

Yale UNIVERSITY PRESS

The Situation of Surrealism Between The Two Wars

Author(s): Andre Breton and R.G.C.

Source: *Yale French Studies*, 1948, No. 2, Modern Poets: Surrealists, Baudelaire, Perse, Laforgue (1948), pp. 67-78

Published by: Yale University Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2928881>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



Yale University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Yale French Studies*

JSTOR

ANDRE BRETON

The Situation Of Surrealism Between The Two Wars*

I have chosen to speak to you concerning the situation of surrealism between the two wars, that is to say, necessarily in relation to them. Surrealism is, in fact, the only organized intellectual movement which has succeeded in spanning the distance which separates the wars. It began in 1919 with the publication in the review *Littérature* of the first chapters of *Champs Magnétiques*, a work written in collaboration by Soupault and myself and in which automatic writing as an avowed method is given free play for the first time; to result, twenty years later, in the appearance of the *Chateau d'Argol* of Julien Gracq, in which surrealism returns freely upon itself to confront the great feeling-experiences of the past and to evaluate, as much from the viewpoint of emotion as from that of clairvoyance, the extent of its conquest. In another realm the result was the incontestable world triumph of the art of imagination and creation over the art of imitation, a triumph consecrated by the unprecedented brilliance of the last international exhibition of surrealism in Paris. I know: even during these last months at Yale you have probably heard it said that surrealism is dead. When I was still in France, I had promised myself to display in public one day everything which I had been able to collect in the way of newspaper articles built on this theme: surrealism is done for. It would have been rather piquant to show that they had followed upon one another almost monthly since the date of its foundation! Criticism—that of reviews, of books—has, anyway, largely compensated surrealism for these maniacal anticipations. I mention this now only in order to forestall the effect upon you of a recrudescence of these prophecies under cover of war during which one is always hard put to it to know who is living and who is not. With all due respects to some impatient grave-diggers, I think I know a little more than they do about what the final hour of surrealism would mean: it would be the birth

* André Breton's "Speech to the Students of Yale", presented in 1942, is actually an important manifesto of the surrealist movement. This is the first English translation to appear anywhere, and it is offered with the consent of the surrealist leader. A recent letter from André Breton informs us that the Speech has been reprinted twice recently in France, and it apparently remains a key reference-point. We have taken the liberty of removing an introductory "digression" which is of little interest now.

of a new movement with an even greater power of liberation. Moreover, because of that very dynamic force which we continue to place above all, my best friends and I would make it a point of honor to rally around such a movement immediately. But it is apparent that this new movement has not arisen. Historically, surrealism can claim unchallenged the place which it held in the avant-garde between the two wars. Arching as it does above the current of feeling which flows between them, nothing can prevent it from throwing a bridge between the beatific fading of one and the blind and anguished approach of the other, nothing can keep it from symbolizing, at least in its most crucial presentations of these last twenty years, the *arm of the scales*.

Comprehended for the moment between these limits, ministering to the whole emotional region which stretches between these two explosions, surrealism follows a route which goes from the repercussion in psychological and moral life of the first catastrophe to the rapid apprehension of the second. During this time life has nonetheless resumed all its forms, and it is this contradiction which surrealism has had to face in order to propose a swift readjustment of values.

Now that the storm is again fully unleashed, it is unfortunately easier to understand the necessity of this adjustment. Once again positivistic realism, which, in the periods of flat calm, returns to yawn above the waters, sees itself convicted of impotence and must flee, flailed with derision. So-called common sense, which can flatter itself for never having learned anything, is told to return at the end of the month with its invoice. What! Humanity tears itself apart more efficiently than in its earliest stages, two successive generations see the sun of their twenty years approaching only to be rushed onto the battlefields, and one would have us believe that this humanity knows how to rule itself, and that it is a sacrilege to object to the principles on which its psychic structure is founded! But what, I ask, what is that narrow "reason" which has been taught us if that reason must, from life to life, yield place to the unreason of wars? Must not that pretended reason be a lure, must it not be usurping the rights of a true unyielding *reason* which we must substitute for it at all costs and towards which we can move only by making, at the outset, *tabula rasa* of conventional modes of thought?

If I said that, before you, I felt poor, it was less in my own name than in the name of the men of my age. From the moment that the surrealist attitude found a clear voice, it was to exalt youth, to exhort it to not let itself be too quickly dispossessed of its treasures, to enjoin it to count only upon itself. Today the waves of youth break upon things other than the shadow of the

ANDRE BRETON

palm trees of Guadalcanal, than the ruins of Stalingrad, and the sands of Lybia. Youth's own virtue masks the insufficient states of consciousness that have caused its return into a delirium of iron and fire. But these far too embryonic states of consciousness will be swept away. From now on the future belongs to the power of that youth and of it alone. Surrealism, I repeat, was born from a limitless affirmation of faith in the *genius* of youth. One must admit that it has never reneged on this point, since it has never ceased proclaiming an unequalled radiation, a sense, one may say, of revelation—with all that this word implies of the absolute—in the message of a Lautréamont dead at the age of twenty-four, of a Rimbaud, who at eighteen years had finished his works, of a Chirico, for whom the gates of a world opened at twenty-three to close at twenty-eight. This gallery could be extended to Saint-Just, guillotined at twenty-seven years, to Novalis, who died at thirty, to Seurat, dead at thirty-two, to Jarry who at fifteen years of age wrote the great prophetic and avenging play of modern times, *Ubu roi*. Can it be that such examples will not finally arm youth with all its credentials, this *plus* the tribute of overflowing blood which the world has the habit of claiming from it periodically? Won't it finally give it a preponderant voice in the deliberations? Or will youth permit its bold solutions to be treated once again as child play and deferred? Such, approximately, is the content of the surrealist interrogation and, however localized, of the surrealist summons at the end of the war of 1914-18. I should be very much surprised if at the end of this war that interrogation, that summons, were not promulgated again with vastly greater force.

Observe that after the first war emphasis was placed with much less precision than today on the ideological conflict. Fascism not having yet been formulated, there were opposed theoretically only rather threadbare conceptions of the world, hardly concealing amid European countries a growing conflict of interests sharpened on eternal grudges and neighbors' quarrels. I think I remember that despair was very great: the outcome of the armed struggle had long been most uncertain. Those who returned, a little haggard and after all somewhat angry at seeing themselves so sparse, after throwing a suspicious glance around, decided to turn over the page. But, while doing this, they took back into their confidence the same book which reserved for them, or for their sons, the same terrible alarms. I do not hesitate to say that surrealism has investigated the very sense of the book, that it has not feared to attack its premises, that it has boldly undertaken to rewrite it.

What was the intellectual situation at this moment? Many intellects had failed, had let themselves be dragged backwards to a bellicose outbidding which

rang false and for which the combattants did not forgive them. In France this was the case with Bergson, Barrès, Claudel. Certain ones, like Gide, had remained silent: they were not blamed too much. Others, less numerous, had carried on their work, keeping it carefully apart from that which had just taken place—this was especially the case with the painters Matisse, Picasso, who were absolved. Valéry had confined himself to poetical exercises which were intensely non-involved, Proust to studies of social milieux which events seemed not to have been able even to touch: paradoxically, it wasn't going to be long before these men would be paid for their detachment with the highest honors. Already a center of attraction for some young people, the greatest poet of this century, Guillaume Apollinaire, had just died from the results of a wound on the very day of the armistice. He had insisted on risking his life, and, nevertheless, inasmuch as he had done his best to "sing the war," one had to recognize that his great abilities had often betrayed him. I nonetheless see again as if it were yesterday that man singular among all, the man whom I have seen with my own eyes incarnate to the highest degree the spirit of intellectual adventure. Enormous, buckled with great difficulty in the pale blue second lieutenant's uniform, disdainful of the sidewalks—the taxis are still at the front—emerging from his domicile at the Café de Flore, he advances a little like a balloon along the roadway of the Boulevard de Saint-Germain. Closer up, the eye at once bantering and so anxious, surmounted by the leather disk which covers up the trepanning scar, that disk and that lesion which Chirico traced distinctly in the portrait which he made of Apollinaire in 1915, that is to say, by a pure act of divination two years before the wound. Apollinaire: if I speak at length of him, it is because he has been much closer than anyone to thinking that in order to better the world it wasn't sufficient to re-establish it on a more just social basis, but that it was necessary, beyond this, to touch upon the essence of the Verb. That is, at least, the manifest sense of his great poem *La Victoire* one of the last of his works and one of the most hermetic in detail, which may pass for his spiritual testament:

*O mouths man is in search of a new speech
in which no language's grammarian will have a say
... ..
The word is sudden, and it is a God who trembles.*

Literally speaking, it is quite clear from a distance that automatic writing and the various other forms of automatic expression put into practise by surrealism have directly replied to this wish of Apollinaire by furnishing every man with the means of reawakening at will the God of whom he spoke. But I believe that, in spirit, what he is asking for goes even farther. Valéry, in a

ANDRE BRETON

short story of about twenty pages, written at the age of twenty-five, which dominates by far the rest of his work, *La Soirée avec M. Teste*, seems to have foretold and called for something analogous when he said, with great respect, of his character: "At times, they [his words] lost all their meaning, they seemed merely to fill an empty place whose destination point was still doubtful or unforeseen by the language. I have heard him designate a material object by a group of abstract words and proper nouns." That which is expected and encouraged by two such different spirits merits our attention more than ever at a time when, sounding the abyss which the news of each day digs before us, Denis de Rougemont can write in all objectivity: "Must it be thought that people kill each other over misunderstandings? Or that words don't mean anything any more? . . . The more we talk, the less we understand each other. Death alone puts everybody in agreement. The twentieth century will appear in the future as a kind of verbal nightmare, of delirious cacophony. During it, one spoke more than one ever had before. Imagine those radio sets which cannot keep silent any more, neither night nor day, where the word is uttered at so much the second whether or not there are auditors, whether or not there is anything to say. A time when words were used up more quickly than in any century of History, time of the wide-spread prostitution of that *word* which was to be the measure of the true, and of which the gospel says that, in its source, it is 'the life and the light of men. Alas, what have we done with the word?' Without forgetting the other changes which are necessary, yes, we shall have to remount to that source. The appeal to non-directed thought puts us in possession of the key to the first room. To enter the second, we must give back to man nothing less than the sentiment of his absolute dependence upon the community of all men. But some have fallen so low that the use of energetic remedies cannot be avoided.

It is not impossible, moreover, that an individual should bring succour amid the great distress of today. He to whose lot it would fall to bring it would no doubt have difficulty in making himself known, but there is no reason to despair of his coming. About the same time that I used to watch Apollinaire strolling down the Boulevard de Saint Germain, attracting in his wake the beasts of Orpheus, I discovered that someone all alone had just pierced the night of ideas in the region where it was thickest: I speak of Sigmund Freud. Whatever the reservations of detail which the vast extent of his work may call for and which are the least debt that a man can pay to non-infallibility, could one ever have concentrated more truth so new, crying, essential in the scope of a thought, a life? And tell me if the hardest rock, that of prejudices, of

taboos, of immemorial dissimulations, did not split as soon as this finger of light pointed upon it, if from this rock the word did not spring limpid, or better, radiant, at least until others, by harnessing it to strictly utilitarian ends, began to becloud it. And yet, since the dawn of this century—*The Interpretation of Dreams* appeared in 1900—until the entry of the Nazis into Vienna in 1938, were there many communications of such extreme importance so perseveringly uncomprehended, many irreplaceable existences paid for so long with ingratitude before finishing in persecution? I was twenty years old when, during a leave in Paris, I tried successively to represent to Apollinaire, to Valéry, to Gide that which, through Freud—whose name was then known in France only to a few psychiatrists—had appeared to me capable of upsetting the mental world from top to bottom. I was then very much given to enthusiasm and also extremely anxious to share my convictions with those who were important to me—the rumor is about that I am not entirely cured of this quirk—and I remember that I held out to each of my victims the bait which he could least resist: to Apollinaire “Pansexualism,” to Valéry the key to the lapsus, to Gide the Oedipus complex. Well, in spite of my pains, I succeeded only in provoking smiles from all three of them or in having myself tapped on the shoulder with friendly sympathy. For here, in fact, we discern from another point of view the modern Tower of Babel. Not only have words become amazingly lax, not only is it true that, as Rougemont also says, “Our language is out of joint;” but the intellects which may be considered in our day as masterful are expert *only in their specialty*: they don’t mind at all professing ignorance as soon as one attempts to take them out of their sphere. Observe that it was quite otherwise in that period so quickly decried, the Middle Ages. Today we are placed before this double problem at least: to recover the meanings of words and to rediscover, I am not so mad as to say: the universality of knowledge, but at least the appetite for a universal knowledge.

We must make fruitful and desirable again those human exchanges which are absorbed today in denying themselves through the exchange of machine-gun fire alone. This can take place provided we fight against the depreciation out of sight of the true coinage, which is language, and provided we oppose the development of that malignant tumor: the division of the world into castes of individuals more and more narrowly specialized. It is a question of keeping our eyes untiringly open for anything which has a chance of re-establishing—as already art, psychology have done—the most general contact, with no prejudice, between human beings. This something *will be*. For its realization there is lacking only, beyond propitious economic conditions,—but that can change—

ANDRE BRETON

only a spectacular discovery, concerning which certain advance signs, which generally do not deceive, have already led us to believe that it will arise in the realm of *physics*.

At the beginning of the first manifesto of surrealism in 1924 I wrote, "the only thing which can still excite me is the word liberty." I retain my capacity for this excitement. Liberty: whatever grossly abusive use one may have attempted to make of it, this word is not at all corrupted. It is the only word which would burn the tongue of Goebbels, it is this word which commands the inscription that his crony Pétain could not bear on the face of public monuments. Liberty: and there immediately blaze up in my mind the oldest, the harshest, the most exciting disputes of theologians, and immediately my memory is taken by some of the most meaningful phrases that I know, those which carry so much farther than their words. I hear the voice of Saint-Just thundering: "No liberty for the enemies of liberty." I see the bent-over foreheads of the greatest thinkers of the nineteenth century collecting at the bottom of the crucible that certainty which seems like nothing and which is all: "Liberty is necessity realized." The thing that echoes now like a challenge, yes, it is still this brief notation of Apollinaire: "The Marquis de Sade, that freest spirit who has ever existed." And I see mounting up, inexorable, growing from the rubble under which certain individuals had sworn to smother it, the conscience of the working class, in which liberty takes on today the aspect of the most delicate woman's handkerchief held by a massive, work-blackened, and clenched fist.

From one war to the other, one may say that it is the passionate quest of liberty which has been the constant motive of surrealist action. To those who periodically ask why certain schisms have taken place within the surrealist movement, why certain interdictions have been brusquely issued, I believe I can reply with all honesty that, on the way, those have been eliminated who, in some more or less manifest way, have broken faith with liberty. Since liberty is revered in its pure state by surrealists, that is to say, praised in all its forms, there were, of course, many ways of breaking faith with it. In my own opinion, it was for example breaking faith to come back, as did certain of the old surrealists, to *fixed* forms of poetry, whereas it has been demonstrated, especially in the French language—and the exceptional radiance of French poetry since Romanticism authorizes a generalization of this viewpoint—that the quality of lyric expression has benefited from nothing so much as from the will to liberate from outworn rules: Rimbaud, Lautréamont, the Mallarmé of *Un Coup de Dés*, the most important symbolists (Maeterlinck, Saint-Pol-Roux), the Apollin-

aire of the "conversation poems." And that would be, in the same epoch, equally true of painting: in place of the preceding names it would suffice to write down those of Van Gogh, Seurat, Rousseau, Matisse, Picasso, Duchamp. It is also to have broken faith with liberty to have renounced expressing oneself personally (and by that very fact dangerously, always) outside the strict framework in which a "party" wishes to contain you, even if it be thought the party of liberty (loss of the feeling of uniqueness). It was equally erroneous for others to believe that they would always be so much themselves that they could be compromised with no matter whom (loss of the feeling of dependence): liberty is at once madly desirable and quite fragile, which gives her the right to be jealous. To find oneself in disgrace before her, there is no need to go as far as Chirico did fifteen years ago, underlining the wretchedness of one of his canvasses of the time with a fascist title like "Roman Legionnaires Looking Over Conquered Country," or to go so far as, more recently, Avida Dollars*, gilding with obsequious academism the portrait of the Spanish ambassador, that is to say, of the representative of Franco, that monster to whom the author of the portrait precisely owes the oppression of his country, not to mention the death of the best friend of his youth, the great poet Garcia Lorca—Franco: one knows only too well the regards Franco has for life, for mind, and for liberty.

I insist on the fact that surrealism can be understood historically only in relation to the war, I mean—from 1919 to 1939—in relation at the same time to the war from which it issues and the war to which it extends. Certainly this epoch was measured in France by a limitless unconsciousness and lack of foresight; it is incontestable that it has rolled on the ball-bearings of the worst smugness and laziness. I think of nearly all the governments which have followed upon one another, made up of personalities which are indifferently interchangeable, having long since given their mediocre measure, prolonging the life of parties they no longer believe in, and through whose veins no new blood has been able to circulate for the past twenty years.

If these men have understood nothing, foreseen nothing, neither they nor the majority which has maintained them in power, I hold that, on the other hand, in the vanguard of disinterested intellectual speculation, and most notably in surrealism, their blindness has in no way been shared. They have been awarded no vote of confidence in their ability either to avoid a new cataclysm or to maintain the mechanism of republican institutions. Does this mean to say that surrealists have had a clear intuition of our new sliding towards the

* Breton's anagram for Salvador Dali.

ANDRE BRETON

pit, or better, that they have been capable of saying approximately *when* the inevitable abyss would open up? I need only one convincing proof: this sentence from my "lettres aux Voyantes" of 1925 which can be found in the 1929 re-edition of the "Manifesto of Surrealism": "There are people who pretend that the war has taught them something; they are all the same less well off than I who know what the year 1939 is reserving for me." If, fourteen years in advance, the coming of the war is strictly foretold in that sentence, it results that the theses of surrealism present in relation to that same war a "this side" and a "beyond." The "this side" is in the affirmation of a will which is non-conformist in all regards, intended to shake off desperately the general inertia, and which entails a certain frenzy. It cannot assuredly be the expression of the return to an age of clemency and of free meditation on the needs of human life. Man senses that the society which he has built is preparing not far away a fresh trap for him, that the good things which it holds out to him are of a quite ephemeral nature, that the very ethics which it imposes upon him are fallacious inasmuch as that society knows it must give way to a quite different scale of values as soon as this ceaseless perfecting and piling-up of death-machines so demands.

That which in the theses of surrealism can go *beyond* this war is for you, gentlemen, rather than me to decide. For this reason it would have seemed pedantic to me, in the present circumstances and especially at a time when you are approaching such an important turning point in your life, to inflict upon you a didactic speech. I know that you have received many precise details and clarifications from the extremely authoritative remarks of Mr. Henri Peyre, who has given me the honor and the grave joy of inviting me to speak to you at such a time. In the trial which surrealism has instituted, it is clear that I have too long been a "party" to be able to make myself a judge today. I nonetheless believe that all the activity spent in the name of surrealism cannot have been *in vain*, and in any event, you will grant me the point because there has never been an example of the contrary case on such a scale with such persistence and so great a circulation of men in both directions. Upon emerging from the present tunnel, we might as well make up our minds to it, we shall have to attempt to replace man in his element. One can hope that the disastrous experience of the other *après-guerre* will have given counsel and that men will not be content to return to the poverty-stricken conceptions which prevailed at that time. "The true life is absent," Rimbaud had already said. It will be the moment not to let pass before conquering that life. In all domains I believe that it will be necessary to bring to that attempt all the audacity of

which man is capable. If that can be, if *this time is the real one*—failing which it will mean only a postponement—I doubt if one can avoid reconsidering seriously, whether directly or at an angle, the surrealist propositions. It will never be emphasized enough that in the presence of the desperate situation of man in the middle of the twentieth century, surrealism tried to put into his hands new keys. In conclusion, I wish to group its propositions for memory such as they have formulated themselves to us gradually but unwaveringly:

1. One must grant to Freud that the exploration of the unconscious life furnishes the only worthwhile basis for appreciation of the motives which make the human being act. The so-called conscious justifications which pretend to dismiss these motives easily only cover over the dirt with polish. Starting from these premises, surrealism has continuously emphasized “automatism,” not only as a method of expression on the literary and artistic level, but, moreover, as a first step toward a general revision of the modes of knowledge.

2. As I said in 1930, and today more than ever: “It is necessary to feel by all means and to make known at all costs the artificial character of the old *antinomies* hypocritically intended to forestall any unprecedented agitation on the part of man, if only by giving him a derisory idea of his means or by defying him to escape in a worthwhile way from the universal constraint Everything leads us to believe that there exists a certain point of the mind from which life and death, the real and the imaginary, past and future, the communicable and the incommunicable, high and low, cease to be perceived as contradictory.” This is not only a view inherited from occultists, it translates an aspiration so profound that it is doubtless from it essentially that surrealism will be considered as having taken its substance. For surrealism—and I think that one day this will be its glory—anything will have been considered good that could reduce these oppositions, which have been presented as insurmountable. Deplorably entrenched during the course of ages, they are the true alembics of suffering: the opposition of madness and of pretended “reason,” which refuses to take into account the irrational; the opposition of dream and of “action,” which believes it can brand dreams with inanity; opposition of the mental representation and the physical perception, both of them produced from the dissociation of a single primordial faculty of which the primitive and the child bear the trace, which lifts the malediction of an uncrossable barrier between the external and the internal world and which, refound, would be the salvation of man.

3. Among those contradictions which are fatal to us the most important to resolve—and it is the one in which I have interested myself most extensively—

ANDRE BRETON

is the one which sets at odds nature and man within man's conception of nature's necessity and of his own, these two necessities presenting themselves as being in grave disaccord. Although I cannot pretend to have resolved it, I have at least shown that it does not totally resist the attentive observation of *coincidences* and other phenomena said to be "chance." *Chance* remains the great veil to be lifted. I have said that it could be the manifestation-form of external necessity as it makes a way in the human unconscious. It is moreover apt to be brought to the front rank of preoccupations by war, in which the strength of calculations appears to be continuously limited by that unknown, the oscillation of a certain chance.

4. There remain one or two sentences of mine, dating from the last war, which I shall allow myself to quote to you, inasmuch as they are applicable equally to my situation at the time and to yours now. Here they are: "We who have reached the age of twenty years during this war, that is, the age at which one systematizes one's life, were forced, while doing this, to take into account the implacable realities. In order not to feel too badly about this, we were led to attach little importance to all things. We came to ask of our philosophers, of our poets, the same sacrifice." I say that these remarks have become fully applicable again. At the time of their utterance they were to introduce an appreciation both of Alfred Jarry and of a sort of *dramatic humor* which is based on a succession of inspired sallies in reaction to that which is most tragic in the situation brought upon man. The human mind is so made that it enjoys such paradoxical relaxation at the moments when the springs of life are stretched to the breaking point. This disposition should consequently dissuade the mind—and sometimes surrealism has challenged this—from trying to take everything seriously.

5. In attempting to co-ordinate the diverse preceding points, surrealism found itself carried quite naturally to the very edge of the *id*, a word which, in opposition to the word *ego* in the psychoanalytic vocabulary, serves, as you know, to designate the ensemble of very active powers escaped from consciousness by virtue of various repressing judgments. Freud has seen in the *id* "the arena of the struggle which brings to grips Eros and the death instinct." Such a conception can not fail to take on full relief in the light of the events of the day. From the moment of return to what one calls normal existence we should sweep with searchlights and then undertake resolutely to disinfect that immense and sombre region of the *id* where myths swell beyond measure and where at the same time wars are fomented. But, you will ask, how can we approach this region? I say that only surrealism has occupied itself with the concrete resolution of this problem, that it has truly put its foot into the arena and charted

landmarks. In view of an undertaking which singularly exceeded its numerical forces, but which appeared to it to be a prime necessity, it has been alone in placing here and there several danger-buoys.

A persistent faith in *automatic expression* as a sounding device, a persistent hope in the dialectic (that of Heraclitus, of Meister Eckhardt, of Hegel) for the resolution of the antinomies which overwhelm man, recognition of *objective chance* as an indication of the possible reconciliation between the ends of nature and the ends of men in the eyes of the latter, a will to the permanent incorporation in the psychic apparatus of *black humor* which, at a certain temperature, can alone play the role of a safety-valve, preparation in a practical way for an *intervention in the mythical life* which would at first take on the aspect of large-scale cleansing—in such contexts are to be found the fundamental watchwords of surrealism today.

Gentlemen, I reflect again that some of you are ready to depart on that incredibly rapid train whose windows are streaked with the inscription “1942—Future” and which consents to stop a moment before the platform on which we are standing, and for no reason would I wish to burden the travelers with anything which might hinder them. All the more reason, then to wish: if surrealism aspires to survive on the devastated field like a stalk, that is to say, like the thing insignificant in itself and marvelous because it holds the secret of the infinite repetition of the same field, may it bear the pride of weighing as little as that stalk on the scales of the wind! Whatever may be the ambition to know and the temptation to act, I know that at the approach of twenty years of age they are quite ready to yield the field to a woman’s look which gathers in itself all the attraction of the world. Everything in which I believed and still believe on another level would lose a great part of its importance for me if I were not confident that, while inspired by the cluster of ideas that I have just retraced for you, while expressing the anguish of its time, surrealism has yet succeeded in giving a new face to *beauty*. It is in this spirit that I have chosen to bring before your eyes, while refraining from weighting them with commentary, some images whose meaning matters only in relation to the *seduction* which they carry, so much that I have deemed it preferable to let the latter work upon you alone. And that is also why I should prefer, in spite of everything, to leave you less with the echo of the preceding considerations than with that of the few poems which I am going to read to you now.*

(Translated by R.G.C.)

* “La Jolie Rousse” by Guillaume Apollinaire, “Monsieur Aa l’anti-philosophe” by Tristan Tzara, “En l’Honneur des Muets” by Paul Eluard, “Le Sang Répandu” by Benjamin Péret, “L’Union Libre.”