The year of Marie’s return to Paris, 1924, is also the year that saw, in that same city of light, the birth of Surrealism.

1924 … that year when catastrophes were the day’s small change.
(Louis Aragon, Paris Peasant)

* 

I/V

Fairground

Marie was not familiar with the fine men and women who emerged from a building that looked like a church. It seemed as if a funeral service had just ended. One of the women, who stood at the door, was in full mourning, whilst some were weeping and stopping to speak with her as they left. And all the while an almighty hot wind blew wild, threatening to lift heavenwards the long dresses of the women, not least the dress of the woman in mourning, the seeming widow.
Fig. 11. Still from *Entr’Acte* (Paris, 1924), directed by René Clair. Les Ballets Suedois.

Fig. 12. Still from *Entr’Acte* (Paris, 1924), directed by René Clair. Les Ballets Suedois.
Before the apartment, in the road, stood a hearse. It was, though, a peculiar hearse, decorated with stars, and festooned with paper chains and the strangest wreaths one could imagine, being made of bread and ham. The fine men and women, each one a mourner, she presumed, fell into order behind the hearse in rows of three. All were formally dressed, and some indeed wore huge garlands of flowers. Among them she saw several top-hatted men who were, she presumed, the pall-bearers, though there was no coffin in view. None. Marie watched as one of the top-hatted men picked regally at a wreath of bread, and ate a little. Of the bread.

The coffin-less hearse was not motorized, but horse-drawn. Or rather, it was designed to be drawn by a horse, though where one might expect to see a horse there stood a camel. A solemn-faced beast. And beside the camel stood a man dressed in frock-coat and cocked hat. Like a man of the theatre, she thought.

Once the mourners had assembled behind the hearse, the cortège, led by the camel, began to move off. The hearse, however, proceeded at a pace that caused the mourners to pursue

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*Fig. 13. Still from *Entr’Acte* (Paris, 1924), directed by René Clair. Les Ballets Suédois.*
rather than follow, and to leap and bound. This they did as if
grief had become, for them, an everyday ballet and their feet
knew nothing of gravity. Gone now were all tears and, as the
cortège departed, Marie could see it was headed not for a cem-
eter but a fairground, Luna Park. As if, she thought, they knew
that death were overcome, and the camel would lead all through
the eye of the needle.

Marie had intended, that morning, to walk to the Gare de
Lyon to meet the eminent Linguist. She had imagined she would
meet him alighting, descending, from his train, the 8:45 from
Geneva. She had, though, somehow gone astray, been blown
west across the city, and now found herself here, amongst these
leaping mourners. But who exactly were they?

She would ask a passer-by, a pale and upright man, an Eng-
lishman newly arrived, it so happened. He stood upright, as if a
soldier, and clutch ed, as if a rifle, a bouquet of now-dead flow-
ers. She thought, indeed, that he had a somewhat familiar face;
but could not quite place him until he remarked that he was, he
thought, the Usher, from the High Court, in the Strand. Lon-
don. He then explained that the leaping mourners, not to men-
tion the camel, were agents of the Revolution.

“Which Revolution?” she inquired.

“The Surrealist Revolution,” he replied, before adding that it
had but recently begun, here in Paris. He did not entirely ap-
prove, but did appreciate the absence of bullets.

The Usher, she thought, seemed to know much about the
Revolution, so asked if he could please say a little more. What,
for instance, was its dearest tenet?

“An absolute commitment,” he murmured, “to chance, acci-
dent, hazard. If such truly exists.”

The Usher appeared to be a little troubled by talk of chance,
but to find comfort in recalling that Professor Saussure had once
declared that “everything … in language is … completely ac-
cidental.” The Usher hastily added that this had nothing to do
with the eminent Professor’s proclivity for gambling. This he
whispered, clearly desirous that neither mourners nor camel
should know that the Father of Modern Linguistics was a man half-in-love with hazard.

The Usher now affected a cough, or rather a clearing of throat, as if to reprimand himself. He had been found guilty of digression and would return to the matter arising, the Revolution. In the first instance this seemed to mean pressing into Marie's undorned hand a book called *Liberty or Love!* Date of composition, “December 13, 1924,” he chimed. It was, he said, a loving disaster of a novel. A surrealist disaster, a hymn to chance. Newly born. But written, he felt, just for her. “Take, read,” he said. Marie thanked the Usher, who went upon his way, a-marching. She herself would follow the cortège. And as she did so she opened the book, quite at random, just as some of the saints had done.

“Strange destiny,” she read, “by which … the Mermaid and the Chanteuse pass … each other in a … Paris suburb.” She looked up. Then read again. “Strange destiny, by which you or I … take a seat … in front of the very person who is able to unite us with the man or woman who has been lost.” But did she wish to be united, or re-united, with such a one? A lost one? Perhaps she had no choice. Perhaps this city, this now Surrealist city, was so condemned to chance, to hazard, that any and every encounter were possible.

She opened the book again, once more at random. This time she read that a man called Corsair Sanglot and woman called Louise Lame, along with some polar explorers and madmen, all “inadvertently united on the arid plain of a manuscript.” She looked up and considered the arid plain of Paris, this manuscript of a city. She could see no madmen or polar explorers, unless the mourners counted as such, but perhaps there, over there, she espied Mademoiselle Lame, or rather her reflection in that window, shop-window. Ah, yes, how beautiful she was.

Marie once more broke open the book; this time, speedily, as if she were a thief. “Take off your clothes,” she read. “The fisherwoman's dress falls to the ground,” she read. “The naked woman knocks hard upon every door,” she read. And paused. Yes, she had knocked upon doors, many a door, often with Madeleine. They had the Gospel to proclaim, and so had gone knocking,
seeking to save the lost, those lost within their homes. She had not, though, been naked. Not when knocking upon each door. Not gone without clothes.

She thought now of London, the clinic, and Johannes, and of how he too, like her, had been subject to examination. Once more she turned to the book.

“On reaching the second floor,” she read, “the young man knocked at the door of an apartment. A tall foot-man in gold-rimmed livery opened the door and showed [the young man] into a vast reception room [where] … flunkies gathered about him. The … Club [was] an immense organization … employ[ing] women the world over to pleasure the most handsome men.”

Johannes, she thought, was a handsome man, and indeed she had herself, on occasion, attended to him. As it were. But that, perhaps, was not the act of a wife, more the labor of a woman who simply happened to aid in the spilling of seed. Seed sufficient to conceive, she had heard, half a world. She paused and thought, for a moment, of half a world. Half a world unborn.
Hundreds of millions of lives not lived. Again and again. Unborn again and again.

Marie returned to the book.

“The wind,” she read, “buffeted the city [and] … Bébé Cadum beckoned.” Ah yes, she thought, the laughing billboard child, the quite impossible child. “From the top of the buildings,” she read, “Bébé Cadum watches.” “Beneath the Bridge at Passy,” she read, “Bébé Cadum was waiting.”

But was the infant waiting for her? If so, then she must find him, embrace him, comfort him. This child of hers. Hers? Impossible. Inconceivable. But not absolutely. After all, she had read that even spilt seed can, on occasion, be effectual. The still unravished bride, even though not quite a wife, may yet prove a mother. Miracle children existed. Impossible children were possible. “Bébé Cadum,” she read, “was born without the aid of his parents.” She looked about the fairground. Where was this child? This holy child? Where? Where? Had no-one seen him?

She read on. The child, Bébé Cadum, she learnt, was newly imperiled, endangered, the victim of “an army,” an army as impossible as the child himself, for it was, she read, “an army of pneumatic tyres.” How she feared for the child. “The tyres,” she read, “coiled around him.” Yes, feared. “Bébé Cadum, or rather Christ,” she read, “was thirty-three years old.” Feared most terribly. “GOLGOTHA,” she read. “Weep, you virgins,” she read. “Weep.”

But Marie did not weep. Not a single tear. She knew that pneumatic tyres could do terrible things, serve appalling ends, not least the wheeling of thousands of men to the Front. And yet that word “pneumatic” she cherished. For she had once, at the Tabernacle, heard faraway talk of “Pneumatology,” a rumoured theology of the Holy Ghost, they had said. God, the Holy Ghost. He who had once burst upon Jerusalem in the form of an almighty wind to inaugurate an age of signs and wonders. And such, she knew, could still be looked for. Madeleine called it “Revival.” In America and Wales, they spoke of “The Awakening.”
Marie thought again of the skipping mourners and, as even as she did so, someone behind her announced “The Great Awakening of the Universe.” She turned to find it was another passerby, this time a Poet, apparently. Beneath a bowler-hat. The Poet welcomed her to Luna Park, Paris’s finest fairground. He then added that, unlike the pale Englishman, he was unequivocally for the Surrealist Revolution, the Revolution of Mourners, as it were. “The Great Awakening,” he cried again, gesturing toward the mourners.

Hallelujah? Should Marie whisper “Hallelujah”? Perhaps. She would ask the Poet, ask him if now, today, at Luna Park, the Kingdom had come. The Poet looked around, at the water chute, the vibrating bridge, and the scenic railway with its miniature trains that climbed a miniature mountain range. “Salvation is nowhere,” he replied, adding that this was his favourite Surrealist outrage. He also remarked, in passing, that he only ever spoke in quotations — words that had fallen through the holes in the trouser pockets of his Surrealist colleagues. At this point he cheerily threw his bowler hat into the air, as if saying “Salvation is nowhere” were much the same as saying “Salvation is everywhere.”

No, she thought, broad was the path to Destruction, and narrow the way to Salvation. The Poet must understand this, must see that Salvation was not everywhere but somewhere, of a very local habitation and address, a very particular street, as it were. And all this she explained, to which the Poet responded by whispering, “Let us go [then]. Let us go down the Good News Boulevard and make a show of it.” Ah, she thought, Rue Belliard. He thinks of Rue Belliard, where the Tab was soon to perch, high up in Montmartre, among the cinema-theatres, there to communicate the Good News of Christ. Praise God for Rue Belliard, 163 Rue Belliard. It was a light in the cinematic dark, she said.

“Bravo for darkened rooms,” replied the Poet.

“It was the bait I set for the unknown,” he said.
“The unknown?” she said
“L’inconnu,” he said, “the chaste and audacious nude [nu].”

The Poet, greatly moved by his word-play, now stooped to bow low before Marie, as if in solemn recognition. He was quickly joined by five of the mourners; each somewhat damp, washed clean by the water chute. Together they greeted the Poet, who at once introduced them to Marie as “lyrical misfits.” The mourners doffed their hats, top-hats, and whispered, as one, “We are the [very] last kings.” Then, without speaking, each last king took out a tiny piece of paper and huge royal pencil, and proceeded to set down a single word or phrase. “The new,” wrote the first; “the exquisite,” wrote the second; “shall drink,” wrote the third; “wine,” wrote the fourth; and “corpse,” wrote the fifth. They immediately allowed their pieces of paper, as if divine litter, to fall gently to the fairground asphalt. Upon reaching the ground, the litter somehow fell into a miracle of syntactical order. Marie looked down and read. “The exquisite” “corpse” “shall drink” “the new” “wine.” Ah, she thought, Scripture. Found Scripture. Holy Scripture. For was not Christ himself the exquisite corpse who, no more a corpse, now drinks forever the new wine? The new wine of the new Dispensation?

Yes, she thought, and she thanked the royal mourners. It was, she said, a sign, if not also a wonder. The mourners, in response, and as one, took a step toward Marie, as if to consider who exactly she was. The Poet would assist them by making three suggestions:
1. “[A] waxwork that fashion has stripped of their clothes.”
2. “[A] film heroine who, in search of a lost ring, [is now] encase[d] … in a diving suit.”
3. “A … girl abducted by a sultan [who] endures dreadful boredom in [his] seraglio until a bit of fun arrives in the shape of an aviator who has made a forced landing.”

The mourners were unsure, divided. They were, though, unanimous in believing that here, before them, stood their long-sought-for muse, l’Inconnue, the Unknown herself, she of whom they had only ever known the “vanished perfume.” As if to con-
firm this, the Poet confessed that she was the “sweet woman of the winds.” He then added, “This woman … I followed her around the walls of a convent. She was in full mourning.” He paused, before resuming: “I was getting set, however, to catch up with her when she suddenly turned about, half-opened her coat and showed me her nakedness.”

Marie, alarmed, turned to the Poet and asked upon what authority he spoke? In whose name, as it were?

“I get all my information straight from heaven,” he replied. He added, however, that “I have never been a Christian. I do not understand the laws.” He looked away, then concluded, wistfully, “I am an animal.”

The Poet, thought Marie, is mistaken. Twice over. First, salvation defied the law. Second, salvation would surely not exclude the beasts of the field. It was true that, at the Tab, Pastor Saillens had once asked “Would Christ have died for mere animals?” implying the answer was “No.” But, perhaps Christ would. Perhaps, indeed, He had. After all, God cared greatly for animals. It was clear. In the Scriptures. Had there not been room for animals in the Ark? Two of every species. Man and wife, as it were. What is more, when in the wilderness, “Jesus,” it is written, “was with the beasts.” Among the beasts, she thought, there for them, even, perhaps, as one of them. All this she now explained, to the Poet. She then paused.

Did the Poet understand?

He nodded, before grandly saying, “The doe … I carry wounded on my shoulders.”

She could not see a doe or indeed any beast, wounded or otherwise, upon his shoulders, but the Poet continued, declaring, “Th[is] doe transfigures the world.”

Yes, she thought. Yes, this poor man is not far from the Lamb, the world-transforming Lamb of God. Was, then, a conversion in the offing? Before she could ask, though, the Poet drew from under his hat a tiny crucifix.

“This cross,” he said.

“Yes,” she said.

“This cross,” he continued, “commemorate[s] … an accident.”
“An accident?”
“An accident that [had] happened to thought.”
No, she thought. It was not an accident. Accidents were terrible things. Motor-cars the worst. She must, however, press on. Eternity was in the balance. Indeed, if this were Gospel Hour at Rue Meslay there would follow, right now, an invitation to respond, a call to the front, or to sign a Decision Card, or lift your hand or rise to your feet, a soul redeemed, in full view of all, before vanishing, newly reborn, into the Paris dark. She looked around, at the Poet and the mourners, her fairground congregation.

“Does anyone,” she whispered, “wish to be saved?”
Silence.
“Today,” she added.
Silence again, save for the roar of the water-chute. She then enquired once more, at which point the Poet stepped forward, albeit only half a pace.
“Salvation?” she inquired.
He shook his head, explaining that he was urgently required to “lead … a lobster on a leash [to] … the Palais-Royal.”
“But what of salvation?”
“No theologian’s argument will transform a Surrealist.”
“Then what can?”
“Only the love of [a] … female saint.”
No, she thought. And flinched. No. Not love. Not that. Though there was death. Yes, death. A consummation devoutly to be wished, praise God. She turned toward the tiny mountain railway, thinking once more of the train from Geneva. What if, she wondered, she were to die, right now? Might that perhaps be sufficient to transform the Poet? If, say, she were to throw herself from a miniature train, to vanish down a tiny ravine, might that make him think again? Think of God?

Self-slaughter had never really crossed her mind before, certainly not in London, not even in the last days. Back there, in Palmers Green, it would have seemed a strange thing to do, an alien act. Here in Paris, it seemed a kind of commonplace, like
a telegram. Here, almost every day, there was, in the papers, a report of suicide.

This she mentioned to the Usher, who had, somehow, reappeared. Dead flowers in hand. For a moment he stood to attention, then, with a sigh, he observed, as they boarded their miniature carriage, that the Surrealists were, in his view, excessively concerned with suicide reports. Indeed, they had made it their catastrophic business to reprint them under the quizzical headline “Is Suicide a Solution?” Two of these reprinted notices, however, had caught his own eye, he confessed. The Usher now drew a cutting from a pocket, and read it aloud.

In Margny-les-Cerises, Madame … Marie Thiroux, … had got up during the … night, gathered her lantern and umbrella, and then threw herself down her neighbour’s well.

The Usher took out a pen and slowly encircled the name “Marie.” He paused as the miniature train reached the peak of the miniature mountain. He admired the miniature view. Switzerland, he sighed. He then drew forth a second cutting, from another pocket, and proceeded to read this aloud as well.

Toward 4 o’clock in the morning, a tall, slender woman, walking … along the Quai des Celestins, suitcase in hand, suddenly … threw herself into the water…. The only things found in the suitcase were a few items of lingerie marked with the initial “W.”

The Usher fell silent, leaving Marie to inwardly ponder this initial “W” for herself. And this she did. What, she wondered, if the “W” had stood for “Wheeler”? What then? Not that she had ever initialed her own clothes, let alone her undergarments, not even when she once had owned so many clothes. In the year of her marriage, when preparing her trousseau, she had, it is true, bought for herself no less than eighteen embroidered
blouses and six petticoats, not to mention several girdles and ostrich feathers.

Marie thought again of that poor woman with the suitcase, and then of what the Poet, that revelatory man, had quoted or recited in the final seconds before she had hastened to board the miniature train.

“The corpse puts on its makeup,” he had cried.
“The elegant gesture of the drowned,” he had cried.
“She is the laundress of fish,” he had cried.

And there had been more, still more, from the Poet’s wild lips, even as her train had departed, still more prophetic fragments, fierce rags and tatters that plagued her, beset her, spoke to her.

“Your heart is a charade that the whole world has guessed,” was one such tatter.
“Darling, … I hasten to you. Here are my lips. Me … damned, damned,” was another.
“Perhaps, all she ever did was wake up at my side,” was still another.

But the fiercest rag of all was his last.
“Marie’s marriage was consummated — amid an overflow of sighs.”
II/V

Good evening, dearly beloved, I am delighted once more to address you and to argue, if I may, that this last surrealist rag, this *sigh*-blown rag from Messieurs Breton and Éluard, does somehow relate to my Marie, Marie Wheeler. To do so is, I accept, likely to lead to condemnation. To my being accused of forsaking scholarship’s straitened gate, its narrow way. So: am I guilty? Guilty of misreading? Of confusing my Marie with another’s, a surreal Marie. Marie and “Marie,” as it were. Do I cross lives as others cross wires?

Perhaps. If so, forgive me. Please. But you see, I think only as these Surrealists do — they who discern, within the walls of Paris, millions of souls who, though oblivious to each other, live in the greatest possible proximity to each other.

Listen to just one of the surrealist crowd, M. Robert Desnos. Listen, hand to your ear, as he whispers this: that in Paris “remarkable people … continually miss each other [but only] by a minute.” And so they do. For just as the Mermaid and the Chanteuse cross in a dark Paris suburb, or Corsair Sanglot and Mlle Lame almost touch as they pass in the Place de la Concorde, so, I say, Marie and “Marie,” real and surreal, come within but a sigh of each other. At the point of consummation. If that it is.

But perhaps you find it all too hard to credit that *my* Marie, my Tabernacle Marie, should ever stray into surrealist Paris, lobster Paris, as it were. This incredulity I do understand. However, observe, with me, just how closely, on one occasion, Marie, mine, comes to the Mermaid and Corsair Sanglot. It is when both Corsair and Mermaid are overlooking the Gare Saint-Lazare, and do so from the Boulevard des Batignolles. Yes, Boulevard des
Batignolles. As intersects, of course, with the Rue de Rome, the
very road on which, at number 107, Marie, as a girl, lived and
blossomed. Yes, the very road. What is more, still more, it is the
road to which she returns in 1924, the very year in which both
Corsair and Mermaid are imagined into very existence.

Here, let me show you, show you how the two roads cross,
here on this skeletal map of mine, this one, the one scratched
upon the blackboard.

Which blackboard?

Are you blind? Allow me, or rather M. Desnos, to give you a
clue. Here goes.

“On the blackboard of a ruinous … lecture-hall, lost in the
lair of stray cats, Circumstance’s black genius traces itineraries
that cross but do not meet.”

This is, you see, my ruinous lecture-hall. Welcome. Don’t
mind the cats. It is, alas, the best a black genius can manage.
My previous lecture-hall burnt down. Remember? Besides,
these are difficult times for the Academy. The Lobsters, you see,
consider all scholars to be “false … scholars.” Moreover, they
have been known, the bastards, to sabotage our lectures, rudely
hurling themselves beneath the speeding wheels of our elegant
discourse. They seek, you see, to “combat … scholarly research,”
“want[ing] nothing whatever to do with those … who use their
minds as they would a savings bank.” Well, sadly, we scholars
have little choice. These days thought is our only wealth.

But this, I feel, the Lobsters forget. Take M. Aragon, for ex-
ample, a ragged habitué of the Passage de l’Opéra. You perhaps
know him? He, the clown, has nothing better to do than hang
around lamenting that scholars do not stop at the Passage shoe-
shine parlors and spend a while in the parlors’ elevated arm-
chairs, their “thrones of chance.”

“Alas,” he sighs, “professors tend to keep their shoes dirty.”

Well, alas, we simply do not possess the money to have
them shined. Nor do we share M. Aragon’s high estimation of
“thrones of chance.” We scholars, philosopher-kings as we are,
occupy thrones of quite another kind — namely, professorial
chairs. These chairs of ours, our university chairs, may now be
somewhat battered or fragile, but at least they have nothing to do with chance. Nothing. Besides, why clean one’s shoes if only then returning to a lecture hall overrun with incontinent cats? Why?

By the way, forgive my prejudice, but I would not myself trust any man who wears well-polished shoes. As M Aragon himself remarks, “these days [it is] … Don Juan [who] need[s] … clean shoes.” M. Aragon thinks, in particular, of “brogues with heels of laminated rubber,” these being, apparently, “the shoes for adultery and seaside resorts.” They are not, please note, the shoes for the Library or Common Room. Not, that is, the kind of shoes a scholar would wear. As I heard, just the other day, “rubber heels … [are] for sport, not the office.”

Or at least not the academic office. Rubber heels might, I accept, befit the commercial office. Unlike scholars, you see, commercial men are famously inclined to both adultery and the seaside. Consider, for example, Johannes. As you may recall, he first met Marie-the-Second while on vacation at Bognor Regis. She, a consumptive, being there to take the air, the seaside air. And, of course, if Johannes’s marriage to Marie-the-First were falsely annulled, what the world takes to be a marriage to Marie-the-Second might, perhaps, be called adultery. At the seaside.

But does Johannes wear rubber-heeled shoes? Is he really guilty of an elaborate form of adultery? With Marie-the-Second, the Consumptive? Well, if he is, please do not overlook the sheer, post-card pathos of our seaside scene, a scene that M. Desnos has, I think, somehow spied upon. As if the butler.

“Happy is the consumptive,” he murmurs. “Her breath … [is] supported by a … pillow of … air,” he murmurs. “[And] her fiancé [is] attentive to the tremor of her lips.”

Ah yes, her lips. Yes, look. Examine her lips, those of poor, consumptive Marie, for there you might well discern a tremor. A sadness. Johannes, you see, is not her first fiancé. Before him there was, I must reveal, another beloved. An unknown soldier. Or at least unknown to me. But he was Lost. In France. Where so many fiancés are lost. Marched off and lost.
“Birds … have ghosts,” says M. Desnos. And so too, these days, do fiancés. Johannes is certainly a kind of ghost, of the lost fiancé. But is he a rubber-heeled ghost? An accusable ghost? If so, he is, I say, very much on the mind of the Lobsters.

“I think,” says M. Breton, “of all the men lost in [our] echoing courts of justice [who] … believe that they must answer — here for an affair of the heart, there for a crime.”

Johannes?

Perhaps. But then, there are so many such men hereabouts. Paris at this hour is full of interrogated men, so many being, as M. Aragon says, “suspected of Surrealism.” Indeed, some of the suspects are condemned, he says, to “be broken on the wheel and hanged.” Amidst such a sorry mob, Johannes is difficult to spot.

The task may not, though, be impossible. There may yet be hope. Consider one very particular figure that M. Aragon observes, as ever, from and within the Passage de l’Opéra. Which, by the way, is itself condemned, soon to be knocked down, to make way for a road, a broad road, one fit for that coming king of the asphalt, the Automobile. Make way. Clear the streets.

I am sorry, I digressed. Albeit briefly. My point was, and is, that the figure to be noted in the Passage de l’Opéra is a “surly … man … playing with a hoop … and … magic wand,” who is, we learn, “a regular customer … name of Sch—.”

Yes, “Sch—.” Might, perhaps, that be “Schad”? “Johannes Schad”? Is he the surly man? I do wonder. It is a possibility. There is a chance. Chance.

★

I know, by the way, what you are thinking, dearly beloved. Namely, that if “Sch—” really is an elision or castration, as it were, of “Schad” then our man in the Passage de l’Opéra might just, theoretically, be myself, Scholar Schad. After all, our man does call his hoop the “wheel of becoming,” a peculiarly learned allusion — to Buddhism, to be precise. So, might this man with
wand and hoop be me? Is it I who have been spotted bowling my way through the newly-condemned arcade?

No. Impossible. Absurd. Although it is the case, I must confess, that I do sometimes escape this crumbling auditorium, out through the window, and off into the Paris streets, there pursuant of an academy sans murs. At such wondrous times, the arcade becomes my library, the cinema is my study, and the statues are my students, yes my students, with whom I speak, face to face. What is more, at night, I dream that somewhere within this wondrous extra-mural university I may yet come across some trace or rag, or rag of a rag, of Marie. Marie the First.

Allow me, dearly beloved, to explain. It won’t take long. Believe me. You see, dear Professor Saussure once taught at the École des Hautes Études. This was back in the 1880s. At the time, he had one particularly fine student, a young man called M. Passy. He too is now a distinguished scholar, but he is also, as it happens, mirabile dictu, one of the happily-Drowned. Yes, a bookish Baptist. Indeed, a man of the Tab. Quite a coincidence. Remarkable, in fact, is it not? Moreover, and here is the thing, Professor Passy forsakes the four-walled academy to establish a free-to-all summer school. L’Université Populaire, it is called. A university sans murs that is open to every beast of the field. Doe, lamb, poor man, etc. And so, you see, whenever I clamber through the window of this here lecture hall, I dream of effecting what chess men might call the “Passy Maneuver,” an extra-mural migration that will, thereby, somehow bring me nearer, however imperceptibly, to Marie, Professor Passy’s co-religionist. His Tabernacle sister.

Yes, yes, it is, I accept, a desperate stratagem, a chasing of breeze. Pursuit of dearest nothing. But then, how else can I pursue one who does not exist? Not before the Law, that is. Or at least not as Marie Schad. And, by the way, please note that, even after the High Court judgement, my runaway calls herself not “Marie Wheeler” but rather “Marie Schad-Wheeler.” Still a no-one. Or, at least, half a no-one.

And how do I know? Know that she signs herself “Schad-Wheeler”? Well, I have seen it for myself, this hyphenation, this
coupling. Seen it upon a tiny piece of paper. Would you like me to show you? It’s somewhere here. Under a cat. Ah, here we are. Be careful with it. Not the cat, the piece of paper. Look, see, it is to do with a blessing, a blessing of some new-born Tabernacle marriage. A kind of solemnization. And here, look, among the solemnizing signatures, is “Madame Schad-Wheeler.” Can you see it? It’s half-hidden. Among the crowd. Of solemn hands.

Quite something, is it not? How she signs herself? How, even now, months beyond the annulment, she still bears the scar of her marriage. A marriage that, according to the Law, never was. Madame Schad-Wheeler has, of course, no legal existence. She is just a juridical ghost. But, then, who better to counter-sign this Tabernacle blessing? For it too has no legal substance, being not the marriage itself—that was a pantomime of a civic kind, an office panto, as it were. This Tabernacle blessing, in the eye
of the State, is a kind of nothing. If it is anything, it is a trick of faith.

As might now be said of Marie herself. Now that she is back in Paris, her life become a parable.

There is one thing I should like to set down; it is the story of Marie Wheeler ... [who] for 19 years never once gave any money to the church. ... All I ever heard from her was to do with her house, her motor-car and her profusion of furs.

Her husband had lost his faith and she maintained only an outward form of piety. One month ago she returned to her mother's and relayed to me her sad story.
(Madeleine, May 21, 1924)

Behold the Prodigal Daughter. Marie, the Prodigal. Back from the far country — England, marriage, a house, and a profusion of furs. Not to mention a motorcar, one in which she might tour the far country. Waving as she goes.

A woman with a car is, I suppose, a rare and dazzling thing. A thing yet to come, as it were. Marie is thus, if you will, a migrant from that farthest country of all, the Future. But, then, she always was. Even in the days of her courtship.

Marie wants, once more, to defer her marriage on the grounds that she is not sufficiently sure of the future. She'd like Johannes to earn 4,500 or 5,000 francs a year [but he] ... currently earns 4,200, [so] ... they each save 12 francs a year. Everything is calculated. They live only for the future.
(Madeleine, January 25, 1905)

The future, alas, did not come — as you know. Or at least not the future for which Johannes and Marie had lived. Marriage. But, then, might it not be argued, painfully, abstrusely, theologically, that every Christian marriage is marked, nay wounded, by a fu-
ture that does not come? I think here, now, even among all these stinking cats, of the Early Church. First century. The Primitives. You see, these earliest of Christians, it is rumored, only sought to marry once it had first become clear that their Lord might not return. Or at least, not within their lifetime. Remember mad Saint Paul.

Brethren, the time is short, ... [and] I would have you without carefulness ... [while] he that is married careth for the things ... of the world. (St Paul, Letter to the Church at Corinth)

In short, dearly beloved, do not marry. Sleep alone. Walk alone. Live alone. And think only of that Eventual Day. Last Day. Judgement Day. The day that shall see the return of Christ. The immortal Groom. He whose arrival will be a consummation to be most devoutly wished. For it shall be the consummation of His marriage to the Church. The ekklēsia herself. His bride. Her. The spotless one.

I am sorry. Forgive me. I have fallen, head-first, into the mire of a sermon. Not to mention, another damned parable. Just as familiar and just as biblical. It is the one that exhorts us to look forward to the greatest wedding of all. At the end of time. You see, we, all of us, are, even now, to be busy, busy preparing the ecclesial Bride, beautifying the ecclesial Bride. Work, work. Wait, wait. Expect. And ensure that everything is ready, everything calculated. Tick-tock. Tick-tock.

But still, it seems, He has not come. Look about you. No end is in sight. Not to this present world. Still, it seems, the great Groom tarries. Still, it seems, the beloved Bride awaits. Still, it seems, the Marriage is deferred. Tick-tick, tick-tock. Yawn. Tick-tock.

So. Then. What shall we do? What shall we do meantime? While we wait. Well, allow me to suggest, or, rather, propose,
that in the meantime, in our boredom, we, I and you — yes you, in the front row, you — be married. He, Christ, has not as yet returned. Or so it very much seems, hereabouts. Therefore, let us marry. Let us marry notwithstanding the fact that our marriage will be made of disappointment, of the still-not-yet, the still-not-yet of the Marriage of our Lord.

Sad? Yes. In a way. But it is simply the slow, sad truth of Christian marriage. And not only Christian marriage in the days of the early Church. It is the sad truth of every Christian marriage. Ever since. For each such marriage is so thoroughly stained by the not-yet of the Marriage, the Marriage-to-Come, as to be a marriage half crossed-out, rubbed-away, erased. Like a face in the sand. At the seaside.

Poor Marie and Johannes are, then, you see, every Christian bride and groom, every Christian man and wife. Their disaster is ours. Yours and mine. Should we be Christians.

* 

A little bewildered? Do not fear. I will scribble, or scratch, my proposal, my thesis, upon the board. My notes, my workings. By which everything is calculated, enumerated.

My work, I know, is rather controversial. Some do, indeed, denounce my work. Behind my back. Accuse me of a certain opportunism. For instance, M. Breton.

“Mathematicians,” he says, “attracted by this blackboard, have taken advantage of the women’s disappearance.”

But what care I for Lobster Breton? Besides, my workings are just as careful, as taking of pains, as are the calculations of fellow Lobster, M. Marcel Duchamp. I think now of a dream-of-a-machine of his. He calls it “The Bride [Mariée] Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even.”

Odd, is it not? This machine. Where, you might wonder, is the bride? Where indeed? Well, she, apparently, is the figure at the top. M. Duchamp calls her the “motor-bride.” But where, then, you say, are her heartless bachelors? Well, they, I gather, are represented by the machine at the bottom, what M. Du-
paris bride

champ calls the “bachelor-machine.” Yes. Quite. I share your puzzlement.

Whatever, my greatest concern is that our two machines are, alas, far from united. Far from one flesh, as it were. M. Duchamp claims that what we here behold is a “desire-motor.” Maybe, but it is hardly, I say, a marriage. Not in my book. This here, I say, is a work of eternal non-consummation. However devoutly it is wished for. Or desired, even.

And yes, machines do have it in them to desire. As do these two unfortunate machines, which together surely desire above all not to be what M. Duchamp says they are. Or amount to. Namely, a “celibate machine.” What could be worse? I ask you. What?

What indeed. However, be assured that M. Duchamp’s celibate machine is, by no means, any celibate machine. No. It is, I say, that most wonderful machine, the Automobile. This here “desire-motor” is, you see, “the internal combustion engine.” In short, make way. Clear the streets. Here comes a glorious motor-car. In fact, here comes “a motor car [that is] climbing a slope, … as if exhausted, … [but that] turns over faster and faster until it roars triumphantly.” Astonishing is it not? That this car, though so nearly exhausted, finally makes it. All the way. All the way to the top, the crown, of the hill. Ah, sublime. Sublime.

“But what,” you say — painfully, cruelly, and pointing your elegant fingers — “what manner of hill is this?”

What? Well, I am not altogether sure. We are not told. Duchamp’s notations are unclear. To say the least. We have, though, perhaps, three sorry clues. Yes, three. Three crippled clues. Here, see, look. Scratched. On the board.

Clue the First: The Bride is also known as the “Hung Woman.”

Clue the Second: The machine is “a shiny metal gallows.”

Clue the Third: A gallows is, invariably, to be found upon a hill.

So, what think? What infer? Deduce? No idea? None? Well then, I shall enlighten you. The hill in question, Monsieur Duchamp’s surrealist hill, is a bloody execution hill. Where the State goes to kill. Quick march. Be gone, filth, be gone.
No, not you! Don’t you go. Please. Not you. I’m not finished. Not yet. And besides, this hill, it is the sweetest possible execution hill—Christ’s. Sweet Golgotha.

You look puzzled. But is it not clear? Clear as day? Crucifixion day. Monsieur Duchamp’s clanking and naked bride is Christ, you see. Christ crucified. “Christ,” he says, “was also stripped bare.” So too my Marie. Bare.

Bare. Yes, as bare as Christ. Marie, my very own Christ. She who went, departed, lifted her skirts and ran, vanished, took her leave of history—and all for me. Had she not done so, I simply would not be. Not be at all.

Some, like Monsieur Breton, might in fact say I have taken advantage of a woman’s disappearance. Shamelessly seized the opportunity to be born. But no. She, this woman, I say, somehow laid down her life for me. Greater love hath no-one. No-one. Not even you, dearly beloved.
“Ah, splendid — show in the infinite,” said the Poet.

Marie entered, along with the Usher, and the cold of the street. She had visited two days before, on the Saturday, but had been told by two garlanded mourners that the Office was closing. Yes, this is 15 Rue de Grenelle, they had said. And yes, this is indeed, they had said, the recently established Office for Surrealist Research, as announced upon the door. However, it was 6:30 p.m. precisely, and Surrealists, they had explained, were most particular in their attention to clocks. Moreover, tomorrow, being Sunday, was to be a day of rest from surrealist labor. Even the Revolution had its Sabbath. Alas, she would have to return on Monday.

Marie had, for a moment, wondered what Surrealists did when not being surrealist, or at least when not conducting Surrealist Research. She had not enquired at the time, but did now raise the question of Sunday closure as she and the Usher sat down. The Poet, seated like half-a-king at his desk, considered her question. Her Monday question.

“The God within,” he finally replied, “does not … rest on the seventh day”; however, the Poet, not being God (neither within nor without), most certainly did. Hurrah, as it were, for the Sabbath! “Lovemaking chapels,” he murmured. “Glowing with Sunday happiness,” he murmured.

The Poet now stared at a box of well-drilled index cards as if he had not quite seen their like before. “Lodging-House,” it said on one the side of the box. “Ideas, Unclassifiable,” it said on the other. There was also both a telephone and a Bible, three volumes thereof, upon his desk. He carefully rearranged the four objects, first in one constellation then another, before taking out his handkerchief and dusting all three volumes. “Secular dust,” he muttered.

The Usher coughed a polite cough to draw forth the Poet’s attention. The latter looked up post-haste but only to address
Marie. He asked, with scientific air, if she had anything to report in the way of dreams, coincidences, secrets, inventions, or indeed (and this he bellowed) “the intimacies of your bedroom.” He added, in a whisper, that anonymity was, in her case, a given. He produced a snow-white index card, picked up a huge pencil, and appeared ready to set down whatever she might say. She said nothing.

It was, she thought, a peculiar place. On the one hand, it was an office, in the sense that everything here was calculated — there being a huge “15” on the door and a sign to boast not only opening and closing times but a telephone number. On the other hand, it was not like any office she had ever seen before. In one corner, stood a headless statue; while, upon the wall, was a book pinioned there by forks; and, from the ceiling, was suspended a plaster-cast woman — stripped bare, once more. Her again. The poet glanced toward her, this hanging woman. “The overwhelming law,” he commented, “of [our] … invented country.”

Marie now noticed that there were two others in the office, two men, attendants who were also ready, they said, to take down whatever she cared to say or confess. Or, did she have not so much something to report but rather someone to report? An enemy of the Revolution, perhaps? Someone with, say, a “passion for reduction … [Or, a] terror of the … Plural?” Did she, by any chance, know anyone like that? On the streets of Paris? There were a few around — in particular, “a sinister joker who, one evening near Châtelet, [had] stopped the passers-by along the quay … and … asked [each one]… ‘What is your name?’” Had she come across this fellow? This desperate-to-know man, murderer of mystery, killer of the Unknown, the beautiful Unknown, l’Inconnue? Did she, by any chance, know this man? Did she? Had he perhaps pursued even her? Had he? This sinister fellow. Marie looked around, as did the Usher. They said nothing.

The Poet, as if defeated, slumped back into his seat. He paused, before beginning to tug a large logbook from one of the drawers in his desk. The book, it seemed, was reluctant to
emerge, almost as if it were shy; but the Poet continued to tug, explaining all the while that the book was there to record the business of the Office. Its Research. He seemed not to like the word Research, or at least not altogether.

With a final tug, the logbook was dragged into the open. It appeared to be largely unused, almost virginal. The Poet flicked through the pages, a casual aviator passing high over many a blank, or empty space, each a pure white hole in Office time, Research time. Tick-Tock. He finally flew over a small crowd of names, as if huddled together. They were the names of those who had visited the Office on Tuesday, November 25th 1924. A busy day it had been, with visits from no less than five, quite perfect strangers. Two of the names intrigued the Poet—one being a Mademoiselle Terpsé and the other a Mr. Harold Tetley. A wondrous coupling, he thought. Terpsichore and Tea, as it were.

He stared hard at the man and woman seated before him, and wondered if they themselves were, perhaps, Tetley and Terpsé, now returned as lovers, or even to be wed. It was unlikely, he felt, but it was theoretically possible; there was a chance. Chance.

The Poet put this to one of the two attendants who declared no interest whatsoever in the identity of the man and woman. Instead, he wished to highlight the despotic fact that, for the most part, the Office for Surrealist Research would appear not to have been overly successful. Indeed, was it not the case that their logbook might best be described as The Golden Book of Our Inaction?

This contention prompted a violent Office colloquy. It focused, in particular, on what exactly constituted a book. Was there not something rather moribund about the seeming wholeness of a book? Indeed, was it not significant that the book per se, the codex, had been invented by that most moribund race, the Christians? And Christians, were they not, alas, lovers of the End? Those for whom God, in terms of revelation, was all but done and dusted? Yes, the Office for Surrealist Research was, it is true, indisputably the shop for writing, but it was of the Automatic kind: write, write, write, and whatever you do don't stop-
The Usher felt moved to join the colloquy and thus enquired, very politely, if either of the attendants or indeed the Poet had any interest in the Classics? The Poet, though, was ready for this and, picking up a pen, wrote wrote wrote wrote like mad like mad—like mad in fact as a mad machine yes that mad bloody mad. He then turned the sheet of paper toward the Usher. “We have nothing to do with Literature[,]” it said. The attendants applauded, as if to say this was indeed the way to Change the World.

The Usher, though, was alarmed, and inquired what the Office did “have to do with” if it were not Literature? Was it not a place for research? Or was it, perhaps, a place in which research took the form of, say, mere judgment? Mere, naked examination? In other words, was this place of theirs, the Office, in truth, alas, a species of university?

The Poet appeared alarmed to be interrogated in this way, but was again ready. He gently explained that the Office was a “machine for killing.”

The Usher asked for clarification.

The Poet replied that the Office was a “machine for killing what is in order to fulfil what is not.”

“Does that explain the headless statue?” asked the Usher.

The Poet said nothing, though pointed to a badly-typed document which carefully enumerated several points of order, house rules, the rules of Revolution. Break them, and one would be “liable to sanctions.”

“Sanctions?” said the Usher.

The Poet made as if to chop off his own head at the grimy nape of his neck, his ink-stained hand the blade of Madame Guillotine. “The Widow” herself. Marie flinched, and pulled from a bag the now dead-fish-of-a-book that the Usher had given her. As before, she opened it at random, and read.

At the moment Corsair Sanglot emerged … into the Place de la Concorde, noting with approval … [the]
adorable guillotine …, the crowd gathered around the engine of retribution watching Louis XVI climb the steps.

Marie lifted her head from the book. She felt for dear Louis XVI. How cruel a machine for killing. She now closed the book. How cruel a machine. She felt for all kings condemned to die. Not only poor King Louis but also poor King Charles — England’s very own. No head to place his crown upon, not in the end. Back in the far country, she and Johannes had daily cause to think of Charles — their house, in Palmers Green, having borne the name “Carisbrooke.” Though only three-bedroomed. One more room than needed.

Strange, she thought, to name such a house after a castle, let alone a castle that had once been the prison of a king, one all-but-doomed to die, even. Poor King, she thought. Poor Charles. At least his execution was not followed by that of his Queen. She thought now of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette. It was said that the latter, poor Queen Marie, when changing into her execution clothes, was afforded no privacy. The guards watched on. “Poor Marie,” she whispered. Out loud.

The Poet was alarmed, “The Hundred Headless Woman!” he cried.

“And what of her?” inquired the Usher. “What of the Headless Woman?”

“She keeps her secret,” said the Poet.
IV/V

Crowd

It behooves me, dearly beloved, at this point in my discourse, to disclose that Johannes once wrote a poem, so-called, a still-born rhyming thing. Its final dead-end couplet is this: the wooden declaration that, “I doubt not the secret lies / In dainty Marie’s shining eyes.”

This corpse of a poem is written long after the annulment and is, in fact, one of several that Johannes wrestles cold to the page in later life. Some of these metrical stiffs make it, indeed, as far as the Swiss Observer, to publication therein. These are the patriotic dead, word-corpses dedicated to what Johannes once called “the perfect State.” Switzerland, naturally. This particular corpse, however, the one with “Marie’s shining eyes,” is dedicated to that perfect woman, Marie-the-Second, Marie-the-once-Consumptive, now Marie-the-Mother. Here it is, the complete corpse. On the blackboard.

Wimbledon

As I sat in the centre court
And watched the experts at their sport
I wished I could award a prize
To Marie with the shining eyes.

She’s the one whom people seldom see,
Is neither star nor referee
She’s there to plan and organize,
Is Marie with the shining eyes.

There’s little fun that comes her way,
Hers is the spadework, day by day.
She solves the problems that arise,
That’s Marie with the shining eyes.
How to account for her success?
(Small wonder she got in the press).
I doubt not that the secret lies
In dainty Marie’s shining eyes.

As I say, a corpse. Albeit a twitching one, given this final couplet, the one about “the secret.” Evidence, I believe, that the poem is haunted. Haunted, that is, by the Marie whom Johannes has not seen for years. Marie-the-First.

And is there a secret that lies in the shining eyes of this earlier Marie? This original Marie? My Marie. My own. My very own. I am not sure. I have never looked her in the eye. Or at least not for real, not in the flesh, not in such a way as she could ever return my dusty gaze. It is true that I have a portrait photograph of her and have often, at night, stared at her shining eyes therein. But it dates from 1897. Which is from before her marriage — if there was a before, a before nothing, as it were. I would not, then, expect to see any secret in those eyes. Not those eyes in the photograph, those nineteenth-century eyes. No.

Her eyes, however, they will grow older, grow modern – will see planes, cars, wars, etc.. And it is, I suppose, within those twentieth-century eyes, eyes I have never seen, not even in a photograph, that the secret might just lie. In this connection, this secret connection, I should perhaps now mention this: that Marie, according to Madeleine, only agrees to facilitate the annulment for “fear that her husband would otherwise kill himself.”

Whether that would be by means of drowning, or hanging, or rubber, I’m afraid I simply do not know. I am, in this regard, as clueless as these bloody cats. But, if there is a secret in Marie’s twentieth-century eyes, it might, I think, have something to do not only with marriage but death. Violent death. And that, I confess, is why I am drawn to the Lobster Office — it being, apparently, “the machine for killing,” the Killing Office, so to speak.

You may, perhaps, be surprised by this, having hitherto thought that the Lobsters labor at a machine for living. For life.
No, not at all. They are, above all, mourners. Do not be fooled by their garlands. These men are for death. And say so.

“The simplest surrealist act,” says M. Breton, “consists of dashing down into the street, pistol in hand, and firing randomly [au hasard] … into the crowd.”

Be warned. Keep off the streets.

By the way, dearly beloved, M. Breton’s crowd is not just any crowd. No, it is a cretinous crowd. You see, those who shoot at the crowd are those “who [have] … dreamed of … putting an end to cretinization.” Thus, shoot at the crowd, and you shoot at cretins.

Indeed, even as you shoot, and even as the cretins drop, screaming and bleeding, do bear in mind that “cretin,” the word,
comes to us from the Alps. It is how, up there, they pronounce Chretien. “Christian,” if you will. In sum, in short, M. Breton’s lobster-gun fires at one very particular crowd — namely, the Christian crowd. All believers take cover. Look out for M. Breton.

Look out as well for M. Peret, another local Lobster, this one wild with a passion for taking to the streets and, once there, “insulting a priest,” any priest. And why not shoot him too? The priest. The prayerful bastard.

After all, these Christians, they simply clog the streets of Lobster Paris, as if just waiting to be shot, the clowns. Remember the front-cover of *La Revolution Surréaliste*. Issue the seventh. The one with the photograph of a mob of curious Parisians all scanning the sky and, beneath them, the legend which spells out their fate. They are, it says, “The Last Conversions.” Voila! Yet more imperiled Christians. That most endangered of species.

It is said, I gather, by those who know such things, that this crowd, the one in the photograph, gestures toward a very particular sainted crowd. That they are, in truth, “The Latest Con-

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*Fig. 18. Photograph of L’Église Chrétienne Primitive (1898).*
versions.” That is to say, those several men-of-very-modern-thought who fall famously for Jesus. Or at least, for his bride, the Church. The painted one, that is. The one in Rome. I think here of such glittering Catholic converts as M. Cocteau et al.

Whatever, my point is this: that, once again, the Lobsters’ mad and random fire targets the Christian crowd. And, thank God, I say. As this, for me, poor Scholar Schad, means hope—hope that random Lobster-fire might yet, might still, assist me in my sorry search to find and save sweet, lost Marie. Our lady of the Christian herd.

Speaking of which, I have, in fact, within my briefcase, a well-worn photograph of Marie’s very particular Christian herd. The Tabernacle herd. It is from 1898. Back then, by the way, they were invariably known as *L’Eglise Chrétienne Primitive*—primitive in the sense of being alike in creed to the earliest, first-century Christians, those wild and killable enemies of the State. Them. The “First Conversions,” as it were. Here, here is the photograph. Just look, don’t touch.

Marie, they say, is second from the left, far left. Toward the upper middle. There. Her hat, it’s disappearing into the dark behind her. Pulled down hard, as if to eclipse her eyes. Her shining eyes. Yes, she’s the one to the left of the skyward-looking seraph. The one with, I think, an Almighty White Feather in her hat. Her. Yes. Marie’s the one beside her. Or so they say.

To be honest, though, I am not convinced. This woman looks just so different from the one in the other photograph, the portrait photograph. The one from just a year before, 1897. Indeed, I believe that this here woman in the hat, her jaw so set, eyes unseen, is not Marie. Not her at all. This woman is, to be frank, too plain. Too Christian, if you will. Too primitive. Too killable.

* *

Forgive my frankness, my black genius, perhaps; but as a scholar I was taught to see the world with a knowing eye. Which is to say, with the eye of power, the eye of the sovereign, as it were—he who has the authority to kill. Yes, him. Remember Charles
IX? At his palace window? Firing at the scurrying Huguenots? Well, consider this: since good King Charles could not possibly have shot all the Huguenots he must somehow, or in some sense, have selected whom to shoot. And what, if he were, in the split second of casual slaughter, to have, on the whole, inclined toward murdering those who did not happen particularly to please his sovereign eye? It is a thought. Not impossible. And if it were the case then, once again, Christians, or at least Protestants, could be described as the especial prey of near-random bullets. Almost arbitrary killing.

I think now, as so often is the case, of the Occupation. Of our jackbooted guests. And the Jews. Who die. Die purely because they are Jews. Without discrimination, as it were. None. All of them, it seems, must die. Not just a few or some, but all. Like the Gypsies, and the Homosexuals. For those Christians among us, however, it is different. They are killed more by chance. Insofar as they die with the assistance of our Nazi friends, they do so rather haphazardly. One is hung here, another is shot there, etc. — but not because they are Christians.

One of these is M. Hubert Caldecott. He was shot along with forty-seven others. Shot at Fort Mont-Valérein. As part of a reprisal execution. He just happened, as it were, to be killed. The memorial for M. Caldecott was held at the Tabernacle. October 24th 1941, 163 Rue Belliard. Madeleine preached Gospel. Primitive mourners gathered. Though not, perhaps, with garlands.

You might now wish, dearly beloved, to ring loud the protest bell. Or at least, the lecture bell, were it not cracked. You might wish to denounce what would appear to be my emergent thesis — namely, that within the history of Paris, and indeed Western modernity in general, the killing of Christians is distinguished, if not ennobled, by a certain contingency, by something, on occasion, approaching chance. Pure chance. Rot, you think. Cat’s shit, you think. Or so I suspect. From the way you look.
Well, what about the twenty-sixth? Of August. Remember? One of the End days. Last days. The one with the bombs. Our German guests are waving a fond farewell to Paris and, from above, the dear Luftwaffe are tearfully bombing us, their eagle-eyes so full of tears they have no idea what they hit. Just a few bombs. Here and there. But one place that is hit, smashed, kissed-to-smithereens by these pure, pure bombs of chance is 163 Rue Belliard. Yes, the Tab.

“What,” asks Madeleine, “has happened to the Tabernacle?”

Why, Nothing. What has happened is Nothing. Nothing has dropped from the sky, and the church is itself now Nothing. Or at least no more than “four walls, … a staircase,” and a “baptistry full of … broken glass.”

Ah, the symmetry. The Surrealism of the accidental bomb perfectly mirrored by the Surrealism of the ruined church. Walls without a roof. A staircase going nowhere. A holy bathtub ready to cut the bathing believer to a thousand pieces. Blood bath. Astonishing.

Cue M. Desnos.

“In cities where strength is deployed,” he says, “wonderfully is your church destroyed.”

That, by the way, was way back in 1924. These bastard Lobsters, you see, speak better than they know. Better than they know of the ruinous future of Paris.

Cue M. Breton.

Years ago, he says, “I know what the year 1939 has in store for me.”

He did not say what he had in mind; however, if it were the fall of Paris to Herr Hitler, he would have been but one year out. But one bloody year.
Dearly beloved, you perhaps recall how the Office for Surrealist Research is, by its own admission, a “killing machine.” It will, then, have come as no surprise that those who work in the Office, its Lobster-clerks, anticipate the very worst that is to come to Paris, the blackest genius, as it were. Herr Hitler, yes. But Satan too. Yes, dear Beelzebub himself. Indeed, even now, right now, one particular ink-stained Lobster sounds the alarum.

“Satan,” he says, “Satan sets off again by motor-car, for Paris!”

Quick! Quick, I say. Leave every possible office. Take to every possible street. And, once there, scan the traffic for Satan’s motor-car. Not, though, in order to avoid the damned thing, but rather to stop and to search it.

And why?

Well, that is simple. For I have heard that “in the back of the car,” “wrapped in her coat,” is none other than, yes, “the Unknown Woman.” L’Inconnue herself.

And is this sweet Marie? Is she this Unknown Woman? The one in the back of Satan’s motor-car? Unlikely, I know. But there is a chance. It is a possibility, however remote. Here in Paris, you see, if you chase Satanic cars you also chase Marie. Or at least her shadow, her Tabernacle shadow.

And why is that? Why?

Well, simply because these cars owe their demonization to none other than that Baptist brother of hers, Professor Passy.

“The motor-car,” he says, is “truly diabolic.”

Professor Passy, you see, thinks that every car is Satan’s. And thus to be shunned, avoided. Like the plague. Even by those invited to his funeral.

“Please do not come,” he says, “by motor-car.”

And he is right. Never drive to a cemetery. It is, I think, no place to go in a motor car. Not even with a corpse. Ask the Lobsters. Or at least the Convulsionaries, so-called. I gather they
regularly take a “decomposed corpse … in a car to the Place de la Concorde.”

The moral, I think, is clear. If you are going to drive anywhere, even with a stiff in the back, don’t, for heaven’s sake, head for the cemetery. The Place de la Concorde, for all its convulsive traffic, would be better. Or even Luna Park, whence our garlanded mourners go. The ones led by the solemn-faced camel.

Ah yes, the camel. You have heard, perhaps, of the solemn-faced camel? If not, you know, at least, of the camel-faced M. Desnos. Well, he has left us a note. Final. Defiant. Here. Here it is. On the blackboard. Fingered in the dust.

To hell with Louise Lame’s hearse; … [although it] may wend its way through Paris, … I shall not raise my hat to it.

And why not? Why does M. Desnos not raise his hat to the passing hearse?

Well, it is because he has, apparently, “a rendezvous with Louise tomorrow.” Yes, tomorrow. The day after her funeral. Bizarre is it not? Lobster Desnos, it would seem, believes in some kind of life after death; or, at least, believes that l’Inconnue, our Woman of the Winds, is still to be pursued even after dying. In short, that we who pursue her, whoever she is, should never, not ever, be duped by a hearse that is heading merely to the cemetery.

Should we not then, you and I, follow, instead, the hearse that is drawn by the camel? The one that goes to the fairground? After all, you see, that way also lies the Tabernacle, happy home to the happily-Drowned, a tribe who will have, in the end, with respect to death, no truck with sorrow, no truck with anything but all the fun of the fair. The resurrection fair.

But is that so? Truly? Really?

Well, what says Professor Passy? Regarding death. Funerals. His own, for example.

Thou shalt not drive.

Pardon?
It’s what he says. Or thereabouts. About his funeral.  
I know. But is that all?  
All?  
All he says about the funeral?  
No.  
What else, then, does he say?  
“We wait … for the Lord … who shall change our vile body  
… unto His glorious body.”  
Resurrection?  
Of the body.  
What?  
There will be a changing.  
Of our bodies?  
Vile to glorious.  
Excellent.  
Ours for His.  
At last.  
(Pause.)  
And Marie, what says she to this?  
Amen.  
How do you know?  
Because of what she says.  
When?  
When dying.  
And what is it? What is it she says? When dying,  
“I am ready.”  
Are you sure?  
It’s recorded.  
What is?  
“I am ready.”  
Ready for what?  
She doesn’t say.  
But she is ready?  
Yes.  
The *bride* is ready?  
Yes.
I am bringing you ... by sovereign science, a Woman of the past.
— Stéphane Mallarmé (1842–1898)