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## Ghost-Ridden Authors/Ghost-Written Texts: Female Phantoms in Two Works by André Breton and Georges Bataille

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Vicki Kirsch

I simply believe that between my thought, such as it appears in what material people have been able to read that has my signature affixed to it, and me, which the true nature of my thought involves in something but precisely what I do not yet know, there is a world, an imperceptible world of phantasms . . .

André Breton, *Preface for a Reprint of the Manifesto*

We had started climbing the rocky mountain with its utterly romantic wall, when a white and thoroughly luminous ghost leapt forth from a deep cavity in the rocks and barred our way. It was so extraordinary that one girl and my mother fell back together, and the others let out piercing shrieks. I myself felt a sudden terror, which stifled my voice, and so it took me a few seconds before I could hurl some threats, which were unintelligible to the phantom, even though I was certain from the very beginning that it was all a hoax. The phantom did flee the moment he saw me striding towards him, and I didn't let him out of my sight until I recognized my older brother . . . Wearing a sheet, he had succeeded in scaring us by popping out under the sudden ray of an acetylene lantern.

Georges Bataille, "Coincidences", *Story of the Eye*

André Breton concludes the second part of his narrative *Nadja* with the following series of questions marked by quotation marks: "Who goes there; Is it you, Nadja? Is it true that the beyond, that everything beyond is here in this life? I can't hear you. Who goes there? Is it only me? Is it myself?" [144]<sup>1</sup> This self-conscious interrogation comes as a finale to the body of a text written in the hey-

day of surrealism, 1928, by the founder of the movement. With the *Manifesto of Surrealism* having been written in 1924, *Nadja* is a practicum for the movement's ideas and ideals. It could be described as a love story, relating Breton's relationship with a woman who calls herself Nadja from the end of August to the end of December. He begins with the question "Who am I?" When Nadja enters the text, about a third of the way through, the emphasis is on a searching for her which eventually, as in the quote above, leads back to its origin in Breton. The very question of Nadja's existence is a central one in the text, and as such *Nadja* straddles the traditional lines between fiction and autobiography, between novel and psychoanalytic case history.<sup>2</sup>

Also written in France in 1928 is a novel titled *Story of the Eye* by Georges Bataille.<sup>3</sup> Considered pornographic by Andrea Dworkin,<sup>4</sup> it recounts a love shared between the narrator and two girls, Simone and Marcelle. Like *Nadja*, *Story of the Eye* is told in the first person and does include supposedly actual occurrences in the life of Bataille. This is suggested after the body of the text in a section entitled "Coincidences" in which Bataille shares with the reader the associations he has with parts of the book, much like Freud's patients' associations with manifest dream content. "While composing this partly imaginary tale, I was struck by several coincidences and since they appeared indirectly to bring out the meaning of what I have written, I would like to describe them." [107] The coincidences reveal associations with Bataille's childhood experiences, his relationship with his father, and scenes from his travels. Although not exactly the same technique of automatic writing described and utilized by Breton and other surrealists, the kind of writing that Bataille says he used in *Story of the Eye*—"I began writing with no precise goal . . ." [107]—is similar in its relation to Freud. Both Breton and Bataille use the free association technique based on "the talking cure" of Freud and Breuer in *Studies in Hysteria*<sup>5</sup> and write without critical self-consciousness. Simone and Marcelle did not exist as individuals, though it may be no coincidence, as I will discuss later, that Breton's wife's name was Simone. In this paper, I will refer to the narrator of *Nadja* as André Breton, but will refer to the narrator of Bataille's book as "the narrator." For despite Bataille's inclusion of "Coincidences" ("Thus at first, I thought that the character speaking in the first person had no relation to me" [102]) there is an important difference between the two books—though one that, by the inclusion of "Coincidences" and

the final section of *Nadja*, is called into question in the texts themselves.

It is curious that I was unable to locate even one reference to any relationship between *Nadja* and *Story of the Eye*. Both of these books were written in France in 1928 in the midst of a personal and political quarrel between the two authors. On one level, I propose that Bataille's story is an outrageous, cutting, and excremental response to Breton's text of pure spiritual love, a text which Bataille situates as being symptomatic of the surrealist movement. On another level, I will look at the relationship between the men-authors-masters and the women-characters-subjects who inhabit their stories. In both *Nadja* and *Story of the Eye*, the women embody the attitudes and ideologies politicized by their intellectual creators. They also embody the notion of the phantom, and it is by focusing on the use of the phantom motif that I will proceed. I hope that by my tracking the phantom through these two levels of reading, a new understanding of author, character, and text will emerge.

The personal and political differences between Breton and Bataille were played out in the public arena. They despised each other. And even though Breton was at this time a powerful man in the world of the French avant-garde, and Bataille was working as a mere librarian, this did not lessen either of their blows. A rage of name-calling ensued, presumably in the cafés of Paris and certainly in the journals being circulated. As Allan Stoekl succinctly states, "It was indeed an all-out assault on dignity."<sup>6</sup> Although it is not within the scope of this paper to examine this controversy in detail, a brief reading of two pertinent papers will serve to illustrate some of the salient points.

### Mind vs. Matter

In the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*, published in 1930, Breton openly criticized Bataille for comparing surrealism to what Breton called the "nonmind" of anti-dialectical materialism. "M. Bataille professes to wish only to consider in the world that which is vilest, most discouraging, and most corrupted. . . ."<sup>7</sup> Breton used as an example Bataille's description of the dismemberment of a rose in which he said: "all that remains is the sordid looking tuft." In Breton's way of thinking "the rose, stripped of its petals, remains the rose."<sup>8</sup> But perhaps the most interesting form of name-calling in the *Manifesto* is Breton's use of psychoanalysis as a weapon:

He is trying, with the help of the tiny mechanism in him which is not completely out of order, to share his obsessions: this very fact proves that he cannot claim, no matter what he may say, to be opposed to any system, *like an unthinking brute*. What is . . . embarrassing about M. Bataille's case is that his phobia about "the idea," as soon as he attempts to communicate it, can only take an ideological turn. A state of conscious deficiency, in a form tending to become generalized, the doctors would say.<sup>9</sup>

Breton stops barely short of calling Bataille's ideas pathological. Breton writes further, "It is to be noted that M. Bataille misuses adjectives with a passion: befouled, senile, rank, sordid, lewd, doddering, and that these words, far from serving him to disparage an unbearable state of affairs, are those through which his delight is most lyrically expressed."<sup>10</sup> The personal thrust of the attack is striking. We mustn't forget that Breton, in a footnote citing Marx, describes Bataille as an "excremental philosopher."<sup>11</sup>

Bataille's paper, "The 'Old Mole' and the Prefix *Sur* in the Words *Surhomme* [Superman] and *Surrealist*," can be read as his response to Breton's attack. Although it was first published in *Tel Quel*, 34 (Summer 1968), it must date from the time of the original controversy, 1929–1930. The paper begins with a stating of the two positions, utilizing Breton's definition of Bataille's materialism and countering it with Bataille's own definition of surrealism: ". . . we could at the same time identify surrealism as a childhood disease of this base materialism."<sup>12</sup>; in other words, something we grow out of. Bataille grounds his reproof of surrealism in the reality of class struggle as opposed to the surrealist emphasis on the spirit which resides above the world of facts. Bataille uses the images of the eagle and the mole to talk about Nietzsche and Breton. Bataille indulges in his share of name-calling, describing Breton as having a "pathology of castration reflexes."<sup>13</sup> Again, we note the use of psychoanalytic jargon. He also accuses Breton of putting it to literary use: "Others instinctively know how blocked impulses are to be taken into account. The surrealists employ them in literature, in order to attain the displaced and pathetic grandeur that strips them of relevance."<sup>14</sup> The central point of Bataille's attack rests on what he calls the "Icarian illumination," his notion that Breton scorns this world and suffers from the illusion that "the blinding celestial vault, when it becomes a psychological obsession, implies spiritual elevation."<sup>15</sup> He identifies Breton with the confused bourgeoisie and a "servile idealism"<sup>16</sup> in the face of the decomposition of the world around him.

The purpose of this brief exposé is to give a smell of the air in which *Nadja* and *Story of the Eye* were written. I will show that tensions presented above will now reappear in another form within these two novels written at the height of this controversy.

### The Phantoms

Breton appeals to the idea of the phantom at the very beginning of *Nadja* as his response to "Who am I?" The question lingers for a moment on the possibility of "knowing whom I haunt"[11] and Breton then fully opens the doors to the text with a consideration of ghosts. He considers himself to be a phantom roaming the world for the purpose of "haunting" his outer self: ". . . what I regard as the objective, more or less deliberate manifestations of my existence are merely the premises, within the limits of this existence, of an activity whose true extent is quite unknown to me. My image of the 'ghost' . . . is particularly significant for me as the finite representation of a torment that may be eternal. Perhaps my life is nothing but an image of this kind . . ."[12] One of the central images in surrealism for Breton, the phantom resides in each person and is the living synthesis between the overtly contradictory regions of the real and the unreal, life and death, waking and sleeping. Indeed, "Nadja's appearance on the scene"[60] a third of the way through the text is that of the fleeting phantom, and is accompanied by the flash occurrence of spirit into blood on earth: "Last of all, now, the tower of the Manoir d'Ango explodes and a snowfall of feathers from its doves dissolves on contact with the earth of the great courtyard . . . now covered with real blood!"[60] Of course the manor must be the haunted castle where phantoms reside, which I will discuss later, but it is also Breton's place of residence in August 1927: "(Could it have been otherwise, once I decided to write *Nadja*?)"[23] and he includes the accompanying photograph.[22] The doves foreshadow Breton's lament later in the book as he describes *Nadja* as "the splendidly mournful bird of divination." [91]

In the description of *Nadja* as Breton first sees her, the physical qualities of a ghost are unmistakable: ". . . she scarcely seemed to touch the ground as she walked." [64] He describes her as being ". . . so pure, so free of any earthly tie . . ."[90]; a woman beyond the fetters of the world. Her relationship to time is extraordinary. She seems to wander without constraints of commitment or time of day, and says to Breton one evening: "Time is a tease—because every-

thing has to happen in its own time.”[102] Breton continues to narrate his life with Nadja with an air of wonder, yet his admiration for her difference becomes increasingly accompanied by a will to possession which takes two forms: the first as an obsession with knowledge and the second a panicked fear of her disappearance. “Who are you?” Breton asks, and she answers “I am the soul in limbo.”[71] What does Breton mean when he says this question “. . . sums up all the rest” and the response is perhaps “a reply worthy of it.”?[71] This is the question with which, in other forms, the book begins and ends—the recurring nightmare, the haunting. He asks it again in a more rhetorical form: “Who is the real Nadja—who enjoyed being nowhere but in the streets . . .”[113] He asks with urgent passion, as if, could he only know, he would be able to hold on to her forever. But above all else he fears her disappearance: “There might be some of those false annunciations, those provisional moments of grace, real deathtraps of the soul, an abyss, an abyss into which the splendidly mournful bird of divination has vanished again.”[91] Yet even though the obsessed Breton dreads and mourns the fleetingness of Nadja’s presence, it is precisely that which allows him to love her, which captures him. “I have taken Nadja, from the first day to the last, for a free genius, something like one of those spirits of the air which certain magical qualities momentarily permit us to entertain but which we cannot overcome.”[111]

The image of the phantom in Bataille’s text is a bit of a joke. It comes at a time in the tale when things are running at a high fever: Marcelle has been taken away to an asylum after an orgy in Simone’s house in which, after standing on a table with Simone and “peeing” onto the tablecloth, Marcelle climbs into a clothes wardrobe and “jerks off.” The parents come home and see these girls and boys smeared with “cum,” “jism,” and blood, sprawled around the house, and Marcelle is removed from the wardrobe by the narrator in an entirely incoherent state. Soon the narrator and Simone discover that she has been sent away, and set out on their bikes to rescue “Marcelle who was in prison and at the mercy of nightmares.”[34] “. . . our attention was drawn to a strange apparition. We had scaled the wall and were now in the park . . . when we spied a second-story window opening and a shadow holding a sheet and fastening it to one of the bars. The sheet promptly smacked in the gusts, and the window was shut before we could recognize the shadow.”[36] Bataille is describing here a shadow placing the sheet outside the window as a sign, a signal. The identity of the shadow itself is still

unknown, yet in the next paragraph the signal itself becomes the ghost.

It is hard to imagine the harrowing racket of that vast white sheet caught in the squall . . . Simone . . . huddled against me . . . and gaped at the huge phantom raging in the night . . . all at once the wind seemed to tatter the clouds, and the moon, with a revealing clarity, poured sudden light on something so bizarre and so excruciating for us . . . at the center of the sheet flapping and banging in the wind, a broad wet stain glowed in the translucent moonlight . . .[36]

For Breton, the existence of the phantom is as serious a concern as being itself: Who am I, who are you? The joke is that Bataille's phantom is a bed sheet with "piss" on it, as explained by him on the next page: "It was our unfortunate friend . . . who had tied that stunning signal of distress to the bars of her prison. She had obviously jerked off in bed with such a disorder of her senses that she entirely inundated herself . . ."[37] What is the significance of the phantom for Bataille? With the glistening wet spot illumined within the grand scheme of the natural elements, the ghost becomes a part of the natural world. Yes, it is nothing more than a bedsheet soaked with bodily excrement. But it is nothing less than the very stuff of heterogeneity.<sup>17</sup> It is as if Bataille is saying: Here André, let us see you place this in your absolute space of sameness where all contradictions fall away. No element of the supernatural, nor of the spiritual divine beyond the body, is present. This is a direct contrast to Breton's phantom. The beautiful, haunting, golden-haired Nadja is an illusive and pure apparition which Breton invests with qualities of the divine. She is the dove, the pure soul. She is the phantom of spiritual love. And blond Marcelle is the phantom of the excremental without union and spilled onto the prison bedsheet.

### Ghosts in Residence

The dwelling places of the phantom are of great concern to both of the authors. For Breton, the phantom is most closely connected to the image of the castle. In his chapter titled "Esoterism and Surrealism" in *André Breton and the Basic Concepts of Surrealism*, Michel Carrouges discusses the haunted castle in Breton's work at some length. "In Breton's language, the term 'haunted' is all the more striking in that it distinguishes a place especially privileged in the mythical topology of surrealism . . . It is the place par excellence for



calling upon the powers of the supernatural."<sup>18</sup> He describes the two tendencies within surrealism, modern skepticism on the one hand and a belief in the supernatural phenomena on the other, and how Breton "has, then, always been able to preserve in the idea of the phantom a certain measure of the marvelous which can be totally reduced neither to Marxism nor to psychoanalysis . . . The aim of surrealism is to awaken the phantoms everywhere . . ." <sup>19</sup> and the castles become "observatories of the interior heavens."<sup>20</sup> The manor house and the prison also evoke this image. In *Nadja*, Breton includes photographs of Augo and the Chateau of Saint-Germain-en-Lage. He speaks about going with Nadja to the chateau: "Here, high in the chateau, in the righthand tower, there is a room which . . . no one would dream of showing us . . . but which, according to Nadja, is all that we would need to know in Saint-Germain . . ." [112] Breton also mentions the secret staircases and sliding doors: ". . . we may imagine the mind's greatest adventure as a journey of this sort to the paradise of pitfalls." [112] The "paradise of pitfalls," the "deathtraps of the soul," "the abyss"—these are the terms that Breton uses to evoke the place of the phantom as a ruin but also as a mirror where humans project the ghosts who haunt them. The prison, too, has this quality for Nadja: "'Listen, tell me why you have to go to prison too. Who was I? It was ages ago. And you then, who were you?'" [84] Nadja speaks about this fantasy of incarceration with an emphasis on the timeless; yet she is projecting back into a past. But where does Breton locate today's phantoms? It is telling that Nadja in fact ends up in an asylum. Of the "Bird of divination," Breton tells us "The essential thing is that I do not suppose there can be much difference for Nadja between the inside of a sanitarium and the outside. There must, unfortunately, be a difference all the same: an account of the grating sound of a key turning in a lock . . ." [136] Breton uses this opportunity to write for several paragraphs about life in the sanitariums and his contempt for psychiatry. "But, as I see it, all confinements are arbitrary. I still cannot see why a human being should be deprived of freedom." [141] But most of all, he laments for Nadja. She truly embodied a life of unrestricted freedom, which he had encouraged her to live, and never developed a persona which would allow her to function in society. "Yet I never supposed she could lose or might have already lost that minimal common sense which permits my friends and myself, for instance, to stand up when a flag goes past . . ." [143] Nadja refused these accommodations to

the social life, and in the end Breton seems to admit his blindness concerning Nadja's destiny: "I shall add, in my defense, only a few words. The well-known lack of frontiers between non-madness and madness does not induce me to accord a different value to the perceptions and ideas which are the result of one or the other." [144] Clearly influenced by Freud in this respect of the continuum leading from sanity to insanity, Breton's ranting against the asylum and the general tenor of psychiatry comes as no surprise.

The sanitarium as prison is presented very similarly by Bataille. Much as Nadja's residence there was only discovered by the author through hearsay, so also Bataille discovers Marcelle's incarceration through Simone's houseservants. Describing her as "the wretched inmate," [44] Bataille describes the connection thus: "I was in a hurry to arrive at the place that I dimly regarded as a 'haunted castle,' due to the association of the words sanitarium and castle, and also the memory of the phantom sheet and the thought of the lunatics in a huge silent dwelling at night." [58]

The narrator and Simone rescue her from the sanitarium, but they cannot rescue her from the alternate reality in which she continued to live. ". . . Simone and I realized that Marcelle grasped absolutely nothing of what was going on . . . Nonetheless when I spoke to Marcelle about the haunted castle she did not ask me to explain . . ." [61] Breton uses the image of the sanitarium as prison as a vehicle for a political exercise against the stifling of freedom—Bataille almost self-consciously neglects the political and locates the sanitarium scene entirely within the realm of the erotic. He describes Marcelle in these terms: "Her sleek pallid hair was caught in the wind, we could now make out her features: she had not changed . . . Under her nightgown, we could distinguish her thin but full body . . . as beautiful as her fixed stare." [41] As much anguish as Breton experiences thinking about the spirit of Nadja behind bars, Bataille's narrator is equally distressed in mourning Marcelle's lonely body. The only malevolent sign of her captors comes while Simone and the narrator are watching her in the window. "But soon, some invisible monstrosity appeared to be yanking Marcelle away from the bars, though her left hand clutched them with all her might. We saw her tumble back into her delirium. And all that remained before us was an empty, glowing window, a rectangular hole piercing the opaque night, showing our aching eyes a world composed of lightning and dawn." [41]

The sanitarium is a temporary place for apparitions such as Marcelle. What could a world of lightning and dawn consist of except the dark natural world illuminated by cracks of light—and there is indeed some play here with the end of *Nadja* when Breton mentions “. . . a huge sky-blue street sign bearing these words: THE DAWNS.”[155] In the final pages of the text Breton is speaking to a you who is a lover, and makes reference to this sign again. “Genius . . . what could I still expect from the few possible intercessors who have appeared to me under this sign, and which . . . I have ceased to possess . . . Nadja was one of these last . . . [157] The sexual frenzy of the naked Simone and the narrator under the piss-laden banner and Marcelle’s eventual accompaniment beneath this sign presents a much distorted view of what Breton had in mind. Thoroughly in keeping with Bataille’s satirical and excremental response to *Nadja*, a metamorphosis of the sanitarium into a glowing emptiness is appropriate. Before Marcelle is brought down by the narrator to the grounds where Simone is waiting, Bataille gives Marcelle the only speech she has in the entire story: “‘Now we can get married, can’t we? It’s very bad here, we suffer.’” The narrator continues: “At that point how could I do anything but devote the rest of my life to such an unreal apparition?”[60] When Marcelle makes this speech, she and the narrator are sitting on the window of the sanitarium. Isn’t this line precisely what Breton desired to hear from *Nadja*? Marcelle, sitting beneath the banner with her “master,” asking to be possessed, asking to be taken away from the asylum where she suffers. But Marcelle leaves this place, unlike *Nadja*—for it is not the total expenditure of mind-spirit but of body that is her fate.

### Analysis

What is the significance of the phantom-woman in these two texts? *Nadja* and Marcelle are ghosts in both the literal and the figurative sense—for they are described as apparitions and denied their own voices through which to speak. The men do all the talking. These texts are haunted by another woman kept from speaking by her master: Freud’s *Dora*.<sup>21</sup> But while *Dora* walks out on Freud with her newly empowered self, *Nadja* and Marcelle remain totally inscribed within the text: *Nadja* vanishes into the asylum and Marcelle dies. Linda Gardner, in her article “*Dora and Nadja: Two Women in the Early Days of Psychoanalysis and Surrealism*,” tells the reader: “In

such an instance, the person whose perceptions are denied and disregarded may be forced to 'comment' on the situation by leaving it altogether, as Dora did, or by going mad, as Nadja did."<sup>22</sup> What I wish to suggest is that while Dora did leave and live in a creative life outside of the text, as it were, Nadja and Marcelle comment on the situation within. Nadja has her drawings, which Breton includes, and Marcelle inscribes herself by first "pissing" onto the sheet and then hanging it out the window like a banner. Further, both of these women were able to take the kinds of powers that were granted them by their masters and transform them to their own advantage; they "speak," in spite of their authors. As suggested by Nina Auerbach, in her article "Magi and Maidens: The Romance of the Victorian Freud": "Dispossessed and seemingly empty, the women reveal a sort of infinitely unfolding magic that is quite different than the formulaic spells of the men."<sup>23</sup>

Breton includes ten photographic reproductions of Nadja's drawings. His interest in these drawings seems to be grounded in Freud's theory of hysterical conversion<sup>24</sup> in which an aspect of psychological trauma is converted into bodily expression. "Since this broadened the concept and intelligibility of language to include presentational symbolism, Breton and Louis Aragon were quick to applaud this tenet of psychoanalytic theory themselves."<sup>25</sup> But rather than try to free their discourse from its bodily expression and so alter the individual's future conduct in a positive way, Breton ". . . had no intention of analyzing this phenomenon, only of celebrating it."<sup>26</sup> Breton shows great passion in describing the circumstances of the drawings and the symbolical associations he is able to understand. But what is revealed in his telling is precisely the opposite. There is much that he does not understand and that Nadja could be accused of withholding from him. For example, when Nadja shows Breton the first of the drawings, "She is glad to explain the meaning of the principal elements of the drawing except for the rectangular mask about which she can say nothing save that this is how it looks to her . . . But what, according to Nadja, constitutes the chief interest of this page, without my managing to learn why, is the calligraphy of the L's." [105-6] Clearly Nadja knows some things about the drawing that she is unwilling to reveal. When Breton mentions that Nadja had tried to draw his portrait several times, he concludes with "After an inopportune remark I made to her about one of the last, and the best, of these drawings, she unfortunately cut off the whole lower part,

which was by far the richest in curious attributes.”[121] Of course, it is Breton who judges that this drawing was the best and that she, without knowing any better, ruined it for him. Other comments about Nadja’s drawings made by Breton are: “It was hastily made,”[12] and “a presence which Nadja herself did not explain.”[122] Finally, Breton having spoken about the earliest drawing describes to the reader the last: “But the last drawings, the unfinished, which Nadja showed me during the last visit . . . and which must have vanished in the torment that carried her away . . . (Before we met she had never drawn at all.)”[130] In these parentheses is revealed perhaps one of the most important clues to understanding Breton’s relationship to Nadja. It suggests that Breton, the master, is responsible for unleashing Nadja’s creative potential. Yet by her refusing to reveal all, one gets the feeling that Breton experiences a betrayal. She has accepted the power given her by Breton and uses it to its fullest; even to the point of ending up in an asylum. Although Nina Auerbach’s statement concerns Freud and Dora, I think a similar affliction is occurring here. She calls it “. . . the teller’s affliction . . . with what might be called ‘dream envy’ . . . In so far as Dora ‘refused to be a character in the story that Freud was composing for her, and wanted to finish it herself’ she both repudiated his project and attempted to exercise the powers it allowed her.”<sup>27</sup> Although I am not saying that Nadja chose to go into the asylum, I would argue that the true fulfillment of her ideas and ideals was accommodated by the society within the asylum. By creating these drawings and then refusing to participate in their analysis to Breton’s satisfaction, Nadja stole meaning from Breton’s life and he immediately denounced her: “For some time I had stopped understanding Nadja.”[130] Many of the characteristics that he had heretofore heralded he now personalizes and scrutinizes: “. . . perhaps we never understood one another . . . She had decided . . . to withdraw from the present moment, to make no differentiation between the trifling remarks which she happened to make and those others which mean so much to me, to ignore my momentary moods . . .” [130] As the text draws to a close, the jealous Breton seems more and more desperate as Nadja increasingly refuses to participate in his projection. “How many times . . . desperate to restore her to a true conception of her worth, I virtually fled . . .”[135] And in spite of his best intentions to silence her in the midst of a text which she neither begins nor ends, her inscription is plain.

Bataille's phantom-woman as signalled by the sheet is another fascinating statement about woman's inscription in a text. The image of the white sheet hung from the sanitarium window revealing a wet stain caused by "masturbation" heralds both the impotence of her power of speech and the source of her creativity. In Susan Gubar's article "'The Blank Page' and the Issues of Female Creativity," Gubar focuses on Isak Dinesen's short story "The Blank Page," which speaks of the sisters of a Carmelite order of nuns who grow flax to manufacture linen. This linen is used by the royalty of the region, and after the wedding night the stained bridal sheet is "hung in a long gallery with a plate identifying the name of the princess."<sup>28</sup> Rather than go further into this particular story, I wish to present a brief summary of Gubar's reading in order to utilize it in approaching Bataille's text. Gubar reads the gallery of bloodied sheets both as a "museum of women's paintings (each sheet displays a unique, abstract design and is mounted in a heavy frame) and a library of woman's literary works (the bloodstains are the ink on these woven sheets of paper)."<sup>29</sup> Further, she demands that "these bloodstained marks illustrate at least two points about female anatomy and creativity: first, many women experience their own bodies as the only available medium for their art . . . second, one of the primary and most resonant metaphors provided by the female body is blood . . ."<sup>30</sup> In rethinking the image of the hospital sheet vividly extending out into the night from the window, I can only see this, in light of Gubar's article, as a signal of her captivity and of her creativity. What other medium was available for Marcelle's self-expression? Bataille allows her only one line of dialogue, spoken when she is rescued: "Now we can get married, can't we? It's very bad here, we suffer . . ."[60] Marcelle seems to embody the excess that Simone and the narrator are able to indulge in and yet escape the consequences. In the guise of a presence, an occasion, a ghost, she provides him with something like freedom—for what would it mean to "devote the rest of one's life to such an unreal apparition?" The single line of dialogue is overtly false; a lie—spoken tongue in cheek to Breton. But she writes herself truly into the present using the only means and medium she has—her body. The shining spot on the sheet created by her masturbatory "piss" serves as a signal of loneliness, bondage, silence, and a signature of her material nature. It is an interesting contrast to Gubar's discussion of the blood from a wound or penetration of the victim, for the usual image of writ-

ing to which Gubar refers is that of the penis or pen penetrating the virgin page. The significance of Marcelle's sheet as canvas is that she has inscribed herself in the text entirely without the male or the pen. She has masturbated herself into being. Her painting brings her literal release from the asylum since it serves as a signal of distress recognized by Simone and the narrator. They take her back to Simone's house where she hangs herself in the bridal wardrobe after making some associations with the night of the orgy and her subsequent incarceration. It is only when Marcelle is dead that the narrator and Simone have sex. "It was impossible to do otherwise: Simone was still a virgin and I fucked her for the first time, next to the corpse." [66] Further, ". . . there had been a great change in Simone after Marcelle's suicide—she kept staring into space all the time, looking as if she belonged to something other than the terrestrial world . . . or if she was still attached to this world, then purely by way of orgasms." [70] Marcelle's presence is now in Simone.

Towards the beginning of the text, Bataille writes: "I was merely trying to soothe a violent agitation, a strange spectral delirium in which, willy-nilly, phantasms of Simone and Marcelle took shape . . . I realized that my life *had* to have some meaning . . . and would have one if only certain events, defined as desirable, were to occur. I finally accepted being so extraordinarily haunted by the names Simone and Marcelle." [30] With only her body as a means of self-expression, Marcelle's death is her ultimate act. Is this one of the desirable events to which the narrator alludes? By committing suicide in the "bridal wardrobe" she does perhaps marry the narrator as she asks in her one line of dialogue—for he says he feels closer to her dead than alive. Just as Nadja fulfills the ultimate ideals of Breton and ends in the asylum, so does Marcelle fulfill the ultimate ideals of Bataille through her suicide. Spirit into no-mind, body into corpse.

### Conclusion: Ghost-Written Texts and Ghost-Ridden Authors

The idea of the phantom as artist or as writer calls to mind the idiom "ghost-writer." A ghost-writer is someone who writes a book or article for someone else in that person's name; that is, her or his identity is subsumed in the signature author. Could one say that the phantom-women I have discussed in this paper, both artists, are ghost-writers of the texts they inhabit? Certainly Breton and Bataille

each had their own motivations. Breton wrote a text that embodied the attitude of the surrealist movement towards everyday life. But within *Nadja*, the haunting of the novel is foreshadowed by a text within the text: “. . . with that extraordinary way of calling me, the way you might call someone from room to room in an empty castle: ‘André? André? . . . You will write a novel about me.’”[100] The phantom is calling him to write and as he grants her the power of the unfettered spirit so she steals herself away—until Breton is dispossessed and seemingly empty: “Who goes there? Is it only me? Is it myself?”

One of Bataille’s motivations for writing the book, as I’ve suggested earlier, is a direct response to Breton; the rage of his excremental materialism against the surrealist attitude. Is it possible to speak of Marcelle as a ghost-writer? Perhaps. For Marcelle, her body and her art were one and the same and in order to complete her destiny to its fullest she had to die by her own hands.

But as noted above, this is not the end of Marcelle. At the end of the story, the narrator says, referring to Simone and himself: “. . . she looked more angelic than ever. In this way, we kept disappearing all through Andalusia, a country of yellow earth and yellow sky, to my eyes an immense chamberpot flooded with sunlight, where each day, as a new character, I raped a likewise transformed Simone, especially towards noon, on the ground and in the blazing sun.”[104] Keeping in mind that, with her death, Marcelle is encompassed in the body of the still-living, no longer virginal Simone, it will be useful to look closely at this passage: Simone/Marcelle is looking like an angel. It is the narrator and Simone/Marcelle who talk through a typically excremental landscape. The sunlight and the sun are central images for Bataille (the eye-sun connection as well) which I could not explore in this paper. They become important here because, in reference to *Nadja*, Breton insists: “As for her, I know that in every sense of the word she takes me for a god, she thinks of me as the sun.”[111] This, coupled with the fact that Breton’s wife’s name was Simone provides a very different way of reading this scene. Is this Bataille’s final pitch at Breton—to have himself in the guise of the narrator rape Breton’s wife and *Nadja* (in the guise of Marcelle) at the same time in full view of Breton (the sun)?

But what if Marcelle had ghost-written this scene? The character of Simone, according to Andrea Dworkin, “. . . exists in the male sexual framework: the sadistic whore whose sexuality is murderous



and insatiable . . . She is a prototypical figure in the male imagination. She is the male ideal of a woman let loose."<sup>31</sup> She is given words by Bataille in order to tell his story but she has no voice of her own. In this final scene there are no words—Simone has stopped speaking (has Bataille lost his voice?) and is possessed with the narrator in the landscape of excrement entirely as body. Having written her story by "pissing" onto the sheet, Marcelle's excrement now floods the entire text. As the excremental artist she has a vehicle for self-expression over which Bataille seems to have no power.

Both Nadja and Marcelle are victims of the lives and attitudes of their masters. They are victimized by their authors' quarrel, for they are destined to overdetermine the attitudes they embody by living them to the fullest. Yet in so doing they stole the magic of the male master and transformed it to inscribe themselves in the texts as only they could.

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### Notes

1. André Breton, *Nadja*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Grove Press, Inc. 1960). Page references for *Nadja* are given within the text.

2. In her article "Dora and Nadja: Two Women in the Early Days of Psychoanalysis and Surrealism," *Hecate*, 2 (Jan. 1976), pp. 23-40, Linda Gardner discusses at some length the problematic of comparing a case history with a novel. More recently, Nina Auerbach addresses this dilemma in "Magi and Maidens: The Romance of the Victorian Freud," in *Writing and Sexual Difference*, ed. Elizabeth Abel (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1982). She discusses the myth of the female life-in-death figure as found in the "stories" of Svengali (George du Maurier's *Trilby*), Dracula, and Freud (and their counterparts Trilby O'Ferrell, Lucy Westenra and "Frau Emmy von N"). For the purpose of this paper, I maintain that both Breton and Bataille reacted strongly against the positivistic ideas of personality that dominated nineteenth-century thinking. Throughout their work there is a constant questioning and self-consciousness of their own experiences in relation to the texts and to the characters within them. It would be a mistake to try to define their works according to these categories.

3. Georges Bataille, *Story of the Eye*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Berkeley Books, 1982). Page references for *Story of the Eye* are given within the text.

4. See Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1981).

5. "The Talking Cure" was the term used by Anna O. herself, according to Breuer, to describe the process by which hysterical symptoms would be removed by bringing the causes to consciousness and talking about them. According to Breuer: "Each individual symptom in this complicated case was taken separately in hand; all the

occasions in which it had appeared were described in reverse order . . . When this had been described the symptom was permanently removed." See Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, *Studies on Hysteria*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 1957), p. 35.

6. Georges Bataille, "Introduction by Allan Stoekl," *Visions of Excess*, ed. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1985), p. xi.

7. André Breton, "Second Manifesto of Surrealism," *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Michigan: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1972), p. 181.

8. Breton, *Manifestoes*, p. 186.

9. Breton, *Manifestoes*, p. 184.

10. Breton, *Manifestoes*, p. 184.

11. Breton, *Manifestoes*, p. 184.

12. Bataille, "The 'Old Mole' and the Prefix *Sur* in the Words *Surhomme* [Superman] and *Surrealist*," *Visions of Excess*, p. 32.

13. Bataille, "Old Mole," p. 39.

14. Bataille, "Old Mole," p. 39.

15. Bataille, "Old Mole," p. 42.

16. Bataille, "Old Mole," p. 41.

17. For a discussion of heterogeneity see "Sacrifices" and "The Psychological Structure of Fascism" in Bataille, *Visions of Excess*. Also: Michele H. Richman's *Reading Georges Bataille* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1982.)

18. Michel Carrouges, *André Breton and the Basic Concepts of Surrealism* (Alabama: Univ. of Alabama Press, 1974), p. 29.

19. Carrouges, p. 35.

20. Carrouges, p. 32.

21. The influence of Sigmund Freud on both Breton and Bataille is significant and warrants further exploration than I could do in this paper. It would be interesting to examine the possibility of Freud's treatment of the "Dora" case and master-subject relationship as being the prototype (c. 1900) of the two texts that are the subject here.

22. Gardner, p. 25.

23. Auerbach, p. 114.

24. See Breuer and Freud, particularly the case history of Frau Emmy von N.

25. Gardner, p. 30.

26. Gardner, p. 30.

27. Auerbach, p. 127.

28. Susan Gubar, "'The Blank Page' and the Issues of Female Creativity" in *Writing and Sexual Difference*, p. 78.

29. Gubar, p. 78.

30. Gubar, p. 78.


31. Dworkin, p. 176.



# PAROLES GELEES

UCLA French Studies



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Ce serait le moment de philosopher et de  
rechercher si, par hasard, se trouverait  
ici l'endroit où de telles paroles dégèlent.

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