typical conversation which it is not. Rather it is an imagined nonsensical exchange between a man and a horse and transgresses the boundary between the human and the animal, dream and reality. It recalls the conversations between Alice and various creatures in Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

The most interesting feature of this text is the way that it is written in the form of a dialogue. In the *Manifeste* (1924), Breton discusses the importance of dialogue to surrealist writing, 'c'est encore au dialogue que les formes du langage surréaliste s'adaptent le mieux.'⁷⁰ These 'formes du langage surréaliste' include nonsensical dialogue, a fragmentation of narrative, and a subversion of logic. He explains that in dialogue 'deux pensées s'affrontent ; pendant que l'une se livre, l'autre s'occupe d'elle'.⁷¹ It is this collision of ideas which creates unusual and unfamiliar images. He reveals 'mon attention [...] traite la pensée adverse en ennemie'.⁷² It is this distortion of the opposing thought which breaks down communication. Cottenet-Hage argues that for Breton 'la conversation paraissait le plus propice à la subversion de la logique'.⁷³ This is perhaps because in dialogue two (or more) interlocutors each bring their own thoughts and opinions and so there is an increased potential for a breakdown in communication. Breton (and Soupault) practice dialogue 'au service de' surrealist writing in *Les Champs magnétiques* (1920)

⁷⁰ Breton, *Manifestes*, p.46.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Cottenet-Hage, *Gisèle Prassinou ou le désir du lieu intime*, p.46.

which he describes as the 'premier ouvrage purement surréaliste'.⁷⁴ in this collaborative volume, the five texts assembled under the title 'Barrières' are written in the form of dialogue.⁷⁵ The title does not refer to the construction of barriers but to their deconstruction. Breton identifies himself and Soupault as the 'interlocuteurs impartiaux' which presents them as the recording devices of their unconscious.⁷⁶ Perhaps Prassinos is also the recording device of her unconscious thoughts.

'Une conversation' is set out like the script of a play with a description of the scene followed by the dialogue. The (chance?) encounter takes place in the unusual setting of a wheat field. The exchange is between a man who wears a stained lace tunic and a horse who is described as naked. The use of the adjective 'nu', which is used to refer to the state of undress of a man or woman, personifies the horse. The reader is presented with the image of a grasshopper's antennae poking out of a matchbox which is suspended from a horse's tail. The grasshopper has perhaps been mistaken for a matchstick or has camouflaged itself as one. The disparate images of a horse's tail, a matchbox, and an insect's antennae creates an image of convulsive beauty and recalls Le Comte de Lautréamont's image of the chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissecting table.⁷⁷ In addition, the grasshopper's antennae is an indexical reference to the title of the collection which

⁷⁴ Breton, *Manifestes*, p.47. For an insight into how Breton and Soupault wrote this volume see André Breton, *Entretiens (1913-1952)* (Paris: Gallimard, 1952), p.56.

⁷⁵ André Breton and Philippe Soupault, *Les Champs magnétiques* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1968).

⁷⁶ Breton, *Manifestes*, p.47.

⁷⁷ Le Comte de Lautréamont, *Les chants de maldoror* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016), p.124.

introduces the themes of animals, nature, and ageing. The reader is informed of the position of the man and the horse in the field. The man is sitting on a patterned cushion and the horse is sitting on the man in a complete reversal of reality which alludes to a subversion of logic.

The way that 'Une conversation' is written can be compared to the technique of collage which brings together different visual or verbal fragments. It can be considered as a collage since there is no clear link between the ideas expressed by the man and the horse. Cottenet-Hage states 'Le fil du discours se rompt d'une phrase à l'autre et à l'intérieur même de la phrase.'⁷⁸ This fragmentation encourages the reader to appeal to their own imagination to establish a narrative and to make sense of the dialogue. For example, in the opening line the man asks about a green diamond and the horse replies about the law and candles. She likens the text to a Cubist collage which is characterised by a distortion of planes.⁷⁹ In a Cubist collage, the eye of the viewer works to identify familiar elements and similarly, in 'Une conversation', the reader works to identify a familiar lexis. The reader focuses on the concrete nouns of 'le diamant', 'bougies', 'la loi', 'les employés', and 'les impôts' and a lexical set of terms which relate to society, 'la loi', 'les employés', 'le téléphone', and 'les impôts' which I discuss in the following chapter in relation to *humour noir*.

In the dialogue, the horse comments 'Comprendre, c'est diminuer'. This can be interpreted as a rewriting of the surrealist aspiration not to make the unknown known, 'L'intraitable manie qui consiste à ramener l'inconnu au connu, au classable,

⁷⁸ Cottenet-Hage, *Gisèle Prassinou ou le désir du lieu intime*, p.47.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

berce les cerveaux.⁸⁰ It can also be interpreted as a remark on the text meaning that to understand it is to reduce its impact. The phrase can therefore be understood as a definition of *écriture automatique* since its aim was to express the unconscious rather than to make sense. However, to complicate matters, the phrase itself is written in the language of rational thinking. It can also be said to reflect Prassinós's desire for her texts to be read and enjoyed but not necessarily understood and to her desire not to delimit *le merveilleux* but to expand the notion.

Having considered *écriture automatique* and form, I will now discuss this surrealist technique with regards to narrative and theme. 'Le Spectre de Châteaubriand' (1934) was first published in the review *Minotaure* in 1935 as an untitled story and later in *La sauterelle arthritique*.⁸¹ The fact that it was published in *Minotaure* suggests that it captures the surrealist spirit. It also appeared in a number of reviews, for example in the Danish review *Linien* in 1935 under the title 'Inspektion' and in the surrealist issue of *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* in June 1936 under the generic title of 'Story' alongside texts by Éluard, Péret, Breton, Dalí, Char, and Buñuel.⁸² The fact that the story was published in translation in these reviews alludes to its popularity.

⁸⁰ Breton, *Manifestes*, p.19.

⁸¹ Gisèle Prassinós, 'Le Spectre de Chateaubriand', *Minotaure*, 6, 1935, p.64 and in *La sauterelle arthritique*, no page numbers.

⁸² Gisèle Prassinós, 'Inspektion', *Linien*, ed. by Wilhem Bjerke-Petersen, issue number not known, 1935, page number not known. Cited in *Correspondance*, ed. by Prassinós and Rye, p.34. Gisèle Prassinós, 'Story', trans. by David Gascoyne, in *Contemporary Poetry and Prose (Surrealist double number)*, 2, June 1936, pp.38-39.

The title, 'Le Spectre de Châteaubriand', introduces the theme of the supernatural to the narrative and recalls Salvador Dalí's article in *Minotaure* titled 'Les nouvelles couleurs du « Sex-Appel spectral »' in which he celebrates ghosts.⁸³ As discussed in the introduction, Todorov identifies two subgenres in the *roman noir* - the 'surnaturel expliqué' or 'l'étrange' and the 'surnaturel accepté' or the 'merveilleux'.⁸⁴ In this story, the presence of a ghost on the streets of Paris is accepted without question by the narrator and the reader and so it belongs to the literary genre of *le merveilleux*. The ghost is that of François-Auguste-René, vicomte de Chateaubriand (1768-1848) who was a late eighteenth-early nineteenth century literary figure. The title therefore combines the supernatural ('le spectre') and the literary ('Châteaubriand'). It is interesting that Chateaubriand wrote on *le merveilleux religieux* in 'Du Merveilleux, ou de la poésie, dans ses rapports avec les êtres surnaturels' (1802) and in 'Vue générale des épopées chrétiennes' (1826).⁸⁵ He identifies several types of *le merveilleux*, '[...] on trouvera *le merveilleux*, et le merveilleux de toutes les espèces : le merveilleux *chrétien*, le merveilleux *mythologique*, le merveilleux *indien*.'⁸⁶ This idea is in keeping with Breton's theory that *le merveilleux* changes over time and Todorov's theory that there are different

⁸³ Salvador Dalí, 'Les nouvelles couleurs du « Sex-Appel spectral »', *Minotaure*, 5, 1934, pp.20-22.

⁸⁴ Todorov, p.47.

⁸⁵ François-René de Chateaubriand, *Génie du christianisme, ou Beautés de la Religion chrétienne* (1802) and *Les Natchez* (1826). Cited in Collani, p.119.

⁸⁶ Hubert Matthey, *Essai sur le merveilleux dans la littérature française depuis 1800 : contribution à l'étude des genres* (Paris: Payot, 1915), p.57. Cited in Collani, p.119.

types of it.⁸⁷ Although Prassinós would not have known of Chateaubriand's theory of *le merveilleux*, she would have learnt about the literary figure at school. Of her story titled 'Sondue', Prassinós states 'Les idées me venaient, rapides, inspirées par chaque page blanche, et je ne manquais pas d'utiliser mes connaissances fraîchement sorties de l'école.'⁸⁸ Her automatic writings were inspired by her imagination and also by what she had learnt at school.

The story is set in Paris and relates the chance encounter of a dog and a ghost with a number of lepers combining the animal, the supernatural, and disease. It has a linear narrative and opens with a dog pacing up and down the left-hand side of the pavement of the rue de Seine followed by the ghost of Chateaubriand. The rue de Seine is located in the sixth arrondissement of Paris and is a short walk away from the café Les Deux Magots where the Surrealists would meet (see chapter one). The reader is presented with a familiar city but with an unfamiliar scene as the familiar is rendered unfamiliar. The ghost of Chateaubriand is described as 'brillant du feu de ses entrailles' which evokes the theme of the body. The fact that the ghost has visible internal organs suggests that it is at once dead and alive and presents the reader with a frightening image. The glowing ghost has an umbrella between his legs and later the dog is described as having a mouth between his two nostrils which alludes to the surrealist game of *cadavre exquis*. One could argue that it is an image typical of *écriture automatique*. The motif of the umbrella combined with the later image of the lepers winking and winding bobbins is perhaps a reference to

⁸⁷ Breton, *Manifestes*, p.26. Todorov, pp.60-62.

⁸⁸ Gisèle Prassinós, 'Sondue', in *Trouver sans chercher*, pp.81-102.

Lautréamont's surrealist image of a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissecting table.⁸⁹ The dissecting table is represented by the ghost's glowing intestines and the sewing machine by the cotton reels which have connotations of creativity.

The themes in this story are diverse. There is lexical set of terms relating to religion, 'il arriva dans une plaine qui séparait l'église Saint-Martin de son clocher', the dog makes a 'signe de croix', 'prière', and 'A un moment donné, le spectre s'assit sur le parapet'. In the story, a number of feverish lepers appear who have been waiting for the dog and his master, the ghost of Chateaubriand to arrive. The text could be read as antireligious; it is perhaps a parody of the scene in the Bible in which Jesus cleanses a leper. The ghost who is described as 'digne et sauvage' watches over the 'ces êtres facilement fous' which suggests that he has no sympathy for them. In Prassinós's rewriting of the Bible story, the dog imbues the lepers with its strength and a strange ceremony takes place with bobbins. The lepers are described with a lexical set of military terms, 'chef', 'troupe', 'les rangs', 'la belle armée des lépreux simples', and 'inspection'. These terms have connotations of organisation and discipline. Perhaps they are a reference to the war between Turkey and Greece which the Prassinós family fled in 1922. The visual image of 'la belle armée des lépreux simples' is unusual as one would not use the adjective 'belle' to describe those suffering from leprosy. The ghost and the dog leave the scene and follow the pavement to the Bastille, a medieval fortress which was stormed on 14 July 1789 and marked the end of the *ancien régime*. The final image is of the *cadavre exquis(esque)* ghost sneaking away 'doucement' with 'les pieds au cœur' which again

⁸⁹ Lautréamont, p.124.

recalls the game of *cadavre exquis* and does not reappear until the day of the leper's inspection on 22 November 999. The reader is presented with a distorted timeframe (Chateaubriand, leprosy, the Bastille, and the date 22 November 999) and as Cottenet-Hage states 'le Moyen-âge et le dix-neuvième siècle sont superposés, la distance temporelle étant annulée.'⁹⁰ Just as the real and the imaginary are blurred, the events of the past are too.

Prassinos's story not only subverts logic with a ghost on the streets of Paris but the illogical is presented as logical. The narrator remarks 'Mais comme tout le monde sait qu'à la fin de chaque mois on fait sa prière, les lépreux fatiguèrent leurs pieds à diminuer la rage de leur chef.' However, not everyone knows of this strange relationship between the lepers and their leader. The reader imagines the lepers tiring themselves out to please him but it makes no logical sense. Another example of the illogical presented as logical is when the dog and the ghost chat about 'un certain cabaretier qui remplaçait le sucre par du papier mâché.' The connection that Prassinos draws between the ingredient of sugar and creativity recalls the association that Carrington makes between cooking and creativity. Perhaps it is a playful prank on the innkeeper's customers and anticipates Carrington's surrealist prank of serving omelettes with the added ingredient of her unsuspecting dinner guests' hair.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Cottenet-Hage, *Gisèle Prassinos ou le désir du lieu intime*, p.54.

⁹¹ Rachel Rickard Straus and Ruth Maclean, 'Nazis, nannies and hair omelettes: Leonora Carrington, the last living surrealist, looks back on her extraordinary life and times', *Independent*, 23 August 2009 <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/features/nazis-nannies-and-hair-omelettes-leonora-carrington-the-last-living-surrealist-looks-back-on-her-1774386.html> [accessed 28 August 2019].

A key theme in the short story is transformation. At the precise time of ten o'clock, the anthropomorphic dog takes a piece of silver cloth out of its waistcoat which recalls the scene in which the White Rabbit takes a watch out of its waistcoat pocket in Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.⁹² The dog throws the cloth into the river and it reappears dragging a buffalo's skull and a miner's picket. These objects link the themes of textiles, still life, and the mining industry. Perhaps these items have been discarded in the river. However, there is no logical explanation for this transformation. This image is perhaps the result of *écriture automatique*. The narrator describes the body of a buffalo grazing on the warm grass which would usually be a pleasant image but this animal is headless. The dog watches the scene 'à la fois blanc et endormi'; the adjective 'endormi' suggests that this transformation is a dream or perhaps the story can be read as a dream narrative. On the one hand, 'Le Spectre de Châteaubriand' is an example of surrealist *écriture automatique* as it contains diverse themes, vivid images, and subverts logic. On the other hand, it is not an example of it since it has a coherent narrative and therefore even if it has been written unconsciously it has certainly been edited consciously.

Another story which has a linear narrative is 'Chevelure arrogante'. It was first published in the review *Documents 34* and later in *La sauterelle arthritique* (1935) and *Le feu maniaque* (1939).⁹³ It also appeared in the poetry review *Jeune Europe* in September 1935 and was illustrated with a sketch by Halé Asaf which depicts a pregnant woman combing her hair and does not directly correspond to the

⁹² Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, p.2.

⁹³ Gisèle Prassinis, 'Chevelure arrogante', *Documents 34*, 2, 1934, p.6, in *La sauterelle arthritique*, no page number, in *Le feu maniaque*, p.15.

story. Written in the first-person and in the past tense (*passé simple*), 'Chevelure arrogante' is a short story with a coherent narrative about three children one of whom has mouldy hair. Prassinos's brother, Mario also made a sketch titled 'Chevelure arrogante' to illustrate his sister's story.⁹⁴ This surrealist sketch resembles hair or roots or even melted candle wax with a nut(?) suspended from it and offers his interpretation of the narrative.

Hair is a recurrent theme in Prassinos's early writings and is a theme that I will return to in chapter four. The title personifies the hair as arrogant which is not an adjective usually used to describe hair but an attitude. The placing together of an adjective and a noun which are not conventionally associated with each other is a typical feature of *écriture automatique*. The hair is assigned an identity of its own and the reader wonders why the hair is arrogant. Perhaps the hair is long and beautiful and has an exaggerated opinion of its own importance. Although the adjective 'arrogante' is negative, it does not refer to the tone of the text which is written in a matter-of-fact way. Despite the title of the story, the hair is not arrogant but is described as 'moisie' meaning mouldy or musty and therefore evokes the senses. Or perhaps, according to Prassinos's (il)logic, the hair is arrogant because it is mouldy. Mouldy hair subverts the association of hair with femininity and beauty. In *Self-Portrait* (1937-38), Carrington imagines herself with long flowing hair identifying herself with the horse (the horse's mane) and not with femininity since she presents

⁹⁴ Mario Prassinos, *Chevelure arrogante* (c.1934). Reproduced in *Gisèle et Mario Prassinos*, ed. by Oterelo, p.62.

herself as androgynous.⁹⁵ Hair therefore plays multiple roles in works by women artists and writers associated with Surrealism. Perhaps it is a way of reclaiming the female body.

The most interesting feature of this text is the way that it subverts logic which suggests that it has been written automatically. The story opens with a child who suffers from a fever entering a room. The verb 'empester' (composed in the *passé simple*) suggests that the hair is mouldy rather than musty. The opening lines set out a deconstruction of logic; the child asks the price of a vase on a shelf, the narrator tells him that his nephew 'serait bien content s'il se dégageait la tête', and the child then asks with a suspicious look 'C'est méchant, les hirondelles?'. This exchange seems irrelevant to the story and recalls the dialogue between the man and the horse in 'Une conversation' in which dialogue is used to break down communication.

A second child appears who has a strange physical appearance 'Sur son ventre nu pendait une chose cylindrique et dure qui lui donnait l'air d'un évadé' which alludes to the game of *cadavre exquis*. There is no logical connection between these two unrelated ideas which have been collaged together. A third child enters the room and although the narrator does not see who it is, they assume 'ce devait être une petite fille, car j'entendis ses dents casser le dessus d'une noix.' This is illogical since one cannot identify one's gender based on the sound of one's teeth cracking a nut. It is perhaps a comment on the arbitrariness of this socio-cultural

⁹⁵ Leonora Carrington, *Self-Portrait* (c.1937-38)

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/492697> [accessed 14 April 2019].

construct. The child tells the narrator 'Ses cheveux doivent être moisissés, car j'ai trouvé un tout petit copeau de bois sur le palier.' The use of the subordinate conjunction 'car' implies a link between the two clauses. However, this is not the case. In 'L'absurde chez Gisèle Prassinos: comment minimiser le malheur?', Chénieux-Gendron observes 'Les conjonctions ou coordinations abondent, surabondent, pour meubler les vides logiques'.⁹⁶ Prassinos subverts the grammatical function of conjunctions since she uses them to connect unrelated ideas. Perhaps these illogical remarks are logical to an imaginative child or perhaps the text is a comment on the illogicality of logic. Prassinos deliberately deconstructs logic to make the reader question it. The narrative concludes with the enigmatic phrase 'Les enfants craignent les idoles' which subverts logic since idols are to be admired and not feared.

Other surrealist themes in the text are dream and transformation. In fact, Richard identifies the main theme in the text as 'métamorphoses désopilantes de l'enfant phallus'.⁹⁷ However, I do not consider the text as humorous. The narrator wakes up and there are no children with musty hair, strange shapes, or nuts in sight which suggests that the narrator has woken up from a dream. This reminds the reader of the association that Breton and Éluard draw between *écriture automatique* and 'les récits de rêves' as ways of accessing the unconscious in *Dictionnaire abrégé*.⁹⁸ The narrator describes a strange scene of 'un pied mâle avec des bandes Velpeau, des cheveux moisissés et des noix'. This scene recalls the transformation in 'Le

⁹⁶ Chénieux-Gendron, 'L'absurde chez Gisèle Prassinos : comment minimiser le malheur ?', in *Le surréalisme et le roman*, p.307.

⁹⁷ Richard, *Le monde suspendu*, p.33.

⁹⁸ Breton and Eluard, *Dictionnaire abrégé*, p.4.

Spectre de Châteaubriand'. The musty hair belongs to the first child, the nuts to the third, and the bandaged foot to the second. However, there is no link between these disparate objects and the reader is left to solve the mystery.

To conclude, I argue that Prassinós does not practice the surrealist technique of *écriture automatique* as theorised by Breton but creates her own version of it. The aim of the scientific-literary experimental technique of writing automatically or without conscious control was to access and express the untapped resource of the unconscious. Although Prassinós recognises its potential as a creative method, she dismisses Breton's theory of it as utopian since one cannot outpace conscious thought. She therefore creates her own more realistic version of writing in which unconscious and conscious thought work together in collaboration. Or she writes unconsciously or freely before editing the text consciously. Her texts were often inspired by an unconscious phrase which acted as the springboard for new ideas. Her writings are therefore a collage, a hybrid of unconscious and conscious thoughts which makes them all the more effective. Although it is impossible to distinguish what is conscious and unconscious thought, there are a number of characteristics which are typical of *écriture automatique* such a juxtaposition of words and images, a fragmentation of narrative, and a subversion of logic.

Of form, the regular rhythm and alternating rhyme scheme of the poem 'La sauterelle arthritique' and the turn-taking between the man and the horse in the dialogue 'Une conversation' suggest that these texts were written or edited consciously. However, the striking visual images in the poem and the subversion of logic in the conversation suggest that the text was first written unconsciously before being edited consciously. As Breton states, dialogue lends itself to surrealist

subversion. Of narrative and theme, both 'Le spectre de Chateaubriand' and 'Chevelure arrogante' have a linear although unfamiliar narrative which reveals that the texts have been written or at least edited with conscious control. In the first story, the diverse surrealist themes of chance encounter, *cadavre exquis*, a critique of religion, and transformation emerge. In the second story, the surrealist themes of dream and again transformation are present. In both stories, there is a clear subversion of logic which is a feature of *écriture automatique* as Prassinós deconstructs logic and constructs her own (il)logic. Overall, I argue that Prassinós's version of surrealist automatic writing comes closest to the Surrealists' ambition to bring together opposing or contradictory states. Prassinós's style of surrealist writing combines the unconscious and conscious, voluntary and involuntary thought, the real and the imaginary. The unfamiliar images which emerge from these texts spark *le merveilleux* and demonstrate that *écriture automatique* is a way of accessing it and discovering the explosive presence of the extraordinary in the ordinary.

Chapter three - Into the dark - Prassinós and surrealist *humour noir*

'C'est la révolution permanente en belles images coloriées à un sou'¹

This visual phrase suggests that Prassinós's writings have the potential to transform *humour noir*, the surrealist image, and society. It reminds the reader of Karl Marx's declaration 'to change the world' and of the French poet Arthur Rimbaud's (1854-1891) desire to 'changer la vie'. It is a phrase taken from Breton's introduction to Prassinós in his *Anthologie de l'humour noir* (1940). These 'belles image coloriées' are not conventionally beautiful but convulsively beautiful and combine beauty and violence which is an aspect of surrealist *humour noir*. The adjective 'coloriées' describes the vividness of these images which appeal to the reader just as penny sweets tempt children.

Humour noir is an important surrealist theme and aspect of *le merveilleux*. In his *Anthologie* which was first published in 1940, Breton outlines his theory of surrealist *humour noir* and features four of Prassinós's diverse texts. Her inclusion in the volume is significant since she is the only woman writer featured in the original 1940 edition (though Leonora Carrington was added to the second 1950 issue) and her writings are included in the genre of surrealist *humour noir*. In this chapter, through close readings of these four texts, I will explore the ways in which Prassinós's writings contribute to the notion of surrealist *humour noir* and our understanding of it. I will discuss Breton's theory of *humour noir*, the inclusion of

¹ Breton, *Anthologie* (1940), p.254.

only one (and later two) women writers in the *Anthologie*, and Breton's introduction to Prassinós. I will then analyse the mood of *humour noir* in Prassinós's four experimental texts, 'Une conversation', 'Suite de membres', 'Souillure sarcastique', and 'Réclame'.

The presence of *humour noir* in the writings of the women associated with Surrealism has not received much critical attention. Although many publications and papers have been written on Breton's *Anthologie* and surrealist *humour noir*, there is no mention of Prassinós (nor Carrington) in J.H. Matthews's article 'Intelligence at the Service of Surrealism: Breton's *Anthologie de l'humour noir*' (1967) nor in John D. Erickson's 'Surrealist Black Humour as Oppositional Discourse' (1988), and Prassinós is only briefly mentioned with a reference to 'Suite de membres' in Doug Haynes's 'The Persistence of Irony: interfering with surrealist black humour' (2006).² Therefore, this chapter on Prassinós's writings in the context of surrealist *humour noir* is an insightful contribution to scholarship on women's surrealist writing. Susan Rubin Suleiman has written two papers on *humour noir*, 'L'humour noir des femmes' (1998) and 'Surrealist Black Humour: Masculine/Feminine' (2003) of which the latter is very much a rewriting of the former.³ Nevertheless, these papers are the only ones

² J.H. Matthews, 'Intelligence at the Service of Surrealism: Breton's *Anthologie de l'humour noir*', *Books Abroad*, 41, 3 (1967), 267-273, John D. Erickson, 'Surrealist Black Humour as Oppositional Discourse', *Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literatures*, 42, 3 (1988), 198-215, Doug Haynes, 'The Persistence of Irony: interfering with surrealist black humour', *Textual Practice*, 20, 1 (2006), 25-47.

³ Susan Rubin Suleiman, 'L'humour noir des femmes', in *La femme s'entête*, ed. by Colville and Conley, pp.41-55 and 'Surrealist Black Humour: Masculine/Feminine', *Papers of Surrealism*, 1 (2003)

which examine *humour noir* in women's surrealist writing (in that of Carrington, Prassinos, and Nelly Kaplan). However, she does not examine *humour noir* in 'Souillure sarcastique' or 'Réclame' which were omitted from the 1950 edition of the *Anthologie*. In her 2003 paper, Suleiman identifies three strategies, 'mimicry', 'parody', and 'assimilation' to analyse the role of women's creative oeuvre in Surrealism and vice versa. In *L'humour noir selon André Breton* (1987), Mireille Rosello discusses Breton's inclusion of the two women writers and analyses Carrington's short story 'La débutante' in great detail but not any of Prassinos's texts.⁴ She does however analyse Prassinos's story 'Suite de membres' in the context of *humour noir* in an essay published in *Jeu surréaliste et humour noir* (1993).⁵

By the end of 1936, Breton had gathered together the initial forty writers and the extracts to be featured in the *Anthologie*. He had also drafted his overall foreword to the volume by 1939 in addition to the short introductions to each writer. However, the book suffered many years of delays by the publishers as a result of financial difficulties and the outbreak of the Second World War. Breton's *Anthologie* was printed on 10 June 1940. However, four days later, on 14 June, German troops marched into Paris and the Occupation began. In June 1941, Leon Pierre-Quint, the editorial director and the book's first and final publisher, submitted

https://www.research.manchester.ac.uk/portal/files/63517385/surrealism_issue_1.pdf
[accessed 20 February 2019].

⁴ Mireille Rosello, *L'humour noir selon André Breton* (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1987).

⁵ Mireille Rosello, '« Suite de membres » de Gisèle Prassinos. Comment mettre en boîte la liberté et le public', in *Jeu surréaliste et humour noir*, ed. by Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron (Paris: Lachenal & Ritter, 1993), pp.67-84.

the volume to the censorship board for authorisation. However, that same month, the book was rejected and in the spirit of surrealist (*mal*)chance, the *Anthologie*, printed after a four-year delay, was not distributed for a further five. Finally issued in 1945, and to Breton's disappointment, the volume received little critical attention. A second, revised edition of the *Anthologie* was published in 1950 and a final one, 'l'édition définitive', edited with a new preface was issued shortly before Breton's death in 1966.⁶ The writers Charles Fourier (1772-1837), Benjamin Péret (1899-1959), Jean Ferry (1906-1974), Jean-Pierre Duprey (1930-1959), and most importantly Leonora Carrington were added to the 1950 edition.

Surrealist *humour noir* is a complex theme. It is a literary and artistic mood which presents the darker side or the dark unconscious of Surrealism. When discussing surrealist *humour noir* one cannot overlook the role of Jacques Vaché (1895-1919) who Breton became acquainted with during his rounds at the military hospital in Nantes. Vaché was a wounded soldier and is described to have been wounded more in mind than in body and in rebellion against society.⁷ In a letter sent to Breton, Vaché defines *umour* (humour spelt without the 'h') as 'une sensation – J'allais presque dire un SENS – aussi – de l'inutilité théâtrale (et sans joie) de tout.'⁸ *Umour* as the pointlessness of everything presents a pessimistic outlook on life. Vaché taught Breton *umour* as a 'defense mechanism', as a way to defend oneself

⁶ Breton, *Anthologie* (1966), p.6.

⁷ Anna Balakian, *André Breton: Magus of Surrealism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p.23.

⁸ Breton, *Anthologie* (1940), p.237. Breton and Éluard use this definition of 'humour' in *Dictionnaire abrégé*, p.14.

against a world (minds and places) devastated by war and the value of non-conformism.⁹ For Vaché and Breton, *umour* or *humour noir* was a 'particular kind of literary protest against the human condition'.¹⁰ Breton and Vaché developed a close friendship which was brought to an end with Vaché's suicide in 1919.¹¹

In the introduction to the *Anthologie* titled 'Paratonnerre', Breton outlines his theory of humour and *humour noir*. A footnote reveals that the title is a remark made by or a reference to the German philosopher and physicist Georg Christoph Lichtenberg (1742-1799), 'La préface pourrait être intitulée : le paratonnerre (Lichtenberg)'.¹² Breton features Lichtenberg's *Aphorismes* in the *Anthologie* and describes him as 'l'un des grands maîtres de l'humour'.¹³ Just as Lichtenberg introduced the lightning rod to Germany, Breton introduces surrealist *humour noir* to France. His preface is a conductor of *humour noir* as opposed to electricity and he presents his theory as a lightning strike of inspiration. It also presents the idea of the writer as a recording device or conductor and as a human-machine hybrid.¹⁴

Humour refers to the quality of being amusing and the capacity to elicit laughter whereas black humour presents tragic, distressing, or morbid situations in humorous terms. I argue that surrealist *humour noir* differs from the general notion of black humour since it presents a critique of society or the human condition. It is

⁹ Balakian, p.24 and p.25.

¹⁰ Ibid, p.24.

¹¹ Breton reflects on their friendship in *Les pas perdus* (1924). See André Breton, *Les pas perdus* (Paris: Gallimard, 1924), pp.67-72.

¹² Breton, *Anthologie* (1940), p.7.

¹³ Ibid, p.36.

¹⁴ See Breton, *Manifestes*, p.39.

characterised by a darkness more so than by humour. In a discussion with Ferdinand Alquié, Annie Le Brun admits that 'Quand on lit l'*Anthologie*, on ne rit pas du tout.'¹⁵ However, if *humour noir* is not humorous then what is it? For Breton, humour resists definition, 'c'est dans cette mesure même que nous échappe et nous échappera sans doute longtemps toute définition globale de l'humour'.¹⁶ Later, he reflects 'Pour qu'il y ait humour... [Breton's ellipsis] le problème restera posé.'¹⁷ There is no comprehensive definition of humour and there cannot be in the near future. It cannot be reduced to a single phrase since there are multiple understandings of it. Instead of providing a written definition of *humour noir*, he outlines his theory through his choice of diverse extracts. Through close readings of Prassinos's texts, I seek to get closer to an understanding of surrealist *humour noir*.

In an act of subversion, Breton defines *humour noir* by stating what it is not. He reveals that 'L'humour noir est borné par trop de choses, telles que la bêtise, l'ironie sceptique, la plaisanterie sans gravité... (l'énumération serait longue) mais il est par excellence l'ennemi mortel de la sentimentalité à l'air perpétuellement aux abois'.¹⁸ If *humour noir* is not ironic, sarcastic or light-hearted then it is sincere, logical, and moreover serious. Breton personifies *humour noir* as 'l'ennemi mortel de la sentimentalité'. The noun 'sentimentalité' denotes the quality of being sentimental which is characterised by feeling and emotion. This suggests that

¹⁵ Annie Le Brun, 'L'humour noir', in *Jeu surréaliste et humour noir*, ed. by Chénieux-Gendron, p.114.

¹⁶ Breton, *Anthologie* (1940), p.8.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p.10.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, pp.13-14.

humour noir is uncompassionate and unsympathetic in its critique of society. Although Breton does not imply a clear link here between gender and *humour noir*, sentimentality is a quality often associated with women. Therefore, if we take sentimentality to be gendered (i.e. feminine), this personification of *humour noir* suggests that it is of masculine origin and the opposite of or a revolt against femininity. However, the use of the adjective 'mortel' as opposed to 'immortel' suggests that *humour noir* as masculine can be defeated and that it can be expressed by women as well as men. This (non)definition suggests effect over intention and presents *humour noir* as a literary or artistic technique.

In his theory on humour, Breton emphasises its importance to the modern spirit, 'Il est de moins en moins certain, vu les exigences spécifiques de la sensibilité moderne, que les œuvres poétiques, artistiques, scientifiques, les systèmes philosophiques et sociaux dépourvus de *cette sorte d'humour*, ne laissent pas gravement à désirer, ne soient pas condamnés plus ou moins rapidement à périr.'¹⁹ Here, Breton relates the importance of '*cette sorte d'humour*' or *humour noir* to a work or system to ensure its success and long-term survival. For Breton, the longevity of a work or system is dependent on the presence of *humour noir*. He suggests that humour can be present in all genres. However, it is not found in scientific papers which are based on research and data. Humour can make a text more entertaining and arguably more memorable and is present in genres of fiction more so than in non-fiction.

¹⁹ Ibid, p.8.

In the *Anthologie*, humour is presented as a form of revolt against society and the human condition. Breton discusses the insignificant results of a number of surveys on the subject of humour. He writes favourably on Léon Pierre-Quint who in *Le Comte de Lautréamont et Dieu* presents humour as ‘une manière d’affirmer, par[]delà « la révolte absolue de l’adolescence et la révolte intérieure de l’âge adulte », *une révolte supérieure de l’esprit*.²⁰ Here, Pierre-Quint presents humour as a form of revolt and moreover as a form of revolt related to age. Adolescence is a period associated with rebellion and ‘la révolte intérieure de l’âge adulte’ is perhaps an attempt to recapture the carefree attitude which characterises youth and the sense of freedom which is normally suppressed in adulthood as one becomes burdened and regulated by society. Moreover, this idea of humour as a revolt links to the spirit of revolution at the heart of Surrealism. Pierre-Quint’s comment also echoes Freud’s remark, ‘Humour is not resigned; it is rebellious’ which conveys the idea that humour is not passive but an active and powerful force.²¹ This idea is echoed by the Argentinian surrealist filmmaker Nelly Kaplan (1931-present) who states that ‘Humour is an essential element of revolt’.²²

Influenced by the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) and Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), Breton draws on their respective theories of humour to elaborate his own understanding of the

²⁰ Ibid, p.10.

²¹ Freud, Sigmund, ‘Humour’ (1927), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 21, trans. by James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1995), p.163.

²² Nelly Kaplan, ‘All creation is androgynous: An interview’ (late 1970s), in *Surrealist Women*, ed. by Penelope Rosemont, p.301.

concept. He credits Hegel and his concept of *humour objectif* with advancing it to the realm of knowledge. The idea of humour entering this realm suggests that like knowledge it is learned and highly respected. Drawing on Freud's study *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905) and his paper 'Humour' (1927), Breton quotes him on the characteristics of humour, 'L'humour a non seulement quelque chose de libérateur, analogue en cela à l'esprit et au comique, mais encore *quelque chose de sublime et d'élevé*'.²³ The use of the adjectives 'libérateur', 'sublime', and 'élevé' to describe humour suggest that it belongs to a superior realm and to the highest sphere of intellectual thought. Breton conceptualises and sublimates *humour noir* and takes it to a more refined intellectual realm.

Breton admits a level of favourable bias (a gender bias?) in his choice of texts and expresses regret at not having exploited the full potential of the featured extracts. He imagines that, 'Pour prendre part au tournoi noir de l'humour, il faut en effet avoir échappé à de nombreux éliminatoires.'²⁴ This metaphor of a 'tournoi noir de l'humour' is a play on the term 'humour noir'. A tournament denotes a martial sport practised in the middle ages in which men mounted and in armour would fight for the prize of valour. The idea of *humour noir* as a tournament, a sport in which only men could participate, therefore implies that this type of humour is exclusive to men. Breton's metaphor suggests that those featured in the *Anthologie* have made it through a competitive process and that only the best and the strongest have succeeded. Prassinos and Carrington have therefore made it through the 'tournoi

²³ Breton, *Anthologie* (1940), p.12. Breton and Éluard also use this definition of 'humour' in *Dictionnaire abrégé*, p.14. It is a direct quotation from Freud's paper 'Humour' (1927), p.162.

²⁴ Breton, *Anthologie* (1940), p.13.

noir' and perhaps have even successfully competed against their male competitors. In addition, Suleiman argues that for Breton humour is not a feminine trait but is rather 'viril, chevaleresque et guerrier'.²⁵ These qualities are associated with men and reinforce the idea that *humour noir* has masculine roots. Moreover, in her study, Rosello extends Breton's metaphor and characterises him as 'l'arbitre souverain du tournoi noir'.²⁶ He is the umpire of the tournament of surrealist *humour noir* and decides what it is and what it is not.

From Breton's foreword and the writers and extracts featured in the *Anthologie*, one can argue that there is no stable or already defined notion of surrealist *humour noir*. In this chapter, it is not my intention to assess to what extent Prassinós's writings conform to Breton's notion but rather to take a more open-ended approach to her texts and to consider what and how they might contribute to our understanding of *humour noir*. The key question that I will consider when discussing Prassinós's texts is do they bring anything distinctive to the concept?

Prassinós's inclusion in the *Anthologie* is significant for a number of reasons and is documented in the letters published in *Correspondance*.²⁷ In a letter addressed to Mario, dated 22 December 1936, Parisot announces Prassinós's inclusion in the volume.²⁸ He states 'Tant pis pour le Heine. L'essentiel est que Michaux, Kafka, et surtout Gisèle figurent dans l'Anthologie en question. Ces

²⁵ Suleiman, 'L'humour noir des femmes', in *La femme s'entête*, ed. by Colvile and Conley, p.44.

²⁶ Rosello, *L'humour noir selon André Breton*, p.57.

²⁷ *Correspondance*, ed. by Prassinós and Rye.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p.155.

messieurs s'arrangeront toujours pour le reste !'²⁹ Here, Prassinos is elevated to the same level as the Belgian painter and poet Henri Michaux (1899-1984) (who was ultimately not included in the *Anthologie*) and the German-language writer Franz Kafka (1883-1924) and above that of the German poet Heinrich Heine (1797-1856). She has successfully competed against Heine in the 'tournoi noir de l'humour'.³⁰ Her writings are presented as of equal literary value to those of Michaux and Kafka. The fact that Prassinos is included in the volume alongside such esteemed figures is significant because of her lack of renown and her sex. Her inclusion in the *Anthologie* therefore implies that there is something unusual about her writings. Or was she included because of Parisot's influence?

Parisot seems to have played a significant role in the inclusion of her writings in the volume. In two letters dated 26 February and 2 March 1937, Parisot asks Mario to encourage his sister to write the requested text for the *Anthologie*.³¹ In another letter of the same date directly addressed to Gisèle, Parisot reminds her to submit 'un conte susceptible de figurer avec honneur' in the volume.³² These letters present Parisot as the driving force behind Prassinos's inclusion in the *Anthologie*. This is backed up by a letter dated 9 March 1937 addressed to the schoolgirl. Having received her texts for the volume, Parisot explains, 'j'aime beaucoup votre dernier texte, sauf l'épilogue, tellement faible qu'il rend tout le reste inutilisable.'³³ He goes

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Breton, *Anthologie* (1940), p.13.

³¹ *Correspondance*, ed. by Prassinos and Rye, pp.164-166.

³² Ibid, p.167.

³³ Ibid, p.171.

on to cite the final lines in question and encourages her to send him the revised draft as soon as possible. This seems to be a deliberate and concerted attempt by Parisot to nurture Prassinos and to get her work published in the context of Surrealism. He seems to exert a great level of control over Prassinos and her writing so much so that Prassinos called him 'mon manager'.³⁴ On the one hand, this is unhelpful as it arguably stifles Prassinos's own creativity and the expression of her own ideas. This makes the reader question the authenticity of her writings. However, they are authentic since she wrote them and redrafted them herself and they were not edited by Parisot. This also reveals that at least one of the texts featured in the *Anthologie* was not originally considered to have been written in the mood of surrealist *humour noir*. On the other hand, Parisot's involvement was beneficial to her career as a writer since after all it is her inclusion in the *Anthologie* which is one of the reasons that we are aware of her work today. Nevertheless, the level of control seems almost manipulative. Parisot manipulates her to produce writing which he judges to be surrealist or to be written in the spirit of *humour noir*. Perhaps Breton would have overlooked Prassinos if it were not for Parisot's persistence. Moreover, perhaps writing to Mario was another way to ensure that Prassinos wrote the texts in the way that he requested them and to exert control over her through the figure of her older brother.

As cited by Parisot, the epilogue in question reads,

Un jour, elle ne vit pas le garçon. Il avait laissé pourrir les lentilles d'eau sur sa fenêtre. Elle les voyait tomber, une à une, comme des boules de papier

³⁴ Prassinos, *Le rêve*, p.11.

rose qui s'ouvraient en chemin. ...Alors elle partit dans la rivière cueillir un énorme bouquet. Le jeune homme y était déjà et ses mains tenaient de toutes petites fleurs avec lesquelles il se caressait les joues. Elle resta avec lui dans la rivière.³⁵

These lines stand alone as a short narrative about a young man and woman picking flowers in a river. The text has a coherent narrative and creates imaginative visual images of floating flowering plants compared to paper scrunched up into balls which is an aesthetically pleasing and tactile image. The text evokes the themes of nature ('les lentilles d'eau', 'la rivière', 'toutes petites fleurs') and love ('il se caressait les joues'). As an adolescent, perhaps Prassinós is mocking the notion of romance. The narrative is strange and subverts logic with the characters picking flowers in the river rather than in a field. However, it is not humorous and does not critique society or the human condition. Perhaps this is the reason why Parisot rejected the text. Prassinós scrapped this short story and wrote a different one altogether as it does not correspond to any of the four texts featured.

As discussed in chapter one, Prassinós began to write to entertain herself and continued as she enjoyed making others laugh, especially her father, through her playful, light-hearted writings. In an interview, Prassinós reflects on the role of humour in her texts and in her tapestries, 'Mes personnages, je les rend ridicules, mais j'ai en même temps une grande tendresse pour eux. Ce n'est pas un humour cruel comme on l'a parfois dit.'³⁶ She gives the example of a story that she had

³⁵ *Correspondance*, ed. by Prassinós and Rye, p.171.

³⁶ Druet.

written about 'un petit garçon sans jambe qui lisait installé dans une cave, ce qui lui permettait de ne voir passer toute la journée devant lui que les jambes et les pieds des gens, on a voulu voir de la cruauté dans mon écriture. Moi, je l'aime cet enfant, avec sa souffrance et son désir : c'est plutôt naïf.'³⁷ Although Prassinós states that this is not 'un humour cruel' (or in other words *humour noir*), I argue that the narrative has a cruel or dark character but it is not humorous. In an interview, Prassinós reflects on the spirit of *humour (noir)* in everyday life, 'C'est important l'humour, ça aide à vivre. Il faut toujours se moquer un peu de soi, prendre de la distance par rapport à ce qu'on peut dire de vous.'³⁸ This attitude conveys a light-hearted approach to life and suggests that the theme of darkness in her writings should not be taken too seriously. It is in line with the Argentinian surrealist filmmaker Nelly Kaplan's theory 'Life may be tragic, but never serious ... [Kaplan's ellipsis]'.³⁹

The inclusion of only two women writers raises a number of questions on the relation between surrealist *humour noir* and gender and in particular between *humour noir* and women's writing. It also raises the broader question on the position of women in Surrealism and Breton's attitude towards women's writing. In *L'humour noir selon André Breton*, Rosello remarks on this 'déséquilibre flagrant' and questions 'Une femme n'aurait-elle pas d'humour? La femme serait-elle incapable d'écrire

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Nelly Kaplan, 'All creation is androgynous: An interview', in *Surrealist Women*, ed. by Penelope Rosemont, p.301.

l'humour?'.⁴⁰ It cannot be denied that women have a sense of humour and are able to express it which underlines the question why did Breton largely exclude women writers? Was it because of his reported misogynistic attitude? Rosello continues 'Amour-fou et u-mour noir sont-ils incompatibles? Breton aurait-il renoncé à rapprocher ces deux réalités dont il a pourtant fait les deux pôles du surréalisme ?'⁴¹ Rosello connects *amour fou* and *humour noir* through word play and like Vaché omits the 'h' of 'humour'. She emphasises that the only difference between the abstract nouns 'amour' and 'umour' is a vowel and questions how can women be capable of mad love but not black humour. It would seem that for Breton women are capable of expressing the emotion of love but not humour. This highlights the initial role assigned to the women of Surrealism as lovers and *femmes-enfants* and not as artists and writers. These two concepts are opposing poles within surrealist thought since they are two extremes – *amour fou* is an obsessive love while *humour noir* is characterised by darkness and violence. However, both are associated with pleasure – *amour fou* with sexual pleasure and *humour noir* with the infliction of pain for pleasure (as I will discuss in Prassinós's story *Tragique fantasme* (c.1935)). Although Breton's inclusion of Prassinós and Carrington confirms that women are able to practice *humour noir*, it presents the idea that for Breton this is the exception and not the norm.

In addition to Prassinós and Carrington, Breton identifies a third woman writer of *humour noir*. In his 1956 foreword, Breton states that he deliberately chose

⁴⁰ Rosello, *L'humour noir selon André Breton*, p.104.

⁴¹ Ibid.

not to expand his *Anthologie*, despite already having made a number of additions to the second issue, and had to resist the temptation to feature the poetry of Joyce Mansour (1928-1986) along with four other writers (Oscar Panizza, Georges Darien, G.I. Gurdjieff, and Eugène Ionesco).⁴² For Breton, the *Anthologie* 'a marqué, tel qu'il est, son époque'.⁴³ However, since the volume was compiled in 1936, and not published until 1940, distributed in 1945, and edited in 1950, it is difficult to understand how the *Anthologie* marks the period in which it was written. Despite having expanded the 1940 edition, Breton declares that it was not his ambition for the volume to become an 'annuaire constamment remis à jour, qu'il prenne un aspect de palmarès dérisoire et on ne peut plus contraire à sa destination originelle'.⁴⁴ This raises the question what was the original purpose of the collection - was it to coin and delimit the term *humour noir* and to outline his theory once and for all or was it to act as a springboard for future understandings of the concept? Nevertheless, it is striking that it is Mansour whom he excludes.

Mansour was born in Bowden, England to Egyptian parents and moved to Paris in 1953 where she joined the surrealist group the following year. Breton described Mansour's collection *Les gisants satisfaits* (1958) as a masterpiece of *humour noir* and in 1960 he hailed her as one of the three most important French language surrealist poets of the post-war years.⁴⁵ Breton therefore seems to

⁴² Breton, *Anthologie* (1966), p.5.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p.6.

⁴⁵ Joyce Mansour, *Les gisants satisfaits* (1958) (Paris: Editions Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1958). *Surrealist Women*, ed. by Rosemont, p.252 and p.203. See J.H. Matthews, *Surrealist Poetry in France* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1969), p.176 and p.236. The only

contradict himself in stating that Mansour is capable of *humour noir* and worthy of inclusion and recognition in the *Anthologie* yet he excludes her. Perhaps Breton did not rate women writers or perhaps he did not think of them as humorous. Or perhaps women as writers of surrealist *humour noir* came to light later as more women came to Surrealism. For example, Mansour would have only been twelve-years-old when the first edition was published. Other women writers associated with Surrealism who practised a subversive humour are Nelly Kaplan (1931-present), German-born Unica Zürn (1916-1970), Irène Hamoir (1906-1994), and Rikki Ducornet (1943-present).

I argue that Breton was more interested in Prassinós as a *femme-enfant* than as a writer. In his introduction to Prassinós, Breton makes several references to her young age which becomes somewhat repetitive (see chapter one). The reader wonders if this is all that he sees in her. However, he does feature an extract from the first part of her short story 'Tragique fantasme' (c.1935).⁴⁶ It is about 'une petite veille' and 'une douzaine des chats de toutes tailles et de toutes couleurs'.⁴⁷ It was first published in the sixth issue of the review *Minotaure* in 1934 and later in *Trouver sans chercher (1934-1944)* (1976).⁴⁸ The main theme in this extract is the infliction of violence on the ageing female body which is a theme that I will return to in chapter eight. In the extract, the old lady's naked body is pierced with knitting needles

woman writer included in this volume is Mansour; Matthews overlooks and omits Prassinós's surrealist poems.

⁴⁶ Breton, *Anthologie* (1940), p.254.

⁴⁷ Gisèle Prassinós, 'Tragique fantasme', in *Trouver sans chercher*, pp.74-80.

⁴⁸ Gisèle Prassinós, 'Tragique fantasme', *Minotaure*, 6, 1935, p.63 and in *Trouver sans chercher*, pp.74-80.

resembling a voodoo doll. The verbs 'traverser' and 'enfoncer' convey this violence and evoke pain and suffering. The knitting needles have connotations of woman's assigned domestic role. However, here, they are not being used to create but to destroy or to inflict pain in a surrealist subversion of their creative function. She has turned the creative tool on herself and is remaking herself as how she wants to be and not as how others see her. The puncturing of her body with these needles is act of self-harm. It is perhaps an expression of her anger at herself, at society, or in rebellion against the surrealist idealised image of woman. It also alludes to sadism or masochism or even perverse torture. Whether as a way of releasing emotion or inflicting pain for pleasure, the piercing of the body with needles is nonetheless violent and disturbing. She is presented as in charge of her own body which alludes to a reworking of the notion of femininity. The narrator reveals that she has done this to beautify her body and has attached pretty green ribbons to the needles. The ribbons have connotations of femininity and are often worn in the hair of young girls. The image juxtaposes violence and beauty (the aesthetic appeal of the ribbons) and perhaps suggests that beauty (or convulsive beauty) can be found in violence (the beauty of violence?).

There is an empty space between her torso and her knees; her thighs, perhaps because of their erotic appeal, have been removed. The old lady is no longer sexually attractive. Her legs are suspended by a piece of string. She is a puppet controlled by men which alludes to the surrealist image of woman as muse or *femme-enfant* or to Prassinos herself. The dismembered body alludes to Bellmer's *poupées*. Bellmer's photographs of these dolls were printed in the same issue of *Minotaure* as 'Tragique fantasme' and can therefore be read as an illustration of this

extract.⁴⁹ Titled 'Poupée. Variations sur le montage d'une mineure articulée', this photomontage depicts a mannequin in various stages of construction or deconstruction, dismembered, and sometimes headless. These images present the female body as Bellmer's plaything and as an object of the male gaze. However, one major difference between Prassinos's and Bellmer's female figures is that Prassinos's character inflicts pain on her own body whereas Bellmer inflicts violence on the female body. Perhaps Prassinos's punctured female figure is in response to Bellmer's dismembered dolls. The old lady's eyeballs fall to her feet; she can endure no more. However, the question why did Breton chose this extract and what does it reveal about *humour noir* remains. The image of an ageing female body pierced with creative knitting needles conveys the darkness of *humour noir* but not the humour. Cottenet-Hage presents this extract as an excellent introduction to Prassinos's 'monde fantastique' since it introduces the themes of 'l'obscurité, le corps-mécanisé, le manqué d'être, la métamorphose, le sadisme et la fascination du corps vieilli'.⁵⁰ The extract exemplifies the presence of violence and darkness in her early writings.

I will now analyse the four texts by Prassinos featured in Breton's 1940 *Anthologie* and discuss how they contribute to surrealist *humour noir* to get closer to an understanding of what it is. The first text by Prassinos featured in the original 1940 edition is 'Une conversation' (1935) which I have already discussed in relation to *écriture automatique* in chapter two.⁵¹ It is a conversation between a man and a

⁴⁹ Hans Bellmer, 'Poupée. Variations sur le montage d'une mineure articulée', *Minotaure*, 6, 1935, pp.30-31.

⁵⁰ Cottenet-Hage, *Gisèle Prassinos ou le désir du lieu intime*, p.48.

⁵¹ Breton, *Anthologie* (1940), p.255.

horse in a field with the horse sat on the man in a reversal of (gender?) roles which is humorous. Suleiman describes it as 'un petit morceau de *nonsense* à la Lewis Carroll'.⁵² The dialogue begins with the unnamed man asking the horse 'Avons-nous méprisé le diamant vert?', which personifies the mineral, to which the horse replies 'Je crois que par la loi nous avons dû le faire.' The diamond, despite its rare value, is not above the law. The horse continues, 'La loi étant diminuée, mon esprit demande la réduction des bougies.' The animal either requests the light to be lowered or a discount on the price of candles. The man reminds the horse, addressing him as 'cachet', that 'l'homme n'a pas le droit de satisfaire les employés et que même le téléphone refuse de payer les impôts.' The personification of the telephone anticipates Salvador Dalí's surrealist object *Téléphone-Homard* (1936).⁵³ The animate-inanimate object has connotations of communication and the references to law, employment, and taxes ('la loi', 'les employés', and 'les impôts') allude to a critique of society.

The horse advises the man 'ne croyez pas en ces choses concrètes qui doivent, malgré leur dignité, épuiser leur bavardage'. Perhaps 'ces choses concrètes' refers to the telephone which has run out of chatter or perhaps to politicians as the animal continues 'Outrez-les, dites-leur des bêtises qui manquent de courage, vous verrez comment ils nous suivront.' This is perhaps a critique of the ideologies which limit and restrict an individual's freedom. The man replies 'N'ai-je pas assez de

⁵² Suleiman, 'L'humour noir des femmes', in *La femme s'entête*, ed. by Colville and Conley, p.45.

⁵³ Salvador Dalí, *Téléphone-Homard* (1936) <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/dali-lobster-telephone-t03257> [accessed 5 May 2019].

grossièretés pour m'occuper, en plus, de la queue d'un millionnaire ?' The noun 'queue' has a double meaning; it can mean 'tail' perhaps referring to the horse's tail or is a vulgar term for 'penis'. The noun 'grossièretés' suggests that she means the latter. This is perhaps a critique of masculinity and wealth and the notion that men are superior to women since a millionaire is financially superior. This critique of society is a defining element of *humour noir*. It explains its inclusion in the volume and perhaps the reason why Breton chose to keep it in the revised 1950 version of the *Anthologie*.

The second text by Prassinós featured in the original 1940 and subsequent editions is 'Suite de membres' (Paris, 1936). It was first published in 1938 in Parisot's collection *Un Divertissement*. Titled 'Une belle famille', the *cahier* was dedicated to Breton and featured five of Prassinós's texts - 'Désagrèments' (Saint-Raphaël, July 1938), 'Une belle famille' (July 1938), 'Véra dit' (July 1938), 'Venda et le parasite' (July 1938), and 'Suite de membres'.⁵⁴ The adjective 'belle' of the collective title 'Une belle famille' is used in a subversive and convulsive sense since the family presented is by no means a model family. 'Suite de membres' was later published in *Le feu maniaque* (1939) with a sketch by the artist-writer of three feet, two large boots, and a small one which illustrates the final scene of the story.⁵⁵ In '« Suite de membres » de Gisèle Prassinós. Comment mettre en boîte la liberté et le public',

⁵⁴ Gisèle Prassinós, 'Une belle famille', in *Un divertissement*, ed. by Parisot, no page numbers.

⁵⁵ Gisèle Prassinós, 'Suite de membres', in *Le feu maniaque*, pp.67-71.

Rosello discusses the text in the context of *humour noir*.⁵⁶ She compares the short story to two other texts, one written as a piece of gossip and the other as a short newspaper article to demonstrate 'la façon dont l'humour noir fonctionne en tant qu'effet de lecture.'⁵⁷ However, I argue that she does not demonstrate the role of *humour noir* in 'Suite de membres' by comparing it to two additional texts but by her two explanations of the story - 'Tout va pour le mieux dans le meilleur des mondes possibles' and 'Une violence omniprésente, ignorée, sans coupable'. The mood of *humour noir* is conveyed by the theme of an omnipresent yet glossed over violence.

The title 'Suite de membres' with 'membres' meaning limbs explicitly evokes the body and moreover the dismemberment of the body. It recalls the extract from 'Tragique fantôme' and can also be said to allude to Bellmer's *poupées*, the fragmentation of the (female) body, the game of *cadavre exquis*, and to the technique of collage. The title anticipates the parade of mannequins which embody *le merveilleux* in the 1938 'Exposition internationale du surréalisme' in Paris. The noun 'membre' has a double meaning; it also means being a member of a family, group, or society. It anticipates the surrealist group's succession of members and the way that Breton fell out with and admitted new members to the group, in particular the women who came to the surrealist group later on. It could also anticipate Prassinós's status as a member of the group before being cast aside by Breton (see chapter one).

⁵⁶ Mireille Rosello, '« Suite de membres » de Gisèle Prassinós', in *Jeu surréaliste et humour noir*, ed. by Chénieux-Gendron, pp.67-84.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p.73.

'Suite de membres' has a linear narrative. It is a short story about a couple who keep their child in a box which they kick down the stairs. The key themes present in the text are violence and a critique of family and society. Suleiman's description of the text as a 'conte cruel [...] dont l'agressivité est à nouveau dirigée contre la famille et la domesticité bourgeoises' is accurate.⁵⁸ In the story, the mood of *humour noir* is expressed by the acts of violence which creep up on the reader. The story begins as a conversation between a woman and her neighbour which presents a close-knit community. The reader learns of her son's absurdly small size and his desire to walk which alludes to his desire for freedom. She questions how can her son walk when his feet do not touch the ground which presents the image of him as a puppet. The neighbour advises the woman that her son is too small to walk and warns her 'Ses jambes pourraient s'écarter et je ne sais pas si le chirurgien pourrait le visiter : il est si jeune encore !'. The exaggerated risk of the child breaking his legs anticipates the final scene. The woman's son is rebellious which demonstrates 'la révolte absolue de l'adolescence'.⁵⁹ He threatens to roll around in the Jardin des Plantes (the botanical gardens in Paris), to steal money to buy bread for the geese, and to wash his white beret.

The narrator presents a nuclear family of a mother, father, and child. The father works at a construction site and the mother stays at home to look after their son. The family adheres to traditional gender roles. The woman cooks dinner and waits for her husband, who is described as 'un gros homme habillé de flanelle

⁵⁸ Suleiman, 'L'humour noir des femmes', in *La femme s'entête*, ed. by Colvile and Conley, p.46.

⁵⁹ Breton, *Anthologie* (1940), p.10.

rouge', to return from work which presents 'un bonheur domestique irréprochable'.⁶⁰ At the dinner table, they discuss their son's future. The father declares that he will soon be working with him on the building site. This suggests that their son is a young man and not a child as the reader has been led to believe. That evening the mother is troubled and cannot sleep and her husband reassures her with a kiss. On the surface the family is presented as a model family with good moral values and intentions. However, not all is as it seems.

Returning to Rosello's theory of 'Une violence omniprésente, ignorée, sans coupable', there are numerous acts of violence which simmer beneath the surface and are glossed over by the narrator. The first scene of violence is when the neighbour, annoyed that the woman has not heeded her advice, slams the door which causes two glass panes to smash. However, this act of violence is glossed over by the narrator which undermines its significance. The second episode of violence is the moment when her husband returns home from work, 'Il alla embrasser sa femme et, sans faire attention, l'appuya sur la cuisinière qui était brûlante.' Rosello describes this as 'un moment de violence parfaitement gratuite' which is glossed over as act of carelessness.⁶¹ Despite the obvious pain, the woman does not say anything. At the cobblers, she purchases size nine shoes which leads to the final and unexpected scene of violence. The shoe maker is unknowingly complicit in the child's fate.

⁶⁰ Rosello, '« Suite de membres » de Gisèle Prassinou', in *Jeu surréaliste et humour noir*, ed. by Chénieux-Gendron, p.75.

⁶¹ Ibid, p.78.

The final and most extreme act of violence takes place on Easter Sunday which presents the text as a critique of religion. The couple move the kitchen stove to uncover 'une petite caisse de bois blanc gentiment ornée de décalcomanies artistiques.' *Décalcomanie* is an artistic surrealist technique discovered by Oscar Dominguez in 1936.⁶² One could identify this box as a surrealist object along with the unidentifiable object in *Nadja* (1928) and Marion's hearing trumpet in *Le cornet acoustique* (1974) both of which were discovered at flea markets (see chapter eight). The reader is horrified to learn that the couple keep their child in a wooden box. The mother holds the crate 'tendrement' in her arms expressing her maternal love for her son. However, this is juxtaposed with the final image in the text in which her husband 'prit son élan et donna un vaste coup de pied dans la petite caisse, qui descendit vivement les escaliers.' The adjectives 'vaste' and 'vivement' emphasise the force with which he kicks the crate containing their child down a flight of stairs in a disturbing scene of domestic violence. The force mirrors 'la même force destructive et aveugle' with which the woman slams the door.⁶³ This can be interpreted as a punishment for his rebellious behaviour or as proof that he cannot walk. The child is a 'victime d'une violence monstrueuse et invisible'.⁶⁴ The adjective 'invisible' refers to the way that the acts of violence are ignored by the narrator. This final scene of extreme violence refers back to the title which implies that the child has fractured or dislocated limbs. This violence undermines the portrait of a caring

⁶² Breton and Éluard, *Dictionnaire abrégé*, p.9.

⁶³ Rosello, '« Suite de membres » de Gisèle Prassinos', in *Jeu surréaliste et humour noir*, ed. by Chénieux-Gendron, p.79.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

and loving family. As Suleiman observes 'La famille bourgeoise protectrice est donc un lieu de violence extrême.'⁶⁵ The fragmentation of the male body is perhaps in response to Bellmer's *poupées* which fragment the female body.

One can compare the scene in which the husband kicks the crate down the stairs to a scene in Luis Buñuel's 1930 film *L'Age d'Or*.⁶⁶ In fact, in the foreword to his *Anthologie*, Breton lists Buñuel and Dalí's *Un chien andalou* (1929) and *L'Age d'Or* (1930) and Picabia's *Entr'acte* (1924) as films which convey the mood of surrealist *humour noir*.⁶⁷ In *L'Age d'Or*, there are numerous scenes of violence. In one scene, a man kicks a harmless dog and in another he kicks a defenceless and vulnerable blind man on the pavement. He also takes aim and shoots a little boy who playfully knocks a cigarette out of his hand. One could argue that it is easier to present humour in film than in text. However, the fact that the reader has to imagine the scenes of violence in Prassinós's story is arguably more powerful. Rosello describes the text as 'à la fois comique et monstrueux'.⁶⁸ However, I argue that the text is more monstrous than comic and that in fact the text conveys the darkness of *humour noir* but not the humour. She also remarks that 'Le texte suscite à la fois l'horreur et l'amusement, la fascination et le dégoût'.⁶⁹ However, the reader is more horrified than entertained by this depiction of violence.

⁶⁵ Suleiman, 'L'humour noir des femmes', in *La femme s'entête*, ed. by Colville and Conley, p.46.

⁶⁶ Luis Buñuel, *L'Age d'Or* (1930).

⁶⁷ Breton, *Anthologie* (1940), p.12.

⁶⁸ Rosello, '« Suite de membres » de Gisèle Prassinós', in *Jeu surréaliste et humour noir*, ed. by Chénieux-Gendron, p.67.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p.75.

The two texts by Prassinos featured in the 1940 edition but omitted from the 1950 and 1966 issues are 'Souillure sarcastique' and 'Réclame'. 'Souillure sarcastique' was first published in 1934 in the second issue of the surrealist review *Documents 34*.⁷⁰ It was later published in the collections *La sauterelle arthritique* (1935) and in *Trouver sans chercher (1934-1944)* (1976).⁷¹ As the opening text to the 1976 collection, it introduces the reader to the dark themes and images present in her writings. Its main theme is a critique of the human condition as Prassinos writes from and accesses the darkness of her unconscious.

The title 'Souillure sarcastique' evokes the dark tone of the text. The noun 'souillure' denotes an ink stain or spill perhaps caused by the knocking over of a pot of ink. The shape formed by the ink spilt on the paper is created by chance. The noun could also refer to the spilling of ideas over the page and that ink spill is Prassinos's text. Moreover, an ink blot would have been a familiar sight in the *cahiers* of a schoolgirl. An ink spill is not deliberate but accidental and alludes to the spontaneous way that the text was written which suggests that the text is an exercise in *écriture automatique*. The idea of her text as an ink spill links to the themes of ink and writing present in 'Réclame'. Read autobiographically, the idea of 'Souillure sarcastique' as a stain on Prassinos's reputation is ironic since it was her inclusion in the *Anthologie* which contributed to her renown as a writer. Cottenet-Hage states 'on peut dire qu'avec cet ouvrage culmine et s'achève la grande période

⁷⁰ Gisèle Prassinos, 'Souillure sarcastique', *Documents 34*, 2, 1934, p.6. 'Souillure sarcastique' was printed in *Documents 34* with typographical errors.

⁷¹ Prassinos, 'Souillure sarcastique', in *La sauterelle arthritique*, no page number and in *Trouver sans chercher*, p.17.

de reconnaissance par les surréalistes.⁷² Along with Man Ray's photograph, it is one of the main reasons that we are aware of her creative oeuvre today. I argue that while Man Ray's photograph reinforced the myth of Prassinos as *femme-enfant*, her inclusion in Breton's *Anthologie* has contributed to her legacy as a writer.

The stain or mark recalls Francis Picabia's *La Sainte Vierge* (1920) and anticipates Henri Michaux's 'mouvements' in *Face aux verrous* (1951).⁷³ *La Sainte Vierge* (1920) is a black ink spill on a white background. It first appeared in the twelfth issue of Picabia's Dada journal *391* in March 1920 in which he published his own poems, notes, and drawings.⁷⁴ The image anticipates Breton's concept of convulsive beauty and the category of 'Explosante-fixe' since it captures the power and energy of the explosion of ink on the page (see introduction). The title *La Sainte Vierge* encodes rather than decodes the image. The Virgin Mary could be represented by the ink spill or by the white background or the image could be dedicated to the biblical figure.⁷⁵

Picabia's image is an indexical reference to Man Ray's cartoon stain or splash which appeared in the amateur broadsheet *The Ridgefield Gazook* printed on 31 March 1915.⁷⁶ On the final page, under the title 'Arte Motes' is a drawing signed

⁷² Cottenet-Hage, *Gisèle Prassinos ou le désir du lieu intime*, p.42.

⁷³ Henri Michaux, *Face aux verrous* (1951) (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1992), no page number.

⁷⁴ Francis Picabia, *La Sainte Vierge*, *391*, 12, March 1920. *391* was published in nineteen issues between January 1917 and October 1924. See *Francis Picabia 391 (1917-1924) (Réédition intégrale)*, ed. by Michel Sanouillet, ([Paris]: Éditions Pierre Belfond, 1975), p.81.

⁷⁵ Elizabeth Legge discusses a number of different interpretations of this image in 'Thirteen ways of looking at a virgin: Francis Picabia's *La Sainte Vierge*', in *Word and Image*, 12, 2 (1996), 218-242.

⁷⁶ Man Ray, *The Ridgefield Gazook*, 0, 31 March 1915.

'Kumoff'. 'Arte Motes' is a wordplay on the terms 'art' and 'mots' combining the visual and the verbal. However, 'Kumoff' is more than an act of wordplay on Man Ray's friend's name Manuel Kumroff with the omission of the consonant 'r'. It is a reference to sexual humour with the stain presented as a seminal stain. If *La Sainte Vierge* can be considered in the same light, Picabia's image is blasphemous. Prassinos's 'Souillure sarcastique' can be read as a textual interpretation of these avant-garde stains or as a comment on them. Picabia and Man Ray present a stain as a visual image whereas Prassinos presents it as a text.

In Henri Michaux's 'mouvements', a footnote reveals that the section is written as a series of signs which represent movement.⁷⁷ Michaux describes these marks as 'taches', 'gestes', 'signes' as he aspires to create a new language or sign system.⁷⁸ In retrospect, Prassinos's stain can be identified as one of Michaux's characters since it conflates the verbal and the visual. 'Souillure sarcastique' could refer to an image or a text. In 'The Mantic Stain: Surrealism and Automatism', Indian-born Ithell Colquhoun (1906-1988) compares surrealist automatic art to making a stain, 'The principle used in many processes of surrealist painting is to make a stain – by chance, or automatically, as we say, and then to look into it and see what forms it suggests to our imagination; and finally to develop these forms into a completed work of art.'⁷⁹ The title 'Mantic Stain' suggests that a stain has the power to reveal unconscious thought. A stain or mark made by a paint brush or a pen is the starting

⁷⁷ Michaux, *Face aux verrous*, no page number.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, pp.16-18.

⁷⁹ Ithell Colquhoun, 'The Mantic Stain: Surrealism and Automatism' (From *Enquiry*, October – November 1949), in *Surrealist Women*, ed. by Penelope Rosemont, pp.220-221.

point of a surrealist work. In Prassinos's text, an ordinary, insignificant stain is transformed into something extraordinary. This 'souillure sarcastique' is much more than an ink stain.

The adjective 'sarcastique' is usually used to refer to the tone of a text or image. However, here it personifies the stain as mocking and contemptuous. It suggests that the stain has its own voice and its able to express itself; perhaps the letter is written by this sarcastic stain. The adjective suggests that the text uses ironic language to convey scorn or insult and in the mood of *humour noir*, the text sarcastically mocks the human condition. In the introduction, Breton asserts that *humour noir* is not 'ironie sceptique'. This confirms that Prassinos's texts do not reflect but help to shape surrealist *humour noir*. In the preface to *La sauterelle arthritique*, Éluard describes 'Souillure sarcastique' as 'la lettre hautaine' referring to its arrogant tone and the way that the voice assumes a superior position to the caricatures it addresses. Perhaps the text should be read sarcastically, as a sarcastic critique of society or the human condition and man's freedom or rather lack of it.

While 'Une conversation' is written in the form of dialogue, 'Souillure sarcastique' is written in the form of a letter. The text opens with the epistolary convention of a salutation 'Chères caricatures'. However, there is no valediction which implies that the text is an excerpt of a letter or that it is unfinished. A valediction would be insightful as it would reveal the identity of the sender of the letter and therefore the narrative voice. A caricature is a sketch of a person which exaggerates their characteristics for comic effect. The fact that the letter is addressed to caricatures personifies these representations. These caricatures can be interpreted as a visual representation of a sarcastic, subversive humour. The use of

caricatures in French culture recalls the French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* ('journal satirique, laïque, politique, et joyeux') which caricaturises politicians and other figures.⁸⁰ Like Prassinis, the newspaper draws on intelligence and the imagination to mock society.

In the letter there are many references to the state of man. It opens with the second person plural pronoun 'vous' which refers to the caricatures. The narrative voice encourages them to fight for the future state of man, 'Vous devez combattre la convalescence future de l'homme entouré'. The post-modified noun phrase 'la convalescence future' presents man's future as a process of recovery, perhaps from the devastation caused by the First World War. The adjective 'entouré' suggests that man is admired or refers to mankind in general. There are a number of further references to the state (both physical and spiritual) of man such as 'l'état de son âme', 'l'esprit', 'sang de ses ancêtres', and the final, disturbing line 'j'ai fait entrer dans la profondeur de vos êtres'. It is disturbing as it presents the narrative voice as powerful and invasive.

The text is composed of four densely descriptive sentences and has a fragmented narrative. Cottenet-Hage states that 'La loi de cette écriture [...] est en effet la disqualification du sens à l'intérieur du moule. Le texte procède donc par ruptures' and Décaudin writes of a 'sautillement discontinu'.⁸¹ The 'disqualification du sens', 'ruptures', and a 'sautillement discontinu' fragment or break down the narrative. The phrase 'sautillement discontinu' evokes the arthritic movement of the

⁸⁰ Charlie Hebdo <https://charliehebdo.fr> [accessed 26 February 2019].

⁸¹ Cottenet-Hage, *Gisèle Prassinis ou le désir du lieu intime*, p.46.

grasshopper of the title of the collection in which the text was published in 1935.⁸²

This irregular movement is present in the way that the sentences jump from one to another, in the juxtaposition of ideas, and in the unexpected change of address from 'Chères Caricatures' to 'chères et satisfaisantes literies'. The address jumps from caricatures to bedding, moving from the realm of satire to the quotidian.

In 'Souillure sarcastique', Prassinos privileges sound and imagery over meaning. Cottenet-Hage states 'Le moule épistolaire ne transmet plus aucune information car les mots s'accolent pour l'oreille seulement.'⁸³ This seemingly deliberate choice and placing of words according to their sound undermines the possibility that the text was written automatically. Sibilance is present in the title 'Souillure sarcastique', in the salutation 'Chères caricatures', and throughout the text, for example in 'combattre la convalescence', 'seule sa courbature suffisant', 'sans vivre du sang de ses ancêtres', and in the final line 'Et c'est pour cela, chères et satisfaisantes literies.' The effect of privileging sound over meaning conveys Prassinos's enjoyment of and experimentation with language. The text is a collage of sound and images.

In her early writings, Prassinos combines a familiar lexis with a strange and unfamiliar one. However, 'les rares textes [...] comme « Souillure sarcastique » pastichent un discours abstrait, l'amoncellement des termes concrets et descriptifs confère aux contes une présence visuelle insistante.'⁸⁴ The reader works hard to visualise these descriptions. The text is heavily descriptive with its extensive use of

⁸² Michel Décaudin, 'Préface', in Prassinos, *Trouver sans chercher*, p.10.

⁸³ Cottenet-Hage, *Gisèle Prassinos ou le désir du lieu intime*, p.46.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p.47.

modified noun phrases such as 'sa courbature suffisante', 'le charme hilarant de sa captivité', 'l'humanité unanime', 'la façon gutturale de se précipiter tranquillement', 'la seule force commune du présent passé', 'le seul fonctionnement rural'. These abstract and sometimes contradictory phrases are expansive and visual. The phrase 'le charme hilarant de sa captivité' mocks the way that man is imprisoned by logic and reason which the Surrealists aspired to break free from. The idea of a 'humanité unanime' and 'présent passé' are contradictory and perhaps refer to the unanimous surrealist desire to free the human spirit and to merge opposing states. There is an explicit reference to death and suffering in 'toutes ces choses imitée par la moquerie du trépassé, réveilleront en nous une minute de souffrance' which conveys the darkness of *humour noir* and a dark side of Surrealism.

The second text omitted from the 1950 and 1966 editions is 'Réclame' which was first published in February 1936 in the nineteenth issue of the ironically named poetry review *Feuillets inutiles*.⁸⁵ It was later published in *Le feu maniaque* (1939) and in *Trouver sans chercher (1934-1944)* (1976).⁸⁶ In a letter dated 23 April 1935 addressed to Mario, Parisot lists 'Réclame' among the texts considered for inclusion in *La sauterelle arthritique* (1935).⁸⁷ However, a month later, in a letter dated 24 May, Parisot informs him that 'Le poème en prose « Réclame », qui est un des meilleurs, ayant été éliminé par Éluard du choix définitif (bien malgré moi, je

⁸⁵ Gisèle Prassinós, 'Réclame', in Breton, *Anthologie* (1940), p.256 and *Feuillets inutiles*, 19, no page number. *Feuillets inutiles* was a poetry review edited by Jacques and Marguerite Maret.

⁸⁶ Prassinós, 'Réclame', in *Le feu maniaque*, p.30 and in *Trouver sans chercher*, p.61.

⁸⁷ *Correspondance*, ed. by Prassinós and Rye, p.32.

t'assure)' which conveys his enjoyment of this surrealist text.⁸⁸ He advises Prassinos (through Mario) to copy out the text twenty times and to attach a copy to each volume to be sent to the 'principaux destinataires du service de presse' as an alternative, unofficial way of circulating the text and getting her work known.⁸⁹ This confirms Parisot's key role in the publication of her writings.

In addition, in another letter dated 1 February 1936, Parisot informs Mario of a short story competition organised by the review *Mesures* with a prize money of three thousand francs.⁹⁰ He explains that Michaux, a member of the review's editorial board, who enjoyed reading Prassinos's 'La sauterelle arthritique' and 'Le feu maniaque', considered her to have a significant chance of winning the competition. Reflecting on the texts considered for entry, Parisot explains 'je crains que ce texte ['Sondue'] ne soit tout de même un peu long et que la prédominance du côté « humour macabre » (type « Description d'une noce ») sur le côté vraiment « mystère » (type « Journoir » [neologism] ou « Réclame » - côté que nous admirons évidemment le plus dans ce qu'écrit Gisèle) ne rebute généralement les membres du comité.'⁹¹ Here, Parisot identifies the themes of 'humour macabre' (or *humour noir*) and 'mystère' and categorises her writings according to them. It is interesting that Parisot identifies mystery as a key theme in 'Réclame' and not *humour noir* whereas Breton perceives *humour noir* to be the main theme in the text.

⁸⁸ Ibid, p.38.

⁸⁹ Ibid, pp.38-39.

⁹⁰ Ibid, p.110.

⁹¹ Ibid.

The title 'Réclame' introduces the theme of advertising to the text and suggests that the prose poem is an advert in itself (for *humour noir*?). In fact, the surrealist juxtaposition of images had a significant effect on modern-day advertising.⁹² In 'Réclame', the reader follows an unnamed man who carries a mysterious parcel which has a piece of green material trailing from it. The narrative is set in a Métro station in the familiar city of Paris. Prassinos grew up in Nanterre and so would have known of the Métro system. Unlike 'Une conversation' and 'Souillure sarcastique', 'Réclame' has a clear, coherent narrative. In the first paragraph the man is in a Métro station and descends a flight of stairs, in the second one he sits on a bench and unpacks the parcel, and in the third paragraph the train enters the station and the man leaves hurriedly. The sentences are linked by adverbials of time and place, 'Puis', 'Arrivé en bas', 'Quand', 'De loin', and 'Près de moi', which conveys a succession of events. The linear narrative thread contrasts to the illogical events which take place. For example, the man tying his shoelace with everyone watching exclaims 'Employez l'encre Waterman' and later the piece of material transforms into a severed chicken's head. The lack of explanation raises a number of questions such as why is the man carrying a parcel, why is everyone watching him, why does he shout 'Use Waterman ink', and why is he limping? Perhaps the answer is 'why not?'. Nevertheless, the reader is encouraged to appeal to their own imagination to solve the mysteries.

⁹² Pamela M. Homer and Lynn R. Kahle, 'A Social Adaptation Explanation of the Effects of Surrealism on Advertising', *Journal of Advertising*, 15, 2 (1986), 50-60.

I argue that the main themes in 'Réclame' are advertising and transformation. In the Métro station, the protagonist announces 'Employez l'encre Waterman'. This can be interpreted as an advertisement for Waterman ink. It points back to the title and in turn presents the text as a surreal advert for this premium ink. Ink has connotations of writing and creativity and so it also advertises these two processes. Or perhaps the man, in the spirit of surrealist *humour noir*, is mocking Capitalist society. Read autobiographically, Prassinós could be commenting on the commodification or commercialisation of her writings.⁹³ The man is perhaps trying to merge in with the posters lining the walls of the Métro station or he is reading aloud one of the slogans. Prassinós returns to the theme of advertising at the end of the story, 'De loin, on entendit une voix grasseuse : « C'est une très bonne marque ».' This distant 'grasseuse' or unctuous voice is unsettling. It forms a dialogue with the man's earlier comment and the voice seems to agree that Waterman ink is of good quality. However, the description of the voice as greasy makes the reader question whether this is a sincere or sarcastic remark. It recalls a scene in the first part of *Nadja* when Breton and Phillipe Soupault spend one Sunday in Paris observing every shopfront with the words 'BOIS-CHARBONS'.⁹⁴ Breton recalls 'J'étais averti, guidé, non par l'image hallucinatoire des mots en question, mais bien par celle d'un de ces rondeaux de bois qui se présentent en coupe' as the photograph by J.A. Boiffard illustrates.⁹⁵ Breton and Soupault, like the character in Prassinós's story, are engaged with the text and image used to advertise goods on shopfronts or on

⁹³ See the foreword to Prassinós, *Le rêve*.

⁹⁴ Breton, *Nadja*, p.29.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, pp.29-31.

posters. This demonstrates the way that both Breton and Prassinós were inspired by the world around them.

Of the theme of transformation, the man opens 'un très gros paquet d'où sortait un morceau de toile verte' to find, to the reader's disappointment, that there is nothing inside. The narrator plays with and subverts the reader's expectations. The man is agitated by the arrival of the train which is a recurrent image in Breton's theory of convulsive beauty (as discussed in the introduction).⁹⁶ The reader is informed that the piece of green material has transformed itself into 'une crête de poule' for which there is no logical or rational explanation. The image of the severed chicken's head evokes darkness and violence. This unexpected and violent transformation conflates reality with the dream, the real setting of Paris and this dream-like transformation. It links to the final image in 'Le spectre du Chateaubriand' (as discussed in chapter two) in which a dog throws a piece of silver cloth into the river only for it to reappear with a buffalo's skull attached to a miner's picket. This aspect of her work is interesting because these transformations link incongruous objects. This collision of disparate images is a common surrealist feature in Prassinós's writing which sparks *le merveilleux*. I would agree with Parisot that the theme of mystery is a stronger and clearer theme in this prose poem than *humour noir*. Moreover, since he omitted this text from the 1950 and 1966 editions of the *Anthologie*, it would suggest that Breton ultimately agreed with Parisot.

As mentioned, although Breton features four of Prassinós's texts in the original edition of the *Anthologie*, in the second 1950 issue he omits two of them

⁹⁶ Ibid, p.189 and Breton, *L'amour fou*, p.15.

(‘Souillure sarcastique’ and ‘Réclame’). Having analysed the texts, on the one hand, one could argue that ‘Une conversation’ and ‘Suite de membres’ are the two texts out of the initial four which contribute the most to the surrealist theory of *humour noir* which is characterised by a critique of society. On the other hand, one could argue that the diverse texts featured in the *Anthologie* all add something different to the concept of surrealist *humour noir* and so perhaps ‘Une conversation’ and ‘Suite de membres’ are the most radical, the former in the way that it is written as a dialogue and the latter in its expression of *humour noir* through an explicit critique of family, society, and religion. A more practical reason is that in the 1950 edition Breton adds five writers and so possibly omitted selected texts to preserve the length of the volume.

In conclusion, Prassinós’s inclusion in Breton’s *Anthologie* is significant since she was one of only two women writers to be featured in the volume and her writings are considered to have contributed to an understanding of surrealist *humour noir*. It is evident that Breton’s definition of *humour noir* is partly formed by the writers whose work he includes in the volume and that Prassinós’s texts help to expand and diversify our understanding of what it might entail. It is clear that Prassinós made an active and unique contribution to surrealist *humour noir* and that her writings do not reflect a pre-existing definition of this phenomenon but to help shape it. The mood of *humour noir* is present in ‘Une conversation’, a dialogue between a man and a horse, in its critique of society which is its defining element of *humour noir* and the reason why it was included in the volume. In ‘Suite de membres’, the mood of *humour noir* is conveyed by the themes of violence and an explicit critique of family, society, and religion. I argue that this is the text that best

fits with Breton's theory of *humour noir*. 'Une conversation' is more light-hearted in its tone than 'Suite de membres' which highlights the darkness of *humour noir* and a darker side of Surrealism. Nevertheless, I argue that both texts are not humorous and so we return to the question that if surrealist *humour noir* is not humorous then what it is? It is a dark critique of society and of the state of man and to great effect.

The two texts that Breton omitted from the 1950 (and 1966) edition(s) of the *Anthologie* are 'Souillure sarcastique' and 'Réclame'. Written as a letter to caricatures, 'Souillure sarcastique' is a critique of the human condition and arguably has the darkest tone of all four texts revealing the dark unconscious of Surrealism. The overriding themes in 'Réclame' are advertising and transformation. However, the text can be interpreted as a critique of Capitalist society. Overall, I argue that the artistic-literary mood of *humour noir* criticises society and the human condition in terms of man's lack of freedom and that Prassinós's texts express the darkness or blackness of *humour noir* more so than humour. The value of the 'noir' as a subversive darkness outweighs that of humour. All four texts contribute something different to surrealist *humour noir* whether that be in form or in theme.

Chapter four – Nature, animals, and the female consciousness

‘Si un arbre oublie de faire l’automne que dirait la forêt ?’¹

From migrating roses, an arthritic grasshopper, a singing glowworm and rooster to a threatening butterfly, Prassinós draws on familiar flora and fauna and renders them unfamiliar as she assigns them a new context. These creatures conflate the real and the imaginary and present a somewhat frightening and subversive world. Through these insects, Prassinós expresses her female consciousness and voices issues of identity, gender, society, and her attitude towards the surrealist movement. She draws on the natural world to access and present *le merveilleux*. As Mabilles states, ‘L’aventure d’Alice pénétrant par le terrier du lapin ou franchissant la glace de la cheminée, nous incite à rechercher d’autres trouées vers le merveilleux.’² Nature becomes an Alice in Wonderland(esque) rabbit hole to access *le merveilleux*.

In this chapter, I will discuss the theme of animals and nature in a number of Prassinós’s texts from the volume *Trouver sans chercher (1934-1944)* (1976) of which the majority have so far evaded analysis.³ I will begin by analysing the role of voice and gender in ‘Trouver sans chercher’, before analysing the role of the grasshopper in ‘La sauterelle arthritique’, the glowworm in ‘Venda et le parasite’, rooster in ‘Véra dit’, and the butterfly in ‘La jeune fille persécutée’. I will also draw on two additional

¹ Written by Prassinós in one of her *carnets*. BHVP, fonds Gisèle Prassinós, [MS-FS-01-0029].

² Mabilles, *Le miroir du merveilleux*, pp.26-27.

³ Prassinós, *Trouver sans chercher*.

texts by Prassinós, an untitled poem and an unpublished prose-poem 'Le ver luisant'.⁴ The question that forms the epigram to this chapter provides an insight into Prassinós's playful, childlike sense of curiosity for the natural world around her. I will first discuss the theme of nature in the creative works of the women artists and writers associated with Surrealism.

Numerous scholars have produced seminal studies on Prassinós and the animal imagery and symbolism in her oeuvre. For example, in *La femme cent sexes ou les genres communicants*, Barnet dedicates a chapter to the bestiary in the writings of Mansour, Prassinós, and Deharme.⁵ She discusses Prassinós's 'bestiaire fantastique et fantasmatique' and observes a difference between the animals in her early automatic texts and those in the stories of her 'période contemporaine'.⁶ In this chapter, I focus on her early writings and discuss nature as a way of accessing and expressing *le merveilleux*. Cottenet-Hage also discusses Prassinós's 'bestiaire fantastique' in her volume on Prassinós but not in great detail.⁷ There are many other studies on animal imagery in the works of the creative women of the avant-garde. In *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (1985), Chadwick dedicates a chapter to women artists and the theme of nature.⁸ She draws on artworks by Oppenheim, Agar, Colquhoun, Emmy Bridgwater, Rita Kernn-Larsen, Edith Rimmington, Kahlo, Miller, Toyen, Sage, Varo, and Fini and discusses their

⁴ BHVP, fonds Gisèle Prassinós, [MS-FS-01-0040].

⁵ Barnet, *La femme cent sexes*, pp.155-223.

⁶ Ibid, p.184.

⁷ Cottenet-Hage, *Gisèle Prassinós ou le désir du lieu intime*, p.51.

⁸ Chadwick, 'The Female Earth: Nature and the Imagination', in *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, pp.141-180.

identification of the creative powers of women with the forces of nature. An insightful essay on creative women and their animal totems in the context of Surrealism is Georgiana Colvile's 'Beauty and/Is the Beast: Animal Symbology in the Work of Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varo and Leonor Fini'.⁹ Similar to Colvile's essay, in *The Animal Surreal: The Role of Darwin, Animals, and Evolution in Surrealism* (2017), Kirsten Strom discusses the associations of Varo, Tanning, Fini, and Cahun with dogs and cats and Carrington with the horse.¹⁰ However, as with Colvile's essay, there is no mention of the role of animals in Prassinos's writings. Moreover, in *Le Bestiaire des surréalistes* (1994), Prassinos is not listed among the twenty-three 'Animaux d'auteurs' and the only woman writer listed is Carrington.¹¹ This highlights the way that some scholars continue to overlook the significance of animal imagery in the writings of Prassinos.

The representation of familiar animals and fantastic beasts in creative works is not new nor is the clichéd association of woman and nature or woman as nature. In *Surréalisme et sexualité*, Gauthier discusses the male Surrealists' metaphor of woman as nature and the comparison of her sexual organs to flowers.¹² She explores

⁹ Georgiana M. M. Colvile, 'Beauty and/Is the Beast: Animal Symbology in the Work of Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varo and Leonor Fini', in *Surrealism and Women*, ed. by Caws and others, pp.159-181.

¹⁰ Kirsten Strom, 'Les Animaux et Leurs Femmes, Les Femmes et Leurs Animaux', in *The Animal Surreal: The Role of Darwin, Animals, and Evolution in Surrealism* (New York: Routledge, 2017), pp.73-84.

¹¹ Clause Maillard-Chary, *Le Bestiaire des surréalistes* (Paris: Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 1994). There is a single reference to Prassinos and the 'roman collectif' *L'homme qui a perdu son squelette* (1939).

¹² Gauthier, p.98.

the surrealist image of woman as nature, flower, fruit, earth, and star and the tropes of woman as 'insaisissable' or enigmatic, the praying mantis, prostitute, *femme-fatale*, seer, and witch.¹³ Many feminist scholars have objected to this association, in particular to the association of woman as witch, 'reine des forêts', and nature.¹⁴ In 'Variations sur des thèmes communs' (November 1977), Simone de Beauvoir argues 'Nous sommes proches de la nature ? Non, on nous défend l'accès aux outils sociaux de la maîtrise, de la connaissance de notre propre corps, de la création.'¹⁵ Women as witches were associated with nature because of their 'direct' contact with it, their knowledge of plants, and their relegation to the moors and because of their association with mystery, the night, and the forest.¹⁶ Breton saw women as an embodiment of *le merveilleux* and as the mythological creature of the sphinx or chimera.¹⁷ In the introduction to Prassinis in his *Anthologie* (1940), Breton identifies her as 'la « jeune chimère » de Max Ernst' as discussed in chapter one.¹⁸ He considered the sphinx and the chimera to be the most important mythological beasts.¹⁹ In a survey on 'the present day relative attractions of various creatures in mythology and legend', twenty-one individuals were asked to number fifteen diverse

¹³ Ibid, pp.98-158 and pp.159-189.

¹⁴ Simone de Beauvoir, 'Variations sur des thèmes communs', *Questions féministes*, ed. by Beauvoir, 1, November 1977, p.11.

¹⁵ Ibid, p.34.

¹⁶ Ibid, p.32.

¹⁷ Colville, 'Beauty and/Is the Beast', in *Surrealism and Women*, ed. by Caws and others, p.159.

¹⁸ Breton, *Anthologie* (1940), p.254. He also identifies Carrington as Jules Michelet's young and beautiful witch. See Breton, *Anthologie* (1950), p.333.

¹⁹ 'Surrealist Inquiry on Mythological Creatures', *VVV*, 1, 1942, pp.62-63.

mythological creatures in order of their appeal.²⁰ Out of the fourteen men and seven women who replied, Breton ranked the sphinx as the most important, Ernst the chimera, and Carrington the unicorn which underpins her identification with the horse.

The women associated with Surrealism perceived a connection between the emancipation of women and nature. Writing on 'le domaine du merveilleux', Martinique-born Suzanne Césaire (1913-1966), who has long been overshadowed by her husband poet-playwright Aimé Césaire, declares 'Voici enfin le monde, la nature, les choses entrer en contact direct avec l'homme qui a retrouvé la spontanéité, le naturel, dans le pleine sens du terme' aligning nature and *le merveilleux*.²¹ Another woman associated with Surrealism, Indiana-born Gina Litherland (1955-present) imagines the wilderness as the imagination, 'The imagination is a wilderness – liberating, ecstatic, waiting to grow and fly and howl' aligning creativity and the natural world and presenting nature as a source of inspiration.²² She argues that 'To suppress the natural world, civilisation created the supreme patriarchy, and by his law women were charged with the crimes of intuition, emotion, and secret knowledge' associating nature with matriarchy.²³ She presents civilisation and technology as masculine and the natural world as feminine with women who were in possession of arcane knowledge accused of being witches and punished.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Suzanne Césaire, 'Alain et l'esthétique', *Tropiques*, 2, 1941, in *Tropiques (1941-1945) (Collection complète)*, ed. by René Ménil (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1978), p.60.

²² Gina Litherland, 'Imagination and wilderness', in *Arsenal / Surrealist Subversion*, 4, ed. by Franklin Rosemont (Chicago, Illinois: Black Swan Press, 1989), p.29.

²³ Ibid.

Many of the women associated with Surrealism favoured a specific animal in their creative oeuvre. As Colvile observes, Carrington identified with the horse, Varo with the owl and the cat, and Fini with the cat and the sphinx. These animals can be seen as 'personal totems, symbols of another world, alter egos, and mirror-images, or as a metamorphosis of a loved one.'²⁴ Carrington chose the horse as her personal totem which features in her early work. She was inspired by Ernst's alter ego Loplop 'le supérieur des oiseaux' and Robert Graves's long essay *The White Goddess: A historical grammar of poetic myth* (1948). In the preface to 'La maison de la peur' (1938), Ernst identifies Carrington as a horse and in the story the horse plays the role of the spiritual animal guide (see chapter five).²⁵ The horse also features in her story 'La dame ovale' (1939) and in the play *Pénélope* (1957) as a magical rocking horse named Tartar(e).²⁶ Carrington's personal totem appears in her paintings *Self-Portrait* (c.1937-38) and *Portrait of Max Ernst* (c.1939).²⁷ I will discuss the role of the horse in Carrington's stories in chapter six. Following her move to Mexico in 1943, Carrington's bestiary expanded to include more fantastical hybrid human-animal figures. For example, the fantastic beast in *Who art thou, White Face?* (1959) and the hybrid butterfly figures in *Lepidópteros* (1969) which is Spanish for the order of

²⁴ Colvile, 'Beauty and/Is the Beast', in *Surrealism and Women*, ed. by Caws and others, p.161.

²⁵ Carrington, 'La maison de la peur', *Un divertissement*, ed. by Parisot, no page numbers.

²⁶ Leonora Carrington, 'La dame ovale', in *La dame ovale* (Paris: GLM, 1939), no page numbers.

²⁷ Leonora Carrington, *Self-Portrait* (c.1937-38). Leonora Carrington, *Portrait of Max Ernst* (c.1939) <https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/164061/bird-superior-portrait-max-ernst> [accessed 14 April 2019].

'Lepidoptera'. Her paintings become otherworldly and can be interpreted as invitations to another world or to *le merveilleux*.²⁸

Prassinós, however, does not favour a specific animal. She draws on diverse species with an emphasis on the arthropod class of the insect (grasshoppers, glowworms, and butterflies). She is interested in the crepuscular world and in the preface to *La sauterelle arthritique* (1935) Éluard imagines that throughout the collection 'une féerie bat des ailes parmi les charmes étranges d'un naturalisme crépusculaire'.²⁹ Here, he personifies 'une féerie' as having wings which have connotations of flight and freedom. Her texts create an enchanted fairy-tale world. This visual image can be interpreted as a paradigm of *le merveilleux*, an enchanted notion always in flight. Éluard confirms that for Prassinós 'cette féerie est quotidienne'.³⁰ Her reality combines the everyday and the enchanted. Here, naturalism does not denote an art-literary movement based on realistic-factual description (as in the writings of Émile Zola (1840-1902) and Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880)) but the natural world. Prassinós's texts do not convey the real or the imaginary but conflate these two states. The adjective 'crépusculaire' denotes animals active at twilight and alludes to another world, a nocturnal world. Prassinós does not identify the self with these animals as Carrington identifies the self with the white horse but places importance on the role of these animals in her narratives and what they represent. As Cottenet-Hage observes, 'Un inventaire du bestiaire de

²⁸ See Gloria Feman Orenstein, 'Leonora Carrington's Visionary Art for the New Age', *Chrysalis: A Magazine of Women's Culture*, 3 (1977), 66-77.

²⁹ Éluard, 'Préface', in Prassinós, *La sauterelle arthritique*, no page number.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

Prassinos révèle la richesse de l'invention au moins égale à celle d'autres artistes surréalistes, parmi lesquels Max Ernst et Leonora Carrington.³¹ Carrington and Prassinos both present a weird and wonderful bestiary in their narratives.

Dedicated to the 'poète surréaliste' René Char (1907-1988) and with a preface by Michel Décaudin, *Trouver sans chercher (1934-1944)* (1976) gathers together Prassinos's surrealist texts which she wrote between 1934 and 1944.³² As Décaudin states, the texts in this volume were written during 'années de découverte et d'exploration' and moreover of experimentation with technique and theme.³³ Many of the texts are narratives of everyday life in which she brings out the extraordinary in the ordinary or *le merveilleux*. Décaudin observes that whilst the length of the texts varies 'l'attaque est toujours un trait insolite ou cocasse.'³⁴ However, although Prassinos's narratives combine the ordinary with the out of the ordinary, they are not always humorous (see chapter three). Décaudin sums up the volume as 'un univers peuplé de messieurs, de dames, de petites filles, qui, le plus souvent, n'ont pas de nom avec des chevaux qui parlent, des araignées et des limaces bleues, des chats multicolores et des chiens qui font les cent pas – tout un bottin et un bestiaire aux pages d'humour rose ou noir.'³⁵ It is this subversive world of real-imagined animals which I am interested in in this chapter.

³¹ Cottenet-Hage, *Gisèle Prassinos ou le désir du lieu intime*, p.51.

³² Breton and Éluard, *Dictionnaire abrégé*, p.7. Prassinos, *Trouver sans chercher*.

³³ Décaudin, 'Préface', in Prassinos, *Trouver sans chercher*, p.10.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p.10.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p.11.

In the 'note de l'auteur', Prassinós poses the rhetorical question 'Trouver quoi?' which provides an insight into the themes in her writings. She hopes to find (or for the reader to find) 'le lieu où l'innocence se réjouit en tremblant de rencontrer la peur, celui où elle déchaîne les monstres et la férocité'.³⁶ She achieves this collision of childhood innocence and fear in 'La jeune fille persécutée'. Through these texts, she hopes to find 'l'endroit où, dedans et dehors, en haut et en bas, hier et demain, la vie et la mort se connaissent, marient leurs dissemblances sans choquer.'³⁷ This can be interpreted as a rewriting of Breton's statement in the *Seconde manifeste du surréalisme* (1930), 'Tout porte à croire qu'il existe un certain point de l'esprit d'où la vie et la mort, le réel et l'imaginaire, le passé et le futur, le communicable et l'incommunicable, le haut et le bas cessent d'être perçus contradictoirement', and as a fulfilment of the surrealist aspiration to unite opposing states.³⁸ Prassinós's narratives conflate the familiar and the unfamiliar, the usual and the unusual, and present the extraordinary in the ordinary.

The title *Trouver sans chercher* is a play on and subversion of the French expression 'trouver ce qu'on cherche'. It arguably alludes to the surrealist 'objet trouvé' which is an object discovered by chance. The title can be read as a definition of the surrealist technique of *écriture automatique* in which words and images arise without consciously being thought of and alludes to the role of the unconscious. The title can also be considered as a definition of *le merveilleux* which is often found without being looked for. It is discovered in the everyday and in chance encounters

³⁶ Prassinós, 'Trouver quoi?', in *Trouver sans chercher*, p.12.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Breton, *Manifestes*, pp.72-73.

with objects and people (as illustrated in Breton's 'L'esprit nouveau' (1922) and *Nadja* (1928)).³⁹ The title could also refer to the way that Prassinós's imaginative writings were discovered by chance by her brother and therefore to her chance discovery by the Surrealists. In a newspaper article captioned 'Gisèle Prassinós: l'imaginaire à l'état pur', Alain Bosquet states, 'Le titre dit parfaitement le manque d'apprêt, la spontanéité, le refus de la raison, l'élan désarmant de ces proses.'⁴⁰ The themes of spontaneity and a subversion of logic are present in Prassinós's early surrealist writings. He continues, 'C'est en tout cas l'impression que l'on retire des quelque cent ou cinquante pages, où l'écolière ne se demande à aucun moment ce qu'elle peut écrire, ni ce que signifient les mots qu'elle soumet à de bizarres collisions.'⁴¹ I argue that despite the diverse themes, Prassinós does take the time to reflect as many of her early writings have a linear narrative. The juxtaposition of words and images conveys her enjoyment of and experimentation with language and suggests that she is more interested in sound and imagery over meaning.

'Trouver sans chercher' is also the title of a short story which was first published in the collection of the same name in 1976.⁴² It is a story about a young woman with a man's voice. The main themes in the narrative are voice and gender which are fitting with the overall objective of my thesis which is to give voice to avant-garde women's writing since women artists and writers have struggled to

³⁹ André Breton, 'L'esprit nouveau', in *Les pas perdus*, pp.119-121 and *Nadja*.

⁴⁰ Alain Bosquet, 'Gisèle Prassinós: l'imaginaire à l'état pur', *le Monde*, 17 December 1976, page number not known. See 'Dossier documentaire', BMD, [DOS PRA].

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Prassinós, 'Trouver sans chercher', in *Trouver sans chercher*, pp.189-190.

make themselves heard throughout history. The title implies that this story was written automatically with the words found and not looked for. However, it has a clear narrative which suggests that this was not the case. Moreover, the title could refer to the way that Prassinos finds her own voice through her experimental writings.

In the story, the mother announces that her daughter has 'une pauvre voix d'homme, un filet mâle qui s'est introduit dans sa gorge' with the adjective 'pauvre' meaning 'poor' or 'weak'. The young woman has a man's voice. This raises the question of what is a man's voice? Is it a voice which belongs to a man? Or is it characterised by stereotypical masculine attributes, by an assertiveness? By a deep tone? Or is it a voice which expresses patriarchal ideologies? Nevertheless, regardless of what 'un voix d'homme' means, it is not considered suitable for a young woman. Moreover, the voice is presented as separate from the body which alludes to the fragmentation of the female body and to Hans Bellmer's *poupées* as discussed in chapter three. It recalls René Magritte's oil painting *Le viol* (1934) in which a woman's body is collaged onto her face with her breasts as eyes, navel as nose, and her sex (pubic hair) as mouth.⁴³ Her mouth is her sex, her body is woman, she is voiceless.

The daughter announces that she has 'de jolis fronts d'assassins qui feront votre affaire' in her pocket which is an example of her male voice or masculine thinking. The young woman is described as a 'pauvre fille vaillante à l'ouvrage' with

⁴³ René Magritte, *Le viol* (1934) <https://www.menil.org/collection/objects/1585-the-rape-le-viol> [accessed 14 April 2019].

the adjective 'vaillante' meaning 'brave' or 'courageous' usually used to refer to a man. Her male voice scares away her suitors, 'nos clients se sauvent, effrayés, les oreilles dérangées et déjà fourbues.' This suggests that it is the sound of a male voice coming from a female body which frightens them away since it confuses the distinction between a man and a woman. The young woman 'gémit et se désespère'. She despairs at having a man's voice because of the reaction of those around her. Her mother resolves to take her to a surgeon 'afin qu'il te donne une vraie voix de femme' which seems rather extreme. The idea of 'une vraie voix de femme' again raises the question of what is a woman's voice? Is a voice which belongs to a woman? Or a voice characterised by stereotypical feminine attributes, by a submissiveness? Perhaps it has a soft and gentle tone? From a feminist perspective, I argue that a woman's voice is no different from that of a man's and that it is as powerful and creative. The mother and daughter have a chance encounter with a 'beau jeune homme' who stops to ask them a question. However, 'Sa voix est frêle et douce, nous ne l'entendons pas.' Is this supposed to be a stereotypical woman's voice, a voice which can hardly be heard? The young man with 'lèvres infimes' whispers 'Je veux une voix' and without hesitation the mother offers him her daughter's voice, 'Je vous donnerai celle de ma pauvre fille'. And so the man finds a new voice without actively looking for one hence the title. One's voice is connected to one's identity and so by offering the young man her daughter's voice she is taking away her individuality as well as her ability to speak.

Inez Hedges identifies the masculine voice with Prassinos's sense of her own notoriety in the predominantly male world of Surrealism.⁴⁴ I argue that identifying Prassinos's voice as masculine is problematic as it is her own (female) voice expressed through her writings which deserves recognition and by identifying her voice as masculine we lose her identity as a woman writer. Prassinos's voice is not 'frêle et douce' but strong and bold and she writes about typically masculine themes of violence and darkness as discussed in chapter three on *humour noir*. Hedges observes that her mother does not arrange for an exchange of voices and therefore the young woman loses her voice entirely, 'Better that a woman have no voice at all than a masculine voice.'⁴⁵ This text therefore reveals the prevailing attitudes towards the socio-cultural position of women in patriarchal society. While the men are the creative artist-writers, the women play the role of the muse. The text perhaps conveys the difficulty that women had in making themselves heard in a patriarchal society, particularly in the context of Surrealism in which women (like Prassinos herself) were initially cast into the role of *femme-enfant*. The text highlights the gender roles and the gender bias present in society and the perceived difference between the voice or role of a man and that of a woman. It also highlights the attitudes towards men's and women's writing and recalls Christiane Rochefort's clear statement 'A man's book is a book. A woman's book is a woman's book.'⁴⁶ In

⁴⁴ Inez Hedges, 'What Do Little Girls Dream Of: The Insurgent Writings of Gisèle Prassinos', in *Surrealism and Women*, ed. by Caws and others, p.30.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Christiane Rochefort, 'Are Women Writers Still Monsters?' (1975), in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. by Marks and De Courtivron, p.183.

other words, a book written by a man is considered neutral and the norm whereas a book written by a woman is considered as a deviation from the norm and gendered. Although the young woman has a man's voice and later no voice, Prassinós retains hers and expresses her female consciousness throughout the volume *Trouver sans chercher* (1934-1944).

Having analysed the role of voice and gender in 'Trouver sans chercher', I will now discuss the theme of nature and animals in Prassinós's early writings. Nature is a key theme in Prassinós's texts and, like Litherland, she aligns nature and creativity. In an untitled and undated two-stanza poem, Prassinós explores the themes of nature (flora and fauna and seasons) and creativity (see appendix).⁴⁷

The poem opens with the verb 'Imaginer' which encourages the reader to appeal to the realm of their imagination and implies a visual element. Prassinós imagines 'roses migratrices' with the adjective 'migratrices' used to describe migratory birds. However, in a surrealist act of subversion, the reader is presented with migratory flowers and the image of flowers travelling from one region to another. The seasonal movement of fauna has been extended to flora. Prassinós expands this idea with the image of 'triangles de roses frileuses'. The shape refers to the formation of the flowers flying in the sky and the adjective 'frileuses' refers to the way that they are affected by the cold weather and justifies the reason for their migration to a warmer climate. The season is autumn which is synonymous with the migration of animals for the winter months and with the harvesting of crops.

⁴⁷ Gisèle Prassinós, 'L'Atelier Imaginaire'. BHVP, fonds Gisèle Prassinós, [MS-FS-01-0083]. A slightly different version was published in *L'Atelier imaginaire : Poèmes et réflexions*, ed. by Guy Rouquet ([Paris]: L'Age d'homme, [date not known]), p.203.

Prassinós writes of 'la course échèvele [sic, échevelée]' with the verb 'écheveler' conventionally meaning to dishevel someone's hair and the noun 'la course' confirms that the flowers are in a hurry to reach their destination. The adjectives 'migratoires' and 'frileuses' and the noun 'la course' all convey a sense of movement. She imagines the flowers as birds led by 'la grande Impériale commise en tête'.⁴⁸

As the flowers migrate from one region to another, Prassinós imagines 'tous ces parfums là-haut / toutes ces tendres plumes'. The poem not only has a visual element but evokes the senses of smell and touch. The noun 'plume' is significant since it denotes a (bird's) feather but also a quill and therefore aligns nature and writing.⁴⁹ She describes these floral scents and feathers falling on 'nos épaules déléguées' which involves the reader. It mirrors the image of the soot falling from the coal sacks hung on the ceiling in one of the rooms of the 'Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme' (1938) onto the visitors below. The roses are perhaps a metaphor for words or images travelling from one place to another, from the unconscious or conscious to the piece of paper in an 'atelier imaginaire'. The thoughts are migrating or in transit. The imagined workshop or studio is a space of creativity and productivity. However, here, it is perhaps a psychological space rather than a physical one. The poem with its themes of nature, flora and fauna, migration, and seasons combined with the title of the publication establishes a connection between the forces of nature and the creative process. Agar continues this idea and draws on the metaphor of painting as a plant, 'They [paintings] grow like a plant,

⁴⁸ In the published version, 'Impériale' is replaced by 'althoea' which is a type of wildflower.

⁴⁹ The feather is an important motif in Carrington's story 'La dame ovale' (1939) which I will discuss in chapter six. Carrington, 'La dame ovale', in *La dame ovale*, no page numbers.

slowly putting out shoots, they need pruning, mediating on, while the roots grow in the dark.⁵⁰ She compares painting to the way that growing and tending to a plant takes time and effort and that just as the roots of a plant grow in the dark the artist's thoughts germinate in the darkness of their unconscious.

Similarly, Tanning was fascinated with the sunflower which features in many of her paintings including her famous oil painting *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* (1943). In the painting, a giant sunflower 'grows' in a hotel corridor in a nightmarish scene. Tanning declares that the image was about confrontation, a possible conflict between the girl and flower.⁵¹ She imagines the sunflower as a 'a symbol of all the things that youth has to face and to deal with' and that it represents 'a never-ending battle we wage with unknown forces, the forces that were there beyond our civilisation'.⁵² In another painting by Tanning titled *The Mirror* (1950), the viewer looks through a sunflower at a sunflower looking into to a sunflower-mirror and in one of *Les 7 périls spectraux* (1950) the sunflower forms a plate or the meal itself framed by a knife and fork. Here, the sunflower resembles an eye and returns the viewer's gaze. In all three paintings, the sunflower plays a different role.⁵³

⁵⁰ From the unpublished manuscript of Agar's autobiography 'A Look at My Life'. Cited in Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, p.147.

⁵¹ Dorothea Tanning, *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* (1943) <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/tanning-eine-kleine-nachtmusik-t07346> [accessed 26 May 2019].

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* (1943), *The Mirror* (1950), and *Les 7 périls spectraux* (1950) were all displayed at the 'Dorothea Tanning' exhibition, Tate Modern, 27 February – 9 June 2019.

Moving from flora to fauna, Prassinos first evokes the image of an insect in the title of her first collection of prose and poetry *La sauterelle arthritique* which introduces the themes of animals, nature, and old age or the ageing body. The choice of the adjective 'arthritique' is interesting as it refers to the condition of arthritis which is associated with old age and the deterioration of the body. Ageing and the ageing body are key themes in Carrington's 1974 novel *Le cornet acoustique*. In the novel, ninety-nine-year-old Marion Leatherby states 'A dire vrai, les rhumatismes ont quelque peu arqué mon squelette, mais cela ne m'empêche pas de me promener par beau temps et de balayer ma chambre une fois par semaine, le jeudi.'⁵⁴ Her rheumatism or arthritis does not prevent her from exercising or from enjoying herself; old age is not a limitation. I will continue this discussion of the ageing (female) body in chapter seven. It is surprising that fifteen-year-old Prassinos was familiar with the painful condition of arthritis. In an article, 'La sauterelle est toujours en forme', Prassinos reveals 'Et les femmes, pour gagner de l'argent, faisaient de la couture, c'était très pénible pour elles: c'est pour cela que je connaissais le mot « arthritique » !'⁵⁵ Therefore, for Prassinos, arthritis is not associated with old age and illness but with women, textiles, and creativity. The use of the term 'arthritique' conveys the way that her writings were informed by personal experiences, the familial, and the domestic.

Prassinos's interest in the grasshopper was perhaps inspired by her interaction with nature and her experiences outdoors. Her interest in the insect

⁵⁴ Leonora Carrington, *Le cornet acoustique* (1983), p.27.

⁵⁵ Jean-Claude Perrier, 'La Sauterelle est toujours en forme', newspaper not known, 14 April 2003, page number not known. See *dossier* on Prassinos.

mimics the Surrealists' fascination with the grasshopper and moreover with the praying mantis. In 'The Praying Mantis in Surrealist Art', William L. Pressly discusses the importance and the role of the mantis and the grasshopper in the works of three male Surrealists, Dalí, André Masson, and Ernst.⁵⁶ However, there is no mention of Prassinós's collection or text. The Surrealists drew on the image of the grasshopper and praying mantis in many of their artworks. For example, in Kurt Seligmann's montage *Les Animaux surréalistes* (1938), the praying mantis is depicted as the largest creature which illustrates its significance.⁵⁷ The other animals in the image include the seahorse, platypus, anemone, lizard, tapir, chameleon, koala, sea lion, rhinoceros, iguana, and giraffe. Seligmann creates a new class of animal, the surrealist animal which groups together strange and exotic creatures. In addition, in the fifth booklet of Ernst's collage novel *Une semaine de bonté* (1934), the praying mantis, caterpillar, and grasshopper all feature and in the fifth plate, a huge grasshopper confronts a Moai-figure-headed-man.⁵⁸

The grasshopper is a recurrent motif in the work of Dalí and in his surrealist period he identified the praying mantis with the grasshopper or locust.⁵⁹ Pressly states that 'even though the meaning of the grasshopper is firmly rooted in Dalí's

⁵⁶ William L. Pressly, 'The Praying Mantis in Surrealist Art', *The Art Bulletin*, 55, 4 (1973), 600-615.

⁵⁷ Kurt Seligmann, *Les Animaux surréalistes* (1938). See Breton and Eluard, *Dictionnaire abrégé*, p.33.

⁵⁸ 'Jeudi, Le noir, Autre exemple : L'île de Paques', in Max Ernst, *Une semaine de bonté* (New York: Dover Publications, 1976), pp.165-176.

⁵⁹ Pressly discusses the significance of the grasshopper in Dalí's paintings *Accommodations of Desire* (1929), *The Great Masturbator* (1929), and *Portrait of Paul Eluard* (1929).

[sic, Dalí's] personal experience, it is also heavily dependent for its poetic and iconographic associations on the artist's fascination with its lethal cousin.'⁶⁰ Perhaps Prassinós's interest in the grasshopper is also linked to the praying mantis especially since the female mantis holds great power over the male insect. The grasshopper-mantis is perhaps a symbol of female power. Pressly suggests that the Surrealists were fascinated with the mantis because of its extraordinary cannibalistic mating ritual during which the female mantis devours the male after coitus.⁶¹ For Dalí, the mantis evolved from a source of pleasure to one of disgust as it came to represent his discouraging father.⁶² For Prassinós, the grasshopper does not represent the patriarch but arguably the matriarch. In Prassinós's collection, the grasshopper invites the reader into the realm of *le merveilleux*. We follow the unsuspecting insect of the title into a surreal world which parallels the way that Alice follows the White Rabbit into Wonderland.

In 'Venda et le parasite', Prassinós expresses the oppression of women in patriarchal society through the motif of the glowworm. 'Venda et le parasite' (1938) was first published in *Le feu maniaque* (1939) and later in *Trouver sans chercher (1934-1944)* (1976).⁶³ It is one of her better-known texts since it appeared in an

⁶⁰ Pressly, p.602.

⁶¹ Ibid, p.600.

⁶² Salvador Dalí, *La vie secrète de Salvador Dalí* (Paris: Éditions de La Table Ronde, 1952), pp.146-147.

⁶³ Prassinós 'Venda et le parasite', in *Le feu maniaque*, pp.94-96 and in *Trouver sans chercher*, pp.180-182.

English translation by Hedges in *Surrealism and Women* (1991).⁶⁴ It is a story about Venda's life with a singing glowworm in her hair which her father has placed there. The themes present in the narrative include the portrayal of the father figure and the theme of psychic disorder. Written in the third person in the past tense, the story has a linear narrative and begins with Venda's birth and ends with her death. The title 'Venda et le parasite' introduces the two main characters of the story, a young girl named Venda and a parasite or glowworm. A parasite is an animal or plant that lives on another (the host) from which it obtains nourishment. The host does not benefit from the association and is often harmed by it. The third main character is Venda's father. In this story, the parasite is a 'ver luisant' or glowworm which is a fascinating luminous insect. The glowworm could be added to Seligmann's photomontage since they are not worms but beetles which have the amazing ability to emit light.⁶⁵

The parasite or glowworm plays an important role in the story which begins with Venda's birth and her father placing a 'ver luisant' in her hair. The visual image of the beetle in her hair is unsightly and is juxtaposed with her beautiful skin, '[il] a reniflé la peau rose du petit crâne'. The verb 'renifler' evokes the sense of smell and the narrator appeals to the reader's senses throughout the story. The glowworm does not intend to cause her any harm and carefully '[il a] relevé ses antennes pour ne pas lui faire de mal', perhaps to avoid its antennae becoming entangled in her hair. This image of the glowworm in Venda's hair reminds the reader of the snails

⁶⁴ Gisèle Prassinos, 'Finding What You Are Not Looking For', in *Surrealism and Women*, ed. by Caws and others, pp.32-36.

⁶⁵ Seligmann, *Les Animaux surréalistes* (1938).

crawling in the hair of the female mannequin in Dalí's *Rainy Taxi* installation outside the entrance to the 1938 Paris 'Exposition internationale du surréalisme'.⁶⁶ It fuses the human and the animal, the inanimate and the animate and recalls Breton's example of the mannequin as an embodiment of *le merveilleux*. The beetle makes its home 'au milieu des broussailles'. The noun 'broussailles' has a double meaning of undergrowth or tousled hair which suggests that Venda's hair replaces the creature's natural habitat. The glowworm enjoys itself and playfully '[il] s'amusait à grimper sur les longs fils en spirales'. Its enjoyment is juxtaposed with Venda's suffering. To make matters worse, at night the glowworm sings and shines brightly, 'il renvoyait dans sa carapace toute la force électrique de son corps, afin qu'on le vît mieux.' Perhaps this 'force électrique' could charge Breton's 'paratonnerre' of *humour noir* as the story has a dark theme of human suffering.⁶⁷ The glowworm tries to attract attention to itself and away from the baby. Although the glowworm does not intend to hurt Venda, it undoubtedly makes her suffer.

Prassinós also wrote about a singing glowworm in an unpublished and undated prose-poem titled 'Le ver luisant'.⁶⁸ It reads,

Il y a une petite lumière sur le dos / Il y a une petite musique qui sonne / Il saute dans l'herbe comme un morceau de soleil oublié / La nuit, quand le grand s'est caché.

⁶⁶ See Raoul Ubac's photograph of Dalí's *Rainy Taxi* installation. Reproduced in Foster, p.33.

⁶⁷ Breton, *Anthologie* (1940), p.7.

⁶⁸ Gisèle Prassinós, 'Le ver luisant'. BHVP, fonds Gisèle Prassinós, [MS-FS-01-0040]. Written on the same page are two other prose-poems titled 'Le chat' and 'L'escargot'.

However, unlike in 'Venda et le parasite', the glowworm is in its natural habitat of grass. This prose-poem can be read as the initial idea behind the story about Venda and the glowworm.

The presence of the glowworm has a huge impact on Venda's identity and reputation. As its singing becomes more and more shrill visitors come to think that Venda is 'une enfant du diable'. The effect on her social reputation can be linked to Carrington's story 'L'oncle Sam Carrington' (1929) in which the narrator's mother is more concerned with her social reputation than with Tante Edgeworth's and Oncle Sam Carrington's wellbeing in a critique of nouveau-riche society as I will discuss in chapter six. Perhaps Prassinós is also criticising the superficiality of social reputation. The glowworm also has an impact on Venda's reputation as a 'fille intelligente' since the beetle would help her with her schoolwork, 'il l'aidait à répéter les phrases de ses leçons, ce qui lui donnait une réputation de fille intelligente.' Venda's identity has been constructed by the presence of the glowworm which suggests that little girls are not free to construct their own identity in a patriarchal society. It mimics the way that the Surrealists initially cast Prassinós's into the role of *femme-enfant*.

The narrator describes the way that '[le ver] creusait des trous profonds dans la chair molle et s'y logeait, sans penser que l'enfant pouvait en souffrir.' The adjective 'profond' emphasises the child's suffering and again contrasts with the child's otherwise virgin 'chair molle'. In a rather gruesome scene, the glowworm reaches the brain, 'Cette matière gluante et onctueuse lui plut et il se mit à la manger lentement, un morceau tous les matins.' However, the glowworm is careful, '[il] referma lui-même la plaie avec sa salive collante.' The adjectives 'gluante et onctueuse' describe the texture of the brain and 'collante' describes the texture of

its saliva creating a tactile image. Hedges observes that 'There is something disturbing about this story, above and beyond its content (though the tale is no pleasant subject).'⁶⁹ The narrative and the visual imagery of the story are memorable and extend beyond the margins of the page to her other writings such as 'Véra dit'. Venda becomes a human-insect hybrid figure, a *cadavre exquis*. Similarly, in Buñuel's 1929 film *Un chien andalou*, the human body is fused with the insect body.⁷⁰ In one scene, a colony of ants climb out of a man's hand which is similar to the image of the glowworm burrowing into her brain.

Venda is characterised by her long blonde hair which is associated with femininity and beauty. However, the presence of a glowworm in her hair renders it unattractive. Venda arranges her long hair into a 'un gros chignon bien tordu'. However, the glowworm feels disorientated and has to climb 'cette montagne régulière et déplaisante'. Her hair becomes a natural environment and as a result of having to climb to the top of her bun, the glowworm becomes thin and its brightness dims which comforts the young girl. The association of hair and nature is not a new idea. Hedges argues that the story recalls Baudelaire's poem 'La Chevelure' in *Les fleurs du mal* and that this is 'the "paternal text" against which this young writer rebels'.⁷¹ The hair of the poet's mistress is associated with animals, plants, and nature.⁷² Hedges observes that in Prassinós's story, as in Baudelaire's poem, the hair

⁶⁹ Hedges, 'What Do Little Girls Dream Of', in *Surrealism and Women*, ed. by Caws and others, p.28.

⁷⁰ Luis Buñuel, *Un Chien Andalou* (1929).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Baudelaire, p.50.

is the vegetation where the worm can hide.⁷³ However, Venda's hair is more than this. It is a symbol of femininity which has been inhabited by a glowworm which represents patriarchy having been placed there by her father. Her hair which represents matriarchy has been invaded by patriarchy and the beetle graphically represents patriarchy embedded in the consciousness of society. Venda strives to free her hair (matriarchal society) of the glowworm (patriarchy). Although she does not succeed as the grip of patriarchal ideology is too tight to release, the women in many of Carrington's stories and in her novel *Le cornet acoustique* triumph (see chapters six and eight). In addition to a symbol of patriarchy, the glowworm can be interpreted as a 'symbole phallique [qui] traduit à la fois le dégoût, la hantise du sexe masculin et la peur d'être « cannibalisée » par l'autorité patriarcale' which Venda is powerless to act against.⁷⁴

The portrayal of the father figure is important to the narrative as Venda's father deliberately placed the glowworm in her hair when she was a baby.⁷⁵ Venda, now a young woman, explains to her father that she has suffered greatly because of the beetle and is despised by society. She confesses to him that she is in love with a young man who has asked her for her hand in marriage 'à condition qu'elle se débarrassât de la bête.' The glowworm is an obstacle to her happiness and future. However, her father is unsympathetic and 'inflexible'. He explains 'Ce tiers ne doit pas exister entre nous [...] il nous gêne et refroidit nos élans.' The way that the glowworm is referred to as a third party suggests that he wants to keep his daughter

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Barnet, *La femme cent sexes*, p.189.

⁷⁵ I will discuss the portrayal of the father figure in Carrington's stories in chapter six.

all to himself and that he has placed the glowworm in her hair for this very reason. This suggests a selfish love for his daughter as he reassures her that she is as beautiful with or without the glowworm. Venda who is described as 'la jeune fille désespérée' throws herself at her mother's feet and begs for her permission to kill 'son persécuteur'. The use of the noun 'persécuteur' to describe the glowworm is significant since she feels as if she is being oppressed because of her gender. Venda is unable to escape the beetle even on her parents' death. Her father 'lui fit juger qu'elle garderait toujours sur sa tête l'animal qu'il y avait fait vivre' and her mother also passes away 'sans oublier les éternelles recommandations' to keep the beetle in her hair. Hedges states that 'Since the worm is the gift of the father, we might interpret this as meaning that little girls are not even free from being educated in the patriarchal system of values that oppresses them, and that turns them into admired objects.'⁷⁶ The father's 'gift' of the beetle which represents patriarchal ideology definitely oppresses Venda. In fact, the parasite of the title could represent her father who places the glowworm in his daughter's hair and who through the insect exercises control over her. This father-daughter relationship is a parasitical one with the father feeding off his daughter's suffering.

The surrealist theme of psychic disorder, which I will discuss further in chapter seven, is present in the story. Venda grows old and her hair turns white but 'le ver luisant vivait toujours, sautait, sifflait gaiement et endommageait la tête devenue sensible de son hôtesse.' At the end of the story, the narrator relates that

⁷⁶ Hedges, 'What Do Little Girls Dream Of', in *Surrealism and Women*, ed. by Caws and others, p.28.

after a number of years, Venda 'perdit la raison'. She dances wildly in the road laughing and shouting 'Je suis un veau blanc'. The noun 'veau' denotes a calf but is also a pejorative term for a person meaning 'sheep'. Perhaps Venda believed that she was being transformed into a white calf. Or perhaps the term 'sheep' refers to Prassinós's relationship to the Surrealists and to the way that she was 'adopted' by the group and had no real voice of her own. Hedges suggests that she begins to see herself as 'a white (sacrificial?) calf'.⁷⁷ She has been sacrificed by her father and by society and has been turned into something to be admired but has no identity of her own. This recalls the concept of the *femme-enfant*, a young woman whose role was to be admired by and to inspire the male Surrealists. The personified, talking glowworm also imagines itself as a white calf and Venda announces 'Nous sommes deux veaux blancs'. Perhaps Venda feels united with the glowworm which conflates the human and the animal. The reader is unsure whether Venda recovers from this loss of reason as the narrator then reports that she has died. Perhaps she was driven to madness by the glowworm which had after all been eating her brain or by her father and his selfish desire for the glowworm to live forever in her hair. Or with the death of her parents perhaps she finally feels free, free from parental authority and expectation. Or is it a reaction to or rebellion against patriarchal society? However, Venda is never freed of the glowworm as it digests her corpse, 'son corps affriolant que le ver luisant achevait de dévorer.' This final image is gruesome; Venda has been eaten by the ideologies present in patriarchal society.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

Prassinos continues this idea of an animal living off a human being and that of a parasitical or host relationship in 'Véra dit' (July 1938). This narrative was widely published in *Une belle famille* (1938), *Le feu maniaque* (1939), *Les mots endormis* (1967), and *Trouver sans chercher (1934-1944)* (1976).⁷⁸ The narrative opens with Véra announcing 'J'ai un coq dans les entrailles.' The idea of a rooster living in her entrails or womb is disturbing and the reader wonders how the rooster entered her intestines in the first place. This image reminds the reader of the ghost 'brillant du feu de ses entrailles' in 'Le spectre de Chateaubriand' as discussed in chapter two.⁷⁹ The idea of a male chicken living in her female organ conflates the male and the female, the human and the animal. Like the glowworm in 'Venda et le parasite', perhaps the rooster represents patriarchy which has been internalised by the women who live in society. It suggests that women have come to embody patriarchal ideology which oppresses them from within. The rooster's voice 's'épanche et s'aplatit avec délice jusqu'à toucher la pointe de mon cœur.' The use of the verbs 's'épancher' meaning to open one's heart or to pour out one's feelings and 's'aplatir' meaning to flatten are interesting as 's'aplatir' is not usually used in this context. Like the glowworm, the rooster sings. However, its singing does not seem to bother her as much as the effect it has on her body. Véra explains 'La force de son soufflé balaye ce qui l'entoure et je sens mes organes se grouper aux extrémités de mon corps. Mon mécanisme se déränge.' This image of the rooster blowing her organs to one side is visceral and visual and her 'mécanisme', perhaps

⁷⁸ Gisèle Prassinos, 'Véra dit', in *Un divertissement*, ed. by Parisot, no page number, in *Le feu maniaque*, p.112, and in *Trouver sans chercher*, pp.187-188.

⁷⁹ Prassinos, 'Le spectre de Chateaubriand', in *Trouver sans chercher*, pp.22-23.

referring to her heart, becomes dislodged. The parasitical rooster takes advantage of her meals and her sleep 'est absorbé par son bec odorant' which evokes the sense of smell.

One day, Véra feels the rooster dying inside her intestine which introduces the themes of death and darkness. At first, she is content to be rid of it but her caring, selfless nature prevails, 'je ne lui veux pas de mal, je l'aime et ferai ce qu'il faut pour lui sauver la vie.' The rooster informs her that he requires 'une femelle' as a lover as he is bored and disheartened. Véra prioritises the rooster's happiness over her own and obtains a dead hen. The narrator's body trembles and 'de minces petites pattes parcourent mon abdomen et mes organes se resserrent davantage.' These 'petites pattes' suggest that the dead hen has laid eggs which have hatched into chicks. The reader has to remind oneself that this takes place inside the young woman's body. Véra is not in control of her own body but is host to the rooster and to patriarchal ideologies which perpetuates the oppression of women in society. The narrative ends with Véra posing the rhetorical question 'Combien une poule peut-elle pondre d'œufs en un an ?' This story anticipates Carrington's narrative 'L'amoureux' (1939) in which the greengrocer shows the young woman his 'dead' wife lying on a bed covered in grass who he places eggs underneath to hatch them, 'Là-dessus il soulève un coin de la couverture et j'ai vu beaucoup d'œufs et quelques poussins nouveaux-nés. « Voyez-vous, c'est là que mes œufs sont couvés (je vends aussi des œufs frais) ».⁸⁰ The egg is a recurrent motif in Carrington's creative oeuvre (see chapter six). In both 'Venda et le parasite' and 'Véra dit', the singing glowworm

⁸⁰ Carrington, 'L'amoureux', in *La dame ovale*, no page number.

and rooster represent the embodied or internalised and inescapable patriarchal ideologies present in society.

Another short story in which the insect plays a key role is 'La jeune fille persécutée' (1935). It is a narrative about a young girl who is threatened by a butterfly at night. Of the crepuscular theme in Prassinós's writing, Cottenet-Hage announces 'Tant de choses se passent la nuit !'⁸¹ This story was published in *Quand le bruit travaille* (1936), *Le feu maniaque* (1939), and *Trouver sans chercher* (1934-1944) (1976).⁸² It is a subversive story of a young girl afraid of a butterfly (or moth) which visits her one morning. In a letter to Mario dated 14 July 1936, Parisot writes of his enjoyment of this story, 'Le petit conte – très nocturne – du papillon, notamment, me plaît beaucoup.'⁸³ Perhaps Parisot enjoyed its surrealist spirit of subversion since one would not expect a young girl to be afraid of butterflies but perhaps of wasps or spiders. A butterfly is associated with beauty (its colour and markings), femininity, and metamorphosis and also has connotations of flight and freedom. As Barnet writes 'si les images animalières fonctionnent comme des éléments perturbateurs, des emblèmes de peur, c'est-à-dire des conventions du genre fantastique, on pourra voir qu'elles se révéleront aussi des plus surréalistes, à la fois éléments de surprise, de « hasard objectif », et de subversion féministe'.⁸⁴ The butterfly is a symbol of fear, surrealist surprise, and subversively represents the

⁸¹ Cottenet-Hage, *Gisèle Prassinós ou le désir du lieu intime*, p.49.

⁸² Prassinós, *Quand le bruit travaille*, no page numbers, *Le feu maniaque*, pp.60-61, and *Trouver sans chercher*, pp.115-116.

⁸³ *Correspondance*, ed. by Prassinós and Rye, p.52.

⁸⁴ Barnet, *La femme cent sexes*, p.185.

threat of the adult world. The butterfly is a recurrent motif in the work of the women associated with Surrealism. In *The Hunt breakfast* (1956) and in *Lepidopteros* (1969), Carrington presents hybrid butterfly-faced figures in the process of metamorphosis with the Zapotec butterfly god symbolising rebirth. Eva Sulzer (1902-1990), a Swiss-born musician and photographer, wrote a piece of prose titled 'Rêves de Papillons' which appeared in the sixth issue of Wolfgang Paalen's review of modern art *Dyn* in 1944.⁸⁵ Sulzer imagines the patterns on a butterfly's wings as another land and its wings transforming into sails. She also imagines species of rare butterflies pinned in a glass case which alludes to the problem of the butterfly collector and to the problem of capturing *le merveilleux*.

Before going to bed, the girl makes a necklace, 'elle avait enfilé un collier de cerfeuil tout frais, avec de petites coccinelles en verre mat, rayé de toile cirée jaune' as an amulet or charm to protect her from the butterfly. The necklace of live ladybirds anticipates Carrington's story 'La maison de la peur' in which 'la patronne [sic, patronne], la Peur' wears a dressing gown made out of live bats which have been cruelly sewn together by their wings.⁸⁶ The girl is proud of her necklace, '[elle] pensait que le papillon n'oserait pas venir la toucher quand il verrait qu'elle n'était pas seule' since she is now protected by the tiny beetles. However, the butterfly returns, 'on vit sur le carreau de la fenêtre la réflexion d'une boule de plomb, surmontée de deux longues cornes de celluloïd bronzé.' The butterfly-moth is presented as a threatening ball of lead with horns as antennae which recalls a

⁸⁵ Eva Sulzer, 'Rêves de Papillons', *Dyn*, ed. by Wolfgang Paalen, 6, 1944, p.47. See *Wolfgang Paalen's DYN (The Complete Reprint)*, ed. by Christian Kloyber (Wien: Springer-Verlag, 2000).

⁸⁶ Carrington, 'La maison de la peur', in *Un divertissement*, ed. by Parisot, no page number.

mythical monster. The description of the butterfly as dull lead subverts its graceful movement and colourful markings. In addition, the image of the butterfly at the window recalls the visual image of words knocking at the window pane in Breton's *Manifeste*.⁸⁷ The window represents the transparent boundary between the conscious and unconscious as discussed in chapter two. The butterfly perhaps represents Prassinós's dark unconscious waiting to be let in. Or perhaps it represents the threat of patriarchy (though a butterfly is usually imagined as feminine). It can be read as a parody of Ernst's *Deux enfants sont menacés par un rossignol* (1924) in which two female figures are threatened by an unassuming nightingale in the sky.⁸⁸ This collage resonated with Carrington as I will discuss in chapter six and the window is also a recurrent motif in her creative oeuvre.

The window, a fixed boundary between the inside and outside world unexpectedly moves et 'on ne vit plus rien'. When the girl wakes up, the lead butterfly has transformed into 'une petit cube de verre creux, plein d'eau, dans lequel nageaient des quantités de rouleaux de ficelle imbibés de pétrole.' The reader is presented with a rather unpleasant image which Helen Thompson likens to a Molotov cocktail which has connotations of violence and destruction.⁸⁹ The girl gets up 'afin d'anéantir cette vision horrible' but the window somehow closes 'toute seule' and she goes back to bed 'avec un gros rire'. She believes that the butterfly

⁸⁷ Breton, *Manifestes*, p.31.

⁸⁸ Max Ernst, *Deux enfants sont menacés par un rossignol* (1924) <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/79293> [accessed 10 April 2019].

⁸⁹ Helen Thompson, 'Identity and the power to communicate the surreal in Prassinós's *Trouver sans chercher*', in *André Breton: The Power of Language*, ed. by Ramona Fotiade (Exeter: Elm Bank, 2000), p.236.

's'était coincé entre les deux battants de la fenêtre' which is cruel and perhaps sadistic. Writing on Prassinos, Breton states 'Très noir : c'est un enfant qui rit de peur dans la nuit.'⁹⁰ However, here, she laughs out of relief rather than out of fear. Thompson interprets the butterfly as a 'messenger between the safety of the girl's bedroom and the frightening Surrealist world on the other side of the window' in a juxtaposition of childhood dreams and surrealist nightmares.⁹¹ The window is perhaps a barrier between reality and the imaginary, the conscious and the unconscious or represents the conflation of these states. The girl returns to bed with 'l'âme d'un pigeon' to protect her which is a strange teddy bear to comfort a little girl and more of an ingredient for a witch's potion. However, the pigeon's soul soon takes flight. Through the window, the lead butterfly and Molotov cocktail have transformed into 'un petit poireau maladif dont les feuilles supérieures étaient miteuses et pleines de pointes sèches.' The adjectives 'maladif', 'miteuses', and 'sèches' suggest that the leek is past its best. Thompson sees the leek as an image of Prassinos herself since her name 'pá vios' (related to 'pá ov' – leek) means leek-green or light-green in Greek.⁹² If this is the case then Prassinos imagines herself as a sickly-looking vegetable and not the fresh-faced *femme-enfant* that the Surrealists saw. Prassinos as a vegetable recalls Giuseppe Arcimboldo's (1527-1593) fruit and

⁹⁰ Breton, *Anthologie* (1940), p.254.

⁹¹ Thompson, 'Identity and the power to communicate the surreal', in *André Breton: The Power of Language*, ed. by Fotiade, p.236.

⁹² *Ibid.*

vegetable portraits. The leek also anticipates Carrington's use of the leafy cabbage in her story 'L'oncle Sam Carrington' (1939) (see chapter six).⁹³

The young girl does not open her eyes for three days since she is frightened by the butterfly and the strange images that she has seen. Thompson interprets the text as an expression of Prassinos's anxiety with regard to the surrealist movement.⁹⁴ She is perhaps frightened by the surrealist adult world dominated by men. In another letter to Mario dated 29 March 1936, Parisot reveals that he dislikes the ending of the narrative, 'la fin du conte est un peu moins brillante que le reste', 'la fin fût un peu ratée'.⁹⁵ It is uncertain whether the ending is the same in the original manuscript as in the published version or whether Prassinos revised it.⁹⁶ Through the window, she sees the ball of lead, the glass cube, and the small leek engaged in a strange dance. These inanimate objects have transformed into animate ones and recalls Léger's *Ballet mécanique* (1924) in which inanimate mechanical parts are animated.⁹⁷ These objects then disappear and the window shuts 'et, au loin, pareil à la pluie, un chœur fermenté s'éleva' which suggests a celebration. This anticipates the strange dance at the end of Carrington's 'La maison de la peur'.⁹⁸

In conclusion, Prassinos draws on familiar flora and fauna and assigns them a new context and role. From the migrating rose in the untitled poem, the attention-

⁹³ Carrington, 'L'oncle Sam Carrington', in *La dame ovale*, no page numbers.

⁹⁴ Thompson, 'Identity and the power to communicate the surreal', in *André Breton: The Power of Language*, ed. by Fotiade, p.236.

⁹⁵ *Correspondance*, ed. by Prassinos and Rye, p.120.

⁹⁶ The original manuscript is not held at Fonds Gisèle Prassinos, BHVP.

⁹⁷ Léger, *Ballet mécanique* (1924).

⁹⁸ Carrington, 'La maison de la peur', in *Un divertissement*, ed. by Parisot, no page number.

seeking glowworm in 'Venda et le parasite', rooster in 'Véra dit' to the menacing butterfly in 'La jeune fille persécutée', these creatures conflate the real and the imaginary and create a subversive, surrealist world. Prassinós does not identify the self with these creatures as Carrington identifies the self with the horse but uses insects to express the female consciousness. In the untitled poem, the migrating roses are a metaphor for words and images travelling from the unconscious or conscious to the piece of paper in an imagined workshop or studio aligning the forces of nature and the process of creativity. In 'Venda et le parasite', 'Véra dit', and 'La jeune fille persécutée', I argue that the glowworm, rooster, and butterfly all represent patriarchy or patriarchal ideologies. In 'Venda et le parasite', the glowworm represents patriarchy which is embedded in the consciousness of society. Similarly, in 'Véra dit', the young woman has a rooster living in her intestines and like the glowworm, the male chicken represents patriarchy which has been internalised by the women who live in society. In 'La jeune fille persécutée', the lead butterfly represents the threat of patriarchy (or the surrealist movement). In these narratives, the main characters are young women and Prassinós draws on these insects to voice and present her concerns on the oppression of women in society. Throughout the experimental volume *Trouver sans chercher (1934-1944)*, Prassinós finds and expresses her own voice through the theme of nature and animals and conflates the unfamiliar and familiar, the ordinary and out of the ordinary.

Chapter five – Leonora Carrington – artist, writer, and woman of ideas

‘Qui est la Mariée du Vent ?’¹

Leonora Carrington was an artist, writer, and woman of ideas who worked in dialogue with Surrealism and is today one of the best-known women of the French avant-garde. In this chapter, I will introduce Carrington and her creative oeuvre and outline the texts that I will analyse in the following chapters. It is worth noting that Carrington’s life has been well-documented and as Suleiman observes ‘it would make a wonderful movie’.² In fact, her life has inspired two novels - Elena Poniatowska’s *Leonora: A novel* (2015) and Heidi Sopinka’s *Dictionary of Animal Languages* (2018).³ In this chapter, I will explore how Max Ernst introduces Carrington and her first published story in his preface ‘Préface ou Loplop présente la mariée du vent’ before analysing the main themes in ‘La maison de la peur’ (1938) which include an experimentation with language, chance encounter, animal-human relationships, and a critique of society.

In ‘Jezamathatiques ou introduction au merveilleux processus pictural’, Carrington recounts her surreal birth,

¹ Max Ernst, ‘Préface ou Loplop présente la mariée du vent’, in *Un divertissement*, ed. by Parisot, no page numbers.

² Susan Rubin Suleiman, ‘Artists in Love (and Out): Leonora Carrington and Max Ernst’, in *Risking Who One Is: Encounters in Contemporary Art and Literature* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1994), p.89.

³ Elena Poniatowska, *Leonora: A novel* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 2015) and Heidi Sopinka, *Dictionary of Animal Languages* (London: Scribe UK, 2018).

Je suis née au début de la deuxième moitié des années quatre-vingt-dix, en de fort curieuses circonstances, dans un ennéhexagramme, mathématiquement. La seule personne présente lors de ma naissance fut notre cher, fidèle et vieux fox-terrier, Boozy, et un appareil à rayons X pour stériliser les vaches. Ma mère se trouvait être absente à ce moment-là, occupée qu'elle était à tendre des pièges aux crevettes qui infestaient alors les hauts sommets des Andes, entraînant la misère et dévastant les populations indigènes.⁴

Carrington was not born in the second half of the nineties but in 1917, the same year that Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918) coined the term 'sur-réalisme'.⁵ It could therefore be said that she was born a Surrealist. This extract introduces the idea of a spiritual rebirth along with the themes of mathematics and science, animals and nature, and different geographies (the Andes Mountains) and cultures ('les populations indigènes') which are present throughout her creative oeuvre. It provides an insight into her wild and wondrous imagination and her sense of humour. It also recalls the opening of Ernst's article 'Some Data on the Youth of

⁴ Leonora Carrington, 'Jezamathatiques ou introduction au merveilleux processus pictural', in *Leonora Carrington : La mariée du vent*, ed. by Annie Le Brun (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2008), p.75. This parody of an artist's statement appeared for the first time in the exhibition catalogue *Leonora Carrington : Exposición de óleos, gouaches, dibujos y tapices* (Ciudad de México: Instituto Anglo-Mexicano de Cultura, 1965).

⁵ Apollinaire used the term 'sur-réalisme' to describe a performance of *Parade* (ballet réaliste), a collaboration between Erik Satire, Pablo Picasso, Léonide Massine, and Jean Cocteau, in reference to the combined mediums of painting, dance, and mime. Roe, p.50.

M.E.: As told by himself' (April 1942), in which he imagines that he 'came out of the egg which his mother had laid in an eagle's nest' and was born a bird.⁶

Leonora Carrington was born in Clayton Green, nearly Chorley in South Lancashire on 6 April 1917 (and died in Mexico City in 2011 aged ninety-four). Her father, Harold Wilde Carrington was a wealthy businessman in the textiles industry. Her mother, Maureen (née Moorhead) was Irish and the daughter of a country doctor from Moat, County Westmeath, Southern Ireland. The family with their newly acquired wealth belonged to the *nouveau riche*. Family and social class are recurring themes throughout Carrington's writings (see 'La dame ovale', 'La débutante', and 'L'oncle Sam Carrington').⁷ Carrington had three brothers, an older brother named Patrick and two younger brothers, Gerald and Arthur. In an interview with Paul De Angelis, she states that she resented being a girl because of the restrictions placed on her and was aware of the gender bias present in society from a young age.⁸ Similarly, Prassinou was aware of the limitations placed on her as a girl growing up in a Greek-Italian family. Carrington's family first lived in a house called Westwood before moving to Crookhey Hall and later, when she was thirteen years old, to Hazelnut Hall in Silverdale. In her novel *Le cornet acoustique* (1974), the ageing heroine, Marion Leatherby imagines 'Les maisons sont comme des corps' in reference to the way that one becomes emotionally attached to a house just as one

⁶ Max Ernst, 'Some Data on the Youth on M.E.: As told by himself', *View*, 1, April 1942, p.28.

⁷ See Carrington, *La dame ovale : sept illustrations par Max Ernst*.

⁸ Paul De Angelis, 'Interview with Leonora Carrington', in *Leonora Carrington: The Mexican Years (1943-1985)*, ed. by Holly Sanchez-Barnet (San Francisco: The Mexican Museum, 1991), p.33.

is physically attached to their body.⁹ Crookhey Hall made a lasting impression on young Carrington and in a 1947 painting of the same name she depicts a white female figure fleeing from a nineteenth-century manor house.¹⁰ It captures her desire to run away as a little girl from a restrictive upper-class upbringing and her running away as a young woman to be with Ernst.

Carrington was expelled from a number of schools as a result of her unconventional behaviour. She was expelled from the convent of the Holy Sepulchre near Essex and St. Mary's Convent in Ascot because she would not 'collaborate'.¹¹ She was then sent to Miss Penrose's boarding school in Florence, Italy, expelled from a finishing school in Paris, and finally sent to Miss Sampson's from which she ran away. This conveys her rebellious spirit and her inherent inability to conform. On her return to England, she was presented at the last court of King George V. She reimagines this experience in her best-known subversive short story 'La débutante' (see chapter six). Following her presentation at court, Carrington broke the news to her family of her aspiration to be an artist. Despite her family's initial objection, she studied at the Chelsea School of Art and then at Amédée Ozenfant's (1886-1966) Academy in West Kensington. For Carrington, art represented a way of escaping from her family, upper-class society, and England.

⁹ See Leonora Carrington, *Le cornet acoustique*, trans. by Henri Parisot (Paris: GF Flammarion, [1983]), p.39.

¹⁰ Carrington, *Crookhey Hall* (1947). Reproduced in Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, p.10.

¹¹ De Angelis, 'Interview with Leonora Carrington', in *Leonora Carrington: The Mexican Years*, ed. by Sanchez-Barnet, p.33.

In *Le cornet acoustique* (1974), Carrington recounts her early life through the character of Marion. Marion (as Carrington) recalls,

De retour dans le Lancashire, je fus prise d'une crise de claustrophobie et tentai de convaincre Mère de me laisser partir pour Londres, étudier la peinture. Elle pensa que c'était une idée futile et sotte, et me fit une conférence sur les artistes. « Il n'y a rien de mal à peindre, m'expliqua-t-elle. Je peins moi-même des boîtes pour les ventes de charité. Il y a une différence, toutefois, entre s'intéresser aux choses de l'art et être effectivement un artiste.¹²

Here Marion expresses her desire to be an artist to escape her suffocating life in Lancashire. Her mother's opposition provides an insight into early twentieth-century attitudes towards art and artists and reveals that painting was not considered as more than a hobby for women. In an interview, Carrington confirms that her mother used to paint biscuit boxes for jumble sales which confirms an autobiographical thread.¹³ Marion continues, 'Votre tante Edgeworth écrivait des romans et était en très bons termes d'amitié avec Sir Water Scott, mais elle n'aurait jamais voulu se donner le nom d'artiste. Cela n'eut pas été convenable.'¹⁴ Drawing on two literary figures, she argues that Anglo-Irish author Maria Edgeworth (1767-1849) would not have wanted to have been called an artist since it was not considered a respectable role for a woman with artists considered to be immoral and impoverished

¹² Carrington, *Le cornet acoustique* (1983), p.99.

¹³ Joanna Moorhead, 'Leonora Carrington – Britain's Lost Surrealist' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lqXePrSE1R0> [accessed 28 October 2018].

¹⁴ Carrington, *Le cornet acoustique* (1983), p.99.

individuals. Moreover, being an artist was not considered suitable for the daughter of a nouveau-riche family with a social reputation to maintain. Carrington mocks the notion of respectability in her story 'L'oncle Sam Carrington' which I will discuss in chapter six.

Marion's mother suggests that she paints at home, 'En outre, qu'est-ce qui vous empêche de peindre à la maison ; il y a toute sorte de coins pittoresques qu'il serait délicieux de peindre ». « Je veux peindre des nus, dis-je, on ne trouve pas de nus, ici. »¹⁵ Her desire to paint nude portraits conveys her rebelliousness. For Carrington, art was more than a hobby, it was a way of life. Marion continues 'Finalement je partis effectivement pour Londres étudier l'art et j'eus une intrigue amoureuse avec un Égyptien.'¹⁶ Although Carrington did travel to London where she studied art, she soon met and fell in love with a German named Ernst and not an Egyptian. This extract reveals the obstacles that aspiring women artists in the twentieth century had to overcome such as family opposition and society's attitude towards women as artists. In becoming a renowned artist, Carrington was to challenge the gender roles present in art history. In a filmed interview, Carrington's cousin Joanna Moorhead recalls that her family spoke of Carrington, who was nicknamed 'Prim', as having run away to be an artist's model.¹⁷ It is interesting that she was thought to have run away to be a muse rather than an artist. This exemplifies the attitude towards women as artists at that time and the assigned gender roles of the man as the artist and the woman as the artist's muse.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Moorhead, 'Leonora Carrington – Britain's Lost Surrealist'.

Carrington was a talented artist and writer who had a diverse creative practice. In a 1975 essay, her patron Edward James states 'She has never relinquished her love of experimentation, the result being that she has been able to diversify and explore a hundred or more techniques for the expression of her creative powers.'¹⁸ As an artist, Carrington practiced drawing, painting, tapestry, and costume and set design. She experimented with the medium of egg tempera which was widely used in painting until the sixteenth century.¹⁹ She designed the set and costumes for a production of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in 1959 and *Much Ado About Nothing* in 1962 in Mexico. The colourful papier mâché masks that she created for *The Tempest* were displayed at the 'Leonora Carrington' exhibition at the Tate Liverpool in 2015.²⁰ As a writer, Carrington penned short stories, novels, and plays in three languages (English, French, and Spanish). The diverse themes that she explores in her writings and paintings are interconnected. The scenes created by the words on the page and the images on canvases mix together as if they are colours on an artist's palette. The words extend beyond the margins of the page and the images

¹⁸ Edward James, 'Leonora Carrington' (Ireland, September 1975), in *Leonora Carrington: Paintings, drawings and sculptures (1940-1990)*, ed. by Andrea Schlieker (London: Serpentine Gallery, 1991), p.35. James collected seventy works in total by Fini, Carrington, and Tanning. See Désirée de Chair, 'A 'Born' Surrealist: Edward James as Collector, Artist's Friend, and Patron of the Arts', in *Collecting the Marvellous*, ed. by Görgen and others, p.196.

¹⁹ Aberth further discusses Carrington's use of egg tempera in her monograph *Leonora Carrington: Surrealism, Alchemy and Art*, p.66.

²⁰ 'Leonora Carrington', Tate Liverpool, 6 March – 31 May 2015. Photographs of the masks are printed in Chloe Aridjis, Francesco Manacorda, and Lauren Barnes, 'Leonora Carrington: transgressing discipline', in *Leonora Carrington and the international avant-garde*, ed. by Eburne and McAra, pp.236-239.

beyond their frames to create a world which conflates the real and the imaginary. In addition, her writings and paintings have an autobiographical theme. Chadwick describes all surrealist paintings as self-portraits and Charlotte Stokes argues that 'all surrealist art is to some degree autobiographical' since it shows how the artist sees the world and how they see themselves which is an idea that could be extended to surrealist writing.²¹ Although Carrington's paintings and writings have an autobiographical thread, they can also be interpreted as creative works in their own right.

For many years, Carrington has been better known as an artist than a writer. However, this is gradually changing.²² Carrington's first publication is a short story titled 'La maison de la peur' (1938) which first appeared in Parisot's collection *Un divertissement* with a preface and illustrations by Ernst.²³ The following year, she published a collection of subversive short stories under the title *La dame ovale* (1939) which was also illustrated by Ernst. This demonstrates their creative partnership and the importance of collaboration to the Surrealists.²⁴ These stories are written in the first-person with rebellious young women as the protagonists and explore the diverse themes of chance encounter, social class and reputation, a

²¹ Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, p.66. Charlotte Stokes, 'Surrealist persona: Max Ernst's *Loplop, Superior of Birds*', *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art*, 13, 3/4 (1983), 225-234 (p.225).

²² See the 'Timeliness' section of the introduction.

²³ Carrington, 'La maison de la peur', in *Un divertissement*, ed. by Parisot, no page numbers.

²⁴ See Renée Riese Hubert, 'Beyond Initiation: Leonora Carrington & Max Ernst', in *Magnifying Mirrors: Women, Surrealism, & Partnership* (Lincoln; London: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), pp.113-139.

critique of upper-class and patriarchal society, magic, transformation, and human-animal friendships. In 1942, Carrington wrote the first draft of her memoir *En bas* which first appeared in English in the New York surrealist journal *VVV* in 1944.²⁵ It is an account of her experience of psychic disorder and confinement to a psychiatric institution in Santander, Spain. In the 1950s, Carrington wrote her second novel *Le cornet acoustique* which was not published until 1974.²⁶ This narrative follows the adventures of ninety-nine-year-old Marion Leatherby at an old people's home and reworks the Arthurian legend of the quest for the Holy Grail. Her writings therefore explore a wide range of themes from psychic disorder to the process of ageing. Carrington also wrote a number of plays including *Une chemise de nuit de flanelle* (1951), *Pénélope* (written in 1946, performed in 1957), and *Opus Siniestrus* (1969).²⁷ Moreover, the questions raised in her critical essays 'The Emancipation of Women' (Mexico, 1970) and 'The Cabbage is a Rose' (September 1975) on gender and gender discrimination, identity, war and peace, racism, technology, the environment, and feminism resonate as much with today's society as they would have almost fifty years ago.²⁸ It can therefore be said that her writings have a timeless quality. The

²⁵ Leonora Carrington, 'Down Below', trans. by Victor Llona, *VVV*, ed. by David Hare, 4, 1944, pp.70-86. *VVV* was a journal dedicated to poetry, plastic arts, anthropology, sociology, and psychology.

²⁶ Carrington, *Le cornet acoustique* (1974).

²⁷ Gloria Orenstein discusses these three plays in *The Theater of the Marvelous: Surrealism and the Contemporary Stage* (New York: New York University Press, 1975), pp.122-144.

²⁸ Carrington, 'The Emancipation of Women', pp.89-90 and Carrington, 'The Cabbage is a Rose', *Arsenal / Surrealist Subversion 4*, ed. by Rosemont, p.21. The essay 'The Emancipation of Women' is published under the title 'Female Human Animal' in the exhibition catalogue

texts that I will focus on in my thesis are 'La maison de la peur' (1938), *La dame ovale* (1939), *En bas* (1945), and *Le cornet acoustique* (1974). Through original close readings of these texts, I will bring to light my interpretations of *le merveilleux* in her creative oeuvre.

Carrington's paintings and writings are open to multiple interpretations. In fact, Carrington refused to interpret or 'intellectualise' her own work.²⁹ In 'The Cabbage is a Rose', she explains that 'Writing and painting are alike in that both arts – music as well – come out of fingers into some receptive artefact. The result, of course, is read, heard or seen through the receptive organs of those who receive the art and are supposed to "Be" what all these different persons perceive differently.'³⁰ For Carrington, writing and painting are similar in the way that they are produced and received by the body. However, they are interpreted differently by different people according to their experiences. Moreover, in Carrington's commentary on her painting, *The Temptation of St Anthony* (1947), which she painted for the 'Bel Ami International Art Competition', she poses the rhetorical question 'Naturellement on pourrait demander pourquoi le vénérable saint possède trois têtes – à quoi l'on pourrait répondre : Pourquoi pas?'³¹ This suggests that there does not have to be a rational behind an idea and alludes to the free play of the imagination. Of the way of

Leonora Carrington: What She Might Be, ed. by Salomon Grimberg (Dallas: The Mexican Institute, 2008), pp.11-15.

²⁹ Acker.

³⁰ Carrington, 'The Cabbage is a Rose', p.21. 'The Cabbage is a Rose' is a series of reflections on diverse subjects including the cabbage, writing and painting, women, and religion.

³¹ *The Temptation of St. Anthony: An Exhibition of Eleven Paintings* (Washington D.C.: American Federation of the Arts, 1946), p.323.

looking at the world around her, she compares the role of the eyes to that of optical instruments, 'Posséder un télescope sans sa contre-partie essentielle – le microscope – me semble un symbole de la plus sombre incompréhension. Le devoir de l'œil droit est de plonger dans le télescope tandis que l'œil gauche interroge le microscope.'³² In other words, to have a telescope, an optical instrument, without a microscope, a scientific instrument, is useless since they work together. The role of the right eye, like the telescope, is to make distant objects appear larger and brighter whereas the role of the left eye, like the microscope, is to magnify small, close objects. They work together to make the invisible or the spiritual world visible to the naked eye. For example, in Carrington's painting *Sidhe, the White People of the Tuatha dé Danaan* (1954), the Sidhe, the Irish fairy people who live underground, are seen for the first time seated around a table in a domestic setting.³³

Carrington's introduction to the surrealist group dates to 1937. In June that year, Carrington met Ernst (1891-1976) for the first time at a dinner party hosted by Ursula Goldfinger (who was also an art student at Ozenfant's Academy). Ernst was in London at the time to attend his own exhibition at the Mayor Gallery.³⁴ However, Carrington already knew of Ernst since her mother had given her Read's 1936

³² Leonora Carrington, *En bas* (Paris: Fontaine, 1945), p.30. Also cited by Breton in *Anthologie de l'humour noir* (1950), p.334. It also recalls the opening scene of Man Ray's 1926 *cinépoème Emak Bakia* of a man looking down a microscope at an eye (his eye?). See Man Ray, *Emak Bakia* (1926).

³³ Carrington, *Sidhe, the White People of the Tuatha dé Danaan* (1954). Reproduced in Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, p.54.

³⁴ 'Exhibition of Surrealist Paintings by Max Ernst', Mayor Gallery, London, 3 – 27 June 1937.

volume on Surrealism which featured five of his artworks.³⁵ She was struck by Ernst's collage *Deux enfants sont menacés par un rossignol* (1924) and describes her visceral reaction 'like a burning, inside; you know how when something really touches you, it feels like burning.'³⁶ In the collage, a red wooden gate opens onto a strange scene - a female figure points a knife at an unassuming bird in the sky whilst another figure has collapsed to the ground. A male figure carrying a girl balances on the rooftop of a house and reaches towards the doorknob fixed to the frame which alludes to the possibility of moving between the dream and the real world. In fact, Carrington understood this scene as 'a kind of world which would move between worlds. The world of our dreaming and imagination.'³⁷ Perhaps Carrington was also inspired by the fact that Read's volume featured artworks by seven women artists (Agar, Fini, Hugo, Oppenheim, Grace W. Pailthorpe, Toyen, and a drawing by Diana Brinton Lee).³⁸ Although only nine artworks by women were featured out of a total of ninety-six, it perhaps revealed to her that Surrealism was a movement in which women artists could work. Carrington fell in love with Ernst, who was twenty-six years her senior and married to his second wife Marie-Berthe Aurenche, and in 1937 she

³⁵ Read, plates 29-33. The five artworks are *The Chinese Nightingale* (1920), *Two Children Menaced by a Nightingale* (1922), *Human Figure* (1931), *Garden Aeroplane-trap* (1934), and *Tête Double* (1936).

³⁶ Max Ernst, *Deux enfants sont menacés par un rossignol* (1924) <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/79293> [accessed 13 September 2018]. Marina Warner, 'Introduction', in Leonora Carrington, *The House of Fear: notes from Down Below* (London: Virago Press, 1989), p.5.

³⁷ John Wilson, 'Seann Penn, Leonora Carrington, Madonna's New Album', *BBC Radio 4*, 9 March 2015 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b054pqv4> [accessed 24 August 2018].

³⁸ Read.

moved to Paris to join him.³⁹ However, Carrington affirms 'Then I ran away to Paris. Not with Max. Alone. I always did my running away alone' which conveys her independent spirit.⁴⁰ In Paris, Ernst introduced her to Breton and the Surrealists where she attended surrealist group meetings at cafés throughout the city.

In 1938, Carrington and Ernst moved from Paris to Saint-Martin d'Ardèche in the south of France to escape the jealousy of Marie-Berthe Aurenche.⁴¹ They bought an eighteenth-century farmhouse in quartier les Alliberts where they lived together until Ernst's arrest and Carrington's nervous breakdown in 1940.⁴² For Carrington and Ernst, the house formed a blank canvas. Carrington painted the interior and exterior walls with phantasmagorical figures and Ernst created hybrid sculptures for their garden. Together they transformed the house into a work of art bringing the imaginary to life and capturing the spirit of *le merveilleux*. Carrington's interior designs of fantastical hybrid human-horse female figures closely resemble Ernst's collage illustrations in 'La maison de la peur'.⁴³

³⁹ For a discussion on Carrington's and Ernst's relationship see Suleiman, 'Artists in Love (and Out): Leonora Carrington and Max Ernst', in *Risking Who One Is*, pp.89-121.

⁴⁰ De Angelis, 'Interview with Leonora Carrington', in *Leonora Carrington: The Mexican Years*, ed. by Sanchez-Barnet, p.36.

⁴¹ See Jimmy Ernst, *A Not-So-Still Life: a memoir by Jimmy Ernst* (New York: St. Martin's/Marek, 1984), p.114.

⁴² Unfortunately, the house is not open to the public. However, Ernst's *bas-relief* of two hybrid human-bird figures is visible from the street. The house was listed as a historic monument on 19 November 1991.

⁴³ Photographs of Carrington's paintings and Ernst's sculptures are printed in the exhibition catalogue *Leonora Carrington*, ed. by Seán Kissane (Dublin, Ireland: The Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2013), pp.76-79.

Written in 1937-38 in Saint-Martin d'Ardèche, 'La maison de la peur' is her first published work and therefore her debut among the Surrealists.⁴⁴ Ernst wrote the preface to the narrative titled 'Préface ou Loplop présente la mariée du vent' and illustrated the text with three collages which reveals his support for her creative writings. 'La maison de la peur' is therefore not only Carrington's first published text but also her first collaborative work. Renée Riese Hubert discusses the dialogue between the text and image in *Surrealism and the Book* (1988) as does Andrea Oberhuber in a more recent article titled 'Qui a peur d'entrer dans *La Maison de la Peur* de Leonora Carrington?'.⁴⁵ I will discuss Ernst's introduction to Carrington and her narrative and offer my interpretation of *le merveilleux* in a close reading of 'La maison de la peur'. The version of 'La maison de la peur' published in Parisot's collection *Un divertissement* (1938) differs not in narrative but in the way that it has been written to the version published in the collection *La Débutante* (1978).⁴⁶ This

⁴⁴ According to Aberth, Carrington and Ernst moved to Saint-Martin d'Ardèche in the Summer of 1938 (p.38). However, there is some discrepancy regarding the date that Carrington and Ernst moved to the south of France and therefore where the story was written. In *Max Ernst and Alchemy*, Warlick states that it was written in 1937-38 in Saint-Martin d'Ardèche (p.159) whereas in *The Surreal Life of Leonora Carrington*, Moorhead states that it was written in the Spring of 1938 in Paris (p.83). Where and when it was written is important as it would have had an effect on the theme and tone of the narrative. In *La Débutante (Contes et pièces)* (Paris: Editions Flammarion, 1978), the story is dated 1937 (p.30).

⁴⁵ Renée Riese Hubert, *Surrealism and the Book* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1988), pp.70-73. Andrea Oberhuber, 'Qui a peur d'entrer dans *La Maison de la Peur* de Leonora Carrington?' <http://lisaf.org/project/carrington-leonora-maison-de-peur/> [accessed 19 September 2018].

⁴⁶ Leonora Carrington, 'La Maison de la peur', in *La Débutante*, pp.26-30.

later version has been edited by Parisot and corrected syntactically and grammatically.

The title 'Préface ou Loplop présente la mariée du vent' introduces two characters – Loplop and 'la mariée du vent'. Loplop is Ernst's surrealist persona and Ernst is identified as 'Loplop, le supérieur des oiseaux' in *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme*.⁴⁷ Many surrealist artists created individual personas which they incorporated into their work, for example Marcel Duchamp created Rose Sélavy (which is a play on 'c'est la vie'). Ernst and Carrington also created individual surrealist personas; Ernst imagined Loplop and Carrington identified with the white horse. For them, the bird and horse respectively represented freedom – physical freedom and creative freedom and was connected to the quest for an artistic identity.

Created in the 1920s, Loplop assumes the form of a bird or a man with the head and wings of a bird and first featured in the 1928 painting *Loplop, supérieur des oiseaux*. In 'Surrealist persona', Stokes states that Loplop is not only the artist's personal symbol but also the presenter of his own interpretation of the world.⁴⁸ She explains that the persona is an aesthetic device created and controlled by the artist and describes it as the artist's mask defining them for the outside world while concealing the real person.⁴⁹ If the surrealist persona presents the artist's own interpretation of the world then it can also be said to present their vision of *le merveilleux*. In the 1930s, Ernst began a series of artworks titled *Loplop présente*. In

⁴⁷ Breton and Eluard, *Dictionnaire abrégé*, p.11.

⁴⁸ Stokes, p.255.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

these artworks, Loplop is presented as a hybrid human-bird-object or artist's easel. For example, in *Loplop présente les membres du groupe surréaliste* (1931), Loplop presents a photomontage of the members of the surrealist group and the surrealist motifs of eyes, hands, and insects.⁵⁰ Ernst's preface can therefore be considered as a continuation of this series. Moreover, for Ernst, birds had a personal signification. In 'Some Data on the Youth of M.E.', Ernst reveals his fascination and identification with the bird.⁵¹ He imagines that he was born an eagle and writes of 'a dangerous confusion [that he felt] between birds and humans'.⁵²

Ernst's persona Loplop introduces 'la mariée du vent' which is in fact the title of a painting completed by him in 1927.⁵³ It depicts two horses engaged in combat or a passionate embrace. The bride of the wind is clearly a horse and a reference to Carrington. Therefore, Ernst as Loplop introduces Carrington as a horse to the surrealist circle and wider readership. Carrington admired horses and as a child she enjoyed horse riding with her mother. She also enjoyed reading and was perhaps inspired by the land of the horses in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1727) and by Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty: The Autobiography of a Horse* (1877) which is written from the perspective of an equine.⁵⁴ Many scholars have cited Graves's *The White*

⁵⁰ Max Ernst, *Loplop présente les membres du groupe surréaliste* (1931) <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/35777> [accessed 7 May 2019].

⁵¹ Ernst, 'Some Data on the Youth on M.E.', pp.28-30.

⁵² Ibid, p.30.

⁵³ Max Ernst, *La mariée du vent* (1927). Reproduced in *Max Ernst: A Retrospective*, ed. by Werner Spies and Sabine Rewald (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2005), p.172.

⁵⁴ Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (1727) (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015). The original title is *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World*. Anna Sewell,

Goddess (1948) as the source of her identification with Epona, the Celtic Goddess who appeared to her followers riding a white horse.⁵⁵ Perhaps Carrington believed that the white horse would allow her to access the otherworld or *le merveilleux*.

The preface opens with a scene of two nightingales asleep in a tight embrace on the doorstep of 'la maison unique, mais de dimensions imposantes'. This is perhaps 'la maison de la peur' of Carrington's narrative or their farmhouse in Saint-Martin d'Ardèche. The image of the two nightingales 'étroitement enlacés' mirrors the image of the horses intertwined in *La mariée du vent*. Perhaps these two birds represent Carrington and Ernst. The nightingale also features in Ernst's earlier collage *Deux enfants sont menacés par un rossignol* which illustrates the way that Ernst draws on his own iconography to introduce Carrington and her work. He presents himself in human form and later in bird form and imagines himself standing knee-deep in water, his body marked by 'violentes caresses' which is perhaps an allusion to his intimate relationship with Carrington.

Ernst imagines 'deux étranges personnes' walking down the street followed by a thousand dwarfs. Carrington and Ernst are living in their own fairy tale. However, unbeknown to them, it will not have a happy ending as the outbreak of war will result in their separation. Ernst works to establish the identity of these two figures and poses a series of questions, 'Est-ce l'homme qu'on appelle Loplop, le supérieur des oiseaux, à cause de son caractère doux et féroce?' He identifies one of the figures as Loplop and therefore as himself in bird form. On his hat lands 'un

Black Beauty: An Autobiography of a Horse (1877) (Amazon: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2017).

⁵⁵ Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, p.32.

extraordinaire oiseau au plumage émeraude'; this bird is fearless and has just flown out of 'la maison de la peur'. With an audience of horses, Ernst introduces Carrington through a series of rhetorical questions, 'Qui est la Mariée du Vent ? Sait-elle lire ? Sait-elle écrire le français sans fautes ?' Rather than praising her character, artistic talents, or vivid imagination, he draws the reader's attention to her imperfect language skills. He continues, 'De quel bois se chauffe-t-elle ? Elle chauffe de sa vie intense, de son mystère, de sa poésie.' This is true of Carrington whose creative inspiration for her writing and paintings came from her life and interest in the mysterious practices of the occult. He adds 'Elle n'a rien lu, mais elle a tout bu. Elle ne sait pas lire' which perhaps conveys the way that she has embraced a new language and culture.

Overall, Ernst's introduction to Carrington seems more derogatory than adulatory. Oberhuber states that 'Cette préface au ton quelque peu paternaliste semble avoir pour but de présenter de manière mystérieuse au lectorat français la jeune inconnue'.⁵⁶ She is presented as a real-mythic, human-horse hybrid figure which recalls the way that Prassinus is modelled as a mythic *femme-enfant* in Man Ray's 1934 photograph. Although Ernst insists that Carrington cannot read, the nightingale has seen her reading and 'bien qu'elle lût en silence, les animaux et les chevaux l'écoutaient avec admiration.' Ernst conflates reality and the imaginary and relates her fictional affinity with animals and her ability to communicate with them. This suggests that the narrative has a special power. He then reveals that she is reading 'La maison de la peur' which encourages the reader to read on and describes

⁵⁶ Oberhuber, 'Qui a peur d'entrer dans *La Maison de la Peur* de Leonora Carrington?'

it as a 'histoire véridique' which implies that the events related actually took place and presents the imaginary as the real.

Throughout 'La maison de la peur', Carrington misspells words writing them phonetically. In his *Manifeste* (1924), Breton states that 'Le langage a été donné à l'homme pour qu'il en fasse un usage surréaliste' and here Carrington puts language 'au service de' Surrealism.⁵⁷ As Hubert states 'Phonetic spelling leads to confusion concerning verb endings, to the substitution of one gender for another, and to the generation of strange contexts' which alerts the reader to the presence of the unusual or *le merveilleux*.⁵⁸ In her phonetic spelling of 'patrone [sic]', Carrington omits the consonant 'n'. In French, 'patron' is the masculine form and 'patronne' the feminine form. Her spelling of 'patrone [sic]' is somewhere in-between which suggests that 'la patrone [sic], la peur' is neither male nor female. It is perhaps a comment on the gendered French language and a revolt against masculine and feminine nouns where the feminine form is regarded as a deviation from the masculine norm.

It is unclear whether Carrington misspells words intentionally or accidentally. On the one hand, incorrect conjugations and agreements are characteristic of the learning of a language. On the other hand, she is perhaps experimenting with language as a way to convey identity and individuality while exploring its potential. It reminds the reader of Prassinós's use of language to create striking visual images as discussed in chapter two. In the preface, Ernst comments on Carrington's

⁵⁷ Breton, *Manifestes*, p.44.

⁵⁸ Hubert, *Surrealism and the Book*, p.70.

experimental use of language. He reveals that the story is written in ‘un langage beau, vrai et pur’ and seems to admire her imperfect French in the way that it reflects her understanding of the language and her individuality. Carrington creates a hybrid language of English and French (‘j’étais donné l’opportunité [sic, occasion]’) and Hubert suggests that Carrington’s use of Franglais displays a lack of respect for the Académie Française which is the institution that regulates the French language.⁵⁹ The way that she resists grammar and syntax is perhaps a comment on the limitations of language. Her grammatical and syntactical inaccuracies disrupt and slow down the process of reading. It is unclear why Parisot corrected the version for the 1978 collection but not for the 1938 one. I argue that these inaccuracies are a defining feature of the narrative. Moreover, the phonetic spellings suggest that the text is to be read aloud and allude to an orality and the tradition of storytelling.

In ‘La maison de la peur’, we enter the realm of the fantastic. Oberhuber states that the plot is ‘ancrée dans la tradition anglo-saxonne du gothique romantique et du merveilleux ludique à la Lewis Carroll’ which conflates the real and the surreal.⁶⁰ The title introduces the theme or emotion of fear to the story. Perhaps ‘La maison de la peur’ is a haunted house although it is unclear whether the house instils fear or whether it belongs to fear or both. In the story, the protagonist-narrator has a chance encounter with a horse in ‘une certaine [sic, un certain] quartier’ at midday. Chance encounter is a surrealist theme which sparks *le merveilleux* and here the ordinary is immediately juxtaposed with the extraordinary

⁵⁹ Hubert, *Magnifying Mirrors*, p.129.

⁶⁰ Oberhuber, ‘Qui a peur d’entrer dans *La Maison de la Peur* de Leonora Carrington?’.

which is presented in a matter-of-fact tone. The horse encourages the young woman, along with the reader, to follow him down ‘un [sic, une] route étroite et sombre’ since he wants to show her something. Like the grasshopper in Prassinos’s first collection of prose and poetry, the horse invites the reader into Carrington’s surreal world of *le merveilleux*. Although she declines, she finds herself following him (‘mais malgré ceci je le suivre [sic, suis]’). The fact that she does not make a conscious decision to follow the horse suggests that he holds a certain power over her. Inside the mysterious building, they are greeted by ‘certaine [sic, certain or certaine] aîtres abillez [sic, habillent] d’un [sic, une] façon religieuse’ who invite them to go upstairs to see their ‘joli parquet’. This recalls the opening scene in Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*.⁶¹ Out of curiosity, Alice follows the White Rabbit down a rabbit-hole. She is not surprised to hear the Rabbit talk to itself just as the reader of Carrington’s story is not shocked to hear the horse speak. It reminds the reader of Prassinos’s dialogue ‘Une conversation’ with the talking horse. Down the rabbit-hole, Alice (and the reader) descend into Wonderland which is inhabited by creatures which are both threatening and humorous. Similarly, in ‘La maison de la peur’, the young woman travels to a land inhabited by horses and governed by Fear. The two worlds are not dissimilar. This idea of entering the unknown and experiencing something strange there is continued in ‘La dame ovale’ (see chapter six).

Upstairs, the horse reveals that he is a carpenter and admits that ‘je ne partien [sic, appartiens] pas à ce milieu’. As a carpenter, the horse is part of human

⁶¹ Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*.

society, however he is aware that he does not fit in. Carrington herself always felt like an outsider but had no desire to conform to society. Rosemont recalls that Carrington always regarded herself as an alien 'outside and against the existing order' and that on receiving her Green Card from US Immigration 'she was astonished and pleased to be informed that she was now a 'registered alien''.⁶² This reveals the extent to which she considered herself an outsider. The young woman realises that the horse is not an ordinary horse and that she has developed 'un certain [sic, une certaine] sympathie' for him. The theme of human-animal relationships is continued in 'La débutante' and 'L'oncle Sam Carrington' (see chapter six). The horse replies 'vous êtes comme [sic, quand] même mieux que les habituelles, je suis très capable de distingué [sic, distinguer] entre les gens ordinaires et ceux qui ont une certaine compréhension. J'ai un dont [sic, don] pour pénétrer une âme au [du] premier coup.' Here, Carrington subversively uses the adjective 'habituel' meaning usual or customary as a noun. The horse is presented as a spirit guide aligning the animal and the spiritual world. It's ability to penetrate one's soul recalls Prassinós's arrogant letter 'Souillure sarcastique'.

In the story, the horse and the young woman journey to a different land, the land of horses to attend a party. This reminds the reader of Tanning's theory that behind a door is another door since here beyond one surreal world lies another.⁶³ In

⁶² Penelope Rosemont 'A Revolution in the Way We Think & Feel: Conversations with Leonora Carrington', in *Surrealist Subversions: Rants, Writings & Images by the Surrealist Movement in the United States*, ed. by Ron Sakolsky (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2002), p.187.

⁶³ See Alyce Mahon, 'Dorothea Tanning: Behind the Door, Another Door', in *Dorothea Tanning*, ed. by Alyce Mahon (London: Tate Publishing, 2018), pp.15-34.

the darkness of the night, the woman, running alongside the horse, cannot see where she is going. She remarks that 'les chevaux deviens [sic, deviennent] de plus en plus nombreux' and describes the team of horses looking straight ahead of them 'd'un façon fixe', their hooves shaking the earth, and the coldness becoming intense. The horse reveals that the party takes place every year and that they are visiting 'le Château de la Peur, c'est la patronne'. It is as if they are making a pilgrimage to a holy land. Fear is the queen of the castle and personifies the emotion of fear. The horses seem to be suffering from the cold; they have bulging eyes and froth at the mouth. This scene recalls the land of the horses in *Gulliver's Travels*.⁶⁴ In part IV, Gulliver is deserted on an island inhabited by two races of horses – the Yahoos and Houyhnhnms. He first sees the horses sitting in trees, a scene which is depicted in Carrington's 1938 painting *The Horses of Lord Candlestick* with 'Candlestick' referring to her father.⁶⁵ The Yahoos are horse-human hybrids and are presented as savage creatures whereas the Houyhnhnms are civilised creatures who maintain reason. In 'La maison de la peur', one could argue that the horses are the Houyhnhnms whereas 'la Peur' is a Yahoo. Similar to Swift's novel in which Gulliver is the only human on an island of Yahoos and Houyhnhnms, in Carrington's story the young woman is the only human in a land of horses.

⁶⁴ Swift, pp.131-146.

⁶⁵ Carrington, *The Horses of Lord Candlestick* (1938). Reproduced in Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, p.36. It was displayed at Peggy Guggenheim's 'Exhibition by 31 Women' in New York in 1943.

There are many similarities between Carrington's 'La maison de la peur' and her painting *Portrait of Max Ernst* (c.1939).⁶⁶ In the painting, Carrington depicts Ernst, with his characteristic white hair, walking in an arctic landscape. He wears a red fur or feathered cloak which ends in a fishtail and a yellow striped sock. He is in the process of metamorphosing into his surrealist persona, Loplop. Ernst is presented as a shaman and carries a lantern in which one can distinguish the outline of a horse. To his left, there is an ice sculpture in the shape of an equine which is perhaps a self-image of Carrington. The painting can be interpreted as a comment on Carrington and Ernst's relationship and her realisation that if she stays with Ernst she will forever remain in his artistic shadow. It anticipates Lee Miller's 1946 photograph of Ernst and Tanning in Arizona with Ernst enlarged to the size of a giant.⁶⁷ Similar to Ernst's preface, Carrington presents herself as a horse and Ernst as Loplop.

Ernst's first collage illustration is of a human-horse hybrid; it is a female figure with a horse's head peering through a circular trumpet. The horse's head has been pasted over the figure's own face which is the only collage element of the illustration. This is made clear in a colour reproduction of the image printed in an exhibition catalogue on Ernst where the horse's head and musical instrument are in black and white whilst the rest of the image is in colour.⁶⁸ The collage element is strange in itself as it juxtaposes two disparate elements (an animal and a brass instrument). The illustration is captioned 'Elle ressemblait légèrement à un cheval...'

⁶⁶ Carrington, *Portrait of Max Ernst* (c.1939).

⁶⁷ For a reproduction of the photograph see Lee Miller Archives <https://www.leemiller.co.uk> [accessed 9 April 2020].

⁶⁸ Werner, p.229.

It is a repeated line from the story which describes 'patrone [sic, patronne], la Peur'. Fear resembles a horse 'en beaucoup plus laide' and her dress is made out of living bats sewn together by their wings which alludes to her cruel nature. The reader later learns that she only has one eye 'elle n'avait qu'un œuil [sic, œil], qui était pourtant dix fois grande [sic, plus grand] comme un œuil [sic, œil] ordinaire'. She is presented as a mythic-cyclopic figure and moreover as queen of the horses. Carrington's description of 'la Peur' as only having one eye anticipates Ernst's collage at the beginning of *La dame ovale* of an cyclopic octopus.⁶⁹ However, this is not the character of Fear as Carrington imagines her but Ernst's own interpretation.

The female figure wears a skin-tight, low-cut dress with a feathered skirt which accentuates her female body. She also wears a headdress made of feathers and her long hair resembles a cloak or wings or even a horse's mane or tail. She poses with a club or staff which Warlick identifies as Hercules's club and a reference to the myth in which Hercules and Omphale, the Queen of Lydia, exchange clothes.⁷⁰ The figure is perhaps Hercules wearing Omphale's clothes or Omphale herself which introduces the themes of gender, clothing, and identity. The figure is perhaps androgynous since it combines feminine elements (the figure's body and dress) with the masculine element of a club. Attached to the club is a pair of butterfly or bat wings or a ribbon which has been tied to form a bow. The feathers and wings have

⁶⁹ This image of an octopus is the same one that features in the last chapter of Ernst's collage novel *La femme 100 têtes* (1929). See Max Ernst, *La femme 100 têtes* (New York: Georges Braziller, 1981), p.293.

⁷⁰ M.E. Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy: A Magician in Search of Myth* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), p.159.

connotations of flight and freedom and allude to Ernst's persona Loplop. The bow is symbolic of femininity and transforms the club into a symbol of female power. The reader wonders whether this is an image of 'la mariée du vent' or 'Loplop, supérieur des oiseaux' or a hybrid of both since the figure combines elements of the bird and the horse. It reminds the viewer of the surrealist game of *cadavre exquis*. Ernst intertwines his own identity with his bird persona and Carrington's identity as a young woman with her persona of a horse. As Hubert states, '*La maison de la peur* becomes not only a collaboration between Ernst and Carrington but also between their creatures.'⁷¹

The narrative then moves from the dream world to a nightmarish one. Having arrived at 'Chateau de la Peur', crying and shaking, 'la patronne [sic, patronne], la Peur' announces that she has created 'une nouvelle [sic, un nouveau] jeu' to play. Her announcement is met with 'une [sic, un] silence profonde [sic, profond]'; the horses are too afraid to move or speak. The rules of the game are to count backwards from one hundred and ten to five while reflecting on one's own destiny and remembering the dead all while tapping one's front left hoof to the tune of the Volga, one's front right hoof to the Marseillaise, and one's back hooves to the tune of 'Où est-tu ma dernière rose d'été [sic, de l'été]?' It is a complex mathematical, self-reflective, and rhythmic game. It is an unusual party game and more like a ritualistic dance or a 'rituel coercitif'.⁷² The significance of the Volga, a river in Russia

⁷¹ Hubert, *Surrealism and the Book*, p.71.

⁷² Chénieux-Gendron, 'L'absurde chez Gisèle Prassinos : comment minimiser le malheur ?', in *Le surréalisme et le roman*, p.262.

is unclear whereas the Marseillaise, the French national anthem, suggests that the horses are pledging allegiance to France.

Fear reminds them that 'le bon Dieu surveil [sic, surveille] tout malgré que je ne peu [sic, peux] pas voir tout la salle à la fois' which seems more like a threat than an encouragement. The horses are overcome with a strange enthusiasm 's'ils avaient envie de descendre dans la profondeur de la terre'. Perhaps it is through this ritual that the horses will be able to access the otherworld. The young woman hopes that 'la Peur' cannot see her but admits 'j'avais l'idée inquiétant qu'elle me voyait très bien à travers sa grande œuil [sic, œil]' and fears that she will be punished for not participating in this mathematical-musical game. The other party guests do not oppose or resist but conform most likely out of fear. Carrington is perhaps criticising society, the restrictions it places on individuals, and the expectation to conform. Chénieux-Gendron describes it as 'une histoire [...] de fête [...] [qui] devient sinistre non parce que c'est la Peur qui l'organise [...] mais parce qu'une abondance des règles extrêmement arbitraires et rigides y sont imposées.'⁷³ These rules suppress any enjoyment and oppress the guests.

The story ends abruptly mid-sentence, 'Ça dure pendant vingt-cinq minutes, mais ...' The reader fears that the young woman has been caught by 'la Peur'. The use of the ellipsis suggests that it is to be continued and 'ouvre vers l'absence, vers l'abîme de ce que restera inconnu, *non dit*'.⁷⁴ It could suggest that the woman has awoken from a (day)dream which is similar to the way that Alice wakes up and

⁷³ Ibid, p.256.

⁷⁴ Oberhuber, 'Qui a peur d'entrer dans *La Maison de la Peur* de Leonora Carrington?'

realises that her 'strange Adventures' have all been a dream.⁷⁵ This is somewhat disappointing since the reader has come to believe that such a wild and wondrous world exists. The ellipsis introduces Ernst's final illustration captioned 'mais...'. It depicts a young woman suspended upside down over a rock watched over by a horse ('la Peur'?) who peers through a window. Perhaps this is the young woman's punishment for not participating in the game-ritual and thereby not conforming.

To conclude, in the preface to 'La maison de la peur', Ernst introduces Carrington as a hybrid horse-woman combining the human and the animal, the imaginary and the real and mystifies her identity as a twenty-year-old young woman making her debut onto the surrealist scene. He (con)fuses his own surrealist persona of Loplop, *supérieur des oiseaux* with Carrington's identification with the horse and creates a verbal and visual (through his collage illustration of 'la Peur') *cadavre exquis* figure. In the narrative, Carrington draws on surrealist chance encounter, subverts the Surrealists' enjoyment of playing games, and presents the extraordinary as the ordinary which in turn presents the unfamiliar as familiar. Moreover, Carrington's experimental use of language is striking since she not only criticises the rules which govern society but also rebels against the rules of language itself. The mathematical-musical game can be interpreted as an initiation ceremony and the reader is now initiated into Carrington's surreal world which conflates the real and the imaginary in the surrealist spirit of *le merveilleux*.

⁷⁵ Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, p.123.

Chapter six – Rebel women in Carrington’s early writings

‘Jeunes, belles et rebelles’¹

The Surrealists were fascinated with women – beautiful women, young women, hysterical women. Both Prassinis and Carrington were initially celebrated by the Surrealists as *femmes-enfants* and Carrington rebelled against this mythic image of woman throughout her life and work. As mentioned in the introduction, reactions to these two women by surrealist circles changed over time and although celebrated as *femme-enfants*, they became more accepted as artists-writers. In her early writings, Carrington’s main characters are young women in rebellion against upper-class and patriarchal society. In this chapter, I will therefore focus on the theme of insurgent female characters in Carrington’s early surrealist writings. I argue that through her heroines, Carrington rebels against and criticises social conventions to present her vision of the world. I will provide a close reading of three short stories from her 1939 collection *La dame ovale* - ‘La dame ovale’, ‘La débutante’, and ‘L’oncle Sam Carrington’. I will also draw on Carrington’s 1946 play *Pénélope* which extends the narrative of ‘La dame ovale’. I will read these stories in dialogue with a number of Carrington’s paintings - *Self-Portrait (Inn of the Dawn Horse)* (1937-38), *Portrait of Max Ernst* (c.1939), *Green Tea (La dame ovale)* (1942), and *The Giantess* (c.1950).

¹ Whitney Chadwick, *Les femmes dans le mouvement surréaliste* (Paris: Thames & Hudson, 2002), p.9. This is a French translation of Chadwick’s *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1985; repr. 2002).

La dame ovale (1939) is a collection of five short stories by Carrington illustrated with seven collages by Max Ernst.² The five stories are 'La dame ovale', 'La débutante', 'L'ordre royal', 'L'amoureux', and 'L'oncle Sam Carrington'. Doris Eibl discusses the relationship between Carrington's stories and Ernst's illustrations in an article titled 'Se répondre ou ne pas répondre : du dialogisme dans *La Dame ovale* de Leonora Carrington et Max Ernst'.³ All five of these subversive stories are written in the first-person. This suggests that Carrington identifies with the female narrator and alludes to an autobiographical thread. Carrington acknowledged that all of her writings have an autobiographical aspect and therefore her early writings conflate fact and fiction, reality and the imaginary.⁴ Although her narratives can stand on their own, I argue that this autobiographical thread adds an additional level of meaning which cannot be overlooked.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Carrington was expelled from a number of schools as a result of her refusal to conform, rebelled against her nouveau-riche family in her aspiration to be an artist and in her decision to travel to Paris to be with Ernst. She also rejected the surrealist image of woman as *femme-enfant* and the label of Surrealist (see introduction). Moorhead accurately describes her as a 'rebel

² Although the cover and title page describe seven collage illustrations by Ernst, there are in fact eight including the cyclopic octopus collage which introduces the collection.

³ Doris G. Eibl, 'Se répondre ou ne pas répondre : du dialogisme dans *La Dame ovale* de Leonora Carrington et Max Ernst' <http://lisaf.org/project/carrington-dame-ovale/> [accessed 25 April 2019].

⁴ Moorhead, *The Surreal Life of Leonora Carrington*, p.34.

par excellence [my italics]'.⁵ Throughout her oeuvre, she rejects a male vision of the world and in 'The Cabbage is a Rose' (1975), she calls on women to take back the Rights and the Mysteries [Carrington's capitalisation] that once belonged to women and in 'The Emancipation of Women' (1970), she encourages women to be an active force in affecting social change and envisions a world where women are equal to men.⁶ The Surrealists projected the image of muse onto women which made it difficult for them to become artists and writers. In 1983, Carrington declared 'I didn't have time to be anyone's muse ... I was too busy rebelling against my family and learning to be an artist' which reveals her defiant nature.⁷ Her rebellion began as a personal one but soon became one against the oppression of women in patriarchal society. The male invention of the muse can be described as 'an externalized source of creative energy and a personification of the female Other' whose role was to inspire.⁸ Carrington did inspire Ernst and vice-versa. She was inspired by his 1924 collage and by his alter-ego Loplop. This role reversal of Carrington as artist and Ernst as muse is illustrated in *Portrait of Max Ernst* (c.1939).⁹ Fiona Bradley states 'If the bird and the horse may be read as totemic substitutions for Carrington and Ernst, the picture perhaps reverses the conventional Surrealist male/female

⁵ Joanna Moorhead, 'Leonora Carrington: last of the great Surrealists', *Telegraph*, 6 April 2015 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/art-features/7618799/Leonora-Carrington-last-of-the-great-Surrealists.html> [accessed 25 April 2019].

⁶ Carrington, 'The Emancipation of Women', pp.89-90 and 'The Cabbage is a Rose', p.21.

⁷ Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, p.66.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Carrington, *Portrait of Max Ernst* (c.1939).

behaviour: Carrington may be claiming Ernst as her 'muse'.¹⁰ Carrington paints Ernst as a merman whereas it is usually the female figure who is presented in a mythological guise. Chadwick states that when asked how she felt about the surrealist image of woman as muse, Carrington responded with a single word, 'bullshit' and rejected such an uninspiring role.¹¹ Described as 'a kind of embodiment of all that the movement held dear in its women: young, beautiful, vivacious, uninhibited, and in possession of an imagination that knew no limits', Carrington embodied the surrealist *femme-enfant*.¹² However, Ernst was mistaken if he thought that Carrington was to be cast into such a passive role.

Like Prassinis, Carrington was cast into various roles including *femme-enfant*, witch, princess, and warrior. Both Breton and Mabile present Carrington as *femme-sorcière*. In his *Anthologie*, Breton likens her to a witch in Michelet's 1862 study *La sorcière* and describes her not as 'laide et vieille' like the three 'weird sisters' in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* but 'jeune et belle'.¹³ Mabile likens her to a legendary Scottish princess who escapes on horseback and transforms herself into a witch.¹⁴ However, Carrington is not a Disney princess but a real-life avant-garde heroine.¹⁵ In a painting by Leonor Fini titled *The Alcove: An Interior With Three Women* (c.1939),

¹⁰ Fiona Bradley, *Movements in Modern Art: Surrealism* (London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 1997), p.53.

¹¹ Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, p.66.

¹² *Ibid*, p.67.

¹³ Breton, *Anthologie* (1950), p.333.

¹⁴ Pierre Mabile, 'A propos de « En bas » de Léonora Carrington', in *Traversées de nuit* (Paris: Plasma, 1981), p.34.

¹⁵ Mabile's description of Carrington reminds a contemporary reader of Disney's 2012 film *Brave* which follows the adventures of a Scottish princess named Merida.

she presents her friend Carrington as a warrior-woman.¹⁶ A female figure stands assertively in the foreground wearing a breastplate of armour over her clothing and defends or protects the two female figures in the background who look up to her as a role model for womankind. Armour has connotations of warfare, masculinity, and bravery and so the imagining of her friend as a warrior subverts the stereotype of a warrior as male. As warrior-woman, Carrington is prepared to fight against patriarchy for the return of matriarchy. In real life, Carrington was a feminist and a champion of women's rights. The image of Carrington as a warrior-woman represents female power and autonomy. Chadwick describes Carrington as "a true revolutionary," autonomous and released from the image of femininity created by man'.¹⁷ Carrington was first described as a 'revolutionary' by Fini who argued that although Carrington was 'a revolutionary, "a true revolutionary," she was never a Surrealist'.¹⁸ She imagines a new femininity created by women, a femininity that is powerful and above all creative. The image of Carrington as a warrior is the antithesis of the female archetype and moreover the opposite of the surrealist idealised image of woman as *femme-enfant*. Through the image of woman as warrior, Fini redefines the socio-cultural position of woman in society. She imagines Carrington revolutionising the role of women by being a woman artist and also through her creative oeuvre. Overall, it is interesting that Breton identifies

¹⁶ Leonor Fini, *The Alcove: An Interior With Three Women* (c.1939). Reproduced in Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, p.41.

¹⁷ Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, p.82.

¹⁸ Interview with Leonor Fini, St. Dyé-sur-Loire, June 1982. Cited in Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, p.66. Fini also rejected being labelled as 'Surrealist' herself.

Carrington as a mythological figure whereas Fini characterises her as a real being. This suggests that for Breton woman as a powerful being exists only in mythology whereas for Fini this is reality.

The title of the collection and the first short story is 'La dame ovale' which suggests that the themes in this narrative are present throughout the others in the collection.¹⁹ 'La dame ovale' is illustrated with a collage by Ernst and is also the title of a painting by Carrington. The noun 'dame' denotes a woman in general or a woman with a high social status and the adjective 'ovale' alludes to the shape of an egg. The title therefore unites the female figure and the egg which is symbol of birth or rebirth, life, the alchemist's oven and therefore transformation. In the foreword to a 1975 translation of the collection, Orenstein states that the title has an occult and mythological significance and that the story creates a literary and symbolic context for the creation of Carrington's own myth – the rebirth of the Mother Goddess.²⁰ One can therefore identify 'la dame ovale' as a female deity, a female alchemist, or the Mother Goddess, and moreover as a powerful female figure.

Written in 1937, 'La dame ovale' is composed in the first-person and in the past tense. It can be suggested that Carrington identifies with the female narrator (or with the heroine Lucretia). In 'La dame ovale', the narrator, out of curiosity, enters a house where she encounters a sixteen-year-old girl named Lucretia who reveals that she is on a hunger strike in protest against her father. The narrator

¹⁹ Leonora Carrington, 'La dame ovale', in *La dame ovale*, no page numbers.

²⁰ Gloria Orenstein, 'Who is the Oval Lady?', in Leonora Carrington, *The Oval Lady: Surreal Stories*, trans. by Rochelle Holt, illustr. by Pablo Weisz (Santa Barbara: Capra Press, 1975), p.7.

follows the teenage girl to her former nursery where she introduces her to her friends – a rocking horse named Tartare and Mathilde the magpie. Lucretia transforms herself into a white horse, an old woman named Mademoiselle de la Rochefroide catches the girl in her horse form and takes her to her father who threatens to burn her playmate.

‘La dame ovale’ anticipates Carrington’s 1946 play *Pénélope* in which a young woman, eighteen-year-old Pénélope, is invited to dinner with her father who she hates.²¹ At the dinner, she transforms herself into a horse and escapes through a window. Pénélope and her rocking horse Tartar (spelt without an ‘e’) are pursued by her father and a number of phantoms who seek vengeance on them. In the final scene, Pénélope and Tartar escape through the nursery window and her father unknowingly jumps to his death. The script extends the themes present in her earlier story and the main difference is that in the story Lucretia’s father has the upper hand as he destroys her beloved rocking horse whereas in the play Pénélope and Tartar outwit her father and he kills himself.

Lucretia is the rebellious heroine of the narrative. She is presented as ‘une dame très haute et mince’ standing in front of a window. The adjective ‘haut’ could refer to her height or to her high rank or both. The window is also described as ‘très haute et très mince’. It is curious that the window is the same shape as the woman, perhaps it is an illusion. The window, a physical barrier between the inside and

²¹ Leonora Carrington, ‘Pénélope’, in *La Débutante*, pp.114-182. A photograph of a performance of *Pénélope* in Mexico City in 1957 is reproduced in Aridjis, Manacorda, and Barnes’s essay in *Leonora Carrington and the international avant-garde*, ed. by Eburne and McAra, p.240.

outside world, is an important symbol in Carrington's oeuvre. The open window is a symbol of freedom as it provides access to the outside whereas the closed window is symbolic of being trapped. We later learn that the woman is not only trapped by the restrictions and expectations placed on upper-class women but by her patriarchal father. In Carrington's painting *Self-Portrait* (1937-38) and play *Pénélope*, the open window is a symbol of freedom. In act 2, scene 1, at dinner with her father, Pénélope transforms herself into a horse, jumps onto a table, and escapes through a window.²² In addition, in the final scene in the nursery, Pénélope (with a horse's head) and Tartar emerge from the darkness glowing bright white and hand in hand they jump through an open window. The reader (or spectator) imagines Tartar as the mythological winged horse Pegasus flying off into the skies. Her father, Monsieur Quatrepièdes, shouts after them before throwing himself out of the window to his death.²³ In both scenes, the window allows eighteen-year-old Pénélope to outsmart her father.

The young woman standing in the window is described as 'pâle et triste' which conveys her unhappiness. Her stillness is juxtaposed with a quivering pheasant feather in her hair which catches the narrator's (as well as the reader's) attention. The feather is perhaps a reference to her presentation at court since débutantes had to wear three ostrich feathers in their hair.²⁴ Perhaps Carrington who was presented as a débutante in 1934 imagines herself as Lucretia. Or perhaps the feather is from a child's game of role-play or dress-up. It is described as 'tremblante' and 'si agitée' as

²² Carrington, 'Pénélope', p.155.

²³ Ibid, p.182.

²⁴ Acker.

if it is trying to tell the narrator something; the feather has a voice but the woman does not. The feather is also an index of a bird and therefore has connotation of flight and freedom. The narrator tells us that she has passed the window seven times and that the woman has not moved which presents her as a mannequin in a shop window. Seven is an important number in this story as the reader learns later on when Lucretia's father reveals that he has given his daughter seven chances.

The narrator is intrigued and wonders whether the furniture, and even the cat (if they had one), are also 'longs et minces'. She is overcome with curiosity, 'Je voulais savoir, j'étais dévorée de curiosité, une irrésistible envie me prit d'entrer dans la maison simplement pour me rendre compte.' The agreement of 'dévorée' with the first person pronoun 'je' reveals that the narrator is a woman. Her decision to enter the house which represents the unknown is an unconscious one, 'Avant de savoir exactement ce que je faisais, j'étais dans l'entrée.' This recalls her first story 'La maison de la peur' (1938) and the opening scene of Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) (see chapter five).

The narrator announces that 'pour la première fois de ma vie je fus dans une vraie demeure d'aristocrate.' This reveals that she is not a member of the upper-class. She describes the experience as 'bouleversant' and is impressed by 'un silence si distingué que j'osais à peine respirer' and 'l'extrême élégance des meubles et des bibelots'. She observes that 'Chaque chaise était au moins deux fois plus haute que les chaises ordinaires, et beaucoup plus étroite. Pour ces aristocrates, même les assiettes étaient ovales, et non pas rondes comme pour les gens ordinaires' and notices a difference between the furniture and dinnerware of the upper and lower classes albeit a superficial and unimportant one. This emphasises that the narrator

does not belong to the aristocracy. The oval shaped plates therefore represent the upper-class and link to the title of the story. The adjective 'ovale' does not refer to the young woman's shape but to her class status.

The narrator discovers 'la Dame Triste' in the living room where there is a table laid with a traditional English afternoon tea. The narrator observes that the girl is almost ten feet tall and is surprised to learn that she is only sixteen years old. The young woman is a giantess, a female mythological figure. The character of Lucretia can therefore be linked to the figure in Carrington's painting *The Giantess* (c.1950).²⁵ The artwork depicts a giant female figure (the giantess of the title) with an oval shaped face. She holds an egg in her disproportionately small hands and two birds fly out from underneath her white cloak. She is presented as a deity, an alchemist, or even the female creator of the universe since she holds an egg which is the symbol of life. The giantess in this painting can be identified as Lucretia from Carrington's story.

The narrator asks if she likes poetry, a suitable past-time for a lady, before offering her a cup of tea. The young woman declines, 'Je ne bois pas, je ne mange pas. C'est pour protester contre mon père, le salaud.' The hunger strike is a direct form of protest against her father and his rules and an indirect protest against upper-class society. It recalls suffragette Marion Wallace-Dunlop's hunger strike in July 1909. Like Wallace-Dunlop, Lucretia's hunger strike is a social protest, a way to seek justice, and to bring about social change. She calls her father 'salaud' (a pejorative term) and later 'Quel porc!' perhaps in reference to his greed (monetary

²⁵ Carrington, *The Giantess* (c.1950). Reproduced in Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, p.78.

or otherwise) which conveys her lack of respect for him. The girl accepts a cup of tea and a cake (or twenty) which she eats with 'un appétit tout à fait extraordinaire' which suggests that she has not eaten for a long time. She is adamant that her father will not get his own way and adds 'Même si je crève de faim. Il ne gagnera jamais'. This raises a number of interesting points on eating and control since eating is presented as a way of controlling her father just as he burns Tartare as a way of exercising control over his daughter. I will return to the idea of the hunger strike as a form of protest to affect social change in chapter eight.

The young girl imagines her own funeral procession, 'Je vois d'ici le cortège funèbre avec quatre gros chevaux noirs, luisants [...] Voici le petit cadavre de la belle Lucretia! [...] j'ai envie de me tuer de faim tout simplement pour l'emmerder' which conveys her desperation. This provides an insight into the girl's love of horses and reveals that her name is Lucretia. Her name is significant since it is the name of an ancient Roman heroine whose suicide led to the events which mark the foundation of the Roman Republic and therefore presents her as a powerful woman. Lucretia's imagining of her own funeral recalls the funeral procession scene in René Clair's short avant-garde film, *Entr'acte* (1924).²⁶ In the film, a man is shot at and falls from the roof of a high building which leads to a funeral procession in which a hearse is curiously towed by a dromedary camel. Shown in slow motion, the mourners begin to run after the carriage. However, the hearse soon becomes untied from the camel

²⁶ *Entr'acte*, dir. by René Clair, music by Eric Satire (1924). *Entr'acte* is a short black and white, silent film directed by René Clair (1898-1981) which premiered as the interlude to the ironically named Ballet Suédois production *Relâche* at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris in 1924.

and in a comical scene the mourners chase after it. The runaway carriage continuously gains momentum and launches itself onto the track of a rollercoaster. The scene ends when the coffin falls to the ground and to the surprise of the onlookers out jumps a magician who with the wave of his wand makes them disappear one by one. Although the funeral scene in *Entr'acte* is comic (an example of *humour noir*), the young girl fantasising about her own death is tragic.

The narrator follows Lucretia into a huge nursery on the third floor of the house which is strewn with hundreds of well-used and broken toys. This gives the impression that the nursery is no longer in use and is symbolic of her past childhood. A nursery once brought to life with imaginative play now lies abandoned. At Crookhey Hall, Carrington's childhood home, the nursery was a space where she spent many happy hours playing and reading. Having visited Crookhey Hall, Marina Warner explains that 'in a sense you can see in this house the structure and hierarchy which enclosed her when she was a child. In a sense she is much closer in all her imagery to the world that is in the margins of the house. She doesn't really occupy the essential spaces, her imagination wanders in the corridors, in the kitchens, and in the attics, and in the places where the servants and the women live.'²⁷ In 'La dame ovale', Carrington's imagination wanders in the nursery which she presents as a magical space of transformation.

Similarly, in *Pénélope*, the first act opens in a nursery on the sixth floor of the house where the toys are alive. She remarks 'Je m'imagine qu'ils [mes parents]

²⁷ Acker.

habitant en bas, aux autres étages, puisque moi, j'habite au sixième'.²⁸ The third or sixth floor is a space of childhood where the imagination is free to play whereas the lower levels represent adulthood, social class, and restriction. In act 2, scene 1, Pénélope enters the dining room with a cat on her shoulder and a crystal ball in her left hand perhaps for protection from her father.²⁹ This image anticipates Carrington's self-portrait *La artista viaja de incognito (The Artist Travelling Incognito)* (c.1955) in which she presents herself as a three-headed hybrid figure with the head of a woman, a green parrot in an orb, and a cat.³⁰ Carrington and the Surrealists placed great importance on childhood and in a filmed interview she poses the rhetorical question, 'Do you think anybody escapes their childhood? I don't think they do.'³¹ For Carrington, the experiences that one has as a child forms the jelly mould for their identity.

In the nursery, Lucretia approaches 'un cheval de bois figé dans une attitude de galop' and introduces the narrator to the rocking horse as Tartare. She declares 'Tartare est mon préféré [...] il déteste mon Père' as she projects her own ideas onto the toy horse. Its name alludes to Tartarus which in Greek mythology denotes the underworld. This suggests that Tartare has access to the otherworld and that Lucretia too has access to these imagined worlds through the figure of the rocking horse. Its name is also an anagram of 'Art' written down twice backwards and so one

²⁸ Carrington, 'Pénélope', p.121.

²⁹ Ibid, p.149.

³⁰ Carrington, *La artista viaja de incognito (The Artist Travelling Incognito)* (c.1955). Reproduced in black and white in Aridjis, Manacorda, and Barnes's essay in *Leonora Carrington and the international avant-garde*, ed. by Eburne and McAra, p.241.

³¹ Acker.

could suggest that the rocking horse reveals the power of the art of magic.³² Anwen Crawford states that 'the horse stands in for the imaginative potential of a woman or a girl, and it's this potential that the antagonists of her stories seek to control.'³³ In this story, the opponent is Lucretia's father who is envious of the power of her imagination. As a child, Carrington created an imaginary friendship with a rocking horse in her nursery.³⁴ This further suggests that Carrington identifies with the fictional character of Lucretia. In 1937, Carrington purchased a rocking horse in Paris and placed it in the apartment that she shared with Ernst. Homer Saint-Gaudens photographed Ernst on the horse for a feature in *Life* magazine.³⁵ In Carrington's painting *Self-Portrait*, a white rocking horse is suspended as if by magic above the self-image of the artist. It transforms into the white horse seen galloping in the forest beyond the window. It is striking that the rocking horse that Ernst is photographed on and the one in the painting both have no tail which suggests that the toy horse that Carrington bought formed the model for the one in her painting. Perhaps Carrington was drawn to the way that a rocking horse conflates the

³² 'Tatare' as a double anagram of 'Art' is first pointed out by Orenstein in *The Theater of the Marvelous*, p.132.

³³ Anwen Crawford, 'Leonora Carrington Rewrote the Surrealist Narrative for Women', *New Yorker*, 22 May 2017 <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/leonora-carrington-rewrote-the-surrealist-narrative-for-women> [accessed 25 April 2019].

³⁴ Whitney Chadwick, 'Leonora Carrington: Evolution of a Feminist Consciousness', *Women's Art Journal*, 7, 1 (1986), 37-42 (p.38).

³⁵ See Deborah Laing, 'The Big Interview: Joanna Moorhead On Leonora Carrington', 19 March 2015 <http://www.thedoublenegative.co.uk/2015/03/the-big-interview-joanna-moorhead-on-leonora-carrington/> [accessed 25 July 2019].

boundary between the inanimate and the animate as it is able to move back and forth mimicking the movement of a real horse.

The narrator observes Tartare rocking back and forth and wonders how it can move on its own as if by magic. The rocking horse is transformed from an inanimate object to an animate one. This transformation is a theme that Carrington continues in 'L'oncle Sam Carrington' with the fighting cabbages and rebellious vegetables. Lucretia explains 'Il ira très loin comme ça [...] et quand il reviendra il me racontera quelque chose d'intéressant.' This reinforces the idea that the rocking horse is alive and that although its physical movement is restricted, it can travel in its imagination. Lucretia's attention is caught by the sound of a magpie knocking at the window who she lets in and introduces as Mathilde. It can be suggested that the magpie is Ernst in bird form who has come to free Lucretia just as he frees Carrington from the boredom of upper-class life (see chapter five). The magpie speaks 'avec une voix de sorcière' which suggests that Mathilde is a sorceress and its ability to talk conflates the boundary between the human and the animal. Although children create imaginary friends, the reader is uncertain whether Lucretia's animal friends are real or imagined.

Lucretia's game is to imagine that they are horses. Mathilde chants 'Cheval!' and performs 'une danse hystérique' on Tartare's head. This scene is illustrated by Ernst's collage which depicts a statue of a horse's head with a magpie emerging from it. The horse is perhaps Tartare and the bird Mathilde. This scene is also illustrated in Carrington's 1937 painting *Femme et oiseau* which depicts a horse's head with a

female face and a magpie in the lower right-hand corner.³⁶ Lucretia throws herself in the snow that has blown in through the open window and exclaims 'Nous sommes toutes des chevaux!' The narrator tells of 'l'effet [...] extraordinaire'; Lucretia has successfully transformed herself into a beautiful white horse with a long mane. The reader is uncertain whether this is an act of magic or an allusion to the power of the imagination. Overcome with excitement, Lucretia encourages Tartare to gallop faster who winks as if in response to her. Colvile describes Tartar as 'toy, animal and fantastic Beast' which conveys the multiple roles the horse plays in this story.³⁷ It plays the role of a rocking horse, an inanimate-animate hybrid, a portal to another world, and a real-imagined figure.

The narrator observes that in the doorway stands 'une vieille femme' who observes Lucretia with 'un œil fixe et méchant'. We later learn that the woman is called Mademoiselle de la Rochefroide. Her name is a literal translation of 'stone-cold', perhaps in reference to her unforgiving nature. The reader anticipates that the girl is in trouble. The woman demands her to stop, 'Lucretia, vous savez que ce jeu est strictement défendu par votre Père? ce jeu ridicule! Vous n'êtes plus un enfant.' The reader learns that it is Lucretia's authoritarian father who has forbidden her from playing games and so by transforming herself into a horse she is rebelling against her father. The adjective 'strictement' emphasises the seriousness of the situation. Rochefroide reminds sixteen-year-old Lucretia that she is no longer a child and therefore cannot play such games. Lucretia refuses to obey her and 'avec une

³⁶ Carrington, *Femme et oiseau* (c.1937). Reproduced in black and white in Suleiman, *Risking Who One Is*, p.98.

³⁷ Colvile, 'Beauty and/Is the Beast', p.162.

vitesse étrange pour quelqu'un d'aussi vieux', she jumps on Lucretia's back and inserts a bit into her mouth. This suggests that Lucretia has transformed herself into a real horse. She grabs the narrator by her hair and Matilde by her head and in a comical scene they engage in 'une danse furieuse'. Lucretia struggles to break free knocking over tables and chairs.

Breton and the Surrealists celebrated childhood and enjoyed playing games as a group. In fact, a favourite game of the Surrealists was *cadavre exquis* which they would often play during *soirées* at Breton's apartment on Rue Fontaine. In *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme*, Breton and Éluard define *cadavre exquis* as a 'jeu de papier plié qui consiste à faire composer une phrase ou un dessin par plusieurs personnes, sans qu'aucune d'elles puisse tenir compte de la collaborations ou des collaborations précédentes.'³⁸ It is a textual or visual game which combines collaboration, collage, creativity, and chance. Writing on *cadavre exquis*, Breton states that 'De cet instant aucun préjugé défavorable – et même bien au contraire – n'était marqué envers les jeux de l'enfance pour lesquels nous retrouvions, quoique sensiblement accrue, la même ferveur qu'autrefois.'³⁹ They enjoyed playing games as adults as much as they did as children.

They arrive in the dining room in 'une véritable orgie de bruit'. The narrator observes 'un vieux monsieur, plus semblable à une forme géométrique qu'à autre chose', which alludes to his large size, sat at the end of a long table. Her father reveals that he has forbidden her from playing such games since she was thirteen

³⁸ Breton and Éluard, *Dictionnaire abrégé*, p.6.

³⁹ André Breton, 'Le cadavre exquis, son exaltation', in *Le Cadavre exquis, son exaltation*, ed. by Schwarz, p.5.

years old and that this is the seventh time that she has been caught. He continues 'Tu es trop âgée pour jouer avec Tartare. Tartare est pour les enfants. Donc, je vais le brûler moi-même jusqu'à ce qu'il n'en reste plus rien.' This threat is echoed in *Pénélope* when the young woman's father threatens to burn Tartar, 'Tartar est pour les enfants et non pour les jeunes filles'.⁴⁰ Her father maintains that games are not for children. His threat to burn Tartare demonstrates that he is a cruel individual capable of violence. Lucretia is distraught and lets out 'un cri terrible'. She falls to her knees and begs her father to take pity on her. The narrator observes Lucretia in a literal flood of tears up to her knees and worries 'j'avais une peur terrible de la voir fondre' which emphasises Lucretia's distress. This recalls the 'pool of tears' scene in Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.⁴¹ In the final scene of the story, Lucretia's father orders Rochefroide to take her out of the room. Lucretia has been reduced to a 'pauvre créature [...] maigre et tremblante'. The narrator hides behind the curtain and hears her father go upstairs to the nursery. The reader fears that Tartare will come to harm. The narrator covers her ears as she hears 'hennissements effrayants [...] comme si une bête souffrait des tortures inouïes.' The fact that the violence towards defenceless Tartare is not seen but heard by the narrator makes the scene even more powerful as the reader imagines Tartare's suffering. He destroys the rocking horse not only to punish her rebellious behaviour but also to restrict her imagination and its potential.

⁴⁰ Carrington, 'Pénélope', p.174.

⁴¹ Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, pp.14-18.

This story can be compared to Prassinos's 'Venda et le parasite' as discussed in chapter four in which Venda's father places a glowworm in her hair which represents patriarchy and turns her into an admired object. Similarly, in 'La dame ovale', Lucretia's father's rules oppress her since she is forbidden from playing games and presents her as a mannequin. In both narratives, the father figure oppresses the young women who long for freedom which alludes to the oppression of women in patriarchal society and the restrictive role of woman as *femme-enfant*.

As mentioned, *Green Tea (La dame ovale)* is also the title of a painting by Carrington. The title *Green Tea* refers to the English tradition of drinking tea and to the green colour palette of the image. *La dame ovale* depicts a female figure wrapped in black and white animal print material. She is presented as metamorphosing into an animal whilst standing within a magic circle. The figure resembles the pupa or chrysalis stage of a butterfly's life. She is waiting to break free from upper-class expectations and restrictions. Her hair forms part a headdress which resembles a Venus flytrap plant and a section of her hair is plaited to form a horse's tail. This figure is clearly 'La dame ovale' of the tile and perhaps sixteen-year-old Lucretia who also feels trapped by her father and upper-class society. To her left is an oval-shaped vessel with animal legs in which four antlered creatures can be seen. The vessel is a cooking pot, an alchemical athanor, or a cauldron. The themes of transformation, magic, and sorcery are all present in 'La dame ovale'. To her right are two animals tied to pear trees growing out of their tails, a white horse and a brown dog with five enlarged teats. The dog recalls the image of the hyena in Carrington's *Self-Portrait* which I will discuss. These hybrid animal-plant creatures are also restrained like the oval lady. The background is of a green landscaped

garden with well-kept lawns and topiary trees. These gardens have been cultivated and do not represent the freedom of the wilderness. In the lower section of the painting, the ground had been cut away to reveal an underworld of bats, birds, and cocooned figures which alludes to Carrington's fascination with the otherworld. The themes present in this painting, being trapped, metamorphosis from human to animal and animal to plant or vice-versa, sorcery, alchemy, and magic are also present in 'La dame ovale'. This illustrates the way that her paintings provide an insight into her writings and form a verbal-visual narrative.

A critique of upper-class society and a rebellion against parental authority is continued in 'La débutante' which is one of Carrington's best-known stories.⁴² It has received the most critical attention, for example Alice Gambrell provides a close reading of 'La débutante' working from the English in *Women intellectuals, modernism, and difference: Transatlantic culture (1919-1945)* (1977) as does Mireille Rosello in relation to black humour in *L'humour noir selon André Breton* (1987).⁴³ It was written in 1937-38 during the same time-frame as her best-known painting *Self-Portrait* and the two works share a number of themes and ideas. 'La débutante' was also featured in the revised 1950 edition of Breton's *Anthologie de l'humour noir* and contributed to the surrealist notion of black humour.⁴⁴ In the story, the main character is a young woman who rebels against the upper-class tradition of being a

⁴² Carrington, 'La débutante', in *La dame ovale*, no page numbers.

⁴³ Alice Gambrell, 'Leonora Carrington's self-revisions', in *Women intellectuals, modernism and difference: transatlantic culture (1919-1945)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp.74-98. Rosello, *L'humour noir selon André Breton*, pp.119-130.

⁴⁴ Carrington, 'La débutante', in Breton, *Anthologie* (1950), pp.334-337.

débutante, against the restrictions placed on women, and also against her family. Carrington was herself presented as a débutante in 1935 and so the story has an autobiographical aspect that one cannot overlook.

The story is set on 1 May 1934 (in the same year that Carrington was held a coming-out ball). It is the narrative of a young woman who befriends a hyena at a zoo. Desperate to avoid the ball being held in the honour, she convinces the wild animal to take her place. The difficulty of disguising the hyena's face arises and the beast suggests killing the girl's maid Marie and wearing her face as a mask. The plan goes ahead and the hyena attends the dance. The débutante of the title of the story is also the protagonist-narrator since the story begins 'Quand j'étais débutante'. She tells her story of being presented as a débutante and reflects on the experience. The way that the text is written in the first-person suggests that Carrington has written a fictional version of her own experience and reveals what she wished she could have done on the day of her coming-out ball. She was inspired by her experience and reimagines it to create an account that conflates fact and fiction, the real and the imaginary. Collani states that 'Le merveilleux s'y manifeste sans aucune irruption explicite dans le récit et sans provoquer aucune surprise chez le héros ni chez le lecteur'.⁴⁵ This is because the imaginary is presented as the real and the narrative takes place in the realm of the surreal.

In 1934, Carrington was thrown a coming-out ball at the famous Ritz hotel in London by her parents. She attended a garden party at Buckingham Palace and viewed the horseraces at Ascot from the royal enclosure. However, she reveals that

⁴⁵ Collani, p.459.

‘in those days, if you were a woman, you were not allowed to bet. You weren’t even allowed to the paddock, where they show the horses.’⁴⁶ And so, in protest, she relates ‘So I took a book. I mean what would you do? It was Huxley’s *Eyeless in Gaza* which I read all the way through’.⁴⁷ She was well aware of the gender bias present in society and its unfairness. On 29 March 1935, she was presented at the court of George V (which was the first presentation at court that year and the final one of the reign of King George).⁴⁸ Being a *débutante* was exclusive to the daughters of upper-class families and was not usually an opportunity granted to those of the *nouveau riche*. However, Carrington’s beauty and her father’s wealth would have made her an ideal candidate for marriage. Nevertheless, Carrington was not interested in getting married and is often described as a ‘reluctant debutante’.⁴⁹ In a documentary, she likens the experience to being ‘put on the market’ and describes it as ‘a great waste of time and very silly’.⁵⁰ She felt that her family were putting her up for sale and that they wanted to get rid of her, and moreover that they were putting into serious doubt whether anyone would chose to marry her’.⁵¹ This reveals her attitude towards being a *débutante* as an objectifying experience. She was not disappointed that no one had chosen to marry her since she aspired to be artist. One

⁴⁶ De Angelis, ‘Interview with Leonora Carrington’, in *Leonora Carrington: The Mexican Years*, ed. by Sanchez-Barnet, p.34.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ A photograph of Carrington and her mother on the day of her presentation illustrates her memoir *Down Below* in *VVV*. See Carrington, ‘Down Below’, *VVV*, 4, February 1944, p.86.

⁴⁹ Gambrell, p.76.

⁵⁰ Acker.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

can argue that Carrington's attitude towards being presented as a *débutante* is captured in a drawing by Prassinos captioned 'à l'Opéra, quelques jeunes *débutantes*' which depicts four young women with visibly hairy legs and grotesque faces in rebellion against the expectation placed on them, the notion of femininity (and beauty), and the tradition itself.⁵² Prassinos too seems to ridicule this upper-class tradition.

The protagonist-narrator reveals that when she was a *débutante* she visited the zoological gardens so often that 'j'ai mieux connu les animaux que les jeunes filles de mon âge'. This reveals that there is a social expectation to get to know girls of the same age as her rather than animals and that it is one that she does not conform to. It suggests that she was more familiar and had more in common with animals and aligns herself with them. Although visiting the zoo belongs the ordinary, the tradition of being presented as a *débutante* has a certain quality beyond the everyday. She announces that 'C'était même pour échapper au monde que je me trouvais chaque jour au Zoo' and that it was to escape from upper-class society and the restrictions and expectations that it places on women. Perhaps Carrington was inspired by her frequent visits to Blackpool zoo with her mother as a child.⁵³ Her use of the reflexive verb 'se trouver' suggests that it was not a conscious decision but an unconscious one. Perhaps she was able to identify with the wild animals in captivity because of her own lack of freedom as the daughter of a *nouveau-riche* family. It also conveys a rejection of human society and her own unhappiness. The reader is

⁵² Gisèle Prassinos, 'à l'Opéra, quelques jeunes *débutantes*' (date unknown). Reproduced in Richard, *Le Monde suspendu*, p.36.

⁵³ Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, p.14.

perhaps reminded of Professor Pierre Aronnax's rejection of human society which leads him to live a life on board a submarine under the sea in Verne's *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers* (1869-70).⁵⁴ She explains that 'La bête que j'ai mieux connu était une jeune hyène' which is an interesting choice of animal. Their friendship seems to be mutual ('Elle me connaissait aussi') and she describes the hyena as 'fort intelligente'. The hyena has the ability to learn and they exchange language skills, 'je lui appris le français et en retour elle m'apprit son langage.' Her friendship with a wild animal and the learning of its language transgresses the boundary between human-animal relationships and the young woman rebels against the expectations of society.

The hyena is a doglike carnivore known for its scavenging habits. In a documentary, Carrington reveals that what attracted her to the hyena was the way that they eat what no one wants anymore.⁵⁵ She also identified herself with the wild animal, 'I'm like a hyena, I get into the garbage cans. I have an insatiable curiosity.'⁵⁶ This suggests that she has an appetite to uncover what others have cast aside, for example in her writings she draws on occult practices such as magic and alchemy, and ancient mythologies. Carrington's identification with the hyena is continued in her painting *Self-Portrait*. In the painting, a striped hyena with blue human-like eyes and three swollen teats mirrors the position of the seated androgynous figure. Their mirrored stance suggests a level of identification between the wild animal and the

⁵⁴ Verne.

⁵⁵ Acker.

⁵⁶ Interview with Carrington at her home in Colonia Rome, Mexico City, February, 1999. Cited in Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, p.32.

human figure. As Carrington remarked in everybody there is an 'inner bestiary' which reminds us that humans are animals and that identity is not singular.⁵⁷ The hyena performs multiple roles in Carrington's writings and paintings. In the painting, the hyena is presented as a domesticated animal whereas in the story we are reminded of its wild nature and its inability to conform. Nevertheless, in both text and image, the hyena intrudes into a domestic space, crossing the boundaries between the inside and the outside, the wild and the domestic, nature and culture. It marks the beginning of Carrington's quest for an alter-ego and is soon replaced by the horse. Although she identified with the wild nature of the hyena, she also identified with the spirit and freedom of the horse. The hyena plays a significant role in her visual and verbal imagery and is presented in contrast to rigid human structures, bodies, and behaviours.

The narrator announces that on 1 May her mother organised a ball to be held in her honour. This causes her distress since 'j'ai toujours détesté les bals, surtout ceux donnés en mon propre honneur.' Carrington's experience of being a débutante was also marked by suffering and Moorhead relates the pain caused by her tiara which Carrington describes as 'biting into my skull'.⁵⁸ In the early hours of the morning on the day of the ball she visits her friend the hyena for advice. She confides in the hyena that she does not want to attend the ball to which the hyena replies how fortunate she is and that although it cannot dance, it can hold a conversation and is envious of the quantity of food that will be available ('Moi, je

⁵⁷ Warner, 'Introduction', in Carrington, *House of Fear*, p.1.

⁵⁸ As told by Carrington to Moorhead. Cited in Moorhead, *The Surreal Life of Leonora Carrington*, p.21.

mange une fois par jour, et ce qu'on peut me foutre comme cochonneries !'). The hyena offers the perspective of an outsider and reminds the reader of the life of privilege that she is rejecting. It recalls her 1938 painting *The Meal of Lord Candlestick* in which she mocks the extravagance of the upper-class and presents a cannibalistic banquet with a grotesque female figure eating a baby.⁵⁹ The young woman is then struck by 'une idée osée' and proposes that the hyena takes her place at the ball addressing it with the third person pronoun 'vous' to show respect. It demonstrates 'la révolte absolue de l'adolescence' and 'une révolte supérieure de l'esprit' in the mood of *humour noir*.⁶⁰ Thinking rationally, the hyena admits that they do not look alike but the young woman assures it that in the evening light no one will be able to tell them apart. However, it is difficult to imagine a hyena and a young woman being mistaken for one another. As Rosello observes 'Pour le lecteur, une telle substitution semble appartenir au domaine du fantastique, de la farce : rien de plus invraisemblable apparemment que de faire passer un animal pour un être humain.'⁶¹ She begs the hyena to take her place 'Vous êtes ma seule amie, je vous supplie' which reveals that the hyena is female and also conveys her desperation. The idea of a hyena attending her coming-out ball is humorous and mocks the upper-class tradition in the spirit of *humour noir*.

That evening she frees the hyena from its cage and together they travel in a taxi to her house. The hyena which represents the wild has been released into

⁵⁹ Carrington, *The Meal of Lord Candlestick* (1938). Reproduced in Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, p.38.

⁶⁰ Breton, *Anthologie* (1940), p.10.

⁶¹ Rosello, *L'humour noir de André Breton*, p.124.

civilised human society. In her room, the hyena tries on her dress and heels for size and a pair of gloves 'pour déguiser ses mains trop poilues pour ressembler aux miennes'. One of the main themes in this story is clothing and identity. Here, the role of the dress and heels is to disguise the hyena's animal body and to make it resemble the young woman's. The dress and heels are a socially acceptable code of dress for a ball. They not only allow the hyena to conform to society's expectations but also to gender norms. In *Body Dressing*, Joanne Entwistle states that 'human bodies are *dressed* bodies' as opposed to animal bodies and that 'Conventions of dress transform flesh into something recognizable and meaningful to a culture and are also the means by which bodies are made 'decent', appropriate and acceptable within specific contexts.'⁶² In 'La débutante', clothing transforms the animal body into something which is socially acceptable to attend a ball. She adds that dress 'does not simply *reflect* a natural body [...] a given identity; it *embellishes* the body'.⁶³ In the story, the dress and heels 'transform' the hyena's animal identity into a human one. Moreover, the image of the hyena practicing walking in her heels until dawn is humorous. In the morning, the girl's mother remarks on 'une mauvais odeur' in her room. This suggests that although one can disguise the animal body, one cannot mask its essence.

The narrator reveals that 'La difficulté la plus grande était de trouvera un déguisement pour sa figure'. This suggests that although the body can be clothed and made to conform, its face cannot be disguised. The hyena suggests that the girl

⁶² Joanne Entwistle, 'The Dressed Body', in Entwistle and Elizabeth Wilson, eds., *Body Dressing* (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2001), p.33.

⁶³ Ibid.

summons her maid and that 'quand elle rentrera on se jette sur elle et on lui arrache la figure : je porterai sa figure ce soir à la place de la mienne.' This suggestion of violence is unexpected and reveals the hyena's true nature. Similar to Charles Perrault's fairy tale 'Little Red Riding Hood', in 'La débutante' the wolf is a hyena and instead of the wolf eating the grandmother before wearing her clothes, the hyena eats the maid and wears her face as a mask. Carrington's story can therefore be read as a subversive fairy tale. Aberth argues that 'La débutante' 'functions on a multitude of levels: as an exorcism of the traumatic events of Carrington's coming-out experience; as a malicious and vengeful adolescent wish-fulfilment; and as a gleefully cautionary tale to parents everywhere.'⁶⁴ As an 'exorcism of the traumatic events', it anticipates her externalising of traumatic memories in her memoir *En bas* which I will discuss in the following chapter. The moral of 'Little Red Riding Hood' is not to talk to strangers whereas the moral of 'La débutante' is for parents to not force their children do something that they do not want to do.

This sudden proposal of violence shocks the reader and reminds them of the simmering violence in the human just beneath the surface of society which recalls the simmering, glossed over violence in Prassinós's story 'Suite de membres' which I discussed in chapter three. The young woman hesitates 'Ca n'est pas pratique' since her maid will die and they will end up in prison. She is more concerned with the practicality of her actions than with their morality which alludes to her selfishness. The hyena adds that it will even eat the bones to dispose of any evidence and the young woman agrees 'Seulement si vous promettez de tuer avant de lui arracher la

⁶⁴ Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, p.35.

figure, ça lui fera trop mal autrement' which suggests that it is perhaps humane after all. The young woman is complicit in the murder of her maid and seems to lack moral values. Carrington reimagines what it means to be an upper-class woman and the notion of femininity. The young woman reassures the reader that 'Je ne l'aurais pas fait si je ne détestais pas tellement les bals' which suggests that this is the last resort. She calls for her maid and unable to watch she turns away. The violence is glossed over as 'un cri bref et c'était fini'. However, the hyena is too full to eat the feet and so places them in an embroidered bag which presents a visceral image that juxtaposes violence and femininity.

The hyena is proud of its new face and exclaims 'Retournez-vous maintenant et regardez comme je suis belle!'. This disturbing image of the hyena with a human face is not one of beauty but rather one of convulsive beauty. As Abigail Susik reveals the masked hyena evokes 'the mixed emotions of wonder and disgust so often associated with the aesthetic of the grotesque'.⁶⁵ In addition, the hybrid hyena- débutante reminds the reader of the surrealist game of *cadavre exquis*. This mask is perhaps a mask of conformity since it allows the hyena to fit in with human society. In the following chapter, I will discuss the mask in more detail as a mask of non-conformity. In 'La débutante', roles have been reversed, the hyena becomes the 'beauty' and the young woman the 'beast' since she gives permission for her maid to be killed (or sacrificed?). This image of a hyena with a human face is not illustrated

⁶⁵ Abigail Susik, 'Losing one's head in the 'Children's Corner': Carrington's contributions to *S.NOB* in 1962', in *Leonora Carrington and the international avant-garde*, ed. by Eburne and Mc Acra, p.118.

by Ernst; instead he depicts a female figure with the head of a caterpillar metamorphosing into a butterfly offering his own interpretation of the narrative.

The young woman anticipates that all will go to plan and on the cue of the music, she sends the hyena downstairs to the social world of the party with the final piece of humorous advice not to stand next to her mother who will realise that the hyena hybrid is not her daughter. One can compare the party-going hyena to the party-going horse in Carrington's story 'La maison de la peur' perhaps mocking the importance of social occasions to the upper-class. The narrative of the hyena-débutante attending the coming-out ball is as Janet Lyon describes 'a wicked parody of debutante culture'.⁶⁶ The young woman, relieved not to have to attend the ball, settles down to read Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* to escape from upper-class society. This echoes the scene in which Carrington reads during the horseraces in protest against the unfair restrictions placed on women. She observes 'le premier signe de malheur' when a bat enters her room which is presented as an omen of bad news. She is strangely afraid of bats but not of hyenas.

Suddenly, she hears a loud knock at the door and her mother enters 'pâle de fureur'. She relates that they were sat around the table 'quand la chose qui était à ta place se lève et crie : « Je sens un peu fort, hein ? Eh bien, moi, je ne mange pas les gâteaux. »'. The use of the noun 'la chose' suggests that the mother is uncertain as to what exactly has taken her daughter's place. The reader is unsure if the hyena's smell has given it away or if the other guests have been commenting on its odour.

⁶⁶ Janet Lyon, 'Carrington's Sensorium', in *Leonora Carrington and the international avant-garde*, ed. by Eburne and McAra, p.165.

The mother is not annoyed at the fact that her daughter has swapped place with a hyena but with its lack of decorum and table manners. It is not the hyena's appearance or smell which gives away its true identity but the fact that it speaks. As Rosello observes 'L'animal masqué a réussi à occuper la place de la femme, et la supercherie n'a pris fin que lorsqu'elle est elle-même sortie du rôle [...] lorsqu'elle s'est mise à parler en disant « je »'.⁶⁷ This scene suggests that identity is performative. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler's argument is that 'there need not be a "doer behind the deed," but that the "doer" is variably constructed in and through the deed' meaning that behaviour creates one's gender or identity.⁶⁸ Here, the hyena's mask and clothing convince the dinner guests that it is the young woman until it speaks which reveals its animal identity. This implies that identity (and gender) is a social performance and is not inherent.

Similarly, in *Pénélope*, at dinner, Pénélope devours a whole chicken 'avec voracité' before jumping onto the table in a rejection of table manners.⁶⁹ Its objection to the desert being served ridicules the superficiality of social norms. In a final repulsive act, the hyena tears off its face and devours it in an act of rebellion against the upper-class. It does not conform to social etiquette or well-respected table manners and reveals its true cannibalistic nature. Although its appearance is socially acceptable since it is wearing a dress and heels and has a female face, its behaviour is not. This suggests that one's true nature cannot be concealed and that the wild cannot conform to civilised society and therefore that one should be free to

⁶⁷ Rosello, *L'humour noir de André Breton*, p.125.

⁶⁸ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.143.

⁶⁹ Carrington, 'Pénélope', p.151.

be whoever they want to be. The hyena then jumps out of the window to freedom perhaps returning to the wild. This mirrors the final scene in the play *Pénélope* and the scene in the painting *Self-Portrait*. The final image of the hyena escaping through the window not only reinforces a contrast between the inside and the outside as Annette Shandler Levitt argues but also between the wild and the civilised.⁷⁰ Both the young woman and the hyena reject conforming to society; the young woman refuses to attend the ball and the hyena tears off the mask of conformity.

The young woman's refusal to attend her coming-out ball and Lucretia's hunger strike in 'La dame ovale' reminds the reader of Germaine Berton's extreme form of (political) protest which cannot be overlooked when considering rebellious women in the context of Surrealism. On 22 January 1923, a young anarchist walked into the office of the right-wing newspaper *Action Française* and shot the head of Camelots du roi, Marius Plateau. According to Chadwick, the Surrealists rallied to her defense with brochures and demonstrations.⁷¹ In the first issue of *La révolution surréaliste*, Berton's photograph is framed by head shots of the male members of the surrealist group as if in support of her actions.⁷² Chadwick described Berton as 'a revolutionary antithesis of traditional female personifications of liberty and patriotism'.⁷³ Although the young women's refusal to attend the ball and hunger strike are not political statements, they are nevertheless rebellious acts against

⁷⁰ Annette Shandler Levitt, 'The Horses, Birds, and Crones of Leonora Carrington', in *The Genres and Genders of Surrealism* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1999), p.71.

⁷¹ Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, p.31.

⁷² *La révolution surréaliste*, 1, December 1924.

⁷³ Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, p.31.

society and parental authority. Other rebellious women who were celebrated by the Surrealists include Violette Nozières who poisoned her parents and the Papin sisters who murdered their employer's wife and daughter.

Although there are no rebel female characters as such in 'L'oncle Sam Carrington', the main theme is a rebellion against or critique of society and social conventions. It is the final text in the collection *La dame ovale* (1939) and is illustrated with two collages by Ernst which I will discuss in dialogue with the text.⁷⁴ 'L'oncle Sam Carrington' is a first-person narrative - the protagonist, an unnamed young girl, is also the narrator. Written retrospectively, the protagonist-narrator recounts a strange series of events which took place when she was eight years old. In the story, two characters, 'Oncle Sam Carrington' and 'Tante Edgeworth' cannot stop themselves from laughing at the sun and moon respectively. This has a negative effect on the girl's mother's social reputation and causes her mother to suffer. Unable to bear her mother's distress any longer, the girl sets out to find a solution. She soon becomes lost and witnesses a surreal scene of two cabbages fighting each other. She then encounters a horse friend who guides her to two wise women who it believes will be able to help her. The girl observes these women at work whipping vegetables in their garden. The story ends abruptly with the two women handing the girl a bag containing these vegetables. I will discuss the themes of social reputation, family honour, and food and social convention which emerge from the text.

The title implies that Uncle Sam Carrington is the protagonist of the story. However, Sam Carrington only features at the beginning of the narrative.

⁷⁴ Carrington, 'L'oncle Sam Carrington', in *La dame ovale*, no page numbers.

Nevertheless, it is Sam Carrington's and Edgeworth's uncontrollable laughter that is the reason for the girl's adventure. The title subverts the reader's expectation that the story is based on this character. The name Sam Carrington suggests that he is one of Carrington's male relations and alludes to an autobiographical aspect. However, there is no mention of a 'Sam Carrington' in any biography of the writer.⁷⁵ The story begins with the revelation that when Uncle Sam Carrington saw the full moon he could not stop himself from laughing and that the sunset had the same effect on Tante Edgeworth. The effect of the natural phenomena, the full moon and sunset, on Sam Carrington and Edgeworth is unexplainable. The full moon has long been associated with superstition and the sun and moon play an important role in alchemy, a practice that Carrington was interested in. It is likely that the name 'Tante Edgeworth' alludes to the Anglo-Irish author Maria Edgeworth (1767-1849) who wrote children's stories and novels on Irish life. Carrington's mother, Maureen, and maternal grandmother, Mary Monica Moorhead, claimed that Edgeworth was one of their female antecedents.⁷⁶ Carrington may therefore have been inspired by her connection to this female writer to make her a literary character and moreover to write her own prose. In addition, Leonora was in fact named after the eponymous heroine of one of Edgeworth's novels.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Moorhead, *The Surreal Life of Leonora Carrington*.

⁷⁶ Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, p.11. Moorhead, *The Surreal Life of Leonora Carrington*, pp.56-57. Carrington's mother is named 'Maureen' in Aberth's study *Leonora Carrington: Surrealism, Alchemy and Art* (2010) and 'Maurie' in Moorhead's biography *The Surreal Life of Leonora Carrington* (2017).

⁷⁷ *Leonora* by Maria Edgeworth was published in 1806. Leonora's grandmother named her second daughter 'Leonora' and her mother passed on this name to her own daughter.

As mentioned, the story is illustrated with two collages by Ernst.⁷⁸ The first illustration, which precedes the text, depicts a man standing alongside a stack of books. He clutches a portfolio of papers under his left arm and carries what appears to be a globe. He is presented as a well-educated and well-travelled man. Is this 'Uncle Sam Carrington' of the story who cannot control his laughter at the sight of the full moon? The reader cannot be certain. This figure is perhaps the Scottish writer Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832) since he is later described in the text as a 'noble aristocrate de la pure littérature'. Ernst's collage bears a closer resemblance to the literary figure than to hysterical Sam Carrington. Eibl compares the collage to one in Ernst's *La femme 100 têtes* (1929), meaning the hundred-headed woman or the headless woman, identifying a connection between his collage-novel and Carrington's collection.⁷⁹ The second illustration is of a hybrid female figure with the collage element of a horse's head who is accompanied by a well-dressed aristocratic man and woman. Perhaps this hybrid figure is the young girl or her mother and the male figure Sam Carrington and female figure Edgeworth. One can argue that Ernst's collages do not illustrate the ideas present in the story but offer his own interpretation of the narrative as it is unclear which scene the second collage corresponds to.

A key theme in the story is a critique of social reputation. The Aunt and Uncle's uncontrollable laughter causes the young girl's mother, who is described as

⁷⁸ It is difficult to distinguish or trace the collage elements in the printed black and white reproductions of these images.

⁷⁹ Eibl, 'Se répondre ou ne pas répondre : du dialogisme dans *La Dame ovale* de Leonora Carrington et Max Ernst'. Ernst, *La femme 100 têtes*, p.103.

having 'une certaine réputation sociale', to suffer. The fact that the girl's mother has a social reputation implies that she belongs to the upper-class. The mother is not concerned with the strange condition of the Aunt and Uncle but with her own social status. This presents her as selfish and self-centred. In reality, Carrington's mother also placed great value on social status since they belonged to the nouveau riche and did not come from a family of aristocrats. In fact, Carrington's mother would often visit jumble sales looking for portraits of aristocratic people who resembled them to hang up in their home to create their own albeit imagined history.⁸⁰ The narrator recalls that at the age of eight years old she was considered as 'la plus sérieuse de ma famille' and that for this reason her mother decided to confide in her, 'Elle disait que c'était honteux, qu'elle n'était plus invitée nulle part, que Lady Cholmendley-Bottame ne lui disait plus bonjour dans la rue.' Her mother places great importance on her social reputation and relates the shame that she feels at no longer being invited to social events. This highlights the superficiality of social reputation.

It is possible that Lady Cholmendley refers to the Lady who lived at Cholmondeley Castle in Cheshire who it is likely was well-known to the Carringtons.⁸¹ Her title of 'Lady' and hyphenated surname indicate that she belongs to the upper-class. However, the way that Carrington has hyphenated her surname with 'Bottame', which is a wordplay on the noun 'bottom', implies that she is mocking

⁸⁰ 'In conversation about Leonora Carrington with Joanna Moorhead and Francesco Manacorda', Tate Liverpool, 29 April 2015
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r8WzzLS6Hhg> [accessed 25 August 2019].

⁸¹ Cholmondeley Castle Gardens <http://www.cholmondeleycastle.com> [accessed 20 August 2018].

class status. The Lady's family name 'Cholmendley' also recalls a seventeenth century painting *The Cholmondeley Ladies* (c.1600-1610) by an unknown artist.⁸² Carrington had a postcard of this painting on her kitchen cupboard, along with a postcard of Diana, Princess of Wales and a map of Iceland. This reveals that she was familiar with this work of art and perhaps her character of 'Lady Cholmendley-Bottame' was inspired by this painting. In the narrative, the reference to the fictional Lady Cholmendley-Bottame confirms that the girl's mother belongs to the upper-class.

In addition to a critique of the superficiality of social reputation, Carrington criticises the notion of family honour. The girl explains that Tante Edgeworth and Uncle Sam Carrington live on the first floor of their house and for this reason there was little that they could do to conceal 'ce triste état de choses'. The girl begins to think of a way to free her family from this shame and unable to endure her mother's distress any longer she decides to look for a solution herself. She considers it her duty to relieve her mother of her suffering. It is interesting that it is the daughter's duty to maintain family honour in a reversal of gender roles since it would usually be the son's responsibility. One evening when her Aunt was laughing 'd'une manière particulièrement choquante' at the red sun, the girl sets off with a pot of jam and a fishing rod. The reader wonders what the items will be used for and it remains uncertain as to what exactly the girl has set out to find. The significance of the pot of jam and fishing rod is revealed in the final line of the story. Similarly, Carrington

⁸² This painting is on display at Tate Britain

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/unknown-artist-britain-the-cholmondeley-ladies-t00069> [accessed 20 August 2018].

mocks the notion of family honour in *Pénélope*. In act 2, scene 1, at dinner, Pénélope jumps onto the table and escapes through the window. Angered by his daughter's lack of respect, her father seeks vengeance on them. The toy cow informs Pénélope and Tartar that they are being pursued by phantoms who sing 'L'honneur de la famille est trainé dans la boue, seul la mort pour nous venger.'⁸³ The father is prepared to murder his daughter to restore family honour which suggests that social reputation is of more importance than family. This echoes Pénélope's earlier remark 'Tu vois ma robe? Eh bien, je vais trainer dans la boue.'⁸⁴ Her dress represents both social and gender conventions.

The scenes that follow remind the reader of what Alice experiences in Carroll's novel *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* when she follows the White Rabbit down the rabbit hole and into Wonderland.⁸⁵ In the forest, the girl encounters 'un ami' which the reader soon learns is a horse who has since played an important role in her life. This human-animal friendship reminds the reader of the protagonist's friendship with a hyena in 'La débutante'. The horse greets the girl in English before asking her what she is looking for in French. She explains to the horse the reason why she is in the forest so late at night and the horse responds, 'Evidemment [...] du point de vue social c'est assez compliqué.' The intelligent animal has the ability to communicate in French and English and also has the ability to understand complex situations. The horse reveals that it knows of two ladies who live nearby and who deal with similar issues, 'Leur but, c'est l'extermination des hontes de famille' and

⁸³ Carrington, 'Pénélope', p.159.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p.128.

⁸⁵ Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, p.2.

offers to lead her to them. The horse is therefore presented as a guide which is similar to the role of the horse in 'La maison de la peur' (1938).

The ladies, 'les demoiselles Cunningham-Jones', live in a house surrounded by wild plants and 'linge d'une autre époque' which gives the impression that the women are living in the past. When the horse and young girl arrive, the women can be seen playing draughts in their garden. In Clair's short film *Entr'acte* (1924), Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray can be seen playing a game of chess on a rooftop in Paris.⁸⁶ Images of the city such as Place de la Concorde are superimposed onto the chessboard before their game is abruptly ended by a jet of water. The Cunningham-Jones' game of draughts and Duchamp and Man Ray's game of chess exemplifies the Surrealists' enjoyment of playing games. The horse humorously puts his head between the legs of a pair of nineteenth-century trousers and addresses the women which recreates a pantomime scene. The ladies speak with 'un accent fort distingué' which confirms that they belong to the upper-class and announce 'Nous sommes toujours prêtes à venir en aide dans l'intérêt de la respectabilité.' The fact that these women seem to specialise in social reputation is ridiculous.

The girl observes that one of the women wears an elaborate hat decorated with different species of flowers. On the one hand, this conveys their enjoyment of horticulture and on the other hand, it reveals a link between clothing and social class. Offering the girl a Louis XV style chair to sit down on, one of the women enquires about her family, 'Votre famille, Mademoiselle [...] suit-elle la ligne de notre cher et regretté Duc de Wellington? ou bien celle de Sir Walter Scott, ce noble

⁸⁶ *Entr'acte*, dir. by René Clair, music by Eric Satire (1924).

aristocrate de la pure littérature?'. Some readers may be familiar that the Duke of Wellington is a historical reference to Arthur Wellesley, 1st duke of Wellington (1769-1852) who was the prime minister of Great Britain between 1828 and 1830. Others may be familiar that Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832) is a cultural reference to the late eighteen-early nineteenth century Scottish author. It is interesting that the women refer to two historical male figures since this emphasises the patriarchal society that they live in. The girl feels uncomfortable as she is aware that there are no aristocrats in her family. This is true of the Carringtons who although they were an upper-class family, belonged to the nouveau riche. The woman observes the girl's hesitation and reminds her that they only settle 'les affaires des plus anciennes et des plus nobles familles d'Angleterre'. The girl begins, 'Dans la salle à manger, chez nous...' when the horse suddenly kicks her and whispers 'Ne parlez jamais de quelque chose d'aussi vulgaire que la nourriture.' This suggests that the aristocracy consider food as vulgar which highlights the absurdity of social conventions. In contrast, in her oeuvre, Carrington transforms the kitchen which is traditionally associated with the oppression of women into a space of creation, magic, and liberation.⁸⁷ The girl corrects herself and continues 'Dans le salon [...] il y a une table sur laquelle, dit-on, une duchesse oublia ses lunettes en 1700.' This link to aristocracy is tenuous but seems to be a valid one which is nonetheless humorous. Carrington is perhaps mocking what it takes to be considered as a member of the upper-class. However, one of the lady replies, 'Dans ce cas-là [...] on pourra peut-être s'arranger ; mais naturellement, Mademoiselle, nous serons obligées de vous

⁸⁷ See Aberth, 'The Alchemical Kitchen'.

demander un prix un peu plus élevé.’ It is perhaps ironic that the women do not talk about food but talk about money which confirms that social class and status is based on wealth.

Another key theme in the story is food and social convention. The shadow of the full moon reveals the source of ‘un bruit inquiétant’ and the narrator describes a surreal scene, ‘C’était deux choux qui se battaient affreusement. Ils s’arrachaient les feuilles l’un de l’autre avec une telle férocité que bientôt il n’y eut plus que des feuilles déchirées partout et plus de choux.’ The reader is presented with the unexpected vivid image of two cabbages fighting and tearing off one another’s leaves. The adjective ‘affreusement’, verb ‘s’arracher’, and modifier ‘avec une telle férocité’ convey the violence of the scene. The inanimate vegetables have been transformed into animate ones and the scene belongs to a dream or nightmare. The girl assumes that she is having a nightmare before realising that she is wide awake which blurs the boundaries between dream and reality. The fight ends in the ‘death’ of the two cabbages and the narrator describes their bodies as ‘cadavres’ which emphasises that they were once alive. The scene is humorous and the level of violence and death suggest that it belongs to surrealist *humour noir*.

The humble cabbage is of great importance to Carrington. In ‘The Cabbage is a Rose’, she imagines,

The Cabbage is a rose, the Blue rose, the Alchemical Rose, the Blue Deer (Peyote), and the eating of the God is ancient knowledge, but only recently known to civilized occidental Humans who have experienced many phenomena, and have recently written many books that give accounts of the changing worlds which these people have seen when they ate these plants.

Although the properties of the cabbage are somewhat different, it also screams when dragged out of the earth and plunged into boiling water or grease – forgive us, cabbage [...] The cabbage is still the alchemical Rose for any being able to see or taste.⁸⁸

For Carrington, the vegetable is a flower with its multiple leaves resembling petals. However, the cabbage is not an ordinary rose but a 'Blue rose'. Roses are not naturally blue, a blue rose has been scientifically modified, and for this reason the blue rose has long been associated with the unattainable.⁸⁹ For Carrington, the cabbage is also associated with alchemy and transformation. She also states that the cabbage is the Blue Deer or Peyote. For the Huichol people of north-western Mexico, the deer represents the spirit guide and the Peyote knowledge. The Peyote is a species of hallucinogenic cactus and is often eaten at their traditional religious rituals as it is believed to allow the individual to communicate with the gods and the spirits. These 'changing worlds' perhaps refer to the hallucinations experienced by the eating of the cactus. Carrington likens the cabbage to the mandrake plant since in Medieval times it was believed that when the plant was pulled out of the ground it gave out a shriek that killed or drove mad those who did not protect their ears from it. For Carrington, the cabbage's multiple layers of leaves represent multiple identities with each leaf representing a different one. The ordinary vegetable

⁸⁸ Carrington, 'The Cabbage is a Rose', p.21.

⁸⁹ Danielle Demetriou, 'World's first blue roses after 20 years of research', 31 October 2008 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/japan/3329213/Worlds-first-blue-roses-after-20-years-of-research.html> [Accessed 26 April 2019].

becomes extra-ordinary and assumes the identities of the garden and alchemical rose, a deity, and a lethal plant.

Carrington also features the leafy vegetable in her paintings. In 1987 she painted a portrait of the cabbage aptly titled *Cabbage*.⁹⁰ It depicts a red cabbage on a black background which resembles a rose with its leaves as flower petals. The painting captures the beauty of this hybrid cabbage-rose. In another painting titled *Grandmother Moorhead's Aromatic Kitchen* (1975) the cabbage is positioned on the centre of the table among other vegetables.⁹¹ Here, it is the ingredient for a recipe or a magic potion. Throughout Carrington's oeuvre, it is clear that the cabbage is assigned multiple identities or roles and transformed into something other than a vegetable. In a painting by Tanning titled *Some Roses and Their Phantoms* (1952) which is a surreal still life, she depicts roses which resemble cabbages and an insect (a grasshopper?) on a table.⁹² Writing on the painting, Tanning imagines 'Here some roses from a very different garden sit?, lie?, stand?, gasp?, dream?, die?'.⁹³ Similarly, we can imagine the cabbage-roses in Carrington's paintings as breathing and dreaming. Michelle Man and James Hewison also recognise the importance of the cabbage in Carrington's oeuvre. In their choreographed dance performance 'Imaginarium', which Man describes as 'a series of fleeting metamorphoses', they

⁹⁰ Carrington, *The Cabbage* (1987). Reproduced in Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, p.135.

⁹¹ Carrington, *Grandmother Moorhead's Aromatic Kitchen* (1975). Reproduced in Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, p.123.

⁹² Dorothea Tanning, *Some Roses and Their Phantoms* (1952) was displayed at the 2019 Tanning exhibition at the Tate Modern.

⁹³ Exhibition plaque. 'Dorothea Tanning', Tate Modern, 2019.

use the cabbage as a prop.⁹⁴ In the opening and closing frames, they tear off the leaves of a cabbage which perhaps represents the revealing of the multiple layers of meaning in Carrington's writings and paintings, for example autobiographical, alchemical, mythical, fantastical. In one frame, they wear the cabbage leaves on their heads as if they are metamorphosing into the vegetable.

In the narrative, having agreed to help the girl, the women instruct her to wait and give her a book to look at, 'vous pouvez regarder les images de ce livre'. This is either a reminder of her young age or an insult since she is not from an upper-class background and deemed uneducated or illiterate. They state that no library is complete without this volume titled 'Les secrets des fleurs de la distinction ou La grossièreté de la nourriture' and that they live by its example. The horse encourages the girl to follow him and to witness the women at work, 'Venez, mais si vous tenez à la vie ne faites aucun bruit', which reveals the power of these women and the secrecy of their work. Sat on the horse's back, the girl describes 'une scène assez surprenante'. The respectable women, each armed with a whip, are seen beating the vegetables and shouting, 'Il faut souffrir pour aller au ciel. Ceux qui ne portent pas de corset n'arriveront jamais!' as if performing a ritual. The women curiously link suffering, clothing, and religion and the whipping of these vegetables undermines their respectability. The rebellious vegetables fight back and comically the larger

⁹⁴ Michelle Man, 'Imaginarium' <http://www.michelle-man.com/imaginarium> [accessed 25 July 2019]. 'Imaginarium' was first performed at the 2015 'Leonora Carrington' exhibition at the Tate Liverpool and in 2017 at the 'Leonora Carrington Symposium' at Edge Hill University. See Man and Hewison's co-written paper 'Of Cabbages and Queens: Dancing Carrington' which was presented at the Carrington Symposium <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ovnO39aL0b0> [accessed 11 August 2019].

vegetables throw the smaller ones at the two women 'avec des cris de haine'.

Perhaps the women are beating the vegetables as they are not conforming. The horse explains that this happens every time and announces 'Ce sont les légumes qui souffrent pour le bénéfice de la société.' The narrator observes that the vegetables do not want to die a 'mort honorable' but soon two carrots and a courgette fall victim to the women. The vegetables are being sacrificed in the name of social reputation. Jennifer Christie states that 'By laughing at the extreme lengths one must go through to eliminate a faux pas we didn't even realize was possible, we have delegitimized the mother's social shame to a size no bigger than a pinhead.'⁹⁵ This is perhaps Carrington's technique to convey the superficiality and ridiculousness of social status.

The girl and horse quickly return to their places and the women return 'avec à peu près la même remarquable allure qu'auparavant' which is unexplainable. They are presented as 'wise women', women who in ancient or medieval times possessed a knowledge of traditional or folk medicine. However, instead of a knowledge of medicine, they are experts in respectability. They can also be said to be witches since they conduct strange rituals in the garden. The association of woman and nature and woman as witch is discussed in chapter four. The story ends abruptly when the women give the girl a bag containing the sacrificed vegetables and the girl pays for them with the pot of jam and fishing rod. As Christie points out by the time the reader reaches the story's conclusion, they have already forgotten the purpose of

⁹⁵ Jennifer Christie, 'A review of *The Complete Stories of Leonora Carrington*', 2 May 2017 <https://entropymag.org/the-complete-stories-of-leonora-carrington-by-leonora-carrington/> [accessed 26 April 2019].

the visit.⁹⁶ The reader does not know whether these vegetables will solve the problem or how they will be used. Perhaps they will be used to 'cure' the Aunt and Uncle of their strange affliction or be given to her mother to eat to restore her social reputation.

In conclusion, Carrington was a rebel woman and a rebel writer. Throughout her life, she rebelled against her family and society in her aspiration to be an artist and also through her writings and paintings. Her friend, Fini also imagines her as a revolutionary warrior-woman in her 1939 painting. In fact, one could argue that all of the women artist-writers associated with Surrealism were rebel women in their refusal to play the role of the muse. Chadwick accurately describes the women of the avant-garde as 'jeunes, belles et rebelles' (see epigram to chapter).

Carrington's rebellious nature extends to her female characters in her early writings, for example in 'La dame ovale' and 'La débutante' the heroines are in rebellion against upper-class patriarchal society and the restrictions placed on them as young women. In 'La dame ovale', Lucretia rebels against her father who has forbidden her from playing games and from transforming herself into a horse. She goes on a hunger strike in protest against him and the restrictions he places on her. In her play *Pénélope*, the heroine also rebels against her father and escapes through an open window. However, unlike in 'La dame ovale', she outwits her father. In 'La débutante', Carrington continues to rebel against upper-class society and reimagines her experience of being presented as a *débutante*. In the narrative, the young woman rebels against the aristocratic tradition of being a *débutante* by sending the

⁹⁶ Ibid.

hyena to the ball in her place. The hyena in turn rebels against the mask of conformity that it has to wear to be accepted into human society and against social etiquette when it tears off its own face and devours it. One could argue that Breton chose this story to feature in his *Anthologie* since it expresses the mood of *humour noir* through its subversive critique of society.

Although there are no rebel female characters in 'L'oncle Sam Carrington', Carrington continues to rebel against and criticise social class. It can be read as a critical commentary on social class and the superficiality of social reputation. Similar to the inanimate-animate rocking horse in 'La dame ovale', in 'L'oncle Sam Carrington' the cabbages are alive and violently tear off one another's leaves and the vegetables in the garden rebel against and do not conform to the two well-respected ladies. In these three stories, *le merveilleux* can be understood as Carrington finding new surreal ways to criticise social set ups since she comments on social class, reputation, expectation, and convention in an imaginative way and to great effect. She explores the social issues of class and status and the oppression of women by drawing on fantastical elements such as the magical rocking horse, the hyena-débutante hybrid, and the rebellious vegetables.

Chapter seven - The embodied *merveilleux* in Carrington's memoir *En bas* (1945)

'Ce n'était qu'un embryon de connaissance que je vais essayer d'exprimer ici avec la plus précise fidélité'¹

The concept of the embodied *merveilleux* refers to the idea of assigning *le merveilleux* a physicality and also to the idea of accessing it through the body. In this chapter, I argue that in her surrealist narrative *En bas* (1945), Carrington embodies *le merveilleux* through an identification of her body with society, the machine, and the natural world. *En bas* is a radical and experimental avant-garde text in the way that it is written, its unconventional form, and in its treatment of its subject matter. It is an account of Carrington's experience of a mental health crisis, the circumstances that led up to it, and the treatment that she received at a psychiatric hospital in Santander, Spain. In *En bas*, she identifies the self with the other with the aim of being able to access *le merveilleux*. In this chapter, I will begin with the broader context of Surrealism and psychic disorder before moving towards an analysis of Carrington's text to illustrate the ways in which it relates to the principles of Surrealism and the marvellous. My analysis of *En bas* discusses the identification of her body with society (and politics), the machine, and nature and animals, and also the idea of writing through the body. I will also draw on Carrington's 1941 painting also titled *En bas* to discuss the relation between the text and image.

¹ Leonora Carrington, *En bas* (Paris: Fontaine, 1945), p.8.

Breton and the Surrealists were fascinated by the concept of psychic disorder which can be traced back his work as a medical assistant during the First World War. His interest in psychic disorder was also influenced by Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and by Psychologist Jacques Lacan's thesis on psychosis, *De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec la personnalité* (1932).² Breton worked as an assistant at a hospital in Nantes and in 1917 he was transferred to a psychiatric centre in Saint-Dizier as the assistant to Dr Raoul Leroy.³ In a radio interview by André Parinaud, Breton recalls that he treated 'les évacués du front pour troubles mentaux (dont nombre de délires aigus)'.⁴ These 'troubles mentaux' and 'délires aigus' relate to the psychological trauma of war, a condition which became known as shell-shock and is known today as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). He acknowledges that his experiences there had 'sans doute une influence décisive sur le déroulement de ma pensée.'⁵ At Saint-Dizier, Breton explains 'j'ai pu expérimenter sur les malades les procédés d'investigation de la psychanalyse, en particulier l'enregistrement, aux fins d'interprétation, des rêves et des associations d'idées incontrôlées' and that these experiments became the first papers of Surrealism.⁶ He seems more interested in the creative potential of these 'troubles mentaux' than in treating his patients. As Alain Chevrier observes 'Le surréalisme de

² Jacques Lacan, *De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec la personnalité* (Paris: Editions Du Seuil, 1975). Lacan also translated Freud into French.

³ Balakian, p.27.

⁴ Breton, *Entretiens*, p.29. *Entretiens* is a series of interviews by Parinaud which were first broadcast as sixteen radio programs between March and June 1952.

⁵ Ibid, p.29.

⁶ Ibid.

Breton est né de l'interférence entre la littérature et les propos des malades mentaux.⁷ During his rounds at the military hospital, Breton met Jacques Vaché (1895-1919). Wounded more in mind than in body, he expressed a derision of humanity and was in rebellion against society.⁸ Vaché 'found the war absurd rather than tragic' and taught Breton the subversive 'defense mechanism' of *amour* (as discussed in chapter three).⁹ His mental instability was to have a profound effect on Breton's subsequent work. Breton adds that from his time spent working at the centre, 'J'ai gardé [...] une vive curiosité et un grand respect pour ce qu'il est convenu d'appeler les égarements de l'esprit humain. Peut-être aussi ai-je appris à m'y prémunir contre ces égarements, eu égard aux conditions de vie intolérables qu'ils entraînent.'¹⁰ His first-hand experience of working at the psychiatric centre made him aware of the devastating effect of psychic disorder on one's life. However, Breton seems to ignore this in his *Manifeste du Surréalisme* (1924).

In his *Manifeste*, Breton describes psychic disorder as 'la folie qu'on enferme'.¹¹ This conveys the idea that the mentally ill are locked up physically and psychologically since they are not accepted by society. On the one hand, the mentally ill are physically confined to psychiatric institutions. On the other hand, mental illness is locked up since it is repressed. He observes that 'les fous' are

⁷ Alain Chevrier, 'André Breton et les sources psychiatriques du Surréalisme', in *Mélusine N.XXVII : Le surréalisme et la science*, ed. by Henri Béhar (Lausanne, Suisse: Éditions L'Age d'Homme, 2007), p.53.

⁸ Balakian, p.23.

⁹ Ibid, p.24.

¹⁰ Breton, *Entretiens*, p.30.

¹¹ Breton, *Manifestes*, p.15.

confined as the result of 'un petit nombre des actes légalement répréhensibles' and that their freedom is consequently put into question.¹² They are treated like criminals and are unjustly imprisoned for minor offences since their unconventional thought and behaviour challenges society. As Breton maintains in *Nadja* (1928), 'tous les internements sont arbitraires. Je continue à ne pas voir pourquoi on priverait un être humain de liberté.'¹³ After all, the Surrealists aspired to free the human spirit rather than imprison it. Breton sympathises with the mentally ill and describes them as 'victimes de leur imagination'.¹⁴ He explains that their imagination encourages them to ignore certain rules thus threatening the stability of society. Perhaps they are not 'mad' at all but in rebellion against the world around them. Breton seems to overlook his experience at Saint-Dizier and the 'conditions de vie intolérables' of the mentally ill and suggests that they enjoy their experience since they remain indifferent to their confinement and take comfort in the realm of their imagination. Moreover, in 'Lettre aux Médecins-Chefs des Asiles de Fous' (1925), Breton(?) describes psychiatric hospitals as 'effroyables geôles' which are comparable to 'la caserne, à la prison, au bagné' and states that 'Les fous sont les victimes individuelles par excellence de la dictature sociale'.¹⁵ They are not only victims of their imaginations but victims of society. In *En bas*, Carrington can be considered as a victim of a world at war.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Breton, *Nadja*, p.166.

¹⁴ Breton, *Manifestes*, p.15.

¹⁵ 'Lettre aux Médecins-Chefs des Asiles de Fous', *La révolution surréaliste*, 3, 15 April 1925.

Unlike Carrington, Breton did not suffer psychic disorder himself and his account reveals that mental illness is a frightening experience. For Breton, hallucinations and illusions 'ne sont pas une source de jouissance négligeable' but rather a source of intense enjoyment.¹⁶ The noun 'jouissance' suggests that he associates hallucinations with sensual pleasure. Breton admires 'les confidences des fous' since they have access to their unconscious and also admires their honesty and innocence since they rather naively remain true to themselves.¹⁷ He boldly declares, 'Ce n'est pas la crainte de la folie qui nous [les Surréalistes] forcera à laisser en berne le drapeau de l'imagination.'¹⁸ Despite being aware of the dangers of psychic disorder, he affirms that they are not afraid of the very real possibility of mental illness in their exploration of the realms of the imagination and the unconscious which conveys his naivety. He seems to wilfully ignore his past experience at Saint-Dizier and offers a romanticised vision of psychic disorder as a creative rather than a destructive force.

It is necessary to interrogate the use of the terms 'la folie' and 'les fous'. The noun 'folie' denotes an 'altération plus ou moins grave de la santé psychique, entraînant des troubles du comportement.'¹⁹ However, in modern psychiatry, one uses the term 'maladie mentale' or 'troubles mentaux'.²⁰ Whilst speaking about his work as a medical assistant, Breton uses the terms 'troubles mentaux' and 'les

¹⁶ Breton, *Manifestes*, p.15.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.16.

¹⁹ *Le Petit Robert : Dictionnaire alphabétique et analogique de la langue française*, ed. by Josette Rey-Debove and Alain Rey (Paris: Dictionnaires Le Robert, 1967; repr. 2011), p.1066.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

égarements de l'esprit humain'.²¹ However, in his *Manifeste*, writing in a creative context, he uses the terms 'la folie' and 'les fous'.²² This suggests that the individuals whom Breton is writing about are not mentally unstable but rather refuse to conform to society. The terms 'mad', 'madhouse', 'asylum' were all of their time and so in this chapter I will use the more appropriate terms of psychic disorder, mental illness, and psychiatric hospital. Writing in a non-medical context, one could define psychic disorder as a (dangerous) confusion of the real and the imagined.

Breton and the Surrealists wrote extensively on psychic disorder and in 1930, Breton and Éluard collaborated on the volume *L'immaculée conception* (1930).²³ The section titled 'Les possessions' is a series of artistic-scientific experiments to simulate various psychopathologies - 'la débilité mentale', 'la manie aiguë', 'la paralysie générale', 'délire d'interprétation', and 'la démence précoce'. Their aim was to 'prouver que l'esprit, dressé poétiquement chez l'homme normal, est capable de reproduire dans ses grands traits les manifestations verbales les plus paradoxales, les plus excentriques'.²⁴ They seem to suggest that psychic disorder can be recreated in the mind of a 'homme normal' and dissolve the limitation between the states of lucidity and insanity. They continue, 'il est au pouvoir de cet esprit de se soumettre à volonté les principales idées délirantes sans qu'il y aille pour lui d'un trouble durable, sans que cela soit susceptible de compromettre en rien sa faculté d'équilibre' which

²¹ Breton, *Entretiens*, p.29 and p.30.

²² Breton, *Manifestes*, p.15.

²³ André Breton and Paul Éluard, *L'immaculée conception* ([Paris]: Seghers, 1961).

²⁴ *Ibid*, p.23.

suggests that they are nevertheless aware of the seriousness and reality of mental illness.²⁵

Breton and the Surrealists aligned psychic disorder with women. For example, in the second part of *Nadja*, the heroine descends into psychic disorder. Her behaviour becomes increasingly erratic which exasperates Breton and in the final pages we learn that she has been confined to the Vaucluse asylum.²⁶ In 'Le cinquantenaire de l'hystérie (1878-1928)', which was published in the eleventh issue of *La révolution surréaliste* in 1928, Louis Aragon and Breton celebrate hysteria as 'la plus grande découverte poétique de la fin du XIXe siècle' associating hysteria with aesthetics.²⁷ They admire a young hysterical woman 'la délicieuse X.L. (Augustine) [qui est] entrée à la Salpêtrière dans le service du Dr Charcot le 21 Octobre 1875' whose case study was published in *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière* (1878).²⁸ For Aragon and Breton, hysteria was 'un moyen suprême d'expression', a way to express unconscious desires through the body.²⁹ The article is illustrated with a montage of six photographs of a young woman (perhaps X.L. Augustine) in various

²⁵ Ibid, pp.23-24.

²⁶ Breton, *Nadja*, pp.159-160.

²⁷ Louis Aragon and André Breton, 'Le cinquantenaire de l'hystérie (1878-1928)', *La révolution surréaliste*, 11, 15 March 1928.

²⁸ Ibid. Bourneville et P. Regnard, *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière : Service de M. Charcot* (Paris: V. Adrien Delahaye & Cie, 1878)

<https://archive.org/details/iconographiepho00regngoog> [accessed 28 August 2018].

²⁹ Aragon and Breton, 'Le cinquantenaire de l'hystérie (1878-1928)'. David Lomas discusses the relation between hysteria, desire, and Surrealism in 'The Omnipotence of Desire: Surrealism, Psychoanalysis and Hysteria', in the exhibition catalogue *Surrealism: Desire Unbound*, ed. by Jennifer Mundy (London: Tate Publishing, 2001), pp.55-77.

convulsive, hysteric choreographed frames.³⁰ They are assembled under the collective title, 'Les attitudes passionnelles en 1878' aligning hysteria with erotic desire.

In addition, one can identify a link between the surrealist myth of woman as *femme-enfant* and mental illness. Chadwick states that 'the *femme-enfant* carried another liability for the woman artist: the element of instability, often bordering on madness, that was as much a part of her image as was her naiveté.'³¹ This association was inevitable since the *femme-enfant* was considered to be in touch with her unconscious, a source of unpredictability. She continues, 'Adopting madness as a creative pose for men and viewing it as a subject for scientific and poetic inquiry when it occurs in women [...] renders simulated madness a source of man's creativity, real madness a source of woman's. The man's is active, the woman's passive, powerless, and at the mercy of the unconscious.'³² For men, psychic disorder was a source of creative inspiration whereas for women it was a real, lived experience. This is most evident in Breton's *Nadja* in which he writes *about* a young woman's madness compared to Carrington's *En bas* in which she writes *with* her own madness.³³ Carrington was aware of this and in an interview she

³⁰ These photographs were first printed in *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière*. The first four photographs in the montage are captioned 'Attitudes passionnelles' with the following subtitles 'Appel', 'Erotisme', 'Extase 1878', and 'Moquerie'. Bourneville et P. Regnard, *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière*, no page numbers.

³¹ Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, p.74.

³² Ibid.

³³ Erich Hertz discusses the surrealist experience in Breton's *Nadja* in dialogue with Carrington's *En bas* in 'Disruptive Testimonies: The Stakes of Surrealist Experience in Breton and Carrington', *Symposium*, 64, 2 (2010), 89-104.

spoke of her anger at surrealist attitudes towards psychic disorder.³⁴ She declares 'Not Breton or anyone has ever seen the inside of a Spanish madhouse. But I don't regret my life' which exemplifies the difference between Breton's imagining of mental illness and Carrington's all too real experience.³⁵

In 'Prolégomènes à un troisième manifeste du surréalisme ou non' (1942), Breton lists Carrington as among 'les plus lucides et les plus audacieux d'aujourd'hui' along with Bataille, Callois, Duthuit, Masson, Mabille, Ernst, Étiemble, Péret, Calas, Seligmann, and Henein.³⁶ It is interesting (and perhaps ironic) that Breton identifies her as one of the most lucid individuals since two years earlier she suffered a mental health crisis and journeyed from lucidity to insanity (and back again). The fact that Carrington is the only woman mentioned conveys Breton's admiration of her bold creative oeuvre which he considers to be equal to that of the male Surrealists. In the introduction to Carrington in his *Anthologie de l'humour noir*, Breton suggests that her experience of psychic disorder had a positive effect on her creative oeuvre, 'les admirables toiles qu'elle a peintes depuis 1940, sans doute les plus chargées de « merveilleux » moderne, toutes pénétrées de lumière occulte'.³⁷ He imagines her post mental illness paintings to capture 'le merveilleux moderne' since she draws on her experience of a different world and different sources of knowledge including

³⁴ Interview with Leonora Carrington, New York, April 1983. Cited in Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, p.74.

³⁵ F. Orgambides, 'Leonora Carrington: "No me arrepiento de mi vida"', p.30. Cited in Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, p.48.

³⁶ André Breton, 'Prolégomènes à un troisième manifeste du surréalisme ou non' (1942), in *Manifestes*, p.155.

³⁷ Breton, *Anthologie* (1950), p.334.

magic and alchemy. His concept of a 'merveilleux moderne' points back to his *Manifeste* in which he observes that *le merveilleux* changes over time and to the figure of the 'le mannequin moderne' as an example of it. He acknowledges that Carrington's paintings have created a new version of the surrealist *merveilleux* inspired by her journey above and beyond the real.

Encouraged by Breton, Carrington first recorded her experience of psychic disorder in English in 1942 in New York.³⁸ Unfortunately, this manuscript was not published and subsequently lost during her move to Mexico. In Mexico City, inspired by Pierre Mabille's volume *Le miroir du merveilleux* (1940), she began to record her experience for a second time. Carrington dictated the narrative in French to Mabille's wife Jeanne Megnen in 1943. The text was published as *Down Below* in the New York surrealist journal *VVV* in February 1944 in a translation by Victor Llona (1886-1953).³⁹ This raises the question why did a Peruvian writer translate Carrington's text into English when that was her first language? The original French dictation was finally published in 1945 with a stock cover image coincidentally by Prassinós's brother, Mario.⁴⁰ The publication of the text as an article in the journal and then as a pamphlet suggests that it was well-received by the journal's readership perhaps because of its wide literary and scientific appeal and was recognised as able to stand alone as a narrative. Natalya Lusty suggests that 'Its inclusion as the very last contribution to the last issue of this important wartime journal, might even

³⁸ Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, p.47.

³⁹ Leonora Carrington, 'Down Below' (as told to Jeanne Megnen, translated from the French by Victor Llona), *VVV*, ed. by David Hare, 4, February 1944, pp.70-86.

⁴⁰ Leonora Carrington, *En bas*, recueilli par Jeanne Megnen (Paris: Fontaine, 1945).

suggest that Carrington was given the final word on 'female madness'.⁴¹ If this is the case, then she dismissed the surrealist imagining of psychic disorder as a state of mind to be aspired to and the myth of woman as the unstable *femme-enfant*. She also adds that since the final issue of *VVV* was devoted to the question of collective myth, it 'asks us to read the essay beyond the putative authentic experience of female madness.'⁴² Carrington's account presents female psychic disorder as an individual experience which she relates through alchemical symbolism. A second French edition was published in 1973 with the addition of a letter by Carrington to Henri Parisot and the most recent French issue was published in 2013 with an introduction by Annie Le Brun.⁴³ The 1973 and 2013 French editions are reissues of the 1945 one.

There is some uncertainty as to whether Carrington or Megnen wrote the 1945 French edition. Aberth states that 'First she [Carrington] talked it through with [...] Megnen, who later edited the original version' suggesting that Carrington wrote it down and it was then edited by Megnen.⁴⁴ Warner also states that Carrington talked it through with Megnen.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, regardless of whether it was written by Carrington or Megnen, it is an autobiographical rather than a semi-autobiographical work. What makes a text autobiographical is not the author's

⁴¹ Natalya Lusty, 'Experience and knowledge in Down Below', in *Leonora Carrington and the international avant-garde*, ed. by Eburne and McAra, p.58.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Leonora Carrington, *En bas* (Paris: E. Losfeld, 1973). Leonora Carrington, *En bas* (Le Vigan: l'arachnoïde, 2013).

⁴⁴ Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, p.48.

⁴⁵ Warner, 'Introduction', in Carrington, *The House of Fear*, p.17.

identity but the text's relationship to reality. Megnen is not necessarily less reliable than Carrington. In fact, the latter's anecdotes typed up by Megnen could be every bit as reliable as if they had been written by Carrington. Moreover, semi-autobiography suggests a distance on the author's part rather than the involvement of another writer. Another autobiographical surrealist account of a woman's experience of psychic disorder is Zürn's *L'Homme-jasmin* (1971).⁴⁶ Interestingly, a note at the back of the 2017 English issue of *Down Below* reads that the text was 'reviewed and revised for factual accuracy' by Carrington in 1987.⁴⁷ However, the reader questions how can the text be edited on the grounds of precision almost five decades after her experience. This reissue of the 1944 English translation features a postscript as told by Carrington to Marina Warner in July 1987 in New York in which she recounts the events that took place following her discharge from the psychiatric hospital.⁴⁸

En bas can be characterised as an alternative surrealist narrative. In fact, Rosemont describes it 'one of the most compelling surrealist texts'.⁴⁹ This raises the question what makes a text surrealist? Is it its form, its content, its themes? Or whether it is written by an individual considered to be a Surrealist working in the context of Surrealism? As Caws questions, 'Is it by some set of criteria relating to the work of art or anti-art: strange imagery, apparently disconnected writing or thinking,

⁴⁶ See Unica Zürn, *L'Homme-Jasmin*, trans. by Ruth Henry et Robert Valançay (Paris: Gallimard, 1971). It would be interesting to compare Carrington's and Zürn's accounts of psychic disorder.

⁴⁷ Leonora Carrington, *Down Below* (New York: New York Review Books, 2017), p.69.

⁴⁸ This postscript was first printed in Carrington, *The House of Fear*, pp.210-214.

⁴⁹ *Surrealist Women*, ed. by Rosemont, p.123.

an eccentric look, an odd subject matter, that is to say, something we judge to seem “Surrealist” by whatever criteria we accept?’⁵⁰ I argue that *En bas* is a surrealist text in its subject matter of psychic disorder, its subversion of the convention of diary writing, and its use of language and imagery. Above all, it presents her own perspective on Surrealism, on the surrealist attitude towards psychic disorder and on the surrealist image of woman as *femme-enfant*. One could argue that it is not a product of Surrealism but one that produces it in its nightmarish narrative. Moreover, it is surrealist in its fulfilment of Breton’s aspiration to bring together the opposing states of ‘la vie et la mort, le réel et l’imagination, le passé et le futur, le communicable et l’incommunicable, le haut et le bas’.⁵¹ In the text, Carrington conflates her body and society, the self with the other, and the real and the imaginary; all boundaries and borders are permeable.

En bas is written as and divided into five diary entries dated ‘Le 23 Août 1943’, ‘24 Août’, ‘Mercredi 25 août’, ‘Le 26 août, jeudi’, and ‘26 Août, Vendredi’. This suggests that the text was written over five days from Monday to Friday. However, the last two diary entries are both dated ‘26 août’. On the one hand, this could be a mistake and the final entry should read ‘27 août’. On the other hand, it is possible that she wrote two entries on the same day and so the day and not the date is incorrect. Mabile reveals that Carrington read and reflected during the day and wrote during the night over four days.⁵² Perhaps she wrote on the Thursday evening continuing into the early hours of Friday morning. The reader expects these dates to

⁵⁰ *Surrealist Painters and Poets*, ed. by Caws, p.xix.

⁵¹ André Breton, ‘Second manifeste du surréalisme (1930)’, in *Manifestes*, pp.72-73.

⁵² Mabile, ‘A propos de « En bas » de Léonora Carrington’, in *Traversées de nuit*, p.37.

correspond to the days on which the events took place. However, in true surrealist style, Carrington subverts the convention of diary writing and the dates mark the days on which she is writing about her past experience, conflating the present and the past. Moreover, the diary entries suggest a recollection of memories presented as a narrative as opposed to a reconstruction. However, writing in the present about the past raises the question whether one can capture past events with precision. Similarly, the second part of Breton's surrealist novel *Nadja* (1928) is written as a series of diary entries which date from 4 to 12 October 1926.⁵³ However, these dates do relate to the events that take place. The use of diary entries in both Carrington's *En bas* and Breton's *Nadja* seek to emphasise the reality of the experience recounted and the use of precise dates in *En bas* alludes to a medical case study.

In addition to diary writing, *En bas* conflates different genres and can be considered as a hybrid narrative. Conley describes it as a 'hybrid text' in the way that it was written down in English, lost, then remembered and told to Megnen in French, before being published in translation.⁵⁴ It reflects the way that Carrington moved from one language to another throughout her life, from English to French to Spanish. The text is also an oral account since it was dictated to Megnen which alludes to the tradition of storytelling. As we read the text, we listen to Carrington narrating her horrifying experience. Conley argues that women are traditionally storytellers more than writers and that *En bas* reflects this tradition.⁵⁵ However, I argue the opposite

⁵³ Breton, *Nadja*.

⁵⁴ Conley, 'Beyond the Border: Leonora Carrington's Terrible Journey', in *Automatic Woman*, p.59.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p.64.

since Carrington related her experience to Megnen who wrote it down. In addition to the unusual way that it was written, *En bas* can be considered as a hybrid text in regards to its content. It features hallucinations and visions, a transition from fact to fiction ('Je crains de me laisser aller à la fiction, véridique, mais incomplète') and back again, and a hand-drawn map.⁵⁶ It is not a map where 'X' marks the spot of buried treasure (or in this case lucidity or self-identity) but a plan of the institution and its grounds. Or as Ara Merjian observes a map of 'her *experience* of the asylum'.⁵⁷

In his essay 'A propos de « En Bas » de Léonora Carrington', Mabilille states 'Cette collection est à peu près exclusivement composée de poèmes, de contes, de récits fantastiques et, de ce fait, une confusion a pu naître quant à la nature même de *En bas*.'⁵⁸ He acknowledges that the genre of the text is unclear but admits 'Il ne s'agit en effet pas d'une œuvre ayant une volonté littéraire, mais d'un document humain, établi avec le plus de rigueur qu'il a été possible de le faire.'⁵⁹ I argue that the text is of literary interest since the way that it is written, its themes, language, and use of imagery are of great importance. Perhaps in stating that it is not literary, he means that it has a scientific value as a medical case study. His description of it as a 'document humain' denotes a document produced by human agency. It demonstrates Carrington's ability to recall and relive her experience of psychic

⁵⁶ Carrington, *En bas* (1945), p.30.

⁵⁷ Ara H. Merjian, "Genealogical gestation': Leonora Carrington between modernism and art history', in *Leonora Carrington and the international avant-garde*, ed. by Eburne and McAra, p.43.

⁵⁸ Mabilille, 'A propos de « En bas »', in *Traversées de nuit*, p.33.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

disorder through the body and demonstrates her inner strength and sheer determination to overcome her fear and to free herself from this past trauma. The adjective 'rigueur' suggests that the document was written with accuracy and alludes to its authenticity as an autobiographical account. Of the role of Megnen, Mabile relates that it was his wife who offered to help Carrington 'classer ses souvenirs et à les préciser'.⁶⁰ He likens the text written down by Megnen to 'une observation scientifique ; rien n'a été supprimé, aucune interprétation n'a été proposée' which emphasises her role as a reliable scribe.⁶¹ Overall, the text is hybrid literary-artistic-scientific document.

Carrington begins her first diary entry dated 'Le 23 Août 1943' with 'Il y a maintenant exactement trois ans, j'étais internée dans la clinique du Dr. Moralès, à Santander (Espagne), considérée par le Dr Pardo, de Madrid, et le consul britannique, comme folle incurable.'⁶² This reveals she is writing three years after she was confined to Dr Moralès's clinic and therefore raises questions as to the text's reliability. Although the account is remembered and not reconstructed, it relies on her memory of past events. Carrington's collective diagnosis as 'folle incurable' is ironic as fortunately her mental illness was temporary. She spent over four months at the clinic from mid-August to the end of December and was released thanks to the intervention of her cousin, Guillermo Gil who worked as a doctor at the main hospital in Santander.⁶³ However, Carrington did not fully recover from the

⁶⁰ Mabile, 'A propos de « En bas »', in *Traversées de nuit*, p.37.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Carrington, *En bas* (1945), p.7.

⁶³ 'Postscript', in Carrington, *Down Below* (2017), p.63.

psychological and physical abuse that she suffered at the clinic and was unable to talk about what happened there over seventy years later.⁶⁴ This conveys the long-term psychological effect that this experience had on her. The diagnosis of Carrington as 'folle incurable' implies that she was written off as 'mad' and locked up as Breton discusses.⁶⁵

However, it is uncertain whether Carrington was 'mad' at all. Many scholars have accepted that she was 'mad' or 'insane' without question. For example, Warner describes *En bas* as an 'exceptionally clear and detailed account of the experience of going insane'.⁶⁶ However, it is much more complex than this. Gambrell accurately questions, 'Was Carrington's internment justified given her state of mind in 1939, or was she interned for a socially unacceptable response to trauma? Was pronouncing her "incurably insane" a reasonable diagnosis or just medical hyperbole?'⁶⁷ I argue that Carrington was confined to a psychiatric institution because her unconventional behaviour and theories were not considered as socially acceptable. In a filmed interview, Carrington recalls that she suffered a 'nervous breakdown' and in a play on words, Orenstein characterises her 'breakdown' as a 'breakthrough' which has positive, liberating connotations.⁶⁸ She describes it as 'a "breakthrough" – to another dimension, to a world of magical and visionary domains' and that whilst interned

⁶⁴ 'In conversation about Leonora Carrington with Joanna Moorhead and Francesco Manacorda'.

⁶⁵ Breton, *Manifestes*, p.15.

⁶⁶ Warner, 'Introduction', in Carrington, *The House of Fear*, p.16.

⁶⁷ Ann Hoff, "I was Convulsed, Pitiably Hideous": Convulsive Shock Treatment in Leonora Carrington's *Down Below*, *Journal of Modern Literature*, 32, 2 (2009), 83-98 (p.84).

⁶⁸ Acker. Orenstein, *The Theater of the Marvelous*, pp.122-123.

'her inner universe of dream imagery, with mythic and archetypal resonances, began to emerge.'⁶⁹ In *En bas*, Carrington experiences a personal and spiritual journey and travels to another world 'en bas'. In her monograph, Aberth states that

Over 50 years later Dr Luis Morales [...] wondered if her diagnosis by the conventional Catholic doctors was influenced by her 'Surrealist' world-view, which stressed a disturbing belief in the magical, primitive and illogical, and rejected notions of a noble humanity and of civilisation in general.

'Surrealism was a prophylaxis' Morales asserted, and he wondered if Carrington, in 1941, was actually sane in her adaptation to society as it was at that time and if now she would even be classified as ill.⁷⁰

Here, Dr Moralès associates Surrealism and psychic disorder. However, the idea that Surrealism leads to mental illness is far-fetched. I argue that Carrington's mental health crisis was a reaction to Ernst's internment and a response to the chaos and confusion of the world at war around her. As Edward James argues, Carrington 'was more inspired than mad and more a casualty of the Nazi juggernaut than of any mental weakness' and moreover a victim of society.⁷¹

One of the main surrealist themes in *En bas* is the transgression of boundaries. On the opening page, Carrington states, 'Depuis ma rencontre fortuite avec vous, que je considère comme le plus clairvoyant, je me suis mise, il y a une semaine, à réunir les fils qui auraient pu m'amener à traverser la première frontière

⁶⁹ Ibid, p.123.

⁷⁰ Luis Morales, 'La enfermedad de Leonora', *El País, La Cultura* (Madrid), 18 April 1993, p.31. Cited in Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, pp.46-47.

⁷¹ Edward James, 'Leonora Carrington', in *Leonora Carrington*, ed. by Schlieker, p.37.

de la connaissance.⁷² Here, the second person pronoun 'vous' could refer to Mabile, Megnen, or the reader. Having discussed the role of Mabile and his wife, I propose that 'vous' refers to Megnen to whom Carrington is dictating the text. The meeting of Carrington and Megnen can be considered as an example of surrealist chance encounter. Here, Carrington introduces the idea of transgressing boundaries and the idea that there is a psychological border between sanity and insanity. For Carrington, crossing this border offered her a different source of knowledge. She calls on Megnen to help her 'voyager de l'autre côté de cette frontière en me conservant lucide, et en me permettant de mettre et de retirer à volonté le masque qui me préservera contre l'hostilité du conformisme.'⁷³ Her appeal to Megnen to help her travel to the realm of insanity while remaining sane conveys the idea that there is a boundary between these two states or moreover between conformity and non-conformity and that one can consciously move between them. This recalls Breton's attempts to simulate psychic disorder in *L'Immaculée conception*. Carrington does not state that psychic disorder is a conscious choice but that non-conformity is. As Mabile states 'Ce voyage en Espagne fut en réalité un voyage sur l'autre versant de la vie mentale ; c'est cette plongée que relate *En bas*. Le gouffre fut exploré' and it is this gap between the real and the imagined which leads to *le merveilleux*.⁷⁴ As mentioned, Carrington was fortunate to recover from her mental illness and Breton states 'Au retour d'un de ces voyages dont on a peu de chances de revenir [...] Leonora Carrington a gardé la nostalgie des rivages qu'elle a abordés et

⁷² Carrington, *En bas* (1945), p.7.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Mabile, 'A propos de « En bas » de Léonora Carrington', in *Traversées de nuit*, p.35.

n'a pas désespéré de les atteindre à nouveau, cette fois sans coup férir et comme munie d'un permis de circuler à volonté dans les deux sens.'⁷⁵ He imagines Carrington's psychic journey as a physical one writing of the shores that she has reached and seems to admire her ability to move consciously and freely between the states of lucidity and insanity and suggests that this is something to which one should aspire to.

This mask is perhaps a mask of non-conformity and the idea of being able to put it on and take it off at will implies that refusing to adhere to social norms is a conscious choice. It is a choice not to conform rather than a choice to be 'mad'. Carrington believes that the mask will be able to protect her against conformism and preserve her freedom and identity. This is interesting because one thinks of a mask as a pretence as discussed in 'La débutante' but here it seems the opposite. The mask does not assign her a new identity but protects her individual identity from a collective one. Throughout her life, Carrington refused to conform and continually asserted her independence and individuality. Later in *En bas*, having arrived in Madrid, Carrington attempts to free herself from all social constraints and tries to give away her identity papers and Ernst's passport.⁷⁶ In Carrington's painting *En bas* (1941), one of the four strange hybrid figures wears a mask which resembles the face of a minotaur with possessed green eyes and a huge grin.⁷⁷ In her right hand, she holds a white human face. It could be said that she has removed her face and put on the mask of non-conformity. Moreover, the circus tent framing the left-hand

⁷⁵ Breton, *Anthologie* (1950), p.334.

⁷⁶ Carrington, *En bas* (1945), p.22.

⁷⁷ Leonora Carrington, *Down Below* (1941). Reproduced in Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, p.47.

side of the image alludes to the idea of social behaviour as a performance and suggests that maybe insanity is a more natural state. In fact, in *L'immaculée conception*, Breton and Éluard express a dislike of reason 'qui nous dénie quotidiennement le droit de nous exprimer par les moyens qui nous sont instinctifs' which reinforces the idea that psychic disorder is closer to man's natural state.⁷⁸

Carrington met Mabile and Megnen at Remedios Varo's and Benjamin Péret's house on the Calle Gabino Barreda in Mexico City in the summer of 1943. Gunther Gerzso's painting *The Days of Gabina Barreda Street* (1944) celebrates this time and depicts Varo wearing a cat-like mask and Carrington entwined in vines.⁷⁹ In his essay on *En bas*, Mabile recalls that Carrington was still trembling from her experience three years on and that her memories were 'à la fois singulièrement lumineux (quant à la perception claire qu'elle avait possédée à certains instants) et effroyables comme un affreux cauchemar'.⁸⁰ Her vivid and horrifying memories of the physical and psychological abuse that she suffered are related in *En bas*. Mabile relates that he gave Carrington a copy of *Le miroir du merveilleux* and that she was struck by 'la volonté d'abolir les frontières entre le physique et la pensée, entre l'être et le monde extérieur.'⁸¹ During her experience of psychic disorder, she too experienced the abolition of boundaries between her self and the world around her. It is evident that Carrington was familiar with Mabile's volume since she begins her

⁷⁸ Breton and Éluard, *L'immaculée conception*, p.24.

⁷⁹ Gunther Gerzso, *The Days of Gabina Barreda Street* (1944). Reproduced in Martica Sawin, *Surrealism in Exile and the Beginning of the New York School* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: The MIT Press, 1995), p.278.

⁸⁰ Mabile, 'A propos de « En bas »', in *Traversées de nuit*, p.35.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, p.36.

fifth diary entry with a direct reference to the text.⁸² He seems to take credit for her writing of and the images present in *En bas*. However, it is important to remember that she wrote the first draft of the text without the help of Mabelle or Megnen. Having read the volume, Carrington became aware of the importance to externalise the memories of 'cet épisode morbide' rather than to internalise them.⁸³ It inspired her to '*tirer au clair* tout ce trouble intérieur qui pesait encore sur elle et la maintenait dans une angoissante incertitude.'⁸⁴ The verbalising of her trauma became a kind of therapy for Carrington to be able to move on from the past, 'Je suis bien obligée de terminer mon récit afin de sortir de cette angoisse.'⁸⁵ I do not disagree that Carrington was inspired by Mabelle's volume but perhaps not to the extent that he imagines.⁸⁶

Carrington begins her account in medias res from the time when she was living in Saint-Martin d'Ardèche and Ernst was taken away (for a second time) to a concentration camp in May 1940. He was arrested as a 'suspect' and taken to an internment camp at Loriol-sur-Drôme and then transferred to the Camp des Milles. His imprisonment had a huge impact on Carrington and triggered her descent into a mental health crisis. Following his internment, Carrington, aged twenty-four, found

⁸² Carrington, *En bas* (1945), pp.70-71.

⁸³ Mabelle, 'A propos de « En bas » de Léonora Carrington', in *Traversées de nuit*, p.37.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Carrington, *En bas* (1945), p.46.

⁸⁶ Natalya Lusty reads *En bas* through Carrington's encounter with Pierre Mabelle and the other Surrealists in exile in New York during the war in 'Experience and knowledge in *Down Below*', in *Leonora Carrington and the international avant-garde*, ed. by Eburne and McAra, pp.57-71.

herself alone (her family had cut off all familial ties with her) and living in a foreign country on the eve of war. Her reaction to Ernst's arrest was at first emotional and bodily. She spent many hours crying and making herself sick, 'je m'étais livrée, vingt-quatre heures durant, à des vomissements volontaires'.⁸⁷ She reasons 'J'espérais alors distraire ma souffrance par ces spasmes violents qui écartelaient mon estomac comme l'aurait fait des tremblements de terre.'⁸⁸ She tries to counteract her psychological suffering with physical sensation. These self-induced violent spasms foreshadow her later drug-induced convulsions. She compares them to an earthquake which exemplifies their intensity and the shock of the outbreak of war on the world. Over the following three weeks, Carrington ate little, drank wine, and tended to her vines and potatoes.

Ernst was first interned in 1939 at Largentière as an 'étranger' and transferred to the Camp des Milles. During this time, Carrington wrote a number of letters to her friend, Leonor Fini. In addition to *En bas*, these letters provide an insight into the reality of her mental health crisis and also convey the importance of friendships between the women who worked in the context of Surrealism. In a letter dated September 1939, Carrington pens, 'I'm deprived, tortured and half mad [...]' Listen, Leonor, Max is in a concentration camp. I'm not allowed to see him. I hardly speak to anyone. I am becoming senile.'⁸⁹ She is conscious of her deteriorating

⁸⁷ Carrington, *En bas* (1945), pp.8-9.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, p.9.

⁸⁹ Letter from Leonora Carrington to Leonor Fini, 16 September 1939. From the Leonora Carrington Papers, Aristophil Archives, Paris. Cited in Whitney Chadwick, *The Militant Muse: Love, War and the Women of Surrealism* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2017), p.72. Chadwick also writes on these letters in 'D'Un jour à l'autre: A Tale of Love, War and Friendship',

mental health and the adjectives 'deprived, tortured and half mad' and 'senile' convey a sense of desperation. The adjective 'half mad' suggests that she retains some lucidity and alludes to the way that she recounts her experience with 'lucid madness'.⁹⁰ She continues, 'I try to draw but I can only do horses and that has become an obsession. I have terrible thoughts all day and most of the night. Another horrible sign of my condition – I get ill if I see a cake. I am rotting away. Max writes that he is being well treated, but if things continue I will end up in a madhouse.'⁹¹ Carrington writes of her isolation, anxiety, inability to eat and sleep, and predicts her eventual confinement to a psychiatric hospital which evokes pathos. In one drawing from this period, *He is Rollicking Humour* (1941), a black horse is being bitten by a sharp-toothed hybrid female figure. It illustrates her physical and psychological pain.

In another letter, Carrington pens,

I have...noticed signs of madness in myself. I eat alone on a terrace with five cats. At night I walk from one side of the terrace to the other. I count the steps I take (17) and I believe that someone follows me – truly there is no one but I cannot convince myself – this seems very simple but it is very frightening...If only I could see Max it would be less terrible...⁹²

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https://www.research.manchester.ac.uk/portal/files/63517393/surrealism_issue_9.pdf

[accessed 27 November 2018].

⁹⁰ See Andrea Gremel's paper 'Lucid Madness as Method? Surrealist Style in Leonora Carrington's *Down Below*' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lzpa839ExcQ> [accessed 22 March 2019]. This paper was presented at the 'Leonora Carrington Symposium', Edge Hill University, 30 June 2017.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

She experiences paranoia which anticipates the hallucinations that she has during the car journey to Spain in the first diary entry. In both letters, the short sentences convey a sense of desperation and panic. During the car journey, Carrington becomes unsure whether what she 'sees' is real or imagined. She imagines lorries with severed limbs hanging over the sides and coffins lining the roadside which recalls the title of Prassinós's story 'Suite de membres'. These morbid, nightmarish visions evoke fear, 'J'avais très peur : Ça pouvait la mort.'⁹³ She becomes unsure of herself and the reader is also uncertain as to what is real or imagined, fact or fiction as the lines become increasingly blurred.

As mentioned, Carrington's reaction to Ernst's internment is at first physical. She then begins to identify her body with the world around her, the self with the other. In the first diary entry, Carrington identifies her body with society, 'Mon estomac était le siège de cette société, mais aussi le lieu dans lequel les éléments de la terre s'unissaient à moi.'⁹⁴ She imagines her stomach as the centre of society and identifies the human body with the social body. She also identifies the biological and the political since 'siège' means 'seat' in a political context. Carrington continues, 'C'était, pour employer votre image, le *miroir* de la terre, dont la réflexion contient la même réalité que le reflété. Ce miroir – mon estomac – a dû être lavé des épaisses couches de crasse (les formules admises) afin de bien refléter la terre, clairement et fidèlement'.⁹⁵ She imagines her body as a mirror-image of the Earth or solar system. Her body reflects society although not a harmonious one but a world at war. Later,

⁹³ Carrington, *En bas* (1945), pp.14-15.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

she imagines her face as a map of the world, 'Ne vois-tu pas qu'il [mon visage] est la représentation exacte du monde ?'⁹⁶ As Aaron Winslow states, the (female) body becomes 'the site of social antagonisms, a reflection of society, the cure for which is vicious, volatile purgings'.⁹⁷ The female body becomes a mirror-image of society which is being destroyed by men. She internalises the world around her in an attempt to comprehend the incomprehensibility of the world at war for a second time in history. Annie Le Brun suggests that Carrington was thrown into 'un abîme intérieur d'autant plus terrifiant qu'elle ne va plus pouvoir le différencier du chaos de l'Europe en guerre.'⁹⁸ The imagining of her body as a mirror image or microcosm of society creates a confusion between the identities of the self and the other.

Perhaps Carrington's metaphor was inspired by Mabille's volume in which his search for the definition of 'merveilleux' leads him to 'miroir' which he defines as 'le plus banal et le plus extraordinaire des instruments magiques'.⁹⁹ The mirror is ordinary in that it is a familiar object and at the same time extraordinary in that it allows one to see themselves not as others see them but as how they see themselves. Mabille writes on the mirror in relation to the self and the way that it joins 'le moi et le soi' and transforms existence into representation.¹⁰⁰ However, in her account, Carrington joins the self with the other and her body represents the

⁹⁶ Carrington, *En bas* (1945), p.25.

⁹⁷ Aaron Winslow, 'Down Below – Leonora Carrington', 2 May 2017 <http://www.full-stop.net/2017/05/02/reviews/aaron-winslow/down-below-leonora-carrington/> [accessed 30 July 2019].

⁹⁸ Annie Le Brun, 'Dévoilé autant que possible', in Carrington, *En bas* (2013), pp.5-14.

⁹⁹ Mabille, *Le Miroir de merveilleux*, p.22.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p.23.

world around her. In fact, one could argue that Carrington, like Alice, crosses over into a world where everything is upside down, the other way round as in Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*.¹⁰¹ She expresses the need to cleanse herself of 'les formules admises' in other words of traditions, conventions, and patriarchal ideologies. The notion of cleansing is a recurrent theme in the avant-garde and Dada artist and writer Tristan Tzara (1896-1963) imagines 'Dada is a new type; a mixture of man, naphthaline [sic, naphthaline], sponge, animal made of ebonite and beefsteak, prepared with soap for cleansing the brain'.¹⁰² Perhaps this Dada soap is to cleanse the brain of the insanities of a world gone mad as the First World War raged on in Europe. As Winslow states, for Carrington 'the body [...] stands as the primary medium for experiencing and analyzing the world.'¹⁰³ It is through her body that she is able to interpret the world around her and access something beyond the everyday, *le merveilleux*. She transgresses the boundary between the body and the social body, the internal and the external, the individual and the collective, and identifies the self with the other. The significance of Carrington's identification of the body with the social body is that the individual comes to represent the collective. Overall, Carrington identifies the body as a microcosm of the social body (the macrocosm).

¹⁰¹ Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass* (London: Harper Press, 2013).

¹⁰² Tristan Tzara, 'Authorization', *New York Dada*, 2, April 1921. Cited in *Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender, and Identity*, ed. by Naomi Sawelson-Gorse (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: The MIT Press, 1998), p.xi.

¹⁰³ Winslow, 'Down Below – Leonora Carrington'.

Carrington develops strange, complex political theories to make sense of the world at war around her. She believes that the Nazi Van Ghen is hypnotising the city and its people 'la guerre mondiale était faite à base d'hypnotisme par un groupe de gens, Hitler et Cie., représentés en Espagne par Van Ghen' combining the real and the imagined.¹⁰⁴ And in one scene, Carrington tears up newspapers which she believes are examples of propaganda which can be compared to the scene of the newspapers blowing in the wind in Man Ray's *L'Etoile de mer* (1928).¹⁰⁵ As mentioned, it is in fact not her strange behaviour but her strange political theories which result in her confinement. She was confined to a psychiatric institution because her reaction was not considered as socially acceptable. She relates 'Dans la confusion politique et la chaleur terrible, je me convainquis que Madrid était l'estomac du monde et que moi j'étais chargée de guérir cet appareil digestif.'¹⁰⁶ She imagines that the city is the stomach of the world aligning the social body and the human body and imagines that the world is a body and the city is the (displaced) centre of the world combining the political, societal, and the biological. She feels that it is her responsibility to cure the world taking on an overwhelming, insurmountable task. She continues that 'La dysenterie [sic, dysenterie] que j'eus par la suite n'était que la *maladie* de Madrid réalisée dans mon intestin.'¹⁰⁷ Her intestinal infection is not an individual illness but the collective political 'illness' of

¹⁰⁴ Carrington, *En bas* (1945), p.26.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p.25. Man Ray, *L'étoile de mer* (1928).

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p.21.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

the city. She internalises the world around her, a world sick with war and believes that she physically embodies the city.

In addition to identifying her body with society, Carrington identifies her body with the machine. This is interesting since the machine is a twentieth-century avant-garde trope. After three weeks of suffering alone in Saint-Martin d'Ardèche, her English friend and fellow artist, Catherine Yarrow, accompanied by the Hungarian Michel Lucas, arrives. With the Germans fast approaching, Yarrow persuades Carrington to leave with them for Spain. She accepts on the basis that Spain represents 'un lieu de découverte', the hope that she will be able to obtain a visa for Max in Madrid, and finally because of an irrational fear of futuristic robots ('êtres automatiques, sans pensée et sans chair').¹⁰⁸ She imagines Spain as a country of discovery and moreover of self-discovery and later packs a suitcase with a tag that reads 'RÉVÉLATION'.¹⁰⁹ Throughout her journey 'en bas', she learns of the injustice of society, her vincibility, and of her self-identity. In fact, Edward James describes the narrative as 'self-revelation'.¹¹⁰

Soon after setting out in Yarrow's cramped Fiat, the brakes on the car become jammed. Carrington recounts,

Nous roulions normalement quand, à vingt kilomètres de Saint-Martin, la voiture s'arrêta, les freins coincés [...] « Coincées » ! Moi aussi, j'étais coincée en moi-même par des forces étrangères à ma volonté consciente et j'étais certaine que la puissance de mon anxiété avait agi sur le mécanisme de la

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, p.12.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p.13.

¹¹⁰ James, 'Leonora Carrington', in *Leonora Carrington*, ed. by Schlieker, p.43.

voiture, l'avait paralysé. C'était le premier moment d'identification avec le monde hors de mon corps. J'étais la voiture.¹¹¹

Here, Carrington explicitly identifies with the broken-down car. While the car is stuck on the geographical border between France and Spain, Carrington is on the verge on a mental health crisis; the geographical mirrors the psychological. She believes that she is being controlled by evil forces and that she is no longer in control of her own thoughts. In this episode, Carrington identifies her body with the machine, the biological with the mechanical. The brakeless car mirrors the way that Carrington will now accelerate towards a nervous breakdown. It is clear that as she loses a connection with the self, she gains a connection to the world around her. The image of Carrington (or woman) as an automobile recalls Raoul Hausmann's photomontage *Fiat Modes* which depicts a wheel made out of a collage of women's legs with a woman's face at the centre. As Julie Wosk states these body parts are metonyms for the whole and present woman as a mechanism or machine.¹¹²

The machine and the mechanical play an important role in Surrealism. For example, the surrealist practice of *écriture automatique* alludes to a mechanical way of thinking without conscious thought and in his *Manifeste*, Breton refers to the poet as a 'modeste appareil enregistreur'.¹¹³ In Leger's short black and white avant-garde film *Ballet mécanique* (1924), the viewer experiences a mechanical choreographed dance. The viewer is presented with a succession of images of working mechanisms,

¹¹¹ Carrington, *En bas* (1945), pp.13-14.

¹¹² Wosk, Julie, *My Fair Ladies: Female Robots, Androids, and Other Artificial Eves* (New Brunswick; New Jersey; London: Rutgers University Press, 2015), p.86.

¹¹³ Breton, *Manifestes*, p.39.

such as cogs and pendulums, in motion which are presented at varying speeds and angles. The images of mechanical parts are juxtaposed with the image of a woman's eye which contrasts the machine and the female human body. In the narrative, Carrington does not juxtapose the human and the machine but identifies the human body with the mechanical body. Another surrealist example of the body as machine is Dalí's *Lobster Telephone* (1936) which assembles the animal body and a human invention.¹¹⁴ Moreover, in Francis Picabia's Dada magazine *391* there are numerous images of machines, mechanisms, and mechanical parts.¹¹⁵ For example, the image of the propeller captioned 'ANE' on the front cover of the fifth issue (June 1917) combines the visual mechanical part and the verbal animal and the image of a lightbulb captioned 'AMÉICAINE' on the front cover of the sixth issue (July 1917) combines the visual bulb with the verbal female body in a subversion of the relation between the text and image, the signifier and signified.¹¹⁶

Carrington returns to and extends the metaphor of being jammed later in the narrative. In Andorra, she recounts the difficulty that she had walking in the mountains since she became jammed 'comme la « Fiat » de Catherine'.¹¹⁷ She relates 'Je me coinçais dans mon angoisse hors de tout pouvoir de description. Je me coinçais dans les mouvements de mon corps.'¹¹⁸ She is unable to think clearly or to walk freely and has become physically and psychologically paralysed. She later

¹¹⁴ Dalí, *Lobster Telephone* (1936).

¹¹⁵ *Francis Picabia 391*, ed. by Sanouillet.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, p.47 and p.49.

¹¹⁷ Carrington, *En bas* (1945), p.16.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.17.

remarks that it is her responsibility to 'délivrer le monde coincé comme moi et la « Fiat » de Catherine' which suggests that the mechanism of the world has been corroded by war.¹¹⁹ Cottenet-Hage states that 'Through this mirroring, osmosis had opened the Self to the outside, and the bad, as well as the good, was introjected, literally 'jamming' the psychic processes and robbing her of rational control. However, though the pain of disorganization was great, it was to be matched by a sense of exhilaration, of feeling completely one with the world of animals and nature.'¹²⁰ Here, she aligns the natural process of osmosis with the jammed mechanism of the machine and anticipates the way that Carrington comes to identify the self with the natural world.

In addition to identifying her body with society and the machine, she aligns herself with nature. She seeks an agreement between nature, her mind, and her body. She recounts that one day she went to mountains alone and lay down on her stomach 'avec la sensation d'être entièrement absorbée par la terre.'¹²¹ She seems to want to rid herself of social embodiment in favour of a closer connection with the natural world. She relates that although she had difficulty walking in the mountains at first, 'au bout de quelques jours, je négociai des sauts, grimpai sur des murs à pic avec la facilité d'une chèvre.'¹²² She is aware that the sight of a young woman skipping in the mountains would have raised concerns as to her state of mind but

¹¹⁹ Ibid, pp.26-27.

¹²⁰ Madeleine Cottenet-Hage, 'The Body Subversive: Corporeal Imagery in Carrington, Prassinis and Mansour', in *Surrealism and Women*, ed. by Caws and others, p.82.

¹²¹ Carrington, *En bas* (1945), p.18.

¹²² Ibid.

that 'Je ne pensais guère à l'effet de mes expériences sur les humains qui m'entouraient et, finalement, ils gagnèrent.'¹²³ The use of the noun 'expériences' suggests that Carrington was fully aware of the strangeness of her behaviour at that time. It recalls the surrealist jokes that Carrington played on others as described by Breton in his introduction to her in the *Anthologie* (1950).¹²⁴ He relates the way that she began to cover her feet 'patiemment' with mustard in a restaurant and prepared recipes from an English sixteenth-century cookbook. One wonders whether these were surrealist experiments on her fellow diners or whether they convey her unexpected, unpredictable, and unconventional behaviour. In the narrative, she then seeks a harmony with animals (horses, goats, and birds) and speaks of 'un langage d'attouchement'.¹²⁵ In a letter to Fini, Carrington pens 'My body has changed into some sort of animal. I would not be able to say what. Perhaps some resemblance to me because I have always felt that I have some horses growing on my head.'¹²⁶ She had always identified with animals but in her altered state of consciousness this association is intensified. She develops a way of communicating with animals through the sense of touch. However, she admits 'il m'est fort difficile de décrire depuis que mes sens ont perdu l'acuité de perception qu'ils avaient alors.'¹²⁷ She recalls that she was able to approach wild animals without causing 'une fuite

¹²³ Ibid, pp.18-19.

¹²⁴ Breton, *Anthologie* (1950), p.333.

¹²⁵ Ibid, p.19.

¹²⁶ An unpublished manuscript read and translated by Whitney Chadwick. Chadwick, *The Militant Muse*, p.82. The manuscript is now held in a private collection.

¹²⁷ Ibid, p.19.

immédiate' whereas others (Yarrow and Lucas) could not.¹²⁸ In her short stories, Carrington also writes of her imagined affinity with animals in particular the horse as discussed in chapters five and six.

At the end of the first diary entry, Carrington recalls that she was administered the drug Luminal three times and anaesthetised arriving at Docteur Moralès's clinic 'à l'état de cadavre'.¹²⁹ Hoff describes Luminal as 'a powerful barbiturate used as an anti-convulsive drug and as a sedative – a sedative strong enough to render a patient unconscious before surgery or drop them into a comatose state.'¹³⁰ This conveys the power of the drug on the human body and the accuracy of Carrington's description of having arrived at the clinic as lifeless and unconscious. Carrington begins her account of what happened at Dr Moralès's clinic from the moment when she woke up from anaesthesia which she dates between 19 and 25 August 1940.¹³¹ She is unsure of the exact date since she was drugged and later states, 'Je n'ai jamais pu savoir combien de temps je suis restée inconsciente : jours ou semaines ?'¹³² She regains consciousness in a small, windowless room, 'Ma première prise de conscience fut douloureuse ; je croyais avoir été victime d'un accident de voiture ; l'endroit évoquait un hôpital'.¹³³ She is unsure where she is and why she is there, 'J'essayais de comprendre où j'étais et pourquoi j'étais là. Hôpital

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Carrington, *En bas* (1945), p.29.

¹³⁰ Hoff, pp.90-91.

¹³¹ Carrington, *En bas* (1945), p.33.

¹³² Ibid, p.35.

¹³³ Ibid, p.34.

ou camp de concentration ?'¹³⁴ She does not know if she is being cared for or otherwise. The reference to a concentration camp which has connotations of horror and death recalls Ernst's internment which triggered her breakdown. The reader perhaps imagines the psychiatric institution in Juan López Moctezuma's art-horror film *La mansión de la locura (The Mansion of Madness)* (1973) for which Carrington designed the set and costume.¹³⁵ She becomes conscious that her hands and feet have been bound to the bed with leather straps and that invasive feeding tubes have been inserted through her nostrils which she has no memory of.¹³⁶ This scene is illustrated in her painting *Green Tea (La dame ovale)* (1942) in which we see a female figure cocooned in black and white bandages.

Later that same day, in the hospital's garden, Carrington is thrown to the ground by two nurses, José and Santos and held down whilst nurse Mercédès injects her in the thigh. Her thigh swells up and she learns that the nurse has 'provoqué un abcès artificiel dans ma cuisse' and that 'la douleur et l'idée que j'étais infectée m'empêchèrent, pendant deux mois, de marcher librement.'¹³⁷ Hoff suggests that the pain and inflammation were caused by a sub-convulsive dose of Cardiazol.¹³⁸ The pain and her inability to walk gives the impression that she is being tortured rather

¹³⁴ Ibid, p.35.

¹³⁵ Juan López Moctezuma, dir., *La mansión de la locura (The Mansion of Madness)* (1973). See Lora Markova and Roger Shannon, 'Leonora Carrington on and off Screen: Intertextual and Intermedial Connections between the Artist's Creative Practice and the Medium of Film', *Arts*, 8, 1 (2019) <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-0752/8/1/11/html> [accessed 21 June 2019].

¹³⁶ Ibid, p.34.

¹³⁷ Ibid, p.41.

¹³⁸ Hoff, p.93.

than being treated. Carrington recalls that, 'ils arrachèrent mes vêtements avec brutalité et m'attachèrent nue sur le lit' and that she was forced to sleep in her own excrement for several days and nights which would have been humiliating and degrading.¹³⁹ She describes the mosquito bites as having made 'mon corps hideux' which foreshadows the description of her body after the drug-induced convulsions.¹⁴⁰ These events lead up to the day when she was administered the powerful drug Cardiazol.

During her confinement to the psychiatric hospital, Carrington recalls being administered Cardiazol on three (or possibly four) occasions. Hoff describes it as 'an analeptic drug used to induce seizures – fits strong enough to fracture vertebrae and stop the heart' which was administered because 'the fits were believed to produce lucidity in psychotic patients.'¹⁴¹ This conveys the power of the drug on the body and its perceived power on the mind. Carrington has most difficulty in writing or talking about this experience. In the third diary entry, she recalls her first injection of Cardiazol which she describes as 'la journée la plus terrible et la plus noire de ma vie entière'.¹⁴² The use of superlatives emphasise the effect that this day had on her. Writing in the present tense, Carrington questions,

Comment pourrai-je écrire cela quand j'ai peur, seulement, d'y penser ? Je suis terriblement angoissée et pourtant je ne peux pas continuer à vivre seule avec ce souvenir... Je sais que lorsque je l'aurai écrit, je serai délivrée. Vous

¹³⁹ Carrington, *En bas* (1945), p.42.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Hoff, p.85.

¹⁴² Carrington, *En bas* (1945), p.55.

devez savoir, ou bien je serai persécutée jusqu'à la fin de mon existence.

Mais pourrai-je exprimer l'horreur de cette journée par de simples
paroles ?¹⁴³

She tells us of her anxiety and fear, the difficulty that she had in thinking or writing about this day, and hopes that once she has recorded it she will be free. The verbs 'persécutée' and 'délivrer' are opposites and reveal the importance of this process in freeing herself of these past memories. However, she is unsure whether she will be able to express 'l'horreur de cette journée' through words which alludes to the limitations of language first explored in her story 'La maison de la peur'. It also alludes to the importance of art as an alternative medium of expression. However, Carrington is aware that neither Megnen (nor the reader) will ever be able to fully comprehend the real fear that she experienced that day.

Carrington recounts that on several occasions she was able to think clearly and came to learn that 'la présence dans ma chambre de plus d'une personne m'apportait le malheur'.¹⁴⁴ However, overpowered by the medical staff, she describes how she was held down by Don Luis, José, Santos, Mercédès, Asegurada, and Piadosa and injected with the drug. She vividly relives the visceral experience and writes through the body, 'je vis *le centre* de tous les yeux fixé sur moi dans un regard AFFREUX, AFFREUX. Les yeux de Don Luis lacéraient mon cerveau, et moi, je m'enfonçais, m'enfonçais, m'enfonçais, dans un puits... très loin...'¹⁴⁵ Here, Carrington recalls being able to see into their soul. Eyes are a recurrent surrealist

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, p.56.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, p.57.

motif, for example in the opening scene of *Un chien andalou* (1929), a man slices open a woman's eye and in *Nadja*, Breton is struck by the beauty of the young woman's eyes.¹⁴⁶ Eyes are important since they present Surrealism as an alternative way of seeing the world, of discovering the extraordinary in the ordinary. The repetition and capitalisation of 'AFFREUX' emphasises how frightening this experience was for her and the verb 'lacérer' conveys the laser-like power of his eyes. She expresses the sensation of moving downwards before ascending. The tripling of the reflexive verb 's'enfoncer' mirrors her descent. This is followed by a sudden return to the surface as she exclaims 'JE GRANDIS... JE GRANDIS...'.¹⁴⁷ The repetition, capitalisation, and ellipsis mirrors her body returning from 'down below' and the ellipsis could also reflect her gasps for air. Carrington's description of her body ascending and descending mimics Alice's experience of shrinking and growing throughout Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.¹⁴⁸ However, this is not a curious or fictional experience for Carrington but one of reality and horror.

Moreover, read philosophically, it can be said that Carrington descends into the self which leads to a discovery of her true identity. It echoes the title of the narrative which conveys the idea of moving downwards, descending into psychic disorder. It alludes to another world, perhaps to the underworld, the world of the dead, or even to hell. The effect of the drug is physical and psychological. Carrington described being plunged into 'un arrêt éternel dans le comble de l'angoisse' and into 'la

¹⁴⁶ Luis Buñuel, *Un chien andalou* (1929) and Breton, *Nadja*, pp.72-73.

¹⁴⁷ Carrington, *En bas* (1945), p.57.

¹⁴⁸ Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

panique éternelle'.¹⁴⁹ The adjective 'éternel' suggests that the sensation of ascending and descending and the accompanying fear was endless and looking back Carrington refers to the anguish that she felt as 'death practice'.¹⁵⁰ The way that Carrington writes through the body is what I term an embodied *merveilleux* since she relives the experience through her body.

The reader learns she is caught in the grip of a drug-induced convulsion ('une étrange convulsion de mon centre vital').¹⁵¹ She writes of her experience of this convulsion as if she is writing through the body. The drug has a profound effect on her body and mind and while convulsing she returns to her political theory of being controlled by a 'force immonde' and her desire to 'libérer' the people of Madrid.¹⁵² This 'force immonde' could either refer to the Nazis or to the powerful drug itself. Following her vivid account, Carrington reveals that this was 'le Grand Mal épileptique', an epileptic seizure induced by the drug Cardiazol.¹⁵³ She describes her body as 'convulsée, pitoyablement hideuse' which is far removed from the image of Carrington as young and beautiful.¹⁵⁴ In fact, Ernst, his son Jimmy, and Mabelle all comment on her beauty as a young woman.¹⁵⁵ However, she is no longer the surrealist image of woman as *femme-enfant* but an image of convulsed beauty. It

¹⁴⁹ Carrington, *En bas* (1945), p.57.

¹⁵⁰ Marina Warner, 'Leonora Carrington's Spirit Bestiary; or the Art of Playing Make-Belief', in *Leonora Carrington*, ed. by Schlieker, p.18.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, p.57.

¹⁵² *Ibid*.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, p.58.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*.

¹⁵⁵ Ernst, *A Not-so-still Life*, p.87. Mabelle, 'A propos de « En bas »', in *Traversées de nuit*, p.34.

recalls the surrealist concept of convulsive beauty as discussed in the introduction. This image of Carrington's body as convulsed is a stark contrast to the photograph of Carrington on the day of her presentation at court which illustrates the narrative printed in *VVV*.¹⁵⁶ This experience had an irreversible impact on Carrington and her outlook on life. It made her aware that she was not invincible or immortal and reflects 'After the experience of *Down Below*, I changed. Dramatically. It was very much like having been dead'.¹⁵⁷

In *En bas*, Carrington writes through the body. She relives her experience of psychic disorder through the body as she experienced it. The idea of writing through the body anticipates Hélène Cixous's theory of *écriture féminine* which she sets out in her 1975 essay 'Le Rire de la Méduse' which is a declaration on the power of women's writing.¹⁵⁸ Cixous declares 'Il faut que la femme s'écrive : que la femme écrive de la femme et fasse venir les femmes à l'écriture, dont elles ont été éloignées aussi violemment qu'elles l'ont été de leurs corps'¹⁵⁹ In *En bas*, Carrington writes her self and reclaims the body from men and in particular from the male Surrealists. The Surrealists initially lay claim to women and their bodies through the image of woman as *femme-enfant* and through Bellmer's *poupées* which violate the female body as discussed in chapter three. Cixous declares that 'Il faut que la femme se mette au texte – comme au monde, et à l'histoire –, de son propre mouvement.'¹⁶⁰ Carrington

¹⁵⁶ Carrington, 'Down Below', *VVV*, 1944, p.86.

¹⁵⁷ Warner, 'Introduction', in Carrington, *The House of Fear*, p.18.

¹⁵⁸ Hélène Cixous's 'Le Rire de la Méduse' first appeared in *L'Arc* (1975), pp.39-54.

¹⁵⁹ Cixous, *Le Rire De La Méduse et autres ironies*, p.37.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

inscribes herself into her autobiographical account and into the history of the Second World War and psychic disorder. In the essay, Cixous addresses women writers and encourages them to take back their bodies and imagines a 'writing that inscribes femininity' as a new form of 'insurgent writing' which rebels or revolts against a writing dominated by male attitudes ('Il faut qu'elle s'écrive parce que c'est l'intervention d'une écriture *neuve*, insurgée').¹⁶¹ Carrington's narrative challenges the Surrealists' romanticised views on women and psychic disorder. The idea is that by writing her self, women will return to the body, and ultimately take back their identity. Cixous proposes a feminine practice of writing, *écriture féminine* which it is impossible to define or theorise since it functions outside of the phallogentric system of language. She calls on women to write through their bodies ('la femme écrit par son corps') which Carrington does throughout *En bas*.¹⁶² Although Carrington wrote *En bas* over thirty years before Cixous's essay, it can nevertheless be considered as a form of *écriture féminine* based on the principle of writing through the (female) body. Carrington did not write through her body consciously but unconsciously in order to be faithful to her visceral experience of psychic disorder. Writing through the body allowed Carrington to recount her experience as accurately as she could. It was perhaps not her intention to reclaim the body but she does so in her attempt to access *le merveilleux*.

Having identified the self with the other (society, the machine, and nature), Carrington begins to identify with the self. She moves from a collective identity to an

¹⁶¹ Ibid, p.45.

¹⁶² Ibid, p.55.

individual one. As Warner states, Carrington leaves the personal body, abandons fixed identity, and experiences split personality.¹⁶³ In the fourth diary entry, following her first dose of the drug Cardiazol, Carrington imagines herself as having multiple identities which relate to religion and gender. She characterises herself as ‘aryenne, celtique et saxonne’.¹⁶⁴ Aryan refers to the ideology which was seized upon by Hitler and the Nazis and became the basis of the German government’s policy of exterminating Jews and Roma whereas Celtic refers to her Irish heritage. She also identifies herself as ‘androgynne, la lune, le Saint-Esprit, une gitane, une acrobate, Leonora Carrington et une femme’ and as ‘Elisabeth d’Angleterre’.¹⁶⁵ Merjian describes this as ‘hallucinatory language’ and relates that her narrative approaches ‘a shamanistic frenzy’.¹⁶⁶ Carrington presents herself as androgynous in *Autoportrait* (c.1937-38) (see chapter two). However, the characterisation of herself as androgynous and as a woman is contradictory and perhaps conveys her confused state of mind. The identification of herself as a gypsy is interesting since in an interview with De Angelis she reveals that ‘the Moorheads were, in fact, gypsies, tinkers.’¹⁶⁷ Carrington seems to conflate real identities (‘une gitane’, ‘Leonora Carrington et une femme’) with the imagined ones of ‘androgynne, la lune, le Saint-

¹⁶³ Warner, ‘Leonora Carrington’s Spirit Bestiary; or the Art of Playing Make-Belief’, in *Leonora Carrington*, ed. by Schlieker, pp.17-18.

¹⁶⁴ Carrington, *En bas* (1945), p.63.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Merjian, ‘Genealogical gestation’, in *Leonora Carrington and the international avant-garde*, ed. by Eburne and McAra, p.43.

¹⁶⁷ De Angelis, ‘Interview with Leonora Carrington’, in *Leonora Carrington: The Mexican Years*, ed. by Sanchez-Barnet, p.33.

Esprit', 'une acrobate', 'Elisabeth d'Angleterre' in her exploration of her self-identity. These diverse identities illustrate Carrington's theory of the plurality of the self (or selves).

Carrington imagines herself as the third person of the Trinity (the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit), and as the Holy Spirit and 'le Christ sur la terre'.¹⁶⁸ She believes that the patriarchal Trinity lacks a female figure and identifies herself as 'la Lune, élément essential de la Trinité, avec la connaissance microscopique de la terre, de ses plantes et de ses créatures' associating woman with nature.¹⁶⁹ She describes the Trinity as 'sèche et incomplète' and that a female element will complete it and in turn transform patriarchal society into a matriarchal one.¹⁷⁰ Orenstein describes this moment as a 'breakthrough' as Carrington realises that what is missing from this patriarchal vision is a large mythic female.¹⁷¹ These identities from the creative ('une acrobate') to the religious (the third person of the Trinity) suggests that Carrington is trying to access something other than the self. As Cottenet-Hage states, during her temporary insanity, Carrington experienced both excessive fusion and irreparable split between the inside and outside, the self and the other.¹⁷² Fusion and split are opposite processes; she experiences fusion with the world around her (with society, the machine, and nature) and a split between self-identity and her body until the final few pages when she begins to identify with the

¹⁶⁸ Carrington, *En bas* (1945), pp.63-64.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, p.64.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Acker.

¹⁷² Cottenet-Hage, 'The Body Subversive: Corporeal Imagery in Carrington, Prassinis and Mansour', in *Surrealism and Women*, ed. by Caws and others, p.82.

self. In one scene, Don Luis maps Carrington's physical journey on a piece of paper. He writes the letter 'M' in the centre of the page which stands for Madrid. Carrington with an 'éclair de lucidité' understands 'le M était moi et non le monde entier' and that her journey is an individual one.¹⁷³ One could argue that the letter 'M' stands for *le merveilleux* which she accesses through her identification with the other. From this moment, she establishes 'à nouveau le contact de mon esprit avec mon « moi »'.¹⁷⁴ She distinguishes between herself and the other and begins to regain her sense of identity which is a sign of her recovery.

Carrington illustrates these different identities in her painting *En bas*. In the postscript, on leaving the hospital, Carrington writes of her urge to paint, 'I was tormented by the idea that I had to paint, and when I was away from Max and first with Renato, I painted immediately.'¹⁷⁵ The verb 'tormented' conveys the importance of painting to her as a medium of expression and the idea that there are some things which can only be expressed through the visual and not the verbal. At the psychiatric hospital, she believes to be in 'un autre monde, un autre temps, une autre civilisation, peut-être une autre planète qui contenait le passé, le futur et en même temps le présent.'¹⁷⁶ It is a surreal world which conflates the present, past, and future. In the painting, four strange figures recline on the grass. From left to right, the first figure is a white feathered hybrid female figure with the head of a bird, the second figure is green with huge possessed eyes, the third is a bearded,

¹⁷³ Carrington, *En bas* (1945), pp.72-73.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, p.73.

¹⁷⁵ 'Postscript', in Carrington, *Down Below* (2017), p.68.

¹⁷⁶ Carrington, *En bas* (1945), pp.38-39.

androgynous figure wearing aristocratic clothes, and the fourth is a sexualised figure wearing red stockings and a black corset with a minotaur-like mask. Approaching this 'frightening cast of human and human/animal hybrid entities' is a female figure who can be identified as Carrington with her long black hair wearing a cloak or wings.¹⁷⁷ She is accompanied by her spirit animal, the horse which is almost camouflaged into the background and perhaps transforms into the winged horse (Pegasus?) on top of the entrance to the institution. All five figures could be interpreted as self-images of Carrington since during her psychic disorder she assumed diverse identities. She presents four versions of the self in the space of the same frame. For Carrington, identity is dynamic and not static. They are perhaps about to perform in the circus-like tent behind them which emphasises the idea that identity or social behaviour is a performance.¹⁷⁸

In conclusion, throughout *En bas*, Carrington identifies her body with the world around her, the self with the other destabilising the notion of the self. Her reaction to Ernst's internment is at first emotional and visceral (as she makes herself sick) as the psychological manifests in the physical. Carrington identifies her body with the social body, the biological with the societal and creates elaborate political theories in an attempt to make sense of the world around her. She also aligns her body with the avant-garde trope of the machine as she identifies herself with the jammed mechanism of Yarrow's Fiat which breaks down on the border between France and Spain. In addition, she identifies her body with the natural world which is

¹⁷⁷ Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, p.50.

¹⁷⁸ See Butler's theory on performance and identity set out in *Gender Trouble* (1990).

a recurrent theme in her early short stories. During her experience of psychic disorder, Carrington internalises the world around her. However, encouraged by Mabille (and by Breton), she records her memories for a second time to externalise them (in a reverse process) and to free herself from them so that she can move on.

The Surrealists initially imagined woman as other, as *femme-enfant* and muse, and in a way Carrington fulfils this by identifying the self with the other until the final few pages. However, while Breton writes about female psychic disorder in *Nadja*, Carrington writes *with* it and provides a first-hand account of it as a frightening reality. In one scene, Carrington relives the moment that she was administered the powerful drug Cardiazol through the body (as she experienced it) and writes through the body in a way that anticipates Cixous's theory of *écriture féminine*. Overall, by identifying her female human body with the social body, the machine, and the natural world, she hopes to access something other than the ordinary, the extraordinary and establishes a different type of *merveilleux*, an embodied *merveilleux*.

Chapter eight - Women's time and old age in Carrington's *Le cornet acoustique* (1974)

'Qu'est-ce que l'âge, après tout ?'¹

In *Le cornet acoustique* (1974), Carrington, through the character of Marion, questions 'Qu'est-ce que l'âge, après tout ?'. The process of ageing is associated with physical and mental decline and eventual death. However, old age is not an obstacle for Marion and her move to an old people's home marks the beginning of an epic adventure. The Surrealists celebrated childhood but not old age and also initially celebrated woman as the idealised *femme-enfant*. In the *Manifeste*, Breton declares 'C'est peut-être l'enfance qui approche le plus de la « vraie vie »' since he believed childhood to be closest to the surrealist experience.² The Surrealists hoped to be able to recapture the bold and vivid imagination of a child. In *Le cornet acoustique* (1974), in a surrealist act of subversion, Carrington exchanges childhood with old age; the main character is a ninety-nine-year-old woman and the story is set in an old people's home. In the novel, Marion remarks 'Le sommeil et la veille ne sont pas des états aussi distincts qu'on le croit généralement, il m'arrive souvent de les confondre.'³ For Carrington, it is perhaps old age that comes closest to the surrealist understanding of 'la vraie vie' which blurs the states of dreaming and waking.

¹ Carrington, *Le cornet acoustique*, trans. by Parisot (1983), p.43.

² Breton, *Manifestes*, p.52.

³ Carrington, *Le cornet acoustique* (1983), p.50.

The main theme in Carrington's novel *Le cornet acoustique* is women's old age. In this chapter, I will discuss women's time and experience of old age in this brilliant surrealist novel. The heroine of the novel is nonagenarian Marion Leatherby who narrates her later life adventure. Old(er) women are not well-represented in literary works and an old woman as the protagonist is the exception and not the norm. In a recent article titled '8 Old-Lady Novels That Prove Life Doesn't End at 80', Heidi Sopinka states that 'older women in literature arguably represent one of the most underwritten aspects of the female experience' and features Carrington's *The Hearing Trumpet*.⁴ This underscores the originality of Carrington's novel. This is also the case in the context of Surrealism, for example in Breton's novel *Nadja*, the archetypal heroine is a beautiful young woman. In this chapter, I will argue that whilst the Surrealists celebrated the *femme-enfant* and childhood as a way of accessing *le merveilleux*, in an act of subversion, Carrington celebrates the figure of the *vieille dame* and imagines old age as a way of accessing it. The main themes that I will discuss are the representation of the figure of the old woman or crone and the ageing female body, the old people's home as a surreal setting, and old age and power. I will draw on unpublished letters from Carrington to Penrose on the drafting of her novel and also on Carrington's imagining of the old woman in two of her paintings - *The Magdalens* (1986) and *Kron Flower* (1987).

Carrington's writings have received much attention from feminist scholars and several articles have been written on *Le cornet acoustique*. In *Subversive Intent*

⁴ Heidi Sopinka, '8 Old-Lady Novels That Prove Life Doesn't End at 80', 4 December 2018 <https://electricliterature.com/8-old-lady-novels-that-prove-life-doesnt-end-at-80/> [accessed 16 June 2019].

(1990), Suleiman analyses *The Hearing Trumpet* in the double context of surrealist experimentation and contemporary feminist experimentation with parodic rewriting and describes the novel as a 'feminist parodic rewriting of [...] the quest of the Holy Grail'.⁵ She also argues that the text occupies a significant place between Surrealism and (feminist) postmodernism.⁶ In both *Subversive Intent* and in an article titled 'Feminist intertextuality and the laugh of the mother: Leonora Carrington's *Hearing Trumpet*' (1992), she reads the protagonist Marion through the figure of the mother and in *The Reflowering of the Goddess* (1990), Orenstein analyses the figure of the Mother Goddess and her depiction in the novel.⁷ In a recent article "Are we to be contented with dreams?' Getting older in the work of Leonora Carrington' (2017), Alicia Kent discusses the ageing process and creative possibilities and how ageing is implicated in feminist readings of the novel.⁸ Despite the volume *Leonora Carrington and the international avant-garde* (2017) analysing a wide range of Carrington's writings, none of the essays focus on an analysis of Carrington's *Le cornet acoustique* which is striking since it is one of her most famous narratives. However, in an essay titled 'Leonora Carrington and the Esoteric Avant-garde', Jonathan Eburne discusses

⁵ Suleiman, *Subversive Intent*, p.144.

⁶ Ibid, p.145.

⁷ Susan Rubin Suleiman, 'Feminist Intertextuality and the Laugh of the Mother: Leonora Carrington's *Hearing Trumpet*', in *Neverending Stories: Toward a Critical Narratology*, ed. by Ann Fehn and others (Princeton, NJ: Princetown University Press, 1992), pp.179-198. Gloria Feman Orenstein, *The Reflowering of the Goddess* (New York; Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1990).

⁸ Alicia Kent, "Are we to be contented with Dreams?' Getting older in the work of Leonora Carrington', *Journal of Romance Studies*, 17, 3 (2017), 293-309 (p.293).

the novel as a '*roman-à-clef* of the esoteric avant-garde'.⁹ In this chapter, I discuss Carrington's reimagining of old age as a way of accessing *le merveilleux* and suggest that it is through the figure of the old woman or crone that we access it.

In *Le cornet acoustique*, equipped with her ear trumpet, a gift from her best friend Carmella Velasquez, ninety-nine-year-old Marion Leatherby is packed off to a home for old ladies. It is here that her adventure begins. At the home, Marion's interest in a portrait of a winking nun intensifies and after reading a book on the life of the Abbess, a strange series of events begin to unfold. Residents Natacha and Vera make poisoned chocolate fudge meant for Georgina but accidentally kill Maud. Marion and Anna Wertz discover that Maud is not an old woman but a man. The women embark on a hunger strike, the planet enters a new ice age, and the women restore the Holy Grail to the Goddess. The novel is written in the first-person from the perspective of Marion and in the present (and past tense) which allows the reader to become part of her journey and in the final few pages even looks to the future.

Written in the early 1950s, *Le cornet acoustique* is Carrington's second novel. However, it was not published until over twenty years later in 1974 with a preface by André Pieyre de Mandiargues.¹⁰ According to Bettina Knapp the original manuscript was lost in 1960, an early draft was rediscovered in 1973 which was reworked and

⁹ Jonathan P. Eburne, 'Leonora Carrington and the Esoteric Avant-garde', in *Leonora Carrington and the international avant-garde*, ed. by Eburne and McAra, pp.152-158.

¹⁰ Leonora Carrington, *Le cornet acoustique*, trans. by Henri Parisot (Paris: GF Flammarion, 1974). All quotations are from the 1983 French edition as this was the edition available to me at the time of writing.

published in 1974.¹¹ Therefore, it is unclear whether the 1974 edition was the original draft or a redrafted one. Chénieux-Gendron states that she wrote the text between 1953 and 1963 and believes it to be closer to the former since the birth of her two sons (Gabriel and Pablo Weisz-Carrington) gave her the impression 'd'avoir basculé de l'autre côté du temps (du côté d'une durée sans indices, sans mesure)'.¹² Carrington's first novel was *La porte de pierre* which she wrote in the 1940s but it was not published until after *Le cornet acoustique* in 1976.¹³ Interestingly both *La porte de pierre* and *Le cornet acoustique* were first written in English and translated into French by Henri Parisot. However, *Le cornet acoustique* was first published in French and two years later in English.¹⁴

The cover image of the 1983 French edition is Carrington's oil painting *Lepidopteros* (1969).¹⁵ It depicts six cloaked hybrid butterfly-human figures gathered around a table. They are enjoying a feast of fruits and are accompanied by four black swans which represent 'le signe secret et sacré de la Déesse de la Vieille Raison Matriarcale'.¹⁶ One can imagine these figures as the elderly residents of the old

¹¹ Bettina L. Knapp, 'A review of *The Hearing Trumpet*', *World Literature Today*, 52, 1 (1978), 80-81.

¹² Jaqueline Chénieux-Gendron, 'Introduction', in Carrington, *Le cornet acoustique* (1983), p.9.

¹³ Carrington, *La porte de pierre*.

¹⁴ Unfortunately, the 1974 and 1983 French editions of *Le cornet acoustique* are out of print. However, the 2005 English version remains in publication.

¹⁵ Reproduced in Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, p.117.

¹⁶ Gloria Orenstein, 'La nature animale et divine de la femme dans l'œuvre de Leonora Carrington', in *Occulte-Occultation*, ed. by Henri Béhar (Lausanne: Centre de recherches sur le surréalisme de l'université de Paris III, 1981), p.133.

people's home in the novel. Their faces resemble different species of butterflies which illustrates their individuality. Since the butterfly is a symbol of metamorphosis these hybrid figures are perhaps in the process of transformation. It introduces old age as the time of transformation and rebirth.

Carrington wrote the novel in Mexico City where she had been living for a number of years and was still in contact with Péret and Varo who were also living in Mexico. Breton hailed Mexico as 'the surrealist place *par excellence*' in its place, people, and spirit and on moving to Mexico in 1943, Carrington's first impressions were that it was exciting, strange, and different.¹⁷ This perhaps accounts for the surrealist themes of objective chance, the surrealist object, surprise, a conflation of the real and the imaginary, and myth. However, the novel did not receive much critical attention when it was first published. Suleiman states that 'she seemed to be caught between nationalities, between languages, between generations.'¹⁸ Carrington was living in Mexico, writing in English, and yet the text was first published in French. It was not until the renewed interest in the work of the women associated with Surrealism in the mid-1980s that Carrington's writings began to receive the attention they deserve.¹⁹ Almost seventy years since it was first written, *Le cornet acoustique* continues to fascinate the young and old alike and in April

¹⁷ My translation. See 'Rafael Heliodoro Valle en un diálogo con André Breton' <https://www.elheraldo.hn/otrassecciones/nuestrasrevistas/627367-373/rafael-heliodoro-valle-en-un-dialogo-con-andre-breton> [accessed 27 August 2019]. De Angelis, 'Interview with Leonora Carrington', in *Leonora Carrington: The Mexican Years*, ed. by Sanchez-Barnet, p.38.

¹⁸ Suleiman, *Subversive Intent*, p.145.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

2017, the theatre group Dirty Market performed a brilliant adaptation of the novel [Figure 1].²⁰ In this photograph, we see the Abbess in the background, the residents of the old people's home with a costume of grotesque papier-mâché masks, and Marion Leatherby with a short beard wearing a white dressing gown.

The way that Carrington wrote *Le cornet acoustique* is interesting. She wrote the novel in Café Garibaldi in the Plaza de los Mariachis in Mexico City 'in the midst of cacophonous noise'.²¹ The fact that the novel was written in such an environment could explain the fast-paced and action-packed ending. She wrote the novel 'for fun' and her enjoyment of writing the text and a sense of amusement is evident in its light-hearted tone and good-humoured heroine.²² In an undated letter to Penrose, Carrington provides an insight into her technique of writing, 'Since I nearly always write on the principle of never rereading anything I have written there is no doubt some truth in the criticism of the narrative as being slightly disjointed'.²³ Her way of writing is not quite automatic but bypasses the editing process. The effect of writing without rereading or editing is that any inconsistencies in the narrative are not worked through and loose threads are not tied up. She explains that 'This method however has the advantage of keeping my interest stimulated as the element of

²⁰ Dirty Market's adaptation of *The Hearing Trumpet* was performed at the Theatre Delicatessen, The Old Library, London, 4 – 29 April 2017 <https://www.dirtymarket.co.uk/the-hearing-trumpet-1> [accessed 11 June 2019].

²¹ As told to Aberth in an interview with Carrington in February 1999 in Mexico City. Cited in Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, p.147.

²² De Angelis, 'Interview with Leonora Carrington', in *Leonora Carrington: The Mexican Years*, ed. by Sanchez-Barnet, p.40.

²³ 'Correspondence: Carrington, Leonora; Ernst, Max; Tanning, Dorothea'.

surprise never fails'.²⁴ This suggests that the narrative surprises her as much as the reader. The element of surprise is key to the surrealist aesthetic and as Kahlo declares 'Surrealism is the magical surprise of finding a lion in the wardrobe, when you were "sure" of finding shirts.'²⁵ This anticipates the title of C.S. Lewis's children's novel *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (1950). *Le cornet acoustique* embraces the element of surprise especially when Marion and Anna Wertz discover that Maud is not an old lady but a gentleman.

Le cornet acoustique is not a conventional novel. In an unpublished commentary on Carrington's first draft, the publishers Macgibbon and Kee argue 'this is not remotely a 'novel' and much of it is confused even on its own curious terms.'²⁶ However, I argue that it is a novel albeit an unconventional one. For example, the book has no chapters or sections as the reader of a novel would expect and features a book within a book. It also reads as an oral account; as Marion listens to the world around her, the reader listens to her story. This reflects Carrington's enjoyment of story-telling which can be traced back to the Irish myths that her grandmother, mother, and nanny would tell her as a child. As Gabriel Weisz writes storytelling is not only an oral art form but a way of shaping the world.²⁷ The publishers comment 'there are seeds here for a really original, though not very saleable novel' and that 'ordinary editorial advice is almost hopeless'.²⁸ This suggests

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Frida Kahlo, 'I paint my own reality', in *Surrealist Women*, ed. by Rosemont, p.145.

²⁶ 'Correspondence: Carrington, Leonora; Ernst, Max; Tanning, Dorothea'.

²⁷ Gabriel Weisz, 'Shadow Children: Leonora as Storyteller', in *Leonora Carrington and the international avant-garde*, ed. by Eburne and McAra, p.128.

²⁸ Ibid. In fact, Macgibbon and Kee did not publish *The Hearing Trumpet*.

that her novel is so unconventional in its form and narrative that it defies any advice that the publishers could offer her. They do however advise that 'the Abbess [...] would have to be cut to the bone and the curious business at the end re-thought and completely re-written.'²⁹ Fortunately, she did not rethink or rewrite the 'curious business at the end' which is a brilliant end to an original narrative. In her reply, Carrington suggests that 'one could always publish it as a serial in the Ladies House [sic, Home] Journal or some other reputable magazine like Reader's Digest' which can be interpreted as a sarcastic comment on their criticism of the novel.³⁰ The publishers state that 'the manuscript [...] dealing with the Abbess's life, has only a tenuous connection with the first part and less with the remaining third' and that after the manuscript on the Abbess 'the book falls to pieces', 'the thing breaks down'.³¹ The embedded narrative on the Abbess occupies thirty-one of the one-hundred-and-seventy-eight pages which is almost a fifth of the text which underscores its importance. In addition to this historic document, the text incorporates postcards, poetry, letters, horoscopes, incantations, and riddles.

The postcards sent from Marion's mother's maître d'hôtel Margrave in London and the letters sent from Carmella to Marion at the old people's home convey the reality of the narrative as these documents remind Marion and the reader of the outside world. The horoscopes, incantations, and riddles convey a spiritual, occult experience. For example, Marion must answer three riddles before

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid. *Ladies' Home Journal* was an American monthly women's magazine founded in 1883 and *Reader's Digest* is a U.S.-based monthly magazine which is still in publication.

³¹ Ibid.

she can enter the tower.³² It recalls the Greek myth of Oedipus who finds Thebes plagued by a Sphinx who puts a riddle to all passersby and kills those who cannot answer it. Oedipus solves the riddle and the Sphinx kills herself. Marion's horoscope-fortune anticipates her entering the tower and meeting herself there and the incantations summon the Goddess Zam Pollum who leads the women to the Holy Grail. The way that the novel brings together diverse texts is perhaps in homage to the surrealist aesthetic of collage. Martine Antle describes the novel as a collage of genres, it is 'un collage situé au croisement du conte fantastique, de la fable, du récit autobiographique et du rêve éveillé'.³³ Perhaps the novel could be read as a surrealist artistic-literary experiment. In fact, at the end of the narrative, Marlborough's wolf-headed sister, Anubeth (a wordplay on the name of the ancient Egyptian god of death, Anubis) who enjoys the ancient Egyptian technique of embalming shows Marion her creation of a tortoise with the head of a wizened baby and the long thin legs of a stork which Marlborough describes as 'une sorte de collage'.³⁴ This nightmarish hybrid human-animal sculpture recalls the surrealist game of *cadavre-exquis*. It is clear that Carrington is not confined by the genre of the novel but borrows freely from other types of texts and creates a sort of collage-novel, not a visual collage novel like Ernst's *La femme 100 têtes* (1929), *Rêve d'une*

³² Carrington, *Le cornet acoustique*, pp.160-161.

³³ Martine Antle, 'Mise au point sur les femmes surréalistes : intertexte et clin d'œil chez Leonora Carrington', in *Mélusine N.XVI : Cultures, contre-cultures*, ed. by Henri Béhar (Lausanne, Suisse: Editions L'Age d'Homme, 1997), pp.208-220 (p.213).

³⁴ *Ibid*, p.199.

petite fille qui voulut entrer au Carmel (1930), or *Une semaine de bonté* (1934) but a textual one.

In the text, Marion makes a reference to writing novels,
Si j'ai une bonne mémoire, les écrivains trouvent généralement quelque excuse à leurs livres, encore que je ne comprenne vraiment pas pourquoi l'on s'excuse d'avoir choisi une occupation aussi tranquille et aussi pacifique. Il ne semble pas que les militaires s'excusent de s'entretuer; pourtant les romanciers se sentent tout honteux d'avoir écrit quelque joli livre de papier inerte, qui a peu de chances d'être lu par qui que ce soit. Les valeurs sont choses très étranges, elles changent si vite que je ne puis les suivre.³⁵

Here, she compares the peaceful practice of writing a novel to a soldier who is trained to kill and states that while writers are ashamed of their books, soldiers do not apologise for taking the lives of others. It can be read as a comment on the writing of *Le cornet acoustique* which is ironically one of Carrington's most read and best-known works thanks in part to its continued publication in English. If as Knapp states that an early draft was discovered in 1973 and redrafted, then perhaps this is a reference to the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre. Carrington was outraged by the mass-shooting of students and created two paintings in response - *Lepidoptera* (13 August 1968) and *Operation Wednesday* (March 1969). *Lepidoptera* depicts a hybrid butterfly-cheetah creature on a bright orange background with a message in Spanish about freedom. Seán Kissane describes it as 'a draft of her anger'.³⁶ *Operation*

³⁵ Ibid, p.49.

³⁶ Seán Kissane, 'Leonora Carrington & Politics IMMA'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eGqDkDG-k7o> [accessed 15 June 2019].

Wednesday depicts two surgeons operating on a cloaked figure with a bright red eye. The surgeon is Dr. Fernando Ortiz Monasterio who was a plastic surgeon at the time of the massacre and to whom the painting is dedicated.

The narrative transitions from reality to fantasy to science fiction. Knapp describes it as a 'surrealistic fantasy', and at once a fairy tale, a mystery novel, and an occult experience.³⁷ The text opens with the mundane reality of Marion's routine of visiting her best friend Carmella on Mondays and sweeping her room on Thursdays. Her move to the old people's home marks a transition from reality to the realm of fantasy where nothing is quite what it seems. The narrative then moves from fantasy to science fiction with the cataclysmic ice age where cities are overrun with abominable snow-people, the postman Taliessin (a bard in Celtic folklore) brings news of the Holy Grail, Marion finally meets Marlborough's wolf-headed sister Anubeth, and the women restore the Holy Grail to the Goddess. I argue that according to Todorov's theory the novel belongs to the literary genre of *le merveilleux* since at the end of the narrative the events cannot be explained by reality but by the imaginary.³⁸ Moreover, the novel has a timeless quality. It is as relevant to today's society as it was in the 1970s with its focus on the social issues of an ageing population and old age and loneliness, the environment and climate change, and politics.

In the novel, the main characters are all women with the exception of Dr Gambit who runs the institution. His name anticipates the way that he will be

³⁷ Knapp, p.80.

³⁸ Todorov, p.46.

sacrificed in the name matriarchy. On her first day at the old people's home, Marion observes 'Il [Dr Gambit] avait pris place au haut bout de la table, ce qui était naturel, je suppose, du fait qu'il était le seul homme présent.'³⁹ He is presented as the patriarch of the institution who is eventually overthrown by the old women; patriarchy is succeeded by matriarchy. The other male characters are Galahad (Marion's great-grandson) and Robert (who are both written out of the novel after the first twenty-five pages), Marlborough who is Marion's friend and a renowned poet (who represents Edward James), resident Maud who turns out to be Arthur, the postman Taliessin, and Carmella's chauffeur Majong. Dr Gambit, Galahad, and his son Robert are all presented in a negative light. Dr Gambit is authoritarian, Galahad gives in to his wife's desire to send his mother to an old people's home, and Robert has no respect for his great-grandmother. On the other hand, the majority of the old women are presented in a positive light. The heroine of the novel is ninety-nine-year-old Marion Leatherby and the other main female characters are her best friend Carmella Velasquez and the eight residents or 'inmates' (as Carrington refers to them) of the old people's home, Veronica Adams, Cristobel Burns, Georgina Sykes, Natacha Gonzalez, Claude de la Chécherelle, Maud Sommers, Vera Van Tocht, and Anna Wertz not forgetting the Abbess.⁴⁰ It is agreed amongst scholars that the character of Carmella is based on Carrington's real-life friend Remedios Varo.⁴¹

³⁹ Carrington, *Le cornet acoustique* (1983), pp.55-56.

⁴⁰ 'Correspondence: Carrington, Leonora; Ernst, Max; Tanning, Dorothea'.

⁴¹ Moorhead, *The Surreal Life of Leonora Carrington*, p.210 and Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, p.60. For a discussion of Carrington and Varo's friendship, see *Surreal Friends: Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varo and Kati Horna*, ed. by Stefan Van Raay and others (Surrey: Lund Humphries, 2010).

However, not all the female characters are presented in a positive light, Muriel wants to get rid of Marion, Natacha and Vera poison Maud, and Mrs Gambit (Dr Gambit's wife) supervises the residents' daily activities and instils fear. She recalls the figure of 'la Peur' in 'La maison de la peur' (see chapter five). Nevertheless, the novel focuses on the ageing female characters and their experience of old age hence the title of this chapter as 'Women's time and old age' as opposed to 'Time and old age' since one's experience of the world is gendered.⁴²

At the age of fifty-six, Carrington wrote a letter to Parisot which reveals her attitude towards ageing (though she lived until the age of ninety-four). This letter first formed the preface to the 1973 edition of *En bas*.⁴³ However, it would undoubtedly make an ideal introduction to *Le cornet acoustique*. In the letter, Carrington makes it clear that she is no longer a young, beautiful woman who arrived in Paris in 1937 in love with Ernst but that now she is an old woman. Aware that she has changed physically and morally, Carrington admits 'Je ne serait [sic, serais] jamais petrifiée [sic, pétrifiée] dans une « jeunesse » qui n'existe plus – J'accepte L'Honorable Décrépide [sic, décrépite] actuelle.'⁴⁴ She has come to understand that youth is not eternal and embraces old age with the new humorous title of 'L'Honorable Décrépide [sic]'. She is proud to be a woman, especially an old woman and embraces all that old age brings. The pride and defiance that characterised her as a young woman now defines her as an old lady. In the postscript

⁴² Although not intentional, 'Le temps des femmes' is also the title of the French feminist Julia Kristeva's 1979 essay in which she addresses the question of feminism.

⁴³ Carrington, *En bas* (1973).

⁴⁴ Carrington, 'Lettre à Henri Parisot', in *En bas* (2013), p.89.

of the letter, she adds 'Si les jeunes me disent maintenant qui j'ai l'Esprit jeune je m'offense [sic s'offense] – J'ai L'ESPRIT VIEILLE.'⁴⁵ Carrington asserts that her youthful spirit of freedom has been replaced by an older and wiser one which is no less inferior. Moreover, she has not lost her appreciation of the surrealist spirit of *le merveilleux*. The old women in Carrington's novel embrace this 'esprit vieille' which is conveyed through their love of life and continued desire to learn about the world around them.

The novel opens with Marion's friend Carmella Velasquez gifting her 'un cornet acoustique'.⁴⁶ The ear trumpet plays an important role throughout the narrative. It is a strange surrealist 'objet trouvé' which was discovered by chance by Carmella at a flea market.⁴⁷ The Surrealists enjoyed visiting second-hand markets with the possibility of discovering unusual objects there. In the first part of *Nadja* (1928), Breton visits the famous flea market at Saint-Ouen in Paris one Sunday. He reveals 'j'y suis souvent, en quête de ces objets qu'on ne trouve nulle part ailleurs, démodés, fragmentés, inutilisables, presque incompréhensibles, pervers' and describes an unidentifiable object of which he includes a photograph.⁴⁸ Similarly, Marion does not know what the ear trumpet is for, 'Quand Carmella déballa le cornet acoustique, j'eusse été bien embarrassée de dire si l'on pourrait s'en servir pour manger, pour boire ou seulement comme objet décoratif.'⁴⁹ Ninety-nine-year-

⁴⁵ Ibid, p.90.

⁴⁶ Carrington, *Le cornet acoustique* (1983), p.27.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p.38.

⁴⁸ Breton, *Nadja*, p.62 and p.61.

⁴⁹ Carrington, *Le cornet acoustique* (1983), p.31.

old Marion has a hearing impairment and so its role is to make the world around her audible. The ear trumpet transforms what was 'un cri grêle et lointain' into 'le meuglement d'un taureau furieux'.⁵⁰ The comparison of the sound to that of raging bulls is humorous. She describes the ear trumpet as 'un bel appareil. Sans être vraiment moderne, il était très joli avec ses incrustations de motifs floraux d'argent et de nacre, et il se recourbait splendidement comme la corne d'un bison.'⁵¹ Unlike in *Nadja*, Carrington does not provide an image of the ear trumpet and so the reader has to imagine what this ornate seventeenth-century object looks like ('il a l'air d'être du XVIIe siècle').⁵² Carmella foresees the significance of the ear trumpet and foretells 'Ce magnifique cornet va changer votre vie', 'Votre vie va en être transformée.'⁵³ It allows Marion to listen in on her family's plan to send her an old people's home which leads to an extraordinary adventure. Together Carmella and Marion imagine 'toutes les possibilités révolutionnaires du cornet' in keeping with the surrealist spirit of revolution and revelation.⁵⁴ The ear trumpet transforms Marion's hearing and her interaction with the world around her. However, Carmella warns her to keep the trumpet out of sight since 'on ne saurait se fier aux êtres âgés de moins de soixante ou de soixante-dix ans s'ils ne sont pas des chats, vous ne sauriez vous montrer trop prudente'.⁵⁵ This underscores the invisibility of old age and humorously implies that cats are more trustworthy and reliable than humans.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid, p.27.

⁵² Ibid, p.32.

⁵³ Ibid, p.31.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p.32.

The heroine of the novel is ninety-nine-year-old Marion Leatherby. On the opening page, Marion describes her physical condition. She begins 'Ici, je dois dire qu'aucun de mes sens n'est en quoi ce soit détruit par l'âge' before ironically listing the effects of ageing on her body. She recounts,

Ma vue est toujours excellente, encore que j'utilise des lunettes pour lire, quand je lis, ce qui m'arrive rarement. A dire vrai, les rhumatismes ont quelque peu arqué mon squelette, mais cela ne m'empêche pas de me promener par beau temps et de balayer ma chambre une fois par semaine, le jeudi [...] Je demeure un membre actif de la société, capable de se montrer plaisant et amusant quand l'occasion s'y prête. Le fait que je n'ai plus de dents et que je n'ai jamais pu porter de râtelier ne m'afflige pas outre mesure ; je n'ai personne à mordre.⁵⁶

She lists the effects of ageing on her eyesight, bones, and teeth before counteracting them using the phrases 'encore que', 'mais cela ne m'empêche pas de', and 'quand l'occasion s'y prête' to assure the reader that they do not affect her enjoyment of life. She asserts that she is still an active member of society which alludes to the way that women are considered useless in old age. The image of the old lady with no teeth foreshadows Carrington's depiction of herself in the letter sent to Parisot. She signs off the letter with 'je vous embrasse a [sic, à] travers mon Ratelier [sic, râtelier] (que je garde a [sic, à] coté [sic, côté] de moi la nuit dans une petite boite [sic, boîte] bleu ciel en plastic [sic, plastique]) JE N'A [sic, N'AI] PLUS UNE SEUL DENT.'⁵⁷ She

⁵⁶ Ibid, p.27.

⁵⁷ Carrington, 'Lettre', in *En bas* (2013), p.90.

reminds Parisot that she is now an old woman and of the reality of old age. She presents a vivid visual image of her false teeth (which she spells with a capital letter) in a plastic box; beauty has been exchanged for practicality. The capitalisation of 'JE N'A [sic] PLUS UNE SEUL DENT' emphasises that she is now a toothless old crone. The difference between Marion's and Carrington's descriptions is that while Marion dismisses the effects of old age on the body, in her letter Carrington brings it to Parisot's attention that she is no longer young and beautiful but old and toothless. She is not a *femme-enfant* but a *vieille-femme* and no longer has an 'esprit jeune' but a no less inferior 'esprit vieille'. It is worth noting that these physical ailments do not define Marion but rather she is characterised by her humour.

Marion later adds that she has a short grey beard, 'A dire vrai, j'ai effectivement une courte barbe grise que les gens du commun peuvent trouver repoussante ; pour ma part je la trouve du dernier galant; chacun son goût !'⁵⁸ This is a refreshing approach to the ageing female body. Facial hair is associated with men and masculinity and the adjective 'galant' meaning courteous or gentlemanly conveys that she is unconcerned with the opinion of others and is proud of her conventionally unsightly facial hair. Marion lives with her great-grandson Galahad and his family. She remarks that 'avec l'âge, l'on devient moins sensible aux petites manies d'autrui. Néanmoins je ne cause aucun ennui à quiconque et je tiens ma chambre propre, comme je me tiens propre moi-même, sans l'aide de qui que ce soit.'⁵⁹ This is a reminder of the reality of old age in terms of the physical

⁵⁸ Carrington, *Le cornet acoustique* (1983), p.29.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, pp.29-30.

deterioration of the body and the dependence upon others. In one scene, Marion returns home to find Robert in the living room and tries to explain to him that she has returned from her usual Monday walk. However, she admits 'Ma diction n'est pas très bonne, du fait que j'ai perdu toutes mes dents'.⁶⁰ She is no longer able to speak clearly and Robert calls her 'ce monstre baragouinant'.⁶¹ This is interesting since the resident old women at the home have no problem in understanding her and it perhaps suggests a generation gap between the youth and the elderly.

Nevertheless, despite Marion's physical decline, she is of sound mind. Marion relates her desire to travel to England and Lapland before admitting 'Ceci est une digression et je ne permets à personne de penser que mon esprit bat la compagne; il divague, c'est vrai, mais jamais au-delà des limites que j'entends lui fixer'.⁶² Although the elderly are unfairly dismissed as senile, here, Marion assures the reader that she is in control of her own thoughts and that she is a reliable narrator.

In one scene, reflecting on her imminent move to a home, Marion announces 'je ne suis pas une beauté, nul miroir n'est nécessaire pour m'assurer du fait. Néanmoins, je m'accroche à cette carcasse décharnée comme si c'était le corps limpide de Vénus elle-même'.⁶³ Venus was a Roman goddess associated with cultivated fields and gardens and therefore with natural beauty and later was identified with the Greek goddess of love, Aphrodite. The way that Marion feels attached to her ageing body as if it were a goddess suggests that she takes some

⁶⁰ Ibid, p.34.

⁶¹ Ibid, p.37.

⁶² Ibid, p.29.

⁶³ Ibid, p.39.

pride in it. The noun 'carcasse' presents her as a 'female human animal'. It reminds the reader that she is a woman, and that humans are animals, and recalls Muriel and Robert's earlier comments. It also suggests that although her body and mind are in conflict, they are impossible to divide which recalls Carrington's identification of the body with the world around her, the self with the other in *En bas* (1945) (see chapter seven). In another scene, Marion begins to daydream on beauty, 'La beauté, comme tout autre privilège, entraîne des responsabilités, les femmes belles ont des vies hors du commun, comme les Premiers ministres, mais ce n'est pas là ce que je veux vraiment, il doit y avoir autre chose...'.⁶⁴ She suggests that beautiful women, like Prime Ministers, experience unusual lives and that beauty carries responsibilities perhaps in terms of expectations. In the context of Surrealism, young and beautiful women were initially assigned the role of *femme-enfant* and not that of creative artist or writer. Marion does not aspire to be beautiful or to be a surrealist *femme-enfant* but turns to the book, 'je préfère lire un livre. Non, pas un livre intellectuel, tout juste des contes de fées. Des contes de fées à votre âge ? Pourquoi pas ?'⁶⁵ She presents knowledge as an alternative to beauty.

Carrington's verbal description of the ageing female figure can be compared to the visual depiction of her in her paintings. Carrington continued to paint throughout her sixties and seventies and in these paintings the figure of the old woman takes centre-stage. In her early paintings, her female figures are fantastical

⁶⁴ Ibid, p.42.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p.43.

animal-human-object hybrids and therefore ageless.⁶⁶ However, the figure of the old woman features in her paintings of the 1980s. Moorhead tells us that when she knew Carrington she was no longer painting but making sculpture since old age had caught up with her and she could no longer see to paint.⁶⁷ This is a reminder of the reality of old age. In the 1980s, Carrington chose to explore the process of ageing and elderly women or crones feature in a number of her paintings such as *The Magdalens* (1986) and *Kron Flower* (1987). Writing on these paintings, Aberth explains 'Whether examining flowers closely or energetically walking through streets, these old women exude a sense of the wonderment they still hold for the world around them' and perhaps for *le merveilleux*.⁶⁸ Or perhaps their way of looking at the world with awe is what *le merveilleux* is all about.

In *The Magdalens* (1986), two solemn-looking women wearing cloaks can be seen exchanging red and white beads in a cavernous landscape.⁶⁹ The old woman on the right has a wrinkled face, a visible sign of old age, which contrasts to the smooth complexion of the younger woman on the left. In a filmed documentary, when asked what they are exchanging, Carrington replies 'birth control pills' before adding that she is unsure what they are.⁷⁰ This conveys Carrington's interest in women's issues

⁶⁶ See the hybrid plant-animal-human figures in Carrington's *The House Opposite* (1945). Reproduced in Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, p.65.

⁶⁷ 'In conversation about Leonora Carrington with Joanna Moorhead and Francesco Manacorda'.

⁶⁷ Breton, *Manifestes*, p.15.

⁶⁸ Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, p.126.

⁶⁹ Leonora Carrington, *The Magdalens* (1986). Reproduced in Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, p.125.

⁷⁰ Acker.

since the contraceptive pill allows women a greater (sexual) freedom and also suggests that her work is open to different interpretations. The title is clearly a reference to St Mary Magdalene who was one of Jesus's disciples. Aberth interprets it as 'an ironic reference to the medieval sisterhood of fallen women'.⁷¹ The two figures wear cloaks which conceal their ageing bodies. Kent interprets that Carrington's cloaked figures are a way of criticising a view of the elderly as a homogenous or indistinguishable group.⁷² This is plausible since in *Le cornet acoustique*, Carrington emphasises the individuality of the old women. Marion is characterised by her sense of humour and Carmella by her unrivalled imagination. In fact, having arrived at the home, Marion remarks 'Pendant un jour ou deux, les neuf personnalités de mes nouveaux compagnons se trouvèrent quelque peu confondues. Ils étaient tous, bien entendu, complètement différents les uns des autres, mais cela prend du temps, de séparer le bon grain de l'ivraie.'⁷³ Claude de la Chécherelle imagines herself as a distinguished soldier and ninety-eight-year-old artist Veronica Adams paints toilet paper. The cloaks are perhaps a critique of the way that older women are made to feel self-conscious of their bodies or perhaps it is to illustrate that what their bodies look like is unimportant. It suggests that a woman's identity is not defined by her body and that her gender does not define her.

In another painting titled *Kron Flower* (1987), three old women or crones also wearing cloaks have stopped to take a closer look at a flower which has grown in-

⁷¹ Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, p.126.

⁷² Kent, p.301.

⁷³ Carrington, *Le cornet acoustique* (1983), p.55.

between the cracks of the pavement.⁷⁴ The women are joined by a large domestic cat. The flower is the 'Kron flower' of the title and the noun 'Kron' is play on the spelling of 'crone' which denotes a withered old woman. Their wrinkled faces which mirror the cracked paving stones of the street along with their grey hair and stooped stance are all visible signs of their old age. One of the crones holds a magnifying glass to her eye to inspect the flower. It alludes to her deteriorating eyesight but moreover to a continued interest in the world around her. In a discussion of this painting, Chadwick observes that the old women no longer have 'sexy bodies like magazine women' or models and Carrington confirms that they are no longer 'candidates for a sexy magazine'.⁷⁵ This highlights the way that society does not consider older women to be beautiful. However, these women are beautiful in their 'esprit vieille'.

A forth old woman with a cat clinging to her back can be seen walking in the street smoking a pipe. She wears a distinctive red hat with a feather which recalls the feather that the character of Lucretia wears in her hair in 'La dame ovale' (see chapter six). This figure is perhaps Carrington or Marion since both the artist-writer and character shared a love of cats. Another crone sits on the ground with a blanket wrapped around her. She perhaps represents the all too real image of the older woman neglected by society. Nevertheless, these women are not confined to the domestic space but occupy the public space of the street; they are no longer wearing cloaks of invisibility.

⁷⁴ Leonora Carrington, *Kron Flower* (1987). Reproduced in Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, p.125.

⁷⁵ Acker.

The way that the flower, a symbol of beauty, has sprung up through the cracked paving, which represents the old women, appeals to the viewer to consider beauty in relation to old age. The title refers to the (re)flowering of the crone and the beauty of old women. Carrington therefore subverts the ideal of youth as synonymous with beauty and here the old women are presented as beautiful in spirit. These crones have not lost their love of life and are connected to the world around them through nature. Although these women no longer have an 'esprit jeune', they have not lost their appreciation of *le merveilleux*. Writing on *Le cornet acoustique* and *Kron Flower*, Orenstein states that 'old age is a period of creative reflowering in which [...] the great female adventure really begins'.⁷⁶ Like youth, old age is associated with creativity, opportunity, and germination and becomes 'a process of development, of growth, and of resurrection'.⁷⁷

In the novel, Carrington subverts the stereotype of the old woman. In one scene, Marion and Anna Wertz, having heard the news of Maud's death climb onto the roof of her house to take one last look at her. To their surprise (and to the reader's), they discover that Maud was not an old lady but in fact 'un vénérable vieux monsieur'.⁷⁸ He had been living in the old ladies' home disguised as a woman. This emphasises that all is not as it seems at the home. The reader is all the more surprised since earlier Marion describes Maud as the ideal old lady.⁷⁹ This conveys a link between clothing, gender, and identity and the way that clothing and makeup

⁷⁶ Orenstein, *The Methodology of the Marvelous*, p.334.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, pp.334-335.

⁷⁸ Carrington, *Le cornet acoustique* (1983), p.143

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p.140.

can be used to present a particular gender. Marion imagines Maud as 'la classique Vieille Dame' with her powdered face, hand-sewn underwear, white hair and false teeth sat in a rose or lavender garden.⁸⁰ Maud's cross-dressing illustrates that gender is not fixed but in flux. Marion breaks the news that 'la délicatement féminine Maud – était en réalité un homme' to Georgina who reveals that she already knew of Maud's real identity.⁸¹ She recounts that his name was Arthur Sommers and that he was involved in selling drugs before working in the nightclub industry which is perhaps material for another surrealist novel. He (and Veronica Adams) finally retired to the home in the hope of a quiet end to an eventful life. Carrington includes Maud's life story to illustrate that old people were not always old and have lived lives filled with adventure and excitement.

The narrative takes place at an old people's home located in Santa Brigida. In reality, Santa Brígida is a village in Gran Canaria, Spain. In an act of subversion, this is not the end of the story but the beginning. In a documentary, Carrington reveals 'A lot of my journeys were running away but in old age I feel that I am beginning a journey'.⁸² This presents the idea that life is a voyage through time and space and of old age not as the end of that journey but the beginning. Marion's move to the old people's home does not mark the end of a journey but the beginning of a voyage to discovery and self-discovery. This recalls the way that Carrington's experience of psychic disorder is presented as a psychological, physical, and spiritual journey in *En*

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid, p.144.

⁸² Acker.

bas (1945) (see chapter seven).⁸³ Marion's move to the old people's home marks a transition from the world of reality to that of fantasy. The old people's home is completely different from how Carmella and Marion imagined it to be. There are no 'vitamines et chiens policiers, murs gris, [ou] mitraillettes' in sight.⁸⁴ On arrival, Marion observes that the main building is a castle surrounded by 'divers pavillons de formes incongrues'.⁸⁵ She continues 'Les fées aiment les maisons en forme de champignons vénéneux, les chalets suisses, les wagons de chemin de fer; il y avait là en outre un ou deux pavillons, l'un en forme de botte, l'autre en forme de ce que je prenais pour une momie égyptienne démesurée.'⁸⁶ These fairy-tale houses remind the reader of the 'pavillons' or wards of Dr Moralès psychiatric hospital in *En bas*. In both texts, these 'pavillons' create a distorted utopian-dystopian world. Pablo Weisz Carrington's sketch of these pavilions in the 1996 English edition bears a striking resemblance to the 'pavilions' on Carrington's map of the psychiatric institution and its grounds.⁸⁷

Marion is assigned the tower which resembles a lighthouse and is furnished with both real and painted furniture. Marion admits 'L'illusion était si parfaite que je faillis tout d'abord m'y laisser prendre.'⁸⁸ This *trompe l'oeil* furniture presents a façade and implies that all is not as it seems at the home. The space combines the

⁸³ Carrington, *En bas* (1945).

⁸⁴ Carrington, *Le cornet acoustique* (1983), p.41.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p.51.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*.

⁸⁷ Leonora Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*, illustr. by Pablo Weisz Carrington (Boston: Exact Exchange, 1996), p.31.

⁸⁸ Carrington, *Le cornet acoustique* (1983), p.52.

real and the illusionary. Marion imagines these fairy-tale houses as a façade to something sinister, 'Chalets de *nursery rhyme* pour amener les familles des vieilles dames à penser que nous menions une vie enfantine et paisible, et, derrière le décor, un énorme four crématoire et une cadène de forçats !'⁸⁹ The reader too begins to wonder if this is the case especially since having read *En bas*. Veronica Adams lives in a house in the form of a shoe which recalls the nursery rhyme 'There was an old woman who lived in a shoe'. Anna Wertz lives in a Swiss chalet with a cuckoo clock and window. However 'Non pas, bien sûr, un pendule à coucou qui marchât vraiment' and 'La fenêtre n'était pas une vraie fenêtre' in line with the two-dimensional furniture in Marion's 'pavillon'.⁹⁰ Claude de la Chécherelle lives in a cement mushroom and Cristobel Burns in a birthday cake. This is significant since the main theme in the novel is getting older and old age. The colours have faded and a candle with 'une flamme de ciment' has turned dark green. Marion reflects 'le gâteau d'anniversaire avait dû s'améliorer avec le temps, et souhaitais qu'il ne fût jamais repeint à ses couleurs d'origine.'⁹¹ This can be understood as a comment on getting older and that as one gets older one becomes wiser and that they should embrace it and not long to return to their 'couleurs d'origine' of their youthful self. Georgina Sykes lives in a house in the form of a circus tent with the words 'trez précier e tacle' which used to read 'Entrez apprécier le spectacle'.⁹² This could be an indirect message to the reader to enjoy the carnivalesque atmosphere of the text

⁸⁹ Ibid, p.55.

⁹⁰ Ibid, pp.59-60.

⁹¹ Ibid, p.60.

⁹² Ibid.

and not to take it too seriously. As Knapp argues the text is somewhere between ‘a gigantic farce and a deadly serious escapade’.⁹³ Maud Sommers and Vera Van Tocht share ‘le double pavillon’ and Natacha Gonzalez occupies an igloo which anticipates the onset of the ice age. Overall, the reader is presented with a surreal setting of an old people’s home in a state of disrepair.

Old age is synonymous with powerlessness, a loss of physical strength and a loss of independence. One evening, Marion uses her revolutionary ear trumpet to listen in on her family’s conversation. She overhears that they plan to send her to ‘une maison pour vieilles gens’.⁹⁴ The way that Galahad’s wife, Muriel, and son, Robert, speak about Marion, whom the reader has come to know over the first few pages, is offensive and insensitive. Muriel argues that ‘Le gouvernement a créé des hospices pour les personnes âgées et infirmes [...] On aurait dû se débarrasser d’elle DEPUIS LONGTEMPS.’⁹⁵ The reflexive verb ‘se débarrasser’ implies that Marion has become a burden and an inconvenience to them and the capitalisation of ‘DEPUIS LONGTEMPS’ implies that this is not a new topic of conversation. Robert remarks ‘L’arrière-grand-mère [...] ne saurait être classée parmi les être [sic, êtres] humains. C’est un vieux sac de viande en décomposition’ and Muriel adds ‘les gens de cet âge sont comme des végétaux ; ce ne sont même pas des animaux !’.⁹⁶ I will return to the visceral image of Marion in a state of decomposition towards the end of this chapter. They both consider her as neither human nor animal and of no use to

⁹³ Knapp, p.81.

⁹⁴ Carrington, *Le cornet acoustique* (1983), p.36.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p.36.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p.37.

society. Ironically it is Muriel and Robert who are presented as inhuman in their opinions of their ageing relative. Suleiman observes that what strikes the reader about the heroine's voice is 'the contradiction between the humorous intelligence of the subject to whom this voice belongs, and the absolute denial of intelligence [...] to which her age, her physical state, and her dependent status reduce her in the eyes of her family.'⁹⁷ Marion proves her family and society wrong when, along with the other elderly residents, she succeeds in restoring the Holy Grail to the Goddess.

Having overheard her family's plans to send her to an old people's home, Marion returns to her room trembling ('je tremblais de fièvre').⁹⁸ The reader empathises with Marion's situation. Her attention turns to the fate of her two cats, Marmeen and Tchatcha and the red hen, of not being able to visit Carmella, and to not being able to make the cat hair that she had been saving up into a warm jumper.⁹⁹ The following day she visits Carmella to tell her the 'terribles nouvelles'.¹⁰⁰ Carmella is certain that 'le puits de la lumière fraternelle' is 'quelque chose d'extrêmement sinistre'.¹⁰¹ The publishers humorously describe it as 'all the weird Californian sects rolled into one'.¹⁰² Marion reflects 'Que dois-je faire ? [...] Ce serait dommage de me suicider alors que j'ai vécu quatre-vingt-dix-neuf ans et sans vraiment comprendre rien à rien.'¹⁰³ The thought of an old lady taking her own life is

⁹⁷ Suleiman, *Subversive Intent*, pp.169-170.

⁹⁸ Carrington, *Le cornet acoustique* (1983), p.37.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p.38.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² 'Correspondence: Carrington, Leonora; Ernst, Max; Tanning, Dorothea'.

¹⁰³ Carrington, *Le cornet acoustique* (1983), p.38.

tragic especially since she implies that she still has so much to learn. She later remarks 'j'avais trop de choses à découvrir encore, avant que de tomber roide dans la tombe' which conveys Marion's love of life and the idea that life is a learning process.¹⁰⁴ Carmella suggests that Marion escape to Lapland and imagines ways that she could help her escape from the home which involve renting a getaway car (for an hour or two) and a submachine gun which is reminiscent of a scene from a Hollywood movie.¹⁰⁵

Unable to think straight and 'crucifiée de désespoir', Marion returns home out of habit and not out of choice.¹⁰⁶ Aware that she has no say in the matter, Marion accepts her fate, 'rien de ce que je pourrais dire de vous fera changer d'opinion ; donc, quand me faudra-t-il partir ?'¹⁰⁷ She has no choice and is rendered powerless. In a filmed documentary, Carrington reflects that as one gets older one loses energy and becomes forgotten.¹⁰⁸ She remarks that 'old women are rather sort of put on those icebergs they send off into nowhere'.¹⁰⁹ This powerful visual image reflects the way that old women are abandoned by society. It also recalls the way that Carrington writes of her family wanting to ship her off to a sanatorium in South Africa in the postscript to *En bas*.¹¹⁰ Marion sets out to pack her tin chest not forgetting the all-important ear trumpet. Carrington often spoke of a 'surrealist

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, pp.46-47.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p.39.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p.41.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p.46.

¹⁰⁸ Acker.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Carrington, 'Postscript', in *Down Below* (2017), p.64.

survival kit' of objects, images, and other 'favourite things' with the aim 'to reawaken our sense of wonder and to renew our capacity for revery and revolt' and so we can imagine the ear trumpet as forming part of Marion's survival kit.¹¹¹ She poignantly remarks 'Lorsque l'on s'en va pour toujours il faut examiner très soigneusement ce que l'on emporte'.¹¹² The adverbial of time 'toujours' emphasises that an old people's home is one's last home on earth. However, as Kent observes 'Rather than the last stop before the final place of rest, the residential home, and by extension the narrative, becomes the site of adventure and opportunity where the limitations of old age are cast off.'¹¹³ The old people's home is not the end of one's journey but the beginning of a new one.

In the novel, when Galahad breaks the news to Marion of her imminent move to an old people's home, she admits 'Je ne suis jamais seule, Galahad. Ou plutôt, je ne souffre jamais de ma solitude. Je souffre beaucoup, par contre, à l'idée que ma solitude peut m'être arrachée par une poignée d'impitoyables personnes bien intentionnées.'¹¹⁴ Although loneliness is associated with old age, Marion has found pleasurable company in the cats, red hen, and cactus called Maguey with whom she shares the backyard and also in her weekly visits to Carmella. In a documentary, Carrington speaks of loneliness as a mood and being alone as a state and the importance of having friends especially old friends in old age.¹¹⁵ In the novel,

¹¹¹ Rosemont 'A Revolution in the Way We Think & Feel', in *Surrealist Subversions*, ed. by Sakolsky, p.189.

¹¹² Carrington, *Le cornet acoustique* (1983), p.48.

¹¹³ Kent, p.293.

¹¹⁴ Carrington, *Le cornet acoustique* (1983), p.46.

¹¹⁵ Acker.

Carmella is prepared to go to any length to help Marion and is even prepared to risk her life to get hold of marijuana to alleviate her perceived suffering.¹¹⁶ Having discovered buried treasure in the form of uranium in her backyard, Carmella decides to rent Natacha's and Vera's 'double-pavillon'.¹¹⁷ The discovery of uranium is perhaps a reference to the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima, Japan on 6 August 1945 which used this radioactive chemical element. When Marion asks why does she not buy 'un luxueux palais', she replies simply 'J'aime la compagnie' and that she will bring luxury with her in the form of tins of sardines.¹¹⁸ This confirms that the elderly do suffer from loneliness and underscores the importance of Marion and Carmella's friendship.

Marion's loss of power is coupled with a regaining of power. Having established that it is Natacha and Vera who have killed Maud, Marion and Georgina inform Dr Gambit. However, he refuses to believe them and dismisses them as 'victimes de [leur] imagination délirante'.¹¹⁹ Marion receives a visit from Carmella who had sensed that she was in danger and advises the women to embark on a hunger strike as a way of protesting against Dr Gambit.¹²⁰ Marion describes the hunger strike as 'une sorte de mutinerie'.¹²¹ It is therefore Carmella who encourages the women to take matters into their own hands. Marion informs the other women with the exception of Natacha and Vera and muses 'Ce n'était pas là une idée bien

¹¹⁶ Carrington, *Le cornet acoustique* (1983), p.84.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p.165.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p.167.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, p.149.

¹²⁰ Ibid, p.151.

¹²¹ Ibid, p.153.

agréable, ni une solution, de notre point de vue. Toutefois, être empoisonnées était pire, peut-être, que de mourir de faim'.¹²² This recalls the story 'La dame ovale' in which sixteen-year-old Lucretia sets out on a hunger strike as a way of rebelling against her authoritarian father who has forbidden her from transforming herself into a horse (see chapter six). Similarly, in *Le cornet acoustique*, the old women go on a hunger strike in protest against patriarch Dr Gambit's refusal to expel Natacha and Vera from the home. The hunger strike marks the point at which the novel descends further into the world of fantasy.

That evening, the women assemble at the bee pond. Cristobel shares out her fortune cookies which each contain a piece of paper with a fortune-horoscope written on it.¹²³ The women dance to the beat of a drum and Cristobel summons Hécate, Zam Pollum, 'la super-reine des Abeilles', and 'Tartare Haute Reine'.¹²⁴ This recalls the scene in 'La maison de la peur' (1938) when the young woman and horses all participate in a mathematical-musical dance (see chapter six). A cloud forms over the pond in the shape of a huge bumblebee wearing a crown which Orenstein interprets as an epiphany of the Goddess.¹²⁵ Marion describes this as 'une hallucination collective' which demonstrates the power of collective thought and disappears in a way that mimics Carroll's character of the Cheshire Cat.¹²⁶ The women persist with the hunger strike which becomes increasingly difficult because

¹²² Ibid, p.151.

¹²³ Ibid, pp.156-157.

¹²⁴ Ibid, p.158.

¹²⁵ Orenstein, *The Reflowering of the Goddess*, p.69.

¹²⁶ Ibid, p.158. See Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

of the unusually cold weather. The women are eventually summoned by Dr Gambit who announces that Natacha and Vera have been expelled from the institution. The reader later learns that this is thanks to Carmella and her threat to inform the papers. Empowered by the collective hunger strike as a way to affect social change, Georgina appoints herself as the group's spokeswoman. She announces that they want to oversee the preparation of their own meals, that the organisation of their meals will be put to a democratic vote, and criticises Dr Gambit's 'sinistres sermons' and 'infecte routine'.¹²⁷ The hunger strike against Dr Gambit has become one against patriarchy. The women are taking back power by challenging the routine and rules imposed on them. They have found their voice and with it a new freedom. She explains that they have no intention to renounce their newly found freedom since for too long they have remained 'sous la domination d'époux atrabilaires and have been 'persécutées par nos fils et nos filles' who no longer love them. As Kent observes 'Marion has a freedom paradoxically created by no longer being needed, or being looked at, or being available to be looked at.'¹²⁸ As a collective group, they have a newly found confidence and are taking back power.

In old age, Marion discovers her true identity. The novel is perhaps as much a quest for identity as it is for the Holy Grail. In a rapid succession of events, an earthquake shakes the earth, the tower bursts into flames and out flies 'une extraordinaire créature' called Séphira. The name 'Séphira' relates to esoteric Jewish mysticism (Kabbala). It is a hybrid human-bird creature with feathers and six wings

¹²⁷ Carrington, *Le cornet acoustique* (1983), p.163.

¹²⁸ Kent, p.297.

and recalls the feathered-serpent Mexican deity Quetzalcóatl. Cristobel leads Marion to the tower and she decides to descend the flight of stairs. This recalls Carrington's memoir *En bas* in which she descends psychologically into psychic disorder, physically during the Cardiazol-induced convulsions, and spiritually into the self. In both *En bas* and *Le cornet acoustique*, one could argue that Carrington descends to discover her true self-identity. Marion descends the stone steps in darkness and enters a kitchen or moreover an alchemical kitchen in which a woman stirs a huge iron cauldron. This cooking pot is at once a sorceress' cauldron and an alchemical athanor and therefore has connotations of cooking, creativity, magic, and transformation. Marion announces 'Il me sembla la reconnaître, bien que je ne pusse voir son visage' and in an unexpected scene she recognises the woman as herself, 'la femme qui se tenait devant moi, c'était moi-même!'¹²⁹ This illusion recalls the painted furniture in Marion's tower-lighthouse. The woman forces Marion at knife-point into the cauldron and she finds herself alongside 'mes compagnons de détresse, à savoir un carotte et deux oignons' and with a roar of thunder she finds herself stirring the soup with her own body in it.¹³⁰ This is more than a homemade broth; it is a magic potion. It recalls Carmella's letter to Marion in which she narrates a perverse dream in which she had to bury her own body.¹³¹

Curious about who she has become, Marion takes a look in a mirror and sees the faces of 'l'Abbesse de Santa Barbara de Tartarus', then 'la reine des Abeilles', and

¹²⁹ Carrington, *Le cornet acoustique* (1983), p.180.

¹³⁰ Ibid, p.182.

¹³¹ Ibid, p.85.

finally her own face and assures the reader that this was not 'une illusion optique'.¹³² Orenstein identifies this as the Triple Goddess whose three aspects of Virgin, Mother, and Crone are replaced by the Abbess, Queen Bee, and Marion.¹³³ It suggests that her identity is threefold and that this is perhaps the female Holy Trinity which Carrington imagines in *En bas*.¹³⁴ Marion announces 'Je me sentais très bien et toute revigorée après avoir avalé le bouillon brûlant' and compares this to the time that she had her last tooth removed and perhaps to a sense of relief from pain.¹³⁵ She feels reinvigorated and her health has been restored. Kent imagines that 'infirmary is simply cooked away'.¹³⁶ Cooking is not only a creative process but an alchemical elixir of life. Marion has transformed from 'un vieux sac de viande en décomposition' into 'une chèvre de montagne'.¹³⁷ Kent observes a transition from dependence to independence, from decomposition to rebirth.¹³⁸ Marion has been reborn yet is still an old woman with a renewed (eternal?) 'esprit vieille'. The reader later learns that the other women have also experienced this alchemical rebirth. The old women do not die but are reborn; death is not final as Carrington redefines the relationship between life and death. As Kent states 'The unwritten fear of the elderly of a descent towards death in the home does feature here, but the rebirth which follows heralds the start of a new life, as Marian steps back from old age into

¹³² Ibid, p.183.

¹³³ Orenstein, *The Reflowering of the Goddess*, p.69.

¹³⁴ Carrington, *En bas* (1945), pp.63-64.

¹³⁵ Carrington, *Le cornet acoustique* (1983), p.183.

¹³⁶ Kent, p.298.

¹³⁷ Carrington, *Le cornet acoustique* (1983), p.183.

¹³⁸ Kent, p.302.

something more like eternal life.¹³⁹ These old women have not reached the end of their lives but are beginning new ones. Carrington believed that to die meant to enter another world, to journey from the world of the living to that of the dead.¹⁴⁰ She considered life and death to be interconnected ('Everything is interrelated. I mean everything in this phenomenal world is interrelated') which is in the spirit of Mexican culture.¹⁴¹

One of the final scenes in the novel is a procession of animals and humans on a mission to restore the sacred pneuma to the Goddess, 'une armée constituée d'abeilles, de loups, de six vieilles femmes, d'un facteur, d'un Chinois, d'une Arche à propulsion atomique, et d'une femme-garou.'¹⁴² The only men present are the postman Taliessin and chauffeur Majong. In fact, during the incantation to summon the Goddess, Marion reveals that 'Taliessin et Majong s'étaient retirés dans le monde d'en haut, car les hommes n'avaient pas le droit d'assister à cette cérémonie magique.'¹⁴³ This idea is continued from her play *Pénélope* (1957) in which men are also excluded from the realm of magic ('Les hommes Quatre-pieds sont d'une race faible et méchante, ce sont des hommes qui ne connaissent pas la magie').¹⁴⁴ It is this quest for the Holy Grail that links the historic document on the Abbess to the narrative of Marion. There have been many reworkings of the Arthurian legend of the quest for the Holy Grail, for example in Steven Spielberg's Hollywood movie

¹³⁹ Ibid, p.297.

¹⁴⁰ Acker.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Carrington, *Le cornet acoustique* (1983), p.203.

¹⁴³ Carrington, *Le cornet acoustique* (1983), p.202.

¹⁴⁴ Carrington, 'Pénélope', p.134.

Indiana Jones and The Last Crusade (1989) we follow Jones on his search for it.¹⁴⁵

However, *Le cornet acoustique* is the only reworking of the legend of the Holy Grail in which a woman or women return it to the Goddess which underscores its originality.

In conclusion, in the surrealist novel *Le cornet acoustique*, Carrington subverts the surrealist celebration of childhood and celebrates old age as a way of accessing *le merveilleux*. She also subverts the surrealist image of woman as *femme-enfant* and reimagines the figure of the old woman or crone. She rejects the idea of woman as a passive *femme-enfant* and presents the older woman as an active 'vieille dame'. The main characters in the novel are ninety-nine-year-old Marion and her best friend Carmella and the other old ladies at the home. It is significant that the final words of the novel are 'vieille dame'; the focus of the novel is refreshingly on the old(er) woman.¹⁴⁶ As Carrington reminds Parisot in her letter these women do not have a youthful spirit but a no less inferior 'esprit vieille'.

Carrington reimagines old age and offers a refreshingly optimistic outlook on the process of ageing. She presents it as a time of creativity and the beginning of a new adventure. For example, the old peoples' home does not mark the end of one's life but the beginning of a new one; old age is not the end of but the beginning of a journey. She also presents old women who are so often overlooked as invaluable to society. These old women restore the Holy Grail to the Goddess which heralds a return to matriarchy; the old woman is a champion of womankind.

¹⁴⁵ *Indiana Jones and The Last Crusade*, dir. by Steven Spielberg (Paramount Films/Lucasfilm, 1989).

¹⁴⁶ Carrington, *Le cornet acoustique* (1983), p.205.

In her paintings *The Magdalens* (1986) and *Kron Flower* (1987), Carrington casts off the cloak of invisibility and rejects the ideal of youth as synonymous with beauty. These crones are perhaps not beautiful in body but are so in spirit and are armed with the wisdom that they have acquired over the years. I argue that the female figures in these paintings and the elderly women in the novel embody *le merveilleux* with their 'esprit vieille' just as the *femme-enfant* embodies *le merveilleux* for the Surrealists. Or perhaps the way that these old women admire the world around them can be interpreted as *le merveilleux* which encompasses a lifetime of women's experiences.

Conclusion

It is clear that Prassinos's and Carrington's versions of *le merveilleux* as expressed through their surrealist writings are diverse and expansive. The Surrealists had an appetite and passion for *le merveilleux* which was key to the surrealist spirit. They assigned it a special status in their writings and redefined it. It can be understood as the discovery of the extraordinary in the ordinary and therefore as a way of looking at the world. It is also an otherworld which is brilliantly conveyed by the photograph on front cover of the eleventh issue of *La révolution surréaliste* captioned 'LA PROCHAINE CHAMBRE'.¹ This image depicts two men looking down a manhole into another world, the world of *le merveilleux*. It is also a transcendental experience; a spark which takes the form of an unfamiliar guise. As theorised by Breton, *le merveilleux* is connected to convulsive beauty which is neither static nor dynamic, conflates the animate and the inanimate, and produces shock. *Le merveilleux* is not fixed but in flux and evolves over time. It has an elasticity and is able to shape-shift and time-travel and is present in diverse genres. It conflates the historical and the modern (from romantic ruins to the modern mannequin) and can be found in the most unlikely of objects and places. However, like the problem facing the butterfly collector, once the *le merveilleux* is caught it is no longer extraordinary. Unlike Todorov's theory of the *merveilleux* as a literary genre, for the Surrealists it is an abstract concept. Throughout my thesis, I have read Prassinos's and Carrington's

¹ *La révolution surréaliste*, 11, 15 March 1928. It is similar to Maar's photograph 'Man looking inside a pavement inspection door' (1935) which depicts exactly that.

writings through the lens of the surrealist *merveilleux* which is my original angle. It is important to remember that there is no checklist of what *le merveilleux* is (or is not) since it extends beyond all limits and frontiers. I acknowledge the potential risk that the concept of *le merveilleux* becomes too expansive, too flexible, however it is this quality which allows me to interpret diverse works of prose and poetry by creative avant-garde women.

Prassinos was introduced to the surrealist group in Paris in 1934 at the age of fourteen after her 'automatic' writings were discovered by chance by her brother while Carrington was introduced to the group in 1937 following a chance meeting with Ernst at a dinner party in London with whom she fell in love. This exemplifies the efficacy of surrealist chance encounter and the eruption of *le merveilleux* into everyday reality. Although Prassinos and Carrington were accepted into the group as artist-writers, they were initially celebrated as mythic *femmes-enfants* which cast a shadow over their role as creative individuals. They were recognised as Surrealists by the Surrealists and their writings were published in surrealist periodicals; Prassinos in *Documents 34* and *Minotaure* and Carrington in *View* and *VVV*. Carrington's paintings were also displayed at a number of international surrealist exhibitions. However, neither Prassinos nor Carrington considered themselves to be members of the surrealist group and refused being labelled as such. Despite Surrealism beginning as a male-dominated movement, its emphasis on dream, the imagination, and the unconscious provided a creative milieu for them to work in and provided the tools to construct (or deconstruct) their own personal and artistic identities. In their early writings, both Prassinos and Carrington explore the realm of the imagination and conflate the real and the imaginary to create a world (or worlds) which go above and

beyond the real (the sur-real) and in a matter-of-fact way present the imaginary as reality, the unfamiliar as familiar.

It is almost certain that both Prassinos and Carrington were aware of the surrealist concept of *le merveilleux* since it was at the heart of the avant-garde literary-artistic movement. Surrealism was a way of life, a way of thinking, and also a way of being and the Surrealists actively set out to find *le merveilleux* in the everyday as well as to present it in their creative mediums. I argue that although Prassinos and Carrington were most likely aware of *le merveilleux*, they did not consciously apply it to their writings, and did not write with the aim of accessing or expressing it. Prassinos began to write to entertain herself and to amuse her father whereas Carrington wrote to express her wild and wondrous imagination, her inner visionary worlds, and to express her reality. As a scholar, I apply it to their writings and read them through the lens of *le merveilleux* in order to understand what it could be from a female perspective. *Le merveilleux* is not an exclusive male domain and having studied Prassinos's and Carrington's surrealist writings, I argue that they unconsciously formed their own versions of it.

Through close readings of their writings, I have disentangled their identities as writers from the trope of the *femme-enfant*. As discussed in chapter one, Prassinos's legacy has come to be (mis)represented by Man Ray's infamous and widely reproduced 1934 photograph which casts Prassinos into the role of the *femme-enfant* and presents her as an embodiment of *écriture automatique*. One could argue that Prassinos embodies *le merveilleux* in the way that she is presented as a modern mannequin or model of their theories. Similarly, Carrington was also cast into the role of the passive *femme-enfant* which she outright rejected and

rebelled against throughout her life and work. By analysing their diverse writings, I have shown that their roles as creative artist-writers outweigh that of the mythic *femme-enfant*.

In their creative œuvre, both Prassinós and Carrington extend and subvert surrealist themes and techniques. Prassinós's early surrealist writings assembled in the collection *La sauterelle arthritique* (1935) and volume *Trouver sans chercher (1934-1944)* (1976) encompass varied themes and genres from poetry to prose. Her writings present the reader with a subversive child's world and overall the texts analysed can be categorised as 'ludique' and 'insolite' in their Lewis Carroll(esque) playfulness and in their creation of unusual scenes and images. The themes in Carrington's first published story 'La maison de la peur' (1938) and 1939 collection *La dame ovale* are as subversive and fantastical and encompass chance encounter, *humour noir*, and transformation. Throughout their writings, they present alternative female visions of the world which take their readers into new realms of experience and consciousness.

Looking back at the four chapters dedicated to Prassinós and her writings, it is clear that *le merveilleux* manifests itself in different ways. Both *écriture automatique* and *humour noir* can be understood as two ways to access *le merveilleux*. *Le merveilleux* is not only a way of looking at the world but it is 'la seule source de communication éternelle entre les hommes [et femmes]'.² It is a method of communication and moreover a surrealist literary-artistic technique and strategy.

² André Breton, 'Le merveilleux contre le mystère : A propos du symbolisme', *Minotaure*, 9, 1936, p.31.

As I have shown in chapter two, Prassinós created her own style of automatic writing which the Surrealists claimed as proof of their theory. Her version combines conscious and unconscious thought and fulfils the surrealist aspiration of combining opposing states. *Écriture automatique* can be understood as a way to access *le merveilleux* since it brings together words not usually associated with one another to create vivid visual images. One can argue that *le merveilleux* is the spark produced when two distant realities collide. Another way to access it is through surrealist *humour noir*. It is an artistic-literary mood which manifests as a critique of society and of the human condition. Both Prassinós's and Carrington's texts featured in Breton's *Anthologie de l'humour noir* actively contribute to this notion and to our understanding of it. However, they are not humorous and express the darkness of *humour noir* more so than the element of humour. In these subversive texts, *le merveilleux* can be interpreted as a way to criticise society. In the fourth chapter, through a close reading of texts from the volume *Trouver sans chercher (1934-1944)*, I have shown how Prassinós finds the extraordinary in the ordinary without looking for it which would have been to the envy of the Surrealists. She draws on flora and fauna in particular the insect (grasshopper, glowworm, and butterfly) and creates a surreal world. For Prassinós, *le merveilleux* is a creative way to express the female consciousness, the oppression of women in patriarchal society, and to present her own vision of the world from a female perspective.

With regards to Carrington's writings, in her first published short story 'La maison de la peur', she invites the reader into a surreal world. In the narrative, the ordinary is juxtaposed with the extraordinary as a young woman meets a talking-horse on a street at midday and the reader enters the realm of the fantastic. Similar

to Prassinos's use of language to create striking visual images, Carrington experiments with language and not only criticises the rules of society but also the rules of language as she resists agreement and conjugation. In this narrative, both the protagonist and reader are initiated into the surreal world of *le merveilleux*, a world which extends beyond the real, rationality, and rules. In 'Venda et le parasite' and 'Véra dit', Prassinos visually and viscerally illustrates the oppression of women in society. Carrington takes this a step further and her female characters rebel against patriarchal upper-class society and the restrictions it places on women. Not only does the reader find themselves in a real-imagined world but *le merveilleux* becomes a strategy to criticise society. In these texts, *le merveilleux* can be understood as Carrington finding new ways to criticise social set ups and to explore issues of social class and status. In chapter seven, I propose that Carrington develops a new type of *merveilleux*, the embodied *merveilleux*. She not only assigns it a physicality but proposes a way of accessing it through the body. In *En bas*, Carrington identifies her body with the social body, the biological with the societal and the political before aligning it with the avant-garde trope of the machine, and also identifies her body with the natural world. She internalises the world around her and relives the experience through her body as she experienced it. By identifying herself with the other, she seems to be trying to access something other than the ordinary. In the final chapter on Carrington, I have explored the way that she reimagines old age through the figure of nonagenarian Marion Leatherby in her novel *Le cornet acoustique* (1974) and the way that in a surrealist act of subversion she celebrates old age as opposed to childhood as a way of accessing *le merveilleux*. The old women have not lost their appreciation of or curiosity for the world around them.

Women's avant-garde writing is doubly marginal in that it is written by women and experimental and remains largely unexplored. Although Prassinós's and Carrington's writings have been studied by feminist scholars, there remains much scope for original research and comment. In my thesis, I have discussed a limited selection of Prassinós's early writings and Carrington's narratives, however, their other surrealist texts could also be read in dialogue with *le merveilleux*. For Prassinós and Carrington, *le merveilleux* was not just a theory but a way of writing. They created their own versions of it not necessarily as a theme that one can pin down but as a technique to present their own visions of the world. Their writings are of no less importance than those by their male surrealist counterparts and by analysing avant-garde women's writing we are able to evaluate the role of women in Surrealism more accurately, what they contributed, and their attitudes towards it. We are also able to consider not only what Surrealism offered creative women but what these women brought to Surrealism and what they contributed to the surrealist understanding of *le merveilleux*. Throughout my thesis, I have considered Prassinós and Carrington as women who worked *in dialogue with* Surrealism and have read their works against the backdrop of the movement to illustrate how they subverted and/or extended surrealist themes to present their own alternative versions of the surrealist *merveilleux*. It has not been my intention to rewrite them into the surrealist canon but to consider them in line with the principles of this literary-artistic-intellectual movement.

Looking to the future, we are approaching the centenary of Prassinós's birth in 2020 and the one hundredth anniversary of Breton's first *Manifeste du surréalisme* in 2024. This not only highlights the timeliness of my thesis but it will

hopefully mark the beginning of a renewed interest in Prassinós's legacy as a writer and a continued one in the other creative women associated with Surrealism. In addition, upcoming retrospectives on avant-garde women artists such as the 'Dora Maar' exhibition at the Tate Modern, London (19 November 2019 – 15 March 2020), the largest retrospective of Maar to be held in the UK, conveys a continued interest in the women artists (and writers) of the avant-garde.³ I hope that this momentum does not decelerate and that these women artists and writers continue to be brought to the forefront of public and scholarly consciousness. Overall, I hope that my thesis paves the way for further readings of women's avant-garde writings through the wide lens of *le merveilleux* and that these women will become as well-known as artists and writers as their male surrealist counterparts.

³ This exhibition was held at the Centre Pompidou, Paris between 5 June – 29 July 2019.

Appendix

Gisèle Prassinos, untitled and undated poem

Bibliothèque historique de la Ville de Paris (BHVP), fonds Gisèle Prassinos, [MS-FS-01-0083]

Imagine des roses migratrices.

Chaque automne, en l'air
des triangles de roses frileuses
que la course échevèle [sic]
la grande Impériale commise en tête.

Et tous ces parfums là-haut
toutes ces tendres plumes
tombant sur nos épaules
déléguées pour célébrer la récolte
l'au revoir.

Figure 1.

'The Old Ladies of St. Brigida', Dirty Market's adaptation of Carrington's *The Hearing Trumpet* (1974).

Photograph taken by Jon Lee, 2017.

Reproduced with the kind permission of Jon Lee (founder of Dirty Market theatre group).



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